

# Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



MARCH 2013



## TEXTBOOKS

### How you can help

Faculty & students at Brooklyn College work to reduce textbook costs.

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Pat Amow

## ENDANGERED BY PATHWAYS LEARNING IN THE LAB

BCC Associate Professor of Biology Nikki McDaniel consults with her students in an introductory anatomy and physiology class as they learn about human circulation by measuring each other's blood pressure. The students, most of whom plan to enter allied health fields, say that lab-based learning experiences like this are

an invaluable part of an introductory science class. "To get that hands-on experience puts everything together," one student explains. Such lab sessions, however, could soon be curtailed under CUNY's Pathways curriculum, which mandates that general education courses be limited to three hours and three credits. **PAGE 12**

### BUDGET

#### PSC makes case for CUNY

As the April 1 deadline for a new State budget draws near, union activists are urging the Legislature to reverse past years of budget cuts.

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### JR. FACULTY

#### Time for your scholarship

If you're working toward tenure at CUNY, you have a right to twenty-four hours of reassigned time for research, writing, or creative work.

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### CIVIL RIGHTS

#### Rethinking Rosa Parks

A new biography by Brooklyn College's Jeanne Theoharis is an antidote to common myths about the civil rights heroine, and spotlights her half-century of activism in Detroit.

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### NYC 2013

#### Council races, mayoral forum

The PSC announced its first wave of endorsements in the 2013 City Council elections. And the union is sponsoring a mayoral candidates' forum on April 23.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR |

WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: (212) 302-7815.

# Seattle test boycott & education's future

● I retired to the Seattle area in 2003. Imagine how surprised I was to see the article about Seattle's Garfield High School's boycott of the "Measures of Academic Progress" (MAP) test in the February 2013 *Clarion*. One of our friends was an English teacher at Garfield, and boycott leader Jesse Hagopian was her student. She thought your article was excellent.

The trend toward inappropriate standardized testing could be a disaster for K-12 education and, by extension, colleges. The MAP test from the Northwest Evaluation As-

sociation is particularly egregious. The company says that it aligns with district or state curricula, but Garfield Academic Dean Kris McBride says that it does not. The Algebra 1 test "is filled with geometry, probability, statistics and other things that aren't part of the curriculum," says McBride. "It produces specious results, and wreaks havoc on school resources during the weeks the test is administered."

Despite this flaw, results of the MAP test will be used by district officials to help evaluate the effectiveness of instructors, even though NWEA says this is inappropriate. A surprisingly honest analysis of the exam's reliability by NWEA official John Cronin is available online at [bit.ly/131qdBi](http://bit.ly/131qdBi).

No one would like to be evaluated on the results of an exam students didn't take seriously and that cov-

ered material not taught in class.

Keep up the great work with *Clarion*.

Harvey Carroll  
Kingsborough CC (emeritus)

## The corporate model

● Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's January 29 remarks at a CUNY Financial Management Conference on "The Future of Higher Education" ([tinyurl.com/CUNY-FMC](http://tinyurl.com/CUNY-FMC)) are very disappointing. It is again apparent that he sees his role as essentially that of a higher-education head who appropriates a corporate model as the *sine qua non* for CUNY's future growth. Privatization, financialization, perhaps even subcontracting, outsourcing and other Wall Street strategies appear to be in CUNY's future.

As Goldstein interprets it, the concept of "value" is defined by the market. In his attempt to represent himself as the pied piper of public higher education, he is merely following in the footsteps of for-profit colleges which are undermining the role of critical thinking as a touchstone of higher education.

In that context, Goldstein argues that the faculty role in academic decision-making is a matter of "entrenched interests." He says that the faculty role may involve "shared governance" but "it's not a matter of constitutional right." In the Chancellor's hierarchical mindset, a new offensive beyond Pathways is not unlikely.

The notion of a no-classroom-time model of MOOCs (massive open online courses) seems to titillate the Chancellor and he looks ready to plunge lemming-like toward an

unreflective adoption. Lastly, he advocates limiting academic integrity and autonomy in the development of a curriculum to be directed by business and commercial priorities.

Peter Ranis  
Graduate Center & York College  
(emeritus)

## In focus

● I appreciated the article in the February *Clarion* about the movie *Lincoln*, which I had just seen and admired. The commentary provided just what I wanted to see next – a discussion of the facts and sensibility of the times from someone who really knows the history. Thanks much to PSC members, like James Oakes, who share their expertise and opinions with a wider audience in *Clarion*.

Pat Arnow

## Write to Clarion

Letters may be on any topic, but should be less than 200 words and are subject to editing. E-mail your letter to *Clarion* Editor Peter Hogness ([phogness@psccmail.org](mailto:phogness@psccmail.org)) or fax it to 212-302-7815.

# MEC president search controversy

By JOHN TARLETON

After a contentious battle between Medgar Evers College faculty and CUNY administrators, three MEC professors have been tapped by their colleagues to serve on the search committee for the college's new president.

A last-minute intervention by the CUNY Board of Trustees excluded two faculty leaders from being considered for the search committee.

The three faculty representatives chosen for the search committee are Associate Professor of Mass Communications Iola Thompson; Professor Umesh Nagarkatte, who is chair of MEC's Mathematics Department; and Professor Sikiru Adesina Fadairo, chair of Computer Information Systems. Thompson, Nagarkatte and Fadairo combined have more than 80 years of faculty experience at Medgar Evers.

"These are long-time members of the faculty. People know them," said PSC Chapter Chair Clinton Crawford. "We hope they represent all of us well and make their voices heard so the right choice is made." Though Crawford was one of the two excluded critics, he voted for all three faculty members who were eventually selected. The three faculty representatives will serve on a 15-member panel.

Thompson was the first faculty representative elected to the search committee, at a February 11 meeting of the Medgar Evers College Council. Crawford and MEC Faculty Senate Chair Sallie Cuffee were the next highest vote-getters, but fell short of the number of votes required. When faculty petitioned for a second meeting of the College Council to continue the balloting, outgoing MEC Presi-

## Trustees draw faculty ire

dent William Pollard scheduled it for Friday, February 22, over the objections of faculty leaders, who said that holding the meeting on a Friday would depress turnout.

When the Faculty Senate pressed Pollard for an explanation for his insistence that the meeting be held on a Friday, his response was short: "On advice and consultation with Medgar and CUNY legal counsel, the Friday day was selected as a means for giving sufficient notice to all faculty to participate in the very important activity."

The February 22 meeting drew 33 faculty members of the Council, four more than the quorum of 29. CUNY Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer announced that under the New York State Open Meetings Law, 29 votes, and not simply a majority of those present, would be required to elect the other two faculty representatives. After multiple rounds of voting, Cuffee had 25 votes and Crawford 23, with the next closest candidate drawing just six votes.

### BOARD RESOLUTION

Turnout increased at a College Council meeting the following Wednesday, February 27 – but faculty found their choices were now circumscribed by a resolution passed two days before by CUNY's Board of Trustees. Adding a new requirement at the last minute, the trustees' resolution decreed that one faculty representative would have to come from each of MEC's three Schools – Liberal Arts, Science and Business. This immediately made the top two vote-getters

at the last College Council meeting ineligible: like the already elected representative Iola Thompson, Faculty Senate Chair Cuffee and PSC Chapter Chair Crawford both work in MEC's School of Liberal Arts.

"They wanted to make sure that Clinton and I would not be in the running, so they delineated who could

### Rules for choosing faculty reps changed at last minute.

be on the search committee in the middle of the process," said Cuffee who decried the Board's move as "paternalistic."

"It was totally unusual and high-handed," Crawford told *Clarion*. "They wouldn't do that elsewhere."

The trustees' resolution sought to influence the vote in another way as well: it empowered Chancellor Matthew Goldstein to designate the final two faculty members on the search committee if the College Council did not elect them by the end of business on February 27.

The administration of President Pollard, who came to MEC in 2009, was marked by antagonism toward faculty and staff that led to two faculty votes of no-confidence. Last November, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education warned MEC that its accreditation was at risk: two months later, Pollard announced his resignation, effective on appointment of his successor. In the wake of Pollard's announcement, his controversial provost, William Johnson, abruptly went on leave; he and several other top MEC officials have been replaced by interim appointees.

In an interview with *Clarion*, Thompson said that she and other search committee members have

received an e-mail from Goldstein stating that he wants a new president chosen by June – a timetable Thompson thinks is a mistake. "The process is too fast to find the best candidate," she says. "It's March already."

Nagarkatte, the School of Science representative on the search committee, told *Clarion* he supports a June deadline. The new president, he added, should be a "facilitator" who values the importance of "constant communication, transparency and shared governance."

With MEC facing a September 1 deadline to respond to the accreditation warning from Middle States, Thompson agrees that the school needs new leadership quickly.

But she believes that an interim president, one who already knows the school, should be appointed immediately to lead MEC's effort to respond to Middle States, while a more thorough national search for a longer-term president is pursued. Otherwise, she says, "We don't know how a president coming in on such short notice will be able to help us address this."

### HASTY

Crawford warned that CUNY conducted a similarly swift presidential search process in the spring of 2009 and ended up replacing retiring president Edison Jackson with Pollard, whose tenure has been marked by nearly constant conflict.

"They are replicating the same scenario," Crawford warned. "And we're going to end up in the same place if they go that way."

# CUNY education faculty meet



Dave Sanders

More than 60 faculty members from CUNY schools of education came to the PSC Union Hall February 1 to discuss changing mandates in accreditation and teacher evaluation, workload of education faculty, and corporate-driven initiatives in public education. The meeting was the first of several planned by the newly formed PSC-CUNY Committee for the Future of Public Education; for more info contact committee member Priya Parmar ([pparmar@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:pparmar@brooklyn.cuny.edu)).



# CUNY cuts corners for Pathways

By PETER HOGNESS

The PSC is taking the case against CUNY's Pathways curriculum to the New York State Regents, warning that Pathways "reduces the academic requirements of the general education curriculum." Both the PSC and New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) urged the Regents, who oversee New York public education at all levels, to closely scrutinize Pathways and examine its damaging effect on CUNY's academic standards.

"Pathways in its current form [is] a mechanism for diluting the curriculum and shortchanging CUNY students," wrote Mike Fabricant, the union's treasurer and a professor of social research and policy at Hunter College, in a February letter to NYS Regents' Chair Merryl Tisch. Fabricant met with members of the Board of Regents in Albany in February, sparking a discussion of Pathways in the Regents' subcommittee on higher education. In that discussion, Regents questioned whether they had jurisdiction to evaluate Pathways; NYSUT and the PSC responded that they are in fact required to do so by State education law.

## BROAD OPPOSITION

The union's letter emphasized the strong opposition to Pathways from faculty across CUNY, expressed in petitions, resolutions and calls for a moratorium on the Pathways process. "Colleges where governance bodies have refused to approve courses for the Pathways curriculum include Brooklyn, Baruch, Queens, BMCC, Bronx Community College and the College of Staten Island." And in late February, LaGuardia Community College joined their ranks.

In addition, statutory governance bodies at Hostos Community College, Lehman and Medgar Evers have not approved all Pathways courses that were submitted by their colleges' administrators.

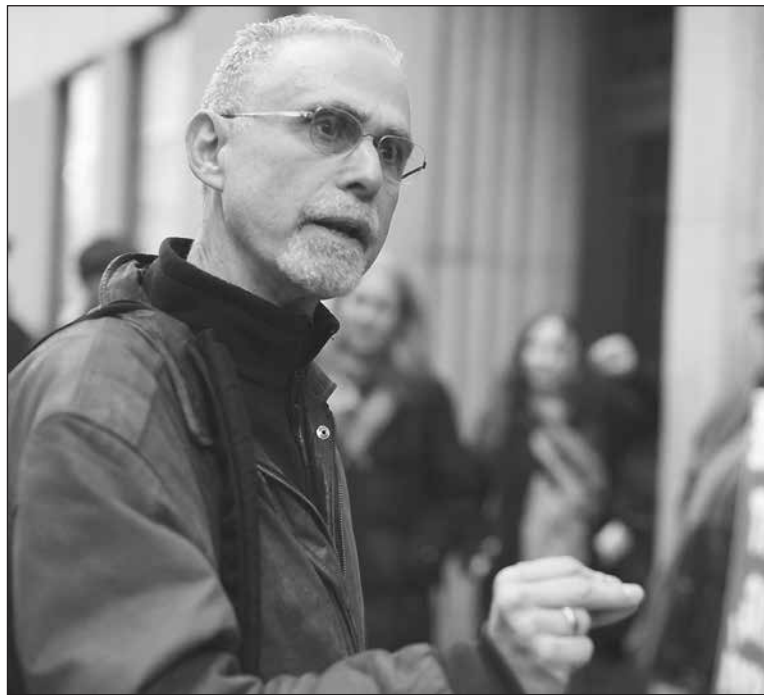
LaGuardia's College Senate endorsed a moratorium on Pathways decision-making at its February meeting, by a margin of more than three to one. "It had been discussed for hours at several previous Senate meetings," the chair of LaGuardia's PSC chapter, Lorraine Cohen, told union delegates on February 28. In addition to faculty, "students criticized Pathways and were extremely articulate," Cohen said. When the February vote was held, the result was 23 in favor of a moratorium, seven against and no abstentions.

## SECOND THOUGHTS

"The Senate then refused to consider any courses or program frameworks that were developed specifically for Pathways," Cohen said. "They simply would not consider it," she reported, to delegates' applause.

Cohen said she was encouraged that some members of the Senate who had voted against previous

## As faculty resistance continues



PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant makes the case against Pathways.

moratorium proposals decided to change their votes. "They came over to me and said, 'You know, I thought about this. I voted against it, but then I went home and asked myself, 'How could I do that?' And they changed their votes.'" One-to-one conversations with Senate members bore fruit, Cohen said: "Enough people changed their votes so that we had a really solid victory."

A January 28 memo from Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Lexa Logue asserted that "the colleges have submitted" over 1,800 Pathways courses to CUNY central administration for review. Logue did not, however, repeat the claim of her December 17 letter to the Modern Language Association (MLA) that "all specific Pathways courses have been proceeding

through traditional mechanisms of faculty curricular development and governance."

"If someone tells you that 1,800 courses have been legitimately approved by some form of college governance, that is a lie," Fabricant told PSC delegates on February 28. "Governance structures have repeatedly been bypassed in one form or another."

When governance bodies have declined to approve Pathways compliant courses, college administrators have forwarded Pathways Flexible Core course proposals to 80th Street on their own.

In the PSC's letter to the Regents, Fabricant details the harm that Pathways will inflict on general education at CUNY. "Many introductory English composition courses have lost 25% of their classroom hours," the letter notes. "The required lab elements of introductory science courses have been severed from the courses, to be taken separately, even in a different semester. Foreign language classes are [also] limited to three classroom hours," and at many campuses, "only one semester of a foreign language is required."

## QUALITY EDUCATION

"Although Pathways is described by the CUNY administration as a tool to ease student transfer, it does not address the main obstacles to student trans-

fer and is, in truth, about expediting movement to graduation," the union letter contends. "More rapid movement to degree completion is a laudable objective. However, such an outcome should not and cannot come at the expense of academic standards. To create an ever-narrower, proscribed, standardized academic experience that more rapidly moves students to degree completion cheats students of a quality educational experience – especially low-income students and students of color, who disproportionately come from struggling high schools."

In sum, the letter explains, "The faculty's broad-based rejection of Pathways results from a desire to maintain high standards and a quality education at CUNY."



LaGuardia Chapter Chair Lorraine Cohen: one-on-one conversations made a big difference.

# 'Poorly prepared & presented'

## A view from the inside

The pressure to implement the Pathways general education framework by Fall 2013 is harming the quality of course proposals, according to a department chair who served on a Pathways course review committee.

"In many cases, it was clear that the administration at these colleges had just submitted courses without any faculty input, so far as one could tell," said Stephen Grover, chair of the philosophy department at Queens College. "Courses submitted by the colleges were often poorly prepared and poorly presented because they had been so rushed."

## DUPLICATION

Under Pathways, courses are offered under one of eight different subject areas. But Grover told *Clarion* that a lack of clear distinctions means that essentially the same course can be offered in several different areas. "This completely undermines the credibility of Pathways as a general education plan," he contends.

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein appointed Grover to the CUNY-wide Common Core Course Review Committee in early 2012, to serve from March 2012 through the end of the year. Before a college can of-

fer a course for general education credit under Pathways, it must be approved by this committee, where Grover served on the subcommittee for courses on "the Individual and Society."

"I have no criticism of the functioning of that subcommittee," said Grover. "It did as good a job as it could have, in the circumstances – but they were pretty dreadful circumstances." When delays required the subcommittees to continue their work through February 2013, Grover was not reappointed. "I'd already threatened to resign, so I don't think it was any big surprise," he said in March.

The principal issue over which he had considered resigning, Grover said, was that the subcommittee was unable to influence the area, or "bucket," to which a general education class would be assigned. "The student learning outcomes are so weak, so generic and so similar across the buckets that you could put most courses in any of several different categories," he explained. "I could see this was true because in

the Sharepoint system we were using, you could see work of the other subcommittees." He observed that courses virtually identical to those submitted for Individual and Society were being submitted under other

## Quality of Pathways courses questioned

categories, such as World Cultures and Global Issues. Learning outcomes for courses in the Flexible Core include ensuring that students can "identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field." But when course proposals are not well-prepared, "it's so often unclear what discipline or interdisciplinary approach is being addressed," said Grover. "The problem is that the same slop ends up in all the buckets."

After he raised public concerns about this duplication and overlap, Sharepoint access to the work of other subcommittees was shut off, Grover recalled. "It was apparently said that this had been allowed by mistake," he added. "It was a strange kind of business."

Allowing this much overlap, he argues, will mean that Pathways

cannot ensure the broad scope of learning that a general education system should require. "It actually enables students to have an extraordinarily narrow education, if they want, especially if you shop around at different colleges," he explained. "And [the School of] Professional Studies has a lot of Pathways courses online." It would not be hard, he noted, to complete the Flexible Common Core without a single class in the natural or social sciences.

## 'MAKES NO SENSE'

To avoid duplication of courses between different areas, Grover felt that the subcommittees should have some say over the area to which a course would be assigned. "Others felt we should not second-guess the colleges, and I really understand that argument," he said. "But we are designing a general education system, and it has to make sense." In the end, the subcommittees were instructed that so long as a course satisfied the stated learning outcomes, it should be approved.

While Grover feels that he and his fellow subcommittee members did the best they could, he says Pathways has become a system that falls far short of what general education should provide.

"Certainly it makes no sense to students," he told *Clarion*. "It makes no sense to them at all."



# First endorsements in Council races

By PETER HOGNESS

In February, the PSC announced its first wave of endorsements in the 2013 elections for New York City Council.

"A stronger group of pro-union, pro-CUNY council members could lead a charge to invest in the public good, protect critical services, and demand a fair share of taxes from the 1%," a union statement said. "CUNY would thrive in an environment like that. City funding could be increased to keep pace with enrollment, and our physical plant could be repaired and improved." (For more on PSC political strategy in 2013, see [tinyurl.com/PSC-NYC-2013](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-NYC-2013)).

The endorsements were made by the PSC's Executive Council, after recommendations from the union's Legislative Committee. The recommendations were based on extensive candidate interviews, which involved more than 20 PSC members in a process that began in the fall.

Many in this first group of PSC endorsements are incumbents with whom the union has worked closely; the list below highlights those who are not currently Council members. *Clarion* will cover other PSC endorsements, as they are made.

## OPEN SEATS

**Queens, Council District (CD) 22:** Costa Constantinides ([www.vote costa.com](http://www.vote costa.com)) is running for the seat previously held by Peter Vallone, Jr. A community activist and Democratic Party district leader, Constantinides teaches at Queens College as an adjunct. He attended the "PSC-CUNY 101" candidate briefing, and showed a strong interest in advocating for public higher education and CUNY.

## More decisions coming later

Constantinides is also endorsed by the Working Families Party (WFP), Progressive Caucus Alliance, RWD-SU, UFCW Local 1500, CWA 1180 and Hotel Trades Council.

**Queens, CD 24:** Rory Lancman ([www.rorylancman.com](http://www.rorylancman.com)) resigned his Assembly seat to run for the US Congress last fall, and the PSC endorsed him in that race.

### Seeking "pro-union, pro-CUNY Council members"

Economic justice and greater resources for public education, with an emphasis on college readiness, are among the issues he is stressing in his campaign. A longtime supporter of union rights,

Lancman has been endorsed by the UFT, DC 37, CSEA, RWDSU, Local 3 IBEW, Hotel Trades Council and UFCW Local 1500.

**Brooklyn, CD 36:** Kirsten John Foy ([www.kirstenjohnfoy.com](http://www.kirstenjohnfoy.com)) is running for the seat previously held by Al Vann. Foy attended Brooklyn College and is closely familiar with CUNY's needs. A former staff member to Public Advocate Bill DiBlasio, he is currently president of the Brooklyn chapter of the National Action Network and a senior advisor to Amalgamated Transit Union President Larry Hanley. A Pentecostal minister, Foy was wrongly detained with Councilmember Jumaane Williams at the Brooklyn West Indian Day Parade in September 2011. Before and after that incident, he has spoken up for reform of practices like stop-and-frisk that undermine equal treatment of all New Yorkers before the law.

## INCUMBENTS

**Manhattan, CD 8:** Melissa Mark-Viverito (incumbent; [melissaforecitycoun](http://melissaforecitycoun)

[cil.com](http://cil.com)) is a founding co-chair of the City Council Progressive Caucus and chair of the Council's Parks and Recreation Committee. She is endorsed by Working Families Party, 32BJ, SEIU 1199, UAW, UFT, SSEU 371 and the Freelancers Union.

**Manhattan, CD 10:** Ydanis Rodriguez (incumbent; [ydanis.com](http://ydanis.com)) is a former City College student activist and public school teacher. As chair of the Council's Higher Education

Committee, he has been a strong supporter of CUNY.

**Bronx, CD 12:** Andy King (incumbent; [electandyking.blogspot.com](http://electandyking.blogspot.com)) was elected to this seat in a special election last November to replace Larry Seabrook, and the PSC endorsed him in that race. King serves on the Council's Higher Education Committee and attended the PSC-CUNY 101 briefing in January (see February 2013 *Clarion*).

**Queens, CD 21:** Julissa Ferraras (incumbent) is a member of the Council's Progressive Caucus. Chair of the

Women's Issues Committee, she is an outspoken advocate for equal rights.

**Queens, CD 25:** Daniel Dromm (incumbent; [danieldromm.com](http://danieldromm.com)) chairs the Council's Immigration Committee and is a Progressive Caucus member.

**Queens, CD 26:** James Van Bramer (incumbent; [jimmyvanbramer.com](http://jimmyvanbramer.com)) is a Progressive Caucus member. Chair of the Libraries Committee of the City Council, he worked for the Queens Public Library for 10 years before running for Council.

**Brooklyn, CD 39:** Brad Lander (incumbent; [bradlander.com](http://bradlander.com)), founding co-chair of the Progressive Caucus of the City Council; chair of Landmarks Committee; and active on the Economic Development, Housing and Environmental Protection Committees.

**Brooklyn, CD 45:** Jumaane Williams (incumbent; [jumaanewilliams.com](http://jumaanewilliams.com)) is a Progressive Caucus member. A Brooklyn College graduate and member of the Council's Higher Education Committee, he also chairs the Oversight and Investigations Committee.

**Staten Island, CD 49:** Deborah Rose (incumbent; [tinyurl.com/DebiRose](http://tinyurl.com/DebiRose)) is a member of the Higher Education Committee and has been very responsive to the PSC and CUNY students. She is a member of the Progressive Caucus and chair of the Council's Civil Rights Committee.

## Candidates for mayor at PSC forum April 23

The PSC is sponsoring a mayoral candidates' forum, focusing on higher education issues, on Tuesday, April 23, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. The event will be held at Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work, located at 2180 Third Avenue and 119th Street.

"This is a chance to see the candidates and hear them answer questions on issues that affect us, as CUNY faculty and staff," said Geoff Kurtz, assistant professor of political science at BMCC and a member of PSC's Legislative Committee.

"Where do they stand on our issues?" asked Ron Hayduk, also a committee member and a political science professor at Queens. "This gives us an opportunity to find out, and the responses can help shape our endorsement decision."

Kurtz urged PSC members to make every effort to attend. "A strong turnout means that we can have lots of members in that conversation, and that's exciting," he said. "It's not a bad message to send to the candidates, either."

## PSC contract update

By CLARION STAFF

PSC leaders say the union faces tough challenges in seeking a new contract – but with members' support, they say they can succeed.

"We do not have a new contract because we are resisting the efforts by the City and the State to impose economic austerity on CUNY faculty and staff," said union president Barbara Bowen. "Instead of accepting the concessionary contracts the City and State have offered other public employees, the PSC is fighting to change the political climate. At the same time we have been quietly reaching agreements with CUNY on contractual issues, outside the formal bargaining process," she told *Clarion*. "I know it puts great strain on all of us not to have a new contract. That's why we need everyone's participation in the fight to win what we need."

At the union's February 29 Delegate Assembly, PSC First Vice President Steve London elaborated on the union's approach.

With New York's political environment shaped by the politics of austerity, London said, all the economics offers made to public employee unions have been bad ones. In 2011, he noted, State government used the threat of massive

layoffs to get the two largest State worker unions to accept five-year contracts that began with a three-year wage freeze (see also page 5). At the City level, Mayor Bloomberg says that any raises for municipal workers must be paid for by union concessions. With City unions unwilling to agree to settlements on the mayor's terms, workers in every single municipal bargaining units are currently working under expired contracts – the first time this has happened since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. City unions have expressed hope that bargaining may make more progress under a new administration, scheduled to take office next year.

The PSC negotiates its contract with CUNY management, London noted, but any settlement requires approval from both the City and the State.

In this situation, London said, it is not in the PSC's interest to press CUNY management to make an immediate economic offer. The union has responded by working on two tracks, he said.

First, the PSC has pursued discussions with management on non-salary issues. "We have been reaching agreements, and have made some important gains," Lon-

don told delegates. "We negotiated the permanent extension of paid parental leave. We negotiated an agreement on increasing funds for the PSC-CUNY Research Awards. And, of course, we have been negotiating and working very hard on adjunct health insurance." On that last point, London reported, "We are very close, and we hope to bring this to a conclusion soon."

### Some agreements reached on non-salary issues.

While negotiating on such non-salary issues, London said, the PSC is also pursuing a second track: working with allies to change the political environment that has put New York on the path of austerity. "We need to change the austerity policy framework within which these contract offers are coming out," London said.

This year's NYC elections offer a major opportunity to do so, London said: "We have the chance to elect a large number of progressive City Council members on an anti-austerity platform. They will be Council members who will speak up for the people of New York City, will speak up for CUNY, who know our issues – and that can start to shift NYC away from the politics of austerity."

"This will not be easy," he added. "We're now 25 years into an austerity agenda. To change that, we are going to have to fight, and we're going to have to have the whole union engaged. But it can be done, with your support."

## 'Teach CUNY' at BMCC



BMCC Assistant Professor of Sociology Deborah Gambs discusses how CUNY is funded during class on Feb. 28. Gambs presentation was a part of "Teach CUNY" week, a BMCC chapter initiative in which faculty members from a variety of disciplines incorporate material about CUNY issues into their regular classes. Students get a chance to use newly learned skills to analyze their own university.



# PSC calls for more State aid

By PETER HOGNESS

Pressing for fair State funding for CUNY, PSC activists met with legislators in Albany and in their home districts in February and March.

Okena Littlehawk, a College Lab Technician at Bronx Community College, joined a grassroots lobbying group on March 5, his second trip to Albany with a PSC delegation. The first time was to apply pressure of a different sort: “That was in 2011, for our anti-austerity direct action on 2011,” he told *Clarion*. Littlehawk was then one of 33 people arrested in a PSC sit-in against deep budget cuts, at the ornate entrance to the governor’s chambers inside the Capitol building.

Littlehawk said he had signed up for both lobbying and direct action because at his campus, BCC, the need for more resources is urgent. “When I put out my orders for things needed to run my microbiology classes, I can’t always count on getting them,” he told *Clarion*. “We need microscopes, media, cultures – we’re being asked to make bricks without straw.”

## ALUMNI INDIGNATION

Berkis Cruz-Eusebio, who works in the ASAP program at Hostos CC, led one of five groups of PSC members in the March 5 lobbying effort. She said the union’s message touched a particular chord with legislators who are themselves CUNY graduates. “I was impressed with their indignation...when they reviewed the consistent decrease in State aid,” Cruz-Eusebio said. “Our students, with family income averages of under \$20,000, are covering 43% to 46% of CUNY’s costs with

## To reverse years of austerity



From left: Assembly Higher Education Chair Deborah Glick; Okena Littlehawk, a PSC union delegate from BCC; & PSC First Vice President Steve London.

tuition payments – yet they are expected to do more!”

The PSC’s call for change was the focus of testimony delivered by First Vice President Steve London, at a joint legislative budget hearing February 11.

Governor Cuomo’s executive budget proposal calls for essentially flat funding for CUNY in the coming fiscal year. But while it does not propose drastic cuts, it does not provide funding for \$35 million of CUNY’s mandatory expenses. Some money is allotted for increases in fringe benefit costs, but CUNY’s additional costs for energy, rent, collective bargaining and some other areas are left unfunded.

“Flat funding is, in fact, a cut to

CUNY’s budget, because it does not account for inflation,” London said. He called for funding for the missing \$35 million, and for changes in the law to include mandatory cost increases in the definition of level funding.

But fully funding CUNY’s current costs is far from enough, the PSC contends. Many years of austerity have left CUNY struggling to continue its role as “a jewel of opportunity” for the people of New York, London told legislators.

“Revenue from State aid per full-time equivalent [FTE] student fell 39.2% between 1990-91 and 2012-13 at CUNY’s senior colleges, when adjusted for inflation,” he said. “At the community colleges, State aid per FTE student fell 43%” in the same period.

State base aid per FTE student at CUNY’s community colleges has fallen sharply, down by 35% since 1990-91 and by 21% in just the last three years. The latter has meant a loss of \$48 million in State support.

“CUNY needs public funds to make up for years of State disinvestment,” London testified. The shortfall in State support has translated into a lack of full-time faculty and reliance on exploitation of adjuncts: while CUNY’s goal is to have 70% of instruction by full-time faculty members, it remains below 50% – and in fact declined from 49% to 46% in the four years before 2011.

As State funding has been cut, the proportion of CUNY’s budget that comes from student tuition has risen sharply. “Student tuition, fees and other revenue now supply 48% of CUNY senior college revenue, up from 38% in 2000-01 and 21% in 1990-91,” London pointed out. In 1990-91, he added, State funding supplied 74% of CUNY senior college revenue; now the state supplies only 51%.

“Turning CUNY into a privately financed institution through tuition dollars will close the door of opportunity to many New Yorkers,” London said. Relying on tuition hikes to make up for decades of State disinvestment has already proven to be a failed strategy, he emphasized: students have shouldered an increasing burden, yet CUNY’s finances continue to struggle. Many students cannot afford CUNY’s current \$300-a-year tuition hikes, he added. If tuition were to be raised enough to make up for past cuts in State support, “the magnitude of the tuition increase that would be needed...is so great

that CUNY’s mission would be compromised by pricing out the City’s low and middle-income students.”

The Tuition Assistance Program, or TAP, cannot be relied on to avoid these consequences, London said.

“Tens of thousands of poor students

**Cuomo budget fails to fund \$35M in mandatory costs.**

are ineligible for TAP,” including most part-time students and those who are undocumented. And only half of CUNY’s full-time students in 2011 qualified for TAP.

The PSC strongly supports the NYS DREAM Act, he noted, which would make undocumented students eligible for TAP (see *Clarion*, February 2013), and supports other TAP reforms. But the need to reverse State disinvestment in CUNY will still remain, he said.

## UNFAIR LINKAGE

The PSC strongly opposes Governor Cuomo’s proposed “Next Generation Job Linkage Program,” which would tie some community college funding to so-called “performance” measures and partnerships with private business. “Shifting to performance-based funding would ignore the many challenges faced by community college students, and [ignores] the years of State disinvestment that have already undermined CUNY’s community colleges,” London said. (Full text of the PSC testimony is at [tinyurl.com/PSC-testimony-State-2013](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-testimony-State-2013)).

You can find out more about the PSC’s CUNY budget campaign, and how you can help, at [tinyurl.com/PSC-budget-FY2014](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-budget-FY2014). And see the top of page 12 of this *Clarion* for an action you can take right now.

# SUNY union agrees to 5-year deal

By PETER HOGNESS

A contract settlement between United University Professions (UUP), SUNY’s union of faculty and professional staff, and New York State was announced on February 19. UUP members will vote on ratification of the tentative agreement this spring; ballots mailed out April 19 will be due back by May 15.

Covering the period from July 2, 2011, through July 1, 2016, the five-year agreement provides for no pay increases in the first three years, followed by a 2% raise in 2014-15 and another 2% hike in 2015-16.

## ‘BEST DEAL’

In addition, a “Deficit Reduction Plan” will reduce SUNY faculty and staff paychecks during the next two years. “Employees will have their salary reduced by the value of a total of nine days” during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 fiscal years. Their work schedules, however,

## No raises for first three years

will be reduced by only two days during that time. The seven days they work without compensation will be repaid, without interest, in the final year of the agreement.

“Times are tough for public employee unions,” said UUP President Phil Smith. “When the dust from the talks settles, I believe our members will see that UUP and the negotiations team did a good job of getting the best deal possible.” Governor Cuomo hailed the agreement, saying that it “continues the State’s commitment to fiscal discipline.”

Gains in the tentative agreement cited by the UUP include several service awards at certain points in an employee’s career, such as a \$500 raise on receiving a permanent appointment, and improvements in the grievance procedure.

SUNY employees do not receive step increases; instead, employees

may receive some increments to salary at the discretion of the chancellor or their college president. In this proposed UUP contract, the chancellors’ awards would be given equally to every member as pay increases in three years of the contract: \$500 in 2013, \$250 in 2014 and \$500 in 2015. College presidents have a pool of funds for bonus payments to individuals that they select, in each of the last four years of the contract. Money for these bonuses is equal to 0.5% of annual payroll.

UUP was the last major State worker union to arrive at a settlement, and terms of the deal follow the same outline as contracts between the State and its two largest unions, the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) and the Public Employees Federation (PEF), in

2011. Those contracts also provide for a three-year wage freeze, followed by two annual increases of 2%, and for several “furlough days” for union members. Governor Cuomo had threatened that he would lay off 10,000 State workers if the concessionary contracts were not approved.

**Higher health costs and withheld wages**

Angry PEF members voted down their proposed agreement the first time around, despite the layoff threats. But after falling short by a margin of 54% to 46%, the PEF settlement – with some minor adjustments – was approved by a more than two-to-one

margin after the first 3,500 layoff notices were sent out. But members of both unions were bitter about the outcome, saying they’d been forced to negotiate with a gun held to their heads. Last year, PEF’s president lost his re-election bid, with the contract settlement a major issue.

State officials had briefly threatened layoffs of UUP members in 2011,

in the wake of the CSEA and PEF settlements. While the State has not publicly threatened UUP members’ jobs since then, the *Albany Times-Union* reported this year that “the UUP [contract] discussion was accompanied by layoff tensions.”

UUP members’ comments on the settlement were strongly negative on the UUP’s Facebook page, and the same was true in comments on the *Times-Union*’s blog on NY politics, Capitol Confidential. However, there was no sign of an organized “vote no” effort among union members.

## COSTS INCREASE

The settlement would also increase UUP members’ health care costs, raising the percentage they must pay of their health insurance premium. For employees earning less than \$40,137, this will go up by two percentage points, leaving employees responsible for 12% of the premium for individual coverage and 27% for a family plan. For employees earning more than that amount, the increase is six percentage points, for an employee share of 16% for individual coverage and 31% for family.



## Taxis in the hot seat

Sometimes initiatives to fight climate change ignore potential allies in the working class, said Bhairavi Desai, director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, at a packed forum on labor and climate change at CUNY's Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies.

Members of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (TWA) drive the largest cab fleet in the country, which includes 13,237 yellow cabs. Workers generally lease the vehicles and pay for their own gas. Driver income has dropped 26% over the last six years, in part, due to rising fuel prices.

So it was good news for them when, under pressure from environmentalists, New York City announced that taxi garages would have to purchase hybrids, with far higher gas mileage and lower emissions. "The difference between a gas-guzzler, like the Crown Victoria, and a hybrid is literally about \$25 to \$30 per shift," Desai told the January 17 forum. "That is significant income for a working person, especially when they're barely making a minimum wage on many days."

TWA members supported the change and understood the stakes for the planet as well, said Desai: many New York cabbies are from Bangladesh, a low-lying country vulnerable to rising seas.

But taxi workers weren't included in the debate, Desai recalled: "It never occurred to [City officials] to come to the drivers that actually operate those vehicles, pay for the fuel." Taxi workers, she said, are also "breathing the air on the streets of the city" every day.

### WHO PAYS FOR HYBRIDS?

So workers were left out of negotiations between taxi garage owners, who opposed the change because they did not want to pay for hybrids' added cost, and City regulators. When the owners decided the concessions they had extracted from the City were not enough, they went to court and sued against the new policy, claiming the hybrids would be too expensive.

For City officials and the media, cab drivers were not even part of the debate. If they had been, it would have strengthened the hand of both the City and the environmental movement, said Desai. "Workers could have been the face of the environmental agenda," she said.

In the end, the City and the garage owners cut a deal that meant cab drivers themselves would have to pay more for the hybrid vehicles. The drivers, who were least able to afford it, ended up subsidizing a much larger part of the cost, a policy that Desai said was not economically, environmentally or socially rational.

If environmentalists had talked to workers, not just their bosses and City officials, said Desai, a more effective and sustainable policy could have been the result. "Don't make us choose between a middle-class existence and the air we breathe," she advised. Environmental activists, she said, should seek to understand workers' lives and outlook.

# Labor's sea change on climate

By JENNY BROWN

"Jobs vs. the environment" – for years the two were seen as permanently opposed, with unions coming down on the side of jobs. But today, with climate change ever more evident and the need for action more urgent, many unions are taking the view that investment to curtail global warming is a job-creator.

Auto workers are backing fuel efficiency standards; taxi drivers are embracing hybrids; and transport workers are lobbying for more mass transit while opposing dirty fuels. Nurses are demanding a "Robin Hood" tax on Wall Street, to be devoted to developing safe, green energy. Utility workers, who run power plants, are calling for "a serious commitment to climate change legislation," which they say will create two million good jobs.

And as the debate over global warming and the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline heats up, Canada's largest energy union opposes it more strongly than ever, along with most of the rest of the Canadian labor movement.

### MORE GREEN JOBS

In the US today, investment in renewable energy creates more jobs than investment in capital-intensive fossil fuels. A recent University of California study found that for every million dollars invested, 5.65 jobs are created in solar energy, 5.70 in wind, and only 3.96 in coal.

A study of the 2009 stimulus package noted that investments in public transportation had created 31% more jobs, dollar for dollar, than those in new road construction.

Better preparation for the impact of climate change could also generate jobs, say utility workers. New York's Consolidated Edison "has cut the workforce to the bone, and they don't invest," said John Duffy, national vice president of the Utility Workers Union.

Con Ed's New York City workforce of 8,500, locked out for weeks last summer in a dispute over pensions, has been winnowed to 7,700.

When a storm like Sandy wreaks havoc on an understaffed, under-maintained system, Duffy said, managers just say, "Whoops, look what the storm did."

### NEW TUNE

After many years of singing in harmony with their Big 3 employers against fuel efficiency, the United Auto Workers has changed its tune, arguing that the recent 2012 regulations will create additional jobs.

Pollution-cutting technology requires "additional content on each vehicle," said UAW President Bob King, at hearings considering the new corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards. "That additional content must be engineered and produced by additional employees." In contrast, UAW's previous president, Ron Gettelfinger, was unenthusiastic about tighter CAFE

## Action vs. warming creates jobs

standards.

In 2102, after King was elected, the UAW joined the BlueGreen Alliance, an effort to unite environmentalists and unions started by the Steelworkers and the Sierra Club in 2006. The Alliance currently includes the American Federation of Teachers (the PSC's national affiliate), and the Service Employees, Communications, Utility, Food and Commercial, Plumbers, Amalgamated Transit, and Sheet Metal unions.

The Alliance predicts that by 2030, full implementation of the new

er to 6,000. The company promised construction unions it would hire their members, leading the Laborers – with support from the Teamsters, Operating Engineers, and Plumbers – to lash out at two transit unions that have spoken against Keystone XL.

Many climate activists rate the Keystone XL pipeline as a hinge-point in the battle to lower carbon emissions. NASA Climate Scientist James Hansen, who spoke at a forum at CUNY's Murphy Institute on labor and climate change (see sidebar),

**Keystone XL pipeline highlights lingering divisions.**



The call for clean energy is seen as a boost for both employment and the planet.

emissions standards would create 50,000 jobs and cut carbon emissions in half for cars and light trucks.

The promise of jobs in the fossil fuel industry has created splits among unions. The BlueGreen Alliance lost the Laborers Union in the first round of the Keystone XL fight in 2011.

The Keystone XL would run 2,000 miles, carrying a corrosive slurry of raw bitumen from Canada to US refineries on the Gulf Coast. Tar sands mining produces a dirty fuel with a large carbon footprint, and spills are not uncommon.

Hamstrung by disagreement among member unions, the BlueGreen Alliance declined to take a stand on the pipeline project. But the Laborers pulled out anyway, angry that other coalition members had opposed a project they hoped would employ their members, who face stubbornly high unemployment. For the Laborers, the promise of "jobs now" was counterposed to climate impacts later – and "jobs now" won.

TransCanada, the energy company behind Keystone XL, has projected it would create 20,000 construction jobs, while the State Department puts this number clos-

has been a leading pipeline opponent. He warned that exploitation of the tar sands "would make it implausible to stabilize the climate," if tar sands are in the mix, "it's essentially 'game over'."

With this in mind, making tar sands bitumen more difficult to mine and ship has become a top priority for US climate activists, leading to 1,200 civil disobedience arrests at the White House in fall 2011. President (and then-candidate) Obama was convinced to delay a decision on whether to OK the pipeline until after the election. The Steelworkers, whose members fabricate pipelines, issued a statement supporting the delay, but didn't mention climate change.

### KEYSTONE XL RE-DO

With the administration again considering Keystone XL, environmental groups marched – with some labor support – on February 17 in Washington, DC.

The Communications Workers urged members to attend what they called "the largest US climate rally ever," with the tagline, "Crippling drought. Devastating wildfires. Superstorm Sandy. Climate change is a real threat."

After the demonstration, the Keystone XL debate reached the highest levels of the AFL-CIO, which tried to make all member unions happy by releasing a vague statement on clean energy, supporting pipelines in general and mentioning that fixing leaky ones would create jobs. The statement's authors even tried to offer an environmental argument, saying that pipelines are a low-carbon way to ship fuel, compared to truck transport.

The AFL-CIO's Building Trades Council released a triumphant press release saying the AFL-CIO supported Keystone XL, though, in fact, the federation statement left that project unmentioned.

The 185,000-member National

Nurses Union voted against the AFL-CIO's statement. The nurses' group came out against the pipeline in early February, joining the Amalgamated Transit Union and the Transport Workers Union.

"It's easy for us" to stand for clean energy, said Jill Furillo of the separate 37,000-member New York State Nurses Association. "Our members are on the front lines of seeing the effects of the environmental crisis."

After Hurricane Sandy, New York nurses not only took care of those injured in the storm, they also evacuated patients from hospitals crippled by loss of electricity, carrying critically ill patients down dark stairwells when rising floodwaters wrecked elevators and backup generators.

While the promise of "green jobs" is a big factor in labor's greater support for action on climate change, climate-related disasters like Sandy are now affecting their outlook, too.

*Jenny Brown is a staff writer for Labor Notes (labornotes.org). A version of this article originally appeared in its March 2013 issue.*



# Joint action on textbook costs

By NANCY SCOLA

According to a recent national survey, 70% of US college students say they sometimes skip buying textbooks because of the cost. Brooklyn College (BC) students grappling with sky-high textbook prices are trying now to tap a major new ally: their professors.

The hope, says Abraham Esses, a junior and student government president at BC's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is to enlist faculty in answering the question, "How do we get the cost of books down without impinging upon the rights of teachers and making sure the quality of the classroom doesn't decrease?"

Part of the answer, student leaders say, can come from used books. Moshe Nathan, the student government's chair of academic affairs and a senior, lays out the math. A professor who assigned the seventh edition of the classic *Quantitative Chemical Analysis*, which sells for about \$200, said yes when asked if the sixth edition, which can be found online for \$4.99, could be used instead. Some professors use their personal websites or the BC WebCentral portal to announce, in advance, that older versions of textbooks are fine.

Other professors don't recommend new texts at all. Joshua Fogel, a Brooklyn College professor of finance and business management, says he stopped assigning the latest version of his core text when it climbed above \$150.

"When you're teaching undergraduates, in particular," says Fogel, "there's no latest development in the field that's going to rapidly change things." Even if there are minor adjustments, he says, when you add up what all the students in one of his classes would collectively pay for that additional knowledge, it totals around \$3,500. "I don't think it's worth it," Fogel says.

## TAKES WORK

That's not to say, adds the business professor, that opting for older editions won't create additional pedagogical burdens. Faculty might need to create syllabi with references to multiple editions, or may need to update a book's software-based exercises. For an older edition, professors might have to buy their own desk copy rather than rely upon publisher copies. "But in life," says Fogel, "you have to make choices."

Nationally, exasperation over textbook prices has been brewing for years and has sometimes bubbled up from within the industry itself. In 2003, Erwin Cohen, former editorial director of the Academic Press, wrote in *The New York Times* that costs could be cut by stripping texts to their essentials and sticking with editions for longer time periods. "Publishers release new editions of successful textbooks every few years – not to improve content, although that may be a by-product – but to discourage the sales of used books by making them seem obsolete."

In 2008, passage of the federal

## By faculty and students at Brooklyn College



Miriam Deutch, a library faculty member at Brooklyn College, and Abraham Esses, BC student government president.

Higher Education Opportunity Act required publishers to start telling professors what's changed between versions. Moreover, it mandated the offering of texts unbundled from the supplemental materials, like CDs, that the US Government Accountability Office found to be a major factor in the tripling of book prices from 1986 to 2004. The bill also encourages the posting of course listings and required materials early enough that students can use them in planning their course selections. But the statute has no real enforcement provisions, and observers at Brooklyn College say that compliance is mixed. Professors may struggle with the technical side of detailing their courses online, and there's little information available for judging competing textbooks.

Few professors they've approached, say student government leaders, are unsympathetic. "I think the biggest problem," says the student

government's chair, Nathan, "is a lack of awareness."

According to a study by the National Association of College Stores, students who reported comparison shopping for course materials increased from 57% in 2011 to 67% last year. Students can also opt to rent used or new books through vendors like Amazon.com, Chegg.com or the Brooklyn College Barnes & Noble.

Fogel, a business professor, says that he skips assigning homework from books for the first two weeks of class to allow time for students to hunt down the best deal, whether it's in the college store or Bangalore.

Beyond books, professors are being encouraged to rethink the coursework packets of articles and papers that can come with their own high costs. Miriam Deutch, an associate professor in BC's library department, says that classroom faculty should consider providing

links to materials in databases like JSTOR, LexisNexis and Academic Search Complete.

"We're already paying for them," notes the librarian, via BC's fees for online journal access. Accessibility of materials, she suggests, should be a factor in syllabi decisions: "If it's not in here, maybe there's a substitute for it...and you should consider updating your reading list."

## CULTURAL SHIFT

The subject of textbook choice, student leaders acknowledge, is bound up with questions of academic freedom. But BC student leaders say that their focus is on a cultural shift, rather than mandates.

Publishers say that they're doing their part to keep costs down, through e-books, black-and-white editions, stand-alone chapters and more. Still, they warn, the way textbooks are now produced can cost in the neighborhood of a million dollars per title.

Some universities think it's worth experimenting with other models and are asking academics to rethink how textbooks are made.

Pilot projects at SUNY and Philadelphia's Temple University give faculty a few thousand dollars and the aid of peer reviewers, librarian-editors and graphic designers to develop new textbooks, available digitally at no charge. Rice University's OpenStax College is aimed at creating freely available textbooks for core introductory classes, and the University of Minnesota is encouraging its faculty to help build a catalog of open-access textbooks.

The Open College Textbook Act, introduced by Sen. Dick Durbin in 2009, would have provided federal grants to faculty who write textbooks made freely available online. The PSC and its national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, supported the bill and gave input on its design, but the measure failed to win passage (see [tinyurl.com/Clarion-9-09](http://tinyurl.com/Clarion-9-09), pages 4 and 10).

Right now, Brooklyn College student leaders are eager to draw a critical mass of attention to a range of possibilities beyond the new-book, publisher-driven textbook market. Toward that end, they are speaking at faculty orientations, engaging in one-on-one conversations with professors and sponsoring book fairs to spotlight cheaper options.

Student leaders and school librarians are also teaming up on a proposal for funding to encourage Brooklyn College faculty to create and curate open-access textbooks.

Brooklyn College librarians describe themselves as eager allies in student-driven efforts to make low and no-cost texts more accessible. Doing so, they say, reflects libraries' enduring roles as crafters of academic collections: librarians will likely be the ones to maintain those new resources over the long haul.

"The neediness is desperate," says Deutch, the librarian. "The lines for reserves," where students are given two hours to read or copy a book, "are out the door. They're willing to wait in line to use the books here in the library. In the past, we had to rely on the publishing industry, but what's different now is that we have options. Things are a click away."

## How to e-mail your professor

By PETER HOGNESS

"How many e-mails do you receive every day? Probably a lot, right? Now imagine a professor who has four classes of 25 students each, or a professor with two lecture hall classes of 80 or 90 students each."

That thought exercise is from a student-written guide on "How to e-mail your professor," one of many "how-to" guides on this subject available online.

E-mail has been a basic fact of academic life for so long that it's often taken for granted, by both students and faculty – but their expectations for e-mail communication are often not the same. Faculty members who

stumble on one of these "how-to" guides often have the same reaction: "I'm adding this to my syllabus!"

The guides include pointers such as:

● "Include a meaningful subject line. While this is true of every e-mail you send (that you wish to be read), it's especially important when you're attempting to communicate with somebody [who's] busy.... If your professor does not already have a preferred convention, then a good default is to start with your course department, number, and section (or day and time of course), and then the topic of your e-mail. For example, PSYC100 Section

XX: Question about data collection for project."

● "Before sending your e-mail, be sure you don't already have the information you need. Did you check your syllabus? Did you check your professor's website?... You might already have what you need; if you do, asking for it again will make you seem lazy or unfocused."

● "No one really likes emoticons and smileys. Trust us on this one. :)"

But one size does not fit all. To start with, these guides don't all give the same advice. For example, some "how-to" guides say flatly that students should always use a college e-mail account, to help avoid spam filters and/or to make a more professional impression than might be left by a whimsical name on their personal e-mail ac-

count. Other faculty members dislike their colleges' e-mail systems and mainly use a different account themselves; they don't mind if students do the same.

## DIFFERENT STYLES

The guides also vary in style and tone. Some are short and to the point. Others are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them all the way through. A few are written by students, which brings a different perspective, perhaps some added credibility.

Links to several popular guides, one of which will probably be a good fit for your own style of teaching and communication, can be found on the PSC website at [psc-cuny.org/clarion/how-email](http://psc-cuny.org/clarion/how-email).



# Your right to a union representative

By JOHN TARLETON

If you're asked to meet with your dean, or provost, or another college official, it could be for many reasons. Perhaps you're going to be praised or honored for your work. Or maybe there's a problem they want you to help solve. But in some cases, it's for a discussion where you should have a union representative at your side.

When a member of the PSC bargaining unit is called to an investigatory interview or a fact-finding meeting that it could be reasonably thought may eventually lead to disciplinary action, he or she has the right to demand and be provided with union representation. This right applies even when the member is not the subject of the investigation.

But in order to have a union representative present, you have to request it directly. Don't expect management to inform you of these rights – it's up to you to assert them. You can do so with confidence: management is required by law to honor this request once you make it.

## COMMON MISTAKE

Unfortunately, many faculty or staff who find themselves in investigatory interviews that would warrant invoking these rights fail to do so. Instead, they try to go it alone, often to their detriment.

"If you ever get called to a meeting that you think might be investigatory or for fact-finding, ask the purpose of the meeting and then contact the union," says Renee Lasher, PSC Coordinator of Contract Administration.

"Faculty will do all sorts of things before they realize 'Hey, maybe I shouldn't be my own lawyer,'" adds CCNY Grievance Counselor Carla Cappetti.

Your rights to union representation in such interviews are often referred to as "Weingarten Rights," after a 1975 Supreme Court decision (*Weingarten v. NLRB*) that established the principle. At CUNY, these rights are guaranteed by New York State's public-sector labor law (known as the "Taylor Law").

## 'MORE CONFIDENCE'

Having union representation is beneficial in a number of ways, according to campus grievance counselors. It allows the member to better prepare, and to have some idea what to expect in an interview. In addition, management may fail to disclose the full aim of an investigation, and a union representative may be able to help a member sort out what is really going on. During questioning, the union representative cannot answer questions for the member. But the representative can advise and consult with the member, and also can state objections to the meeting and to inappropriate questions. The Union's presence can also alter the dynamic of the interview in intangible but significant ways.

## In a "fact-finding meeting"

Avi Bornstein, a former grievance counselor at John Jay College, says it can be important to have someone taking notes who is not also being questioned. When he accompanied a member in an investigatory meeting, Bornstein said, he would raise objections whenever necessary. But the simple fact of having a union representative present, he added, can also help keep a meeting from getting off track.

When a union rep is present, "administrators behave themselves, and it gives members more confidence that they are not isolated," agrees BCC Grievance Counselor Simon Davis.

Of course, many meetings with college officials have nothing to do with investigation or discipline: most are part of the normal functioning of a university. But if a meeting's purpose turns out to be different from what you expected, or if the nature of a meeting suddenly changes, it's important to know that you can assert your right to a union representative at any time – before the meeting, when it starts, or in the middle. It is your right, and is guaranteed by law.

In the 1975 Supreme Court case



Suzan Moss of BCC.

**If you request it, representation cannot be denied.**

that established Weingarten rights, a cashier at the Weingarten's grocery chain was wrongly accused of theft. She asked for a union representative to be present, but her request was denied. Her flustered response to interrogation was then used to try to make her look guilty, though she was later exonerated.

Investigations can be deeply upsetting for union members

who find their character called into question, their careers put at risk, or their colleagues accused of wrongdoing. Investigations on issues such as racial or sexual discrimination may leave a member feeling deeply offended or embarrassed, and the impulse to argue one's own defense can be strong. While faculty members are accustomed to arguing on their own behalf, grievance counselors say, they need to recognize that in an investigatory meeting, they are not the expert – and they should ask for a union representative to be present.

A union representative can help keep management from going on "fishing expeditions" to put the member at a disadvantage, asking inappropriate questions that go far beyond the facts of the case or the behavior regulated by CUNY policies. For example, one grievance counselor cited an administration lawyer who asked a number of off-topic, personal questions, including whether a married faculty member had ever committed adultery. No union rep was present, and notes from this conversation went into the faculty member's files. The counselor said that union representation can help correct course "if the conversation starts to go into people's personal lives."

The presence of a union representative can also help calm down members who are upset and might speak rashly. "If you feel like you're going to lose your temper or blow your stack, it's better to stop the situation," says Suzan Moss a former grievance counselor at BCC.

Many PSC members are not aware of the due process protections they have or the importance of using them. "People carry on as if all will always be well but we know that sometimes isn't the case," says BCC's Simon Davis. He says the



Former John Jay grievance counselor Avi Bornstein says a union representative can help keep management from going on "fishing expeditions."

campus chapter makes a point of discussing Weingarten rights each year at its annual meeting for new members. This year's meeting was held in February and drew about 20 people, Davis said.

While members are often unaware of their Weingarten rights, Davis says his college's administration has aggressively sought to curtail them, asserting in the past that he had no right to be present at an investigatory meeting or, if he was present, that he had no right to intervene. Davis has resisted these encroachments by firmly asserting his colleagues' union rights.

"When the administration sees the union is serious, they tend to adapt a more diplomatic stance," Davis says. "But, we have to be firm and vigilant."

"Very often, it seems they are not aware [either]," Davis adds, though he says the new administration at his college has begun to show more respect for the Weingarten rights

of PSC members. "The message is starting to get through, which would be good for everyone on campus."

At BMCC, the PSC chapter includes information on Weingarten rights in its newsletter, at least once a semester, says Grievance Counselor Charlie Post. A decade ago, the BMCC administration insisted that faculty or professional staff facing an investigatory proceeding had no right to union representation.

## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

"We schooled them on that," Post says. "We made it very clear that we would file grievances if they did not abide by federal law."

But while management often needs to be educated, enforcing due process starts with union members. As Avi Bornstein says, "As union members, we need to know and assert our rights. That includes directly asking for union representation in a fact-finding meeting."

## CALENDAR

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3 / 6:00-8:30 pm:** The PSC will co-sponsor a forum with the Social Science Project on Racial Justice at CUNY. Discussants will address research that shows declining diversity in CUNY's student body and little progress in diversifying the full-time faculty in the past decade. Panelists include PSC President Barbara Bowen; CUNY Law School Professor Frank Deale; Paul Washington, chair of the PSC Committee on Race; David R. Jones, CEO of the Community Service Society; and Ann Cook, co-founder of the Urban Academy Laboratory High School. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 5 / 4:00 pm:** Monthly First Friday meeting for PSC part-timers. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 12 / 6:00 pm:** Labor Goes to the Movies presents *Dupes*, a 1973 movie by Egyptian director Tewfik Saleh about three Palestinian men seeking work in Kuwait. A scathing indictment of Palestinian dispossession and the corruption of Arab bureaucracies, the film was banned throughout the Arab world upon its initial release. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 19 / 6:00 pm:** The Women's Committee will be showing Tami Gold's film, *Passionate Politics*, about global feminist Charlotte Bunch. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 23 / 7:00-9:00 pm:** PSC mayoral candidates' forum (see page 4). At Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work, 2180 Third Avenue and 119th Street.

## TRS main office reopens

The NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is back in full operation at its office on 55 Water Street in lower Manhattan, a building damaged by Superstorm Sandy.

As of February 4, the TRS Member Services Center is again open at 55 Water Street during regular business hours (8:30 am-5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, except during official

New York City holidays). TRS staff are no longer stationed at the temporary walk-in facility on Court Street in Brooklyn, which was opened to provide services after the main office was made unusable by flooding and the resulting loss of power and communications.

More information about TRS services is at [www.trsnyc.org](http://www.trsnyc.org).



# Making the most of reassigned time

By JOHN TARLETON

At CUNY, the union contract guarantees junior faculty 24 hours of reassigned time for scholarship and creative work. If you're working toward tenure, it's your right to use this time – and junior faculty have done so in a variety of ways.

Julie George took her reassigned time in small chunks, over four semesters, so she could continue teaching political science classes at Queens College while making steady progress on her book on the politics of ethnic separatism in Russia and the republic of Georgia.

For Karen Strassler, being able to take a full semester off from teaching anthropology at Queens College made it much easier to finish the manuscript for her first book on how popular photography helped create a national identity in postcolonial Java. "It was incredibly helpful to be able to work on the manuscript in a sustained and intensive way for four months," Strassler wrote via e-mail from Indonesia where she is currently doing research.

At City Tech, Huseyin Yuce says reassigned time reduced his Math Department teaching load enough

## Junior faculty scholarship

during his fourth year on the tenure clock for him to publish one paper and submit another.

Yuce, George and Strassler have all received tenure and promotion to associate professor, in recent years. While they used their junior faculty reassigned time in different ways, all three scholars say they received strong support from their departments in how they chose to structure it.

"My chair was excellent," George recalled. "She made it very clear that I could use my reassigned time in whatever way I wanted and whenever I wanted."

But junior faculty sometimes face obstacles in using their reassigned time, and are sometimes wrongly told that it is up to administrators whether they can use it. "It's an entitlement, not an option," emphasizes PSC Director of Contract Enforcement Debra Bergen. "It's important that people know what their rights are."

The contract states clearly that junior faculty "must be granted re-

assigned time provided under this agreement." In scheduling the use of this time, the contract says department chairs "should give full consideration to the wishes of the individual faculty member, the nature of the work that the individual proposes to perform during the reassigned time, and the instructional needs of the department."

City Tech Chapter Chair Bob Cermele emphasized to *Clarion* that while a junior faculty member's choice of reassigned time "should meet the needs of the department," it should not be expected to be scheduled "for the convenience" of the department.

Senior faculty and union activists advise junior faculty to take the initiative, and be both proactive and flexible in working out a plan with their department chair.

"It really should be a close consultation with the department chair who will hopefully be supportive though the process," added Howard Meltzer, chair of BMCC's Department of Music and Art.

As an example of that kind of

collaboration, City Tech's Yuce described to *Clarion* how his Math Department chair would ask him to take reassigned time during the spring semester when enrollment drops and fewer class sections need to be taught. Yuce said he largely accommodated this request because the momentum he built up from doing his research work during the spring on fourth order differential equations carried over into the summer months as well.

### MAKING A CASE

For junior faculty, Cermele added, it's best to write out a detailed plan for how one intends to use her or his reassigned time and present it to the department chair. "It's harder to argue with the written word," Cermele said.

Meltzer said department chairs can also help junior faculty by making sure their reassigned time is not consumed by a disproportionate share of committee work. "These are not departmental packhorses that should be loaded down with every task that tenured faculty decide they no longer want to do," said Meltzer who received tenure in 2008.

The junior faculty reassigned time provision was first won in

contract negotiations in 2002, and was expanded four years later. "Why should time for research be a luxury, unthinkable at CUNY?" said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "It took a campaign by the entire membership and two contracts with incremental changes, but eventually we won both the conceptual and the material victory: CUNY faculty are entitled to time for research, just as other faculty are."

Untenured faculty appointed as librarians are entitled to 450 clock hours of reassigned time and counselors 525 clock hours. These hours may be scheduled in one semester or one academic year or allocated as agreed upon between the faculty and the department chair during the first five years of service.

The 24 hours of junior faculty reassigned time is "a remarkable step forward," says Julie George, and the benefits of supporting junior faculty in their use of this time is clear: "It allows you to relax and think, which is when faculty do their most productive work."

If you have questions, talk to your campus grievance counselor, or call 212-354-1252.

# Health insurance and your W-2

By PATRICK SMITH, PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund & PETER HOGNESS

The federal health reform law – the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) – requires that employers begin reporting the cost of employer-sponsored health insurance coverage on employees' W-2 forms. Federal guidelines say that the purpose is "to provide employ-

## New information is listed

ees with useful and comparable consumer information on the cost of their health care coverage."

For CUNY employees, that figure should appear in Box 12 of your W-2 form, with figure Code DD to identify the amount. The most important thing to know about this informa-

tion is that it does not affect your taxes.

While there is a provision of the ACA that, as of 2018, will impose an excise tax on high-cost employer-provided plans, this will be a tax on the employer, not the employee. So whatever figure appears in Box

12 of your W-2, your tax bill will be unchanged.

In any case, the vast majority of PSC members have coverage that will be well below the threshold for these so-called "Cadillac plans." While lower limits were proposed and debated as the ACA worked its way through Congress, a plan is currently considered to be in this high-cost category if its price tag exceeds \$10,200 annually for individual coverage or \$27,500 for family coverage. This amount is indexed to inflation, using the Consumer Price Index.

### TAXES UNCHANGED

For CUNY employees, the amount shown in Box 12 includes the cost of your basic health insurance, prescription drug coverage and other benefits you may have through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. Since these are group plans, where premiums for some aspects of coverage are not assessed on a strict per-capita basis, some components of this figure represent a prorated calculation rather than a precise per-person cost.

As April 15 draws nearer, you can expect to hear more discussion – and misinformation – about the health-coverage cost figure in Box 12 of your W-2. The most important thing to remember, and to share with others, is that it doesn't matter whether this figure is \$3 or \$30,000 – your taxes remain unchanged.

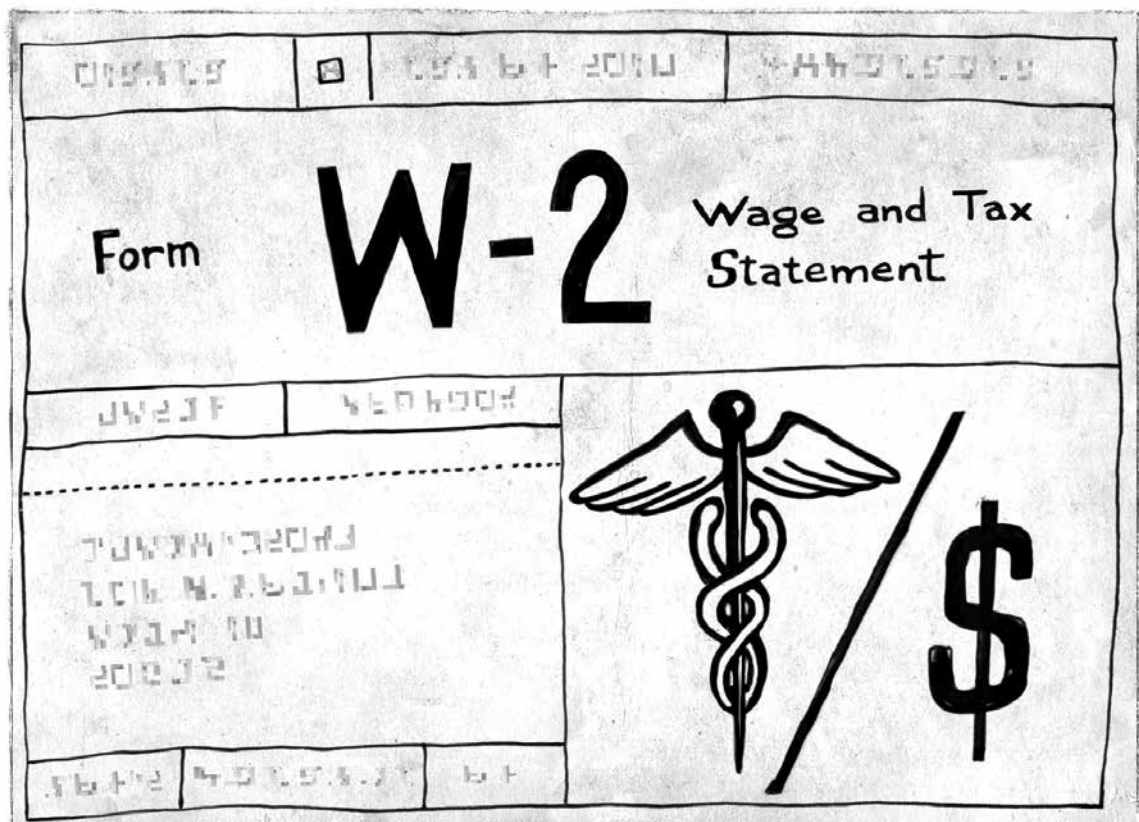
## NYC LABOR IN BRIEF

### Sick day pay, out in the cold

New York City workers continued to press City Council Speaker Christine Quinn to allow a vote on legislation that would grant five paid sick days per year to more than a million mostly low-wage workers. "I don't want what happened to me to happen to any other worker," deli worker Emilio Palaguachi said at a January 31 rally outside the deli where he used to work. He described being fired for taking a day off while he had the flu. "I was miserable and did not want to contaminate my coworkers or the customers, since my job was making sandwiches," Palaguachi explained. The sick leave bill has support from 37 of 51 Council members: if it is brought to a vote it is certain to pass.

### Lawsuit: Time for Sanitation Dept. to trash racism

Denouncing a "plantation mentality" at the Department of Sanitation, 11 black and Hispanic employees filed suit against the City February 12. The plaintiffs allege they have been denied promotions and forced to work in a hostile racial environment. The lawsuit charges that while 55% of street-level Sanitation workers are black or Hispanic, no more than 5% of top supervisors are people of color. "It's about who you know and what color your skin is," plaintiff Adrenia Burgis, a veteran black employee, told the *Daily News*.



Jud Guttau



## SEEK DINERS' SUPPORT

# Restaurant workers reach out

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Between 1991 and 2011, spending in the United States on meals eaten outside the home went up by 49%, after adjusting for inflation. More than half of all US meals are now consumed away from home, and that's been true since 2004. But the wages of those who serve this food are low and have remained that way: the federal tipped minimum wage has not gone up one cent in more than 20 years, remaining stuck at \$2.13 an hour.

Seven of the nation's ten lowest-paying jobs are in restaurants, and their median wage, with tips, is \$9 an hour. In other words, fully half the jobs in this industry are paid less. Servers "are almost three times more likely to be paid below the poverty line" than the workforce as a whole, according to a report from the Restaurant Opportunities Center-United (ROC). Ironically, food servers are "nearly twice as likely to need food stamps as the general population."

## ONE IN TEN WORKERS

The restaurant industry is one of the nation's fastest-growing, even through the current recession, and now employs 10% of the US workforce, or more than 10 million workers in all. In her new book, *Behind the Kitchen Door*, Saru Jayaraman, director of the Food Labor Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley and a co-founder of ROC, examines the ugly low-wage reality that is part of our growing reliance on outside-the-home meals.

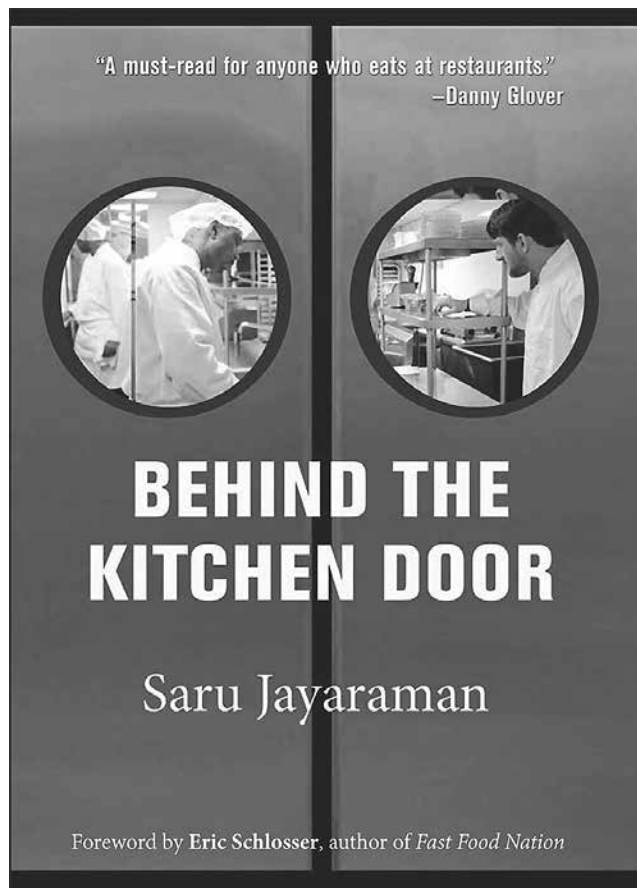
The problems Jayaraman details in her book are both unsurprising and deeply shocking – the depth of the racial discrimination and sexual harassment, the prevalence of stolen wages, the number of restaurant workers who are one or two mishaps away from homelessness. Jayaraman takes a look at the power of the employer's lobby, the National Restaurant Association, which she calls "the other NRA." The National Restaurant Association has worked hard – and spent a lot of cash – to keep the tipped minimum wage unchanged for more than 20 years, and to block other reforms such as requiring a minimum number of paid sick days.

"There's nobody who isn't outraged by \$2.13," says Jayaraman. "Given that, how outrageous is it that Congress hasn't changed the tipped minimum wage in all this time? They're not listening to their constituents; they're listening to big money." While the law does require restaurant owners to cover the difference when a slow night leaves workers making less than the regular minimum wage (\$7.25 an hour), this is ignored far more than it's honored. That, Jayaraman says, is why raising the tipped minimum wage is so crucial.

## LOW PAY &amp; ABUSE

Only 1% of restaurant workers are in unions, and that, plus the low wages endemic to the industry, leaves workers vulnerable. Through her work at UC Berkeley, in her new book, and in her organizing work with ROC, Jayaraman aims to share their stories.

"A few weeks ago, I met a worker who had worked at Olive Garden for 20 years, and developed carpal tunnel and nerve problems from carrying the trays," Jayaraman told *Clarion*. "She never had a day off, because



she never had paid sick days. The pain had become so bad that she could no longer feel her arm and her leg. She filed for workers' comp, and they fired her three weeks later. She [had] opened the place, she had regulars, and they just fired her. She's unable to move, unable to sit. What is going to happen to this woman?"

Conditions like these have prompted a rise in non-traditional organizing among food-service workers. The recent one-day strike by fast-food workers in NYC is one example; ROC is one of the most developed of these organizing efforts.

The organization has a New York soul – it was created here, out of 9/11. Workers at Windows on the World, the famous restaurant at the top of the north Tower, were unionized; the sought-after jobs had low turnover, and those who made and served the food at Windows formed strong bonds. After 9/11, some surviving workers – and their now-former union – contacted Jayaraman, and together, they started Restaurant Opportunities Center-New York. In 2007, ROC went national, led by Jayaraman and her co-director, Windows survivor Fekkak Mamdouh.

In her book, Jayaraman tells some quintessential New York stories, sharing the experiences of Mamdouh and ROC-NY Director Siby Sekou, a former Windows worker and an immigrant from the Ivory Coast who was ROC's first official member. Others profiled in the book live across the country – there are waiters in the Midwest, a pastry chef from Philadelphia, workers in New Orleans and DC.

Jayaraman also showcases what ROC calls "high-road" employers, restaurant owners who offer better-than-the-minimum compensation, treat their workers fairly and promote from within. The profiles have two powerful commonalities: all of those profiled become organizers and advocates for a better industry, and they love their vocation and are deeply devoted to cooking and serving our food well. ROC, primarily an organization of restaurant

workers, is enlarging its organizing to include diners. It's this effort that inspired the writing of *Behind the Kitchen Door*. Though it's Jayaraman's name on the cover, as a veteran organizer, she emphasizes that it's a collective product, reflected in how often she says "we" rather than "I" in discussing how the book took shape: "We wrote the book to let consumers know what's behind the kitchen door, so they can join us in the struggle for change," she told *Clarion*.

## FOOD MOVEMENT

Jayaraman explains that ROC has been working with Slow Food and other "food-movement" groups. "We saw the success in the food movement, in demanding locally sourced food items and restaurants," she says. ROC and its allies agree that the "sustainable" food idea can, and should, include workers' issues. "We decided to build consumer engagement for a groundswell for change alongside the workers," Jayaraman says. As she's talked about this idea with more and more diners, she describes hearing a lot of "shock and surprise."

"Most diners don't know about \$2.13, don't know tips are the core of workers' wages,"

she told *Clarion*. In fact, years ago, Saru Jayaraman didn't know either – the book chronicles her own trajectory from bad tipper to advocate-diner.

Diners allying with restaurant workers isn't just a matter of doing something because it's right, Jayaraman says – though that it certainly is. The two groups have some shared interests at work, for example, on the issue of paid sick days. A ROC study of New York City's restaurant industry found that 84% of NYC restaurant workers do not get paid sick days, and more than half of the workers interviewed reported that they had worked while sick.

## COMMON GROUND

In the face of low wages and the very real threat of being fired for taking time off, even unpaid, the latter statistic is not a surprise. It also makes diners' interest in paid sick days starkly clear. To help change such conditions, Jayaraman urges diners to make worker advocacy as regular a habit as leaving a tip. "It's important not just to be a better tipper," she told *Clarion*. "Speak up every time you eat out. I've found it's easiest to do it at the end of the meal, as I'm paying the check." She asks for the manager or owner, she explains: "I compliment the service. When I say something like, 'I would love to see you provide paid sick days,' I've found the employer responds, 'Thank you very much.' Doing it at the end shows your leverage as a customer." ROC offers a consumer tool kit to help, including "tip cards" to facilitate speaking up and a ranking of restaurants' labor practices. (Find them at [roc-united.org/dinersguide](http://roc-united.org/dinersguide))

To organize diners, ROC helped launch The Welcome Table, "a national association of people who care about the food they eat and the people who have touched it, and want to be part of making a better food system for all." At [www.thewelcome-table.net](http://www.thewelcome-table.net), diners can find easy organizing tools, view short films based on the workers' stories in Jayaraman's book, and sign up to stay informed.

A long-time New Yorker who taught at Brooklyn College before moving to UC Berkeley, Jayaraman thinks that New Yorkers, who eat out more than residents of any other US city, have special reason to get involved. That's even more true, she says, for CUNY faculty and staff. In her classes at Brooklyn College, she recalls, "so many of my students were restaurant workers. This is an issue that intersects so intimately with the students in the University – it's important that we all pay attention."

*Dania Rajendra is a former associate editor of Clarion.*

## Jobs need to be sustainable, too.

### Clarion MARCH 2013

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## FROM ALABAMA TO DETROIT

## Rosa Parks: a life of rebellion

In *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, Jeanne Theoharis, professor of political science at Brooklyn College, takes a closer look at a legendary figure. The book “argues that the romanticized, children’s-book story of a meek seamstress with aching feet who just happened into history in a moment of uncalculated resistance is pure mythology,” wrote New York Times columnist Charles Blow.

While scholars may know that Parks was already an activist at the time of the Montgomery bus boycott, the political roots of her early life, and her long years of political activity in Detroit, have received less attention. In the discussion below, Theoharis talks about the long life of Rosa Parks.

**Q** A large proportion of Parks’ personal papers have not been made available to scholars. How did that affect your work on this book?

**A** Parks gave a portion of her papers to Wayne State’s Reuther Library in the late 1970s but the rest of her papers have sat in a storage facility here in New York for the past five years, unseen by scholars or students. Guernsey’s Auctioneers, charged by the Michigan Probate Court to sell Rosa Parks’ effects (her papers along with material effects such as dresses, hats, eyeglasses, her sewing basket, etc.), has not allowed any scholar to evaluate the papers in that archive. This is a significant loss, not only to my research, but to scholars and students more broadly. It’s hard to imagine auctioning a portion of Martin Luther King’s papers without a scholar assessing what was there.

To work around this restriction, I scoured other archives – Parks’ papers at Wayne State; the NAACP Papers at the Library of Congress; the Highlander Folk School Papers; James Haskins’ notes and interviews with Parks for her autobiography; research by Preston Valien, a Fisk sociologist who sent an interracial team of researchers to Montgomery in the first months of the bus boycott; and many more collections. I read dozens of interviews and oral histories, combed the black press and conducted scores of my own interviews with her friends, family and political comrades. These varied threads helped me piece together a fuller account of her political beliefs and activities.

**Q** It’s a shock to learn that before your book, there was no full-length scholarly monograph on Parks, despite the many children’s books about her. Was it this omission that led you to write the book?

**A** I found it shocking; I still do. It seemed like a tremendous oversight – and reflective of the very myths I critique in the book. Rosa Parks is one of the most famous Americans of the twentieth century – yet she is treated not as a substantive political figure, but as a character in a children’s book. The only book about her for adults was Douglas Brinkley’s small, unfootnoted Penguin Lives biography. I think people mistakenly assume we knew all there is to know about her.

For me, as a scholar of the civil rights movement in the North, her life in Detroit was particularly compelling. While some historians have started to examine Parks’ political life before the boycott, and the rich story of the origins and maintenance

of the Montgomery bus boycott itself, the Detroit part of her history – this half-century of activism in Motown – was completely overlooked.

**Q** The title of one of your chapters refers to “The Suffering of Rosa Parks” – her economic struggles, the constant hate attacks, her endurance of hardship in the wake of the bus boycott. Was it difficult to write about those years?

**A** Yes, this is a very painful chapter. Despite the fact that Parks has been celebrated for her courage and service, the impact her arrest had on her family and the decade of suffering that ensued is not usually part of the story. She didn’t like to talk about it – and the economic retaliation that civil rights activists faced has often gone unrecognized.

Parks’ arrest had grave consequences



Rosa Parks at a 1984 protest outside the South African Embassy in Washington, DC.

for her family’s health and economic well-being. After her arrest, the Parks home received a steady stream of hate calls and death threats, such that her mother talked on the phone for hours to keep the line busy. Parks and her husband lost their jobs and didn’t find economic stability for nearly ten years. Even as she made fundraising appearances for the movement across the country, Parks and her family were at times nearly destitute. She developed painful stomach ulcers and a heart condition, and suffered from chronic insomnia. Her husband, Raymond, unnerved by the relentless harassment and death threats, began drinking heavily and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Eight months after the boycott ended, they left Montgomery for Detroit, but things did not get much better. Prompted by pushes from Parks’ friends and allies, the black press eventually exposed the depth of Parks’ financial need, culminating in JET magazine’s July 1960 story on “the bus boycott’s forgotten woman,” leading civil rights groups to finally provide some assistance.

Interestingly, we also haven’t grappled with how much and how long civil rights activists like Rosa Parks were red-baited and demonized, in the South and the North. In 1957 the Georgia Commission on Education published a broadside, titled Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School, filled with photos of civil rights activists who attended conferences at Highlander, which offered workshops for union and community activists. Five of the pictures show Rosa Parks, who is identified as “the central figure in the agitation which resulted in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.” Over a million copies of the pamphlet were circulated by 1959. One of these photos, featuring Martin Luther King with Parks plainly visible at his side, was plastered on billboards throughout the South, under the screaming headline, “Martin Luther King At Communist Training School.” When John Conyers hired Parks in 1965, the office received a lot of hate mail and threatening calls: writers warned that she “hovered with top communists,” called her a “dastardly” traitor, and told Parks and her new employer that she was not wanted in the North.

**Q** Your book examines gender inequities within the civil rights movement. Do you think this is the main reason that Parks’ contributions were downplayed?

**A** I think it’s a combination of gender, class and personality. At the first mass meeting in Montgomery, Parks does not speak – despite a standing ovation and calls for her to do so. At the 1963 March on Washington, women were very much relegated to the background. No women got to speak. Parks was dismayed by the treatment of women at the March. Indeed, at the March itself, Lena Horne and Gloria Richardson took reporters aside, telling them that the real story was Rosa Parks and they should be interviewing her. The two got sent back to their hotel before the March was over – and Richardson attributes this to their outspokenness.

Parks also never got to go to college, and many civil rights organizations only wanted to hire college-educated people. Finally, she was a shy person who did not seek out the limelight. With all the attention paid to her role in the Montgomery bus boycott, she actively sought to keep the spotlight off herself in the following decades.

**Q** What was her relationship to the labor movement?

**A** Parks had a longstanding relationship to labor justice. In the 1940s and 1950s, she assisted her friend and fellow activist E.D. Nixon in his work with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. During the boycott, she came to Detroit on the invitation of Local 600, a militant UAW local, over the objections of UAW president Walter Reuther. She corresponded with the National Negro Labor Council that year and many other labor

militants over the course of her life. Once she moved to Detroit, she continued this relationship with Local 600 and other grassroots labor activists – and these allies were some of her most vociferous advocates and supporters when the Parks family hit hard times in 1959-1960. Parks took part in many strike rallies and picket lines throughout her life, from striking Greyhound workers in DC to sanitation workers in Memphis to newspaper workers in Detroit.

**Q** You talk about her “rebellious life.” Why has Rosa Parks so rarely been seen as a lifelong rebel and activist?

**A** Rosa Parks’ politics were far more expansive and progressive than most people understand. Her political roots began with her grandfather, who was a supporter of Marcus Garvey, as he sits out on their porch with his shotgun ready to protect their family from the Klan violence that had escalated after World War I. (“I wanted to see him kill a Ku Kluxer,” Parks said years later.) Her adult political life begins as a newlywed with her husband Raymond Parks (who she describes as “the first real activist I ever met”), who is working to free the nine Scottsboro boys.

The fable of Rosa Parks is fundamentally a Southern story – and so it becomes hard to see the actual Rosa Parks who spent more than half of her political life fighting the racism of the Jim Crow North. In the 1960s, she is living, as she puts it, in the ‘heart of the ghetto’ – and describes Detroit as the “promised land that wasn’t.” And so, as she had in Montgomery, she set about to challenge the racial caste system in jobs, housing, schools and policing that beset her new hometown.

Parks’ political life demonstrates the connections and overlap activists made between the civil rights and Black Power movements. By the late 1960s, her long-standing commitments to self defense, black history, criminal justice, independent black political power and economic justice intersected with the growing Black Power movement, and she took part in many events and mobilizations. She attended the Black Political Convention in Gary and the Black Power conference in Philadelphia. Helping to run Detroit Friends of SNCC, she journeyed to Lowndes County, Alabama, to support the movement there, spoke at the Poor People’s Campaign, helped organize support committees on behalf of black political prisoners and paid a visit of support to the Black Panther school in Oakland, CA. But our vision of militancy often doesn’t include reserved middle-aged women activists, and so, in many ways, Rosa Parks was hidden in plain sight during the Black Power era.

Internationalist in her vision, Rosa Parks’ vision of justice was a global one. She was an early opponent of US involvement in Vietnam. In the 1980s, she protested South African apartheid and U.S. complicity, joining a picket outside the South African embassy. And eight days after 9/11, she joined other activists in a letter calling on the United States to work with the international community and urging no retaliation or war. Rosa Parks is often celebrated for her long-ago contribution to history – and yet her political work continued to take on the justice issues of our time.

An earlier version of this article was published January 30 on Biographile.com.

Brooklyn college prof on new biography





## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

# Join the PSC Budget Campaign

Governor Andrew Cuomo promised that CUNY would not be subjected to any more budget cuts after the Legislature approved in 2011 annual tuition increases of \$300 per year. Now, the Governor is trying to impose a backdoor cut by refusing to cover \$35 million in mandatory costs for CUNY in this year's budget. Call your legislators now and insist they

restore the \$35 million in mandatory costs that should be in the budget. Also, let them know that we need changes in the law to include mandatory cost increases in the definition of level funding. For more information about how to get involved in the PSC's budget campaign, see <http://psc-cuny.org/state-budget-action-2013>.

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NEWS

Clarion | March 2013

# In science lab, learning by doing

By JOHN TARLETON

"What is systolic pressure? What is diastolic pressure?"

"What are Korotkoff sounds?"

"Is blood pressure higher at the top of your body or the bottom?"

Standing at the front of a laboratory classroom that contained several human skeleton replicas as well as an assortment of plastic body parts, BCC's Nikki McDaniel walked her 22 students through the basics of the human circulatory system and how to measure blood pressure.

"Does everybody follow me?" McDaniel, an associate professor of biology, asked, toward the end of her 45-minute talk.

Now in their second semester of introductory anatomy and physiology, most of the students in the room cautiously nodded their heads or raised their hands.

## SIGNAL

For McDaniel, that was the signal to go from talking about science to doing it – an option that could disappear from future introductory science courses at CUNY, under changes to the general education curriculum mandated by Pathways.

McDaniel took out several small boxes containing stethoscopes, sphygmomanometers and cardio-microphones and placed them on the black laboratory table in front of her. The students were tasked with measuring blood pressure three different ways:

- By wrapping a sphygmomanometer, or inflatable cuff, tightly around a subject's arm and then slowly deflating it, while listening through a stethoscope to learn at what pressure blood resumes flowing through the constricted artery.

- By following the same procedure but with a cardio-microphone placed in the crook of a subject's elbow and linked to a computer.

- By measuring the pulse in the subject's finger.

The class divided into groups of four in which each person in the group had a specific role – Manager,

## Bio class pulses with activity



BCC student Doreen Ascagnò watches Esther Ross (left) use a sphygmomanometer and a cardio-microphone to measure Yeancarla Liriano's blood pressure.

Computer Geek, Go-fer and Subject. In addition to the three different types of blood pressure measurements, students were also asked to measure the blood pressure in their subject's arms when held at different heights. Their results underscored the point that blood pressure is lightest at the top of the body and heaviest at the bottom.

## STUDENT GOALS

"If you tell them blood pressure is highest at your feet, they will try to memorize that and half of them will

get it wrong," McDaniel said. "But if they conduct the experiments and do the measurements, it sticks."

Most of the students in the McDaniel's class plan to study in the allied health fields – nursing, radiology and nutrition, among others. In previous lab sessions, they had done cheek swabs and dissected sheep hearts. They set to work eagerly while McDaniel walked around the room briefly dropping in on each work group.

"I'm there to help them over specific hurdles," McDaniel told

Clarion. "In a good lab, I shouldn't be doing much talking at all." A lab session is going well, McDaniel explained, "when the students start to turn to each other and begin dialoguing among themselves."

For Esther Ross, the lab marked the first time the pre-nursing student had handled a stethoscope. As the Go-fer, she wrapped the cuff around Yeancarla Liriano's arm and inflated it.

"She was holding it in an uncomfortable way, and then she got the hang of it," Liriano said, rubbing her arm gingerly and laughing.

"I got the experience and now I can do it," Ross said.

"In order to have an experience, we had to work together," added Marilyn Navas, the group's designated Computer Geek.

The three women and the group's fourth student, Doreen Ascagnò, all said they were baffled and dismayed by CUNY's drive to scale back introductory science classes to three hours/three credits under the Pathways framework. Their course is currently six hours/four credits. The three-hour limit in Pathways will mean eliminating lab sessions from current introductory science classes: there is simply not enough time.

## PROBLEMATIC

As it pushes hard to implement Pathways (see page 3), CUNY central administration has suggested a variety of optional workarounds through which labs might be restored, as separate three-hour classes. But each of these comes with its own problems, from scheduling to transferability outside the CUNY system. All the proposed workarounds are at odds with the clear guidelines of the National Science Teachers Association: "At the college level...all introductory courses should include labs as an integral part of the science curriculum....Labs should correlate closely with lectures and not be separate activities."

The students in McDaniel's class can't see why an intro science

class without labs would even be considered. "Taking the labs away would be crazy," Ross said. "Reading about it [the subject material] is good. Talking about it is good. But, to get that hands-on experience puts everything together for you."

## 'WHERE'S THE MONEY?'

"The tuition is going up again this year," Navas noted. "So where is all the money going?"

"If you don't practice what you know, you know nothing," said Nelson Gonzalez, the team leader in a nearby work group. To Gonzalez, for

**Pathways' limits on lab classes deemed 'crazy.'**

CUNY to put a three-hour ceiling on intro science classes seems both unwise and disrespectful. "It's not right. It looks like poor people can't get the same kind of education," he said. "It's like discrimination."

While McDaniel was teaching her students the basics of blood pressure, her colleague Associate Professor Kyeng Lee was teaching a first semester, introductory anatomy and physiology course next door in which students used microscopes to examine slides that held various types of human tissue, including the skin, kidney, bladder and trachea.

"The images are in the textbook, but, it's important to see them in real life," Lee told Clarion. "Lab teaching is essential to introductory science. You take away the lab component, and there will not be science courses."

McDaniel's frustration with Pathways is compounded by the realization that it would undermine the work she and other members of her department have done in recent years to acquire additional laboratory supplies and equipment that CUNY had previously failed to provide their school.

"We should be expanding lab times, not cutting them," McDaniel said. "The little bit we have is vital, taking that away eviscerates our students' education in biology and the worth of the degrees they work so hard to earn."