



ADJUNCTS Why I teach at CUNY

Adjunct
faculty speak
to Clarion's
Roving Reporter.

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Dave Sanders

PSC MEMBERS IN THE STREETS DEMANDING MOVEMENT

"CUNY needs a raise." That's the message that George Sanchez, chair of the Department of Performing and Creative Arts at the College of Staten Island, held up high at a rainy day rally outside of Hunter College. Hundreds of PSC activists gathered, urging movement on salary and on

non-economic demands such as adjunct job security and HEO advancement. PSC President Barbara Bowen told the crowd that if there's no significant movement from CUNY, the next union protest would be at the chancellor's Upper East Side address.

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BARGAINING

RF Field Unit seeks new deal

Grant-funded Research Foundation employees at City Tech, the Graduate Center and LaGuardia Community College begin to negotiate their second contract.

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HOUSING

NY's tenants vs. landlords

In the past few years, rents have soared in New York City. Tenant organizations are pushing the state to renew and strengthen rent protections.

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Scholarship and sequential art

A May 7-8 conference at the Graduate Center, "Queers & Comics," is just one part of the growing attention to comics at CUNY.

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City, State and CUNY's funding

The new State budget does not cover mandatory increases in CUNY's costs. The City, however, is likely to increase its future support.

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

Getting CUNY history right

● I write to express my appreciation for Shomial Ahmad's first-rate piece of investigative journalism in the March *Clarion* on student activism at City College in the 1960s [tinyurl.com/CCNY-Selma]. Not only did she uncover a vital CCNY link to the historic Selma, Alabama, march in 1965 (including the wonderful photographic work of Stephen Somerstein), but she also placed the article correctly in the complicated context of City College in 1965. City's student body was overwhelmingly white (by one estimate 99%), while its campus was situated in the midst of Harlem's African-American and Puerto Rican communities that barely had access. Ahmad's work reminds us of how important it is to have a clear-eyed understanding of CUNY's actual history unclouded by overly romanticized visions of past political glories. Kudos for a fine piece of journalism and historical analysis.

Stephen Brier, Co-Director
CUNY Digital History Archive
Graduate Center

Reaching out

● We had a good turnout for the March 31 contract demonstration and everyone was very energized and enthusiastic. I was glad to learn that we were more than street theater – we gave out nearly 1,000 leaflets explaining our campaign to passersby. We've had some radio and print ads as well, but I don't think we have gone nearly far enough in telling the community what is at stake here. In addition to wearing contract T-shirts to class [editor's note: see p. 3], we should involve students and their parents in our struggle by having ads in more languages than English, and in the ethnic and neighborhood newspapers.

In addition, our fight for a fair contract is one that involves the whole labor movement. I saw representatives from DC 37 and ACT-UAW 7902 (The New School) at our march, but we should reach out for support from the other unions in New York City, especially those whose members work at CUNY, like carpenters, electricians, cafeteria workers and others. The PSC is not just fighting for the faculty, but for the survival of the institution of public higher education in New York City.

Yvonne Groseil
Hunter College

On pensions: responsible to whom?

● PSC members may have been reading recently about the latest attempt by the US Department of Labor to require investment professionals who are advising on individual retirement accounts (IRAs) to put their clients'

interests above their own – to assume a fiduciary duty to their client. The concern is that currently these advisors might recommend investments that enrich the advisors more than the advisees. It is estimated that the lack of such consumer protections costs IRA investors up to 1% of their assets per year.

Those of us in CUNY's Optional Retirement Program might be forgiven for assuming that the wealth management advisors at TIAA-CREF – with its long and honorable history of providing secure retirements for academics – do have such a fiduciary responsibility to their clients, but they would be mistaken. The TIAA wealth management advisors must make sure that “transactions are appropriate and suitable for your financial needs,” but their annual bonus is based partly on how successful they are in “gathering, retaining and consolidating client assets” (from the TIAA Advice and Planning Services Disclosure Brochure). It is up to you to make sure that retirement advice is in your best interest. Per-

haps our union, or NYSUT, or the AAUP could comment on the proposed rule and try to get advisors at all institutions managing retirement funds to assume a fiduciary duty.

Bonnie Nelson
John Jay College

Human solidarity

● My mother, Kathleen (“Kay”) Kier, who retired in 2010 as an associate professor of American literature at Queens College, died at age 80 on February 25. Kay was awarded tenure at CUNY in 1990 after a protracted, contentious fight on her behalf by the Professional Staff Congress.

She was eternally grateful to the PSC. When she was denied tenure, she was crushed. When the union contacted her and urged her to let them fight for her, it restored her spirit. And when the PSC won the case, and Kay was awarded tenure by a select faculty committee, she literally wept tears of joy.

A Queens College alumna, Kay

served on the faculty of the English department of Queens College for more than 30 years until her retirement in 2010. She was a very popular professor and supported the College's Kay Kier Prize for an essay related to Herman Melville.

I'm writing to thank the PSC on behalf of Kay's whole family for its action in support of her professional rights: she really saw it as the kindest thing anyone had ever done for her.

Peter Hamm
Bethesda, MD

A harmful decision

● For many, many years, students at CUNY have been able to call on Ron McGuire to support them in their court battles. After a long struggle in the case of *Husain vs. Springer*, in which students sued the College of Staten Island for violating their First Amendment rights, the students won a series of decisions that set five First Amendment precedents. Mr. McGuire worked on the case for over

3,000 hours and requested payment for that time. CUNY said he should be paid for less than a third of the total, and the court awarded him barely one-twelfth of the full amount. This completely disregards the time and energy McGuire gave to the defense of CUNY students. Something is wrong here.

This unfair decision sends a message to the legal profession and to the larger population that is chilling in more than one respect. Not only will lawyers think many times before defending students in the future, but students may feel pressured to confine their protests to those actions that will not need a lawyer.

This is an anti-democratic message that seems to fly in the face of what we teach our students as members of a democratic society. Mr. McGuire deserves a hearing and he deserves to be paid fairly for the work he has done on our students' behalf. An amicus brief is being filed to support McGuire's appeal by a committee of civil rights attorneys, and I invite CUNY colleagues to join me and others in signing on to it. (Those interested can email me at starcny@aol.com.) A separate amicus brief will be filed by the Student Press Law Center of Washington, DC.

Elizabeth Starcevic
City College (emerita)

RF campus bargaining begins

By PETER HOGNESS & SHOMIAL AHMAD

Campus-based employees of the CUNY Research Foundation (RF) have started negotiations for a new union contract. The current agreement, which covers RF employees represented by the PSC at the Graduate Center, City Tech and LaGuardia Community College, is set to expire on May 31.

The first bargaining session was held on March 23 at the Graduate Center. “We presented our proposals on expanding the ability to carry over annual leave, job security, paid holidays...for part-time employees, retiree benefits...with no loss in eligibility for breaks in service, compensation for time worked above 35 hours for all employees and more,” the union bargaining team reported in a joint chapter newsletter. The demands were based on a survey of PSC members on the RF payroll at the three campuses, who work on a variety of grant-based projects.

MAJOR CONCERNS

The union bargaining team is made up of 13 rank-and-file members. They are supported by a Contract Action Team of about 20 members, which lets people know what is going on in bargaining.

“I really want people to improve their lives and I want to improve my life,” said Olga Jimenez, a PSC bargaining team member from the



The union bargaining team at the March 23 negotiating session.

Graduate Center, when asked why she got involved. “I wanted to fight for our rights.” She'd found the people active with the union to be easy to work with: “They listened to me, they would give me advice. And I like people who like to get things moving. I like to work hard and see results.”

A key change Jimenez wants to see is a provision for part-time employees like herself to get paid when their campus is closed for a holiday or due to severe weather. “Right now, people like me who work on two part-time lines – one CUNY and one RF – don't get any pay when there is a holiday,” she explained. Anyone in a part-time position – even two of them – must use annual leave to cover those days, or

make up the time another day if that's possible. Otherwise, their pay is cut – and Jimenez says her paycheck is already very low to start with.

“When we have a holiday coming, it's very stressful to think about because I don't get paid,” she told *Clarion*. “That's not good for me, and it's not good for the Research Foundation.”

Lia Molero, a bargaining team member who works at LaGuardia, says that in the member survey, the issue of part-timers' holiday pay emerged as one of the top concerns. Although Molero is a full-time RF employee and thus isn't directly affected by the problem, she says it is a key issue. “I first learned about it because I knew somebody

who told me he had to work late that night to make up hours because Monday was a holiday,” she said. “To get his full paycheck, he would have to make up seven hours during the other four days left in the week. I thought it was very unfair.”

Another important issue, she said, is to gain some kind of job security provision that would recognize past service by helping RF employees get a new position when the current one comes to an end. “We all know that working as an RF employee means that we're paid by grants and could be let go when the grant ends,” Molero said. “My situation is different, but if it changes I'm aware that the same thing could happen to me.”

Calvin Patterson, an RF employee at City Tech for the past five years, says he's seen “the growing pains” of organizing an active union “in an environment where it didn't exist before.” It felt like the right time to step up by joining the bargaining team, he said. “I felt a need to be a part of it and show solidarity, by taking a more active role,” Patterson told *Clarion*. “My major concern in doing so was if I'd have enough time. I think sometimes you have to commit to it, and then you'll figure out the time.”

In addition to Jimenez, Molero and Patterson, other members of the union bargaining team include Darren Kwong, Donna Thompson-Ray and Isa Vasquez at the Graduate Center; Roxanna Astorga and Martie Flores at City Tech; and Erica Guzman, Frederick John, Migdalia Ramos and Miosoty's Rivera at LaGuardia.

“They really work hard,” Jimenez said of her fellow PSC negotiators. “We are all doing it as a team.”

Demanding contract action

By PETER HOGNESS

The sky was gray and the weather was wet, but PSC members were on fire at the March 31 demonstration for a fair contract. Chants of “CUNY needs a raise!” echoed loudly from the walls of Hunter College, where a rally was held before the march began.

Jessica Gordon-Roth, an assistant professor of philosophy at Lehman College, was among the hundreds of union members who came out despite the rain. “We want a raise, we want to teach fewer courses,” she told *Clarion*. “We want adjuncts to have a better gig.” It was Gordon-Roth’s first union demonstration.

Marcello Di Bello, an assistant professor in the same department, said it was his first protest, too. “Our salary is not competitive,” Di Bello stressed. Everyone at CUNY needs a raise, he said, especially those lowest paid: “The No. 1 issue is the extremely low pay of adjuncts. With a family this is not sustainable, especially in New York City.”

“The last five years with no raises to our pay scale has hit us hard in terms of retention,” said George Sanchez, chair of the Department of Performing and Creative Arts at the College of Staten Island. “We’ve lost some really wonderful junior faculty in the last few years,” he told *Clarion*. “I just found out that a few people for whom I was on the search committee will be leaving for other universities – it’s had a real impact.”

PRESSING ISSUES

“We work extremely hard,” said Shakia Brown, who works in the budget office at Medgar Evers College. “We work hard, and we’ve been without a contract for going on five years.” With a sign that said “HEOs for a good contract,” she was one of many employees in the Higher Education Officer series who came to stand up and speak out. “My main issue is a raise,” said Brown, adding that she is currently drawing on her savings to pay for living expenses and may have to move away.

“I have my master’s. I’m looking to further myself at CUNY,” Brown added. “But sometimes I feel like I’m at a standstill.”

“I’m here for a contract, retroactive pay and job security,” said Bernardo Saravia, an adjunct lecturer in mathematics at Hunter, who has taught at the college for 15 years. His top concern is job stability: though he is an experienced teacher dedicated to CUNY students, and his work is valuable enough that he has been rehired year after year, Saravia doesn’t know from one semester to the next whether his job will continue.

“It’d be wonderful if I had some long-term stability,” he told *Clarion*, “because I wouldn’t have to worry about asking if I have a job next semester.”

Many protesters said CUNY suffers from its outsized teaching load. “Lower teaching loads would allow

Hundreds rally and march in the rain



PSCers outside Hunter College demanded CUNY move at the bargaining table.

faculty to secure more grant money, provide continual curriculum updates and create a better undergraduate experience,” said Michael Green, professor of chemistry at CCNY.

Gordon-Roth from Lehman told *Clarion* she decided to come to the demonstration because “it seems pressing now.” At first, she explained, “I just thought we’d have a new contract soon,” whether she got involved or not. But as the complex negotiations dragged on, Gordon-Roth concluded she had to make her voice heard.

President Barbara Bowen drew applause when she told the crowd, “We are sick and tired of being sick and tired. There is no excuse for CUNY management’s failure to move – even on non-economic demands.”

In a March 23 letter to members, Bowen commented: “It is within the power of the CUNY administration right now to move on PSC demands that would have little or no economic cost. These are demands such as job security for adjuncts, protection of faculty rights in the use of educational technology, a route to advancement for HEOs, equity in research time for library faculty, tuition waivers for our children.”

TAKING IT TO MANAGEMENT

Standing on a bench in the Hunter plaza, Bowen announced that if there is no significant movement on the PSC’s demands in the coming weeks, the next union protest would be at Chancellor Milliken’s Upper East Side address. “CUNY administrators complain that demonstrating in front of Milliken’s luxury apartment building would be ‘making it personal,’” she said. “Well, it is personal for us! What could be more personal than an in-

ability to pay our rent, handle special medical costs or send our own children to college?”

“We are not prepared to accept a contract that fails to resolve any of the major problems in our working conditions,” Bowen told *Clarion*.

In the latter part of the rally at Hunter, Chancellor Milliken showed up at the edge of the crowd, under a gray umbrella. Berkis Cruz-Eusebio, who works in Hostos Community College’s ASAP initiative (see page 5) as a career and employment specialist, was one of several union members who told him that CUNY needs to move at the bargaining table.

She told Milliken that she is affected by a problem common to all HEO positions: because HEO titles are not defined as promotional, there is no real path for career advancement. Moving up essentially requires being hired for a brand-new job. The problem is a union priority in contract negotiations, along with salary increases, reduction in the full-time faculty teaching load and improved job security for adjuncts.

“I’m a HEO and I work in a program that’s expanding because it’s successful. I was managing 100 students and now it’s more like 400,” Cruz-Eusebio said. “My job description has changed very much, but nobody’s looking at reclassification or anything. I love what I do, but my workload is increasing, my responsibilities are growing, and I’m not getting any more salary or more recognition. I’m stuck in my current title, and the only thing that expands is the number of people I serve. There’s no place to go but out.” It’s no way to treat a professional, she added.

PSC President Bowen told *Clarion* that HEO advancement has in fact

been the focus of several bargaining meetings in March and April. “CUNY is rightly proud of programs like ASAP,” she said. “It’s not right that HEOs who make them run have no career path because of CUNY’s outdated job classification system. The system has to be changed to reflect the reality of the work HEOs do and the professionalism that is expected of them. The chancellor has the power to make the change through an agreement with the union – and he should.”

“The chancellor’s appearance at the rally could be seen as political theater,” said Bill Friedheim, chair of the union’s Retirees Chapter. “It positions him as more affable, acces-

sible and maybe politically skilled than his predecessor, but is it charm over substance? Conversation is nice, but it’s no substitute for real movement at the bargaining table.”

Chancellor Milliken was not the only non-PSC member to attend the demonstration: members of other unions – CUNY employees who belong to DC 37, AFT members from Pace University, UAW members from the New School, and more – were there in solidarity. “I’m out here because we also don’t have a contract,” said Rory Stachell, a custodial assistant at College of Staten Island. “I’m out here because we’re not paid the prevailing wage.”

In mid-April, the PSC launched a new outreach effort to inform students and their families about CUNY’s lack of a new union contract and how it hurts the University. The union is distributing black-and-white T-shirts with a two-part message – “Five Years Without a Union Contract Hurts CUNY Students” on the front, and “Ask Me Why” on the back – and PSC members across CUNY made plans to wear them on the job. (See sidebar and page 4.)

SPREADING THE WORD

“Bringing this fight for a fair contract into classrooms is in fact our obligation as faculty,” said PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant. “Students must be in a conversation that enables them to understand how CUNY risks losing many of its best faculty and being less able to recruit effectively as wages stagnate. As the real dollar value of our wages falls so too will the quality of students education decline. It has never been clearer that faculty and staff working conditions are students’ learning conditions.”

“We have to stay active, particularly now. We’ve got to be really strong,” Claudio Mazzatenta, a professor of biology at Bronx Community College, said as the March 31 rally neared its end. “Sure, we’ve got to continue. It’s the only way we will win.”

Wear a contract T-shirt

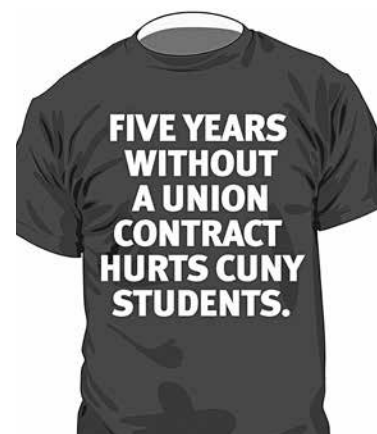
Five years without a contractual raise is an insult to faculty and staff and destructive to the University, PSC activists say. “CUNY management’s failure to deliver on a contract hurts CUNY students, too, by damaging the University’s competitiveness and blocking changes that can protect the quality of a CUNY education,” a union statement declared this spring.

In mid-April, the PSC moved to take its message directly to students: at campuses across CUNY, hundreds of faculty and staff began wearing T-shirts that said “Five Years Without a Union Contract Hurts CUNY Students” on the front, and on the back, “Ask Me Why.” The black-and-white shirts were produced in Spanish as well.

You can sign up to wear a T-shirt in class, or wherever you work at CUNY, by filling out a short form on the PSC website at psc-cuny.org/IWillWearAShirt. Every T-shirt comes with a set of talking points

to get you started.

And while you’re wearing your shirt, you’re invited to take a selfie (or a group photo) with colleagues or students and share it on Twitter or Facebook. Tweet at your college, at Chancellor Milliken (@jbmilliken) and at Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (@CarlHeastie) with #CUNYNeedsARaise.



LABOR IN BRIEF

A win at the car wash

Carwasheros at Vegas Auto Spa in Park Slope won a landmark contract in early April. The agreement includes wage hikes, paid time off, sharing of hours and overtime and a \$1,500-per-person signing bonus. The car wash owner also agreed to settle a suit over wage and hour violations. The settlement comes after a four-month-long strike during a bitterly cold winter.

"They stood outside the car wash on strike around the clock for more than four months in the most brutal winter, to say to car wash owners around this city that the days of wage theft and abuse in this industry are over," said Deborah Axt, co-executive director of Make the Road New York.

The contract is the first one negotiated at a Brooklyn car wash, and the ninth one negotiated since the Wash New York campaign launched three years ago. There were several civil disobedience arrests during the campaign, including labor leaders and City Council members.

"Every dollar donated, every cup of hot chocolate dropped off, and every 'si, se puede' chanted, made all the difference in achieving this win," said New York City Councilmember Brad Lander, who stood on the picket line with the striking workers.

Bike-share workers unite

Bike-share workers in four major cities have voted to unionize despite aggressive anti-union tactics from their employers. Workers in Boston, Chicago, New York and Washington, DC, have voted to join Transport Workers United Local 100 (TWU), the NYC-based union that is representing bike-share workers nationally.

"We're not fueled by negative horror stories, but rather the desire to have a voice at the table and unite as a collective," Ursula Sandstrom, a bike checker for Capital Bikeshare in DC, told Next City, an online news site that covers urban issues. "This is about protecting us in the future, making sure we can keep doing the job we really like doing."

Workers at the bike-share programs in all four cities faced a robust anti-union effort from Jackson-Lewis, a law firm known for its anti-labor stance. Management worked to divide workers, by playing favorites and holding closed-door meetings. In the end, their efforts failed. Workers at CitiBike in New York City, Hubway in Boston, Divvy in Chicago and CaBi in DC voted to unionize in the fall and winter of 2014.

"This is a burgeoning and growing industry of public transportation," TWU's lead organizer Nicholas Bedell told Labor Press. "We want to start setting standards for employees in the industry so that they can be paid decent, livable wages, can make a career out of it and retire with dignity."

PSC advocates for City support

Seeking a progressive budget for CUNY

By PETER HOGNESS

With the June 30 municipal budget deadline approaching, the PSC asked the City of New York to fund CUNY in a way "worthy of a progressive city with a progressive leadership."

Testifying at a City Council hearing on March 6, PSC First Vice President Steve London welcomed Mayor Bill de Blasio's support for increased CUNY funding in last year's budget and in the mayor's preliminary executive budget proposal for the coming fiscal year.

LOOKING AHEAD

London urged the council to "move toward fulfilling the aspiration for CUNY that Mayor de Blasio has articulated: to ultimately increase City funding for the University by \$150 million per year." Reaching that goal, he said, will require the council's active support: "The City Council can put a down payment on that investment by negotiating with the mayor for operating funds to CUNY over and above the mayor's proposed increase," he told the council.

As an example of why those funds are needed, London cited CUNY's successful ASAP Initiative (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs), which President Obama cited as a national model. "With an additional investment of \$3,900 per full-time equivalent student (FTE) above the standard community college allocations, ASAP has resources to provide smaller classes, sharply focused counseling and mentorship, free tuition and other critical supports for students," London said. As a result, "graduation rates can be dramatically raised. Of the most



(l to r) Michael Green, Cecelia McCall, Iris DeLutro, Harold Forsythe and a CUNY student meet with Councilmember Corey Johnson (standing) during last year's 'CUNY at the Council' effort.

recent cohort, 56% graduated from community college within three years – a result that far outpaces national averages."

A particular priority for the union in this year's City budget is support for collective bargaining between the PSC and CUNY administration (see sidebar). In London's testimony, he called on Council members and the mayor to back "the goal of reaching a contract that allows the University to offer the best possible education."

CITY COUNCIL

This year the union's grassroots lobbying efforts on the City bud-

get are taking a new tack. In past years, a large effort on a single day around the beginning of May, dubbed "CUNY at the Council," was central to the union's City budget campaign. Dozens of meetings with Council members and key staff were held, and the large scale of the event helped draw attention to CUNY's needs and the PSC's budget priorities. But the focus on a single day makes it harder to engage a large number of members in the kind of targeted approach that the PSC took with the State budget in 2015, with focused follow-up that allowed union activists to track legislators' stances over time and prioritize attention to those who still need to be moved.

This year the PSC's grassroots lobbying on the City budget will emphasize local meetings with Council members in their home districts during late April and throughout the month of May. "Constituents speaking directly with their Council representatives at home is the most effective tool we have for strengthening the Council's stance on CUNY funding," said London. "If CUNY funding is important to you, we need you to set aside the time to join other PSC members in meeting with your Council member. Right now is when your presence can have the most impact."

To attend a district meeting with your Council member, or just to find out more, call the PSC's Amanda Magalhaes at 212-354-1252, or contact her by email at amagalhaes@pscmail.org.

CHANGE IN DIRECTION

"Mayor de Blasio and the City Council have started an important change of direction for CUNY funding," London told Council members. He noted that New York City's operating budget for the current fiscal year (2014-2015)

boosted funding for CUNY's community colleges by \$14.7 million, expanding the ASAP Initiative and programs in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), and added \$10.9 million in new merit scholarships for CUNY students.

Meeting Council members in home districts

But while the mayor's preliminary budget proposal for the 2015-2016 fiscal year "increases community college funding by another \$13 million for the same purposes," London noted, it relies on the Council "to continue to fund the City Council Merit Scholarship and other CUNY-focused initiatives." The PSC therefore urged Council members to maintain their support, which helps to fund CUNY's Center for Puerto Rican Studies, its Dominican Studies Institute, the Council's new Merit Scholarship program and more.

The PSC also sought council support for its "One City Fellows" proposal, which would fund 100 new full-time faculty lines as a first installment toward a total of 1,000 new full-time faculty and staff positions. "No other single investment could do more to ensure the future success of CUNY's students," London told Council members, with important impacts in "increasing opportunity and reducing inequality in our city." The added lines "would mean smaller classes, more course offerings, and workloads that would support greater mentorship to students," he emphasized. And this new hiring "could be used by CUNY to create full-time opportunities for qualified long-serving adjuncts and to hire black and Latino personnel to address the disparity between the ethnic composition of the faculty and the students they serve."

The union also gave its support to CUNY's capital budget request, addressing critical repairs needed at many campuses as well as support for new facilities.

PSC: new union contract important for quality of education at CUNY

At the New York City Council's March 6 preliminary budget hearing, collective bargaining costs were a central theme in the testimony by PSC First Vice President Steve London. Below is an excerpt from London's remarks.

An urgent and essential step in restoring support for CUNY is funding a new collective bargaining agreement. CUNY faculty and professional staff have not had a contractual raise since 2009. Our salaries, already low in comparison to other comparable institutions, have now become completely noncompetitive. At the end of our last contract, the average full professor at Rutgers earned \$141,000 a year; the average full professor at a four-year CUNY college earned \$114,000. The same professor would earn \$170,000 at Columbia and \$176,000 at NYU—both of which frequently vie with CUNY for the

Low salaries are hurting recruitment of CUNY faculty.

same candidates. In a profession in which universities compete nationally for faculty, CUNY is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the faculty we need.

Meanwhile, decades of underinvestment by the State and City have led to a massive reliance on adjuncts, whose underpaid labor allows CUNY to stay afloat as enrollment rises. An adjunct who carries a full load of courses earns less than \$30,000 a year and doesn't know from one semester to the next whether she will have a job. Theirs are not the smiling faces you see in CUNY's subway ads, but they are doing the bulk of the teaching, especially of the highest-needs students. That is no way to run a university....

It is time for this contract to be settled; we ask for your support to settle this contract and allow CUNY to recruit and retain the academic workforce it needs.

State budget deal falls short

By PETER HOGNESS

In the final agreement on New York State's budget, Albany kept state-wide spending growth below 2% for the fifth year in a row – and the resulting spending plan falls short for CUNY.

As New York's economy grows, tax revenues are rising. But forced austerity still defined Albany's spending plan.

Steven Spinola, head of the Real Estate Board of New York, hailed the restraint on public spending as “very good news.” While money was tight for public services, the new budget includes special tax breaks for New Yorkers who buy yachts and private planes (see sidebar).

Albany's budget failed to include the PSC's two priorities in this year's negotiations: a true “maintenance of effort” in State funding to cover mandatory cost increases, and dedicated funding for retroactive pay in a future contract settlement. At stake was \$63 million for the mandatory cost increases, and \$240 million for retro pay.

PSC budget organizing did increase the number of legislators who firmly backed the union's goals, and while the union didn't get over the top by the April 1 deadline, PSC leaders resolved to “continue to advocate with elected officials for their support through the end of the legislative session in June.” Albany could approve a separate pay bill to fund a new collective bargaining agreement, as has been done with past CUNY contracts, and PSC officers said members should be ready to take action on short notice.

SOME GAINS

Union action on the budget helped win some improvements for CUNY in the March 29 agreement between the governor, the State Senate and the Assembly.

- An increase of \$100 per full-time-equivalent student in the rate for State Base Aid to community colleges, for a total increase of \$6.1 million to CUNY.

- An additional \$12 million for CUNY senior colleges. These funds are tied to creation of a performance plan, but an earlier proposal to base 10% of future funding on results of that plan was not adopted.

- Opportunity programs at CUNY, SEEK and College Discovery, received increases totaling \$4.1 million.

- CUNY's much-praised ASAP initiative (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) saw its current funding of \$1.7 million restored and an additional \$0.8 million appropriated.

- The Joseph Murphy Institute for Labor Studies had its funding restored (\$0.5 million).

- Funding for campus childcare was increased (\$0.4 million).

The expanded legislative support for the PSC's two key priorities, on which the union hopes to build, can be seen in two letters issued

PSC continues to seek support

in March. The first letter initiated by Assembly Higher Education Committee Chair Deborah Glick, and signed by 64 assemblymembers, urged that this year's budget “adequately fund...maintenance of effort (MOE) as promised,” a commitment that ought to “include all collective bargaining costs or inflationary costs for mandated items like energy.”

In another letter, Glick and 43 cosigners advocated dedicated funding for “retroactive pay for the CUNY faculty and professional staff,” a one-time expenditure that the assemblymembers said was important for CUNY students. “Five years without a raise...hurts the quality of education that CUNY can offer,” the letter said. “Professors are reluctant to accept positions at CUNY, and many current faculty members may have to consider leaving for other jobs. Ultimately, education suffers.” Both letters were addressed to Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie as he entered budget negotiations.

The union's budget organizing this year emphasized a targeted approach, identifying legislators who had not yet committed to support the union's priorities but who could be convinced. Meeting with legislators in their local districts proved especially effective, sometimes in combination with a quick appeal to PSC members to call or fax a legislator who was on the fence. In this way, the union was able to increase the number of legislators

signing both letters, and the goal for the rest of the legislative session is to further expand that support. (See page 12.)

Funds for CUNY contract settlement not included.

PSC officers traveled to Albany again and again in March. Together with members meeting with their representatives and a radio ad campaign (see tinyurl.com/PSC-radio-letters-2015), the union gained a new level of visibility in Albany. “I'd be in a Dunkin' Donuts or a legislative office and someone would say, ‘I know that voice – oh, you're Barbara Bowen!’” said Bowen, the union's president. “Inside the Capitol corridors, when a legislator saw us coming they'd make clear that they knew our issues.”

NO NY DREAM

In April, as the PSC continued to seek State support for a contract settlement, CUNY agreed that Albany should make this a priority. A CUNY administration statement said that University officials “will continue to work with all parties during the remainder of the legislative session on critical outstanding issues, including support for collective bargaining on behalf of CUNY faculty and staff.” Union activists said that in Albany, the CUNY administration had been most visible on the issue during the last month of the budget battle; they welcomed the stance, one the PSC had urged since last summer.

PSC leaders said that CUNY's message in Albany did improve this

year: instead of college presidents talking mainly about individual projects on their campuses, they focused more on the need to increase base funding.

Beyond CUNY funding, the budget agreement did not include the New York State DREAM Act, which would make tuition assistance available to New Yorkers who are undocumented immigrants. The executive budget linked this to a proposed tax credit for donations to private schools, but in the end, neither measure won approval. “This news breaks my heart,” said Claritza Suárez, an immigrant activist who is a student at Brentwood High School. “We're going to keep pressuring the

governor and our [State] Senators to make sure that the New York DREAM Act becomes a reality this year” – an effort that the PSC and the CUNY administration both support.

In a struggle over a new teacher evaluation system, while Gov. Cuomo did not get everything he wanted, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) condemned the final measure: “This evaluation system...is an unworkable, convoluted plan that undermines local control, disrespects principals and school administrators, guts collective bargaining and further feeds the testing beast. It does nothing to help students.” NYSUT President Karen Magee said that teachers will keep organizing “to ensure that the State addresses what kids need, that educators' rights are supported and that evaluations are fair, meaningful and focused on improving teaching and learning.”

NY's yacht tax break

By PETER HOGNESS

The public didn't know until after the New York State budget was passed – but Albany's newly approved spending plan includes special tax breaks for expensive yachts and private planes.

The budget eliminates sales tax on the cost of a yacht above \$230,000. For the purchase of a private plane carrying fewer than 20 people, there's an even better deal: the sales tax is completely eliminated. “The exemptions come after state lawmakers did not include a hike in the state's minimum wage,” noted NY1 reporter Nick Reisman.

“It's completely unjust that, while the legislators aren't giving workers like me a raise, they're giving this benefit to millionaires and billionaires for their yachts,” Manuel Melendez, a Brooklyn restaurant worker who earns minimum wage, told the *Daily News*. “It shows that our government is working for the wealthy and not for me,” said Melendez, who belongs to the community group Make the Road New York.

LUXURY TAX BREAKS

Senate Finance Committee Chairman John DeFrancisco (R-Syracuse) defended the luxury tax reductions, telling reporters that since poor people already get a federal tax credit if they are sufficiently low-income, it is only fair that rich people get some tax breaks, too. “I think it's been misrepresented that people are living on just the minimum wage because they're getting huge – in my mind, in relation to the amount of income they're earning – huge credits,” DeFrancisco said. “Those are tax credits, too. Just like for the airplanes and the ones you mentioned before. Tax credits for the poor.”

The yacht and private-jet tax exemptions were added to the budget in the final stages of budget talks, with zero public discussion. They were first brought to light by the

Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI), which was reading the fine print in the budget deal the day after agreement was reached. “We were simply looking for things like property tax relief for regular folks and we found the yacht exemption,” FPI head Ron Deutsch told *The New York Times*.

“The ironic part is that your average Joe in New York who wants to go out and buy a small 16-foot bass fishing boat for his own personal use will actually pay sales tax, but someone going out and buying a yacht isn't going to be subject to the same tax,” Deutsch told Capital New York.

Supporters argued that tax breaks for people who

buy yachts and private jets are measures that will help people rise out of poverty. “It creates jobs, it makes New York State competitive and that would afford jobs for people to make above the minimum wage,” said Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos. “It's about job creation.”

“We are trying to encourage people to buy their boat, to maintain their boat and use their boat in New York,” a Cuomo administration official told the *Daily News*. The official “added that many New Yorkers purchase planes in Connecticut because that state doesn't tax such expenditures,” the *Daily News* reported.

Yoni Appelbaum, a senior editor at the *Atlantic*, put such arguments in a larger context. “America's state tax laws are riddled with carve-outs and loopholes aimed at attracting or retaining businesses, or promoting economic growth,” Appelbaum wrote. “Each individual measure may seem compelling to the legislators who support it, but in aggregate, they produce an impossibly convoluted and regressive tax code. The top 1% of Americans pays only half as much of its income in state and local taxes as the bottom 20%. And governments end up starved for the very revenues these tax cuts are often aimed at securing.”

Fighting for \$15 together



Members of Laborers' Local 79, a construction and building trades union, gathered outside a McDonald's to show solidarity with fast food workers demanding a \$15-an-hour wage. The rally was a lead-up to an April 15 mass action, where thousands of workers around the country gathered to demand a more livable wage.

Jeff Rae/GNTECET

Clarion's Roving Reporter goes to Hunter College, and asks adjunct faculty,

Why do you teach at CUNY?



Photo by Gary Scholichet

KIMBERLY DEL GAIZO
Adjunct Lecturer
Special Ed, Deaf & Hard of Hearing
Teaching at CUNY since 2000

I am in deaf and hard of hearing education, teaching graduate students at Hunter. I am very committed to the field – having taught every semester since 2000 (and I generally teach two classes each semester). I also work directly with deaf and hard of hearing children full time for the New York City Department of Education. I have a very personal connection with this population of students and am honored to help prepare future teachers.

While a number of our graduates have found work in other states – Virginia, Georgia, Colorado, Hawaii – the majority work in the tri-state area. Over 80 of my former students are now working as teachers of the deaf for the New York City Department of Education – something quite fulfilling for me. In fact, 10 of my former grad students are now my colleagues in the Bronx. And I am always honored to receive letters from others who graduated 10 or 15 years ago. Being their professor for two, three, and sometimes four of their deaf ed classes creates a very tight bond between us that I treasure dearly.



Photo by Francisco Molina Reyes II

ESPERANZA MARTELL
Adjunct Lecturer
Hunter School of Social Work
Teaching at CUNY since 1987

What brings me back, year after year, is to be able to serve my community – poor, working-class people of color, who supposedly are who CUNY serves. I find that there are fewer people of color, from working-class backgrounds, who are CUNY faculty. The University is primarily white, with little or no understanding of the needs of poor working-class students of color. All students are harmed by the lack of diversity in the faculty. So this is what brings me back – the needs of a college community that is underserved and marginalized.

I don't have to tell you that being an adjunct is tough. And as we get older, it gets worse and worse. So the question is, am I complicit in my own oppression as an educator, accepting low pay and poor working conditions? Is it worth it, to help people of color and our allies to get a master's in social work? In the long run, will it make a difference in our community, where our students are being trained to be gatekeepers?

I ask myself these questions all the time. But as long as I can do this work to transform gatekeepers into critical thinkers and gate-openers – yes, it is worth it.



KATHRYN SZCZEPANSKA
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Russian and Slavic Studies
Teaching at CUNY since 1990

Teaching language classes involves a lot of acting, a lot of energy trying to get students to participate and to make it fun, to make them laugh and to make them think at the same time. I usually have large classes. Right now, one group has 20 students and the other has 28, both fairly large for language study.

I assign a lot of homework, and I correct all my homework, because I need to know what the students don't know. I give extensive corrections and explanations. Then in class, after I spend time explaining the grammar, I'll break them up into groups or have them work one-on-one or they'll do a quick written assignment in class that I'll take home. I try to keep it as lively as possible.

I've been teaching Russian at Hunter since 1990. In 2010, I was given one of Hunter's Presidential Awards for Teaching. After working at CUNY for 25 years, I just can't imagine teaching anywhere else. There is always such an incredible mix of people that it keeps things interesting. I love my students, and I can't imagine doing anything else.



DAVID ALM
Adjunct Associate Professor
Film and Media Studies
Teaching at CUNY since 2006

There's something really compelling about Hunter's history and what it represents. I consider it an enormous privilege to be able to contribute to the education of such a diverse student body. Immigrants, people who are the first in their family to go to college, former models finally going back to school at age 25, people putting themselves through college at age 40 after spending 20 years as a delivery person for FedEx, kids who got into Columbia or NYU but chose Hunter for any number of reasons – it's all kinds of people, it's a cross-section of New York.

It's very different from where I went to college, where almost all of the students were 18- to 22-year-olds whose parents paid their tuition and who were in college because that's what they were expected to do.

I take the responsibility of teaching at Hunter very seriously. When you can really engage students, help them become more critical thinkers, that's very rewarding. And it's rewarding to see where they go afterwards. I've written countless letters of recommendation over the years, helped students get into law school, master's programs, programs to study abroad. It's great to hear back from them years later, to hear what they've gone on to do.



CINDY WISHENGRAD
Adjunct Lecturer
English
Teaching at CUNY since 2003

My students are great. Each class is different, and I like that. I teach ESL, and right now I'm teaching is a late class, at night, at BMCC. The students are all working, and they're very motivated. They get up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning, go to work all day and then they're in class until late at night.

They all work very different jobs. A lot of the women are nannies, or in home health care. But a lot work in banks, in retail establishments. Most work in English-speaking establishments, so they can speak reasonably well – it's their writing that needs work. It's great when you run into them later, and they say, "Oh, professor, I'm so happy I took your class! It really helped me."

The life of an adjunct is not easy, as you know. There's always a chance that your course will be cancelled at the last minute – and then it's usually too late to replace it. I haven't had this happen at Hunter or BMCC, but I have at other colleges. You think have your schedule set and then it can be pulled right out from under you. There's a lot of anxiety.

I've been fairly lucky, I've never lost more than one class. But if you do, it can be a disaster.

Shomial Ahmad is the Roving Reporter

HIGHER ED IN BRIEF

NYU grad students secure major contract gains

The graduate student union at NYU overwhelmingly ratified a landmark contract this spring after more than a year of negotiations. The union, GSOC-UAW Local 2110, is the only union of graduate employees that is recognized by a legally binding contract at a private university. "There are some historic gains that we've earned, and I mean earned," Chris Nickell, a PhD student in music at NYU told Inside Higher Ed. "They weren't given to us."

Among those gains are 4% raises

for fully funded teaching assistants, a family health care fund and guaranteed annual minimum increases on total compensation of at least 2.25%.

From 2001 to 2005, NYU's teaching and research assistants were recognized as a collective bargaining unit. But when the National Labor Relations Board decided that graduate employees at Brown University were primarily students and not workers, the administration refused to negotiate a new contract when the grad union's contract expired. In a surprise turn in 2013, NYU voluntarily decided to recognize the union.

Graduate employees at other private universities, like Columbia, Yale and the University of Chicago, hope that their union organizing efforts reach similar victories.

"We are all very excited and congratulate our colleagues at New York University," Paul Katz, a Columbia PhD candidate in history told Inside Higher Ed. "Their campaign has been an inspiration to us at Columbia and to the growing movement of graduate employees organizing across the Northeast."

CUNY refunds excess tuition payments by undocumented students

More than 150 undocumented students at the City University of New York overpaid their tuition. As a result, CUNY is returning thousands of dollars that are owed to these students. CUNY officials say that 6,500

undocumented students attended CUNY in Fall 2013.

The student group, CUNY DREAMers, alerted school officials about the overpayment. The students paid higher, out-of-state tuition rates even though they were eligible by a 2002 state law for in-state rates. The difference in tuition is about \$4,000 per semester.

"I was going to quit school. It was too expensive," Freddy Vicuna, a computer engineering student at City College told the Associated Press. Vicuna was one of the undocumented students who was overcharged, and CUNY has already returned \$7,500 in overpayments to him. CUNY officials told the Associated Press that they've done a complete review and are in the process of refunding excess payments.

The group CUNY DREAMers canvassed CUNY's campuses, sharing information on in-state tuition rates available to qualified undocumented students. The group's Facebook page stated, "Not only did we ensure that undocumented students were being treated fairly, but we also saved students from dropping out of college."

Nineteen states, including New York, offer in-state tuition rates for undocumented immigrants. Unlike California and Texas, there is no state-funded financial aid available to undocumented students in New York. Immigrant advocates are seeking passage of the NY DREAM Act this legislative session. The measure would allow certain undocumented students to receive state aid.

Collaborative teaching & learning

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

For Cynthia Jones, who has been teaching at Hostos Community College for more than 35 years, being named New York State Professor of the Year meant recognition for the college she calls “home.”

“I’m really walking around saying, ‘Finally, finally, finally, Hostos is being recognized for what we do here,’” Jones told *Clarion*. “We are a hardworking college, and there’s a lot of love here, a lot of grace.” It was the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) that spotlighted Jones with the Professor of the Year title, in recognition of her commitment to undergraduate teaching and her profound influence on Hostos students.

BRIDGE BUILDER

Jones has been a teacher, a faculty mentor, a negotiator and a program builder at Hostos since 1977. In each role, colleagues say, she brings people together to reach a common goal. Jones said she learned this collaborative work style from her mother – an educator and social worker who always encouraged Jones to work with others on finding solutions.

“Even if the other person’s thoughts might not agree with mine, I am still open to that person contributing to whatever we’re working on,” Jones said. “That’s how I set up my classroom from day one, making it a safe environment where we can become a community.”

Jones began at Hostos as an adjunct, teaching ESL reading courses; she has been a full-time lecturer since 1981. Her roles over the years have included teaching in the college’s Early College Initiative, mentoring other faculty at the Hostos Center for Teaching and Learning, and working with the American Social History Project at the Graduate Center on its Making Connections program, bringing innovative teaching techniques to high school teachers.

When former Hostos Provost Carmen Coballes-Vega approached Jones about submitting her name for the Carnegie/CASE award, Jones was reluctant to accept the nomination. “I’m a lecturer, and I’ve been around long enough to know the elitism that goes on – not just at CUNY but in general,” Jones said. “I don’t have my PhD, so I suggested to her that there might be others who were more worthy.”

Coballes-Vega, who is now at Rock Valley College in Illinois, felt strongly that Jones should be recognized for her work and dedication. Coballes-Vega told *Clarion* she could see Jones’s positive influence from the moment they met; and she believes that people like Jones who often work collectively should be honored individually.

Hostos faculty member wins top honor



Cynthia Jones (center) was named New York State Professor of the Year by national foundations that recognize excellence in undergraduate teaching.

“They’re not the type of people who want to be in the spotlight,” Coballes-Vega said. “They’re hidden in the crowd, but they have a tremendous impact.”

Low Levine, a faculty member in the college’s Department of Language and Cognition, has known Jones since they were graduate students together at Columbia’s Teachers College. Levine says Jones has made Hostos “her home” – and that whenever something needs to be done, Jones is there. Both with students and with faculty and staff, he says, she always lets people know what she thinks. “She’s respectful of people and their feelings, but she’s straight with people and lets them know where she stands,” Levine observed. “It’s a fine line to walk.”

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

One of Jones’s areas of expertise is developmental learning, where she works to demystify the learning process. When she heard the struggles her colleagues in mathematics often had in teaching developmental math learners, Jones responded by developing an interdisciplinary class, Reading Mathematics. By reading literary works on mathematics, students could connect with math in a new way. The result, Jones says, was that they were less intimidated by the subject and began to approach assignments as ways to become more effective readers, writers, thinkers and math learners.

“[I’ve] learned that the power of story and making connections were essential to effective learning and teaching,” wrote Jones in her

personal statement for the award. “This...approach I utilize in all of my classes in order to elicit the story of the learner, what is known and unknown about the subject and possible impediments to learning.”

“I have been engaged in looking at curriculum development through the lens of students and what their needs are,” Jones said. “It’s always a collaborative process.”

In 2007, Jones created a course for high school students who would not graduate on time because they did not have enough credits. Her semester-long course, “Discoursing the Unspeakable,” was a rigorous reading and writing course, where students shared a written reflection of their life stories and their own personal roadblocks to learning. At the semester’s end, Jones collated all 19 essays, and gave each student a copy.

“They talked about how personal matters often kept them from going to school,” Jones recalled. One student wrote that his identity as a joker kept him distracted, another wrote about taking an “easy life” by “making trouble in the street.” By writing their own stories, the students took ownership of their own education, and through the story sharing, students felt that they weren’t alone.

Her emphasis on listening served Jones well when she was a PSC grievance counselor at Hostos. Jones said her role wasn’t easy: she was dealing with management officials who often took an antagonistic approach to their relationship with the union.

“It was a challenge, but I think

that challenge really inspired me to try to get it,” Jones told *Clarion*. With a consistent approach in regular labor-management meetings, Jones says she was able to make progress as she sought fair solutions for employees and promoted good practices for the college.

MORE TRANSPARENCY

Jones says that one thing she emphasized as a union representative was the need for greater transparency at the college: faculty and staff, for example, should know exactly what to expect from performance evaluations. On an individual level, Jones worked with union members on their grievances. She was suc-

cessful in overturning a non-reappointment, she recalls, and learned how to “put out fires” before filing a formal grievance became necessary. PSC’s Director of Contract Administration Debra Bergen says that Jones was “very engaged as a grievance counselor and gave her all to every member.”

MENTORING STUDENTS

After 37 years at Hostos, Jones says she feels lucky every day that she gets to do what she loves – and she’s always striving to do it better. “My father believed that you should always question, dig deeper and not remain in the same place,” Jones said. “So many of the activities that I do with the students are pushing them to challenge themselves, to question, to explore, to inquire.”

The combination of listening, encouragement and challenge has led Jones to become close to many of the students whom she has guided over the years. One is Hostos alumnus Luis Torres, who says he considers Jones his professor, career coach and “second mother.”

As a young Puerto Rican man who was one of the first in his family to get a college degree, Torres says Jones was central to his success at Hostos. “She took me under her wing and mentored me from the moment I met her,” he told *Clarion*. “She inspired me to continue my education and to believe that I could achieve my goals.” Now an elementary school principal in the Bronx, Torres was recognized in 2013 as a Hometown Hero in Education by the *Daily News*. “When I became a teacher she gave me guidance on how to become the most effective educator possible,” Torres said. “Today I am a school principal, and it is because of Cynthia Jones that I now am able to touch the lives of thousands of children.”

New School adjunct contract



The New School’s part-time faculty rallied this March for a fair deal in a new contract. The faculty’s union, ACT-UAW Local 7902, fought against clawbacks to health coverage and demanded greater job security. A tentative settlement was announced shortly before *Clarion* went to press.

Courtesy of Hostos Community College.

Mira Schor/ACT-UAW

Comics come to CUNY

By RAFAEL NOBOA Y RIVERA
& PETER HOGNESS

A subject for scholarship, a teaching tool

The word *comics* brings up all kinds of associations. You might imagine a neighborhood comics store; walls lined to the ceiling with printed material depicting muscled women and men wearing outlandish costumes. You may think of the recent spate of blockbuster movies, featuring modern demigods like Captain America or the Incredible Hulk. Or maybe you'd think of independent comics artists such as Art Spiegelman or Adrian Tomine whose work is found on the cover of *The New Yorker*.

As comics art and graphic novels have become a stronger force in US culture in recent decades, they've increasingly become a subject for academic exploration. Works like Spiegelman's *Maus* or Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* have been landmarks in gaining broader recognition for comics as an art form with aesthetic and intellectual ambition, and comics' expanding influence in pop culture has drawn attention to the ways they have long provided a mirror – sometimes a fun-house mirror – for society as a whole.

'QUEERS AND COMICS'

Today CUNY faculty and staff are engaged with comics in a sometimes surprising variety of ways. This May 7 and 8, comics creators will take center stage at the CUNY Graduate Center, as the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) hosts "Queers and Comics," a conference bringing together LGBT comics writers, artists and scholars.

Keynote speakers at Queers and Comics will be Alison Bechdel and Howard Cruse. Bechdel's success with *Fun Home* was preceded by more than 20 years of work on the alt-weekly comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For." A musical based on *Fun Home*, originally produced at the Public Theater in 2013, is about to open on Broadway. Cruse is best known for his graphic novel *Stuck Rubber Baby*, a tale of sexuality, homophobia, racism and resistance in the US South during the 1960s. Tony Kushner described the book as "deeply important and fortifying" and called Cruse "one of the most talented artists ever to work in the form" in his introduction to the book when it was first published in 1995.

CLAGS board member André Carrington, an organizer of the conference, says it will offer a forum for LGBT cartoonists, comics writers and artists to discuss their art, help document the past and present of queer comics, and provide a place for professional discussions.

"The idea for the conference came to CLAGS about two years ago from Jen Camper, who's a cartoonist who's worked on a number of comics," Carrington told *Clarion*. Camper is the conference's coordinator, and in that a role she draws on "the strength of her longtime connections with LGBT cartoonists," he noted. There will be



symposium at the Graduate Center, "Comics @ CUNY," that explored comics as a subject for scholarship and a teaching tool.

"This is new territory for both teaching and scholarly research," Matsuuchi told *Clarion*. "The varieties of comic books, graphic novels, manga/manhwa are wide-ranging and present narratives and imagery in so many innovative ways."

Topics explored at the symposium included how comics have both shaped and reflected struggles over social power and cultural norms. "Mainstream and popular superhero characters such as Wonder Woman – who was originally created by a Harvard psychologist – can provide worthwhile insight into a history of American feminism. Several books about this character have been published in the last two years, including one from an academic press," notes Matsuuchi, who has written about Wonder Woman herself.

Presenters at Comics @ CUNY included Jonathan Gray, associate professor of English at John Jay. Gray recently founded the *Journal of Comics & Culture* with Pace University Press; the first issue is due out this fall.

Author of *Civil Rights in the White Literary Imagination*, Gray is working on a book project for Columbia University Press titled *Illustrating the Race*, which examines representations of blackness in US comics since the first appearance of the Marvel character Black Panther in 1966.

In a presentation last year at the New School, Gray discussed how blackness is often portrayed as alien, and explored why black superheroes are often depicted as cybernetic hybrids, half human and half machine. "Given that people of African descent were often linked to primitivism, in the cultural imagination in general and in comic strips and early comic books in particular, do these post-human black heroes induce us to understand both race and heroism differently?" Gray wrote.

DEPICTING RACE

"It's a fairly common trope – there's Cyborg, there's Deathlok, there's Hardware, who was part of the Milestone comic line as well, and Misty Knight," Gray said in an interview this April. "I'm still working through why this is so common. This is actually the most common heroic trope for black people" in US comics.

One black superhero who doesn't fit into that template is Luke Cage, a Marvel character Gray says has changed over time – and not for the better. "The original Luke Cage has been badly misunderstood. People say he's an imitation of Shaft, but that's because [Shaft] was the big cultural thing at the moment" that the Luke Cage character first saw print, in 1972. "More accurately, Luke Cage is based on Attica."

"The No. 1 thing in the news [at the time] was the Attica prison riots and the death of George Jackson," Gray told *Clarion*. "Attica was front page news for months in New York. The original Luke Cage is, in part, a response to the Attica prison riots, as seen through this ridiculous cartoon glass that is Marvel Comics." Cage acquires his superpowers while imprisoned for a crime he did not commit;

approximately 110 panelists, comprising about 25 to 30 panels. Topics to be covered include histories of queer comics, the visibility of transgender people in imagined worlds, and examinations of how queer comics reflect and critique queer culture, Carrington said.

In addition to Bechdel and Cruse, the conference will also feature queer comics creators Ginkoru Tagame, Jiro Ghianni and Ivan Velez, who was only the second Latino writer to have worked for Marvel Comics.

The conference is open to the public, and much of it, including the keynotes, will be live-streamed. "We want a broad audience, because this is

a fantastic occasion for people to learn about the subject," Carrington said.

Interest in comics as a medium for telling important stories is not limited to people like Spiegelman, Bechdel or Cruse who'd been making comics for years. When civil rights legend John Lewis, the former head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who has served in the House of Representatives since 1986, decided to write a memoir, he chose to do it as a graphic novel, titled *March*. Lewis has worked with cowriter Andrew Aydin and comics artist Nate Powell to develop his narrative in graphic form. The first volume (of three)

was widely acclaimed and soon became a best-seller. The second volume has just been published, and the book is already in widespread classroom use.

March "is a good example of the central role that comic books have played historically in American culture," says Ann Matsuuchi, an associate professor in the library department at LaGuardia Community College. Lewis chose to write his memoir as a comic, she says, in part because a 1958 comic book about Martin Luther King and the Montgomery bus boycott had "served to inspire him as a young man."

Eight months ago, Matsuuchi was one of several organizers of a

his name puts an unsubtle spotlight on that origin story.

By the 21st century, Gray says, Luke Cage “has been updated and rehabilitated...in a way that I find sadly predictable,” with a cleaned-up Cage now a leader of the Marvel superhero group the Avengers. “So he’s a leader, sure,” says Gray, “but he’s not a transgressive figure, the way he was in the ’70s, when he was an ex-con who was fighting to clear his name and contesting the state.”

Crime, the courts and justice are themes that Staci Strobl and Nickie Phillips explore in their magisterial work, *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*. Published in 2013, the book illustrates how comic books have presented crime since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Strobl, an associate professor of law and police science at John Jay, and Phillips, associate professor of sociology and criminal justice at St. Francis College, analyzed around 200 comic books that appeared from 2001 to 2010 in their research.

CRIME & JUSTICE

Crime is of course a perennial subject in comics and graphic novels; Phillips wrote last year that their book examines “how stories in comic books frequently explore ideas of authority and power post-9/11, as well as how cultural notions of retributive justice resonate in the books.” A close look at “how mainstream comic books envision heroes and villains” illuminates “powerful ideological messages about what motivates crime,” Phillips contends.

While there are important exceptions, Strobl said in an interview this April, overall the comics industry “follows some very steadfast conventions that have led to the most prevalent portrayals of crimefighters being white males who protect women and children against massively apocalyptic threats, with or without aliens and zombies, that necessitate some pretty extreme responses and retributive rhetoric.” Comics, and the books and TV shows based upon them, are an important source of American ideological identity, Strobl says. The messages they reproduce, she adds, suggest that “the political problem of a punitive criminal justice system is also potentially a problem of the imagination.”

“Nickie and I began this work as graduate students in criminal justice at CUNY,” Strobl recalls. “We had trouble finding a research advisor, and a couple of professors told us that we should probably stay away from this type of pursuit as intellectually dubious. So we became our own advisors and began presenting at conferences. Luckily we were discovered by sociologists Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm, who saw something in what we were doing and encouraged us to aim higher and write a book.”

CUNY faculty are exploring comics not only as an object of study, but also as a pedagogical tool. Rebecca Bratspies is a professor at the CUNY School of Law and founding director of the CUNY Center for Urban Environmental Reform (CUER). As part of CUER’s work in youth education on environmental

justice, Bratspies wrote a comic book, *Mayah’s Lot*, in collaboration with famed comic book artist Charlie La Greca, who also did the book’s art. *Mayah’s Lot* tells the fictional story of a local resident – Mayah – as she discovers that a private company (Green Solutions) is planning to turn a local lot into a toxic waste facility. The comic goes into plenty of detail and paints a vivid picture of local organizing on environmental justice issues.

Mayah’s Lot is envisioned as the first in a series. “We’re in the final stages of the second comic,” Bratspies said in an interview. “It’ll be released over the summer.” Like the first book, she says, “it serves as a how-to guide for people who want to organize on these issues.”

Bratspies says she’s pleased by the reception the first book’s received. In use in public-school classrooms and distributed through state environmental agencies, she says it’s proven a valuable teaching tool. “When I teach it in New York City public schools, I ask students if they live in an environment; lots of times they say no, because they don’t see [the term] as being about themselves and their lives. That’s what we’re trying to change.”

Steve Ovadia, a professor in the library department at LaGuardia who was an organizer of the Comics @ CUNY symposium, says that meeting sparked his own interest in comics’ pedagogical possibilities. “I’ve become more interested in them as a teaching tool,” said Ovadia. “My LaGuardia colleague Stafford Gregoire spoke extensively about this during our event and it was an aspect I hadn’t really considered prior to his talk.”

EXPLAINING TECH

Ovadia writes the blog My Linux Rig, a personal project on a topic that is close to his heart – and he thinks comics have some untapped potential for teaching about computers. “Comics are definitely an intriguing way to introduce computer science and technological concepts,” he said. “One of the most famous Ruby programming manuals is a comic – *Why’s (Poignant) Guide to Ruby*. And for Linux, a solid comic might make it more accessible to less technically inclined users. The strength of comics is that it presents visual ideas with text, and that’s a fairly standard way of teaching technical concepts.”

Douglas Rushkoff, a professor of media studies at Queens College, is known for writing deep theory about computer-based media. He’s also written comic books.

Rushkoff, who joined the CUNY faculty late last year, has written three comics: *Testament*, *A.D.D.*, and *Club Zero-G*. Science fiction writer and journalist Cory Doctorow, co-editor of the tech culture blog Boing Boing, describes *A.D.D.* as a “tight, action-packed comic wrapped around a serious, thought-provoking critique of the commodification of youth culture.”

THEORY & HISTORY

“I write each thing I do very specifically for a particular medium,” Rushkoff told *Clarion* this spring. “I usually start with an idea that is specific to a form. *Testament*, my graphic novel about the Bible as a kind of narrative time machine, was invented for comics.” In contrast, he says, his book *Present Shock* “is a literary nonfiction treatment of time. It’s an extended meditation that would not be particularly friendly to sequential narrative.”

Rapid changes in how we communicate are changing the kinds of stories that are told, Rushkoff says: “I am teaching a course in narrative – Interactive Narrative Lab. And there, we look at how traditional narrative is threatened – appropriately! – by interactive media from comics to apps, and how that changes power relationships and politics.”

Rushkoff says that comics can be an effective vehicle not only for telling stories, but also for considering theory: “Brooke Gladstone’s book on propaganda, *The Influencing Machine*, is quite effective and a great classroom comic book. It’s not necessarily any easier than reading an essay, but students are often fooled into thinking comics are easier...so I use it.”

One of the best analyses of the specific power of the comics form is itself a comic, he adds, citing *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud. “*Understanding Comics* is pretty profound all by itself,” he told *Clarion*. “You can’t come to recognize the deep functioning of one medium without applying those insights to all the others. I think people who read that comic are changed forever.”

For Josh Brown, executive director of the American Social History Project at the Graduate Center, his relationship to comics has particularly personal roots. “My father

was an artist. He made his living as a cartoonist, and he was not always thrilled about it. When I was a kid, he was doing crime comics, before the comics code. I certainly was thrilled that he was doing this kind of work!”

Crime comics were a prime target of the 1950s psychologist and anti-comics crusader Fredric Wertham, who warned that these lurid tales would warp young minds. In a kind of natural experiment, albeit with a very limited data set, Josh Brown does not seem to have suffered much from this youthful exposure.

As a child, Brown says, “I ended up always drawing.” A native New Yorker, he went to Music & Art High School (now LaGuardia High School of the Arts), and in graduate school he paid his bills doing fabric design, as well as freelance mural painting and illustration. He also did posters, buttons and leaflet illustrations for antiwar movements. But all this



was entirely separate from his academic work as a doctoral student in history.

“When I was in grad school I didn’t talk about cartooning,” he said in a recent interview. “It probably would have been the kiss of death at Columbia at the time.” And it was some time into his development as a social historian before he became interested in visual culture as an academic subject. “My early work was on working-class gangs in New York in the 19th century, as well as those in Philadelphia and Baltimore. But I didn’t use any visual evidence at all.”

It was only when he began working on a documentary film project at

the American Social History Project that his frame of reference changed. “I began looking at the illustrated press of the 19th century, and realized there was a lot more there. That eventually became my dissertation and a book.”

Since then the visual culture of the 1800s has become the main focus of Brown’s scholarship. With support from a Guggenheim fellowship, Brown has been working on his next book, *The Divided Eye*, which examines the visual culture of the US Civil War.

Over the years Brown had worked on various comics projects, mainly personal efforts he did on the side. These included an independent comic on Ed Koch and a long-running blog of political cartoons, Life During Wartime, that was a way to speak out during the Iraq War. He did a short graphic novel, *Robeson in Spain*, as a project with the Archives of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and contributed a chapter to a comics history of SDS.

With a recent project, a 2013 online graphic novel titled *Ithaca*, Brown’s comics work and his historical scholarship came together in a new way. It’s a tale of a murder, set during the sharp conflicts of Reconstruction in the wake of the Civil War. “I always thought that Reconstruction was an era ripe for telling dramatic stories,” said Brown, “and they could be told well in a graphic form.” (This and other comics by Brown can be found through his website, joshbrownnyc.com.)

Somewhat to his own surprise, Brown says, “I’m finding that my cartooning and scholarship seem to be merging more than I might’ve thought possible. So I definitely want to explore this some more.”

It’s not what he would have expected when he began his doctoral studies, Brown says with a laugh. “It’s still somewhat amazing to me that now you can enroll in an art program and major in graphic novels.”

As Brown implies, the idea of comics having a place in the academy still encounters some reflexive resistance. *Comic books?* is the implicit or explicit question. *Do you really think that comic books deserve serious discussion in a university classroom?* Of course, in 1860 most college professors might’ve said the same thing about Charles Dickens.

It’s hard to say what role comics may play in the university in another 10 or 20 years. What seems clear is that academics are more engaged with comics than ever before, and that shift does not seem likely to end any time soon.

Clarion MAY 2015

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CALENDAR

FRIDAY, MAY 1 / 5:00 pm: May Day march and rally against income inequality, endorsed by more than 50 unions and community groups. PSC members will gather on 60th Street between Lexington and Park Ave. For more info, email Jim Perlstein at jperlstein@bassmeadow.com.

MONDAY, MAY 4 / 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm: Retirees Chapter meeting. Discussion topic: “Fighting Social Insecurity.” Speakers: Mark Hannay (No Bad Grand Bargain) and Roger Sanjek (History of the Gray Panthers). PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For more info, contact Jacob Judd at jjudd18@optimum.net.

TUESDAY, MAY 5 / 6:30 pm: College Lab Technicians (CLT) Chapter general meeting. Dinner at 6:00 pm. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. For further information, contact Albert Sherman at asherman@citytech.cuny.edu.

THURSDAY, MAY 7 / 5:00 pm: Rally to Save One Million Homes. The Alliance for Tenant Power and the Real Rent Reform campaign host a rally to fight for renewing and strengthening New York’s rent regulation laws. The laws protecting 1.1 million rent-regulated apartments in NYC renew in June. Let’s make them stronger. Tenants must come together to protect our communities and keep New York affordable. You can make a difference. Join the movement. Location not yet final. For further information, see tinyurl.com/May-7-tenant-rally or contact Darren at 212-608-4320, Darren@tandn.org.

FRIDAY, MAY 8 / 4:00 pm: “First Fridays” adjunct meeting will be held on the second Friday of the month, as the NYSUT Representative Assembly meets on May 1. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For further information, contact Marcia Newfield at mnewfield@pscmail.org.

FRIDAY, MAY 8 / 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies: *Darwin’s Nightmare* (2004). This year’s Labor Goes to the Movies film series presents a group of films – documentary and fiction – that take the threat of apocalypse as their premise. They are meant to stimulate discussion about options for future actions. The 2004 documentary *Darwin’s Nightmare*, the first film by director Hubert Sauper, explores the catastrophic ecological and economic consequences of the introduction by Europeans of the predatory Nile perch into Lake Victoria, Tanzania. The neo-colonialist inequalities are compounded by the devastation of the lake ecosystem as well as the native fishing economy, even as the perch are commercially harvested for sale in European supermarkets. Other elements captured in the film include international gun-running and the scourge of AIDS. Nominated for an Academy Award, and the winner of numerous other awards, the film presents in stark images the nexus of military, economic, and ecological forces convulsing one African region. Discussion to follow the film. Light refreshments provided. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 / 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm: Legislation Committee meeting. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For further information, contact Amanda Magalhaes at amagalhaes@pscmail.org.

TUESDAY, MAY 19: Free buses to Albany for a day of grassroots lobbying and action to support renewal & strengthening of rent regulations. For details, call Larry Wood at 212-799-6838 x205, or see metcouncilonhousing.org and tenantsandneighbors.org.

OCCASIONAL POEMS

Four by Kimiko Hahn

Shot Dead, a villanelle

*Fatal Encounter in Ferguson Took Less Than 90 Seconds/
police radio communications and video ... offer new details from the day/
an unarmed black teenager was shot dead by a white ... officer in August.*

*Did Officer Wilson view Mr. Brown as a suspect in a theft
that had just occurred at a store?*

Fatal Encounter in Ferguson Took Less Than 90 Seconds

*Were Mr. Brown’s hands raised in the air in a motion of surrender
when he was shot, as some witnesses have said?
an unarmed black teenager was shot dead by a white ... officer in August.*

*Was Officer Wilson punched and scratched in a struggle
with Mr. Brown, as he has told the authorities?
Fatal Encounter in Ferguson Took Less Than 90 Seconds*

*Mr. Brown [pushed] a store clerk and [took] cigarillos /
“Put me on Canfield with two,” Officer Wilson told a dispatcher at 12:02 pm /
Ferguson Took
an unarmed black teenager ... in August.*

“Fatal Encounter in Ferguson Took Less Than 90 Seconds, Police Communications Reveal” by Monica Davey, *NYT*, Nov. 15, 2014

Chokehold, a villanelle

*several times before he went motionless/
–the heavysset 43-year-old father of six–/
Garner could be heard saying, “I can’t breathe”*

*He was a nuisance to shop owners who complained
about him selling untaxed cigarettes on the street./
several times before he went motionless.*

*[a] veteran officer appeared to wrap his arm around
Garner’s neck and take him down to the ground./
Garner could be heard saying, “I can’t breathe”*

*If he could repeatedly say, “I can’t breathe,”
it means he can breathe [said Congressman King]/
several times before he went motionless.*

*The medical examiner later found
that a chokehold resulted in Garner’s death/
Garner [had been] heard saying, “I can’t breathe”*

*The video showed Garner telling officers
to leave him alone and refusing to be handcuffed./
before he went motionless/
Garner could be heard*

“Police: Chokehold Victim Eric Garner Complicit in Own Death” by Tom Hays and Colleen Long, Associated Press, Dec. 5, 2014

Semi-Automatic,
ghazal-inspired

*Shot in the Park After Waving a Toy/
1. Don’t carry a toy/*

*do exactly what the police ask you to do, even
(like showing them that your gun is a toy)/*

*There are no statistics on the number
of people shot while holding toy/*

*What will you tell your sons/
as much as we might want to say that [a] toy*

*gun was the beginning and the end of this story, it isn’t/
Tamir Rice, Shot in the Park After Waving a Toy/*

“How Will You Talk With Your Sons About Tamir Rice, Shot in the Park After Waving a Toy Gun?” by KJ Dell’Antonia, *NYT*, Motherlode parenting blog, Nov. 24, 2014

Sharing – A Father’s Day Gift

Tending my own disquiet—sniffing the milk
and smacking fruit flies off the grapefruit—
I sit at the counter and click onto The Daily Poem,

catching on Sandburg’s line
a hairpin in her teeth
—Mother twisting her hair into a nest
as my sister does now. As my two daughters

each, hands above head, twist strands. One
takes a clip from her teeth to trap the coil,
stray shocks like pretty black antennae;

the other takes a pencil to pierce a thickness
we all possess in varying shades. Here
is Mother, gone twenty years. Here in their twenties,

my girls realize the luminous mundane :
I was three, quietly watching my quiet mother
shake out her pin-curls in the window’s sun.

From a blinking cursor I look up and through the blinds
to the hedge where nothing stirs in the stark bright or shadow
but the painful cicada:
sharing these women is my gift to Father.

Kimiko Hahn’s last two collections, *Toxic Flora* and *Brain Fever* (WW Norton), were inspired by science. Three of these occasional poems use lines from newspaper articles, as noted. The fourth, though very different, is also “occasional” in that it was written for the occasion of Father’s Day. Hahn is a distinguished professor in the Queens College MFA Program in Creative Writing and Literary Translation.

PSC LEADERSHIP

Looking back & ahead

This year several long-serving members of the PSC Executive Council (EC) are stepping down. Below is a look back – and ahead – from Vice President for Part-Time Personnel Marcia Newfield and from Vice President for Community Colleges Anne Friedman. Next issue will include perspectives from EC members Bob Cermele, Arthurine DeSola and Steve London.

MARCIA NEWFIELD

Vice President for Part-time Personnel since 2002

Although I was active in CUNY Adjuncts Unite! before I took office and saw our yearlong petition drive for paid office hours for adjuncts become a contract reality, I was not prepared for the extent to which the PSC would become a central part of my life.

I wanted to understand the infrastructure and make sure that an adjunct voice was heard, so in addition to my duties on the Executive Council, bargaining team and in the Delegate Assembly, I became active on a range of union committees: Legislative, Academic Freedom, Finance, International, Grievance Policy, Labor Goes to the Movies. I got involved with our affiliates AAUP, AFT, NYSUT, and with US Labor Against the War. I also initiated the open monthly meetings of the Committee for Part-Time Personnel, aka the First Friday Committee.

I also wanted to counter the stereotypes about adjuncts (less than, not good enough) and the second-class status that we too often

internalize (invisible, silent). I forced myself to become vocal and visible about our situation. My work as a grievance counselor gave me ample examples of the hardship that the system has tolerated: a longtime teacher who is non-reappointed with no explanation or conversation; poverty wages; and the denial of unemployment benefits, forcing some adjuncts to qualify for food stamps.

A GOLIATH OPPONENT

I was unprepared for the complexity and struggles of bargaining. CUNY is a Goliath opponent. They accede to demands grudgingly and always want their pound of flesh. And while we struggle with CUNY management, we also have to lobby the City, the State Legislature, the community. The PSC leadership and activists have done this and more. There is, however, a learning curve, and to win requires an exercise in vision, persistence and perseverance, which I now understand to be the spine of the labor movement.

The internal struggles to understand the complaints and desires of our various constituencies have been agonizing. It's painful to sit in the midst of contradictions and frustrations and come to an agreement. The process does not stop with each contract; moving that process forward is important to building our union's strength.

I got involved in the union because I wanted to fight the devaluation of higher education – and in the PSC we have built a community in

struggle. Monumental victories for part-timers (and these took a truly Sisyphean effort) are inclusion in the City health program, paid office hours, a professional development fund, increased wages and tuition remission. Yet there is so much more to do. Adjuncts still do not have a living wage (receiving less than \$30,000 for 30 credits a year), job security, accumulated sick days, unemployment insurance or health insurance coverage in retirement. Some of these are current contract demands, others will be fought out in the future. What will it take?

I trust my adjunct colleagues on the EC – VP Susan DiRaimo, Michael Batson, Lenny Dick, Tony Gronowicz and Blanca Vazquez, as well as the other PSC leaders – to fight on for the well-being of all.

ANNE FRIEDMAN

Vice President for Community Colleges since 2000

I have spent over one-third of my professional life as a member of the PSC Executive Council, on the bargaining team and as vice president for community colleges. The front page of a somewhat yellowed May 2000 *Clarion* has me pictured among a team of 21 colleagues elected that year to the PSC Executive Council, a body I worked with to lay the foundation of PSC's leadership through the next 15 years. Though a political activist all

my life and raised in a family of union leaders, that election catapulted me to a level of responsibility that was both daunting and thrilling. At a time when open admissions was under attack and community colleges were demonized by the Giuliani administration, the PSC became a focal point for melding the struggle for better working conditions to the needs of our students.

Reflecting upon how I navigated this maze of challenges, I feel alternately exhausted and exhilarated. The collective of PSC leaders, committed to a common goal, to democratic process and mutual respect, made this possible. Together we have negotiated our contracts during periods of economic crisis and political strangleholds. We've learned that we can be bold, break patterns, win the confidence and respect of our members and build our union's capacity. We've taken risks, been nimble, made hard choices. We've made significant gains during times of economic and political crisis.

WORKLOAD REDUCTION

For me, the highlight of the last 15 years is the struggle around community college contractual teaching hours and shadow workload. Efforts by local chapter leaders and rank-and-file activists to achieve a breakthrough on workload have been steady and firm. Unflinching support from this constituency has been invaluable in my leadership position. My dearest friend and most special sister in struggle, Lorraine Cohen, held my hand when I felt frustrated and angry facing what seem to be insurmountable odds in tempering the insanity of an oppressive workload. I am disappointed that we have made such little concrete progress on this issue since 2000. But I am confident that we have built a solid base on the ground, and that we have outstanding incoming EC leadership who will lead us forward in what we have always known is a long-term struggle.

POWER & RENT

Extend & strengthen NY's tenant laws

By TOM ANGOTTI

Since the last PSC contract was signed in 2009, rents in New York City went up astronomically while our pay scale has remained flat. According to a recent report in the *Wall Street Journal*, the average rent in NYC outside of Staten Island costs more than 30% of the top salary of a full professor at CUNY. However, rent regulations are still in place that limit rent increases for current tenants.

If the real estate lobby is successful in its push to weaken the city's rent laws even further, any wage increases we may secure at the bargaining table could simply end up in the pockets of our landlords. This June the New York State Legislature will decide whether to renew the laws that regulate rents in New York City. Tenant advocates are working hard to ensure that the rent protections are both renewed and strengthened.

RENT DEREGULATION

Rent laws limit the increases that landlords are permitted to seek when leases are renewed. They also protect tenants who comply with the terms of their leases from evictions. While enforcement has been weak, the rent laws are important to the economic stability of all working people in NYC.



Tenant advocates in Brooklyn are part of an effort to reform current rent laws.

In the 1990s, real estate interests were able to weaken the rent regulations and secured a change that automatically deregulated apartments when the rent exceeds \$2,500 a month. As the real estate market overheated, many buildings were deregulated as rents were legally raised above this limit. In addition, speculators bought occupied buildings and used a host of methods, both legal and illegal, to force tenants out and either sell apartments as condominiums or rent them for more than \$2,500. More and more apartments are deregulated every year; it is a formula for the eventual elimination of rent regulation altogether.

Led by two tenant organizations, Tenants

& Neighbors and the Metropolitan Council on Housing, the campaign for renewal of the rent laws is pressing for the passage of nine bills in Albany. The most important bill seeks to repeal vacancy deregulation and re-regulate apartments that have been deregulated in the last 20 years. Others would close a host of loopholes that have allowed landlords to price tenants out of their apartments and tack on illegal fees that effectively serve as rent increases.

A parallel struggle in Albany is over whether to renew a huge tax benefit for large developers (421-a). Many housing advocates are calling for termination of the program, which cost the State more than \$1

billion in foregone tax revenue last year. The tax break has subsidized construction of luxury apartments – for example, the One57 tower near Central Park, where a penthouse unit sold for \$100 million, slashed its property tax bill by 95% thanks to 421-a. Housing advocates say that money could be better used as public expenditures for affordable housing. “Subsidize our house, not the penthouse!” protesters chanted in a recent demonstration at One57.

CHANGING RENT POLICY

In Albany this year, leading tenant advocacy groups are pushing for a two-year renewal of the rent laws in the hopes that the political landscape will be more favorable for even greater reforms down the road. One of those fundamental changes is repeal of the Urstadt Law, which places responsibility for rent regulation with the State legislature, which is dominated by landlord interests, rather than letting cities decide rent policy for themselves.

On May 19, rent-law activists are planning a day of grassroots lobbying and action in Albany; free buses will be leaving from New York City. There will also be a rally on May 7 in Foley Square in NYC. See page 10 for details on both actions.

Tom Angotti is professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, and chair of Hunter's PSC chapter.



Urge officials to fund our contract

We need to continue to push City Council members, State lawmakers and borough presidents about the necessity to fund our contract. This effort requires individual meetings that will last a bit longer than 15 minutes of activism, but the time to fund our contract is now. The deadline for the City budget is the end of June, and Albany can still pass a pay bill to fund our contract. Targeted lobbying

had an impact this spring when PSC activists got dozens of State lawmakers to sign on to a letter supporting funding for a contract settlement. More needs to be done. Contact the PSC's Amanda Magalhaes (amagalhaes@pscmail.org or 212-354-1252) to join a visit to the elected official who represents you or your college. These meetings can make a difference.

Advocates push for TAP reform

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

New York's Tuition Assistance Program has made the dream of a college education a reality for hundreds of thousands of CUNY students, but the more than 40-year-old program needs to be reformed to meet the current needs of college students.

TAP must "meet the needs of today's students," said PSC First Vice President Steve London, when he testified before the State Assembly's higher education committee recently. "The laws written for TAP were written largely with full-time, dependent students – who went right from high school to college – in mind," London said. But "today a great number of students...don't fit that mold."

STARK STATISTICS

The PSC is part of the Coalition to Reform the NY Tuition Assistance Program, a group of 33 labor, higher education and student activist groups leading an effort to change the state's largest financial-aid program. Their reform agenda aims to make TAP more accessible to part-time students; to those who are financially independent and working in low-wage jobs; and to New Yorkers who are undocumented immigrants.

Advocates who are urging an update point to some stark numbers. Most New Yorkers don't realize that those who attend college part-time are virtually shut out of receiving TAP assistance. For example, in 2013, out of the 40,000 students attending CUNY community colleges part-time, only 91 students received TAP assistance. No, that's not a typo – the total was less than 100 students, according to a detailed report from the Center for an Urban Future, "Tapped Out," which was released last year.

Financially independent students without dependents cannot receive TAP if their annual income is more than \$10,000 adjusted (or \$15,000 gross income). And while thousands

Program leaves out many needy students



Students assemble outside of City Hall, demanding TAP reform and passage of the New York State DREAM Act.

of undocumented immigrant students call New York their home and qualify for in-state tuition, they are excluded from State financial aid.

Hostos Community College student Lizayda Rodriguez is an example of how TAP fails those attending college on a part-time basis. Now in her first year in Hostos' nursing program, she previously received TAP while attending school full-time. But now, because not enough of her required courses are offered this semester, Rodriguez is enrolled part-time.

EXPANDING AID ELIGIBILITY

"This is the semester that I would need [TAP] the most, and this is the semester that I don't qualify for it," Rodriguez told *Clarion*. This year she has to pay for a \$500 nursing assessment test, uniforms, textbooks and equipment, totaling about \$1,000 altogether. "I was having financial trouble before," Rodriguez said. "Now, it's stressful figuring out how I'll pay for everything."

"Over the last two decades, average tuition and fees at public four-year colleges in New York have

risen 127% while students continue to foot the bill," wrote Kevin Stump, former chair of the Coalition to Reform TAP, in a December op-ed for *Gotham Gazette*. "Since 2008, New York State cut nearly \$2 billion to higher education." Over the same period tuition at CUNY was raised by \$1,700, wrote Stump, a director at the Roosevelt Institute Campus Network. With tuition rising so sharply, when TAP leaves out low-income students it threatens their ability to continue in college.

Of the items on the coalition's agenda, the fight to pass the NY DREAM Act, so far unsuccessful, has received the most legislative attention this year. If New York passed the NY DREAM Act it would join other states like California and Texas that allow undocumented high school graduates to access state-funded financial aid.

"If I could get help with TAP, it would be less pressure," Cintya Jimenez, an undocumented student at Hostos, told *Clarion*. Jimenez had to work for seven years after she graduated high school before

she had saved enough money to start attending college. That money's now running out, she said, and she hoped the NY DREAM Act would allow her to apply for help from TAP. "It'd be a relief not to think every time about how I'm going to pay for each semester, if I can pay it on time, or if I'm going to miss the deadline," Jimenez said.

TAP excludes many part-time & independent students.

Efforts to include funding for the NY DREAM Act in the 2015-2016 State budget were unsuccessful, but proponents of the measure say they will continue to seek its passage in the rest of this legislative session, which ends June 17. CUNY officials say that 6,500 undocumented students attended CUNY in Fall 2013; advocates say the total number is likely far larger.

Financial-aid specialists at CUNY agree that TAP is in need of reform. Current requirements for TAP eligibility are complicated and do not provide "a cohesive whole that works together logically," said Queens College's Associate Direc-

tor of Financial Aid Services Sydney Lefkoe. It becomes a challenge "for some of our neediest students to get adequate grant aid," Lefkoe told *Clarion*.

PROPOSALS

Under TAP's current rules, Lefkoe and colleagues explained, most of a financially independent student's income is assumed to go toward educational expenses, even if their pay is very low; the resulting award is much lower than awards for students who are dependent on their parents. And coalition activists note that part-time students face severe obstacles to receiving TAP, such as having to enroll full-time for a year before they can qualify, hitting their maximum allotment after six or eight semesters.

The proposals from the Coalition to Reform TAP include raising income thresholds and providing the same maximum award to independent students and eliminating the requirement that students attend school full-time for a year before they can qualify for part-time tuition assistance, as well as increasing the maximum TAP award to cover the full cost of CUNY and SUNY tuition, which TAP currently does not provide.

Coalition activists say that the best opportunity for broad TAP reform may come when the five-year tuition-hike plan now in effect at SUNY and CUNY comes to an end. The coalition plans to continue its push for the NY DREAM Act, as it gears up for a strong TAP reform effort in the context of the upcoming tuition debate.

"The program needs to be reformed...because the needs of college students have changed," said Donovan Borington, a Baruch student who is vice chair for fiscal affairs for CUNY's University Student Senate, in testimony before the Assembly Higher Education Committee. "This change requires the program to evolve if it is to continue to remain effective."