

Clarion

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



MAY 2020



Dave Sanders

COVID AT CUNY

The COVID-19 pandemic has come to CUNY, and the PSC has been working around the clock in order to ensure both the physical protection of all its members and the protection of members' rights as they work remotely. **PAGE 2**

COVID CLASSROOM Online teaching at CUNY

The PSC has fought for fairness and contractual protections as thousands of CUNY faculty shift to online teaching.

PAGE 3

BUDGET Fight for fair funding

The pandemic has worsened the state's economic outlook, but the union and its allies continue to fight against austerity.

PAGE 4



CHAPTER ELECTIONS Voting changes amid COVID

The pandemic has interrupted the union's spring chapter elections, and the union's election committee has responded quickly.

PAGE 8

Organizing locally in the crisis

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Members pressure CUNY

PSC members of all titles across CUNY engaged in individual acts of resistance and solidarity in March as the COVID-19 crisis continued to impact the university and the entire country in unprecedented ways. The PSC leadership applied persistent pressure on management to ensure the health and safety of all workers, while simultaneously negotiating changes to normal work schedules and conditions. Key among the terms was a commitment that the university had no plans to interrupt pay for employees during the public health crisis. As in-classroom teaching transitioned to “distance learning,” professional staff and non-teaching faculty advocated to ensure that all PSC-represented workers be able to work safely and remotely.

“This is not a normal time, and it will not be a normal semester. Both classroom and non-classroom work will have to be performed in new ways. Neither faculty nor staff should be evaluated in the traditional ways during this semester, and there must be no repercussions for those whose work cannot be performed or supervised normally,” wrote PSC President Barbara Bowen in a March 14 letter to CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez.

MEMBERS’ RIGHTS

Chapter leaders and staff in the PSC’s contract administration and organizing departments (who themselves are working remotely) have heard from hundreds of union members who are concerned about their work, their pay, and their safety and health. In response, the PSC has issued guidance to members on what actions to take during this difficult time.

“Members may feel they are acting as individuals in seeking reassurance or asking questions about the advisability of coming to campus, but really members all over CUNY are doing the same thing. They’re standing together,” said PSC Organizing Director Deirdre Brill. “Their health, the health of their fami-



Jud Guttau

lies are important. It’s not going to be easy, but the union is standing up for that.”

As early as mid-February – after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global health emergency – PSC officials reached out to CUNY management regarding employment protocols, pay for hourly workers and proper handwashing facilities.

Within days of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approval of widespread coronavirus testing, Bowen was demanding that Chancellor Matos Rodríguez address the university’s procedures for maintaining a safe and healthy workplace, as well as potential changes to normal work schedules.

From early March onward, PSC leadership continued to press CUNY management on a near-daily basis. And in the absence of clear direction from CUNY management, the PSC issued its own guidance on the rights of its 30,000 PSC members working across CUNY, promising that the union would fight for them.

On March 17 the PSC bargaining team presented to CUNY management a series of new demands to safeguard the health and working rights of its membership during the COVID-19 crisis.

Even after President Donald Trump’s March 13 declaration

of national emergency and the CDC’s urging against gatherings of 50 people or more, thousands of CUNY professional, administrative and classified employees were still being required to

go to work. During the week of March 16, when NYC public schools were closed for students, numerous CUNY campus libraries and computing centers remained open. Even after a John

Jay College of Criminal Justice student tested positive for COVID-19, the college’s computing center remained open, with around 85 students coming in one day. CLTs continued to work in labs, art studios and computing centers. Bursar’s offices and registrar’s offices remained open. PSC officers protested this injustice around the clock.

OPEN LIBRARIES

To ensure that CUNY employees continue to be paid, the Office of the NYS Comptroller took over the payroll for senior colleges. As *Clarion* went to press, employees in most bursar’s offices at both CUNY community and senior colleges were reporting to work on-site at least, with some reporting to work as often as once a week.

Library faculty members were particularly incensed at CUNY’s misguided decision to keep libraries open.

“We understand better than anyone the critical role that libraries play in teaching and learning at CUNY, from providing broadband internet access to desktop computers, laptop loans and circulating library collections. However, in a public health crisis that relies on all New Yorkers to practice social distancing in order to quell the spread of COVID-19, libraries must play a different role,” wrote Maura Smale, chair of the CUNY Council of Chief Librarians, and Polly Thistlethwaite, interim university dean for library services, in a message to CUNY officials.

REORGANIZING WORK

Library faculty researched and organized. They put together documents and spreadsheets that tracked CUNY library openings, closings and infections. The PSC Library Faculty Committee organized a petition that was signed by 400 people in one night. They pressured their campus presidents to enable nonteaching instructional staff – including nonteaching faculty, HEOs and nonteaching adjuncts – in the libraries to work remotely. There were organizing successes around the CUNY system and PSC members sent thousands of emails to the chancellor demanding protection for essential employees.

“CUNY administrators were fixated on the idea that the physical computing spaces of the campuses needed to remain open, not understanding the health risks they posed,” said Robert Farrell, PSC chapter chair at Lehman College and an associate professor in Lehman’s library department. “As one colleague said, it made sense to keep the campuses and libraries open after Hurricane Sandy as places for people to gather and get information. [But] in a global pandemic, the goal is to keep people apart.”

For adjunct faculty, finally, nonteaching adjuncts and adjunct CLTs – whose health insurance depends on the number of hours worked – finding ways to work remotely was especially crucial. With no clear initial di-

Continued on page 7

Clarion MAY 2020

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, collective bargaining representative of the CUNY instructional staff. Vol. 49, No. 3. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 61 Broadway, 15th floor, New York, NY 10006. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Website: www.psc-cuny.org. Email: apaul@psccmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

PSC OFFICERS: Barbara Bowen, President; Andrea Vázquez, First Vice President; Nivedita Majumdar, Secretary; Sharon Persinger, Treasurer; Michael Fabricant, Steven London, George Emilio Sanchez, Luke Elliott-Negri, Alia Tyner-Mullings, University-Wide Officers; Penny Lewis, Vice President Senior Colleges; James Davis, Michael Batson, David Hatchett, Senior College Officers; Lorraine Cohen, Vice President Community Colleges; Michael Spear, Sharon Utakis, Howard Meltzer, Community College Officers; Iris DeLutro, Vice President Cross Campus Units; Janet Winter, Jacqueline Elliott, Cross Campus Officers; Joan Greenbaum, Steve Leberstein, Retiree Officers; Carly Smith, Vice President Part-Time Personnel; Susan DiRaimo, Blanca Vázquez, Meg Feeley, Part-Time Officers; Peter I. Hoberman, Vice President Emeritus, Cross-Campus Units.

STAFF: Deborah Bell, Executive Director; Naomi Zauderer, Associate Executive Director; Faye H. Alladin, Coordinator, Financial Services; Renée Lasher, Director, Contract Administration; Deirdre Brill, Director, Organizing; Francis Clark, Director, Communications; Barbara Gabriel, Coordinator, Office Services and Human Resources; Diana Rosato, Coordinator, Membership Department; Peter Zwiebach, Director of Legal Affairs.

Editor: Ari Paul / Associate Editor: Shomial Ahmad / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Copy Editors: Teri Duerr, Matt Schlecht

© 2020 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Teaching goes online, and CUNY fumbles

By ARI PAUL

PSC blasts admin's 'recalibration' plan

As the COVID-19 crisis began to hit New York City in March, PSC members agitated for CUNY to move to remote learning immediately, following the lead of several tristate universities. CUNY management replied that the university would follow state government directives, but after pressure from the PSC leaders and rank-and-file members, all instruction was shifted to “distance learning.” As this crisis has been a test of the government and the American health-care system, so too has it been a test of the academy. At CUNY, where many students, faculty and staff are under-resourced for such a shift, the transition has been time-consuming and sometimes impossible.

CUNY professors and lecturers, like their colleagues around the country, are hunkering down at home and adjusting to non-classroom teaching. Given the speed of the health-care emergency's progress, there was little time for instructors to adapt. At Brooklyn College, instructional staff received distance-learning training on March 12, right before the CUNY system closed its classrooms.

SHOCKING MEMO

But just five days after faculty members across CUNY had begun to teach through online technology, the CUNY chancellor dropped a bombshell. In a letter to the CUNY community, Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez said that the university would take a break to “recalibrate” the distance program in order to distribute equipment to students who may not have what they need for online classes.

Recalibration took effect at certain CUNY schools on March 27 and distance learning resumed April 2. CUNY also shortened spring break, scheduling it from April 8 to April 10. Faculty across the system were furious. Hundreds of members wrote to the union voicing their frustration.

“Faculty are upset because we are paying with our spring break, and with additional work revising syllabi, for a problem the CUNY administration could have anticipated. Ensuring student access to loaner laptops should have been part of the initial move online,” said James Davis, PSC chapter chair at Brooklyn College. “Rather than giving just five days to overhaul our courses



Faculty members at Brooklyn College received a training in remote teaching in March.

and learn new remote-learning platforms, the university could have pumped the brakes, given everyone involved – students, faculty and staff – a moment to say what they need to maintain academic continuity. Instead, rushed into teaching online, we rose to the challenge and did tons of work, only to be told after a week to wait, and at the expense of most of spring break. No one's flying off to Miami Beach, but everyone deserves a break during this stressful public health crisis. And our hourly instructors deserve to be paid for the many additional hours they're working.”

Rosa Squillacote, a delegate from the PSC Graduate Center chapter who teaches at Hunter College, said, “I am very angered by the recalibration decision. While it is true that we aren't going anywhere for spring break, the point of the break isn't for travel but to have a break. I think both we and our students need some time off to get a grip – emotionally, physically – on what is going on. Additionally, the shortened break is being exchanged for recalibration time, which means we are being required to do even more additional uncompensated labor. I am not used to teaching online, and it took a lot of work for me to translate my classes – and now I need to change the schedule again? No. I am ignoring this order and continuing with my classes as I had originally scheduled them. I am not spending more time reorganizing my syllabus, when this se-

mester is already taking up far too much unpaid time.”

And Bronx Community College PSC Chapter Chair Sharon Utakis said, “CUNY didn't have a plan to deal with this situation, so they're making it up as they go along, and not consulting the people who are actually doing the work.”

Echoing many of the complaints from the faculty, PSC President Barbara Bowen said, in a message to members, “The PSC is also concerned that each college president is being asked to make a plan for how laptops and other equipment will be distributed to students. Librarians and professional staff must not be asked to put themselves and the public safety at risk to do the distribution.”

PSC RESPONSE

Bowen said that after union pressure, the university altered its original position about rearranging spring break and that the recalibration period would be days off for faculty. She said, “The union acknowledges, however, that because CUNY management has now made a second shift in the teaching schedule, faculty who developed a schedule of assignments based on the original academic calendar may have to spend much of the recalibration week reorganizing their courses yet again. The union continues to be in discussion with CUNY about the effects of the changed schedule.”

In general, faculty members had mixed reviews about teach-

ing from home. In addition to the amount of time needed to restructure courses for distance technology presentation and student engagement, it is a challenge to create deadlines for student work and revise expectations. Some adjuncts, for example, did not have appropriate software or internet connections to make the sudden move to remote teaching. Others raised questions about how the sudden shift would affect tenure reviews, observations and issues of privacy.

“I am generally suspicious of online teaching both for pedagogical (the importance of social interaction to learning) and union-professional reasons (it can be a step toward management assuming ownership of our work),” Charles Post, a professor of sociology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, wrote in an email. “However, facing a choice between no instruction and online, I do choose the latter. Unfortunately, neither Blackboard nor CUNYfirst has up-to-date email addresses for our students, many students have no or inadequate access to the digital platforms and most are simply overwhelmed with the social fallout of the pandemic.”

GETTING ADJUSTED

“At City College's School of Education, the associate dean took over the online instruction tutorial workshop responsibility. He offered one on-site and two online workshops for faculty,” said Carol Huang, the PSC

Continued on page 5

Albany delivers severe austerity

The struggle goes on

By ARI PAUL

Unions like the PSC were already facing a tough challenge when it came to fighting for a fair state budget agreement.

Since the start of 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo’s new state budget plan has had no new revenue channels for the state and forecasted a \$6 billion budget deficit. The PSC and other advocates pushed – through lobbying, CUNY-wide demonstrations and social media campaigns – for a state budget that included new taxes on the wealthiest in order to fund vital public programs and services, including CUNY. Many state lawmakers agreed with the union’s position.

PANDEMIC POLITICS

The COVID-19 pandemic changed things. The new budget agreement maintains austerity, and the decrease in tax revenue caused by the crisis has forced the estimated shortfall to balloon to as much as \$15 billion. It also fails to include any new tax revenue from the wealthiest. Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou didn’t mince words when she said on Facebook, “This budget...is completely terrible. Sorry, New York.”

“It looks, for CUNY, as though this budget is essentially the same budget proposed by Cuo-

mo back in January,” said Mike Fabricant, the union’s legislative representative. “There are no year-over-year real increases except in fringe benefits. All of this represents a cut to the extent that largely it is the same budget as a year ago, and on top of that, it reflects the decline in state investment over the last decade.”

OTHER CUTS

Community college aid remains flat, childcare centers will be cut by half a million dollars and there will be cuts to ASAP and other programs. The budget also includes the sale of some CUNY buildings to the state.

The city also announced a \$20-million cut with a “temporary delay of new cohort of freshmen for CUNY ASAP program,” affecting community colleges.

More generally, the budget gives the governor the ability to make midyear cuts, and critics say there is no additional funding for K-12 schools. To get a sense of how inhumane this budget is, just remember this: it includes hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid cuts during a global health pandemic.

For Fabricant, giving the governor unilateral authority to make midyear cuts is the most worrisome aspect. “It is troubling down the road,” he said.



Brooklyn College PSC Chapter Chair James Davis with members.

“What kind of cuts is the governor going to exact upon CUNY given his absolute unwillingness to tax the wealthy?”

LOCAL CUTS

PSC President Barbara Bowen blasted college presidents who, even before the state issued any major cuts to CUNY, demanded and threatened cuts locally. In a message to members, Bowen called the local cuts unnecessary, and said that they “undermined the entire university” because they send “the message that

cuts to CUNY are inevitable and acceptable,” adding, “they are neither.”

In addition to fighting those local cuts, the union stated that the only way to stave off further cuts to public services in the state was to advocate for more state revenue, through more taxation of the wealthy and advocacy for federal funding.

“We are in a circumstance where revenues are likely to fall for the state,” Fabricant said. “That’s a real recipe for disaster over time.”

A dark budget in a dark time



PSC members joined New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and other advocates demanding a fair state budget.

Budget actions

Continued from page 4



Ellen Moynihan

Members demonstrated with a marching band at Bronx Community College.



Dave Sanders

City Tech members dropped a banner off the Manhattan Bridge.



Erik McGregor

Students and PSC members discussed CUNY funding during a town hall at Lehman College.



Victoria O'Shea

Queenborough Community College members wore "red for ed."

Colleges donate gear for response

CUNY aids response effort

By ARI PAUL

Remember: just because we're enforcing social distancing doesn't mean we can't have social solidarity.

That's the motto many PSC members are living by right now, as many are eager to put their time and expertise to good use during this pandemic. On March 22, the Office of the Queens Borough President reported that faculty and staff at Queens College's School of Mathematics and Sciences had made a "donation of various personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies including N95 masks, 30 unopened cases of disposable nitrile gloves, disposable lab coats and bottles of 70% isopropyl alcohol" and that the campus's "professors, faculty and college lab technicians (CLTs) of 'the college of the future' stepped up and scoured their teaching labs for materials that could be of immediate use by the city's medical professionals and other frontline workers."

LEHMAN HELPS

The School of Natural and Social Sciences at Lehman College also donated N95 masks to

Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

PSC President Barbara Bowen hailed the donations and told members that she was urging all of CUNY's physical science departments to look into making whatever donations they could to nearby hospitals as they struggle with the increasing number of COVID-19 cases around the city (as of this writing, New York City has reportedly been one of the most badly hit cities in the world in the COVID-19 pandemic).

A field hospital at CSI

AFT SUPPORT

Bowen also said that the PSC's national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, was donating health-care equipment nationally, as the union represents nurses and other health-care workers.

At the request of several officials, including U.S. Congressman Max Rose, from Staten Island (whose mother is a PSC member), the federal government approved a plan to convert the College of Staten Island into a 1,000-bed field hospital, according to the *Staten Island Advance*.

Teaching goes online, CUNY fumbles

Continued from page 3

chapter chair at City College. "I decided to get ahead of schedule and did my online instruction on Monday and Tuesday [March 16 and 17] just to get my students ready. [Class with my] graduate students on Monday went well.... But for my undergraduate students on Tuesday, it was not easy. Many did not appear, and for those who appeared, they have many problems. The speed of internet was obviously slower than Monday. My students could not hear me clearly."

HELPING EACH OTHER

Sarah Chinn, the chair of the English department at Hunter College, said, "I guess it is positive that I'm learning to use online tools. Beyond that, it's hard to see much upside. Actually,

one positive thing I'm seeing is that people are really going above and beyond to help each other and the students. Our IT folks have been available by video chat every day and helping people with the most complicated and most basic problems. As chair, I've had to deal not just with my own class, but also making sure that all the English faculty – about 35 full-timers and 140 adjuncts – are getting everything they need." Rebecca Smart, an adjunct instructor in the psychology departments at Baruch College and BMCC, said, "From my experience at Baruch and BMCC, the response has been as good as could be expected. My department chairs especially have been great for providing updates and resources."

Members talk about remote teaching.

5 Q's: Himmelstein, Woolhandler

Doctors for equality

By CLARION STAFF

David Himmelstein and Stephanie Woolhandler are both distinguished professors at the School of Urban Public Health at Hunter College. In addition to having authored countless articles on health-care policy, they are also founders of Physicians for a National Health Program, which advocates for single-payer health insurance in the United States.

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolds in New York City and worldwide, people have been asking urgent questions about the flaws in our health-care system, and what can be fixed in light of this crisis.

To help answer some of these questions, Himmelstein and Woolhandler participated in *Clarion's* "Five Questions" interview.

Hospitals worry about being overloaded. Why are hospital systems, many of which make lots of money each year, not able to expand their ability to provide more care?

There has already been some overall capacity expansion, and more is on the way. However, money can't make new hospital resources appear instantly. Hospitals need spaces with ventilation systems that minimize contamination; plumbing in patient rooms so health workers can wash their hands and patients don't have to wander the halls (spreading viruses) to use the bathroom; special mattresses that can be sanitized between patients; oxygen hook-ups or tanks available at each (or at least most) beds; computer stations where staff can access electronic medical records; ready access to diagnostic equipment like CT scanners; a call system that works at each bed, so patients can contact nurses if they need urgent help, etc. Useful, although less than optimal, hospital wards can be set up in convention centers, hotels, dorms etc., but hospital staff have little expertise in such construction or providing care in such settings, and lack in-house resources to undertake building construction or modification.

Over the last several years, hospital ownership in lots of cities has been consolidated. University systems have bought up hospitals and clinics. How has this affected health care in America?

The giant systems that have taken over most hospitals and tens of thousands of physicians' practices have used their monopoly power to leverage higher prices in negotiations with insurers. In the wake of mergers and acquisitions, hospitals' profits have increased, but the availability of primary care and other services has decreased, and studies show that patients' experiences have worsened and the promised quality improvements have not materialized.

In New York State, the per capita supply of hospital beds fell by 23% between 2000 and 2018, a slightly faster fall than occurred nationwide. Consolidation of ownership was partly responsible for the fall in hospital beds in New York, but the Andrew Cuomo administration's explicit policy goal of reducing beds (particularly in New York City) was the main driver.



David Himmelstein

Do you think that this pandemic will inspire some sort of change toward something like Medicare for All?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the myriad weaknesses in our health-care and public health systems, and in our broader social safety net. Early diagnosis and isolation of infected individuals is key to stopping the spread of the virus, but the 29 million uninsured are largely excluded from care. Tens of millions more are saddled with steep copayments and deductibles, and restricted to their insurers' narrow networks, obstructing their access to the care that's a vital component of dealing with the epidemic.

In a recent survey, 68% of US adults said that high copayments and deductibles would discourage them from seeking care for coronavirus symptoms. Congress stepped in to make coronavirus tests free, but it did nothing to spare people who test positive



Stephanie Woolhandler

from potentially disastrous medical bills for treatment.

The pro-market ideology that has dominated US health policy for a generation has also interfered with a timely and effective response. Those policies pit hospitals against one another as competitors and have pretty much abolished overall health planning that could assure that medical resources are distributed according to needs.

For decades, hospitals have amped up their provision of profitable services like elective orthopedic surgery, while neglecting unprofitable services like emergency care and mental health, and we have a concentration of resources in wealthy areas of Manhattan, while many parts of New York are underresourced.

We've also underinvested in public health, a reflection of the general assault on public services. The share of overall health spending devoted to public health efforts in the United States peaked at 3.21% in 2002, falling to 2.65% in 2016 (about half the level in Canada or the UK), and fell further to 2.45% in 2019.

Funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Public Health Emergency Preparedness program, the main source of federal support for state and local public health emergency capacity, fell by one third between 2003 and 2019. These and other funding cuts forced state and local public health agencies to eliminate 50,000 positions, a 20% decrease in the frontline workforce for fighting epidemics. Similar cuts have affected the CDC as a whole, whose program funding, adjusted for inflation, decreased by 10% between the fiscal years 2010 and 2019.

These glaring failings offer opportunities for Medicare for All advocates to make the case for universal health care based on cooperation, solidarity and planning, rather than on competition and profitability.

Nurses' unions have been vocal about the importance of a single-payer system. In this crisis, what can health-care unions do to inspire major change?

Broad popular mobilization will be needed to overcome opposition to a single-payer health-care system by drug firms, insurers and other corporate interests that now reap enormous profits from the current dysfunctional system. Unions can be a vital force in sparking that mobilization through education and public advocacy. Health-care unions (as well as physicians) have a particularly important role to play in assuring the general public that single-payer reform would strengthen, rather than undermine, health care and that the health-care workforce would welcome such reform.

Italy is in a crisis, but Asian countries seem to be flattening their curves. What models should we be looking at?

Public health efforts and restrictions on movement and interaction have been key to stemming the COVID-19 epidemic in several Asian nations. When spread goes unchecked, no health-care system has the spare capacity to meet all the needs. So social distancing and identifying all of those who are infected and isolating them are critically important.

The most successful efforts have employed measures that impinge on freedom and privacy. While those measures save lives in the short run, they pose long-term threats. In the United States, we need to insist that any expansion of government's surveillance powers and limitations on movement be immediately rescinded once the epidemic subsides.

PSC endorsed Bernie Sanders

By ARI PAUL

When Senator Bernie Sanders planned his 2020 presidential campaign, he chose Brooklyn College (BC) as the place to hold a rally on March 2, 2019, to kick off his run. This wasn't just because he's a native Brooklynite or because he spent a year as an undergraduate at BC, but because it signaled that his vision for a robust social democracy rests on working-class, public institutions like CUNY.

The PSC took notice.

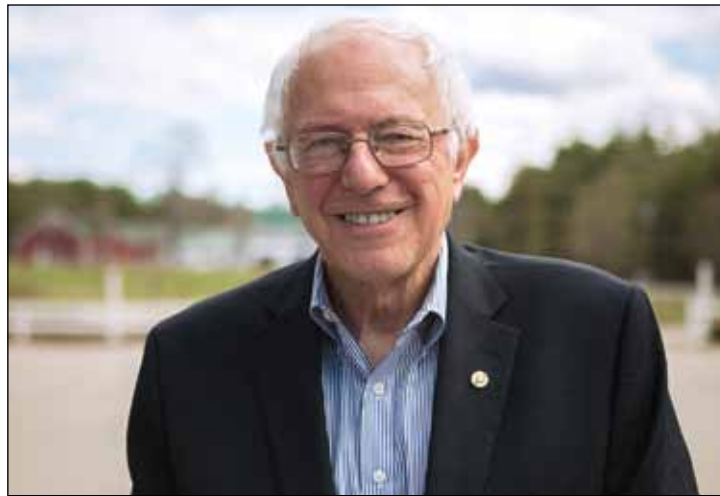
On March 19, during a digital PSC Delegate Assembly (due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic), PSC delegates overwhelmingly approved a resolution to endorse Sanders. While the state effectively canceled the primary due to the pandemic, the union's endorsement of Sanders, which the senator tweeted out to millions of followers, was still historic.

MOVEMENT BUILDER

While Sanders dropped out of the race in April, the PSC's presidential primary endorsement signified why Sanders's platform was so historic.

"His political platform was clearly most fully aligned with the social justice policies our union works to achieve," said Carly Smith, the PSC vice president for part-time personnel. "Of all the candidates, his plan for public higher-ed funding would most substantially benefit CUNY workers and students, and he is the only candidate who has built a grassroots social movement powered by young, working-class peo-

Historic first for AFT locals



Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont

ple of color. A strong social justice union like ours should be proud in this historic moment to put full, unequivocal support behind a democratic socialist candidate whose policies remain broadly popular and remain the way forward to defeating this fascist administration."

The endorsement came after vibrant debate among the members. The PSC will support the Democratic Party nominee, and the union respects all members' views, PSC President Barbara Bowen said.

The endorsement was historic for both the PSC and its national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT endorsed former Vice President Joe Biden. Local AFT affiliates such as unions representing K-12 teachers in Los Angeles and Boston also made independent endorsements this

year. Earlier, this semester, the PSC's Executive Council had recommended to the DA a joint endorsement of both Sanders

A candidate who stands for economic justice

and Senator Elizabeth Warren, as they represented the progressive flank of the primary candidates. By the time the resolution reached the DA – after a lot of debate by rank-and-file members about a presidential endorsement – Warren had suspended her campaign.

PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

The PSC made clear that the Sanders endorsement had significance even after he dropped out. As Sanders's rallying cry has been "not me, us," PSC members said that support for Sanders should be read as a long-term commitment to rebuilding working-class politics and universal policies like Medi-

care for All and tuition-free college, regardless of who the next president is. The current global health crisis, the Executive Council said, underscored the need for Sanders's policies.

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

Luke Elliott-Negri, the PSC chapter chair at the Graduate Center and an Executive Council member, said, "Across the country and right here in New York City, funding for public higher education has been shrinking for decades. Bernie Sanders had the strongest higher-ed platform and he is willing to fight for it. And, not for nothing, the current political and economic systems have pushed human life to the edge of viability. Even Bernie's proposals were just the beginning of the transformation we'll need to undergo as a society and a planet if we don't want our species engulfed by seas or fires."

"The current pandemic," the Executive Council wrote in a recent message, "exposes the inhumane contradictions of our society, where children's nutritional needs are conditional on being able to attend school, and people cannot stop working because they don't have sick leave."

"A nation where millions have no health insurance and even more are struggling with medical bills is now scrambling to respond to an unprecedented health crisis. Sanders's platform on health care, on economic inequality, on union protections, on climate change and on a billionaires' tax have acquired even greater urgency now."

Organizing locally

Continued from page 2

rection from management, there was a lot of anxiety and stress.

"There has been a strong effort to keep nonteaching adjuncts, including adjunct CLTs, on the payroll by developing creative ways to support all initiatives in the transition to remote teaching, student learning and staff telecommuting," Amy Jeu, acting CLT chapter chair, told *Clarion*. "Most lab courses have been able to transition to e-labs, and CLTs worked aggressively with the administration to develop the IT infrastructure and protocols to support remote operations and monitor systems around the clock."

People working in these titles can continue to submit time sheets and get paid.

Some adjuncts and continuing education teachers reported that

they did not have adequate internet access or the equipment needed to work from home. Members were advised to contact their HR office, and chapters raised these issues with colleges.

On several campuses, continuing education teachers whose classes were scheduled to begin later in the semester found their classes canceled. At Brooklyn College, the American Language Academy, which was scheduled to begin April 6, has been suspended for the semester, leaving nearly a dozen ESL Continuing Education Teachers without work and a paycheck. The PSC Brooklyn College Chapter asked program officials to work on offering an online program, indicating that instructors are ready to teach online and the chapter had a deep concern that instructors will lose

their health insurance. Program administrators responded, saying they canceled classes due to low enrollment.

Scott Cally, PSC chapter chair at Kingsborough Community College, reported that at least seven language immersion instructors in the KELI (ESL) program were not reappointed for classes scheduled to begin in April, leaving them unemployed, without a paycheck or health insurance. The union successfully fought for three of those instructors to teach classes starting May 4 and will continue to fight for the other four members.

CRISIS WORKERS

On March 20 Governor Andrew Cuomo announced his guidance for essential services in the state, which included childcare centers and food pantries at CUNY campuses. By the end of the following week, the childcare centers at BMCC and Lehman College

were designated as regional enrichment centers for children of essential workers, while other CUNY childcare centers were closed but remain on standby. As *Clarion* went to press, the childcare center at Lehman College was receiving about two to three children a day. Employees who work at the center, who are hired by a private contractor, have some protective equipment and supplies, but due to shortages they do not have everything they need, including gowns.

As this crisis unfolds, members are encouraged to contact the union to report any unjust or unreasonable labor practices or demands. Members can contact their chapter leadership, chapter grievance counselors or PSC organizing and contract administration staff. Contact information can be found on the PSC website at psc-cuny.org/about-us/who-we-are.

New CUNY campus presidents

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Starting this summer

In March, the CUNY Board of Trustees appointed three new college presidents: Robin L. Garrell at the Graduate Center, Frank H. Wu at Queens College and, on an interim basis, Daisy Cocco De Filippis at Hostos Community College. The Board had also appointed S. David Wu at Baruch College in February.

Garrell, a chemist and bioengineer, is vice provost for graduate education and graduate division dean at the University of California, Los Angeles, and will start at the Graduate Center on August 1. “We hope and expect that Dr. Garrell will be a public champion for full CUNY funding,” said Luke Elliott-Negri, PSC chapter chair at the Graduate Center. “New state investment at the Graduate Center would enable us to address the gross inequality among doctoral student employees, to recover the many faculty and HEO lines that remain unfilled and to deepen the ability of our institution to conduct cutting-edge research.”

STRIKE TROUBLE

Elliott-Negri also noted that in a recent letter to UCLA faculty, Garrell referred to graduate students at UC Santa Cruz who were striking and demanding a cost-of-living adjustment because of high rents as engaging in “an unauthorized strike.”

“The recent teacher and support staff strikes in West Virginia were also unauthorized, not to mention the sit down strikes of the 1930s,” Elliott-Negri said. “UCSC strikers should be lauded for their fight, not dismissed.”

Frank H. Wu, who will take office at Queens College beginning July 1, is currently a distinguished professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, where he also served as chancellor. He began working there in 2010. Prior to that, he spent a decade, from 2000-2010, as a trustee and a vice chair of the board at Gallaudet University, which offers higher education to the deaf and hearing-impaired. The board, according to Wu’s CV, is an active, working board, and



Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Hostos

during his time as a trustee, he also was a visiting professor at law schools in Michigan and in the Washington DC area. While he was trustee, campus protests brought the school to a standstill over a controversial presidential appointment that was later rescinded, according to the *Washington Post*. Wu later sought to assure faculty, staff and students that the new search would be characterized by “better communication and more inclusiveness.”

“We hope that President Wu provides more public leadership on campus, and that [he will bring] a collaborative leadership style,” said David Gerwin, PSC chapter chair at Queens College.

Gerwin, who participated in the final round of faculty interviews for the new president, said that Queens College faces constant fiscal challenges, including the merging of the bursar’s and registrar’s office over the past couple of years and ongoing turnover in the position of QC registrar.

The newly appointed interim president at Hostos Community College, Daisy Cocco De Filippis, is a CUNY alumna, a former provost at Hostos and a former faculty member focusing on Dominican women’s studies at York College. She will be the first Dominican woman to serve as president of a CUNY college when she begins on August 1. She is currently president of Naugatuck Valley Community College in Connecticut.

“We welcome Dr. Cocco De Filippis back to Hostos, along with her passion and commitment to excellence that characterized her during her years as a



Robin Garrell, Graduate Center

provost,” said Lizette Colón, PSC chapter chair at Hostos. “On the other hand, we urge her to address the lack of transparency, leadership and the incredibly low morale that we are confronting at Hostos, [and] restore effective communication between the different divisions of the college.”

SUCCESS RECORD

Baruch’s recently appointed president, Dr. S. David Wu, a scholar in systems engineering and operations research, is currently the provost and executive vice president of George Mason University. Under his leadership,

George Mason earned a Carnegie tier-one research designation. He was also dean of the college of engineering at Lehigh University, and he is a current board member of Dartmouth College’s Thayer School. He will assume office on July 1.

“The decisions made by administrators have more consequences than ever, and the union’s input and perspective are essential to wise governance, especially concerning health and safety issues, which have been a priority of the Baruch chapter,” said Vince DiGirolamo, PSC chapter chair at Baruch College. “We have also been vigilant about protecting scholars from the undue influence of government agencies and corporate donors. As elected representatives of the faculty and staff we have an ongoing moral obligation to make sure that our voices are heard and our vision of academic excellence is realized.”

In addition to these presidential appointments under CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez’s leadership, there are several interim presidents appointed in the past year still serving – at Lehman College, York College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, LaGuardia Community College and Queensborough Community College.

Chapter elections update

By CLARION STAFF

Acting on the recommendation of the PSC Elections Committee, the union’s Executive Council took action to minimize the risk to PSC staff of exposure to the COVID-19 virus by passing a resolution on the conduct of scheduled chapter elections during April. Members in the chapters that have uncontested elections scheduled in April will not be receiving ballots in the mail as they normally would. Elections in all but two chapters are not contested. Therefore, the Elections Committee – when it convenes remotely in early May – will certify as elected the candidates for office in the uncontested chapter elections. Ten business days after that, the candidates will take office.

The Elections Committee’s certification will be reported to the union’s Delegate Assembly when it meets remotely in May. Normally, for uncontested chapter elections, the practice is that union staff print the ballots and other voting materials, place them in envelopes and mail them. Voting members return their ballots to the union office, where they are opened and counted on the designated day at the end of

April. The PSC office is closed for the duration of the current crisis period. The PSC does not consider staff going to the office to count ballots in an uncontested election as “essential.”

MAIL BALLOTS

For the two chapters where positions are contested, the American Arbitration Association (AAA) is conducting the mail ballot, as is the union’s practice in the case of contested chapter elections. For Bronx Community College and York College, ballots were mailed out on April 1 by AAA, and members are instructed to return their votes by mail in the business reply envelopes included in the mailing. AAA reports that they are not sure when they will be able to pick up the ballots at the post office, so counting those ballots will probably be delayed past the designated vote count day at the end of April.

Candidates will be notified when the votes are to be counted at AAA, so observers can participate. Anyone at BCC or York who believes they are eligible to vote and who does not receive a ballot should contact the PSC immediately.

Editor’s note

For the first time in our publication’s history, we are distributing only a digital version, rather than printed copies, of *Clarion* to PSC members. The idea of having workers – fellow unionists – print and sort newspapers and load them on and off mail trucks during a pandemic inspired this decision by PSC officers and staff.

This historic moment has the potential to redefine not just our professional lives but the entire global order, economy and health system. *Clarion* will adapt and do our best to document the moment. And we hope to return to print whenever we can.

**New
chiefs
at CUNY
schools**

**Managing
PSC
elections
during
COVID-19**