

# Clarion

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



JANUARY 2011



## 400 YEARS History of race

John Jay prof  
looks at how  
our racial  
caste system  
was created.

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Dave Sanders

## THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE, SAYS PSC SPEAKING OUT VS. CUTS

PSC members, students and City Councilmembers rallied at City Hall to speak out against Mayor Bloomberg's \$11.8 million midyear cut in City support for CUNY. Above, Geoff Kurtz, assistant professor of political science at BMCC, talks about what these cuts mean on a local level. "We've got 23,000 students jammed into

a building made for 9,000," Kurtz said. "When we see availability of classes decrease and class sizes increase, education starts to erode." Union chapters are also pressing colleges to cope with the cuts in ways that do the least harm to students, faculty & staff.

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## Faculty casts no-confidence vote

A president and provost are criticized for poor management skills, hostility toward faculty and staff, and distancing the college from the community.

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## PSC-CUNY Awards change

New guidelines are finalized for PSC-CUNY Research Awards, which are now in three categories. The application deadline is January 28, 2011.

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Ending corporate loopholes and making the very wealthy pay fair taxes is the starting point for solving New York's budget crisis.

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CUNY's academic librarians are scholars who empower students and faculty to succeed. Now, they are organizing to gain time for their own scholarship.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR |

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

# Correcting the myths on Social Security

● As the economy falters and the federal deficit grows, more and more misstatements are being spread about Social Security. Many claim that the program is bankrupt, that benefits must be cut, and that the age for retirement must keep rising.

But in fact, because Social Security has been collecting more in taxes than it has paid out in benefits, it has built up a trust fund of \$2.5 trillion. The program has been successful for 75 years, and even if no changes are made, the program could continue to pay full benefits until the year 2037.

Only minor adjustments are required to strengthen Social Security for future generations. First, raise or eliminate the cap that protects all income above \$106,800 from paying any Social Security taxes. Second, to correct any shortfall that may occur later in the 21st century, raise the tax by 1% on both employees and employers.

Now is the time to start a grassroots movement. We need to write to the media and spread the word to emphasize the facts, not the rumors. We need to tell Congress not to submit to baseless scare tactics, but instead to defend Social Security and ensure its continued success.

Lawrence Kaplan  
John Jay (emeritus)

## Health insurance: cost & calendar

● The November *Clarion* issue reminded readers about the important information for choosing health insurance plans, especially when we are not even aware of possible insurance increases that will occur over the upcoming year ("NYC health plan choices: how to weigh possible hikes"). Perhaps CUNY (and New York City) can solve some of the strange aspects of a CUNY health insurance plan where the rates can increase in the middle of the year and the consumer (i.e., the CUNY employee) is responsible to pay for this increase?

First, instead of the current Fall open enrollment period, the open enrollment should instead be in the Spring, a time closer to when the new health insurance contracts are negotiated and major annual price increases go into effect in the summer. Second, CUNY (and New York City) should insist in their contract negotiations with health insurance companies that the cost for health insurance should be the same price during the whole year. There should not be increases occurring in the middle of an annual contract. Is this something that the PSC-CUNY can advocate on behalf of our members?

Joshua Fogel  
Brooklyn College

PSC First Vice President Steve London replies: *This is a good idea, and worth consideration – though it would not be simple to arrange.*

*The costs of higher-premium options under the NYC Health Benefits Program are set through negotiations between the City of New York and the insurance carriers – and the many unions that make up the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) can review technical details and offer comment. So coordination among many different players would be required.*

*Moving the re-opener period or changing the time each year when rates are set could shrink, but not abolish, the gap between rate-setting and the chance to choose a new plan. First, time would still be required to implement any changes in coverage. (Currently, choices made in the November re-opener take effect Jan. 1.) Second, the negotiations between NYC and carriers over new rates, and municipal unions' opportunity to comment, take some time – usually a little more than a month, but sometimes longer. Some gap in time is thus unavoidable – but the current lag might, for example, be cut in half.*

*Alternatively, participants might simply be given a one-time ability to opt out of their current plan if, for example, a rate increase exceeds a certain percentage.*

*So there are many complicating factors, but the basic point remains: it's a good idea, and deserves discussion. Thanks to Joshua Fogel for raising it.*

## Students across Europe

● In addition to the British students' militant defense against rising tuition, excellently reported by Steve Leberstein in your December issue, we should also be aware of many other mobilizations against similar austerity measures in Europe.

In Ireland, facing a bleak future of high unemployment, 20,000 young people demonstrated. In Italy, students surrounded the Chamber of Deputies in Rome where a bill on education reform was being debated, blocked trains in Milan, disrupted traffic in cities from Turin in the north to Palermo in the south, occupied the Leaning Tower of Pisa and unfurled a banner from the top, and in Naples, threw rubbish bags at government offices. In Athens, Greece, thousands marched in the streets and several colleges were occupied.

European students' sense of social justice and their political energy are enviable.

Renate Bridenthal  
Chair of the PSC International Committee

## Exchange on anti-Muslim bias

● My colleague Moustafa Bayoumi ("At the center of a sudden storm," in the December *Clarion*) seems comfortable discussing the seven interviews that form the body of his book, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* – but he steadfastly refuses to comment on criticisms of his preface and afterword. In particular, his

claims that pervasive anti-Muslim abuses were sustained beyond the 9/11 aftermath and are comparable to Japanese internment or the Palmer Raids were based on a gross misrepresentation of his sources.

As I detail elsewhere ([tinyurl.com/CherryOnBayoumi](http://tinyurl.com/CherryOnBayoumi)), Bayoumi selectively presented FBI hate crime statistics, misstated the government's registry policy, and ignored survey evidence on the experience and outlook of Muslim Americans. He ignored the dramatic decline in anti-Muslim hate crimes, which in 2008 were one-tenth the number experienced by Jewish Americans and one-ninth those experienced by male homosexuals. Bayoumi ignored the Pew Foundation survey results that 90% of young Muslim Americans characterize themselves as very or somewhat happy, that three-quarters of Muslim Americans stated that they have never experienced discrimination, or that 76% of young Muslim Americans believed that if they worked hard they could succeed.

This evidence from the same sources Bayoumi cited are totally at odds with his inflated victimization narrative. It indicates that beyond the serious violation of human rights Muslim Americans experienced in the 9/11 aftermath, anti-Muslim attitudes have not significantly translated into anti-Muslim actions.

Robert Cherry  
Brooklyn College

Moustafa Bayoumi replies: *Robert Cherry distorts my book and mischaracterizes its intentions. He*

*claims, for example, that I equate Japanese internment with anti-Muslim abuses following the September 11 attacks, when in my book I write, "post-September 11 detentions nowhere approximated the scale and suffering of Japanese internment." (One can compare events without them being "comparable.") Cherry says I grossly misrepresent statistics to advance an "inflated victimization narrative," citing the 2007 Pew poll. But a 2007 Zogby poll for the Arab American Institute found that 76% of young Arab Americans "had personally experienced discrimination" ([tinyurl.com/Zogby2007](http://tinyurl.com/Zogby2007)). Regarding anti-Muslim hate crimes, I reported, correctly, that they haven't receded to pre-9/11 levels and never said they were worse for Muslims than for others. (Cherry contrasts absolute numbers of hate crimes drawn from populations of different sizes, which is just bad statistics; he must also know that local reporting of hate crime statistics to the FBI is voluntary and beset with problems.)*

*Most importantly, my book isn't a compendium of statistics and horrors. Nor is it about victims. It's about the struggles young people have while living through an age when anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment is pervasive and troublingly self-evident. Cherry ignores the many acts of sympathy, kindness, and solidarity found in its pages. By distorting the book's aims, he ends up denying the obvious problems of today and discounting the human struggles of those who face them.*

# RF workers to top execs: don't be a Grinch



Research Foundation workers from three CUNY campuses and their supporters look on as the Grinch joins their December 22 protest outside a meeting of the RF Board of Directors. They were demanding that RF reach a fair first contract with 700 workers at LaGuardia, City Tech and the Graduate Center after years of negotiations.

"That was great," said one union activist of the Grinch's picket-line appearance. "He's living proof anybody can change their hard-hearted ways, even top executives at the Research Foundation."

## NEGOTIATIONS

The union has reached tentative agreement on a number of non-economic provisions with RF management, which has also agreed to the union's health insurance co-premium proposal that would restrict annual increases to no more than 2% per year. However, the two sides remain apart on several economic issues, including wages. — JT



# City budget & CUNY Austerity 'does not make sense'

By PETER HOGNESS

"There really is something wrong with the huge inequality that exists in our society," said Steve London. "With such huge wealth in our city, to talk about austerity just does not make sense." That's what London, the PSC's first vice president, told a City Council hearing on Mayor Bloomberg's midyear budget cuts.

Citywide and on CUNY campuses, the PSC has a consistent message: there is an alternative, and we need the political courage to pursue it.

"CUNY students are being punished for a budget shortfall they did nothing to create," PSC President Barbara Bowen said at a December 8 press conference at City Hall. "It isn't smart and it isn't fair to endanger New York's economic future" by cutting higher education, Bowen said.

About 80 people turned out on short notice to fill the steps of City Hall, with signs that urged, "Invest in CUNY, Invest in New York." The event was organized jointly with City Council Higher Education Committee Chair Ydanis Rodríguez.

Councilmember Jumaane Williams, a graduate of Brooklyn College, agreed that budget alternatives were both necessary and possible. "The biggest expansion of CUNY happened during the Great Depression," Williams said. "If they had the money then, we definitely have the money now."

When the mayor was seeking reelection, he sang a different tune, Rodríguez recalled. At the start of this year, well into the current economic crisis, Bloomberg pledged to make CUNY community colleges "one of my biggest priorities" and talked about budget increases, not cuts. "What happened to the \$50 million you promised, Mayor Bloomberg?" Rodríguez asked.

The strong turnout at the press conference helped convince Council leaders to hold a joint hearing of the Finance and Higher Education Committees on December 13, to assess the effects of midyear reductions Bloomberg has imposed on CUNY and other vital services.

## DEVASTATING CUTS

Bloomberg's \$11.8 million mid-year reduction this year will grow to a \$16.3 million cut in fiscal 2012. That means a 5.4% cut in City funding for CUNY this fiscal year, and an 8% drop in the year to come. Before these latest cuts, CUNY community colleges had already lost \$29 million in State aid over the last two years.

CUNY Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance Marc Shaw was unusually blunt about the educational impact. The reductions "affect all academic and support operations at the campuses, and will be felt by students at every level," Shaw said, and he outlined likely consequences

at each affected campus. His candor reflected the intense budget discussions going on at CUNY campuses, in which union chapters are playing an increasingly assertive role (see sidebar).

Shaw said that at Hostos, for example, "approximately 70 class sections per semester would be lost. Library hours in the evening and the weekend would be eliminated. The Hostos Academic Learning Center would be severely impacted, minimally resulting in the loss of almost four full weeks of tutoring, [as well as] weekend tutoring services."

Rank-and-file PSC members told the hearing what it looks like when you meet those cuts in person. "As an example as to what this budget cut can do, a young father who works full time as a security guard came in to me distraught, tears in his eyes," said Linda Alexander Wallace, director of counseling at Hostos, "because some courses he needs to meet his graduation requirement may not be available to him in the Spring, because we can't provide the faculty to teach them." Wallace said she fears that cuts will leave her college "unable to meet the demand for courses that our students need in order to fulfill their dreams."

## TUITION PROTEST

Last month's decision by CUNY Trustees to seek a tuition increase was the target of a student protest on December 14 outside the Manhattan office of Governor-elect Andrew Cuomo. A lawsuit against the proposed hike was filed three days later. "This is an outright assault on our communities, on getting access to public education," Lehman College Christian Peruyero told NY1 News when the suit was filed.

As the cuts take hold, colleges



City Councilmember Letitia James at the PSC's December 8 press conference.

are deciding how to cope. Too often, PSC chapters say, the choices they make are the wrong ones.

The cuts now being implemented are serious and they will hurt students' prospects, union leaders say. But this level of reductions should not require cuts in instruction. Colleges need an open public discussion

about budget alternatives, PSC activists contend, to ensure that cuts do the least harm to students, faculty and staff.

That requires transparency, and full disclosure of information by college administrations. As union chapters press for answers to budget questions, they are all raising

the same demand: open the books!

To have a truly open discussion of campus finances, a college administration needs to provide an "all-funds" budget. "An 'all-funds' budget means that it isn't limited to tax-levy funds," Bowen told union delegates in December. "Colleges also get money from overhead on grants, money from the Research Foundation, money from a college's own foundation, money from the different auxiliary services like food services or the campus bookstore."

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The point, she said, is that there are several streams of revenue that a college can draw on. Without full disclosure, some of those streams may be protected. "Maybe a fund that pays for the president to organize special meetings is not being tapped, and maybe that money could pay for an additional HEO-line hire to prevent further escalation in workload," Bowen said.

Knowledge is power – and power is something that administrators often don't like to share. Because management is often reluctant to provide an all-funds budget, the PSC has filed a Freedom Of Information Law (FOIL) request, seeking the total budget picture for every college. Individual union chapters are also pressing the issue in labor/management meetings, some with more success than others (see sidebar).

"Faculty and staff have a right to know where their money is," Bowen said. "Transparency won't make the cuts disappear. But we want to make sure that before a college decides to rely on super-jumbo classes and cutbacks in adjunct jobs, that alternatives are considered."

# Chapters question college budgets

At the December 16 meeting of the PSC Delegate Assembly (DA), union activists compared notes on their chapters' experiences in pressing for transparent budget information – and for public discussion on how to respond to campus cuts.

"Resistance helps!" reported Baruch College's Jackie DiSalvo. Baruch's administration appears to have backed off from an effort to push some departments into a shift to "jumbo" classes of more than 100 students each, with no discussion sections. The administration plan ran up against chairs who, as part of departmental control over curriculum, would not assign anyone to teach a class of that design, DiSalvo said.

Cuts will still be felt at Baruch, she said. In her own department,

English, overall class size limits will probably be increased by about three. But that at least is a choice that does less harm to students, adjuncts and full-time faculty.

"One of the things these chairs said is that it's really important to not let management take department chairs out of the union," DiSalvo added, "because if chairs weren't union members, they could not have resisted the way they did."

## WAITING TO HEAR MORE

In a labor/management meeting at John Jay, "we warned them that their plan to cut the adjunct budget would not work – and they finally admitted that, because too many people are leaving for the ERI," said the college's chapter chair, Carl Williams.

So far cuts at John Jay have fallen most heavily on college assistants, Williams told the DA, and in a meeting with management the chapter objected that this has increased Higher Education Officer (HEO) workload to unsustainable levels. "They said that no HEOs have complained," Williams told the DA, to widespread and somewhat bitter laughter. "We are sure that there are some HEOs who will make sure their complaints are heard."

At Queensborough Community College, "the president assured us that there would be no cuts in sections," said QCC Chapter Chair Judith Barbanel. The chapter did get a copy of the college's plan for handling funding reductions

(known as "the PEG," for the NYC budget initiative called "Program to Eliminate the Gap").

"We are waiting for the all-funds budget," Barbanel added. "I spoke to the VP for Finance and she assured me it would be forthcoming."

At BMCC, "in our second labor/management meeting, we asked for an all-funds budget," Chapter Chair Joyce Moorman told delegates. "They told us we don't need to know anything about auxiliary services," she said with a slight smile. "They said they'd just give us the tax-levy budget. We told them we'd like to know about these other funds as well, but we'll take the tax-levy budget to start."

– PH

**Seeking choices that do the least harm**



# Meet the new academic superstars

By JOHN TARLETON

Fifteen minutes before the Brooklyn College Library closed on a Friday afternoon in late October, a bald-headed man in a gorilla suit came to the reference desk looking for help.

Myles Bassell, a faculty member in the college's business program, wanted help in his research on the global move toward creating uniform international financial reporting standards in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Before heading off to an annual on-campus Halloween party that he helped students organize, Bassell made an appointment with reference librarian Jill Cirasella to review his research strategy.

## EXPERTISE

"I asked Jill if I could meet with her to discuss my research objectives because she is an expert in the research tools available at the library," Bassell said. It was time to supplement his literature review with other sources, and Bassell needed to make sure he chose wisely in focusing the next phase of his work.

Academic librarians like Cirasella routinely assist other faculty with scholarly work. Their expert knowledge of specialized databases, public documents, historical archives, online search strategies, and library resources at CUNY and other universities can make them ideal partners for other faculty members' research projects.

Library faculty are also able to play this role because they are scholars themselves. Cirasella has published a number of papers on the history of quantum computing research (which helps her assist computer science faculty) and on the role of Google in research libraries. In her writing on Google, she drew on her own interactions with students to encourage colleagues to embrace the search engine giant in creative ways, and use it to draw students toward using more advanced research tools. She notes that being an active researcher keeps her on the cutting edge of librarianship.

## APPLIED RESEARCH

Maura Smale, an assistant professor in the Library Department at City Tech, is in the middle of a three-year study with Associate Professor Mariana Regalado of Brooklyn College on the scholarly habits of students at six CUNY campuses. Smale said their initial findings have already encouraged reconfiguring study areas at City Tech's library to facilitate more privacy for students. NYC's expensive housing market means that many CUNY students live in crowded conditions, making it hard to concentrate at home. "We've heard from students that they really value having the private space where they can focus on getting their work done," said Smale.

## Faculty librarians ideal guides for info age



Brooklyn college reference librarian Jill Cirasella (right) helps faculty members like Myles Bassell (left) optimize their use of the research tools available to them.

Philosophical inquiry by Robert Farrell, an associate professor in the library department at Lehman College, led to a practical payoff for Lehman students. "My work studying the theory of skill acquisition and expertise put forward by Berkeley phenomenologist Hubert Dreyfus led to developing a new workshop for our Freshman Year Initiative program," Farrell told *Clarion*. The workshop focuses on how to determine the validity of information in areas in which one is not an expert – an increasingly important skill in an era when students are flooded with online information sources, of widely varying quality.

"We are living in a knowledge society," said Farrell, "and the nature of our profession has changed." Through their scholarly work, CUNY librarians both keep up with and help shape the changes in how academic libraries operate today.

CUNY's full-time library faculty, like those in other departments, must meet demanding research and publication standards for promotion and tenure. Their scholarship benefits both CUNY's students and their colleagues in other fields. Yet while most other faculty receive summer annual leave, which they use for both vacation and their research projects, annual leave for library faculty is capped at four to six weeks. This makes it difficult to make progress on their research agendas.

CUNY's 250 library faculty say they are long overdue to receive full parity in annual leave, and the union has made this one of its demands in the upcoming round of contract negotiations.

Library faculty carry out a variety of responsibilities that place

them at the center of the University's intellectual life, and this has only become more true with the information revolution of the past generation. Today they work with other faculty to make development of information literacy skills an integral part of course curriculum, and conduct thousands of instructional sessions per year to help students across the CUNY system make better use of library resources.

Information literacy is the ability to identify the information one needs, locate it, evaluate it and effectively use it. This increasingly vital skill is gradually being embedded throughout John Jay's curriculum, says Ellen Sexton, a librarian who sits on the college's undergraduate curriculum committee. Teaching faculty who propose a new course are asked to describe the information literacy goals for the course and how those fit in with the information literacy goals of the major. The faculty member proposing the course also meets with the library liaison to their department to discuss what library resources can be used in this course of study.

"The idea is to get the faculty member thinking about information literacy and what they can do," Sexton said. "It's fostering awareness."

## INFORMATION LITERACY

Farrell told *Clarion* that students at Lehman are required to take three workshops on information literacy during their first year. Lehman's nine faculty librarians hold 75-85 freshman information literacy sessions during the course of the year, and conduct

more than 300 workshops per year for all programs and departments at the school.

Much of an academic librarian's day is taken up with individual requests for assistance. "For students, working with a faculty librarian at a reference desk is a lot like meeting with teaching faculty in office hours," Cirasella said. "Given how crowded classes are, students really appreciate being able to get that kind of focused one-on-one attention."

## TIME

Whenever possible, library faculty use these one-on-one encounters as opportunities to help students think reflectively about how best to use the resources at their fingertips, building skills that students can use in the future. "We are putting students in a position of maximizing their freedom to take information and use it," said Farrell, "so that they realize their full potential as human beings."

The daily demands of CUNY's libraries make it hard for their faculty to devote consistent time to writing or research without a greater amount of annual leave. "It's impossible to put out a book if you don't have a long block of time or a sabbatical," said Rob Laurich of City College.

Junior library faculty do receive 24 hours of reassigned time, and Cirasella is using this to take one day of reassigned time per week for her research. She recently completed a paper on peer mentoring of librarians and is working on another on the academic benefits of having an art collection housed within a library.

Scott Sheidlower, librarian at

York, spent a year gathering information for a book he is co-authoring on using humor to defuse students' sense of being overwhelmed by large academic libraries. This past summer he used a 25-day block of junior faculty reassigned time to write 25,000 words, about one-fourth of the manuscript.

"Those 25 days made a huge difference for me," Sheidlower said. "It's the sort of thing librarians need much more of."

## PARITY

Currently, up to 50 library faculty per year can receive a limited five-week leave for scholarly and creative work. After applying, they must go through several layers of campus bureaucracy to get their request approved.

"It's not available to everyone, and some libraries are better than others about granting it," one junior library faculty member told *Clarion*. "We shouldn't have to apply for it – it should be available to all." Another problem is the lack of replacements. When taking a research leave means more work for already overworked colleagues, or a huge backlog waiting upon one's return, it's a disincentive to scholarship.

Librarians' faculty status has been a subject of contention in the past. CUNY granted tenured-faculty status and rank to academic librarians in 1965. "There was an expectation that they would eventually get the same annual leave as other faculty," said Bonnie Nelson, a library professor at John Jay who worked in the CCNY library as an undergraduate and then a library school student during the early 1970s.

Nelson said that dream receded in the aftermath of the retrenchment that took place in 1975. In 2006 a new generation of faculty like Cirasella won inclusion in the provision for junior faculty reassigned time after mobilizing to make their voices heard.

## Empowering students and faculty to succeed

This Spring, library faculty turned out in force at the campus contract meetings held across CUNY, where they pushed for parity in annual leave.

"I don't think there's another faculty group as unified as us," Farrell said.

Now library faculty are looking to build that same level of unity with their colleagues – joining the broad fight for the union's contract agenda and seeking support for their own equity demands. They are taking the same collaborative approach to union action that is at the heart of their professional work.

Working together is something that seems to come naturally to faculty in CUNY's libraries. "Whether it's helping students and faculty or helping each other," said Cirasella, "sharing and collaboration are what librarians are all about."



# Comm. of 500 conference call

By JOHN TARLETON

It was a meeting like no other in PSC history. Hundreds of people took part – from hundreds of different locations.

Edwin Diaz, an academic advisor at Hostos, joined in from his home after putting his two small children to bed.

Alan Feigenberg, a professor of architecture at City College, listened to the mass conference call while relaxing barefoot in his living room, listening to jazz.

Edgardo Diaz, an adjunct at John Jay, tuned into the one-hour virtual meeting via his Blackberry while he ran errands on the Upper West Side.

All three are members of the PSC's Committee of 500, rank-and-file activists who have volunteered to take some simple steps to help win a good contract in negotiations that begin this Spring. The November 30 conference call was an opportunity for the Committee of 500 to learn more about the bargaining agenda just approved by the PSC Delegate Assembly, and discuss how the union can succeed in the face of an adverse political climate.

## CALL-IN QUESTIONS

The call began on a Tuesday evening at 7:30, with an introduction from PSC President Barbara Bowen. Then the union bargaining team took call-in questions from members, who lined up in a queue managed by the phone system's operator. "It was like talk radio," said one participant, "but more thoughtful."

Bowen began with a short review of the PSC's four core contract demands: continuing to make CUNY salaries nationally competitive; restructuring full-time faculty workload; making significant gains on pay parity and job stability for adjuncts; and establishing a path for advancement for those in Higher Education Officer titles (HEOs).

The PSC contract agenda contains 35 demands (see [tinyurl.com/PSCdemands](http://tinyurl.com/PSCdemands)), and a number of questions were raised about specific points. For example, Pedro Luna, an Associate HEO at Lehman, asked whether the union would support tuition waivers for the children of HEOs as well as faculty. PSC negotiators answered that both faculty and professional staff are definitely included in the union's demand.

At the end of November, President Obama announced that he was freezing the wages of federal workers for two years (see page 10). Beth Rosenthal, professor of social work at York College and the Graduate Center, asked if New York State could automatically freeze the wages of public employees in the same manner. Bowen noted that the PSC and other unions had defeated Gov. Paterson's attempt to impose furloughs in court. Future pay increases, she said, depended on a strong contract campaign.

In the organizing discussion, John Hyland of the Retirees Chapter

## Fosters contract campaign ideas

asked how a variety of protest tactics including civil disobedience could be used to build a mass movement demanding more resources for CUNY and opposing the broader attacks on the public sector. "People have to be able to say 'No!' to those things that are not good for us," Hyland told *Clarion*. "We need to add this more defiant approach to our toolbox."

Lenny Dick, an adjunct in mathematics at BCC, reported that faculty and students rallied on their campus on October 19 to mark the expiration of the contract, and again in November over looming budget cuts. This kind of local mobilization, said

Dick, can provide building blocks for "a cross-campus movement."

At the end of the call, Bowen asked each participant to strengthen the contract campaign by signing up at least one colleague to join the Committee of 500. PSC members who join the Committee commit to take six simple actions, such as attending a contract bargaining session as an observer or encouraging colleagues to attend a future union protest.

Jackie DiSalvo, an associate professor of English at Baruch, signed up three new members at her department's holiday party the following

## Discussion about issues & organizing



Mary McGlynn (left), an associate professor of English at Baruch, recently joined the Committee of 500 after her colleague Jackie DiSalvo (right) encouraged her to do so.

week. "I just said, 'We've established a Committee of 500 so we can have a broad group of people supporting the contract campaign,'" DiSalvo told *Clarion*. "It's a way of participating that doesn't put too much of a burden on any one person."

One of those whom DiSalvo recruited to the committee was Mary McGlynn, an associate professor in the same department. McGlynn said today's harsh political and economic climate, together with DiSalvo's impending retirement after 26 years, helped convince her to join. "It seems like it's time for the rest of us to start participating," McGlynn told *Clarion*.

## MOVING FORWARD

Those who took part in the conference call often said the union should organize more such calls in the future. "It was a very interesting discussion, one with a lot of substance," said Jerry Markowitz, a distinguished professor of history at John Jay. "There was a diversity of viewpoints that I thought brought a real strength to the discussion, and a variety of voices that kept me engaged. Everyone was wonderfully articulate!"

"After the call, I felt like I could talk about the union's four main demands more clearly," added Suzan Moss, chair of the Health and Wellness Department at BCC. Moss plans to pass out sign-up cards to the 31 members of her department at their first meeting of the new semester. "It's a 'put your money where your mouth is' kind of situation," Moss said. "You can't complain about the contract if you don't get involved."

To find out about joining the Committee of 500, go online to [www.psc-cuny.org/Committee500/signup.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/Committee500/signup.htm).

# Clarion wins labor journalism awards

By CLARION STAFF

This November, *Clarion* took first place in four categories in the International Labor Communicators Association (ILCA) annual labor media awards. Judges gave the PSC's newspaper the top prize for best editorial or column, best analysis, best profile and best photo, among all local union newspapers published in the US and Canada.

Brooklyn College psychology professor Nancy Romer won first place for best editorial or column for an opinion piece in the December 2009 *Clarion*. Her editorial questioned the CUNY Research Foundation's decision to spend \$500,000 of University research money on a union-busting law firm during contract negotiations with Research Foundation employees. "Romer's clear-eyed exposition guides readers through a potentially confusing thicket of details,"

## Honored locally and nationally

the judges wrote. "Using a low-key approach that respects her readers' intelligence, Romer builds a case on facts, not invective yet reaches an inescapably damning conclusion."

Eric Laursen took home the prize for best analysis, for his examination of the relationship between the erosion of private-sector pension plans and the growing attacks on public-sector pensions. "We've never seen this issue explained so clearly," the judges wrote. Laursen's article, in some ways even more timely today than when it was first published, is online at [psc-cuny.org/PensionClarion0909.htm](http://psc-cuny.org/PensionClarion0909.htm).

Freelancer Pat Arnow has worked for a variety of labor publications, and this year her work for *Clarion* won an unusual pair of prizes in two

different categories: best profile and best photograph. Judges praised her profile of former PSC Health & Safety Committee co-chair Dave Kotelchuck as offering "a complete picture of a man with many facets," from Kotelchuck's early civil rights activism to his career shift from physics to workplace safety and health. Arnow's photo prize was for a shot of a striking worker at the Stella D'oro bakery in the Bronx confronting 2009 mayoral candidate Bill Thompson outside the factory gates.

## AFT & METRO LABOR

*Clarion* also received two first-place awards in July in the annual labor media competition among locals of the American Federation of Teachers, the 1.5-million-member national union to which the PSC belongs. *Clarion's* designer, Mar-

## CALENDAR

**MONDAY, JANUARY 10 / 12:30 pm:** Retirees Luncheon. John Jay College, West 59th St. Contact Linda Slifkin at PSC, 212-354-1252 or Jim Perlstein at [jperlstein@bassmeadow.com](mailto:jperlstein@bassmeadow.com). \$24 per person.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 13 / 6:30 pm:** MLK Day: Mass Meeting for Living Wages. Convent Avenue Baptist Church. 420 W. 145th St. [afarkas@rwsu.org](mailto:afarkas@rwsu.org).

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 22 / Noon:** Labor Goes to the Movies. *Red Riding* trilogy explores the cynical abuse of power in a region of northern England. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Fl. \$2 suggested donation.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 23 / 3 pm:** PSC Theater event. Working Theater's production of "Honey Brown Eyes." Set during the Bosnian War in 1992, this play explores the everyday impact of war through the story of two friends and former bandmates who find themselves on opposite sides of the conflict. Working Theater's artistic director Mark Plesent says, "These are people who didn't ask for the war, but now that it is happening find themselves challenged in the most extraordinary ways."

At the Clurman Theater on 42nd St. between 9th and 10th Aves. Tickets for PSC members are only \$20. Reserve your seats today – last year's event was sold-out! Send your checks payable to Steve Leberstein at the PSC, 61 Broadway, 15th Floor, NY, NY 10006. For more information email [sleberstein@psccmail.org](mailto:sleberstein@psccmail.org).

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4 / 4 pm:** Part-Timers Committee Meeting. PSC, 61 Broadway, 15th Fl. Contact Marcia Newfield at [revolu@earthlink.net](mailto:revolu@earthlink.net).

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8 / 6:00 pm:** Women's Committee meeting. PSC, 15th Fl. Contact [revolu@earthlink.net](mailto:revolu@earthlink.net).

garita Aguilar, was cited for best design among the AFT's largest affiliates, while Associate Editor John Tarleton tied for first place for best feature, with his account of Queens College geology professor Stephen Pekar's research in Antarctica on global warming. *Clarion* also placed second for general excellence, behind *California Teacher*.

Earlier in the summer the NYC Metro Labor Communications Council cited *Clarion* for best illustration among the area's largest union locals, for Greg Nemec's illustration on the cover of the Summer 2009 issue. Metro also cited *Clarion's* reporting and feature writing, with Tarleton's second-place award for coverage of the recurrent Blackboard software breakdowns that afflicted CUNY in Spring 2009, and Nicole Lisa's third-place nod for her profile of Brooklyn College's Annie Hauck-Lawson, who explores the social fabric of food in New York City.



# 'IBM school' in CUNY's future?

By ARI PAUL  
& PETER HOGNESS

In late September, Mayor Bloomberg announced "a new partnership we've entered into with IBM and the City University of New York." According to a New York City press release, CUNY and the NYC Department of Education plan to "work jointly to develop a school that runs from grade 9 through the equivalent of grade 14," combining high school and two years of college with a focus on information technology and computer science.

"When they graduate from grade 14 with an associate's degree and a qualified record, they will be guaranteed a job with IBM and a ticket to the middle class," Bloomberg told an NBC studio audience at Rockefeller Center on September 27.

## A SCHOOL – OR NOT?

But in fact, IBM has not promised to guarantee any jobs for CUNY graduates. It has made no specific financial commitment to the project, and there are no clear answers about how IBM would be involved with its curriculum. The proposed "school" may not be a single school at all, but a program spread over a number of high schools and community colleges.

Although the program is slated to begin next September with nearly one hundred 9th grade students, it

## Plan for a "grades 9-14" hybrid

has not yet been discussed in a CUNY trustees' meeting – and there is little definite information about it.

PSC President Barbara Bowen reported to the union's Delegate Assembly that when she called Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, demanding to know why the union had not been informed in advance about creation of a new school, Goldstein said that there was no new school, and that current programs would simply be continued. He also stated that there would be no grades 13 and 14 at CUNY. In testimony at an October 21 City Council hearing, University Provost Alexandra Logue described it as a program that would open a number of "new schools running from grades 9 through 14 (the first two years of college)."

"IBM envisions that the 9-14 school would be in one physical location," IBM spokesperson Doris Gonzalez said in a statement, "but it is possible for the students to attend a New York City Department of Education school in grades 9-12 and then attend a CUNY community college for grades 13 and 14."

"We are excited about the prospect of engaging IBM in opportunities for our students," CUNY

Director of Communication and Marketing Michael Arena told *Clarion*. "It's very early in the process, but certainly if this new model proves successful, we would want to build upon that success."

## Terms of corporate partnership are unclear

The City's press release says that the "school" will be developed "with the generous support of IBM."

How much money might be forthcoming? "IBM has already invested in other education initiatives that will be leveraged for this new school," Gonzalez responded, "such as the work we are doing with Queensborough Community College's STEM Academy, where we have donated \$250,000 in technology and technical services."

"The level of contribution is still in discussion," CUNY spokesperson Rita Rodin told *Clarion*.

Corporate funding of higher education is nothing new, but this particular proposal seems unprecedented in the CUNY system – especially given its expressed purpose of feeding graduates into a specific company. Questions about whether a public university should have this close a relationship with a particular corporation might not be the top concern for CUNY students anxious to

secure employment. But it is unclear how many graduates would actually benefit from this arrangement.

Despite the mayor's talk of "guaranteed" jobs, or graduates being "first in line for a job at IBM," the formal press release on NYC and CUNY websites is more circumspect, referring only to "possible job placement with IBM." And in recent years, IBM has been laying off employees in the US while expanding employment overseas.

## DISAPPEARING JOBS

Earlier this year IBM laid off thousands of employees across the US and Canada. "What locations and communities had job cuts?" asked Alliance@IBM, a local of the Communications Workers of America. "Nobody knows, because IBM no longer gives out that information. Now IBM has decided that it will no longer inform employees, the government, communities, the media or stockholders how many employees work at IBM in the US....Only the global headcount will be reported."

Alliance@IBM gathered information on the layoffs on its own, and by late August had confirmed at least 10,425 lost jobs in North America, mainly in the United States.

A number of IBM employees have been laid off and then rehired as full-time consultants – still earning a

paycheck, but losing all benefits and any semblance of job security.

"Our students deserve every assistance in getting hired for good jobs after college," said Scott Dexter, an associate professor of computer science at Brooklyn College. "But it would be unfair to them for IBM to over-promise and under-deliver."

On the program's curriculum, IBM's Gonzalez said that the first several years of study would use existing Department of Education curriculum, but that this would be augmented by "providing students at each grade level with relevant hands-on, project-based learning experiences integrated into core math and science classes." Beyond that, she added, IBM would continue to discuss educational methods with the DOE and CUNY so as to "ensure that the students are prepared with the critical thinking, problem solving, communications and teamwork skills that are vital for success in IT and other fields."

CUNY spokesperson Rita Rodin said flatly that IBM will not be involved in developing curriculum on the college level. CUNY faculty and department chairs will help determine courses offered to students. Rodin told *Clarion* that "IBM's role will be helping to develop internship opportunities."

In 2002, plans for a new CUNY campus on Governors Island were announced with great fanfare. But funding never materialized, and the plans were quietly shelved. The "IBM school" may amount to more than that – but so far, there is little definite information about this information-technology program.

## LIFE/WORK

# Searching for equality

By JOHN TARLETON

## Gloria J. Browne-Marshall

Associate Professor of Constitutional Law & Criminal Justice, John Jay College  
MA, University of Pennsylvania  
JD, St. Louis University

*Gloria J. Browne-Marshall served as a civil rights attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Southern Poverty Law Center until 2002, when she joined the faculty at John Jay. In her work, Browne-Marshall explores how the law has served as both a tool of oppression and a shield for the vulnerable. She is the author of three books, including Race, Law and American Society (Routledge, 2007), which Derrick Bell, in his foreword, describes as "compelling," and which Cornell West calls "a gem."*

*The book analyzes key court cases since 1607 that created this country's racial caste system, while highlighting the role of African Americans in pushing the courts toward a more expansive and inclusive vision of freedom and equality. Browne-Marshall has also written five plays, which often intertwine, in a more personal way, with issues that emerge from her scholarship.*

## TIME TRAVEL:

When I worked for the NAACP, I spent a lot of time in motel rooms in remote towns in Georgia and Alabama. It gave me the chance to consider how long the search for equal

rights in the law had been going on. My research into old cases eventually took me back as far as the 1600s. Real people put themselves in harm's way and most were very unsuccessful in their attempt to make change under the law. But, I feel we owe it to them to know our history and their part in it. That's essential if we want to have a better understanding of how we got where we are today, and where we might want to go in the future.

## A FIGURE I CAN'T FORGET:

Mary Morgan. She escaped her enslavement and started a new life in Pennsylvania as a free person. Several years later a slave catcher by the name of Edward Prigg abducts her and her free-born children to return them back into slavery. The community rallied to Mary's support and Prigg was convicted of violating a Pennsylvania anti-slavery statute. However, the US Supreme Court subsequently ruled in 1842 that Prigg's actions were constitutionally protected.

## WHAT I'M WORKING ON:

I'm researching black women and the law. Black women like Mary Morgan have contributed so much to the struggle for freedom under law and are nameless, for the most part.

## WHY CUNY:

I can have disparate research interests



Gloria J. Browne-Marshall

and follow through on those interests. In many universities today you have to have this narrow specialization and that's it. Also, the challenge of teaching constitutional law to a student body as diverse as CUNY's is just amazing and I enjoy it so much. We have people who come from countries that don't have a functioning legal system or who come from countries where the legal system is totally different.

## INFLUENCES & INSPIRATIONS:

James Baldwin, a civil rights activist whose novels and plays really spoke to the general public about what was at stake. And Charles Hamilton Houston, the architect of the successful legal struggle to dismantle Jim Crow.

## CROSSROADS:

I write plays to explore moments of conflict when human beings have to choose to go one way or the other, and I examine that struggle from the perspectives of class, race and gender. What are the choices we make, and how do we live with those choices?

## MOST RECENT PLAY:

*My Juilliard* is about the tension between two musicians – and family members. One is a former child prodigy who was prevented from living her dream of becoming a concert pianist. The other is her granddaughter, who has both a gift for music and the opportunity to attend the Juilliard School – but is oblivious to the struggles that created this opportunity. Many women are resentful of younger women coming up through the ranks. We need to discuss generational obstacles in order to better respect each other's struggles.

## POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

I don't believe in a post-race America, I believe in an America that needs to know its history so that it can better understand why it *wants* to believe in a post-race America. Racism is a chronic condition like diabetes or high blood pressure. We shouldn't close our eyes and try to turn away – if it's not monitored and understood and care is not given, then it can destroy the host.

# Tracing the legal history of racism



# Dissent at Medgar Evers

By JOHN TARLETON

A mass meeting of Medgar Evers College faculty on December 8, 2010, endorsed a statement of no-confidence in the president and provost of the college. With close to half of the college's tenured faculty taking part, the measure was approved by a vote of 59 to 6, with one abstention. It sharply criticizes President William Pollard and Provost Howard C. Johnson for taking a "dictatorial and confrontational" approach.

The detailed resolution faults Pollard and Johnson for poor leadership and management skills, hostility toward faculty and staff, cutting funds from essential student services and distancing the college from the surrounding community in central Brooklyn, with which it has maintained a close relationship since its founding in 1970.

"There are multiple issues that always come back to the same thing: A lack of respect for the mission and the legacy of the college, and incompetence in how to follow proper governance process," said Brenda Greene, a professor of English and the executive director of the Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College (MEC).

Greene is one of five members of the steering committee of the Committee of the Whole Faculty, which was launched in November by a group mostly senior faculty. The group's organizers say it was needed because the college's Faculty Senate was no longer functioning effectively; they cite a failure to meet regularly and a flawed election in which fewer than 25 votes were cast.

The College Council, MEC's overall governance body which is chaired by the college president, saw its November and December meetings cancelled, just as the controversy over President Pollard's leadership came to a head.

## CONCERNS DISMISSED

In an open letter to the college on December 10, Pollard dismissed the no-confidence vote as a statement from an unrepresentative minority. The college has 182 full-time faculty, fewer than 75 of whom are full or associate professors, plus a larger number of adjuncts. According to Greene and others, a majority of the 66 faculty members who voted on the no-confidence measure are tenured, and the vast majority are full-timers.

The broad show of dissent, which drew media attention in the *Daily News*, *Our Time Press* and elsewhere, followed months of simmering frustration. While the president and provost often speak of making the college a student-centered institution, critics say its actions have undermined prospects for student success.

The no-confidence resolution notes that under Pollard and Johnson the college's Center for Teaching and Learning and its Writing Center have been eliminated, the number of tutors has been cut, and staff in the library

## Faculty/admin. conflict grows

and student computer lab have been reduced, while the hiring of high-paid administrators has grown.

The catalyst for the December 8 meeting was the sudden non-reappointment of at least 10 faculty and staff. Like many others, Eugene Pursoo, a distinguished lecturer in the Department of Public Administration, was handed his letter of non-reappointment by a campus security guard as he arrived to teach his class. Pursoo sat down at his desk at the front of the class, read the letter, and told his shocked students he had just been informed that next semester would be his last.

## BADLY HANDLED

"I thought the whole process could have been handled with more dignity," said Pursoo, who has been at Medgar since 1996 and helped launch its Department of Public Administration in 2002.

Earlier that morning, Sahidha Odige received a letter of non-reappointment from the same campus security officer while working at the circulation desk at the Medgar Evers Library, where she is a fifth-year CLT. "It was pretty public," Odige told *Clarion*.

Odige had been transferred from her previous position in the college president's office to the library last February. Her non-reappointment came despite a glowing evaluation in September from the library department chair, and a unanimous vote from her department in support of recommending her for tenure.

"This kind of behavior cannot and should not be condoned in any academic institution," said PSC Chapter Chair Clinton Crawford. Such incidents, he said, are part of a growing pattern of arbitrary actions by the college administration.

"We are appalled that faculty at the college are being treated so unprofessionally and with such a lack of collegiality," said PSC Director of Contract Enforcement Debra Bergen. "The college's faculty deserve to be treated with respect for their rights under the contract."

A number of faculty and staff were given letters of non-reappointment after the contractual deadline of December 1. This is a clear violation of the union contract, said Bergen, and if this happens to you it is critical to file a grievance before the contractual time limit runs out, in most cases on January 11. If you have received a notice of non-reappointment, she said, call the union office immediately at 212-354-1252.

The Medgar Evers administration has also been faulted for indifference to the historic mission of the college, and turning its back on MEC's historic links to the central Brooklyn community. One flash point has been the college's academic and co-curricular centers, many of which connect scholarly

research with community service and a focus on social justice, and offer collaborative educational opportunities to students at MEC.

One of the major projects of the Center for Black Literature (CBL) has been the National Black Writers' Conference, a biannual meeting that brings prominent authors and poets to MEC. Past participants include Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, John Edgar Wideman, Maya Angelou, Samuel Delany, Edwidge Danticat and Amiri Baraka. Novelist Walter Mosley has called it "the most significant gathering of black writers in the country."

One of its main funders has been the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and CBL Director Greene has secured a series of NEA grants supporting the conference in previous years. But this past summer Provost Johnson initially refused to sign off on Greene's application for an NEA grant to support the next session of the conference in 2012. According to Greene, Johnson balked at the prospect of having to grant her reassigned time to work on the project, and did not relent until two days before the application deadline, under pressure from an NEA official.

## EVICTED

The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions has been less fortunate. On December 3, it received notice it was being evicted from its campus offices as of December 30.

Staffed by former prisoners with advanced degrees, the Center for NuLeadership had been part of MEC since 2004. Its work on criminal justice policy issues and support services for ex-offenders who enroll

in college have built a strong reputation among advocacy groups working on prisoner re-entry issues. Earlier this year, the new administration at MEC blocked a NuLeadership grant proposal for a program in which first-time non-violent drug offenders would attend college or other educational programs under court supervision, instead of being sent to prison.

NuLeadership staff had secured such arrangements in a number of individual cases, and sought to expand the idea into a broader program. Johnson and Pollard, however, objected that the proposal raised insurance liability and security concerns for MEC and declined to support it – a stance that criminal justice advocates blasted as "evening-news risk assessment." (See *Clarion*, Summer 2010, at [pscunyc.org/communications.htm](http://pscunyc.org/communications.htm).)

NuLeadership board member Eddie Ellis said the center would relocate soon and will continue its work. The broader question, he said in a December 20 statement, is what will MEC's policy be "regarding formerly incarcerated students and other at-risk youth seeking to turn their lives around by acquiring higher education?"

In his December 10 open letter, Pollard defended his record. "Any recent changes in personnel have occurred as part of our routine academic and administrative decision-making [sic] process," he wrote. "My administration's policies and practices reflect a deep commitment to the best interests of our college, and the standards of excellence that allow it to fulfill our college's core mission."

Pollard's and Johnson's critics, however, say that their concerns are supported by the administrators' records at previous institutions. As provost at University of North Texas

(UNT), for example, Johnson denied tenure to more than one-third of candidates in 2004, though all of them had support of their colleagues and deans. The University Tenure Committee at UNT said it was particularly troubled by Johnson's refusal to provide reasons for his determinations. The head of UNT's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, Don Smith, said that in one case Johnson admitted denying tenure based on an assessment of titles of published articles, without reading any of the articles themselves.

## PAST CONFLICT

According to the *Washington Post*, Pollard left his post as president of the University of the District of Columbia after "the university's Board of Trustees forced [him] to resign" in June 2007. That November, his successor told local officials that "gross mismanagement" under Pollard had wasted millions of dollars in public funds.

"The past of the president and the provost is a checkered one," said Crawford. "To allow a situation like this to fester can only cause more dissent in the institution."

While faculty support for the Pollard administration has collapsed at Medgar Evers, the president still has strong backing from 80th Street. On December 9, CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein commended Pollard for his work. In a letter to Pollard, Goldstein wrote: "Your efforts to calibrate and set priorities in a difficult fiscal climate are to be commended...I firmly believe that your leadership, and that of your team, is advancing the very best interests of the student body."

Despite the current turmoil, Greene remains hopeful that the situation at Medgar Evers College can be resolved.

"Chancellors will publicly support their presidents no matter what," she said. "But presidents and provosts have been asked to resign before when the situation became unbearable and untenable for an institution."

# Day-care workers and parents united



CUNY faculty, staff and students are not the only ones speaking out against cuts in city services. On December 8, baby-stroller-pushing parents and employees of the city's day-care system affiliated with District Council 1707 marched from Bowling Green to City Hall to rally against the mayor's plans to close 16 day-care centers and eliminate 3,650 slots.





(From far left) Newly elected State Senator Tony Avella and Assemblymember Francisco Moya joined PSC activists Michael Batson, Alex Vitale, Bob Cermele and Tony Gronowicz (at rear) at a December 16 reception at the PSC office.

# PSC-COPE donations pay off

By **RON HAYDUK**  
BMCC

You will soon receive an important mailing from the PSC – please look for it!

The mailing contains a letter and brochure about the PSC-COPE program, the political-action arm of the PSC. Now more than ever, your support is needed to build the union’s political power to make sure that government, especially at the state and local levels, is responsive to our needs.

*Please take the important step of deciding to contribute.*

Why? Because contributing to PSC-COPE helps build the union’s political power to insure our collective future is a good one.

Here are a few things that PSC-COPE has helped to accomplish during the past year:

- We beat back an inferior pension tier and efforts to privatize CUNY/SUNY funding.
- We helped win job-saving federal stimulus funds and extension

of unemployment benefits.

- We elected lawmakers who understand our message: “CUNY is the path to New York’s future.”
- In June we won restorations of funds for New York City support for CUNY, and won enhanced funding for CUNY community colleges during tough economic times!

That’s PSC-COPE at work: protecting our salaries, our benefits, our jobs, and our vision for a better CUNY, and working to benefit all New Yorkers. PSC-COPE isn’t just

## Bernard Sohmer, 1929-2010

Bernard Sohmer, former chair of CUNY’s University Faculty Senate and professor emeritus of mathematics at City College, died on November 19. A longtime union activist, Sohmer also served as PSC Chapter Chair at CCNY, as a member of the PSC Executive Council and as a trustee of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. He had been a member of the CCNY faculty since 1952.

“Bernie was a principled defender of academic unionism and faculty governance, and an outspoken advocate for public higher education,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “His passing is a loss for both CUNY and the PSC.”

“In every position in which he served, Bernie was a leader, and his influence was always strong,” said Irwin Yellowitz, former PSC

treasurer and a colleague of Sohmer’s on the CCNY faculty for many years. “While he could be outspoken, he also had a wonderful sense of humor and ultimately sought the most reasonable outcome. It was my privilege to know and work with Bernie over the decades, and I am sorry to see him go.”

Family members have asked that Sohmer be remembered through contributions to a scholarship established in his name to benefit undergraduates in mathematics at CCNY. Contributions to the Bernard Sohmer Scholarship should be sent to: Rosemary Weiss, Exec. Director of Development, CCNY, 160 Convent Avenue, Shepard Hall 154, NY, NY 10031. (E-mail [rweiss@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:rweiss@ccny.cuny.edu) for more information.)

– PH

## Commuter changes

As a result of municipal union negotiations, CUNY is changing providers for its transit benefit and the program has been expanded. The change has been implemented for employees at the community colleges and the Hunter Campus Schools (HCS), and senior college employees have received a letter on their enrollment this Spring.

Now administered by WageWorks and known as the Commuter Benefits Program, the idea of the program remains unchanged. Through payroll deduction, participants can pay for commuting expenses with pre-tax dollars. Depending on your tax bracket, you may save as much as 40%. As before, there is a small monthly administrative fee; this varies with the type of benefit you choose.

### EXPANDED BENEFITS

The expanded Commuter Benefits Program can now be used with almost any transit system in the tri-state area. You will be able to use it on MTA subways and buses, the Long Island Railroad, NJ Transit, PATH, and NY Waterway, to name just a few, and you can also use it to pay for parking at or near a public transportation stop that you use to commute to work. Participants receive a stored-value card, which works like a credit card, that can be used to purchase transit passes and tickets at transit providers.

Community college and HCS employees who were enrolled in the old transit benefit were automatically transferred to a comparable benefit under the new program (the “Commuter Card/Unrestricted Plan”) at the beginning of December. Those who want to request a change to one of the other options available under the new, expanded benefit may do so.

A full list of participating transit organizations is online at [getwage-works.com/nyc/transitcard](http://getwage-works.com/nyc/transitcard). Enrollment forms and details on how the plan will operate at CUNY are both available at [www.cuny.edu/transitbenefit](http://www.cuny.edu/transitbenefit).

– CGW

## PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – SPRING 2011

### Chapter Officers, Delegates and Alternates to the PSC Delegate Assembly and PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council

**Term of Office: 3 Years**

#### ELECTION SCHEDULE

1. Nominating petitions will be available upon request from chapter chairpersons or the PSC office from February 1, 2011 to March 1, 2011.
2. Properly completed nominating petitions must be received at the PSC office, 61 Broadway – Ste. 1500, New York, N.Y. 10006, by 5:00 pm, March 1, 2011.
3. Ballots will be mailed to members’ home addresses on April 1, 2011.
4. Ballots in uncontested elections must be received at the PSC office by 5:00 pm on April 28, 2011.
5. **Ballots in contested elections must be received at the office of the designated ballot-counting organization by 5:00 pm on April 28, 2011.**
6. Ballots will be counted at 10:00 am on April 29, 2011.

#### OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED

In each of the Chapters listed below, voters will elect the Chapter Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, four Officers-at-Large, Delegates to the Delegate Assembly (in addition to the Chapter Chairperson, who shall automatically be the initial delegate to the Delegate Assembly) and Alternates to the Delegate Assembly according to the following listing:

Chapter	Members	Delegates	Alternates	Petition Signatures Required
Baruch	683	Chair + 6	5	25
Bronx Community College	484	Chair + 4	4	25
Brooklyn	825	Chair + 7	5	25
City College	776	Chair + 7	5	25
College Lab Technicians	649	Chair + 5	4	25
CUNY Central Office	251	Chair + 2	3	25
Graduate School	306	Chair + 2	3	25
Hostos Community College	306	Chair + 2	3	25
Hunter	958	Chair + 9	6	25
John Jay	899	Chair + 8	5	25
LaGuardia	676	Chair + 6	5	25
Queens	1039	Chair + 9	6	25
York	357	Chair + 3	4	25

Relevant portions of the ELECTION RULES are summarized below. The complete rules may be obtained from Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office, or viewed on the PSC website.

**Eligibility for Holding Office:** Members shall be permitted to hold chapter-level office who have been members in

good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 1, 2011.

**Voting Eligibility:** Members shall be permitted to participate in the nomination process and to vote who have been members in good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least four (4) months prior to the mailing of the ballots on April 1, 2011 (i.e., they must have joined on or before December 1, 2010).

**Nominating Procedures:** Nominations of an individual or of a slate *must* be by official nominating petition signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) members of the chapter in good standing, or by no fewer than twenty-five percent (25%) of the members of the chapter in good standing, whichever is less. For *all* candidates, petitions shall include: (a) the printed name, signature, department and college of each petitioner; and (b) the printed name, signature, department and college of the nominee, as well as the office being sought by the nominee. For chapter elections, members may only sign nominating petitions of the chapter to which they belong. **A candidate’s signature on a slate petition shall constitute that candidate’s acceptance of the slate designation.**

**Slate Regulations:** A slate of candidates will be recognized if it consists of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the officers to be elected, and if it submits, prior to the close of nominations: (a) a listing of caucus officers, including the person designated to authorize nominees for that slate; and (b) the names of the members of the caucus’s Committee on Vacancies, which, unless otherwise designated, shall be the caucus nominating committee authorized to replace any candidate on the slate whose name is withdrawn no later than seven days prior to the mailing of the ballots.

**Balloting:** All voting must be on the official PSC ballot. Write-in votes are permitted. A write-in vote shall be valid if the intent of the voter is clear; written, printed and typed names are acceptable. A write-in candidate must meet the same eligibility requirements as a regular candidate. In chapter elections, any nominated or write-in candidate must receive at least ten votes or ten percent of the votes cast for that office, whichever is less, in order to be elected. Write-in candidates who are elected must submit written acceptance of office to the Elections Committee within ten calendar days of notification that their election has been certified.

**Campaigning:** Duly declared candidates may mail literature at their own expense, either directly or through the PSC mailing house (Century Direct, 30-00 47th Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101). At the request of the candi-

date and at cost, the PSC will provide Century Direct with home-addressed download of the membership, or will provide candidates with college-addressed list or labels of the membership. Candidates must notify the PSC five business days in advance of the mailing to allow sufficient time for the ordering of labels. Please see Barbara Gabriel at the PSC for further information, and to file the required forms.

**Election Tally:** Each candidate, or a representative of the candidate, is entitled to be present at the counting of the ballots.

#### PSC-CUNY WELFARE FUND ADVISORY COUNCIL

At each of the colleges listed below, voters will elect the designated number of members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, in accordance with the above schedule and rules and the by-laws of the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund:

Colleges	Council Members
Baruch	2
Bronx Community College	2
Brooklyn	2
City College	2
CUNY Central Office	2
Graduate School	2
Hostos Community College	2
Hunter	2
John Jay	2
LaGuardia	2
Queens	2
York	2

**Voting Eligibility:** All members in good standing of the PSC at the above colleges, who have been members in good standing for at least four (4) months, including Higher Education Officers, Registrars and College Laboratory Technicians, as well as faculty, will elect the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council members running at their respective colleges.

**Eligibility for Holding Office:** PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council members must be CUNY instructional staff members who have been members in good standing of the PSC for **two (2) years** prior to the close of nominations, March 1, 2011.

**Nominations:** Advisory Council members shall be nominated by written petition signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) or twenty-five percent (25%) whichever is less, of the CUNY instructional staff members at each unit who are also PSC members. Slate nominations will be permitted.



## HISPANIC COLLEGE ACCESS

# Making CUNY an 'engine of equality'

By STEVE LONDON

PSC First Vice President

*This article is adapted from a November 7 presentation at "Somos El Futuro," the annual New York Hispanic legislative conference.*

In this political moment – with economic crises, large budget deficits, political instability and calls for austerity measures – how can we shape policies to increase Hispanic access to college and success in completing a college degree?

One thing is clear: austerity policies are moving us in the wrong direction. Instead, we need public investment that will allow CUNY and SUNY to be "engines of equality."

Social policies must respond to the stark reality of extreme income inequality in the US and in New York State, and the disparate impact of the Great Recession on communities of color and working-class New Yorkers as a whole.

New York State and City have experienced a decades-long trend toward greater income inequality. Not only are the rich getting richer, but the poor – especially during the Great Recession – are getting poorer faster. While Wall Street firms saw their profits skyrocket in 2009 to over \$60 billion, the child poverty rate in Mott Haven and Hunts Point in the Bronx was 56%. New York City's overall poverty rate was 22%, while NYC's Hispanic poverty rate was nearly 29%.

## EXTREME INEQUALITY

In a December 2010 study, the Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) found that in 2009 New York State had the greatest degree of inequality among the 50 states and New York City had the greatest degree of inequality among the 25 largest US cities. Nationwide, in 2007 the share of total income in the US that went to the highest-earning 1% hit a historic high of 23.5% – last reached in 1928. But 2007 data for New York shows that here, the problem was even worse: in New York State, the richest 1% of households received 35% of total income, while in NYC, the top 1% got an incredible 44% of all earnings in the city.

Adopting policies to reverse these trends is the chief challenge we face in this political moment. The extreme income inequality of our society leads to broken lives, wasted resources, and social and political instability. Government can be an instrument promoting greater equality or it can become an instrument to intensify inequality.

Economic challenges don't have to lead to greater inequality. In the Great Depression, for example, New Deal policies favored greater equality, and this helped put our economy on a firm foundation.

Austerity budgets at this time move us in exactly the wrong direction. To provide greater access and assure greater success in college for the Hispanic population, public investment is required. The case is even clearer when we consider the large demographic wave of Hispanic students making their way through the K-12 school system or already in college.

- Hispanic students now comprise 28% of all CUNY undergraduate degree enrollments; 24% at the senior colleges and 36% at the community colleges.

- Hispanic students comprise 44% of all CUNY freshmen – a huge increase over the last five years.

A failure to help New York's growing

population of Hispanic students succeed in college would mean a huge cultural and economic loss for all of New York State. Conversely, investing in the education of our growing Hispanic population can be an important part of the solution to our current economic problems.

Unfortunately, New York has pursued a long-term policy of disinvestment in public higher education. In real dollars, State funding per full-time-equivalent (FTE) student has fallen for both SUNY and CUNY since 1990. Governor Spitzer's Commission on Higher Education and the FPI have amply documented this long-term disinvestment and its destructive consequences.

New York is also one of the worst states when it comes to making an "effort" to publicly fund higher education. In 2008 and 2009 (even with stimulus money counted in) there were only 10 states that gave higher education less support than New York, per \$1,000 of personal income. In other words, New York has devoted a smaller share of its wealth to higher education than 39 other states.

This long-term disinvestment particularly hurts those Hispanic and other students at CUNY:

- who are low-income – 38% of all CUNY undergraduates and 45% of all community college students come from households earning less than \$20,000 per year.

- who are graduates of NYC public high schools (69%) and need remediation (50% of NYC HS graduates who entered CUNY in 2009).

- who are the first generation in their family to attend college – 43%.

- who speak a native language other than English – 45%.

- who have substantial family or work responsibilities.

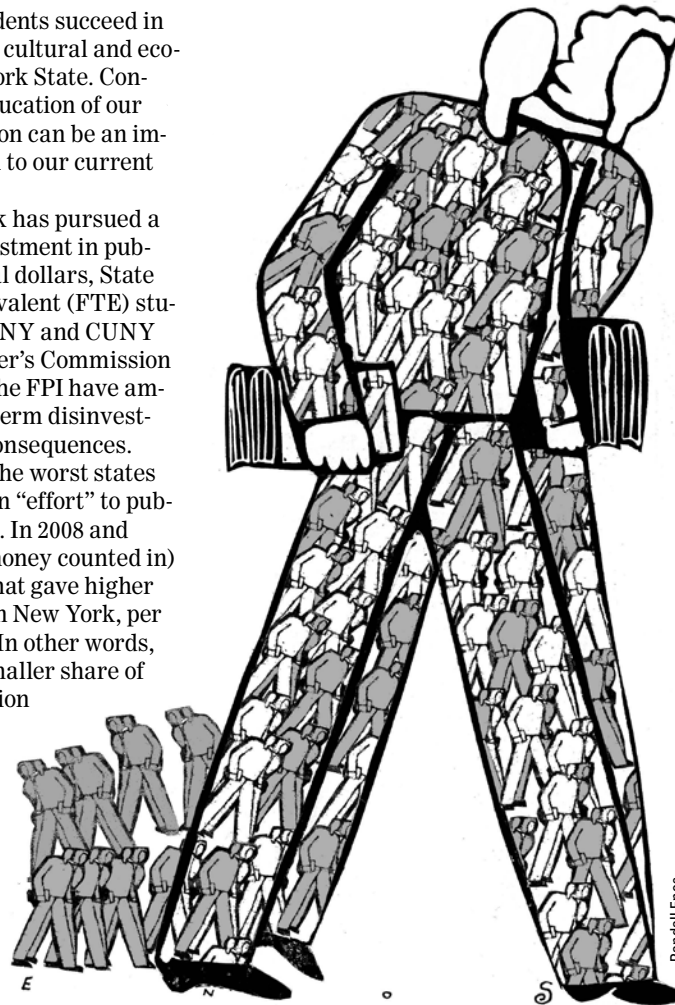
Hispanic students, in particular, are likely to meet additional hurdles while attending CUNY. They are more likely to enter CUNY at the community college level where there are fewer full-time faculty for each student. (The full-time faculty to student ratio is 1:47.) They are also more likely to need developmental courses, including instruction in English as a Second Language, to make up for deficits in their high school preparation before beginning credit-bearing college courses.

## HISPANIC STUDENTS

Given these obstacles, it is not surprising that Hispanic students take longer than white students to graduate with either an associate or baccalaureate degree. After six years, the graduation rate of all CUNY community college students with an associate's degree is 24.3%. But white students do better. After six years, 32.2% of white students earn an AA degree, compared to only 22.9% for Hispanic students. This racial inequity diminishes over a longer period, but even at eight years, the graduation rate of Hispanic students is only 30%. (The situation facing African American students is similar.)

So, what must be done to improve opportunities for Hispanic students and others?

First and foremost, more resources are desperately needed to give Hispanic students



the support they deserve. Amid record-high admissions to CUNY, unfortunately, we have experienced cuts to the senior and community college budgets, followed by additional midyear cuts, with results that are seen in the poor physical plant, higher class size and weakened student support.

## TAPPED OUT

These additional resources need to come from greater investment of public funds. The gap between current funding levels and what CUNY and SUNY need to create the conditions for Hispanic access and success is so large that relying on tuition increases for additional resources is simply unrealistic; our students are too poor to provide the system with that much money.

New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and Federal PELL Grants assist many students, but they do not adequately cover all, especially those enrolled part-time or who are financially independent without dependents. Thus, TAP does not protect many of our students from the impact of higher tuition. In addition, much financial aid involves the student assuming debt, and research has shown that many poorer students are reluctant to take out educational loans.

The PSC commends the legislative leadership for rejecting the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Initiative Act (PHEEIA), because such privatization proposals move us in the wrong direction. As a proposal, PHEEIA was accompanied by cuts in public funding. At its core, PHEEIA would force public higher education funding to rely more and more on tuition increases and unaccountable public authority-like frameworks. (See *Clarion*, December 2010.) To provide accessible, quality public higher education, there is no substitute for public investment.

New York can raise additional public funds by adopting progressive revenue measures and closing corporate tax loopholes. (See page 11.) Two decades of tax cuts favoring the wealthy are an important part of the story of increasing income inequality in New York State. If we truly believe that all students deserve equal access to a quality public college education, we need to reverse these tax policies that favor the well-to-do.

## WHAT WE NEED

What must CUNY and SUNY do with greater resources?

- Most immediately, we need to hire more full-time faculty so they will have the time to meet with and mentor students – and we need more full-time faculty who are themselves Hispanic. In 1975, CUNY had 11,500 full-time faculty and 250,000 students. Now, with more students who need more educational and support services, we have only 7,000 full-time faculty. The deficit is made up of thousands of adjunct faculty who are very dedicated and excellent teachers, but are underpaid, treated as contingent labor, and not hired to perform many of the duties and student support activities of full-time faculty. For all these reasons, current research demonstrates greater student success when taught by full-time faculty.

- TAP must be reformed to make it more equitable. New York needs TAP support for part-time students, and increased support for financially independent students without dependents. If tuition continues to rise, the cap on TAP grants also needs to increase.

- Additional financial aid counselors are needed to support students applying for financial aid – including simply filling out federal FAFSA forms. Too many immigrant and Hispanic students don't receive Pell and TAP grants even though they are eligible. More academic counselors and better coordination with high school advising are also needed.

- Expansion of "College Now" and similar programs can play an important role. Many studies on Hispanic college success have underscored the importance of making sure students have rigorous college-track courses in high school so that they gain the skills they need and know what to expect when they enter college. This can be true for all students, but is especially true for Hispanic students who are the first generation of their family to go to college.

- Resource-rich academic, career and mental health counseling services are needed – especially for incoming freshmen. For example, the new ASAP program has succeeded in raising retention and graduation rates among a representative sample of community college students. But each program has two to four college advisors carrying an average caseload of 60 students, a career and employment specialist to help students find paid internships while going to school, and three clerical staff. Outside ASAP, the ratio of mental health counselors to CUNY students alone is less than one to 2,000.

Continued cutbacks for CUNY and SUNY would mean a future of increasing inequality for New York State, with growing exclusion from the chance to earn a college education. If we believe in inclusion, if we believe that Hispanic community leaders are right to say, "Somos el futuro!" then more public investment in higher education is a necessity.

Supporting CUNY as an engine of equality will benefit the Hispanic community – and everyone in New York.

## Higher ed remains a wise investment



## CUNY FUNDING

# Is a tuition increase the answer?

When PSC President Barbara Bowen testified before the Board of Trustees on CUNY's proposed budget request for the next fiscal year, she strongly supported CUNY's proposal for funding 250 new full-time faculty lines, but opposed the request for a tuition increase. Here are answers to some common questions about tuition, and the union's position.

**Q. How much is the tuition increase passed by the Board of Trustees?**

**A.** three separate tuition increase requests. If all three increases are enacted, tuition will be 10% higher next fall than the current semester.

The trustees have raised tuition by 5% for the Spring semester, to an annual rate of \$4,830 for a full-time student at the senior colleges (a \$230 annual increase) and \$3,360 at the community colleges (or \$150 per year). Grad students pay more, with annual costs rising by as much as \$1,000. Tuition will go up another 2% in Fall 2011, to about \$4,925 annually at senior colleges and about \$3,425 at community colleges. The Board also authorized Chancellor Goldstein to impose an additional 3% increase if he determined that was necessary.

**Q. Supporters of a tuition hike have said that no student in need will be hurt by the increase – is that true?**

**A.** It is a myth that NY's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) protects all

needy students. TAP offers very inadequate support to the 34% of CUNY students who attend part time – many of whom are in dire financial need – and none, as of last year, to graduate students. TAP's arcane rules can also be especially harmful to CUNY students. CUNY has 20,000 independent students without dependents who are eligible for TAP but can receive only very small grants and have extremely low incomes. The tuition increase will hit them the hardest. TAP would have to be substantially reformed in order to cover the real needs of CUNY students – and the PSC is working on that.

**Q. I understand why the union has opposed tuition increases in the past, but isn't the need especially urgent this year?**

**A.** There is a real need this year because of the cut to CUNY's operating funds – a cut already being felt on the campuses. While total funds from the State this year actually increased, in part because of mandatory costs such as salary increases negotiated by the union, the decrease in operating aid has real effects.

But tuition increases will not solve the problem. New York State has systematically deprived CUNY of funds for decades, despite a few years of increases since 2000

achieved through intense advocacy. A tuition increase of any size that has been contemplated by the trustees will not make up for decades of planned poverty. In fact, the record shows that increased tuition is an invitation to the State to cut CUNY funds even further. New York State uses tuition increases to fill the hole created by withdrawal of public funds – but often doesn't fill that hole completely. The result, when adjusted for inflation and number of students, is a net loss, not a gain, for CUNY.

**Q. If tuition isn't the solution to campus cuts this year, how should colleges handle the current budget shortfall?**

**A.** A cut of the size CUNY has received this year should not require cuts to instruction. Several colleges built up reserves in the past few years, and are not imposing cuts at all. Even without reserve funds, however, colleges can make choices about handling the budget reduction in ways that do not hurt students, faculty or staff. Some colleges initially proposed reducing the number of sections, and then found alternatives when local union leaders pressed for a different approach. Other colleges called for "super-jumbo" sections, but agreed to a solution that made more sense pedagogically when challenged by department chairs and

activists. On some campuses, faculty and staff have questioned why cars for multiple administrators, expensive landscaping of grounds and other administrative costs are not considered for cuts before any cuts to instruction.

**Q. But in hard times, doesn't everyone have to make sacrifices? Shouldn't students pay a little more?**

**A.** CUNY students have *already* made sacrifices to pay for college. Tuition increased by 15% in 2009 and many struggle financially to be able to stay in school. One student testified that she missed two rent payments to pay tuition, but that she won't be able to continue that much longer. A 5% increase to students on the edge is not trivial.

But it's the logic of "shared sacrifice" that is bankrupt. CUNY students – like CUNY faculty and staff – should not be made to pay for a financial crisis we did not create. A tuition increase is a tax – a regressive one, imposed on some of the poorest people in the State.

The call for "shared sacrifice" is an attempt to shift the blame for the economic slowdown onto the public sector, as James Parrott writes on page 11. It was the same call that produced the proposal for furloughs last year. By rejecting austerity for our students and ourselves, we are demanding an alternative to the poverty version of CUNY.

## The problem: State disinvestment

## DEFICIT THEATER

# Federal pay freeze: Obama vs. labor

By MIKE ELK

The Obama Administration, looking to bolster its deficit-cutting credentials and show its desire to take on what some label a "special interest" – organized labor – yesterday announced a two-year freeze on the wages of all federal workers. Tim Fernholz of *The American Prospect* points out that the pay freeze will reduce the deficit by just 0.1% over the next 10 years. Obama's pay freeze reinforces the notion that public employees earn exorbitant salaries, despite a Bureau of Labor Statistics report showing that civil servants earn 24% less than their counterparts in the private sector.

"This proposal to freeze federal pay is a superficial, panicked reaction to the deficit commission report," stated AFGE National President John Gage, a union that represents over 600,000 federal government employees. "This pay freeze amounts to nothing more than political public relations. This is no time for scapegoating. The American people didn't vote to stick it to a VA nursing assistant making \$28,000 a year or a border patrol agent earning \$34,000 per year."

### RACE TO THE BOTTOM

"No one is served by our government participating in a 'race to the bottom' in wages," said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. "The president talked about the need for shared sacrifice, but there's nothing shared about Wall Street and CEOs making record profits and bonuses while working people bear the brunt."



AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka speaks at a 2009 rally on Wall Street.

The pay freeze is in line with the president's earlier attacks on teachers unions and lack of leadership on the Employee Free Choice Act. Obama and his advisors calculate that attacking "greedy federal workers" will allow Obama to claim he is willing to take on "special interests" – though he proved unwilling to take on the rich over the Bush tax cuts. In the short run, it may work: recent polling analysis by the Center for American Progress shows that as high unemployment continues, public support for unions has declined.

But Obama's effort to score cheap political points by scapegoating workers may have

a ripple effect that could impede economic recovery and imperil Democrats in 2012.

### 'SHARED SACRIFICE'

"Is this Obama's PATCO?" says Campaign for America's Future Co-Director Robert Borosage, referring to President Ronald Reagan's mass-firing of Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization members in 1981. "Will employers across the country use his language and his message to inflict another round of pay cuts?" Obama's attempt to define pay cuts for workers as "shared sacrifice" can be adopted by private employers without changing a word. But

a cut in wages by corporations across the board could decrease demand, swinging us even further into a depression.

Regardless of the economic impact of Obama's pay freeze, the political impact is clear: Republicans smell blood in the water and will attempt to push the White House to make even more attacks on workers. Trumpeting the pay freeze as a significant deficit-cutting measure – when in fact it is not – reinforces the Republican message that unionized public workers are both unnecessary and overpaid.

Meanwhile, workers will continue to wonder who is on their side. Indeed, the vote of union members appears to be at turning point. Last November, for the first time in a generation, less than 50% of union members voted Democratic. Obama's attacks on federal workers will push them even further into the arms of right-wing, corporate-funded, populist demagogues.

"There will be no rejoicing in the homes of workers tonight," said UE Political Action Director Chris Townsend after the pay freeze was announced. "But the corporate CEOs who frequently dine at the White House will enjoy this immensely as they realize what an opportunity this president has presented them."

Mike Elk is a third-generation union organizer and labor journalist based in Washington, DC. Another version of this article was originally published online November 30 in *Working In These Times*, the labor blog of the newspaper *In These Times*.

## Move may have ripple effect like PATCO



## FISCAL REALITY

# Practical options for New York's budget

By JAMES PARROTT

Fiscal Policy Institute

With the slow recovery from the Great Recession of 2008-2009, New York State's budget situation remains precarious. Most states are in a similar position, since their revenues have dropped more than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s. State tax collections, adjusted for inflation, are still 12% below pre-recession levels while the need for state-funded services has grown. At least 46 states struggled in 2010 to close budget shortfalls. There is no let-up in sight. Federal fiscal relief to the states has greatly diminished and most of it is scheduled to end in mid-2011.

New York State's revenues are projected to grow by 5% in the coming budget year, but the winding down of federal fiscal relief will cost New York more than \$5 billion, mainly in the areas of Medicaid and K-12 education. The pace of the national recovery is slower than it should be, partly because the continuing pressure on state budgets is forcing states to cut spending and/or increase taxes. Fiscal relief to the states is still urgently needed – yet in August the Democratic-controlled Congress could only muster a modest six-month extension (through the first half of 2011) of increased Medicaid assistance.

## RESENTMENT

There is tremendous public resentment over the economy. The recession was clearly the result of Wall Street's excesses, yet conservatives have succeeded in deflecting the focus of public animosity to government. Republicans rode the tsunami wave of economic anxiety and insecurity to victory at the polls, even though they lack any realistic strategy to boost the recovery and reduce unemployment. Now they claim a mandate to reduce government, at all levels, at all cost. Cutting government will exacerbate unemployment and retard the recovery – but for Republican leaders that doesn't matter, because they believe a still-weak economy in 2012 will lead voters to deny President Obama a second term.

Conservatives have also succeeded in channeling popular resentment against public-sector workers, claiming that their benefits are too high and their compensation now exceeds that of comparable private-sector workers. However, when pay and benefit comparisons are done accurately – by adjusting for the higher education and higher average age of public-sector workers – New York's government workers are compensated pretty much in line with their private-sector counterparts.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

Attacks on public pension funds never mention the tremendous stock market losses pension funds suffered during the financial crash, which were certainly not caused by public employees. Not surprisingly, these attacks often come from political forces who supported corporate raids on private-sector pensions over the last generation, and who are now seeking cuts in Social Security benefits. It's an agenda that is harmful to the retirement security of all Americans.

New York needs a balanced approach to balancing its budget. Slashing essential public services or scapegoating public-sector

workers isn't the answer. Other major interests, particularly Wall Street, big business, and New York's ever-richer elite must participate in the solution.

Following the September 2008 financial meltdown, Wall Street firms bounced back sooner than anyone anticipated. Wall Street profits and bonuses in 2010 likely won't match 2009's record levels, but they will still be far better than in any other part of the economy. In this weak economy, Wall Street handily makes money because of the Federal Reserve's low interest rate policy – a policy intended to foster economic recovery. Without a recovery, these are just windfall profits.

## SOLUTIONS

In an April 2010 report (available at [www.fiscalspolicy.org](http://www.fiscalspolicy.org)), the Fiscal Policy Institute and the Center for Working Families advanced several proposals for how Wall Street could help the state's finances recover from the financial-sector-induced Great Recession. Options include a temporary windfall profits tax, a bonus recapture tax, updating the taxation of financial firms (especially hedge funds), and a reduction in the stock transfer tax rebate.

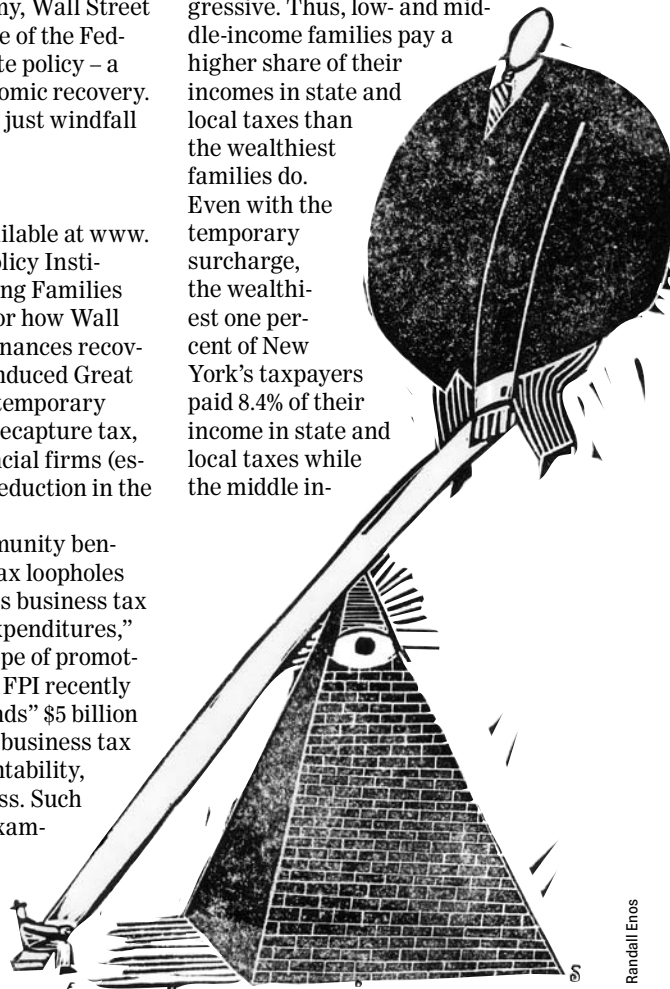
New York's corporate community benefits from several corporate tax loopholes and from excessively generous business tax breaks, also known as "tax expenditures," that were enacted with the hope of promoting economic and job growth. FPI recently estimated that the state "spends" \$5 billion annually on a wide variety of business tax expenditures that lack accountability, transparency and effectiveness. Such programs should be closely examined for possible savings.

The job of closing New York's yawning budget gaps over the last two years has been aided considerably by a temporary increase in personal income taxes on high-income earners. However, the temporary income tax increase is due to expire at the end of 2011. The surcharge – which raised the state's top tax rate for married couples from 6.85% to 7.85% for income above \$300,000, and to 8.97% above \$500,000 – generates \$4-5 billion a year. It should be extended at least until state tax revenues recover from the recession.

Most of this surcharge is paid by the richest one percent of taxpayers, who have annual incomes over \$650,000. A recent FPI report documented that the top one percent increased their share of total income in New York from 10% in 1980 to 35% in 2007, a level of inequality far above the national average. Not surprisingly, New York has the most polarized income of all states. New York City is the most

polarized among the largest 25 cities. (For more details, see [www.fiscalspolicy.org](http://www.fiscalspolicy.org).)

The real issue with New York's tax burden is its regressivity, not that its magnitude is constraining New York's economic recovery. The state personal income tax is mildly progressive. Yet the highly regressive effects of the sales tax and local property taxes mean that New York's overall combined state and local tax burden is regressive. Thus, low- and middle-income families pay a higher share of their incomes in state and local taxes than the wealthiest families do. Even with the temporary surcharge, the wealthiest one percent of New York's taxpayers paid 8.4% of their income in state and local taxes while the middle in-



Randall Enos

come quintile or one-fifth of taxpayers paid 11.6% in state and local taxes and the poorest one-fifth paid 9.6%.

To address this regressivity, and to deal with the growing concerns about burdensome local property taxes, New York State needs to rethink its tax structure and revamp the fiscal relations between the state and local governments. Several steps are needed.

## REAL TAX RELIEF

New York should significantly enhance the property tax circuit-breaker administered through the personal income tax to provide meaningful property tax relief to those households, including renters, truly

burdened by high property taxation relative to their incomes.

The state should aid communities with low property wealth and proportionately high Medicaid usage by increasing the state share of Medicaid costs in a way that takes a locality's "ability to pay" into account.

## REVENUE SHARING

The state should also establish a reasonable schedule for phasing in the additional funding needed by high-need/low-wealth school districts under the 2007 settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit; and it should restore the state's commitment to revenue-sharing with municipalities with significant service needs relative to their resources. These Medicaid, school aid and revenue sharing steps will lessen pressure on the property tax in those communities that have limited property tax bases relative to their service responsibilities.

The STAR program, which currently provides property tax relief to homeowners but which does so in a very ineffective manner, should be reduced to help fund the expanded circuit-breaker and provide Medicaid relief to poorer communities.

New York State should make its personal income tax structure more progressive through higher rates at the top. Before the enactment of the 2009-2011 temporary income tax surcharge, New York families with \$50,000 in taxable income paid the same marginal tax rate as families with \$500,000 in income – or even \$50 million.

Wall Street should contribute to addressing the state's financial problems that were exacerbated by the finance-induced recession – for example through a windfall profits or bonus recapture tax, or by taxing the hedge fund profits of non-residents.

## LOOPHOLES

Finally, the state should seek to close corporate tax loopholes and excessive growth in the cost of business tax breaks.

A balanced approach to balancing the state budget includes identifying additional revenues and not relying on cutting critical services at a time when need has been elevated by the lingering recession. Government spending is inextricably tied to prospects for economic recovery. Steep cuts will worsen unemployment. Public spending in areas such as K-12 education, public higher education, healthcare and infrastructure is needed to help get the economy moving again.

Public investments in our collective physical and human capital will enhance both the recovery and our long-term productivity. New York needs a smart approach to our fiscal problems – and that means thinking beyond a list of budget cuts.

*This is a corrected version of the article in the print edition.*

## Time to consider these practical options.

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## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

# Research awards: time is now

PSC-CUNY Research Awards have been a vital source of funding for four decades, especially for junior faculty. Now, the size of these awards are expanding and so too the opportunity they offer. However, you won't be considered for the grant if you don't get your application in on time!

This year's deadline is January 28, 2011. In future years, the deadline will be January 15. For more information about PSC-CUNY Research Awards, see article below. If you know a junior faculty member who is unaware of the application deadline, please inform them. Senior faculty are also eligible to apply.

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NEWS

Clarion | January 2011

# New shape of PSC-CUNY Awards

By CLARION STAFF

CUNY and the PSC have finalized agreement on new guidelines for the PSC-CUNY Research Awards, which will govern a three-year pilot program beginning this year.

The application deadline for this cycle of awards is January 28, 2011. In future years, the deadline will be January 15, but it was extended this year due to the time it took to work out all the details of the pilot program. All applications, as in the past, must be submitted electronically; for most awards, the project description will be limited to three pages.

## GUIDELINES

Full text of the guidelines are on the CUNY Research Foundation website (see [tinyurl.com/PSC-CUNYawards-guidelines](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-CUNYawards-guidelines)). Details on the online application process are available at [tinyurl.com/PSC-CUNYawards-apply](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-CUNYawards-apply).

Under the new guidelines, applications must now be submitted for one of three categories of awards:

- "Traditional A" Awards, of up to \$3,500.
- "Traditional B" Awards, of more than \$3,500 and up to \$6,000.
- Enhanced Awards, of more than \$6,000 and up to \$12,000.

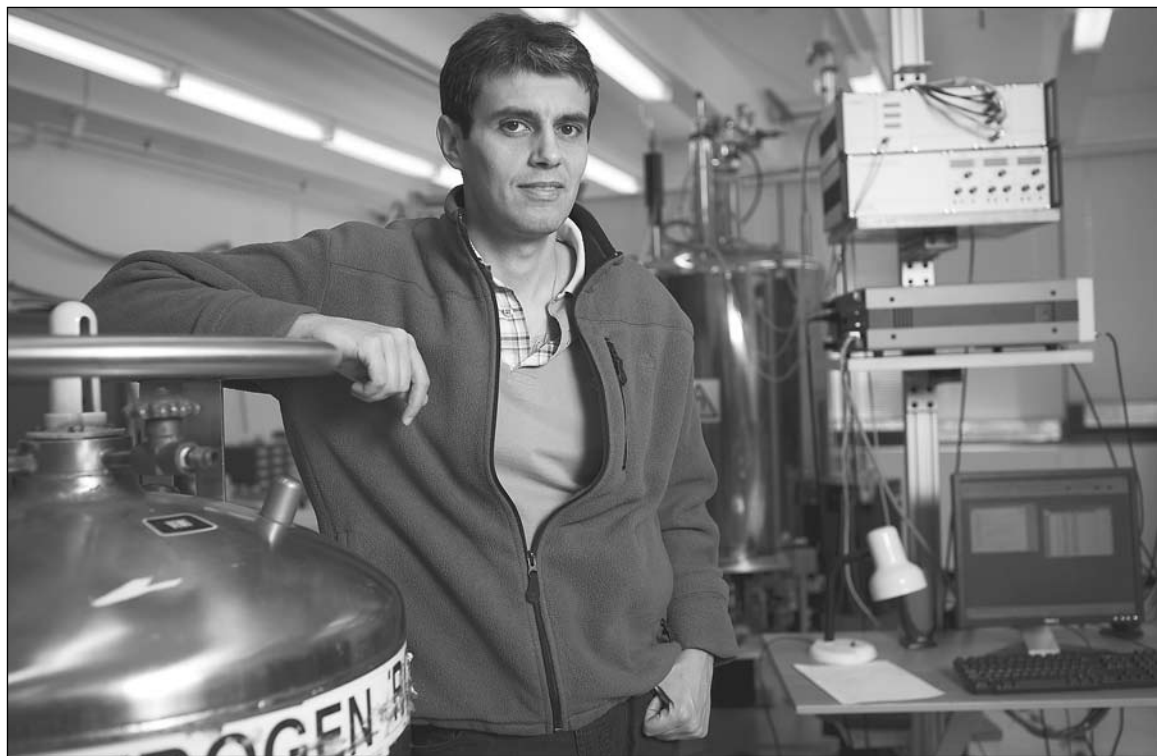
Last year the average award was about \$3,400. This year the largest number of grants will be Traditional A Awards, with about 75-80% of the money available for the two Traditional Awards allocated to the Traditional A category.

## ENHANCED AWARDS

The most competitive category is expected to be the Enhanced Awards, of up to \$12,000; this category requires a more extensive project description and budget justification, and no more than 40 Enhanced Awards will be made each year.

"I want to thank members for being patient while the new guidelines were being established; Many of you have been eager to see the new guidelines so you can get started on applications," said PSC President

## Deadline this year is January 28



Faculty members like Carlos Meriles (above), an associate professor of physics at CCNY, will be able to apply for larger PSC-CUNY Research Awards starting in 2011.

Barbara Bowen. "By extending the deadline to the end of January, we hoped to create enough time for you to prepare. Although CUNY and the PSC had reached general agreement on the pilot program with CUNY in August, the range of options in the program meant that it took us longer than expected to develop new joint guidelines."

In a change from the past, selection panels will not reduce requested budgets; if an award in any category is granted, it will be funded in full. The appropriateness of the budget request is, therefore, a major factor in evaluating the proposal; it should be clear that a proposed budget is accurate and realistic.

As in the past, applications for released time must be for \$3,990, and thus should be made as part of a proposal for the Traditional B or Enhanced Awards. Summer sal-

ary, however, will now be available at amounts up to \$3,500, and can be applied for in the Traditional A category. In addition, the total income limit for summer salary applicants has been raised to \$88,418 for the 2010-11 academic year.

During the three-year pilot program, tenured faculty may not receive more than two awards, and only one of these may be an Enhanced Award.

Funding for the Enhanced Awards is "new money," a combination of administrative savings and an additional CUNY contribution to the program. (For more on the discussions that led to the new guidelines, see *Clarion* coverage at [psc-cuny.org/communications.htm](http://psc-cuny.org/communications.htm), on page 5 of the September 2010 issue.)

As established in Article 26 of the union contract, funds for PSC-

CUNY Awards are available to all full-time members of the instructional staff represented by the PSC, and to untenured faculty in particular. Part-time faculty and professional staff should note that the PSC has negotiated additional professional development funds for which they can apply. Information and applications for the HEO/CLT Professional Development Fund and the Adjunct Professional Development Fund are on the PSC website ([psc-cuny.org/HeoClitProfDev.htm](http://psc-cuny.org/HeoClitProfDev.htm) and [psc-cuny.org/AdjunctContinuingEdDev.htm](http://psc-cuny.org/AdjunctContinuingEdDev.htm), respectively).

## CHOICES

The biggest question for many faculty applying for the restructured PSC-CUNY Research Awards will probably be under which category to apply. In a meeting about the new program, one junior faculty member said, "I don't like to

gamble, and this feels like a gamble to me." It should be borne in mind, however, that while the average award in the past was less than \$3,500, many applicants asked for almost twice that amount, expecting that their budget request would be reduced. Because selection panels will no longer reduce requested budgets, this part of the application process will be more clear-cut.

## STRATEGY

One guideline in choosing the category for your application might be: if you believe you can do your project well for \$3,500 or less, apply for that amount – and note that the largest allocation of funds will be in the Traditional A category. If you feel your project is truly not possible with less than, say, \$5,000 in support, then apply for a Traditional B Award. And if you feel that your project cannot be done unless you receive more than \$6,000 in funding, apply for one of up to 40 Enhanced Awards, bearing in mind that there are fewer of these grants and that they involve more extensive review.

"Our goal in revamping the program on a pilot basis was to open it up to as many members as possible – particularly to junior faculty – and to recognize that different kinds of projects can require substantially different amounts of funding," said PSC President Bowen. "I know from my own experience that \$3,500 can jump-start a research project, but that amount is not meaningful for certain other projects – for example, those that require more expensive equipment or more staff."

"I launched a lot of my own research through PSC-CUNY Awards, spending several memorable summers doing archival work in the British Library," Bowen added. "I was armed with an early Zenith laptop that weighed about 20 pounds, purchased through a PSC-CUNY grant, and assisted by a CUNY undergraduate who went on to earn a doctorate in English. I am a huge advocate of these awards, and I want them to work for our members."

Dave Sanders