


<p>PSC/CUNY</p> <p>Professional Staff Congress 61 Broadway, NYC 10006 212-354-1252</p>  <p>AFT LOCAL #2334</p> <p>MISSION STATEMENT DIRECTIONS</p>	<p>LETTER FROM BARBARA BOWEN. PSC PRESIDENT, ON DOCTORAL EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE</p>
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July 11, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

I write to update you on the significant progress that has been made on achieving health insurance for doctoral student employees of CUNY. We are not all the way there yet, but two major hurdles—securing the funding and gaining agreement for inclusion in the State Student Employee Health Plan—have been cleared. As you know, the demand for doctoral employee health insurance on the basis of parity with SUNY was one of the PSC’s priorities in this round of bargaining, and we have continued to pursue it even after we reached a proposed contract settlement with CUNY in June.

Earlier this year, after a series of demonstrations and actions by the PSC and the Doctoral Students Council, Chancellor Goldstein, with the strong support of the Graduate Center administration, made the commitment to provide the necessary funding for doctoral employee health insurance; the funding is in addition to the economic package negotiated between CUNY and the PSC. Once finalized, the health insurance plan will apply equally to all eligible CUNY doctoral employees, regardless of academic program. The University will honor its commitments on health insurance to incoming science fellows this fall, but has agreed to include all eligible doctoral employees on the same terms in the NYSHIP program once enrollment at CUNY begins. The PSC will be a party to any final agreement, and we hope to be able to memorialize an agreement in a side letter to the proposed contract.

The plan currently available at SUNY is the Student Employee Health Plan (SEHP) of New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP). Details of the plan are spelled out in the collective bargaining agreement between the State of New York and the Communications Workers of America, Local 1104/Graduate Student Employees Union, and summarized in the plan description: <http://www.gseu.org/pdf/bensum07.pdf>. The Student Employee Health Plan provides hospital, medical, prescription drugs, dental and vision services through NYSHIP. It includes both individual and family coverage. Under the current contract, premiums for individual coverage are subsidized at 90% and premiums for family coverage at 75%. The plan, while not perfect, is very strong and a real improvement in the conditions of employment of CUNY doctoral employees. The agreement under discussion is that CUNY doctoral employees would join the existing plan on the same terms as SUNY doctoral employees. We are not negotiating a new plan design.

Obviously the most urgent question is timing. If we continue to make progress and reach final agreement on participation in the NYSHIP plan, when can eligible doctoral employees expect to receive coverage? The PSC, the Graduate Center and the University are working as hard as we can to have coverage begin at the earliest possible date, but we do not yet have a start-date. I can only imagine how frustrating this is for people who have to make plans about the most basic thing, their health, especially those who have organized to move the discussion this far. I am sorry we are not yet able to announce a completed agreement. The PSC will continue to provide information as it becomes available and will call on you, if necessary, to organize in support.

Expanding health insurance coverage does not happen without a collective effort, especially when the national trend is to try to strip workers of the health coverage they have. The PSC is proud of our partnership with the Adjunct Project of the Doctoral Students' Council, whose efforts have been essential in bringing urgency to the issue, and appreciative of the high level of commitment to resolving the issue by the administrations of CUNY and the Graduate Center. Since 2002, the union has been active in demanding health insurance for CUNY doctoral employees on the same basis as for SUNY, and we intensified our work on the demand this year by making it a bargaining priority. While the PSC has advocated for health insurance for all, however, we can negotiate only for employees we represent.

Several important issues remain to be resolved, but I would like to thank every graduate student who has emailed me about health insurance and every member of the faculty and staff who joined in solidarity. I apologize for being unable to respond to your messages individually. I would, however, like to single out two members of the PSC negotiating team, Marcia Newfield and Diane Menna, whose advocacy for the interests of part-time faculty and doctoral employees contributed powerfully to our progress. We will provide further updates as discussions progress.

In solidarity,
Barbara Bowen
President