



THE PSC RESISTS CUNY'S BRUTAL CUTS

The CUNY administration is imposing harsh cuts on nine campuses. The colleges are dealing with understaffing, cancelled classes and increased workloads. It's a devastating moment for faculty, staff and students. But the PSC is fighting back.

PAGES 6-7

RETIREES Union defends health care

The PSC is organizing to defend a judge's ruling against the city's attempt to move retiree health care into a privately managed system.

PAGE 2

CONTRACT Bargaining talks with CUNY

Contract talks with CUNY have resumed after a hiatus. The union continues to press its case for a fair and just contract for faculty and staff.

PAGE 3

BUDGET It's budget season again

The PSC is working with its political allies to ensure that this year's city and state budget agreements include fair funding for CUNY.

PAGE 4



ACADEMIC FREEDOM Silenced by Baruch College

Once again, the PSC Academic Freedom Committee has stood up to defend academic freedom at the University. This time at Baruch College.

PAGE 5

Non-academic unions reach pact

By ARI PAUL

CUNY has tentatively agreed to a contract settlement with several unions representing workers in non-pedagogical titles. The question on the minds of faculty and professional staff is: What does this mean for the PSC's bargaining position?

The Chief reported that the administration has settled joint contract talks with District Council 37, Teamsters Local 237 and Service Employees International Union Local 300, "representing college assistants, IT staff, bookkeepers and other CUNY employees." The paper reported that the deal "includes 14.9% in compounded wage increases over the span of the 67-month agreement." The deal is retroactive to June 2021 for DC 37 members, March 2021 for Local 300 members and September 2021 for Teamsters, and comes with a ratification bonus of \$3,000.

"With this contract, they will be able to withstand inflation and the

What does it mean for PSC negotiations?

rising cost of living," Local 300 President Jim Golden said in a statement.

DC 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido said in a statement that the deal "fairly compensates our members and responds to the new world of work."

The good news is that the deal raises minimum pay for those covered in this contract from \$15 per hour to \$18. And the retroactive language sets a precedent that there is in fact money available for some kind of retroactive agreement in the next PSC-CUNY deal.

COST OF LIVING

But PSC members have dealt with record inflation and a rising cost of living. It has been an especially dark economic time for adjuncts, who do not enjoy job security, and professional staff at the lower end of the pay scale. The PSC seeks to go above and beyond the pattern set here.



Henry Garrido

"I am happy to see that DC 37 at CUNY – along with some of the other, smaller CUNY unions – have gotten a new contract," said Sharon Utakis, the PSC vice president for community colleges and a member of the union's bargaining team. "They certainly de-

serve increases, though I would say that the increases that they got were smaller than I would have hoped, and far less than what we hope to get for our PSC contract. The members of DC 37 are getting ratification bonuses of \$3,000, but since ratification bonuses are a one-time thing, they are far less valuable than higher across-the-board increases."

FIGHT HARDER

Utakis, a professor of English at Bronx Community College, added, "In the PSC, we will need to fight harder to get better across-the-board increases along with many of the other demands that we have put forward."

She added, "[We] will need to show that power in a variety of ways in order to win what we want."

The deals are awaiting ratification by the unions' memberships

and must be approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees.

In August, the members of the United University Professions ratified a contract with SUNY that included, according to a union statement, "across-the-board raises, with a 2% raise for 2022 and 3% raises for 2023, 2024 and 2025." The City's agreement with the United Federation of Teachers also looms

large. Last year, the mayor's office announced that it had reached a deal with the UFT, based on the pattern set in a previous agreement with DC 37, that "includes wage increases of 3% for each of the first three years of the contract, 3.25% in the fourth year, and 3.50% in the fifth year."

The UFT deal "also includes a \$3,000 lump sum ratification bonus for all UFT members and a first-of-its-kind annual retention payment to be paid in May of each year, beginning with \$400 in 2024, \$700 in 2025 and \$1,000 in 2026 and every year thereafter."

PSC fights to protect retiree health care

By ARI PAUL

A judge in Manhattan ruled last year that a City Hall plan to move municipal retirees into a privately-run Medicare Advantage health plan violated the city code and could not go forward. It was a huge victory for union retirees. And the PSC is fighting to ensure the ruling stands.

In August, Manhattan Judge Lyle Frank ruled that the city is "permanently enjoined from requiring any city retirees, and their dependents, from being removed from their current health insurance plan(s)," *Gothamist* reported, adding, "The City is also barred from forcing retirees or their dependents to enroll in an Aetna Medicare Advantage Plan – the proposed cost-cutting replacement – or requiring those parties to find their own health plan, per the ruling."

IN THE COURTS

The judgement came after years of member-led organizing and legal action in response to well-founded fears that the move would negatively impact retiree health-care coverage and open the door to further privatization of public service health benefits. While the Municipal Labor Committee – a coalition of city unions, which includes the PSC, that negotiates with the city on municipal health coverage – approved of the City Hall plan, the PSC was among a handful of unions that opposed it, in part over a lack of transparency about how the shift was taking place.

The administration of Mayor Eric Adams is appealing the decision. In January, the PSC filed an amicus brief (friend of the court) brief with the appeals court to support Judge

Union counters mayor, files appeals brief



PSC members rally to defend retiree health care.

Frank's decision and urging the court to uphold that decision.

PSC President James Davis said in a statement: "The PSC is committed to holding the city to its promise to provide workers with not-for-profit, Medicare-based health-care coverage in retirement. We believe Justice Frank's ruling should stand and that the solution to increasing municipal

health-care costs must not be for the city to break faith with retirees or pass costs on to in-service workers."

The amicus brief states that the city code is clear, and that the mayor's plan would violate that provision by shifting health-care costs onto retirees.

"I'm delighted that the PSC has defended retirees' publicly funded

Medicare and City Senior Care," said Nancy Romer, a retiree officer on the union's executive council. "Our brave union leads the way in protecting members against all aggressors."

Adams, whose poll numbers have plummeted as federal investigators probe his campaign finances and as he enacts

draconian cuts throughout city government, has been defiant toward the judge's ruling. He told reporters in November, "We're dealing with a fiscal cliff on our health care. We're dealing with a fiscal cliff that's questioned us an unbelievable amount," adding, "And so we sat down with the unions, we sat down with the reps and said, 'How do we figure this out?' And we're still in the process of trying to figure it out. So I notice it's an issue that we're all feeling, but the cost of health care has skyrocketed through the roof, through the roof."

IN-SERVICE WORKERS

As reported in December's *Clarion*, the City is now in the process of considering bids from prospective providers of a new comprehensive benefits plan for in-service members, currently provided by GHI/Empire, with the intention of saving \$1 billion a year on health-care costs. Although such a move could increase the size of the network of providers available to PSC members, the PSC is concerned that the winning bidder may try to achieve these savings through mechanisms such as increased pre-authorization requirements and hospital tiering, which would charge members more to be treated at higher-priced hospitals. The PSC is actively preparing to educate and agitate with our members and allies to oppose attempts to achieve savings by dramatically increasing costs or diluting the benefits our members receive.

Clarion MARCH 2024

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York. Vol. 54, No. 1. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 25 Broadway, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10004. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Website: www.psc-cuny.org. Email: apaul@pscmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

PSC OFFICERS: James Davis, President; Andrea Vásquez, First Vice President; Penny Lewis, Secretary; Felicia Wharton, Treasurer; Luke Elliott-Negri, Jennifer Gaboury, Justyna Jagielnicka, Sharon Persinger, Youngmin Seo, University-Wide Officers; David Hatchett, Vice President Senior Colleges; Michael Batson, Susan Kang, George Emilio Sanchez, Senior College Officers; Sharon Utakis, Vice President Community Colleges; Geoffrey Kurtz, Howard Meltzer, Emily Schnee, Community College Officers; Larry Bosket, Vice President Cross Campus Units; Amy Jeu, Lucy McIntyre, Janet Winter, Cross Campus Officers; Marva Lilly, Nancy Romer, Retiree Officers; Lynne Turner, Vice President Part-Time Personnel; Ángel Martínez, Claudia Shacter-Dechabert, Pamela Sternberg, Part-Time Officers; Peter I. Hoberman, Vice President Emeritus, Cross Campus Units.

STAFF: Dean Hubbard, Executive Director; Anais Surkin, Associate Executive Director; Denise Poché-Jetter, Director, Human Resources and Operations; Dan Hunt, Director, Financial Services; Faye Moore, Director, Contract Administration; Rico Doan, Director, Organizing; Francis Clark, Director, Communications; Bettina Damiani, Director, Policy and Research; Denyse Procope-Gregoire, Coordinator, Membership Records.

Editor: Ari Paul / Contributing Editor: Shomial Ahmad / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Copy Editors: Teri Duerr, Matthew Schlecht
© 2024 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY



PSC President James Davis addresses members who are observing contract negotiations.

Observe a bargaining session

Hundreds of members from around the university have attended bargaining sessions at both the PSC office and at CUNY headquarters. Having members in the room during bargaining has helped build power at the bargaining table and has energized the membership during this contract campaign.

The union encourages as many members who can to come to these sessions to do so. The union's next bargaining orientation is March 4. Sign up here: tinyurl.com/PSC-bargaining-orientation.

Check the PSC website for further opportunities to attend bargaining sessions.

The union is approaching the one-year anniversary of its last contract's expiration on February 28, 2023. The PSC will be holding demonstrations and mounting a campaign to pressure CUNY into putting forward a viable economic offer and negotiating a strong contract as quickly as possible. In early February, members gathered at a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing at John Jay College to demand that management engage in serious bargaining with the PSC and reach an agreement soon.

The PSC is encouraging members to attend and observe bargaining sessions, especially on February 29, the one-year contract expiration anniversary. For one thing, management sees the union's power with the members present. It is also an organizing opportunity for members. Juhasz described it as an educational and inspiring experience.

MEMBER OBSERVATIONS

"Observing this tense, often dramatic, very formal, and exceedingly combative – albeit mostly polite – interaction provides insight into how very hard it is for the union, and everyday workers, to achieve reasonable conditions from our bosses," Juhasz said. "[The principal officers] were all prepared, articulate, impassioned and strong. They were polite when necessary and pushed back when that seemed appropriate. Watching the contentious back-and-forth, I have a better sense of why this takes so long, and I also feel confident that our team is qualified and doing all they can, given strong and equally prepared forces that are oppositional."

Members like Deborah Gambs, an associate professor of sociology at Borough of Manhattan Community College, emerged from contract talks with energy for the campaign for a fair deal.

"My sense is that more than ever we need a strong unified presence of the entire membership to fight the manufactured austerity coming from CUNY and the city especially," she said.

Contract talks resume after hiatus

By ARI PAUL

Collective bargaining with CUNY resumed in late January after management effectively put the brakes on contract bargaining with the PSC in the fall semester. Administration representatives and the PSC bargaining team met for the 10th and 11th time since talks began last year.

"We have a lot still to go," PSC President James Davis said to the more than 60 members gathered to observe the January bargaining session. He told the members that he hoped the resumption of contract talks would "regain the momentum" the union had in the fall.

NEW LEADERSHIP

Contract talks also entered a new phase, as the administration has introduced a new lead negotiator, Gary Dellaverson, who for years was the chief labor negotiator and an executive for the MTA. The union has brought on Debbie Bell, the former PSC executive director, as a negotiations consultant.

Having played a key role in bargaining several PSC-CUNY contracts and served as a negotiator for DC 37, Bell knows a thing or two about tough collective bargaining.

The union offered a series of new contract demands, including "kill fees" for instructors who have their classes cancelled before the beginning of the semester, a reduction in the time it takes for higher education officers to achieve job security (from eight years to five), exemption of sabbatical decisions from budgetary considerations, greater

Union presents new key demands to CUNY

CLIP and CUNY Start job security and other advances for instructors in these programs, improvements to the CLT promotions process, professional advancement opportunities for lecturers, additional support for department chairs, and labor management committees for the parties to make progress regarding retirement issues and professional respect in the workplace, along with a proposed change to the non-discrimination provision in the contract.

Management proposed that contractual provisions that stipulate sufficient office space for faculty be struck, and that retirees no longer be allowed to have CUNY email addresses after one year.

For many PSC observers of the January session, management's position appears hostile to the faculty and staff.

REACTIONS

Kevin Adams, director of community standards at Medgar Evers College, said that "CUNY management did not appear ready to bargain in good faith," and while "there were a number of comments in the session about management's desire to quickly reach a good agreement... these comments run counter to the arc of the past 11 months."

Alexandra Juhasz, a distinguished professor of film at Brooklyn College, hailed the union's bargaining team and the principal officers' bargaining strategy and ability to push back against manage-

ment. "The nature of the interaction is more contentious and hostile than I could have imagined," she said.

Boyda Johnstone, an associate professor of English, said that the PSC leadership forcefully made the case in contract talks that the next collective bargaining agreement must address inequities at the University. She noted that the union's treasurer, Felicia Wharton, "revealed a disturbing imbalance in teaching and workload requirements for EOC (Educational Opportunity Center)

lecturers, who teach 33 hours annually across vastly different subjects and age demographics."

FAIRNESS

At the January bargaining session, regarding the PSC's demand "calling on CUNY to provide a salary advance to adjuncts who have not been paid for their work in a timely manner," Peter Kolozi, PSC chapter chair at Bronx Community College, explained, "It's a matter of basic fairness. A person should be paid in a timely manner for the work they do."



Kevin Adams is one of many members observing bargaining sessions.

Ari Paul

Scott Heins

City, state budget campaigns ramp up

By ARI PAUL

To get an idea of what kind of budgets Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams are proposing, a good place to start is the editorial page of the *New York Post*, a semi-official organ of New York's boss class.

In response to the governor's budget proposal in January, the *Post* said her plan "isn't terrible," as it includes no new taxes on the wealthy and "calls for slowing the growth in school aid," but the editorial board worried that Hochul, a centrist Democrat, "fears being rebuffed by prog[ressive] lawmakers." At the same time, *Post* columnist Nicole Gelinas fretted that "Hochul will attempt to sustain the unsustainable."

STATE BUDGET

In other words, the monied classes of the state worry this year's budget agreement, due this April, will be too progressive. Good – let the residents of the Upper East Side quake. Indeed, for public higher education advocates, Hochul's budget proposal appears to have an adequate starting point for negotiations, with "\$1.5 billion in new capital projects" and "\$270 million in new operating support for SUNY and CUNY campuses." The *Albany Times Union* summarized the executive budget proposal thusly: "Relatively unchanged funding for higher education after a 17% increase from the prior two years. It includes \$106 million for increased funding for university employee benefits and \$90 million for general operating support at State University of New York and City University of New York."

The PSC said in a statement: "We applaud [Hochul's] new investments in fringe benefits and CUNY operations and funding collective bargaining agreements for our public universities. These are critical investments, though far more state funding is needed."

At the same time, the governor's office announced that CUNY is "receiving \$75 million from the Simons Foundation, the University's largest-ever donation," which "earmarks \$50 million to establish CUNY as a hub for computational science and \$25 million to support CUNY's participation in the governor's proposed Empire AI project."

FUNDING REALITIES

It's not all rosy, however. CUNY's own budget request to the state and city was less ambitious than the one from the previous year. According to a PSC analysis, the enrollment and retention request dropped from \$20 million to \$6.7 million, facilities maintenance decreased from \$30 million to \$10 million. The funding request for academic and career advisement fell from \$34.1 million to \$18.5 million, the analysis showed.

Now let's look at Mayor Adams, who has already imposed draconian cuts to all city agencies, hurting CUNY's community colleges acutely.

Demanding full funding for public higher ed



NYC Comptroller Brad Lander and State Senator Jessica Ramos (l to r) rally with PSC members at the Borough of Manhattan Community College to support more CUNY funding.

The *Post* editorial board called the mayor's budget proposal "surprisingly sunny" and "certainly an improvement over the feckless spend-it-all attitude of the de Blasio years."

That, by contrast, is a bad sign. "Mayor Adams has turned his back on his alma mater and has given New Yorkers no reason to expect better from him in his preliminary budget," the PSC said. "Why can't this

Advocating for budgets that fund CUNY's needs

mayor recognize that an investment in CUNY is an investment in the future workforce of New York? The fact is, in the last year, enrollment has begun to rebound from the pandemic at almost all CUNY colleges, and the question is what awaits those students who want to pursue their degrees. CUNY is at risk of a twin crisis in student retention and faculty and staff attrition without

significant new investments in city and state operating aid."

Mayor Adams even had the nerve to deliver his State of the City address at a CUNY campus, Hostos Community College – as activists heckled him, including some who reportedly told him to "fund CUNY."

The PSC statement continued, "Thanks to the mayor's budget cuts, years of public disinvestment and CUNY's overdependence on tuition revenue, CUNY imposed plans



Susan Kang: fight City Hall's austerity

on every college to close 'structural deficits' totaling \$128 million in fiscal year 2024. A freeze on new full-time hires coupled with reductions in budgets for adjunct hiring and other temporary services has led to an understaffing crisis. Now, midway through the academic year, the CUNY administration has demanded even more cuts at nine campuses, including two community colleges, six senior colleges and one professional school. This harms students and staff as hundreds of spring semester classes have been cancelled, enrollment caps on remaining classes have been raised and adjunct faculty and full-time faculty serving on term-limited contracts have lost their positions, their expected income and in some cases their health insurance."

POLITICAL SUPPORT

The PSC's allies in elected offices are already speaking out in defense of CUNY and funding for other vital services. NYC Comptroller Brad Lander said in a statement: "I was pleased to see that the mayor increased funding to address some of the fiscal cliffs that my office has previously identified, and that City Hall is not proposing to tap into long-term reserves. Other long-term budget issues, like the growing cost of uniformed overtime and claims against the City, remain unaddressed. While I was grateful to see key programs like Summer Rising and sanitation services restored, critical services, such as CUNY, still face painful cuts, and agency vacancies and attrition continue to jeopardize key city capacities."

The Adams administration has been devastating for education, both for CUNY and New York City public schools. The United Federation of Teachers is suing the administration over its deep cuts to the city's schools. *The New York Times* reported that the mayor "would reverse a small portion of previously announced cuts to New York City's education budget that would



Governor Kathy Hochul (right) must negotiate with Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (left).

Susan Watts/Office of Governor Kathy Hochul

Paul Frangipane

Alex Chan

Continued on page 11

Another academic freedom fight at CUNY

By ARI PAUL

The PSC is protesting yet another case of the CUNY administration violating academic freedom, this time at Baruch College.

In a letter to the Baruch College administration in January, Anthony Alessandrini, the chair of the PSC Academic Freedom Committee, wrote, “We note with great concern reports that the Baruch College administration acted to cancel a faculty-organized event, which is a clear violation of academic freedom and free expression. A faculty teach-in, titled, ‘The Gaza Crisis’ and organized by members of the Baruch College History Department, was scheduled to be held on December 4, 2023. The event, which had been approved by the administration in advance and advertised via Eventbrite, was to have featured three Baruch faculty speakers.”

UNILATERAL DECISION

Yet, a day before the teach-in was to take place, the administration cancelled the event. “It is our understanding that the organizers had

Baruch administration cancels teach-in

expressed some concerns regarding the claiming of tickets via the Eventbrite page: Although tickets were supposed to be reserved only by those who registered with Baruch email addresses, a number of tickets were bought in blocks of 10 by people without Baruch email addresses,” Alessandrini wrote.

“While this might have caused a potential security concern, it is our understanding that Provost Essig subsequently informed the chair of the History Department of several additional reasons for the cancellation of the event: that the title suggested it was an advocacy rather than an educational event; that the framing created an alleged security concern; and that the title of the event – ‘The Gaza Crisis: Teach In’ – was apparently deemed to echo the language of advocacy organizations inside and outside of campus.”

Alessandrini, who is a professor of English at Kingsborough Commu-

nity College, said that none of these concerns merited the cancellation.

“While the reserving of tickets by those who might not have been Baruch ID holders might have been a concern, this fact on its own hardly justifies the complete cancellation of the event,” he wrote.

Event on the Gaza crisis cancelled

“This unilateral decision by the administration prevented members of the Baruch community – students, staff and faculty alike – from having an opportunity to discuss the sorts of important issues that are the essence of a public university’s work. Finally, the arbitrary cancellation of a faculty-organized event by management contributes to the chilling of academic freedom and free expression on campus more generally. Like other recent events by CUNY management at other campuses – including the cancellation of a film screening at Hunter College last month – this act by Baruch management strikes us as extremely

disturbing because it is contrary to the principles of academic freedom at our university.”

In a response on January 12, Baruch President David Wu said that the “exercise of [academic] freedom is not without bounds” and that it must be “thoughtfully balanced with considerations of time, manner and place.”

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE

“The safety and well-being of our students and faculty are of paramount importance,” Wu wrote. “When an event raises potential security concerns, the institution must act responsibly. The administration’s decision to cancel the event was based on multiple unforeseen safety concerns because of time and place.”

The union has been fighting several academic freedom battles around the University since the Hamas attacks in Israel on October 7 and the subsequent Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

PSC workload survey

By ARI PAUL

The union is sending out a workload survey for college laboratory technicians and higher education officers. The CLT and HEO chapters are asking their members to fill out the survey in order to address the numerous issues facing PSC’s members in professional staff titles.

Jeanette Batiz, the CLT chapter chair, said that “the way the contract is written doesn’t really protect the CLTs when it comes to workload, the language is really open.”

One problem that CLTs have, Batiz said, is that when CLTs leave the job, the college administration doesn’t replace them. “A CLT retires or leaves, then you end up doing their job and your job, you can’t expect us to do two and three jobs,” she said.

Batiz encouraged CLTs to fill out the workload survey in hopes that the findings will help the PSC at the bargaining table against the CUNY administration. “[The PSC] can bargain to put language in there to protect us.”

PERSONAL STORIES

Rulisa Galloway-Perry, the PSC co-chair for HEOs, said, “On some of our campuses, HEOs are feeling overwhelmed and stressed out as they are now doing the jobs of their colleagues who retired or left for jobs outside of CUNY. It is very important for all HEOs to fill out the workload survey that PSC will be sending out soon. We need to hear your personal stories of HEOs doing the jobs of vacant positions of staff they supervise or of their supervisor due to hiring freezes on some of our campuses.”

She added, “I implore all HEOs to participate in upcoming bargaining campaign actions, press conferences, and legislative work with our elected officials. The more HEOs elected officials see in front of them in their legislative offices or in front of the Board of Trustees business office with disruptive signs will force them to fight with us for a fair contract.”



Jeanette Batiz, CLT chapter chair

Building the union’s electoral power

By ARI PAUL

This year, progressive state assembly members and senators will fight to keep their seats and maintain a Democratic majority in both state legislative houses. The following year looks to be just as busy, with progressive city council members up for re-election and a possible Democratic primary challenge to Mayor Eric Adams.

How does the PSC flex its electoral muscle in such times? Through PSC/CUNY COPE, the union’s political action committee fund. Contributions to this fund are separate from regular union dues, which cannot be used for political purposes. They increase the efficacy of the union’s electoral work. It is vital that as many PSC members contribute to COPE as possible.

OUTREACH MATTERS

And members are joining in increasing numbers. According to Liz Stevenson, one of the union’s COPE coordinators, the number of PSC members contributing to the fund doubled between 2019 and 2023. Stevenson, an academic advisor at City Tech and a member of the union’s legislative committee, attributes this growth to outreach, as she has been going to PSC chapter meetings and informing members about COPE.

Signing up members for COPE



Liz Stevenson, a PSC COPE coordinator, says COPE membership has doubled since 2019.

“There are a lot of PSC members who don’t know COPE exists, what it is or how to contribute,” she said. “There are lots of members who have joined the PSC in the last de-

cade and don’t know that COPE is there.”

With more members contributing to COPE, the union has more resources to defend its allies at the

state and city level. These are electeds who have supported the PSC and fought against cuts to CUNY and have advocated for the New Deal for CUNY, state-level legislation that would increase full-time faculty and staff at CUNY and make the university tuition-free again. At the city level, the PSC’s allies in the City Council have proven to be vital in fighting back the worst of the Adams administration’s cuts to CUNY and other services.

POLITICAL POWER

“Unfortunately, in politics, money is power. It translates to more power in a lot of ways,” Stevenson said of the increased contributions to COPE. “I think people see it as an investment. We recognize that our job security, our pension, our salaries and the services on our campuses, all of that is really dependent on who is in power in our state and city government.”

Contributing to COPE is one of the many ways PSC members can become involved. Combined with our strategic plan and upcoming event-organizing campaigns, we can build the power we need to win a strong contract and a well-funded university. Members can sign up to contribute to COPE here: <https://psc-cuny.org/issues/issues-cope/>.

Paul Frangipane

Ari Paul

CUNY imposes citywide devas

By ARI PAUL

More than 50 Queens College faculty and staff members were gathered outside their campus's administration building, as their president, Frank Wu, looked on. The PSC members were protesting the severe new budget cuts at Queens, resulting in the layoffs of more than two dozen full-time instructors. David Gerwin, a former PSC chapter chair at Queens College, handed Wu a list of all of the departments impacted by the cuts. Wu left the scene in the middle of the rally. "That's a real classy move," said Kevin Birth, an associate professor of anthropology, with his trademark sarcasm.

Birth and his fellow members are part of a broader University-wide movement fighting CUNY's irresponsible and draconian responses to fiscal challenges. Before the start of the new semester, PSC members protested new cuts to nine campuses, mandated by the CUNY Central administration. While many of these campuses are already dealing with understaffing and worsening physical conditions, the new cuts mean class cancellations, layoffs and an overall erosion of education.

ADMINISTRATION'S RATIONAL

In addition to rallies around the city, numerous state and city elected officials joined with CUNY faculty, staff and students at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) to denounce the cuts. "This is going to have a material impact on their lives," said Assembly Member Zohran Mamdani, speaking of what the cuts would do to working-class students.

The campuses under the knife are BMCC, Kingsborough Community College, the School of Professional Studies, Queens College, York College, John Jay, the College of Staten Island, Brooklyn College and City Tech.

In a CUNY Central administration document obtained by *Clarion*, the administration explains the rationale for cuts by saying, "The rapid and unprecedented enrollment loss fueled by the pandemic has been the primary driver of structural deficits at campuses across the University,"

Stopping dire cuts at nine colleges



Carolina Banks Muñoz, PSC Brooklyn College chapter chair, says these cuts are 'unconscionable.'

adding that "from fiscal year 2020 to 2022, the University lost \$140 million in tuition revenue."

And in a letter from Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez to the Queens College (QC) PSC chapter, he wrote, "Nine CUNY colleges have been identified as having acute fiscal challenges and therefore needing to take additional measures to be able to balance their budgets. Five of the nine colleges, including QC, are projected to have a cash deficit at the end of fiscal year 2024."

He added, "The University's deficit reduction plan is part of a nearly five-year multifaceted plan to stabilize the University's finances and sustain our ability to fulfill our mission."

On top of that, the University said, CUNY has suffered from cuts in city funding and underinvestment from the state, two problems the PSC is currently fighting. A memo from CUNY Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Wendy

Hensel to all presidents and deans said that campuses should "move to an average enrolled section size of 25 students and raise fill rates to 85%."

Thus, many students will have their classes cancelled. Many workers are losing their jobs – they will lose pay and direly needed health coverage. The city's colleges are being cut to the bone. And union members around the city have demonstrated and told the press that the university administration is making terrible mistakes with these kinds of cuts.

ABRUPT DECISIONS

At Queens College, 26 substitute faculty members were laid off for the spring semester. PSC chair Karen Weingarten told the *Queens Ledger*, "[For] these faculty members, it's too late to find new classes." She added, "They lose their jobs, they lose their health insurance and chairs are left scrambling to find a way to either

staff or run many, many sections. There are hundreds and hundreds of students in these classes that the faculty members are teaching and now won't be able to teach."

The paper also quoted Amy Herzog, chair of the media studies department, saying the terminations were abrupt and caught the faculty off guard. "[The administration] left us, the chairs, the job of calling them to let them know they've been let go two weeks before classes begin, without ever having been consulted about other ways we could have saved money," she said.

Gerwin, the chair of the college's education department, told *The City*, "Nobody would dream of laying people off 10 days before the semester starts,"

adding, "In my 20 years, there haven't been these last-minute notices."

This comes as the college has already hollowed itself out, according to members. In a Facebook post, the PSC Queens College chapter posted that the campus is still without a registrar, director of counseling services, director of graduate admissions and key faculty posts.

Gerwin later said that this kind of devastating austerity "lies squarely at the feet of Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez and CUNY Board Chair Bill Thompson."

IMPACTING ENROLLMENT

Members at Queens College pointed out that the cuts will only make existing problems on their campus worse. Students are leaving the campus in frustration because of the lack of advisors and other service providers, in addition to class cancellations and the lack of college laboratory technicians to staff science courses. "It's like they *want* an enrollment death spiral," Birth said.

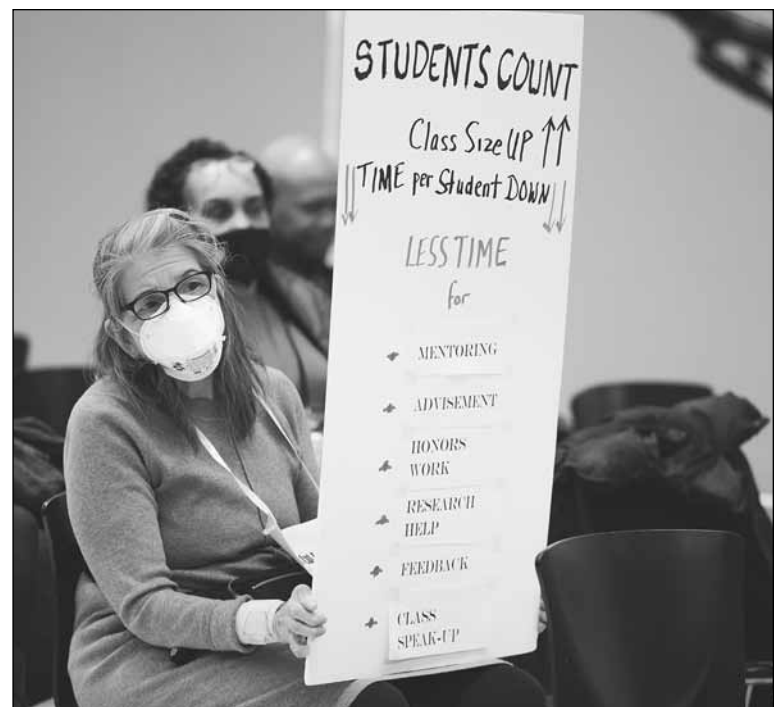
At Brooklyn College, the cuts this year come on top of a massive decline in morale, as the PSC chapter voted "no confidence" in the leadership of President Michelle Anderson, joining more than a dozen student clubs who have called for her resignation.

Carolina Bank Muñoz, the PSC chapter chair at Brooklyn College, said, "In March 2023, the college was asked to develop a plan to generate \$9.3 million in 'savings' to reduce the 'structural deficit' as a result of a tuition shortfall in fiscal 2023, and in early December 2023 the college was asked to cut an additional \$3.5 million in fiscal 2024 and \$4.5 million in fiscal 2025. These cuts are unconscionable."

Muñoz noted that these new cuts have only worsened the mood on campus. "We have no food vendor in the cafeteria, classrooms and offices are perpetually too hot or too cold,



Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez (center).



Members protest at a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing at John Jay College.

More cuts have worsened an already low morale.

station



Dave Sanders

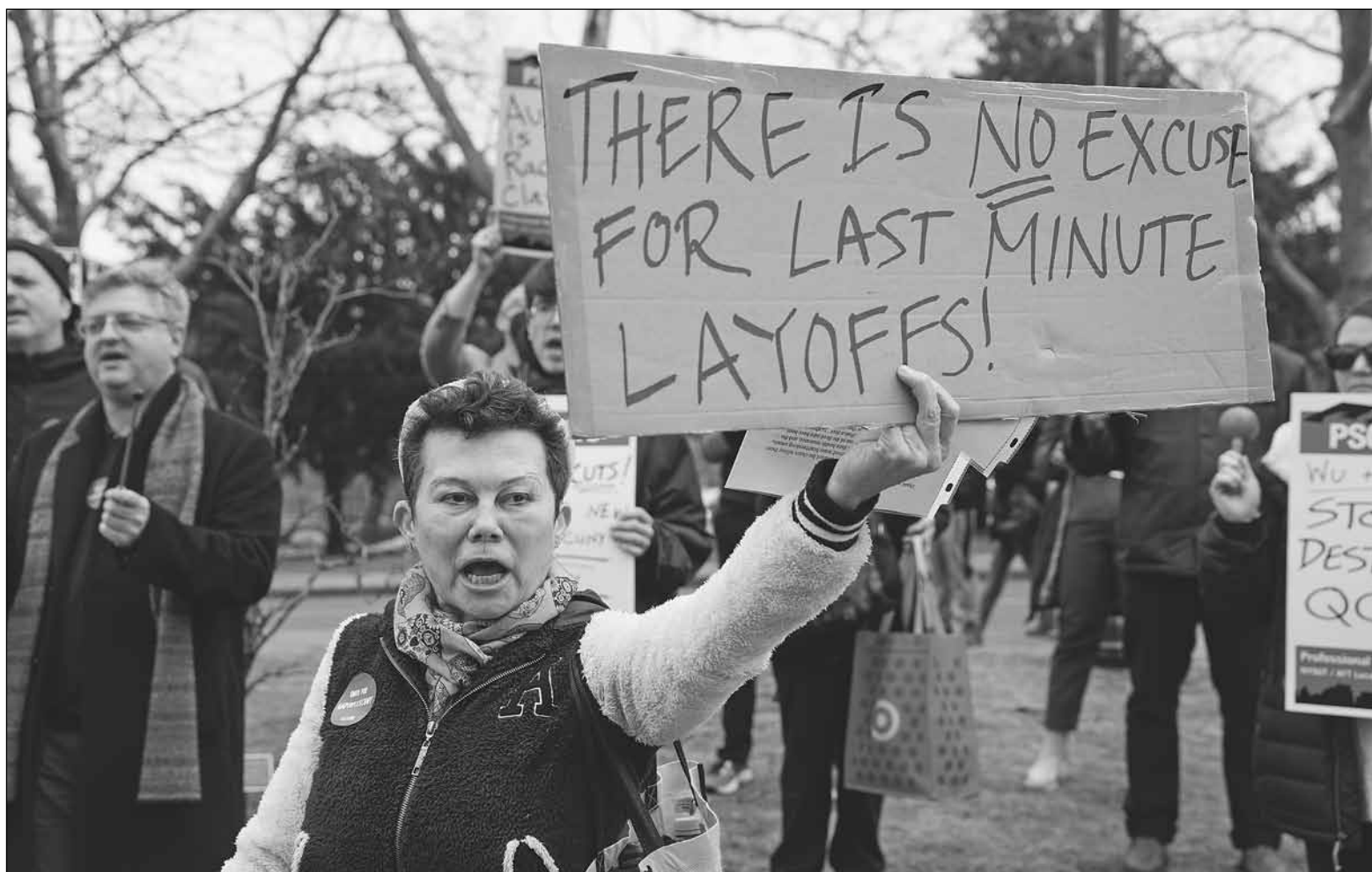
Freya Pritchard, of York College.

mold is a persistent issue in some of our buildings and the library is operating with reduced staff and hours," she said. "As of October 2023, there were 77, mostly staff, positions that had been approved by the campus Vacancy Review Board (VRB), but had not been approved by President Michelle Anderson. The vast majority of the requests came from offices and departments seeking to replace personnel, rather than new positions. Importantly, most of these requests were for replacing personnel in key areas including infrastructure, student-facing offices and academic departments."

She added, "This means that staff titles, represented by the PSC as well as other unions on campus, are faced with severe speed-up. Over the last year, staff have expressed deep concern over working out of title, working over their 35-hour work week with little or no additional compensation, and otherwise picking up the slack caused by attrition." The college's response to our consistent effort to raise these issues at labor-management meetings is to say that supervisors need to be trained in 'prioritizing work' and that staff need to work on 'time management.' But we all know that the work does not magically disappear. Management expresses shock and care for overworked staff and yet continues to ask them to do more with less."

ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

Members around the University have held protests against the cuts at the nine so-called "colleges of concern." Members also demonstrated and testified during a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing at John Jay College, where they displayed signs decrying cancelled classes and reductions. Members around the city also held Valentine's Day actions on their campuses protesting the cuts. And faculty and staff from the impacted schools met with state and city legislators and staff to explain the intensity and brutality



Paul Frangipane

PSC members at Queens College protest the drastic budget cuts at CUNY campuses.

of CUNY's austerity plan. On top of all that, many members have submitted op-ed articles to the press and spoken to reporters about the crisis at CUNY.

DIRE EFFECTS

Gerald Markowitz, a distinguished professor of interdisciplinary studies and history at John Jay College, which is facing cuts, wrote in an op-ed for *AM New York*, "In my 53 years at John Jay College and at CUNY I have seen several periods of budgetary challenges. I have also seen that disinvestment does not make sense as a short- or long-term solution. Our students surmount serious obstacles to succeed. For future generations and for even greater societal benefits, let's make it easier, not harder, for our amazing students to thrive."

Scott Cally, the PSC chapter chair at Kingsborough Community College, said, "The latest round of budget cuts at Kingsborough couldn't come at a worse time. At Kingsborough our enrollment has begun to recover after years of decline, and this so-called savings plan threatens to reverse the progress we have made. Following round after round of budget cuts, our professional staff are already at a critically low level."

He added, "We are now seeing offices unstaffed, as we further decrease our staffing level, while at the same time faculty are facing pressure to raise class sizes. All of this is having the cumulative effect of degrading the services and educational quality we provide to our students, who are already among the

most underprepared and underserved in New York City."

But perhaps no campus has a more dire situation than York College, where a whopping proposed \$11.5 million cut poses a severe existential crisis at the Queens campus. "At York, 275 class sections – or about 18% of all of its original total of 1,513 classes – have been cut from the registrar," *The City* reported. Fabiola Salek – the chair of the world languages, literature and humani-

ties department, believes it is far worse, telling *Clarion* that the administration wants all classes with less than 80% enrollment chopped. As a department chair, she said she tried to do "minimal damage" and

cut as few classes as possible, but fears that the administration will ultimately cancel more classes despite her efforts.

"I've been very dismayed at the whole thing," Salek said. "Either I do the cuts with a scalpel, or they do the cuts for me with a chain saw."

Many faculty and staff members who are far from retirement are pondering if the end of their campus is near. "It's very bleak," Salek said. "People are very disturbed about the whole thing. It seems like a doom scenario."

The campus, located in the Jamaica neighborhood, serves a largely Black community, and already suffers from infrastructural decay – it lacks an on-campus dining facility and PSC members there often complain about rodents and mold. "The library is falling apart. There are leaks everywhere," Salek said.

'NO CONFIDENCE'

In fact, in January, the faculty caucus of the York College Senate passed a "no confidence" vote against the senior leadership of the college for having "failed to cultivate shared governance and faculty involvement," "undermined the shared governance of the [college] through a top-down decision-making process" and a "deficit crisis" that has "gone unchecked."

"This school has been horribly mismanaged," said Freya Pritchard, a professor of mathematics and computer science who is also the PSC chapter chair at York.

About 30 faculty and staff members held a protest in January at one of York's main buildings to protest the cuts. While the rally lifted spirits, the mood at the school is still tense. Pritchard worries that if the cuts are not rescinded, the school could undergo "reorganization" or even end up being closed.

"The cuts are disastrous," she said.



Paul Frangipane

David Gerwin (left), of QC, hands QC President Frank Wu (right) a list of all the departments affected by the cuts.

Class cancellations, unstaffed offices, building neglect

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fund CUNY, don't cut it

By JAMES DAVIS
PSC President

PSC President James Davis delivered the following testimony at a joint hearing for the State Senate Finance Committee and the State Assembly Ways and Means Committee on February 8.

The legislature has worked with the governor in the past two budget cycles on the arduous process of setting CUNY back on course after decades of disinvestment. More than \$400 million in new annual operating aid has entered CUNY. Support for the New Deal for CUNY has raised the profile of our exceptional students and the work our colleagues do with them.

Without these resources, CUNY would be in a far more precarious position. We have seen 575 new full-time faculty hired in the past two years and laudable efforts to boost enrollment, aided by enhancements to the Tuition Assistance Program. PSC members are faculty and professional staff who are deeply committed to their students and their disciplines, and they believe in CUNY's historic mission to educate "the children of the whole people" of New York City. They continue to make it possible for CUNY to help propel more students into the middle class than all the Ivy League schools combined. And we love what we do.

But CUNY now faces financial pressures that are more intense than any I have seen in 20 years as a professor, and we need your commitment and the governor's for more resources. Student enrollment is not quite back to pre-pandemic levels, but it has made a decisive rebound. The crisis we face is not a crisis of student enrollment but of student attrition and understaffing. In the four years from 2018 to 2022, CUNY experienced a net loss of 1,313 full-time employees, a 7% decrease, even *with* that infusion of 575 new faculty that you helped to provide. Sharper cuts still have fallen on budgets for adjunct faculty and other part-time staff. Enrollment is increasing across almost every CUNY campus, and applications for next fall hit an all-time high. What awaits these students? My members know how to educate the students we serve and support their academic and personal development. But they cannot be effective in a chaotic environment in which hundreds of classes are being cancelled up to the week before the semester, instructors come and go like a subway turnstile and vacant staff positions go unfilled by design.

In this context we must commend Senator [John] Liu and Assembly Member [Zohran] Mamdani for sponsoring the REPAIR Act. This visionary legislation deserves support because it would allow New York City to collect revenue from private universities that enjoy more than \$100 million in annual property tax exemptions – Columbia and NYU – and to direct these resources to the City University, which educates hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. As the State and the City stare down major deficits in the years ahead, it is time that foregone revenue of this scale is reconsidered.

When I testified here last February, it was the day our contract with CUNY expired. As we now approach one year of working on an expired contract, and as the administration continues to claw back funds from the campuses in order to close deficits, PSC members feel anxious and unappreciated. On behalf of the 30,000 faculty and staff we represent, I need to convey the urgency of a budget that will fund a fair contract and improve our students' learning conditions.

CRISIS AT NINE 'COLLEGES OF CONCERN'

The CUNY administration credits tight fiscal discipline for improving what they call "structural deficits," from nearly \$234 million in fiscal year 2022 to \$128 million this fiscal year. Their austerity measures include increasing enrollment caps on classes, reducing student services such as library hours and cafeteria access, and abrupt layoffs of hundreds of faculty and staff on contingent appointments, including 26 Queens College full-time substitute lecturers, right before the start of this semester. Despite the fact that all but three of CUNY's 24 colleges ended fiscal year 2023 with a surplus, the administration cut across-the-board in fiscal year 2024, anticipating the expiration of federal stimulus funding and slow enrollment growth. This past fall, when nine of the colleges failed to show sufficient progress in meeting their savings targets, the administration pursued further cuts, requiring tens of millions in additional savings. This was on top of the \$57 million in fiscal year 2024 savings that these nine campuses alone were already tasked with delivering – two community colleges, six senior colleges and one professional school.

Brutal is the only word to describe these midyear cuts. It is excruciating for academic professionals who are invested in educational quality to operate in this environment. Moreover, the PSC has yet to learn of any CUNY administrator making sacrifices while they demand sacrifices from our members. Where was the Board of Trustees' concern for fiscal discipline when they approved 30% raises for the top two executive vice chancellors in 2022, and where is the Board's call now for furloughs for the executive staff to help achieve cost savings in 2024? PSC members have heard enough about the university's "multi-pronged strategies" for reducing costs; every prong affects us and our students, not them. We urge the legislature to advise the CUNY administration against implementing the midyear cuts to the "colleges of concern," especially now, as the state budget process presents an occasion to collaborate to identify the needed resources.

Improving retention and graduation rates: a matter of racial and economic justice, and a wise investment in workforce development

CUNY students have a distinctive profile:

- Over 80% of incoming CUNY undergraduates are New York City high school graduates.
- Half of CUNY students come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000, and 36% have reported food insecurity.
- 80% are people of color.

- 44% are in the first generation of their families to attend college.
- 13% are supporting children.
- 35% are foreign-born.

But full-time freshmen decline to return for their second year of college at alarmingly high rates at both the community colleges (40% stop out) and the senior colleges (20% stop out). It would be a shame if, having worked to expand the pool of CUNY applicants, Governor Hochul and the CUNY administration fail to properly support the new students coming to our campuses and those who are persisting. CUNY is also working to streamline its application process and make transferring between CUNY schools easier. Governor Hochul's proposal to admit students at the top of their class will also raise enrollment. This is on top of New York City Council Speaker [Adrienne] Adams's "CUNY Reconnect" program, which has helped 25,000 stopped-out students re-enroll in CUNY.

We recognize the efforts to bring students to CUNY, and they are working. But if there are not enough faculty to foster academic progress or professional staff to advise and support students, a successful enrollment strategy will be sabotaged. The CUNY administration should be advocating for full funding to ensure students can complete their studies and get the wraparound services they need. But preemptive budget cuts and hiring restrictions are being pursued instead of robust funding requests to meet the University's actual needs.

For example, the CUNY Board of Trustees stripped out key initiatives when it approved a revised fiscal year 2025 budget request in December:

- Enrollment and Retention request dropped from \$20M to \$6.7M (\$3.4M state/\$3.3M city).
- Graduate Education request of \$15M to the state was zeroed out.
- Academic and Career Advisement dropped from \$34.1M to \$18.5M (\$5.3M state/\$13.2M city).
- Workforce Skills and Employment Outcomes dropped from \$25.6M to \$14M (\$7M state/\$7M city).
- Facilities Maintenance and Enhancement dropped from \$30M to \$10M.
- STEM-focused donor matching (\$50M) and STEM majors funding (\$50M) were both zeroed out.
- IT Support dropped from \$15M to \$4.8M.
- Restoration of City PEG cuts \$61.5M was zeroed out.

The CUNY administration should request what it needs because public investment in CUNY students, faculty and staff, and the communities that we serve pays dividends for the state. A March 2021 report from the New York City Comptroller showed that

- Nearly 80% of CUNY graduates stay in New York.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State earned a combined \$57 billion annually (\$67,000 on average) in 2019, or \$28.6 billion more than they would have earned without a post-secondary degree.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State paid an estimated \$4.2 billion in state income taxes in 2019.

- CUNY graduates represent 10% of the private workforce in New York State.

RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

We are grateful for Governor Hochul's advocacy for public higher education. This is evident in her two previous budgets and various policy initiatives. As my testimony shows, however, CUNY desperately needs new operating aid – not the same as last year, and certainly not the \$26.8 million reduction in programs. The Executive Budget includes cuts to vital programs and services, including the nursing program expansion, mental health services and CUNY's School of Labor and Urban Studies. PSC appreciates the governor's announcement of new funding for the "Create AI" initiative, and we look forward to engaging her office to advance more public dollars for CUNY.

There are resources in the state economy to resist these cuts and add hundreds of millions more to the CUNY budget. CUNY's return on its investment repays New Yorkers many times over, as research consistently shows. Governor Hochul must not retreat from her commitment to public higher education. We urge the legislature to hold her to it, and urge you to secure significant new investments in CUNY, as you have before.

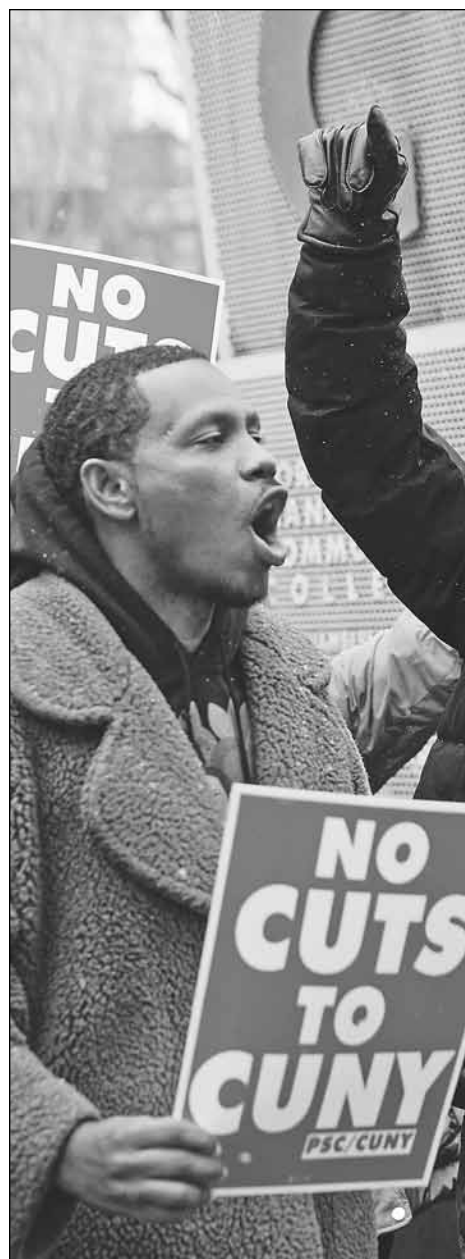
Low-income, working-class families are leaving the state because they cannot afford housing and other costs of living. According to a December 2023 report featured in *The New York Times*, the families who left New York at the highest rate in 2022 were those who make between \$32,000 and \$65,000 a year and come disproportionately from communities of color, like our students do. A great public university like ours helps move generations of students out of poverty and into the middle class.

Our elected leaders should want the long-standing trend of CUNY graduates staying in New York to continue. But what can we expect if New York State's budget priorities deem their education less important than tax breaks for the wealthy? A population, by the way, who has only gotten wealthier. Meanwhile our members and students face rising costs for housing, health care, childcare, groceries, utilities and more. We believe the legislature wants these communities to flourish, and a strong public university is the path to economic security.

PSC VISION FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR

CUNY must firm up its foundation for current and future students to succeed. The New Deal for CUNY is the cornerstone on which to build. New resources have helped to slow the alarming rate of faculty attrition, but each component of this legislation must become reality. The PSC requests the following for the FY25 budget cycle:

\$385 MILLION | Full-time faculty Support for faculty hiring will address racial inequities in student access to full-time professors and improve CUNY's full-time faculty-to-student ratio, which remains stubbornly low. Unfortunately, gains in prior cycles have been eroded by attrition, and CUNY still largely



PSC President James Davis (center) rallies with other PSC members at BMCC to protest CUNY's cuts to nine colleges.

runs on adjunct labor (senior colleges: \$341 million, 2,306 faculty hires; community colleges: \$44 million, 376 faculty hires).

"BMCC's recent practice of cancelling 'low-enrolled' classes to save money is a big problem for students in political science. Just last semester, two of my students found that courses they needed to graduate with a political science degree were cancelled. To prevent their graduation from being postponed and their transfer plans derailed, I helped them through the onerous, bureaucratic process of finding another class and substituting it for the course that they initially selected." – Heather James, Political Science Assistant Professor, Borough of Manhattan Community College

\$87 MILLION | Enhanced wraparound support, academic advisement, mental health counseling, food insecurity For most CUNY students, the University is their only access to mental health counseling and other supports. CUNY lags behind the national average ratio of academic advisors to students. We must hire full-time academic advisors and mental health counselors and relieve food insecurity (\$67 million to improve staff-to-student ratios for advisors and mental health counselors; \$20 million to address food insecurity).

\$700 MILLION | First 60 credits free CUNY is a transformative path through which poor and working New Yorkers attain higher education and economic success. First-dollar, tuition-free college credit is an investment that will pay dividends for the state.

\$82.7 MILLION | Mandatory cost increases

Fund the basic year-over-year cost increases required to operate CUNY, including negotiated employee salaries and fringe benefits.

\$24.5 MILLION | Graduate education support

Align fellowships and stipends with peer institutions and NYC's cost of living. Increase support for doctoral programs to connect students with CUNY research centers and graduates with jobs in the academy and industry. Expand and diversify research-focused faculty who mentor graduate students (\$24.5 million for fellowships/stipends, 50 faculty hires, and other investments).

\$11.7 MILLION | Raise community college funding floor

Lift and fund a stable floor and increase base aid to \$3,250 per student. The state has never met its legal obligation to fund 40% of community college operations. Community colleges are a springboard to careers and a pathway to further higher education. They are job creators and must not be forced to operate in a state of constant vulnerability.

\$1.7 BILLION | Invest in capital infrastructure

We support the CUNY administration's capital request to maintain and improve the University's infrastructure across its 300 buildings (\$1.7 billion). A recent independent assessment showed that only 8% of CUNY buildings meet the "state of good repair" standard. CUNY students and employees deserve safe, welcoming conditions for working and learning.

"Coupled with mold and moisture-ridden spaces, bed bug and rodent

issues, and a capital footprint in desperate need of an upgrade, this further disadvantages the students that Medgar faculty and staff serve." – Kevin Adams, Director of Community Standards/Student Conduct Officer Medgar Evers College

ONE YEAR WITH AN EXPIRED CONTRACT

The 30,000 CUNY faculty and staff represented by the PSC are seeking to renegotiate our expired union contract with the University to secure competitive salaries, pay parity for adjunct faculty and other gains. Much of the current fiscal trouble at CUNY can be traced back to the State's failure to fund collective bargaining agreements at CUNY under the prior governor. It is time to return to the principled practice of fully funding contracts. Let's make New York a state that cares for its residents as both citizens and workers.

The PSC's bargaining agenda seeks job security, safe working conditions and just wages. These common good goals are only achievable with the public investment that CUNY deserves. An increase of 7.15% for fringe benefits is certainly positive to see in the governor's Executive Budget, but we assure you we plan to fight for the additions that our members need.

A strong contract will help CUNY achieve its goals of a faculty and staff that reflect the diversity of the students. For example, the average salary for professors at CUNY senior colleges lags far behind that of professors at most institutions in a cohort of

regional and comparable colleges and universities. Structural impediments to diversifying the faculty are reflective not only of society but of the wages the University can offer.

CRITICAL INTERVENTION

At the heart of these issues of access and quality in public higher education is a fundamental question of fairness. New York must not slide further down the ranks toward inequality.

According to a 2022 Economic Policy Institute report, New York has the highest concentration of wealth of any state in the nation and the deepest economic inequality. New Yorkers worth over \$30 million (fewer than 0.4% of the population) possess \$6.7 trillion dollars in wealth. We have the resources to fund college for New Yorkers, and we know CUNY is key to reversing this inequality.

Thanks to the efforts of this legislature to work with the governor, the past two years have helped CUNY recover from the devastating pandemic. But the constraints cited by the executive branches here in Albany and in City Hall have led the CUNY administration to go after our colleges for deep, preemptive cuts, even those with healthy, reviving enrollments. Such ill-advised, unnecessary austerity measures could easily send these colleges into a tailspin of student attrition and understaffing from which they will not recover. Your intervention this year is more critical than ever.

PROGRAMS

CUNY must protect ASAP

By KRISTINA BAINES and SHARON UTAKIS

“That program is incredible – we’re looking to adopt it at our college.” Last month, we were sitting across the table from educators from around the state, listening to them praise one of the most successful college initiatives in the City University of New York’s history. In our roles as CUNY community college professors and union leaders, we had traveled to the New York State United Teachers conference in Saratoga Springs to share strategies for strengthening higher education opportunities for the most vulnerable students – those at community colleges.

Amid conversations about equity, health and safety, and academic freedom in the context of strong contracts, our colleagues singled out the one program that was so successful that others are adopting it – not just in New York but nationwide. And what are we doing? Dismantling it.

CITY CUTS

Mayor Eric Adams has just announced another 5% cut to all city agencies, including CUNY. And CUNY management has decided that our cut will come out of one of our most successful community college initiatives – the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP.

Our colleagues, through their anger, echoed two major concerns: CUNY has been underfunded for so long that it is hard to imagine how it could survive any additional cuts and the irony of targeting such a celebrated and successful program.

“Taking textbooks out of the hands of the most marginalized students? That’s where these administrators with their bloated salaries think is the best place to cut!”

Since 2007, CUNY’s ASAP has increased graduation rates for thousands of students. The program was designed to provide fi-

nancial, academic and personal support to help students complete their degrees as soon as possible. It has provided students with MetroCards, textbook vouchers, early registration, consolidated schedules, a tuition waiver for any gap between full-time tuition and fees and their financial-aid award, and dedicated ASAP advisers (and, in its early stages, reduced class sizes).

Graduation rates increased dramatically, and the ASAP model has been touted by CUNY around the country. But now all of that could be changing.

STUDENT SUPPORTS

ASAP was developed in response to research showing that the reason many students don’t make it through college is not

because they aren’t smart, capable or diligent – it’s because they don’t have the supports necessary to focus on their programs of study. “The community-building is a vital part of keeping students enrolled in college and moving forward,” says Salvatore Pisciotta, who began working at Queensborough Community College as an English tutor in 2015 and now works as an ASAP



Sharon Utakis, the union’s vice president for community colleges, speaks out against budget cuts.

**CONTRIBUTE
to COPE!**

The union’s political organizing has successfully defeated proposed tuition hikes and crippling budget cuts. It has saved vital programs throughout CUNY. And the union’s political work has won funding for CUNY at the state and city levels.

Members can strengthen the union’s political program by contributing to COPE.

MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY!

Sign up online at: <https://psc-cuny.org/issues/issues-cope/>

adviser. “Our conversations are holistic, ensuring students are not only doing well academically, but that they are receiving necessary services within the community as well. Many students report never having had the kind of support that ASAP offers.”

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Elizabeth Stevenson, a senior adviser for ASAP at City Tech, explains the deep impacts of cuts to the program: “When students have to wait for answers to ba-

sic questions or can’t access services at all, they struggle to enroll properly, to get the aid they need, to get the support they need and to complete their degrees. That’s not just bad for CUNY students, that’s bad for all of New York City, which honestly couldn’t function without CUNY graduates. ASAP [and] ACE [CUNY’s Accelerate, Complete, Engage program] are the best interventions we have.”

There has been some discussion among top CUNY administrators that ASAP is too

expensive. But the data shows that this investment pays off.

Lori Ungemah, professor of interdisciplinary studies at Guttman Community College, the newest CUNY college to use ASAP as a blueprint for its high-touch model, remembers how the free MetroCard was so impactful that students included it in their essays. “They would write how the financial impact of that monthly unlimited [card] affected them so greatly that it kept them motivated,” she says.

“The MetroCard gave the student and family such financial relief, and that allowed them the brain space to focus on their

academics. We think of our public transportation system in New York City as a liberating, unifying space, [but] we forget the cost per swipe is still prohibitive for many people. Who knows how many students CUNY could serve if the City continued to give free MetroCards to those enrolled in a public institution of higher education part- or full-time.”

FUND THE PROGRAM

Members of our faculty and staff union, the Professional Staff Congress, are working hard to convince the mayor and other city leaders to fund a program that has been life-changing for our students and a boon to our city. As CUNY and so many other colleges struggle to maintain enrollment, we can celebrate having record numbers of students at CUNY this fall, but if students can’t access the proven supports they need to persist and succeed, these numbers mean little.

Our students are not just numbers on a page. If CUNY is to continue to act as the great engine of social mobility that it has been shown to be, the mayor should continue to fund the successful programs that help CUNY students graduate.

Kristina Baines is the PSC chapter chair at Guttman Community College and Sharon Utakis is the PSC vice president for community colleges. A version of this article originally appeared in AFT Voices.

A proven program – nationwide

GOT UNION?



Teeshavi Acosta
College Lab Technician

Joining the Professional Staff Congress means joining a community of faculty and staff dedicated to fighting for our rights and the rights of our students. As a union, we can unite and demand that our hard work and contributions to the university are respected and appreciated. Don't miss out on the chance to have a voice in shaping the future of CUNY - join PSC-CUNY today and let's work together towards a better tomorrow! >>> <https://psc-cuny.org/join-psc> <<<



Budget campaigns

Continued from page 4
have slashed money for dozens of high-needs schools.” But the damage is still immense – cuts have even forced schools to thin out their lunch options for students.

FIGHT FOR EDUCATION

“There is a big war on children and education happening at City Hall,” said Jessica Ramos, the chair of the state senate’s labor committee. “Education money is sacred. Children’s money is sacred.”

The fight is on for the PSC to secure city and state budget agreements that address CUNY’s needs. The governor will negotiate with the state assembly and senate in February and March until a budget is reached, while the mayor and the City Council, led by Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, must come to a final agreement by the summer.

This means the PSC will be mobilizing. PSC members and CUNY students will travel to Albany to lobby lawmakers, and they will meet locally with state and city lawmakers, pressing them to invest in public higher education.

DEMOCRATIC DOCUMENT

“Both the state and city budgets are public documents that are part of a democratic process, and it’s in the interest of everybody at CUNY, for each and every PSC member, to get involved and agitate around the budgets for the future of CUNY,” said Susan Kang, an associate professor of political science at John Jay College and a member of the PSC Executive Council.

Kang added that the mayor’s austerity budgets are framed around the need to cut spending in order to avert an impending fiscal disaster. But she argued that PSC members shouldn’t buy into the fearmongering. “There’s always more money; these are artificial crises that he manufactures,” she said. “We can’t allow him to do this.”



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Adjunct job security

The PSC has always held protecting adjunct job security as a top priority in its agenda. While the University is imposing harsh cuts across the system, it is now more important than ever to protect job security for non-tenured, part-time faculty members.

The PSC is encouraging all its members to send a letter to Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez, explaining why adjunct job protections are important and demanding the University honor the job security measures the union has fought for over the years.

Members can find the letter here: tinyurl.com/PSC-adjunct-letter

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
25 Broadway, 15th Floor
New York, New York 10004
Return Service Requested

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 8049

12

CONTRACT

Clarion | March 2024

MEMBERS PREPARE TO SPRING INTO ACTION

February 28, 2024 marks the one year anniversary of the expiration of the PSC-CUNY contract.

Since the summer of 2023, the union has been bargaining with CUNY. While progress has been made, many issues remain unresolved.



IT IS TIME FOR PSC MEMBERS TO TURN UP THE PRESSURE.

In the spring semester, the union will be mobilizing across the five boroughs to demand CUNY reach a contract settlement that offers members adequate raises, job protections and opportunities for promotion.

BE IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CHAPTER LEADERSHIP ABOUT ORGANIZING EFFORTS ON YOUR CAMPUS AND CITYWIDE.