

# Clarion

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



APRIL 2019



**ADMIN**  
**Meet  
the new  
boss**

Trustees tap  
Queens prez  
as the next  
chancellor.

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Dave Sanders

## LOUD AND CLEAR

Chanting "Full-time, part-time – all unite. Same struggle, same fight," the union escalated the campaign for a fair contract with a series of actions aimed at Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio. The clear message to the state, city and CUNY: the members are united. **PAGE 3**

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#### Frozen pipes flood BCC

Hundreds of classes were forced to relocate as decades of neglect contributed to burst pipes in a main building at Bronx Community College.

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The PSC won three-year appointments for adjuncts in the last contract, and some are ready to reapply. The union provides some pointers for reappointment.

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While 9/11 was nearly two decades ago, the health effects of the WTC collapse still plague workers in Lower Manhattan, including at BMCC.

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#### Work-ins at campuses

Campus chapters have hosted work-ins and grade-ins to demonstrate the kind of work PSC members do, and to build solidarity at the local level.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. EMAIL: APAUL@PSCMAIL.ORG.

# Broad goals for labor

● As a faculty member at LaGuardia Community College, it was distressing to see CUNY's top administrators, including the president of LaGuardia, a school with many immigrant and working-class students, stump for a union-busting company, Amazon, that does business with ICE and threatened to accelerate the gentrification of our communities. Like many, I was overjoyed that people power was able to score a rare victory over a corporate giant when Amazon said, in response to community protests, it would not build a new headquarters in Long Island City, Queens. In taking stock and holding up the work of community groups and activists who won this fight, this victory holds powerful lessons for us as union activists.

For too long, progressive activists have been on the defensive, assuming that we will voice our objections and then the powerful will get their way. Unions in this defensive posture too often limit themselves to the immediate needs of their members rather than engage in broader community struggles for the working class. This victory underscores the need to strengthen our relationship with community groups and immigrant-rights activists on the front lines of struggles for housing justice, worker's rights and immigrant rights – challenging, labor-intensive work that doesn't always bear immediate fruit and requires us to think more broadly about the power structures that harm our school, our lives and those of our students.

True social movement unions have great potential right now to fight a broader struggle against austerity and on behalf of robust, well-funded and inclusive public services.

**Laura Tanenbaum**  
LaGuardia Community College

## Amazon falls

● CUNY students and faculty have been at the center of the grassroots movement to oppose Amazon's proposed HQ2 corporate development in Queens, organizing alongside a coalition of anti-gentrification and immigrant-rights groups.

Of particular concern is Amazon's highly profitable role as the technological backbone for Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) surveillance network.

Through a series of government contracts and partnerships with corporations such as Palantir and COPLINK, Amazon Web Services (AWS) allows ICE to aggregate, distribute and make searchable vast amounts of personal data on individuals. Amazon has received pushback from their own employees about the sale of biased facial recognition technology to law enforcement agencies. These technologies

pose a direct threat to our communities and our students. A corporation conducting this kind of work should not receive billions of public dollars in incentives from a city that claims to be a sanctuary.

When the HQ2 deal was first announced, the CUNY Board of Trustees pledged to “commit our considerable college assets to ensure that Amazon has a strong pipeline for talent, ideas and innovation.” The details of this proposed pipeline were not fully elaborated, and the board refused to answer questions from students.

Amazon has since withdrawn from the HQ2 deal, but it pledged to retain and expand their existing presence here, which includes a hub for AWS cloud development. It is not clear what aspects of a CUNY-Amazon partnership might remain in place.

Part of CUNY's mission is to increase the social mobility of low-income and underserved communities, and we must take the economic futures of our students seriously. But a job that contributes to the technological surveillance and targeting of our city's immigrants and communities of color is not a good job, no matter how high the salary. A job that contributes to gentrification, housing shortages and transit crises in the neighborhoods where our students and faculty live is not a good job. A job that undermines worker unionization, locally owned small businesses and community input is not a good job. A good job is a just job, and the CUNY community must use our collective resources to advocate for socially responsible, community-based models for economic development.

**Amy Herzog**  
Queens College

*Editor's note: See the president's message on Amazon on page 12.*

## Our campaign

● The \$7K or Strike campaign is a rank-and-file movement of PSC members and allies working to make the \$7K per class demand non-negotiable. We fight *as members* for a more militant approach to contract negotiation by advocating for a strike authorization vote. We are doing this because,

in our view, the PSC leadership has focused on lobbying lawmakers to the detriment of building grassroots militancy. PSC leadership says we have to ask for more money before we organize a strike, but we say organizing a strike stands a better chance of pressuring lawmakers to come up with the money, as it did for striking educators in Los Angeles, Oakland, West Virginia and elsewhere. Our goal is not to stymie the union's leadership. Rather, our primary targets are CUNY management and the city and state government, who have so far refused to allocate the funds necessary to eradicate adjunct poverty and transform the university into a dignified place of teaching and learning. The \$7K demand is a long overdue step in this direction.

To build the campaign, we have organized a public conference, multiple campus grade-ins, tabling, office visits, chapter meetings, one-on-one dialogues, picket line solidarity with other unions and coalition meetings. Hundreds of members across all titles – knowing full well that \$7K or Strike is not yet the official position of the entire union

– have signed pledge cards and solidarity letters calling on the leadership to hold a strike authorization vote. Statements in support of \$7K or Strike have been passed at 10 PSC chapters and counting, at meetings – historically sparsely attended – that have drawn large numbers of newly activated members.

Building the threat of a strike infinitely strengthens the position of PSC officers at the bargaining table. But denying and diminishing the efforts of the campaign has the opposite effect. The union's leadership has thus far chosen to rebuke members for acting without their permission. This is a strategic mistake: the \$7K or Strike campaign provides PSC officers an opening to build up militancy while providing legal cover to the union. They should embrace it. And to members: remember, we are the union, and the leadership only represents our will.

**Erin Cully**  
Graduate Center  
**Chris Natoli**  
Hunter College  
**Conor Tomás Reed**  
Brooklyn College

*PSC President Barbara Bowen, First Vice President Andrea Vásquez, Secretary Nivedita Majumdar and Treasurer Sharon Persinger respond:*

*PSC is proud of its militant history in fighting for its members. In 2016, we held a strike authorization vote, trained hundreds of member activists, and won that vote by 92 percent. For this contract, in defiance of a deeply reactionary political climate, we have forged ahead with our most ambitious demand, \$7K per course for adjuncts – a demand that carries the potential of transforming the university and its structure of funding. We are in negotiations and are building pressure for all our demands through actions on campuses, in the streets and in Albany.*

*We are not calling for a strike authorization vote at this time, but it is not off the table. If we were to consider a strike authorization vote, we would do it seriously by first holding union-wide one-on-one conversations on the possible gains and risks of a strike. Our Delegate Assembly and Executive Committee would then vote on it after careful consideration. We welcome the energy and the commitment of all our members. Our open letter was addressed to a small group of activists who have tried to actively mislead the membership about the union position, which was reached through democratic decision-making by those elected to represent all members. We once again call on them to stop the distortions and instead unite in the struggle to win this historic demand.*

# Making, and wearing, your union pride



Members at City Tech printed T-shirts supporting the contract and funding for CUNY on March 14, in preparation of an escalation of the union's contract campaign.

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# United in demands: fair contract now

By ARI PAUL

The message to the state, the city and CUNY is clear: the PSC will not back down from its demand for a fair contract for all and an end to poverty-level pay for adjunct faculty. On March 14, the PSC held demonstrations at both the governor's office and City Hall, and then presented a sweeping counterproposal to management across the bargaining table. "The fundamental issue in this contract is funding," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "By insisting on decent raises and calling for an end to CUNY's exploitation of adjunct faculty, the union is challenging the poverty-funding model for CUNY. We are demanding resources for our students."

## ONE YEAR

More than a year after the last contract expired, the administration in late February finally made an economic offer. But the offer did not come close to what the union has demanded. Rather than providing even inflation-level increases and substantially lifting adjunct pay, CUNY management offered what Bowen called "a zero-sum-game approach."

Management offered a higher increase for adjunct faculty than for other members of the bargaining unit – a first in PSC bargaining history – but proposed to fund the increase by gouging the money out of the same austerity settlement reached by other New York unions. Further, management's proposal included no back pay and a zero-percent increase in the final year.

## FALLING SHORT

The proposed raise for adjunct faculty fell far short of the union demand for \$7,000 per course, a demand that seeks to put CUNY adjunct pay in line with adjunct salaries at peer institutions. Management's proposal would have raised the minimum pay for a three-credit course to only \$4,000.

The union responded on March 14 with an innovative counterpro-

## Labor rejects economic austerity at CUNY



District Council 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido stood with PSC members on the steps of City Hall to demand full state and city funding for CUNY in order to secure a just PSC contract.

posal and the firm position that the state and city must put more money into CUNY in order to resolve the contract.

Earlier that day, union members had come together for a daylong set of actions to pressure the city, state and CUNY administration to deliver a just contract. Starting at 8 am outside Governor Andrew Cuomo's Midtown Manhattan office, more than 300 PSC members, armed with ringing alarm clocks and supported by a brass band, delivered a "wake-up call" to the governor. Chanting "Full-time, part-time – all unite. Same struggle, same fight," and "No contract, no peace," members demanded that the governor agree to a state budget for next year that increases funding for CUNY, providing more resources for a fair contract.

## Street action and talks at the bargaining table

Just hours later, members were out in force on the steps of City Hall to deliver a similar message: the city must also step up to put more money into CUNY in order to alleviate decades of underfunding. Joined by labor leaders from across the city, PSC President Barbara Bowen said, "There is no justification to keep CUNY under-resourced...it's a sign of contempt for the people we serve," noting that both the governor and Mayor Bill de Blasio point to their records as progressives. "Show us the money, show us your progressive values," she said.

Vincent Alvarez, president of the New York City Central Labor Council (CLC), decried the low pay for adjunct faculty. "One job should be enough," he said, noting that many CUNY adjuncts work many other part-time jobs to survive. "You're

talking about minimum wage jobs in the city of New York, and that's unacceptable."

District Council 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido, who represents 10,000 CUNY clerical workers who recently settled a contract with the administration, said since PSC stood by his members in their contract fight, his union would fight for the PSC. He said, as a CUNY graduate, the fight for fair wages at CUNY was a citywide struggle. "It's the people's university," he said.

## SOLIDARITY

At City Hall, Bowen addressed members, saying it was important that labor leaders from the CLC and AFSCME District Council 37 – as well as representatives from the United Federation of Teachers, University Student Senate and the New York State Nurses Association – had come out to demon-

strate their support for the PSC. "Something important happened today," Bowen said. "Major labor leaders just pledged to make our fight their fight. They announced publicly that just as the PSC has stood with them, they will stand with us as we campaign for wage justice and racial justice at CUNY. We are no longer fighting alone."

Immediately after the two rallies, the union's bargaining team went into formal contract talks with the administration. The union's team put forward a counterproposal that includes back pay, provides for annual salary increases that keep up with inflation, makes significant investments in equity increases, offers a new way of reaching \$7K a course for adjuncts and addresses important non-economic issues.

## MOVING FORWARD

Pressure continues to build outside of the bargaining room for the funding needed in the contract. Members have met and are continuing to meet with state lawmakers both in Albany and in their respective districts, pressing for them to put more money in the state budget for CUNY (see story, page 7). Members are demonstrating on their respective campuses to raise awareness about the contract struggle and to build local-level solidarity (see story, page 8). The union created a 30-second television advertisement featuring CUNY students demanding full funding for CUNY. Management declined to respond to the TV spot and asked for additional time to consider the union's proposal.

"How strong we are at the bargaining table depends on how strong we are on the campuses, in Albany, at City Hall and in the streets," the union bargaining team wrote in a March 25 letter to the membership. "This contract is fundamentally a struggle for resources to educate our students. That's why the fight is so hard – and so important."



The PSC bargaining team discusses its counter-offer to the CUNY administration.



The 8 am wake-up call at Governor Cuomo's Manhattan office.

# Matos Rodríguez confirmed as chancellor

By ARI PAUL

In a historic vote on February 13, the CUNY Board of Trustees designated Queens College President Félix V. Matos Rodríguez the eighth chancellor of CUNY, making him the university's first minority chief executive.

"With sterling credentials, unparalleled depth of perception and a demonstrated commitment to CUNY," Board Chairman William Thompson hailed Matos Rodríguez as "one of our own."

Thompson and Trustee Kevin Kim both noted Matos Rodríguez is unique among university-system chancellors in that he has been president of both a CUNY four-year and a CUNY two-year college. The onetime Hunter College professor was president of Hostos Community College from 2009 to 2014, before heading to Queens College.

## A CUNY VETERAN

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that under Matos Rodríguez the retention rate at Hostos Community College increased by double digits. And while he was president of QC, the Queens College Foundation doubled under his watch, and a 2016 study by the Equality of Opportunity Project (now called Opportunity Insights) ranked Queens College in the top 1 percent of all colleges in moving students from the bottom fifth to the top fifth of the country's income distribution.

Matos Rodríguez, who earned his doctorate in history from Columbia University, is also a CUNY scholar – he has written numerous articles and books about the Puerto Rican experience in New York City. His book *Women in San Juan: Puerto Rico, 1820-1868* is considered an important text that debunks the myth that Puerto Rico is a male-dominated society.

Trustee Mayra Linares-Garcia offered a word of warning before she voted to approve his appointment, saying, "I think there's a lot of work in front of you."

## First Latino CUNY chief, and a known scholar



Ellen Moynihan

After a lengthy search, Félix V. Matos Rodríguez will begin as chancellor in May.

"[D]espite the advantages Matos Rodríguez brings to the position, he will not succeed unless he can solve CUNY's immediate labor crisis," PSC President Barbara Bowen wrote in an op-ed in the *New York Daily News* – the PSC has been without a contract for more than a year. "Faced with soaring enrollments since 2000 and a failure by the

city and state to keep up with costs, the CUNY administration has lacked the political courage to demand the funding CUNY needs. Instead, trustees have accepted austerity budgets and the implicit premise that goes with them: that CUNY students deserve no better. The faculty and staff of CUNY repudiate that premise.

Failing to challenge underfunding, CUNY has survived by increasing tuition (by 68 percent since 2008) and cutting labor costs. Both moves hurt students."

Bowen continued, "Whether Matos Rodríguez succeeds as the next chancellor of CUNY may well depend on whether he secures the necessary public funding to settle the union contract and raise adjunct pay to a living wage."

Indeed, President Matos Rodríguez met with Queens College adjuncts in November and listened to their testimonies about struggling to serve students on their meager pay.

"We congratulate Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and look forward to continuing to engage with him in our campaign to win a fair starting wage

for CUNY adjuncts of \$7K per course," the group QC Adjuncts Unite said in a statement. "We appreciate the open-door policy he has maintained at Queens College, and we know he is well aware of our frustrations. He has heard our stories of struggling to survive on poverty wages."

## LONG SEARCH

The choice of Matos Rodríguez as chancellor comes after nearly a year of deliberation by the search committee, which consisted of trustees, faculty members and students, and was assisted by an outside consulting firm. At least one high-profile candidate, New York Public Library President Anthony Marx, pulled himself out of the running. Matos Rodríguez was reported as a finalist last summer, raising questions as to why it took another half year to settle on him in the end.

Interim PSC Queens College Chapter Chair Ted Kesler is optimistic about the new chancellor given his chapter's experience with him as the president of Queens College, where things like health and safety issues have loomed large for years.

"After spending long, late hours in labor-management meetings together, I know that Dr. Rodríguez is aware of the harm that years of fiscal austerity by the state has done to preserving Queens College and CUNY in general," he said. "He is genuinely proud of shaping his career to serve CUNY students. He heard firsthand adjunct testimonies of their hardships, subsisting at poverty wages, in their commitment to serving CUNY students. He recognizes the shabby conditions of our Queens College facilities because

we no longer have the resources to maintain and upgrade them."

Kesler continued, "He is aware of CUNY's trajectory to reduce full-time faculty and increase reliance on adjunct instructors as a cost-saving measure. He knows that CUNY no longer pays competitive salaries to retain full-time professors. He laments state austerity measures such as the TAP Gap that costs CUNY \$86 million annually and rising." Therefore, Kesler said, the new chancellor should reject austerity and he and the board should "fight for CUNY as a social justice project."

How much will the new chancellor fight to fund the PSC contract? It's not clear. During an appearance on WNYC's Brian Lehrer Show Matos Rodríguez took a call-in question from PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez, who cited the "scandal of underfunding the university" and asked of his plans to "settle a good contract and bring sufficient funding into CUNY." He did not put forth a specific plan to confront the state over its underfunding of higher education, but said that the BOT and the administration would "like to do more [for adjuncts]" in terms of paying them more and said CUNY "should have more full-time faculty." When pressed on specific plans, he reiterated, "I'm not the chancellor yet."

## GETTING EFFICIENT

In an interview with Errol Louis on NY1, the chancellor-to-be said that he would address getting more funding for CUNY. "We need to be more efficient," he said in regard to administrative costs. He added that he hoped those savings, as well as increased revenue from more aggressive fundraising, would help put more money into student services.

Jonathan Buchsbaum, a professor of media studies at Queens College, said that while Matos Rodríguez as QC president was supportive and cooperative during labor-management meetings, union members were often frustrated with what they saw as lackluster results in terms of addressing health and safety issues and changing reclassification opportunities for HEOs.

"He meant well, but was probably restricted in what he could do, so he didn't get a lot concretely done while he was here," said Buchsbaum. He added that Matos Rodríguez "certainly did support diversity hiring, there was real support at Queens."

Dean Savage, a professor of sociology and former department chair at Queens, noted that he used to send Matos Rodríguez a spreadsheet comparing the salaries of starting assistant professors at each college in a bid to raise starting salaries at Queens.

"Our starting salaries improved, not quite as much as we would have liked, but he always paid attention," Savage told *Clarion*.

PSC delegates at Queens College noted that Matos Rodríguez failed to reorganize administrative departments to address workforce

Continued on page 9



Vita Rabinowitz, left, has served as interim chancellor since last year and will serve until May.

Dave Sanders

# Burst pipes cripple BCC

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Bronx Community College HEO Delwar Sayeed could have been skating on thin ice – literally – in his office in Colston Hall. The day after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, he discovered ice droplets in his office. In the meeting room next door, icicles hung from the ceiling and patches of ice dotted the radiator and computer tower. Sayeed soon found out that he was not alone.

A series of leaks in the late-night hours throughout the eight-floor building caused significant damage: upending tiles, damaging more than 60 ventilators and leading to a complete electrical, heat, Internet and phone outage. BCC administration immediately shut down Colston Hall. More than 500 classes had to be relocated from the building, and the six academic departments housed in the building were displaced.

Thus Colston Hall became another urgent and significant repair project resulting from the decades-long budget austerity at CUNY, where faculty, staff and students teach and learn in decaying buildings across the city. CUNY cites nearly \$178 million needed for critical repairs at BCC alone in its five-year capital plan request, which was drafted before the Colston disaster, and is waiting to be approved by the state and city.

The repairs include replacing antiquated fire alarms in 18 buildings, replacing the deteriorated roofs of 15 buildings, and replacing decayed windows with ineffective energy coatings (like those in Colston Hall) that make the windows practically opaque. CUNY's sticker price for upgrading and repairing existing buildings across the university is \$4.7 billion.

## MAINTENANCE DUE

"We have a beautiful campus that has been neglected for decades, and now all the deferred maintenance is coming due," PSC BCC Chapter Chair Sharon Utakis told *Clarion*. "This disaster [at Colston Hall] makes BCC the austerity poster child."

An outside engineering group, Genesys Engineering, prepared a status report on the needed repairs in Colston Hall. In it, they cite the initial cause for the leaks as "a power dip and voltage drop" that shut off pumps circulating water through the heating system and causing water in the coils of some heating units to freeze and burst. Remaining water in the units then flooded the building.

The report also noted that fan coil units installed in a 1984 building renovation were well beyond their 20-year life expectancy. Each unit also has dampers that prevent outside air infiltration, but over time, the report noted, the "dampers can fail or become out of adjustment."

## Decades of economic neglect led to chaos



Makeshift dividers separate this large meeting space, which made room for some of the 500 classes that were displaced because of the flooding of Colston Hall.

"This never should have happened in the first place. It wasn't an accident," said Alex Wolf, an associate professor in biology and a member of the PSC chapter executive committee at BCC. "They're letting things go until they blow up."

## 'ROUND THE CLOCK

A college spokesperson said that as a preventative measure for future issues, they have engineers and public safety staff – and additional personnel during extreme weather conditions – working around the clock to monitor and quickly respond to any emergency situations.

In the days and weeks following the leaks, classes and offices moved to wherever there was space. Students in a small history class sat in a 300-seat auditorium with the sound of a loud fan. A lower-level assembly hall was partitioned with makeshift dividers so classes could take place concurrently. Stephen Duncan, an assistant professor of history, had one of his classes moved to a computer lab, where students sat in vertical rows in front of computers, and had to rotate their chairs so they could face him.

"It was extremely disruptive for the [start of the semester]," Duncan said. Duncan thinks he unconsciously talks more and struggles to figure out ways to draw out the shy students because of the awkward seating arrangement in the new space. "Our students are very flexible and easygoing, [but] it's still a disruption in the fragile relationship between student and educator."

For Sayeed, an academic technology specialist and Blackboard administrator, his office is where he does his work. After Colston's closing, he moved offices five times before settling in a small room shared with four other colleagues.

The situation that Sayeed faced in January was avoidable. He had

alerted administration more than a year ago about a draft in his office.

"There is an opening in the wall under the window...which causes the air from outside to rush in," he wrote in an email to BCC administration dated October 17, 2017. "My hands and feet are getting very cold as I am typing this email."

Since that email, the problem persisted.

On February 14, BCC President Thomas Isekenegbe held a campus-wide town hall meeting. Isekenegbe acknowledged that the situation was not ideal and recognized faculty and staff's frustration and anger. He asked everyone to work through the crisis.

"We all need to come together as a community to solve the problem," Isekenegbe told faculty and staff who came to the town hall. "Let's try to frame it in a conversation that is *not* administration versus faculty. Because at the end of the day, folks, it's Bronx Community College."

At the town hall meeting and in campus-wide emails, BCC administration repeatedly laid the blame for the catastrophe on outside forces.

It was "a challenge resulting from the weather," one email said. "There was a power-surge failure in the building," President Isekenegbe said during the town hall. "A brand-new system would have broken too," said Kay Ellis, the vice president of administration and finance, during the town hall.

The administration failed to mention that proper dampers would have prevented cold air from coming in and freezing the water in the coils. The cost of repairs to Colston will come out of CUNY's capital budget – and not through the college's operating budget – because CUNY declared the incident an emergency, President Isekenegbe said. But later the college said that CUNY Central

provided emergency funding, and the outstanding costs would be the responsibility of BCC.

At the February 14 town hall, the president reported that light, heat and the communications network, including the phone and computer system, were restored, and the damaged coils in the heating units had been fixed. But the building was still closed. Ten rooms were sealed off for asbestos abatement, and nearly 50 rooms either needed

some retiling and/or new flooring. By March 5, most classes were back at Colston, but much of the second and third floor was closed off due to asbestos abatement. Faculty from the history and the social sciences departments have expressed concern about returning to their offices on the third floor in Colston until PSC external evaluators sign off on its health and safety. There are no specifics on how to dispose of things properly, especially water-damaged items, faculty said, and the details of the college's cleanup process have not been explained.

During the town hall meeting, BCC administration confidently asserted there was "no mold," but agreed when Utakis pressed the chapter's demand to bring in a nationally recognized mold consultant that the PSC would pay for to evaluate the damaged areas in the building.

Two weeks later, union representatives along with administrators and the outside inspector, Microecologies, conducted a limited walk-through and were able to inspect only eight of the more than two dozen rooms where ruptures in ventilation coils occurred.

## PSC PRESSURE

In half of the rooms observed, they discovered "minor levels of

visible mold growth" or "discoloration" that could suggest mold. Upon receiving the findings, the administration immediately "cleaned and sanitized" the areas, and inspected other areas, but chose not to follow the evaluator's recommendation of replacing the drywall in the inspected rooms and the rooms below them.

"My conclusion is that [the college let us conduct] the walk-through only for show," Utakis wrote in an email to her chapter. "Indoor air quality regulations and regulations concerning mold are not very strict. CUNY seems to be doing only the minimum necessary to stay in compliance with these regulations."

## OUTDATED BUILDINGS

The PSC plans to press forward to ensure that the safety of BCC faculty, staff and students is not compromised, and that proactive, rather than reactive, measures are taken to repair the building.

On March 14, the union conducted another walk-through with the administration, evaluating rooms that were marked off for asbestos abatement and rooms with significant water damage. In some of the rooms severely impacted by the flood, the college agreed to inspect for mold in drywall by removing it and also examining the area behind and on the back of it.

Jean Grassman, co-chair of PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs, attended both walk-throughs. Mold could be hiding behind soaked drywall, impossible to see with painted drywall, or developing in porous materials that remained wet after the flood, explained Grassman.

"We'd like to see the drywall replaced as recommended. Since that is not being considered, it's essential to conduct monitoring for airborne mold," Grassman told *Clarion*. "If that isn't done, we're flying blind in terms of mold hazard."

Utakis said that Howard Apsan, university director of environmental health, safety and risk management, said they would not test the air because the state does not recommend it.

In the past 10 years, CUNY has spent \$140 million in capital funding to upgrade BCC's infrastructure, according to the BCC president. Because there are outdated systems campus-wide, he said that infrastructure upgrades are prioritized: first electrical systems and then the heating and cooling systems. (These projects are part of CUNY's capital budget request.)

Meanwhile, faculty, staff and students work and learn in outdated buildings and adapt as best they can. The PSC continues to demand adequate operating and capital budget funding for CUNY so that faculty, staff and students do not work and learn in conditions that are disasters waiting to happen.

"It's only a matter of time in another building," Wolf told BCC President Isekenegbe in the town hall meeting. "You said next time we'll be better prepared. I hope the attitude is that there won't be a next time."

Dave Sanders

# Getting the next three-year appointment

By CLARION STAFF

## Steps to take to prepare ahead of time

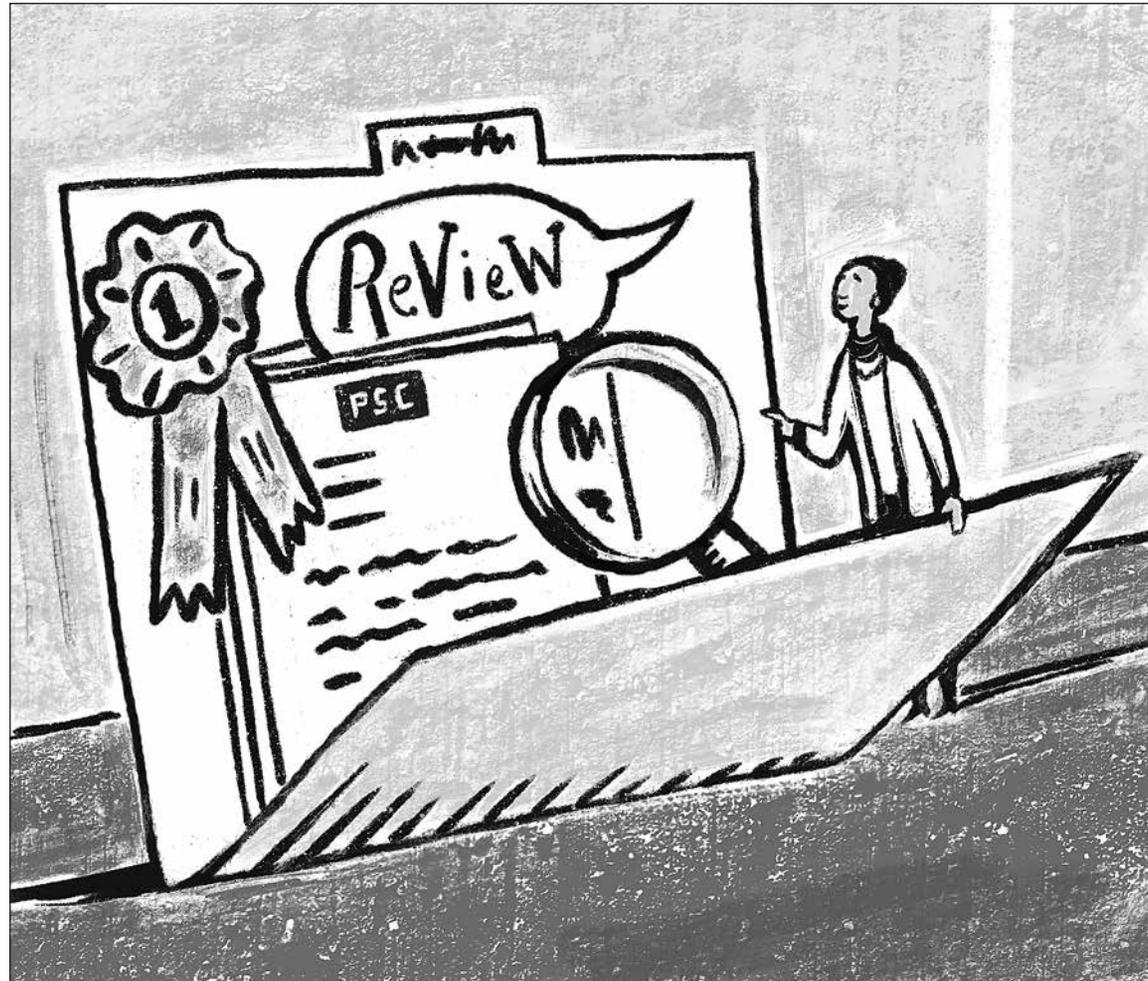
One of the most dramatic changes negotiated in the recent contract is the introduction of a pilot program of multiyear appointments for adjuncts who have taught consistently in a single department. The contract provision seeks to professionalize the treatment of part-time faculty and stabilize their employment, benefiting both adjuncts and students.

More than 2,200 teaching adjuncts CUNY-wide are currently on three-year appointments. The first cohort of adjuncts who received these three-year appointments (about 1,500) in Fall 2017 will be up for renewal of their three-year appointments in Fall 2020. (Over 400 eligible adjuncts voluntarily sought two-year appointments starting Fall 2016 and were considered for three-year appointments during Spring 2018; most received them.)

### COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS

Consideration for reappointment to a new three-year appointment is mandatory and subject to a “comprehensive review” of performance by the adjunct’s respective department, as well as “fiscal and programmatic needs of the department and/or the college.” Consistent with contract language, an adjunct not reappointed to a three-year appointment will receive no other appointment in that department unless that other appointment is a three-year appointment.

Adjunct counselors in the union’s Contract Administration Department have been working with adjuncts on multiyear appointments for the past two and a half years and have some suggestions about how best to prepare for their departments’ “comprehensive reviews” in order to secure another three-year appointment. Leading up to the review, it is important that your



Jud Gutreau

personnel file contain a positive record of your accomplishments in the department.

Recommended best practices include:

### 1. CHECK YOUR PERSONNEL FILE – FIND OUT WHAT’S IN IT!

When the departmental Personnel & Budget (P&B) committee, charged with making personnel decisions, conducts its comprehensive review,

that is the file they will examine. If you find anything that raises questions or concerns, contact an adjunct counselor at PSC.

### 2. REQUEST A CLASS OBSERVATION.

Because adjuncts on three-year appointments have been working for more than 10 semesters, the department is not contractually obliged to assign a faculty member to observe

your class, but you should ask for an observation, particularly if there is no record of prior observations in your personnel file, or the observations are not recent. The observation should be conducted by a faculty member designated by the departmental P&B who will observe one class session for 50 minutes. The department must give the adjunct 24 hours’ notice of the observation. The observing faculty member takes notes on the class and prepares a written report for the department chair. A post-observation meeting will be held with the chair, the employee and the observer to discuss the observation and findings within two weeks after the chair has received the observation report. A written record of the meeting and the original observation report, initialed by the adjunct – signifying that s/he has seen them – go into the adjunct’s personnel file.

### 3. REQUEST AN ANNUAL EVALUATION.

An evaluation of an adjunct is performed by the department chair or a designated member of the departmental P&B committee. It is a one-on-one conference and is an evaluation of the adjunct’s total academic performance, which gives the department chair (or representative) the chance to consider all of the adjunct’s work beyond teaching, such as publications, research, awards, conferences, contributions to student life on campus and progress to date. Concerns that the

department may have that are not related to the observation should be discussed at this meeting.

PSC adjunct counselors said observations are essential to reappointment and scheduling one should be a priority for adjuncts with three-year appointments. They also said that annual evaluations should be seen as a collegial experience rather than a potentially adversarial one to help adjuncts build a positive record. A positive evaluation also gives an adjunct something to rely on for an appeal if she or he is denied a three-year appointment. (Full-timers, they said, should also see the evaluations not as a burden, but as a chance to build solidarity, friendship and collegiality between full-timers and adjuncts.)

### REVIEW YOUR FILE

Under the contract, a written report of the evaluation meeting must be prepared and shown to the employee who initials it to signify that s/he has seen it. It is then placed in the adjunct’s personnel file. If the overall evaluation is unsatisfactory, the employee has the right to request to appear in person before the department P&B.

Starting this semester, adjuncts should review their personnel file and ensure that written reports of class observations and evaluations are there, as these will be important for the department’s comprehensive performance review. If problems are identified, it is better to know about them now, make an effort to correct them and ask for another observation/evaluation in the fall. Also, be sure your personnel file contains any academic awards or honors you have received (particularly in recent years), articles, research reports, accolades from students and colleagues, as well as acknowledgments of college service.

### CHECK TIMELINES

Depending on the college, adjuncts should check with their department, the provost’s office or with human resources to ensure that they are on the list for observation and evaluation. PSC adjunct counselors say it is important for adjuncts to get a sense of the timelines for notification of eligibility and observation so that these things happen in a timely manner, and that adjuncts should be cognizant of the other time and work demands of their chair.

If you have questions, call the PSC (212-354-1252) and ask to speak to an adjunct counselor. The fiscal pressure on colleges and departments is great, and adjuncts may be eliminated because of curriculum changes. Curricular issues are not covered by the contract, but the counselors are experienced in assisting adjuncts in navigating some of these challenges effectively. Do not be hesitant about asking questions; your continued employment at CUNY is a concern the union shares with you.

## Your personnel file

By CLARION STAFF

The PSC-CUNY contract (Article 19) provides for two types of personnel files for CUNY faculty and staff: a “personal” file and an “administration” file. The administration file is confidential, but you have the right to examine your personal file upon request. The PSC recommends that every employee – full- and part-time instructional staff, HEOs and CLTs – review and initial their personal file at least once a year to verify its accuracy.

Your personal file is the representation of your work and professional history at CUNY and is a record of all your contributions to your profession – you can and should submit documentation of your accomplishments to your file.

What materials go into my personal personnel file?

Annual evaluations, peer observations and student evaluations; mid-tenure reviews; curriculum vitae; reappointment letters. Also included are documents demonstrating scholarly work: agendas of conferences, publication offprints, articles submitted for publication or at press, etc. It should also have documents demonstrating service such as thank-you letters.

What materials should not be in my personal personnel file?

No document may be placed in your personal personnel file until you have been provided an opportunity to read its contents and attach any comments you desire. Initialing the document does not indicate that the employee approves or agrees with the contents of the document, simply that you have seen it. If the employee refuses to initial any document after having

had the opportunity to read it, a statement to that effect may be put on the document before it is placed in the personal file.

How do I add documents to my personal personnel file?

Submit a copy via email to the person responsible for file maintenance. Keep the original in a file at home. You may want to respond to any negative documents that are to be placed in the file. Before responding to a negative document, such as an unsatisfactory annual evaluation, you should consult with a PSC grievance counselor.

What do I do if I find something in my personal personnel file that I have not already seen?

If you discover documents in your file that were placed there without your knowledge, request a copy of the document, make a note of the date and time discovered and contact a grievance counselor immediately. You have 30 working days to grieve.

# The political struggle continues

By ARI PAUL

As this newspaper went to press, the state government was concluding final negotiations to produce its spending plan for next year. Both the Assembly and Senate, now led by a Democratic majority, included modest increases for CUNY in their “one-house” bills that positioned them for final negotiations with Governor Cuomo. These increases included operating funding for the “TAP Gap,” which cuts financial aid revenue available to CUNY by \$74 million this year. However, at press time, it appeared that Governor Cuomo’s resistance to raising taxes and general concern about the federal tax cuts on state tax revenues will limit increased spending for services across the board – including for CUNY. If this proves to be the case, the PSC will continue to press for funding from New York City and other sources to fund the next PSC contract or address the systematic and historic underfunding of CUNY by the state.

## FUNDING NEEDS

The budget deal comes after a serious lobbying campaign by the PSC. While the immediate focus of PSC lobbying efforts is the next contract, the union’s effort is part of a broader, long-term campaign to increase revenue from the state for public higher education. Increased revenue would enable CUNY to address college funding deficits, full-time salary needs and the wages and working conditions of part-time adjunct faculty. The state has a long-term obligation, the union argues, to ensure the viability of CUNY as both a research and teaching university. As a national leader in enabling students to move out of poverty, CUNY is essential to the state’s economic future. But it should also be supported as a major employer, which should offer secure jobs and good pay. Given the current level of adjunctification of CUNY’s teaching faculty, the state’s current funding model hardly lives up to that ideal.

PSC’s argument for increased funding for CUNY has several components:

## Reframing the Albany debate about CUNY



John Liu (center), chair of the State Senate New York City Education committee, speaks with PSC members during the union's Albany lobby day.

- Funding to cover the “TAP Gap,” which requires CUNY to fund all or part of the difference between students’ TAP awards and tuition at senior colleges. This amounts to a revenue loss of \$74 million this year, and will grow to \$86 million next year;
- Wage equity for teaching adjuncts – an increase to \$7,000 per course to establish fair pay;
- New full-time faculty lines and additional lines for advisors and counselors;
- Funds to address mandatory operating cost increases and adequate capital investment to cover critical building maintenance and new facilities.

On February 12, 55 PSC members – full-time and adjunct faculty, HEOs and CLTS – traveled from New York City to Albany to meet with state lawmakers and their staffs to press the need for funding for public higher education, hammering home that CUNY cannot continue to be financed through tuition increases and a growing dependence on low-paid adjuncts to teach a majority of courses. A smaller group participated in the NYSUT Committee of 100 in early March.

At home in New York City during March, the union and campus chapters organized 13 in-district meetings in local offices with state lawmakers or their staffs. Members testified at borough-wide “budget townhall” meetings in Manhattan and Queens. PSC leaders from the three Bronx campuses – Lehman College, Bronx Community College and Hostos Community College – held a press

conference on March 22 demanding that Bronx lawmakers work to increase funding for CUNY citing the benefits the university provides for the borough. Toby Ann Stavisky, the State Senate Higher Education Chair, addressed questions from faculty and staff during a meeting at Queens College, which is in her district.

“In each meeting, we explained how years of inadequate funding from New York State have put CUNY in a state of perpetual crisis: too few full-time faculty positions, too much reliance on a model of low-paid contingent labor that is bad for educators and students alike, overburdened professional staff, strained services, crumbling buildings,” said Geoff Kurtz, a political scientist and the PSC chap-

ter chair at Borough of Manhattan Community College, on his experience on lobby day. “We pointed out that CUNY needs a massive increase in state aid to senior colleges [and] a lift in per-student aid to community colleges. It’s a tough ask,” Kurtz said, noting that lawmakers, even if sympathetic to the PSC’s demands, are still wary about confronting the prickly and reputedly vindictive Cuomo. But he noted two insights from lobbying that surprised him.

“First, everyone we spoke with knew that CUNY is an important public good, that CUNY needs public support and that the PSC is the crucial voice for CUNY in New York politics. The details we conveyed – the urgency of raising adjunct pay,

especially – were new to some. But years of PSC advocacy have raised awareness of the situation at CUNY and have put the PSC itself on the political map,” Kurtz said. “Second, although they saw the PSC’s aims as ambitious – no one we spoke with thought that we were making a mistake by pushing harder than ever for increased CUNY funding this year. There’s a new Democratic/Working Families majority in the New York Senate. A door has opened: changes that would surely have been blocked in recent years now stand a chance of enactment.”

## RECEPTIVE LAWMAKERS

Rebecca Smart, an adjunct instructor in psychology at Baruch College and at Borough of Manhattan Community College, attended the lobby day. She said all of the lawmakers she met with, both in Albany and at in-district meetings – including State Senators Andrew Gounardes of Brooklyn, Julia Salazar of Brooklyn and Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou, whose district includes BMCC – agreed with the PSC’s demands, but they noted that it was going to be an uphill negotiation with the governor.

Smart noted that many lawmakers had been aware of CUNY’s low pay for adjuncts and the need bring adjunct salaries in line with salaries at peer institutions, but that it was “good to reiterate it” and that lawmakers were moved by adjuncts’ personal testimonies of struggle with poverty wages.

In the fight for a good contract, the next steps for the union go beyond state lawmakers – the union is pressuring the mayor, governor and the CUNY administration to come to a contract agreement that grants raises for all, addresses equity needs and non-economic needs, and lifts adjuncts out of poverty wages. But the direct campaign toward lawmakers will continue for the long haul. Activists have said that they are looking to propose new revenue generating new taxes on the wealthy or a stock buyback tax to fund critical public goods like CUNY.

## Pushing for more state funding for CUNY



Toby Ann Stavisky (right), chair of the State Senate Higher Education committee, spoke to PSC members at Queens College. At left is interim Queens College PSC Chapter Chair Ted Kesler.



Julia Salazar  
@JuliaCarmel\_

CUNY changes lives, and dedicated adjunct faculty are the people who make CUNY a world-class institution. But these instructors aren't being paid a living wage.

Join me in demanding that:

★ We increase CUNY's funding in the State budget

★ CUNY pay adjunct faculty \$7K+ per course

11:46 AM · Mar 5, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Many lawmakers, like State Senator Julia Salazar, have indicated their support.

# At BMCC, 9/11 illness still looms large

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Yvonne Phang, a professor of accounting at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), taught five classes in the Fall semester of 2001. So in the weeks and months after the World Trade Center terrorist attacks, she was at BMCC a lot – teaching students, preparing classes and breathing in the “acrid” air that made her throat burn. The college resumed classes in October.

In the days after the terrorist attacks, federal officials said the air was safe to breathe, even though it smelled anything but clean. Sixteen years later, in October 2017, Phang was diagnosed with breast cancer. At the time, she didn’t make the connection that her cancer could have been caused by breathing in the toxic dust.

## FEDERAL PROGRAMS

“It was so long ago,” Phang told *Clarion*. But when a friend told her to look into the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund (VCF), she began to investigate. Eventually, after talking to a lawyer, she went through the bureaucratic maze of registering. (In order to file a claim with the VCF, she needed to first apply to the WTC Health Program.)

“It’s kind of sad that I had to hear about [the VCF] through a radio advertisement indirectly through a friend, and that the college didn’t take responsibility to tell people about it,” Phang said.

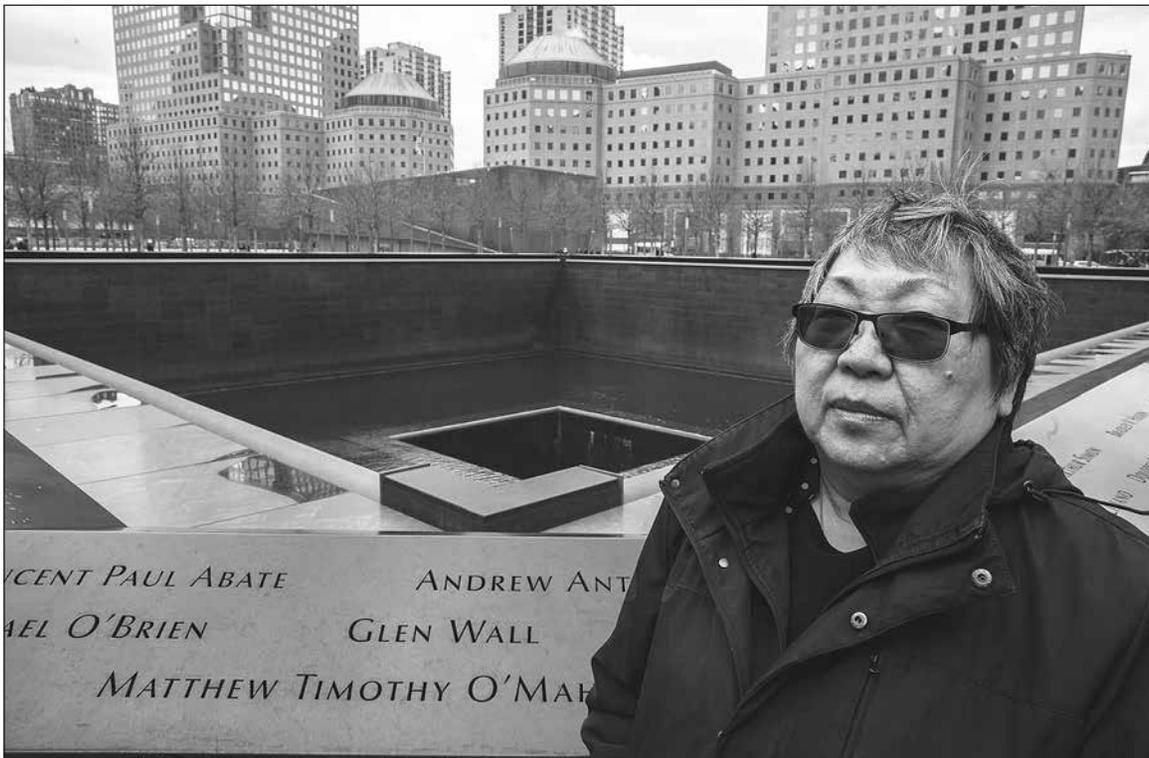
BMCC was directly affected by the terrorist attacks. The college’s Fiterman Hall was destroyed when a building in the World Trade Center complex fell on the hall’s south wall. The college’s main building on Chambers Street is about a half-mile north of where the towers fell. Those who were at BMCC at the time and who continue to work at the college have expressed frustration over the college’s lack of programs or outreach for people suffering from 9/11-related illnesses.

“People are not well. It’s the BMCC community,” said Olivia Cousins, a professor in health education at BMCC. In the summer of 2002 Cousins developed gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and she also has difficulty breathing and post-traumatic stress disorder. “They need to know from BMCC that this registry exists and BMCC needs to tell them, ‘Just sign up.’”

## LIMITED BMCC OUTREACH

Both Phang and Cousins, at the time of their interviews, did not recall the college doing any outreach to let the BMCC community know about 9/11 programs that they and others could qualify for, and they were right. The BMCC Human Resources department had not done any outreach in the 17 years after the terrorist attacks, but at the end of March of this year, the college for

## Survivors continue to seek compensation



Yvonne Phang, a BMCC faculty member, developed a 9/11-related illness, and found out through a friend – not through the college – that she could apply for health coverage and compensation.

the first time sent out an informational email to current BMCC faculty and staff. As a result, nearly a dozen people from BMCC contacted one Manhattan law firm representing people with 9/11-related illnesses. The college also plans on mailing former students who were studying at the college during the 2001-2002 academic year. That mailing is expected to be completed by the summer of 2020, just months before the current December 18, 2020, deadline to register a claim with the VCF.

Phang applied for the WTC Health Program in August 2018 and only recently got certified. It will take another year or so for her to find out what kind of claim for financial compensation she will get from the Victim Compensation Fund. Her claim could be drastically lower than what she expected when she registered. Because of dwindling finances, the Victim Compensation Fund recently announced that pending claims would be paid at 50 percent of their prior value; claims received after February 1 of this year will be paid at 30 percent. Only about \$2.3 billion remains in the VCF, which originally started with \$7.3 billion – with thousands of unpaid claims still to address. The fund, if no Congressional action is taken, is set to expire near the end of 2020. People diagnosed with a 9/11-related illness will be left with limited compensation.

For many health and safety advocates, the cutoff date for VCF claims seems arbitrary.

“Cancer certainly won’t stop afflicting the 9/11 community any time soon, and especially not on its current expiration date of December

18, 2020,” said Michael Barasch, an attorney with Barasch, McGarry, Salzman and Penson, one of the law firms representing people suffering from 9/11-related illnesses, including BMCC faculty and staff, like Phang and Cousins, who have developed 9/11-related illnesses. “It would be a gross injustice to treat people in the 9/11 community differently and award less compensation based on the random date of their cancer diagnosis,” said Barasch.

Under the Zadroga Act, the federal legislation that authorized the

VCF and the WTC Health Program, people diagnosed now and in the future with a 9/11-related illness will be treated and monitored in the WTC Health Program at no cost to them until 2090. Phang will be monitored and treated through the WTC Health Program.

## NEEDED COMPENSATION

For Phang, whose cancer nearly forced her into early retirement, VCF compensation and other benefits mattered greatly. When she was diagnosed with cancer, she had

exhausted her sick leave because of recent surgeries. Out of money and denied an emergency loan, she could not afford to be off the CUNY payroll and on disability. That’s when she thought that she might have to go into early retirement and dip into her savings. Through the Catastrophic Sick Leave Bank Program, a PSC benefit, she was able to get sick leave that was donated by her colleagues while she was treated for her cancer. However, she knows that not everyone is that lucky.

## TIP OF THE ICEBERG

“[BMCC] was within the dust cloud area and was completely contaminated with dust and debris of over 100 different WTC contaminants,” Liam Lynch, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health’s program coordinator for the WTC Health Program, told *Clarion*. Lynch said that many diseases will take years to manifest. “More conditions will bloom in the coming years. We’re seeing the tip of the iceberg, and it’s going to get a lot worse.”

Asthma, acid reflux and cancer are some top certified conditions in the WTC Health Program, he said.

Advocates for the extension of the VCF have been lobbying federal lawmakers for a new bill that would fully fund and extend the VCF.

“Peoples’ eyes are running. People are starting to have splotches on their faces. People aren’t well,” said Cousins. “There’s still time to get on the [WTC Health] registry.”

For information about the WTC Health Program and the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, go to the websites [www.cdc.gov/wtc](http://www.cdc.gov/wtc) and [www.vcf.gov](http://www.vcf.gov).

## In solidarity with New York nurses



PSC Secretary Sharon Persinger spoke at a New York State Nurses Association rally at Mount Sinai Hospital on March 18. The union authorized a strike at several New York City hospitals. Nurses are demanding increased staffing to serve patient needs.

# Five questions for Arthur 'Ben' Chitty

BY CLARION STAFF

## An activist reflects on decades of resistance

Arthur Chitty, sometimes known as Ben Chitty, a higher education associate in the Queens College Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library, is known as the go-to person when it comes to health and safety activism on campus. In 2011 he was awarded an "Unsung Hero" award from the PSC's statewide affiliate, the New York State United Teachers for "his work in creating and maintaining an ongoing Quality of Work Life group at Queens with representatives from all unions on the campus."

While officially a member of the union's HEO chapter, he is the ad hoc representative for health and safety at Queens, known for championing the concerns of everyone from PSC faculty members to custodial assistants in DC37.

But that is far from his whole story. He served in the US Navy during the Vietnam War, and returned to participate in the Winter Soldier Investigation into war crimes committed by the US military and its allies in Southeast Asia. Chitty is also a medieval literature scholar but turned his focus elsewhere and became the coauthor of an influential book about the American labor movement.

In part of an ongoing series of interviews with PSC activists, *Clarion* spoke to Chitty about his life and advocacy work.

*Clarion: Tell us about your journey from studying medieval literature to writing about the American labor movement.*

Chitty: The path was torturous. I went into medieval studies in college, mostly from dismay with how events were going in the US and in the world; I thought I might learn how this happened if I went far enough back in history to study pre-capitalist society. But I ended up abandoning medieval literature for two reasons: the prospects for academic employment in the mid-1970s were pretty grim, and I thought that studying medieval texts was pretty close to impossible without access to the documents themselves.

Writing about the American labor movement was not really my choice: my wife studied labor history in graduate school and had just published her dissertation; the general history of labor in the US had been published in the late 1960s. Her dissertation director was invited to write a new general history; he suggested that she write it, and she asked me to help her. The result was *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, cowritten with Priscilla Murolo and with illustrations by Joe Sacco.

*You served in Vietnam. How did you end up serving, and what motivated you to later oppose the war?*

Like every boy my age, I expected to be drafted. I enlisted instead in



Arthur Chitty, a Queens College library HEO, is known locally as a fierce advocate for campus health and safety. But the road that got him here brought him through scholarship as well as fighting in the Vietnam War, which he would later oppose.

the Navy, which was something of a family tradition. I did not expect to go to Vietnam, but by the time I finished advanced training (in electronics), pretty much everyone went. We were sent off to defend democracy and fight communism, and in my first deployment (1966-7), I thought we were winning. By my second deployment in 1968, it was a different war. The Tet Offensive had pretty much proved that the US was not going to win, and the assassinations first of Dr. King and then of Robert Kennedy showed that whatever was wrong with the war was also wrong with the country.

While I was home on terminal leave awaiting discharge in August 1969, I went to check out the local American Legion Hall. I recognized the guy behind the bar – an older Navy vet – and asked for a beer. He didn't recognize me but said, "I can't serve you, you're not a veteran." I replied, "Well, actually I am." He half-smiled and said, "Yeah, what war?" "Vietnam," I replied. "Well," he said, "you lost your war, didn't you, boy?" And he was a patriot. In fact the only contemporary photographic evidence known to me of someone actually spitting on a Vietnam veteran is from the 1970 Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) march to Valley Forge. The spitter wore a VFW garrison cap. He must have been a patriot, too.

I became active in the anti-war movement as soon as I enrolled in college, right after I was dis-

charged. I joined VVAW and counseled young men about getting out of the draft. I thought that while this might not shorten the war, it would certainly at least keep some people from going into it.

*When you came to CUNY, what inspired you to become active in the PSC?*

I was first hired at Queens College in 1984 as an assistant pro-

fessor in the library. Because I had come from a job where I had been president of an AFSCME local, the PSC chapter recruited me to start training as a grievance counselor. But, after a year or so, I moved to an HEO line, and, since there wasn't much local union activity among HEOs, I stopped working with the union. The next time I paid much attention to the union was when I went to a HEO

chapter meeting for the first time, after CUNY's declaration of fiscal exigency in 1994-5.

Then PSC President Irwin Polishook came to the meeting to tell us that he would not oppose HEO layoffs because the union had to focus on defending tenured professors, its core constituency. That squelched any interest I had in the union. I later looked for ways to get involved again. I volunteered to go onto the Welfare Fund Advisory Council and to work on health and safety issues as a PSC watchdog.

*What are some of the health and safety issues you have worked on at Queens?*

The first big issue for the joint committee was mold remediation, and, because of frequent leaks, mold remains a perennial problem. Asbestos abatement, toxic chemical releases, Legionella in cooling tower water, inadequate lighting, buckled sidewalks – a nearly endless list of problems common to most large institutions of a certain age. Many health and safety problems can be traced back to inadequate maintenance and to poor or corrupt supervision of construction and renovation projects. Perhaps the most common and difficult issues have to do with ventilation.

*With all that in mind, what do you see as a path forward for organized labor in the age of Trump and Janus?*

Public employee unions have to assert themselves as proponents of the common good. Organized labor has to cultivate grassroots activism and practice militant solidarity.

## Matos Rodríguez confirmed

Continued from page 4

attrition, causing low morale. *Clarion* reported in 2016 that at Queens College 56 full-time faculty lines had been lost over the course of five years through attrition. The hardest hit departments were sociology, English, chemistry/biochemistry, history and philosophy.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONCERNS

Union officials did note the novelty of having a chancellor with experience running a CUNY two-year institution. "He is an interesting choice because he has held a range of high-level positions in CUNY, including being president of Hostos Community College," said Lorraine Cohen, the PSC vice president for community colleges.

"The community colleges face real challenges in terms of lack of funding. There are serious physical problems and the ratio of part-time to full-time faculty is very high at the community colleges, since we

teach many introductory-level courses. These part-time faculty are underpaid and undervalued. Lack of funding leads to schemes to reduce costs of remediation, diminish student choices over courses they take, larger class sizes and inadequate counseling resources," said Cohen.

Jo-Ann Rover, an associate professor of allied health sciences at Hostos Community College and a PSC alternate delegate, called Matos Rodríguez a "sincere, considerate, extraordinary individual who I have witnessed take the time out of his daily activities to stop and acknowledge students and faculty by name."

### A CUNY ADVOCATE?

But questions remain. While he was often constrained as a campus president, will he be less so as a chancellor? Will he advocate for CUNY or will he take direction from the governor's office, which

has been hostile to public higher education? What kind of role will Thompson play? These questions loom large as the union and other advocates demand that he lead the charge in demanding more investment in CUNY from the state to fix historic underfunding of the university and address the need for across-the-board wage increases, especially lifting adjunct pay to \$7,000 per course.

Matos Rodríguez will be paid an annual salary of \$670,000, Thompson said, and he will also receive a \$7,500 monthly housing stipend, the *New York Post* reported. Matos Rodríguez, who will replace Interim Chancellor Vita Rabinowitz, said that he hopes to keep "inclusion and diversity" as a centerpiece of CUNY's administration under his watch.

"I came to Hunter in 2000, driven by CUNY's mission of access," he said. "I remain as engaged and motivated today as I was in 2000."

Dave Sanders

# Staff, faculty 'work-in' for contract

By ARI PAUL

Amy Larimer, an associate professor of dance, was working on equivalencies for transfer students. Mari Sakaji, an adjunct Japanese language instructor, was grading homework assignments. And Leslie Lieman, an education technology coordinator, was filling out a staff survey about use of official campus data.

These three PSC members at Lehman College joined nearly two dozen of their colleagues on February 13 in the lobby of the college's main administration building, Shuster Hall, in what was the first of many "work-ins," where union members at Lehman work in public spaces to make visible their labor. With campus safety officials – both in uniform and in plain clothes – looking on, the union demonstration was meant to show the administration and the public how much work CUNY faculty and staff do each and every day.

## INVISIBLE WORK

Similar actions, called "grade-ins," where faculty members grade assignments in public areas on campus, also took place at Baruch College, Bronx Community College, City College, Queens College, Brooklyn College, City Tech and Borough of Manhattan Community College.

The actions are a part of the union's escalation of the contract campaign. Far too often, members said, the faculty and staff's work goes unseen. Yes, they said, it's well known what happens in the classroom, but what's not so well known are the hours faculty and staff put in every day outside of class time – responding to emails, grading, attending meetings, etc. Work-ins such as these are meant to demystify academic labor.

"It represents what we're doing; we're not asking for something for nothing – we need the resources to do our work," said Larimer.

## Rank-and-file members work and socialize.

## A series of local campus actions in public spaces



Faculty and staff participate at a "work-in" in the lobby of Lehman College's main administration building.

Lieman, with her laptop open in Shuster Hall, while periodically communicating with fellow HEOs passing by about equipment maintenance, said, "It was unacceptable for it to take six years to reach the last contract. And now it's already one year of 'no contract.' Adjunct and full-time faculty, HEOs and CLTs work incredibly hard on behalf of our students. We deserve a contract now."

Work-ins are not a new tactic in the pedagogical labor movement. As part of the Occupy Wall Street movement, rank-and-file United Federation of Teachers members read homework assignments in Zuccotti Park to show how much work teachers do after students

leave school in the afternoon. PSC members at Brooklyn College held a grade-in late last year.

## ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

For James Davis, the PSC chapter chair at Brooklyn College who helped organize two grade-ins on that campus, one of the powers of the tactic was internal solidarity building – unlike rallies, he said, there is no speaker leading a crowd, but rather rank-and-file

members socializing and meeting each other.

"The first one we did at Brooklyn College got some coverage in a local paper, and they get picked up on social media. Of course we want that, but it's useful for people to feel empowered because they feel visible and feel seen," Davis told *Clarion*. "It appeals to different people than the noisy rally. It's a different mode of expressing militancy, just to be collectively out there, taking up

space, I think, makes an important statement and it does allow people to trade stories or turn to their neighbor and have conversations."

For Lieman, an expected rise in enrollment at the campus would mean more work for faculty and staff that should be met with wage increases. "This action is aimed at the administration, especially for adjuncts, whose salaries are simply not a living wage in New York," Lieman said. "It's about the impact of the growth in student enrollment. It's most visible impact is in the classroom, but HEOs feel the impact, too."

## ESCALATING CAMPAIGN

Both full-timers and part-timers highlighted the demand for \$7K for adjuncts, who are currently paid well below what adjuncts at peer institutions earn.

Amel Derras-Chouk, an adjunct physics instructor at Lehman and a PhD student at the Graduate Center, told *Clarion*, "It shows we care, that we're not interested in 'not working.' It's an action that's aimed at who makes the decisions at CUNY, the people who make the decision not to pay us."

Kamran Moshref, an adjunct political science instructor at Lehman and a Graduate Center student, said, "The only way to get \$7K is to organize and mobilize. It's about visibility in the workplace. For the administration, it's just a reminder that we're here. Things will probably escalate from here, each action we do is a step toward something larger and more ambitious. I hope the administration sees this as a reminder of how CUNY can't function without adjuncts."

# Rutgers faculty OK strike

## Staffing a major issue

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Nearly 5,000 full-time faculty and graduate employees may walk off their jobs if contract negotiations fail at Rutgers University, New Jersey's major public university system. This March, with 88 percent voting in the affirmative, full-time faculty and graduate employees in a Rutgers faculty union, Rutgers AAUP-AFT, voted to authorize union leaders to call a strike if necessary. It would be the first time faculty and graduate workers have gone on strike at Rutgers.

"We do not want to call a strike unless we absolutely have to," said Deepa Kumar, president of the union and an associate professor of media studies and Middle Eastern studies, in an interview with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "We are fighting to defend quality public higher education, and this is not just about the faculty and graduate students. This is about our students."

The union, which represents 4,800 full-time faculty and graduate employees at Rutgers' three campuses – New Brunswick, Camden and Newark – has been bargaining for a contract for more than a year. Their old contract expired at the end of June 2018. Adjunct faculty are also represented by the union but under a different contract.

Key issues in this round of contract talks include salary equity by gender and across the three campuses, more diversity in faculty hiring, longer contracts for non-tenure-track faculty, and better faculty-to-student ratios.

## LEGAL STRIKE

New Jersey law does not prohibit strikes or work stoppages by public employees, as the Taylor Law does in New York, but the university administration can petition state

courts to issue injunctions to end a strike, according to the union's website.

## 88 percent support strike authorization

The faculty and graduate worker union was offered a 1.5-percent per-year increase, which the union characterized as "insulting," according to NJ.com.

Rutgers University has contracts with more than 20 labor unions, and has recently reached agreements with six labor unions, which include 3-percent raises in the next three years and a 2.5-percent increase in the final year, according to a report in NorthJersey.com.

"We're hopeful in the next few weeks the [Rutgers] administration comes back with a constructive proposal," Kumar told NorthJersey.com. "If not, we will have no choice but to call a strike."

## A Half-Century of Open Admissions

CUNY Is Our Future is hosting a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Black and Puerto Rican Student strike of 1969, which forced CUNY to establish open admissions as well as ethnic studies departments.

Thursday, April 18

12:30 pm to 2 pm

Remembrance Rock

Behind the Davis Arts Center  
City College

## POLITICS

# In defense of fusion voting

By JOHN KRINSKY

The attempt by the state's Democratic Party to get rid of New York State's fusion voting system is an act of political vengeance by self-interested politicians with little interest in accountability or political principle.

Fusion voting allows parties to cross-endorse candidates from other parties. Historically, this has meant that smaller parties (the American Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, Working Families Party, the Rent Is Too Damn High Party, etc.) can put up a candidate for office on a ballot line who is also put up for office by one of the two major parties. In order to retain a ballot line for four years, the smaller party has to get at least 50,000 votes for their candidate on their ballot line. Smaller parties sometimes put up their own candidates and reach that threshold, but not all do.

## POLITICAL TARGETS

Fusion is one way, therefore, to retain a party's place in the political life of the state, take some fewer risks, but also push a candidate toward their political positions – usually somewhere close but not identical to the major party's consensus positions – as a pressure group under his watch. Candidates from major parties can benefit from fusion particularly when the minor party has strong party loyalty among its members or when it has a successful ground operation that can turn out voters on Election Day.

Rudy Giuliani might not have won his first successful bid for mayor without the Liberal Party's backing in 1993. A different kind of Republican, Fiorello La Guardia, won the mayor's race in 1934 on a fusion ticket.



Bill Lipton, New York state director of the Working Families Party, during a PSC action in December 2017.

Last week – by most accounts, with Governor Andrew Cuomo's blessing and even urging – the State Democratic Committee voted to end fusion voting in New York State. This is not likely to happen, given dissent in the ranks of the party and the requirement that it pass the state legislature. But it is clearly intended as a shot across the bow to the Working Families Party, whose endorsement in the Democratic gubernatorial primary of Cynthia Nixon – who chal-

lenged Cuomo from the left – incurred the governor's wrath.

As a party with roots in the union movement and organizations based in working-class communities of color in New York City and its surrounding suburbs, the Working Families Party focuses on electing Democrats whose platform is consistent with reducing urban inequality and exploitation, from repealing draconian drug laws to labor protections. More moderate Democrats

from rural and more affluent areas have not warmed to the Working Families' platform.

Yet, as PSC Graduate Center Chapter Chair Luke Elliott-Negri says, the reason that the Working Families Party endorses Democrats is that people running as progressive or even left Democrats have politics consistent with the WFP's, and there is no reason for the WFP to find other candidates who might split the vote and end in losing the election for progressive forces. They help "Democrats be Democrats" and distinguish themselves from Republicans.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Opponents argue the meddling of one party in another's affairs is anathema, but they also point to the idea that minor parties can get plum patronage appointments from successful candidates whose victories they help. Nobody really charges the Working Families Party with this, but opponents recall the Liberal Party's turn toward patronage, including deeply corrupt and nepotistic jobs for the party boss's family. And because minor parties can pull major ones toward ideological extremes, opponents of fusion voting blame them for political polarization.

The fusion system actually means that the internal party dynamics of both major parties are held accountable to people not tied to the party by loyalty – or patronage. Fusion voting was initially a way to fight machine politics, since machines were, and still are, rooted in a favors system based on political parties. The attack on fusion voting is an attack on political accountability: for example, the Independent Democratic Conference that blocked progressive legislation in the State Senate for years was shown the door by vigorous Working Families Party-backed challengers. An attack on fusion is, therefore, an attack on precisely those politics that have held back much more popular demands for equality – including funding CUNY – for years.

John Krinsky is an associate professor of political science at City College.

## An attack on the state's third parties

## CLIMATE ACTION

# Labor can back a Green New Deal

By NANCY ROMER

It's now well known that planet Earth must completely transition from fossil fuels to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050 and we must achieve most of that in the next 12 years or face a level of disaster unknown to our species. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Fourth National Climate Assessment and a World Bank Report on climate change all agree. The good news is that a new, energized youth movement with supporters in Congress and on the streets in every part of our nation is pushing for that transition, calling it the Green New Deal. The danger and the hope stand before us. Which one will we choose?

## GREEN NEW DEAL

Mirroring the despair and fear of the 1930s and the New Deal that transformed American life, the Green New Deal (GND) has a similar scope and purpose. As of now it is a resolution in Congress – sponsored by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey – made powerful by a movement on the ground. It proposes drafting legislation to transform our energy system to be 100 percent renewable, end-

ing the destructive fossil fuel regime. The broad-strokes plan advances a giant 10-year mobilization that changes how we fuel our economy and transforms our society.

The US Senate has blocked the bill for now, but it will be back.

The deal calls for:

- A massive growth in new and renewable technology;
- Overhaul of old infrastructure and expansion of renewable energy infrastructure;
- A jobs program that would guarantee a job to everyone who wants one;
- A just transition for workers in fossil fuel-related industries, including retraining, early retirement and new occupations;
- The right to organize and prioritize unions, with racial and gender equity in all hiring;
- Community-defined projects and strategies and participation in deciding the location of new energy and manufacturing facilities and removing toxic ones;
- Workplace health and safety;
- Overhaul of transportation, emphasizing public transportation;
- The right to clean air, water, healthy food, and many more positive features.

The Sunrise Movement, the Climate Justice Alliance and other environmental groups such as 350.org, Food & Water Watch, and the Sierra Club can be important entry points for our students (and us) to engage in the fight for their futures.

## POLITICAL ROAD MAP

And what about labor? The GND provides a general roadmap to labor prosperity, to sharply decrease poverty and provide good jobs to a wide swath of people often left behind. It enables those new jobs to be union jobs. But unions need to jump in, support the GND – even with some criticisms – lift up the rights of workers and make sure we organize.

Some unions are getting on board, but others like unions representing the 6.4 million workers in the fossil fuel and related industries are digging in their heels, protecting jobs in the very short term rather than pushing for organized labor to have as strong and united voice as possible in the conversation about how to build a longer-term, just transition for their members. Their members – and future members – will need stable, good-paying jobs in new indus-

tries, jobs with good benefits, union membership and safe working conditions.

We can protect and expand good-paying jobs within the context of the existential threat that climate change presents. Labor has the opportunity to lead again, to build hope and opportunity for the future of a healthy planet and a more just society. If labor retreats to an unimaginative, fear-driven and tragically short-sighted defense of the fossil fuel industries, labor will have missed our chance, yet again, to lead a progressive movement to transform our economy and government into one that serves the vast majority of our people instead of just those making obscene profits from the present and ultimate misery of many.

In such an outcome, we would be making our members even more dependent on dying industries that do not have working people's welfare at heart. Organizations such as the national Labor Network for Sustainability are joining with frontline communities to push for an equity-based GND.

The PSC and AFT can play a pivotal role in that effort, too.

Nancy Romer is a professor emerita of psychology at Brooklyn College. She is a member of the PSC Environmental Justice Committee.

## Saving the earth is a worker issue.



## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

### Recommitting, year-round

The far right thought that the *Janus* decision would destroy public-sector unions. Lately, to much of the right's dismay, the press has reported that in the first few months since the decision, membership numbers for public-sector unions haven't been affected. That's some good news.

But unions need to keep it up. Members can talk to their chapter chairs about new hires on campus, so the chapter can reach out to these new folks and get them signed up as full union members.

You can access the union sign-up card online at <https://psc-cuny.org/join-psc>.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY  
61 Broadway, 15th Floor  
New York, New York 10006  
Return Service Requested

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

FUNDING

# Hidden in plain sight

By BARBARA BOWEN  
PSC President

More than a month after Amazon's decision to withdraw its plan for a New York City headquarters, debate continues to rage over the willingness of State and City governments to pledge \$3 billion in public money in exchange for Amazon's promises of private economic development. But the debate also continues to be blind to a resource much closer to home. The most powerful engine of economic development for New York State is not Amazon, Google or any other corporation. It is an institution that already has deep roots in city neighborhoods and an unequalled record of advancing the poor and working class. Unlike Amazon, it is fully unionized. Better yet, it generates knowledge rather than profits. Its mission involves redistributing wealth rather than concentrating it at the top. And it will never leave New York City.

### ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

To PSC members, the identity of the resource is obvious. CUNY, with its half-million students, is responsible for enabling more people to rise out of poverty than any other university in the United States. CUNY leads the nation in fostering both individual and intergenerational economic mobility. According to economist Raj Chetty's comprehensive 2017 study of the economic benefit of attending college ("Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility"), CUNY lifts nearly six times more people from the lowest income bracket to middle-class or higher incomes than all of the Ivy League colleges plus Duke, Stanford, M.I.T. and the University of Chicago – combined.

Nearly half of CUNY undergraduates come from families whose annual income is less than \$20,000. More than 60 percent come from families with annual incomes under \$30,000. Three-quarters are black, Latino or Asian. While some CUNY students are from middle-income families, the majority live in or close to poverty. For most, CUNY is the only realistic chance of building a good life within a political system that sets them up to fail.

All of us who work at CUNY, however, know that CUNY has always been about more than expanding the economy or even changing individual lives. It is about equip-



CUNY students demanded full funding during a march across the Brooklyn Bridge in March.

ping students to think critically about the causes of inequality even as they tackle its effects in their own lives. At its best, CUNY has the potential to reimagine the economy, not just reduce its savageness. But CUNY's impact on economic mobility for both individuals and their communities is undeniable. For students who are able to stay in college and graduate, a CUNY degree has economic reverberations that are still measurable two generations later.

We are right to resist reducing CUNY to a machine for increasing the tax base, but the statistics are revealing in a debate on economic development. The Social Security Administration reports that lifetime earnings for men with bachelor's degrees are \$900,000 higher than for those with high school degrees, and earnings for women are \$630,000 higher. Last year alone CUNY graduated more than 50,000 students. Given that eight in 10 CUNY graduates are still living in New York State a decade after graduation, their income differential translates into millions of dollars of additional tax revenue every year for the city and state. It also means greater spending power in local communities, lower expenditures on social services, lower public health costs and lower expenditures on criminal justice and public assistance.

Collectively, CUNY graduates pump bil-

ions of dollars every year into the state and local economy, far more than was dreamed of by Amazon or any other corporation. Add to this the tax revenue and intellectual capital generated by CUNY's 45,000 faculty and staff, and you begin to take the measure of the university's economic contribution to New York.

Yet as we experience on a daily basis, CUNY is being systematically and deliberately starved of public funding. One result is that only a fraction of students graduate. Thus only a fraction receive the full benefit of the state and city's initial investment in their education. Just 6 percent of CUNY community college students graduate in two years, and only 26 percent of four-year college students in four years.

### PUBLIC DEFUNDING

Poverty is undoubtedly the largest reason CUNY students struggle to graduate, but the lack of investment by city and state governments is a close second. A good public college education costs money. New York has largely made the decision not to invest. And CUNY's current Board of Trustees refuses to challenge that decision.

The city's investment in CUNY has risen under Mayor de Blasio, but it still falls below the amount needed. Meanwhile Albany slashed per-student support for CUNY's

four-year colleges by nearly 20 percent between 2008 and 2018. To cover the gap, CUNY increased tuition by 46 percent over the same decade and increased its reliance on exploited adjunct labor. Full-time salaries are also far from competitive, but CUNY balances its budget on the backs of students and adjuncts.

The union's sustained pressure on the State Legislature has yielded incremental improvements and saved CUNY from the worst of budget cuts. In 2016 PSC advocacy beat back a proposed half-billion-dollar cut proposed by Governor Cuomo. But the state and city must do much more.

### FUND CUNY

Investment in CUNY is a wage justice issue and a racial justice issue. It is also a matter of economic development. The \$3 billion in tax breaks for Amazon came from a combination of city laws designed to provide huge tax breaks for businesses that locate in certain areas and discretionary funding from the state, especially through Governor Cuomo's Excelsior Jobs Program. Without changing a single law, the \$1.2 billion promised to Amazon from the Excelsior Jobs Program could be redirected to CUNY. The idea is not far-fetched. While private corporations have mixed records of delivering on promised job creation, CUNY is a proven engine of economic development, a proven creator of jobs and an essential contributor to the state's intellectual infrastructure.

No investment would repay New York more than a major investment in CUNY. The value of enabling CUNY to thrive goes well beyond dollars in the economy, but in purely economic terms it is also profound. The ASAP program at the community colleges has shown that an added investment per student in a structured and supportive program more than doubles the graduation rate. Adding \$1.2 billion to CUNY's budget would virtually guarantee that the graduation rate throughout the university would double. CUNY students would be able to take the classes they seek and get the advising they need. Part-time faculty would receive equal pay for equal work. Full-time faculty would have time to support every student in the class. College libraries would begin to restock their shelves. Labs would have equipment for every student in a class. Tuition would stop rising and even begin to fall to levels affordable for working-class students.

Governor Cuomo loves to enjoin us to think big about spending billions on airports, bridges and tunnels. Both he and Mayor de Blasio urged New York to think big about committing \$3 billion to Amazon. And all the time they were missing the economic powerhouse hidden in plain sight. It is not too late for New York to think big about CUNY.

## Use New York's wealth for education.