A new biography by Brooklyn College’s Jeanne Theoharis is an antidote to common myths about the civil rights heroine, and spotlights her half-century of activism in Detroit.

BCC Associate Professor of Biology Nikki McDaniel consults with her students in an introductory anatomy and physiology class as they learn about human circulation by measuring each other’s blood pressure. The students, most of whom plan to enter allied health fields, say that lab-based learning experiences like this are an invaluable part of an introductory science class. “To get that hands-on experience puts everything together,” one student explains. Such lab sessions, however, could soon be curtailed under CUNY’s Pathways curriculum, which mandates that general education courses be limited to three hours and three credits.

As the April 1 deadline for a new State budget draws near, union activists are urging the Legislature to reverse past years of budget cuts.

If you’re working toward tenure at CUNY, you have a right to twenty-four hours of reassigned time for research, writing, or creative work.

A new biography by Brooklyn College’s Jeanne Theoharis is an antidote to common myths about the civil rights heroine, and spotlights her half-century of activism in Detroit.

The PSC announced its first wave of endorsements in the 2013 City Council elections. And the union is sponsoring a mayoral candidates’ forum on April 23.
Seattle test boycott & education's future

By JOHN TALBOTEN

After a contentious battle between Medgar Evers College faculty and CUNY administrators, three MEC professors have been tapped by their colleagues to serve on the search committee for the college’s new president.

A last-minute intervention by the CUNY Board of Trustees excluded two faculty leaders from being considered for the search committee.
The three faculty representatives chosen for the search committee are Associate Professor of Mass Communications Iola Thompson; Professor Umesh Nagarkatte, who is chair of MEC’s Mathematics Department; and Professor Skirka Audre Fadairo, chair of Computer Information Systems.

“Those are long-time members of the faculty. People know them,” said PSC Chapter Chair Clinton Crawford. “We hope they represent all of us well and make their voices heard so the right choice is made.” Though Crawford was one of the two excluded critics, he voted for all three faculty members who were eventually selected. The three faculty representatives will serve on a 15-member panel.

Thompson was the first faculty representative to elect Roberts to the search committee, at a February 11 meeting of the Medgar Evers College Council. Crawford and MEC Faculty Senate Chair Mary Thompson were the next highest vote-getters, but fell short of the number of votes required. When faculty petitioned for a second meeting of the College Council to continue the balloting, outgoing MEC President William Pollard scheduled it for Friday, February 22, over the objections of faculty leaders, who said that holding the meeting on a Friday would depress turnout.

When the Faculty Senate pressed Pollard for an explanation for his insistence that the meeting be held on a Friday, his response was short: “On advice and consultation with Medgar and CUNY’s legal counsel, the Friday day was selected as a means for giving sufficient notice to all faculty to participate in the very important activity.”

The February 22 meeting drew 23 faculty members of the Council, four more than the quorum of 29.

CUNY Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer announced that under the New York State Open Meetings Law, 29 votes, and not simply a majority of those present, would be required to elect the first two faculty representatives. After multiple rounds of voting, Cuffee had 25 votes and Crawford 23, with the next closest candidate drawing just six votes.

BOARD RESOLUTION

Turnout increased at a College Council meeting the following Wednesday, February 27 — but faculty found their choices were now circumscribed by a resolution passed two days before by CUNY’s Board of Trustees. Adding a new requirement at the last minute, the trustees decreed that one faculty representative would have to come from each of MEC’s three Schools — Liberal Arts, Science and Business. This immediately made the top two vote-getters at the last College Council meeting ineligible: like the already elected representative Iola Thompson, Faculty Senate Chair Cuffee and PSC Chapter Chair Crawford both work in MEC’s School of Liberal Arts.

“We wanted to make sure that Clinton and I would not be in the running, so they delineated who could be on the search committee in the middle of the process,” said Cuffee who decried the Board’s move as “pathetic.”

“We really needed a faculty representative that would be unique and high-handed,” Crawford told Clarion. “They wouldn’t do that elsewhere.”

The trustees’ resolution sought to influence the vote in another way as well: it empowered Chancellor Matthew Goldstein to designate the final two faculty members on the search committee if the College Council failed to do so by the end of business on February 27.

The administration of President Pollard, who came to MEC in 2009, was marked by antagonism toward faculty and staff that led to two faculty votes of no-confidence. Last November, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education warned MEC that its accreditation was at risk: two months later, Pollard announced his resignation, effective on appointment of his successor. In the wake of Pollard’s announcement, his controversial provost, William John- son, abruptly went on leave, and he, along with several other top MEC officials have been replaced by interim appointees.

In an interview with Clarion, Thompson said that she and other search committee members have received an e-mail from Goldstein stating that he wants a new president chosen by June – a timetable Thompson thinks is a mistake. “The process is too fast to find the best candidate,” she says. “It’s March already.”

CUNY education faculty meet

More than 60 faculty members from CUNY schools of education came to the CUNY Union Hall February 1 to discuss changing mandates in accreditation and teacher evaluation, workload of education faculty, and corporate-driven initiatives in public education. The meeting was the first of several planned by the newly formed PSC-CUNY Committee for the Future of Public Education; for more info contact committee member Priya Parmar (pparmar@brooklyn.cuny.edu).

As Goldstein interprets it, the concept of “value” is defined by the market. In his attempt to represent himself as the pied piper of public higher education, he is merely following in the footsteps of for-profit colleges which are undermining the role of critical thinking as a stone of higher education.

In that context, Goldstein argues that the faculty role in academic decision-making is a matter of “en- trenched interests.” He says that the faculty role may involve “shared governance” but “it’s not a matter of constitutional right.” In the Chancellor’s hierarchical mindset, a new offensive beyond Pathways is not unlikely.

The notion of a no-classroom-time model of MOOCs (massive open online courses) seems to parallel the Chancellor and he looks ready to plunge lemming-like toward an unpredicatable adoption. Lastly, he ad- vocates limiting academic integrity and autonomy in the development of a curriculum to be directed by busi- ness and commercial priorities.

But she believes that an interim president, one who already knows the school, should be appointed im- mediately to lead MEC’s effort to respond to Middle States, while a more thorough national search for a longer-term president is pursued. Otherwise, she says, “We don’t know how a president coming in on such short notice will be able to help us address this.”

HASTY

Crawford warned that CUNY con- ducted a similarly swift presidential search process in the spring of 2009 and ended up replacing retiring President Edison Jackson with Poll- ard, whose tenure has been marked by nearly constant conflict.

“They are replicating the same scenario,” Crawford warned. “And we’re going to end up in the same place if they go that way.”
The PSC is taking the case against CUNY's Pathways curriculum to the New York State Regents, warning that Pathways "reduces the academic requirements of the general education curriculum." Both the PSC and New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) urged the Regents, who oversee New York public education at all levels, to closely scrutinize Pathways and examine its damaging effect on CUNY's academic standards.

"Pathways in its current form [is] a mechanism for diluting the curriculum and shortchanging CUNY students," wrote Mike Fabricant, the union's treasurer and a professor of social research and policy at Hunter College, in a February letter to NYS Regent's Chair Merryl Tisch. Fabricant met with members of the Board of Regents in Albany in February, sparking a discussion of Pathways in the Regents' subcommittee on higher education. In that discussion, Regents questioned whether they had jurisdiction to evaluate Pathways; NYSUT and the PSC responded that they did and that fact required them to do so by State education law.

**BROAD OPPORTISION**

The union's letter emphasized the strong opposition to Pathways from faculty across CUNY, expressed in petitions, resolutions and calls for a moratorium on the Pathways process. "Colleges where governance bodies have refused to approve courses for the Pathways curriculum include Brooklyn, Baruch, Queens, BMCC, Bronx Community College and the College of Staten Island," and in late February, LaGuardia Community College joined their ranks.

In addition, statutory governance bodies at Hostos Community College, Lehman and Medgar Evers have not approved all Pathways courses that were submitted by their colleges' administrators. LaGuardia's College Senate endorsed a moratorium on Pathways decision-making at its February meeting, by a margin of more than three to one. "It had been discussed for hours at several previous Senate meetings," the chair of LaGuardia's PSC chapter, Lorraine Cohen, told union delegates on February 28. In addition to quality, "students are experiencing a strange kind of business," Cohen said. When the February vote was held, the result was 21 in favor of a moratorium, seven against and no abstentions.

**SECOND THOUGHTS**

"The Senate then refused to consider any courses or program frameworks that were developed specifically for Pathways," said Cohen.

"They simply would not consider it," she reported, to delegates' applause.

Cohen said she was encouraged that some members of the Senate who had voted against previous moratorium proposals decided to change their votes. "They came over to me and said, "You know, I thought about this. I voted against it, but then I went home and asked myself, 'How could I do that?' And they changed their votes." One-to-one conversations with Senate members bore fruit, Cohen said: "Enough people changed their votes so that we had a really solid victory."

A January 28 memo from Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Lexa Logue asserted that "the colleges have submitted" over 1,800 Pathways courses to CUNY central administration for review. Logue did not, however, repeat the claim of her December 17 letter to the Modern Language Association (MLA) that "all specific Pathways courses have been proceeding through traditional mechanisms of faculty curricular development and governance."

"If someone tells you that 1,800 courses have been legitimately approved by some form of college governance, that is a lie," Fabricant told PSC delegates on February 28. "Governance structures have repeatedly been bypassed in one form or another."

When governance bodies have declined to approve Pathways compliant courses, college administrators have forwarded Pathways Flexible Core course proposals to 8th Street on their own.

In a letter to the Regents, Fabricant detailed the harm that Pathways will inflict on general education at CUNY. "Many introductory English composition courses have lost 25% of their classroom hours," the letter notes. "The required lab elements of introductory science courses have been severed from the courses, to be taken separately, even in a different semester. Foreign language classes are [also] limited to three classroom hours,

**QUALITY EDUCATION**

"Although Pathways is described by the CUNY administration as a tool to ease student transfer, it does not address the main obstacles to student transfer cannot ensure the broad scope of learning that a general education system should require. "It actually enables students to have an extraordinarily narrow education, if they want, especially if you shop around at different colleges," he explained. "And [the School of Professional Studies has a lot of] Pathways courses online. It would not be hard, he noted, to complete the Flexible Common Core without a single class in the natural or social sciences.

"MAKES NO SENSE" To avoid duplication of courses between different areas, Grover felt that the subcommittees should have some say over the area to which a course would be assigned. "Others felt we should not second-guess the colleges, and I really understand that," he said. "But we are designing a general education system, and it has to make sense." In the end, the subcommittees were instructed that so long as a course satisfied the stated learning outcomes, it should be approved.

While Grover feels that he and his fellow subcommittee members did the best they could, he says Pathways has become a system that falls far short of a general education system should provide.

"Certainly it makes no sense to students," he told Clarion. "It makes no sense to them at all."
In February, the PSC announced its first wave of endorsements in the 2013 elections for New York City Council.

"A stronger group of pro-union, pro-CUNY council members could lead to changes to invest in the public good, protect civil rights, and demand a fair share of taxes from the rich," a union statement said. "CUNY would thrive in an environment like that. City funding could be increased to keep pace with enrollment, and our faculty and staff could be repaired and improved." (For more on PSC political strategy in 2013, see tinyurl.com/PSC-NYC-2013.)

The endorsements were made by the PSC's Executive Council, after recommendations from the union's Legislative Committee. The recommendations were based on extensive candidate interviews, which involved more than 20 PSC members in a process that began in the fall.

Many in this first group of PSC endorsements are incumbents with whom the union has worked closely; the list below highlights those who are not currently Council members. Clarion will cover other PSC endorsements, as they are made.

OPEN SEATS

Queens, Council District CD 32: Costa Constantinides (www.votecosta.com) is running for the seat previously held by Peter Vallone, Jr. A community activist and Democratic Party district leader, Constantinides teaches at Queens College as an adjunct. He attended the "PSC-CUNY 101" candidate briefing, and showed an interest in advocating for public higher education and CUNY.

Constantinides is also endorsed by the Working Families Party (WFP), Progressive Caucus Alliance, RWDSU, UFCW Local 1180 and Hotel Trades Council.

Queens, CD 24: Rory Lancman (www.rorylancman.com) resigned his Assembly seat to run for the US Congress last fall, and the PSC endorsed him in that race. Economic justice and greater resources for public education, with an emphasis on college readiness, are among the issues he is stressing in his campaign. A longtime supporter of union rights, Lancman was endorsed by the UPT, DP, CSEA, RWDSU, Local 31 IBEW, Hotel Trades Council and UFCW Local 1500.

Brooklyn, CD 36: Kirsten John Foy (www.kirstenjohnfoy.com) is running for the seat previously held by Al Vann. Foy attended Brooklyn College and is closely familiar with CUNY's needs. A former staff member to Public Advocate Bill Di Blasio, he is currently president of the Brooklyn chapter of the National Action Network and a senior advisor to Amalgamated Transit Union President Larry Handley. A Pentecostal minister, Foy was wrongly detained with Councilmember Ju maanae Williams at the Brooklyn West Indian Day Parade in September 2011. Before and after that incident, he has spoken up for reform of practices like stop-and-frisk that undermine equal treatment of all New Yorkers before the law.

INCUMBENTS

Manhattan, CD 8: Melissa Mark-Viverito (incumbent; melissafortycouncil.com) is a founding co-chair of the City Council Progressive Caucus and chair of the Council's Parks and Recreation Committee. She is endorsed by Working Families Party, 32BJ, SEIU 1199, UAW, UFT, SUSE 371 and the Freelancers Union.

Manhattan, CD 10: Ydanis Rodriguez (incumbent; ydanis.com) is a former City College student activist and public school teacher as Chair of the Council's Higher Education Committee. He has been a strong supporter of CUNY.

Bronx, CD 2: Andy King (incumbent; electandyking.com) was elected to this seat in a special election last November to replace Larry Seabrook, and the PSC endorsed him in that race. As a former member on the Council's Higher Education Committee and attended the PSC-CUNY 101 briefing in January (see February 2013 Clarion).

Queens, CD 21: Julissa Ferreras (incumbent) is a member of the Council's Progressive Caucus. Chair of the Environment Committee, he has been quietly reaching agreements, and have made some important gains, Lond on told delegates. "We negotiated the permanent extension of paid parental leave. We negotiated an agreement on increasing funds for the PSC-CUNY Research Awards. And, of course, we have been nego tiating on the very hard on adjunt health insurance." On that last point, London reported, "We are very close, and we hope to bring this to a conclusion in the next few weeks.

While negotiating on such non-salary issues, the Council also took up a number of critical new initiatives. For example, London told delegates that the PSC is also pursuing a second track: working with al lies to change the political environment that has put New York on the path of austerity. "We need to change the austerity policy framework within which these contract offers are coming out," London said.

This year's NYC elections offer a major opportunity to do so, London said: "We have the chance to elect a large number of progressive City Council members on an anti-auster ity platform. The new Council members who will speak up for the people of New York City, will speak up for our issues - and that can start to shift NYC away from the politics of austerity." "This will not be easy," he added. "We must be prepared to take on the austerity agenda. To change that, we are going to have to fight, and we're going to have to have the whole union engaged. But it can be done, with your support."
PSC calls for more State aid

To reverse years of austerity

State base aid for PTE student at CUNY's community colleges has fallen sharply, by 35% since 1990-91 and by 21% in just the last three years. The latter has meant a loss of $45 million in State support. “CUNY is unable to make up for years of State investment,” London testified. The shortfall in State support has translated into a lack of full-time faculty and reliance on exploitation of adjuncts: while CUNY's goal is to have 70% of instruction by full-time faculty members, it remains below 50% - and in fact declined from 49% to 46% over the last three years.

As State funding has been cut, the proportion of CUNY's budget that comes from student tuition has risen sharply. “Student tuition, fees and other revenue now supply 48% of CUNY senior college revenue, up from 38% in 2000-01 and 21% in 1990-91,” London pointed out. In 1990-91, he added, State funding supplied 74% of CUNY senior college revenue; now it's state dollars, only 51%.

"Turning CUNY into a privately financed institution through tuition dollars will close the door of opportunity to many New Yorkers," Lon- don said. Relying on tuition hikes to make up for decades of State disinvestment has already proven to be a failed strategy, he emphasized: students have shouldered an increasing burden, but CUNY's finances contin- ue to struggle. Many students cannot afford CUNY's current $300-a-year tuition hikes, he added. If tuition were to be raised enough to make up past cuts in State support, “the magnitude of the tuition increase that would be needed...is so great that CUNY's mission would be compromised by pricing out the City's lowest income students.”

The Tuition Assistance Program, or TAP, cannot be relied on to avoid these consequences, London said. “Tens of thousands of students are ineligible for TAP,” including most part-time students and those who are undocumented. And only half of CUNY's full-time students in 2011 qualified for TAP. The PSC strongly supports the NYS DREAM Act, he noted, which would make undocumented students eligible for TAP.

Unfair Linkage

The PSC strongly opposes Governor Cuomo’s proposed “Next Generation Job Linkage Program,” which would tie some community college funding to so-called “performance” measures and partnerships with private business. “Shifting to performance funding – with some minor ad- justments – would make undocumented students ineligible for TAP,” the PSC's CUNY budget campaign, and it would ignite the same challenges faced by community college students, and [ignores] the years of State disinvestment that have already undermined CUNY’s community colleges,” London said. (Full text of the PSC testimony is at tinyurl.com/ PSC-testimony-State-2013. You can find out more about the PSC's CUNY budget campaign, and how you can help, at tinyurl.com/ PSC-budget-FY2014. And see the top of page 12 of this Clarion for an action you can take right now.)

SUNY union agrees to 5-year deal

No raises for first three years

By PETER HOGNESS

A contract settlement between United University Professions (UUP), SUNY's union of faculty and professional staff, and New York State was announced on February 19. UUP members will vote on ratification of the tentative agreement this spring; ballots mailed out April 19 will be due back by May 13.

Covering the period from July 2, 2011, through July 1, 2016, the five-year agreement provides for no pay increases during the first three years, followed by 2% in 2014-15 and another 2% in 2015-16.

"Best Deal"

In addition, a "Deficit Reduction Plan" will reduce SUNY faculty and staff pay during the next two years. “Employees will have their salary reduced by the value of a total of nine days during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 fiscal years. Their work schedules, however, will be reduced by only two days during that time. The seven days they work without compensation will be reapaid, without interest, in the final year of the agreement.

"Times are tough for public em- ployee unions," said UUP President Phil Smith. "When the dust from the talks settles, I believe our members will see that UUP and the negotia- tions team did a good job of getting the best deal possible. Governor Cuomo hailed the agreement, saying that it “continues the State's commitment to fiscal discipline.”

Gains in the tentative agreement cited by the UUP include several service awards at certain points in an employee's career, as such as a $500 raise on receiving a permanent ap- pointment, and improvements in the grievance procedure.

SUNY employees do not receive step increases; instead, employees may receive some increments to salary at the discretion of the chan- cellor or their college president. In this proposed UUP contract, the chancellors' awards would be given equally to every member as pay in- creases in three years of the contract: $500 in 2013, $250 in 2014 and $500 in 2015. Col- lege presidents have a pool of funds for bonus payments to individuals that they select, in each of the last four years of the contract. Money for these bonuses is equal to 0.5% of annual payroll.

UUP was the last major State worker union to arrive at a settle- ment, and terms of the deal follow the same outline as contracts be- tween the State and its two largest unions, the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) and the Pub- lic Employees Federation (PEF), in 2011. Those contracts also provide for a three-year wage freeze, fol- lowed by two annual increases of 2% and for several “furlough days” for union members. Governor Cuomo had threatened that he would lay off 10,000 State workers if the conces- sionary contracts were not approved.

Angry PEF members voted down their proposed agreement the first time around, despite the layoff threats. But after falling short by a margin of 54% to 46%, the PEF settle- ment was approved by a majority of 53% to 47% - 3,500 layoff notices were sent out. But members of both unions were bitter about the outcome, saying they’d been forced to give up on so many hard-won gains in the face of layoffs.

Last year, PEF’s president lost his re-election bid, with the contract settlement a major issue. State officials had briefly threat- ened layoffs of UUP members in 2011, in the wake of the CSEA and PEF settlements. While the State has not publicly threatened UUP members' jobs since then, the Albany Times- Union reported this year that “the UUP bargaining discussion was ac- companied by layoff tensions.”

UUP members’ comments on the settlement were strongly negative on the UUP’s Facebook page, and the same was true in comments on the Times-Union’s blog on NY politics, Capitol Confidential. How- ever, there was no sign of an organ- ized “vote no” effort among union members.

Higher health costs and withheld wages

The settlement would also include higher health care costs. For example, members who must pay their health insurance premium. For employees earning more than $40,000 who will go up by two percentage points, leaving employees responsible for 12% of the premium for individual cover- age and 16% for family plan. For employees earning more than that amount, the increase is six percent- age points, for an employee share of 14% for individual coverage and 31% for family.
Taxis in the hot seat

Sometimes initiatives to fight climate change ignore potential allies in the working class, said Bhairavi Desai, director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, at a packed forum on labor and climate change at CUNY’s Murphy Institute for Work and Education in New York City.

Members of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (TWA) drive the largest cab fleet in the country, which includes 13,237 yellow cabs. Workers generally lease the vehicles and pay for their own gas. Driver income has dropped 28% over the last six years, in part, due to rising fuel prices.

So it was good news for them when, under pressure from environmentalists, New York City announced that taxi garages would have to purchase hybrids, with far higher gas mileage and lower emissions. “The difference between a gas-guzzler, like the Crown Victoria, and a hybrid is literally about $25 to $30 per shift,” Desai told a packed forum.

But taxi workers weren’t included in the debate, Desai recalled: “It never occurred to [City officials] to come to the drivers that actually operate those vehicles, pay for the fuel.” Taxi workers, she said, are also “breathing the air on the streets of the city” every day.

WHO PAYS FOR HYBRIDS?

So workers were left out of negotiations between taxi garage owners, who opposed the change because they did not want to pay for hybrids’ added cost, and City regulators. When the owners decided the concessions they had extracted were enough, they went to court and sued against the new policy, claiming the hybrids would reduce their profit.

For City officials and the media, cab drivers were not even part of the debate. If they had been, it would have strengthened the hand of both the City and the environmental movement, said Desai. “Workers could have been in the face of the environmental agenda,” she said.

In the end, the City and the garage owners cut a deal that meant cab drivers themselves would have to pay more for the hybrid vehicles. The drivers, who were least able to afford it, ended up subsidizing a much larger industry.

By JENNY BROWN

Labor’s sea change on climate

“We would make it more plausible to stabilize the climate,” said Jill Furillo of the BlueGreen Alliance, “if tar sands are in the mix, “it's essential that we take over”

After Hurricane Sandy, New York nurses not only took care of those injured in the storm, they also evacuated patients from hospitals crippled by loss of electricity, carrying critically ill patients down dark stairwells when rising floodwaters wrecked elevators and backup generators.

While the promise of “green jobs” is a big factor in labor’s greatest support for action on climate change, climate-related disasters like Sandy are now affecting their outlook, too.
Joint action on textbook costs
By faculty and students at Brooklyn College

According to a recent national survey, 76% of US college students say they sometimes skip buying textbooks because of the cost. Brooklyn College (BC) students grappling with sky-high textbook prices are trying new strategies—on a budget and with a major ally: their professors.

The hope, says Abraham Eesoe, a junior and student government president at BC’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is to enlist faculty in answering the question, “How do we get the cost of books down without impinging upon the rights of teachers and making sure the quality of the classroom doesn’t decrease?”

Part of the answer, student leaders say, can come from used books.

Moshe Nathan, the student government’s former president and a senior, lays out the math. A professor who assigned the seventh edition of the classic Quantitative Chemical Analysis, which sells for about $200, said yes when asked if the sixth edition, which can be found online for $4.99, could be used instead. Some professors use their personal websites or the BC WebCentral portal to announce, in advance, that older versions of textbooks are fine.

Other professors don’t recommend new texts at all. Joshua Fogel, a Brooklyn College professor of finance and business administration, says he stopped assigning the latest version of his core text when it climbed above $150.

“How when you’re teaching undergraduates, in particular,” says Fogel, “there’s no latest development in the field that’s going to rapidly change things.” Even if there are minor adjustments, he says, when you add up what all the students in one of his classes would spend, you pay for that additional knowledge, it totals around $3,500.

“I don’t think it’s worth it,” Fogel says.

TAKES WORK

That’s not to say, adds the business professor, that older editions won’t create additional pedagogical burdens. Faculty might need to create syllabi with references to multiple editions, or may need to update a book’s software-based exercises. For an older edition, professors might have to buy their own desk copy rather than rely upon publisher copies. “But in life,” says Fogel, “you have to make choices.”

Nationally, the cost of textbook prices has been brewing for years and has sometimes bubbled up from within the industry itself. In 2009, for example, the literary director of the Academic Press, wrote in The New York Times that costs continue to soar because of the “high, and mainly use a different account like their colleges’ e-mail systems for communication, can be found on one-on-one conversations with professors and sponsoring book fairs to spotlight cheaper options.

Student leaders and school librarians are also teaming up on a proposal for funding to encourage Brooklyn College faculty to create and disseminate open-access textbooks.

Brooklyn College librarians describe themselves as eager allies in student-driven efforts to make low and no-cost texts more accessible.

Doing so, they say, reflects librarians’ enduring roles as crafters of academic collections. Librarians will likely be the ones to maintain those new resources over the long haul.

“The neediness is desperate,” says a Brooklyn College librarian. “The lines for reserves, where students are given two hours to read or copy a book, “are out the door. They’re in the stacks and people are reading the books here in the library. In the past, we had to rely on the publishing companies to decide what’s different now that we have options. Things are a click away.”

A shared concern for keeping college affordable

Miriam Deutch, a library faculty member at Brooklyn College, and Abraham Eesoe, BC student government president.

Higher Education Opportunity Act required publishers to start telling professors what’s changed between versions. Moreover, it mandated the offering of texts unbundled from the supplemental materials, like CDs, that the US Government Accountability Office found to be a major factor in the tripling of book prices from 1986 to 2004. The bill also encourages the posting of course listings and required materials early enough that students can use them in planning their course selections. But the statute has no real enforcement provisions, and observers at Brooklyn College say that compliance is bound up with questions of academic freedom. But BC student leaders say that their focus is on a cultural shift, rather than mandates.

Publishers say that they’re doing their part to keep costs down, through e-books, black-and-white editions, stand-alone chapters and more. Still, they warn, the way textbooks are now produced can cost in the neighborhood of a million dollars per title.

CULTURAL SHIFT

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Some universities think it’s worth experimenting with other models and are asking academics to rethink how textbooks are made.

Pilot projects at SUNY and Philadelphia’s Temple University give faculty a few thousand dollars and the aid of peer reviewers, librarian-editors and graphic designers to develop “open-access textbooks” available digitally at no charge. Rice University’s OpenStax College is aimed at creating freely available textbooks for introductory science classes, and the University of Minnesota is encouraging its help to build a catalog of open-access textbooks.

The Open College Textbook Act, introduced by Sen. Dick Durbin in 2009, would have provided federal grants to faculty who write textbooks made freely available online.

The PSC and its national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, supported the bill and gave input on its design, but the measure failed to win passage (see tinyurl.com/news-4 and 10). Right now, Brooklyn College student leaders are eager to draw a critical mass of attention to a range of proposals to bring down textbook costs.

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Doing so, they say, reflects librarians’ enduring roles as crafters of academic collections. Librarians will likely be the ones to maintain those new resources over the long haul.

“The neediness is desperate,” says a Brooklyn College librarian. “The lines for reserves, where students are given two hours to read or copy a book, “are out the door. They’re in the stacks and people are reading the books here in the library. In the past, we had to rely on the publishing companies to decide what’s different now that we have options. Things are a click away.”

The guides also vary in style and tone. Some are short and to the point. Others are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them. Some are more detailed with specific examples. Others are so long that the students who could use them most are perhaps the least likely to read them.
In a “fact-finding meeting”

Avi Bornstein, a former grievance counselor at John Jay College, says it can be important to have someone taking notes who is not also being questioned. When he accompanied a member in an investigatory meeting, Bornstein said, he would raise objections whenever necessary. But the simple fact of having a union representative present, he added, can also help keep a member from getting off track.

When a union rep is present, “administrators behave themselves, and it gives members more confidence that they are not isolated,” agrees BCC Grievance Counselor Simon Davis.

Of course, many meetings with college officials have nothing to do with investigation or discipline, most are part of the normal functioning of a university. But if a meeting’s purpose turns out to be different from what you expected, or if the nature of a meeting suddenly changes, it’s important to know that you can assert your right to a union representative at any time – before the meeting, when it starts, or in the middle. It is your right, and is guaranteed by law.

In the 1975 Supreme Court case that established Weingarten rights, a cashier at the Weingarten’s grocery chain was wrongly accused of theft. She asked for a union representative to be present, but her request was denied. Her flustered response to interrogation was then used to make her look guilty, though she was later exonerated.

Investigations can be deeply upsetting for union members who find their character called into question, their careers put at risk, or their colleagues accused of wrongdoing. Investigations on issues such as sexual or racial discrimination may leave an innocent party feeling offended or embarrassed, and the impulse to argue one’s own defense can be strong. While faculty members are accustomed to arguing on their own behalf, grievance counselors say, they need to recognize that in an investigatory meeting, they are not the expert – and they should ask for a union representative to be present.

A union representative can help keep management from going on “fishing expeditions” to put the member at a disadvantage, asking inappropriate questions that go far beyond the facts of the case or the behavior regulated by CUNY policies. For example, one grievance counselor cited an administration lawyer who asked a number of off-topic, personal questions, including whether a married faculty member had ever committed adultery. No union rep was present, and notes from this conversation went into the faculty member’s file. Bornstein said that union representation can help correct course “if the conversation starts to go into people’s personal lives.”

The presence of a union representative can also help calm down members, who find their character called into question or their colleagues accused of wrongdoing. As Avi Bornstein says, “As union rights are established, we need to know and assert ours.”

“In a fact-finding meeting,” says Davis, “the union is serious, they tend to adapt a more diplomatic stance,” Davis says. “But, ‘we have to be firm and vigilant.’”

Very often, it seems they are not aware [either],” Davis adds, though he says the new administration at his college has begun to show more respect for the Weingarten rights of PSC members. “The message is starting to get through, which would be not for everyone on campus.”

At BMCC, the PSC chapter includes information on Weingarten rights in its newsletter, at least once a semester, says Grievance Counselor Charlie Post. A decade ago, the BMCC administration insisted that faculty or professional staff facing an investigatory proceeding had no right to union representation.

Our Responsibility

“We schooled them on that,” Post says. “We made it very clear that we would file grievances if they did not abide by federal law.”

While management often needs to be educated, enforcing due process starts with union members. As Avi Bornstein says, “As union members, we need to know and assert our rights. That includes directly asking for union representation in a fact-finding meeting.”

YOUR RIGHTS

By John Tarleton

If you’re asked to meet with your dean, or, God forbid, another college official, it could be for many reasons. Perhaps you’re going to be praised or honored for your work. Or maybe there’s a problem that they want you to help solve. But in some cases, it’s for a discussion where you should have a union representative at your side.

When a member of the PSC bargaining unit is called to an investigatory interview or a fact-finding meeting that it could be reasonably thought may eventually lead to disciplinary action, he or she has the right to demand and be provided with union representation. This right applies even when the member is not the subject of the investigation.

But in order to have a union representative present, you have to request it directly. Don’t expect management to inform you of these rights – it’s up to you to assert them. You can do so with confidence: management is required by law to honor this request once you make it.

Common Mistake

Unfortunately, many faculty or staff who find themselves in investigatory interviews that would warrant invoking these rights fail to do so. Instead, they try to go it alone, often to their detriment.

“If you ever get called to a meeting that you think might involve investigatory or for fact-finding, ask the purpose of the meeting and then contact the union,” says Renee Lasher, PSC Coordinator of Contract Administration.

“Faculty will do all sorts of things before they realize ‘Hey, maybe I should have my own lawyer’,” says CCNY Grievance Counselor Carla Cappetti.

Your rights to union representation in investigatory interviews are often referred to as “Weingarten Rights,” after a 1975 Supreme Court decision (Weingarten v. NLRRB) that established the principle. At CUNY, these rights are guaranteed by New York State’s public-sector labor law (known as the “Taylor Law”).

More Confidence

Having union representation is beneficial in a number of ways, according to campus grievance counselors. It allows the member to be better prepared to have some idea what to expect in an interview. In addition, management may fail to disclose the full aim of an investigation, and a union representative may be able to help a member sort out what is really going on. During questioning, an uninformed union representative cannot answer questions for the member. But the representative can advise and consult with the member, and can present objections to the meeting and to inappropriate questions. The Union’s presence can also alter the dynamic of the interview in intangible but significant ways.

The NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is back in full operation at its office on 55 Water Street in lower Manhattan, a building damaged by Superstorm Sandy.

As of February 4, the TRS Member Services Center is again open at 55 Water Street during regular business hours (8:30 am–5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, except during official New York City holidays). TRS staff are no longer stationed at the temporary walk-in facility on Court Street in Brooklyn, which was opened to provide service during the retirement office’s damage from Superstorm Sandy. TRS services are at www.trsnyc.org.

The TRS main office reopens

Former John Jay grievance counselor Avi Bornstein says a union representative can help keep management from going on “fishing expeditions.”

If you request it, representation cannot be denied.

Faculty will do all sorts of things before they realize ‘Hey, maybe I should have my own lawyer.”

FRIDAY, APRIL 12 / 6:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies presents Dupes, a 1973 movie by Egyptian director Tewfik Saleh about three Palestinian men seeking work in Kuwait. A scathing indictment of Palestinian dispossession and the corruption of Arab bureaucracies, the film was banned throughout the Arab world upon its initial release. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19 / 6:00 pm: The Women’s Committee will be showing Tami Gold’s film, Passionate Politics, about global feminist Charlotte Bunch. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

TUESDAY, APRIL 23 / 7:00–9:00 pm: PSC mayoral candidates’ forum (see page 4). At Hunter College’s Silberman School of Social Work, 2180 Third Avenue and 119th Street.

CALENDAR
Making the most of reassigned time

By JOHN TARLETON

Junior faculty scholarship

At CUNY, the union contract guarantees junior faculty 24 hours of reassigned time for scholarship and creative work. If you’re working toward tenure, it’s your right to use this time – and junior faculty have done so in a variety of ways.

Julie George took her reassigned time in small chunks, over four semesters, so she could continue teaching political science classes at Queens College while making steady progress on her book on the politics of ethnic separations in Russia and the republic of Georgia.

For Karen Strasser, being able to take a full semester off from teaching anthropology at Queens College made it much easier to finish the manuscript for her first book on how popular photography helped create a national identity in postcolonial Java.

It was incredibly helpful to be able to work on the manuscript in a sustained and intensive way for four months,” Strasser wrote via e-mail from Indonesia where she is currently doing research.

At City Tech, Huseyin Yuce says reassigned time reduced his Math Department teaching load enough during his fourth year on the tenure clock for him to publish one paper and submit another.

Yuce, George and Strasser have all received tenure and promotion to associate professor, in recent years. While they used their junior faculty reassigned time in different ways, all three scholars say they received strong support from their departments in how they chose to structure it.

“My chair was excellent,” George recalled. “She made it very clear that I could use my reassigned time in whatever way I wanted and whenever I wanted.”

But junior faculty sometimes face obstacles in using their reassigned time, and are sometimes wrongly told that it is up to administrators whether they can use it. “It’s an entitlement, not an option,” emphasizes PSC Director of Contract Enforcement Debra Bergen. “It’s important that people know what their rights are.”

The contract states clearly that junior faculty “must be granted reassigned time provided under this agreement.” In scheduling the use of this time, the contract says department chairs “should give full consideration to the wishes of the individual faculty member, the nature of the work that the individual proposes to perform during the reassigned time, and the instructional needs of the department.”

City Tech Chapter Chair Bob Carmelle emphasized to Clarion that while a junior faculty member’s choice of reassigned time “should meet the needs of the department,” it should not be expected to be scheduled “for the convenience” of the department.

Senior faculty and union activists advise junior faculty to take the initiative, and be both proactive and flexible in working out a plan with their department chair.

“It really should be a close consultation with the department chair who will hopefully be supportive though the process,” added Howard Meltzer, chair of BMCC’s Department of Music and Art.

As an example of that kind of collaboration, City Tech’s Yuce described to Clarion how his Math Department chair would ask him to take reassigned time during the spring semester when enrollment drops and fewer class sections need to be taught. Yuce said he largely accommodated this request because the momentum he built up from doing his research work during the spring on fourth order differential equations carried over into the summer months as well.

MAKING A CASE

For junior faculty, Carmelle added, it’s best to write out a detailed plan for how one intends to use her or his reassigned time and present it to the department chair. “It’s harder to argue with the written word,” Carmelle said.

Meltzer said department chairs can also help junior faculty by making sure their reassigned time is not consumed by a disproportionate share of committee work. “These are not departmental packhorses that should be loaded down with every task that tenured faculty decide they no longer want to do,” said Meltzer who received tenure in 2008.

The junior faculty reassigned time provision was first won in contract negotiations in 2002, and was expanded four years later. Why should time for research be a luxury, unattainable at CUNY? “It said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “It took a campaign by the entire membership and two contracts with incremental changes, but eventually we won both the conceptual and the material victory. CUNY faculty are entitled to time for research, just as other faculty are.”

Untenured faculty appointed as librarians are entitled to 450 clock hours of reassigned time and counselors 525 clock hours. These hours may be scheduled in one semester or one academic year or allocated as agreed upon between the faculty and the department chair during the first five years of service.

The 24 hours of junior faculty reassigned time is “a remarkable step forward,” says Julie George, and the benefits of supporting junior faculty in their use of this time is clear. “It allows you to relax and think, which is when faculty do most their productive work.”

If you have questions, talk to your campus grievance counselor, or call 212-354-1352.

NYC LABOR IN BRIEF

Sick day pay, out in the cold

New York City workers continued to press City Council Speaker Christine Quinn to allow a vote on legislation that would grant five paid sick days per year to more than a million mostly low-wage workers.

“I don’t want what happened to me to happen to any other worker,” deli worker Emilio Palaguachi said at a hearing Monday of the City Council’s Finance Committee.

In any case, the vast majority of PSC members have coverage that will be well below the threshold for these so-called “Cadillac plans.”

While these limits were proposed and debated as the ACA worked its way through Congress, a plan is currently considered to be in this high-cost category if it costs more than $2,000 annually for individual coverage or $27,500 for family coverage.

Once the amount is indexed to inflation, using the Consumer Price Index.

TAXES UNCHANGED

For CUNY employees, the amount shown in Box 12 includes the cost of your basic health insurance, prescription drug coverage and other benefits you may have through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. Since these are group plans, where premiums for some as aspects of coverage are not assessed on a strict per-capita basis, some components of this figure represent a prorated calculation rather than a precise per-person cost.

As April 15 draws nearer, you can expect to hear more discussion – and misinformation – about the health-care coverage cost figure of Box 12. One of the most important thing to remember, and to share with others, is that it doesn’t matter whether this figure is $3 or $30,000 – your taxes remain unchanged.

In case of a dispute, the Department of Labor is certain to pass.

The sick leave bill has support from 37 of 51 Council members: if it is brought to a vote it is certain to pass.

Lawsuit: Time for Sanitation Dept. to trash racism

Denouncing a “plantation mentality” at the Department of Sanitation, 11 black and Hispanic employees filed suit against the City February 12. The plaintiffs allege they have been denied promotions and forced to work in a hostile racial environment. The lawsuit charges that while 55% of street-level Sanitation workers are Hispanic, only 5% of top supervisors are people of color. “It’s about who you know and what color your skin is,” plaintiff Adriana Burgos, a veteran black employee, told the Daily News.
Restaurant workers reach out

By DANIA RAJENDRA

The restaurant industry is one of the nation’s fastest-growing, even through the current recession, and now employs over 10% of the US workforce, or more than 10 million workers in all. In her new book, Behind the Kitchen Door, Saru Jayaraman, director of the Food Labor Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley and a co-founder of ROC, examines the ugly low-wage reality that is part of our growing reliance on outside-the-home meals.

The problems Jayaraman details in her book are both unsurprising and deeply shocking—the depth of the racial discrimination and sexual harassment, the prevalence of stolen wages, the number of restaurant workers who are one or two mishaps away from homelessness. Jayaraman takes a look at the power of the employer’s lobby, the National Restaurant Association, which she calls “the other NRA.” The National Restaurant Association has worked hard and spent a lot of cash—to keep the tipped minimum wage unchanged for more than 20 years, and to block other reforms such as requiring a minimum number of paid sick days.

“There’s nobody who isn’t outraged by $2.13,” says Jayaraman. “Given that, how outrageous is it that Congress hasn’t changed the tipped minimum wage in all this time? They’re not listening to their constituents; they’re listening to big money.” While the law does require restaurant owners to cover the difference when a slow night leaves workers making less than the regular minimum wage ($7.25 an hour), this is ignored far more than it’s honored. That, Jayaraman says, is why raising the tipped minimum wage is so crucial.

LOW PAY & ABUSE

Only 1% of restaurant workers are in unions, and that, plus the low wages endemic to the industry, leaves workers vulnerable. Through her work at UC Berkeley, in her new book, and in her organizing work with ROC,Jayaraman has heard stories from workers.

“A few weeks ago, I met a worker who had worked at Olive Garden for 20 years, and developed carpal tunnel and nerve problems from carrying the trays,” Jayaraman told Clarion. “She never had a day off, because she never had paid sick days. The pain had become so bad that she could no longer feel her arm and her leg. She filed for workers’ comp, and they fired her three weeks later. She [had] opened the place, she had regulars, and they just fired her. She’s unable to move, unable to sit. What is going to happen to this woman?”

Conditions like these have prompted a rise in non-traditional organizing among food service workers. The recent one-day strike by fast-food workers in NYC is one example; ROC is one of the most developed of these organizing efforts.

The organization has a New York soul—it was created here, out of 9/11. Workers at Windows on the World, the famous restaurant at the top of the north Tower, were unionized, the sought-after jobs had low turnover, and those who made and served the food at Windows formed strong bonds. After 9/11, some surviving workers—and their now-former union—contacted Jayaraman, and together, they started Restaurant Opportunities Center New York. In 2007, ROC went national, led by Jayaraman and her co-director, Windows survivor Fekkak Mamooh.

In her book, Jayaraman tells some quintessential New York stories, sharing the experiences of Mamou, and Dina Rajendra, her co-director. “Most diners don’t know about $2.13, don’t understand that we all pay attention.” She never had a day off, because she told Clarion. In fact, years ago, Saru Jayaraman didn’t know either—the book chronicles her own trajectory from bad tipper to advocate-diner.

Diners and restaurant workers isn’t just a matter of doing something because it’s right, Jayaraman says—though that is part of it. “There are some shared interests at work, for example, on the issue of paid sick days. A ROC study of New York City’s restaurant industry found that 84% of NYC restaurant workers do not get paid sick days, and more than half of the workers interviewed reported that they had worked while sick.

COMMON GROUND

In the face of low wages and the very real threat of being fired for taking time off, even unpaid, the latter statistic is not a surprise. It also makes diners’ interest in paid sick days starkly clear. To help change such conditions, Jayaraman urges diners to make worker advocacy as regular a habit as leaving a tip. “It’s important not just to be a better tipper,” she told Clarion. “Speak up every time you eat out. I’ve found it’s easiest to do it at the end of the meal, as I’m paying the check.” She asks for the managers’ employ. She says: “I compliment the service. When I say something like, ‘I would love to see you provide paid sick days,’ I’ve found the employer responds, ‘Thank you very much.’ Doing it at the end shows your leverage as a customer.” ROC offers a consumer tool kit to help, including “tip cards” to facilitate speaking up and a ranking of restaurants’ labor practices. (Find them at roc-united.org/dinersguide)

To organize diners, ROC helped launch The Welcome Table, “a national association of people who care about the food they eat and the people who have touched it, and who want to be part of making a better food system for all.” At www.thewelcome-table.net, diners can find easy organizing tools, view short films based on the workers’ stories in Jayaraman’s book, and sign up to stay informed.

A long-time New Yorker who taught at Brooklyn College before moving to UC Berkeley, Jayaraman thinks that New Yorkers, who eat out more than residents of any other US city, have special reason to get involved. That’s even more true, she says, for CUNY faculty and staff. In her classes at Brooklyn College, she recalls, “so many of my students were restaurant workers. This is an issue that intersects so intimately with the students in the University—it’s important that we all pay attention.”

Dania Rajendra is a former associate editor of Clarion.

Clarion MARCH 2013
FROM ALABAMA TO DETROIT

Rosa Parks: a life of rebellion

I n The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Jeanne Theoharis, professor of political science at the Brooklyn College, takes a closer look at a legendary figure. The book “argues that the romanticized, children’s-book image of Rosa Parks as a meek, unassuming seamstress taking a stand for fair treatment is a distorted vision of history. The book also challenges the idea that civil rights activism is a discrete event, emphasizing that Parks was active throughout her life.”

Theoharis’s talks about the long life of Rosa Parks.

A large proportion of Parks’ personal papers have not been made available to scholars. How did that affect your work on this book?

A Parks gave a portion of her papers to Wayne State’s Reuther Library in the late 1970s but the rest of her papers have sat in a storage facility here in New York for the past five years, unseen by scholars or students. Guernsey’s Auctioneers, chartered by the Michigan Probate Court to sell Rosa Parks’ effects (her papers along with material effects such as dresses, hats, eyeglasses, her sewing basket, etc.), has not allowed any scholar to evaluate the papers in that archive. This is a significant loss, not only to my research, but to scholars and students more broadly. It’s hard to imagine acquiring a portion of Martin Luther King Jr.’s papers without a scholar asking what was there.

To work around this restriction, I secured other archives – Parks’ papers at Wayne State; the NAACP Papers at the Library of Congress; the Highlander Folk School Papers; James Haskins’ notes and research by Preston Valien, a Fisk School Papers; James Haskins’ notes and research by Preston Valien, a Fisk School Papers; and the collection of Guernsey’s Auctioneers, which offered workshops for union and community activists. Five of the pictures show Rosa Parks, who is identified as “the central figure in the agitation which resulted in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.” Over a million copies of the pamphlet were circulated by 1959. One of these photos, featuring Martin Luther King Jr. with Parks visibly at his side, was plastered on billboards throughout the South, under the screaming headline, “Martin Luther King At Communist Training School.” When John Conyers hired Parks in 1965, the office received a lot of hate mail, and threatened calls: writers warned that she “hovered with top communists,” called her a “dastardly traitor,” and told Parks and her new employer that she was not wanted in the North.

Q Your book examines gender inequalities within the civil rights movement. Do you think this is the reason that Parks’ contributions were downplayed?

A I think it’s a combination of gender, class and personality. At the first mass meeting in Montgomery, Parks does not speak – despite a standing ovation and calls for her to do so. At the 1963 March on Washington, there was very much a man沃 negotiate to the background. No women got to speak. Parks was dismayed by the treatment of women at the March. Indeed, at the National Negro Health Council over the summer, Parks and Richardson took reporters aside, telling them that the real story was Rosa Parks and they should be interviewing her. Two days later, Parks went to a hotel before the March was over – and Richardson attributes this to her outspokenness. Parks also never got to go to college, and many civil rights organizations only wanted to hire college-educated people. Finally, she was a shy person who did not seek out the limelight. With all the attention paid to her role in the Montgomery bus boycott, she actively sought to keep the spotlight off herself in the following decades.

Q Eight months after the boycott ended, they left Montgomery for Detroit, but things did not get much better. Prompted by pressure from Parks’ friends and allies, the black press eventually exposed the depth of Parks’ financial need, culminating in an appeal that included a photo of a “boycott woman,” leading civil rights groups to finally provide some assistance. Interestingly, we also haven’t grappled with how much and how long civil rights activists like Rosa Parks were red-baited and demonized, in the South and the North. In 1957 the Georgia Commission on Education published a broadside, titled Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School, filled with photos of civil rights activists who were labeled “communists,” which offered workshops for union and community activists. Five of the pictures show Rosa Parks, who is identified as “the central figure in the agitation which resulted in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.” Over a million copies of the pamphlet were circulated by 1959. One of these photos, featuring Martin Luther King Jr. with Parks visibly at his side, was plastered on billboards throughout the South, under the screaming headline, “Martin Luther King At Communist Training School.” When John Conyers hired Parks in 1965, the office received a lot of hate mail, and threatened calls: writers warned that she “hovered with top communists,” called her a “dastardly traitor,” and told Parks and her new employer that she was not wanted in the North.

A It’s a shock to learn that before your book, there was no full-length scholarly monograph on Parks, despite the many books and films about her. Was it this omission that led you to write the book?

A I found it shocking; I still do. It seemed like a tremendous oversight – and re-reflective of the very myths I critique in the book. Rosa Parks is one of the most famous Americans of the twentieth century – yet she is treated as a footnote in most political biographies, a peripheral and political figure, but as a character in a children’s book. The only book about her for adults is a Penguin Lives biography. I think people mistakenly assume we knew all there is to know about her.

As a scholar of the civil rights movement in the North, her life in Detroit was particularly compelling. While some historians have started to examine Parks’ political life after the boycott, I saw the rich story of the origins and maintenance of the Montgomery bus boycott itself, the Detroit part of her history – this half-century of activism in Motown – was completely overlooked.

Q The title of one of your chapters refers to “The Suffering of Rosa Parks” – her economic struggles, the constant hate attacks, her endurance of hardship in the wake of the bus boycott. Was it difficult to write about those years?

A Yes, this was a very painful chapter. Despite the fact that Parks has been celebrated for her courage and service, the impact her arrest had on her family and the decade of suffering that ensued is not usually part of the story. She didn’t like to talk about it – and the economic retaliation that civil rights activists faced has often gone unrecognized. Parks’ arrest has grave consequences for her family’s health and economic well-being. After her arrest, the Parks home received a steady stream of hate calls and death threats, such that her mother talked on the phone for hours to keep the line busy. Parks and her husband lost their jobs and didn’t find economic stability for nearly ten years. Even as she made fundraising appearances for the movement across the country, Parks and her family were at times nearly destitute. She developed painful stomach ulcers and a heart condition, and suffered from chronic insomnia. Her husband, Raymond, unnerve by the relentless harassment began drinking heavily and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Rosa Parks at a 1984 protest outside the South African Embassy in Washington, DC.

Q You talk about her “rebellious life.” Why has Rosa Parks so rarely been seen as a lifelong rebel and activist?

A Rosa Parks’ politics were far more expansive and progressive than most people realize. Parks began with her great-grandfather, who was a supporter of Marcus Garvey, as he sits out on their porch with his shotgun ready to protect their family from the Klan violence that had escalated after World War I. (“I wanted to see him kill a Ku Kluxer.”) Parks said years later Her adult political life begins as a newlywed with her husband Raymond Parks (who she describes as “the first real activist I ever met”), who is working to free the nine Scottboro boys.

The fable of Rosa Parks is fundamentally a Southern story – and so it becomes hard to see her as more than half of her political life fighting the racism of the Jim Crow North. In the 1960s, she is living, as she puts it, in the “heart of the ghetto” – and describes Detroit as the “promised land that wasn’t.” And so, as she had in Montgomery, she set about to challenge the racial caste system in jobs, housing, schools and policing that beset her new hometown.

Parks’ political life demonstrates the connections and overlaps activists made between the civil rights and Black Power movements. By the late 1960s, her long-standing commitments to self-defense, black history, and anti-imperialism were very much related to her anti-war leadership and economic justice intersected with the growing Black Power movement, and she took part in many events and mobilizations. At the Poor People’s March, Parks and Richardson were part of a team of people who paid a visit to support the Black Panther school in Oakland, CA. But our vision of militancy often doesn’t include preserved middle-aged women activists, and so, in many ways, Rosa Parks was hidden in plain sight during the Black Power era.

Internationalism in her vision, Parks’ vision of justice was a global one. She was an early opponent of US involvement in Vietnam. In the 1960s, she protested South Africans. In 1984, she corresponded with the National Black Labor Council that year and many other labor movements. Once she moved to Detroit, she continued this relationship with local and other grassroots labor activists – and these allies were some of her most vociferous advocates and supporters when the Parks family hit hard times, often part of the story. She didn’t like to talk about it – and the economic retaliation that civil rights activists faced has often gone unrecognized. Parks’ arrest has grave consequences for her family’s health and economic well-being. After her arrest, the Parks home received a steady stream of hate calls and death threats, such that her mother talked on the phone for hours to keep the line busy. Parks and her husband lost their jobs and didn’t find economic stability for nearly ten years. Even as she made fundraising appearances for the movement across the country, Parks and her family were at times nearly destitute. She developed painful stomach ulcers and a heart condition, and suffered from chronic insomnia. Her husband, Raymond, unnerve by the relentless harassment began drinking heavily and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Rosa Parks as a 1984 protest outside the South African Embassy in Washington, DC.

Q What was her relationship to the labor movement?

A Parks has a longstanding relationship to labor justice. In the 1940s and 1950s, she assisted her friend and fellow activist E. D. Nixon in his work with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. During the boycott, she came to Detroit on the invitation of Local 600, a militant UAW local, over the objections of President Walter Reuther. She corresponded with the National Negro Labor Council that year and many other labor movements. Once she moved to Detroit, she continued this relationship with local and other grassroots labor activists – and these allies were some of her most vociferous advocates and supporters when the Parks family hit hard times, often part of the story. She didn’t like to talk about it – and the economic retaliation that civil rights activists faced has often gone unrecognized. Parks’ arrest has grave consequences for her family’s health and economic well-being. After her arrest, the Parks home received a steady stream of hate calls and death threats, such that her mother talked on the phone for hours to keep the line busy. Parks and her husband lost their jobs and didn’t find economic stability for nearly ten years. Even as she made fundraising appearances for the movement across the country, Parks and her family were at times nearly destitute. She developed painful stomach ulcers and a heart condition, and suffered from chronic insomnia. Her husband, Raymond, unnerve by the relentless harassment began drinking heavily and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Brooklyn college prof on new biography
Governor Andrew Cuomo promised that CUNY would not be subjected to any more budget cuts after the Legislature approved in 2011 annual tuition increases of $300 per year. Now, the Governor is trying to impose a backdoor $35 million in mandatory costs for CUNY in this year’s budget. Call your legislators now and insist they restore the $35 million in mandatory costs that should be in the budget. Also, let them know that we need changes in the law to include mandatory cost increases in the definition of level funding. For more information about how to get involved in the PSC’s budget campaign, see http://psc-cuny.org/state-budget-action-2013.

By JOHN TARLETON

“What is systolic pressure? What is diastolic pressure?”

“What are Korotkoff sounds?”

“Is blood pressure higher at the top of your body or the bottom?”

Standing at the front of a laboratory classroom that contained several human skeleton replicas as well as an assortment of plastic body parts, BCC’s Nikki McDaniel walked her 22 students through the basics of the human circulatory system and how to measure blood pressure.

“Does everybody follow me?”

McDaniel, an associate professor of biology, asked, toward the end of her 45-minute talk.

Now in their second semester of introductory anatomy and physiology, most of the students in the room cautiously nodded their heads or raised their hands.

SIGNAL

For McDaniel, that was the signal to go from talking about science to doing it – an option that could disappear from future introductory science courses at CUNY, under changes to the general education curriculum mandated by Pathways.

McDaniel took out several boxes containing stethoscopes, sphygmomanometers and cardiovascular microphones and placed them on the black laboratory table in front of her. The students were tasked with measuring blood pressure three different ways:

● By wrapping a sphygmomanometer, or inflatable cuff, tightly around a subject’s arm and then slowly deflating it, while listening through a stethoscope to learn at what pressure blood resumes flowing through the constricted artery.

● By following the same procedure but with a cardiovascular microphone placed in the crook of a subject’s elbow and linked to a computer.

● By measuring the pulse in the subject’s finger.

The class divided into groups of four in which each person in the group had a specific role – Manager, Computer Geek, Go-fer and Subject. In addition to the three different types of blood pressure measurements, students were also asked to measure the blood pressure in their subject’s arms when held at different heights. Their results underscored the point that blood pressure is lightest at the top of the body and heaviest at the bottom.

STUDENT GOALS

“If you tell them blood pressure is highest at your feet, they will try to memorize that and half of them will get it wrong,” McDaniel said. “But if they conduct the experiments and do the measurements, it sticks.”

Most of the students in the McDaniel’s class plan to study in the allied health fields – nursing, radiology and nutrition, among others. In previous lab sessions, they had done cheek swabs and dissected sheep hearts. They set to work eagerly while McDaniel walked around the room briefly dropping in on each work group.

“I’m here to help them over specific hurdles,” McDaniel told Clarion. “In a good lab, I shouldn’t be doing much talking at all.” A lab session is going well, McDaniel explained, “when the students start to turn to each other and begin dialoguing among themselves.”

For Esther Ross, the lab marked the first time the pre-nursing student had handled a stethoscope. As the Go-fer, she wrapped the cuff around Yeancarla Liriano’s arm and inflated it.

“She was holding it in an uncomfortable way, and then she got the hang of it,” Liriano said, rubbing her arm gingerly and laughing.

“I got the experience and now I can do it,” Ross said.

“In order to have an experience, we had to work together,” added Marilyn Navas, the group’s designated Computer Geek.

The three women and the group’s fourth student, Doreen Ascatigno, all said they were baffled and dismayed by CUNY’s drive to scale back introductory science classes to three hours/three credits under the Pathways framework. Their course is currently six hours/four credits. The three-hour limit in Pathways will mean eliminating lab sessions from current introductory science classes: there is simply not enough time.

PROBLEMATIC

As it pushes hard to implement Pathways (see page 3), CUNY central administration has suggested a variety of optional workaroundsthrough which labs might be restored, as separate three-hour classes. But each of these comes with its own problems, from scheduling to transferability outside the CUNY system. All the proposed workarounds are at odds with the clear guidelines of the National Science Teachers Association: “At the college level...all introductory courses should include labs as an integral part of the science curriculum...Labs should correlate closely with lectures and not be separate activities.”

The students in McDaniel’s class can’t see why an intro science class without labs would even be considered. “Taking the labs away would be crazy,” Ross said. “Reading about it [the subject material] is good. Talking about it is good. But, to get to that high-speed experience puts everything together for you.”

WHERE’S THE MONEY?

“The tuition is going up again this year,” Navas noted. “So where is all the money going?”

“If you don’t practice what you know, you know nothing,” said Nelson Gonzalez, the team leader in a nearby work group. To Gonzalez, for CUNY to put a three-hour ceiling on intro science classes seems both unwise and disrespectful. “It’s not right. It looks like poor people can’t get the same kind of education,” he said. “It’s like discrimination.”

While McDaniel was teaching her students the basics of blood pressure, her colleague Associate Professor Kyung Lee was teaching a first semester, introductory anatomy and physiology course next door in which students used microscopes to examine slides that held various types of human tissue, including the skin, kidney, bladder and trachea.

“The images are in the textbook, but, it’s important to see them in real life,” Lee told Clarion. “Lab teaching is essential to introductory science. You take away the lab component, and there will not be science courses.”

McDaniel’s frustration with Pathways is compounded by the realization that it would undermine the work she and other members of her department have done in recent years to acquire additional laboratory supplies and equipment that CUNY had previously failed to provide their school.

“We should be expanding lab times, not cutting them,” McDaniel said. “The little bit we have is vital, taking that away eviscerates our students’ education in biology and the worth of the degrees they work so hard to earn.”