



Erik McGregor

MEMBERS ARE MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD

PSC members prepare for the contract campaign. This fall, they testified about low pay, exploitation and slow hiring at the first in-person CUNY Board of Trustees hearing since the pandemic began. Near the end of October, more than 1,000 union members attended a virtual "Mass Meeting on Winning a Just Contract," to discuss their contract priorities. They will continue to organize in the coming weeks and months. **PAGES 2-3**

CAMPUS **Public safety** **alerts?**

A shooting near City Tech's downtown Brooklyn campus went unreported by the campus admin, raising concerns about safety on campus. **PAGE 4**

HEALTH AND SAFETY **For a healthy** **workplace**

PSC members confront health and safety issues on their campuses, including mold, inadequate ventilation and lack of heat as temperatures drop. **PAGES 4-5**

ORGANIZING **Stop the MA+** **fiasco**

Mayor Eric Adams is pushing for reforms that could put current retiree health coverage in jeopardy. The PSC is fighting to stop the changes. **PAGE 8**



ACADEMIA **A new online** **frontier**

CUNY boasts about its expansion of online degree programs, but a union officer raises serious concerns over faculty governance and pedagogy. **PAGE 11**

Trustees hear calls for CUNY funding

By CLARION STAFF

On October 17, the CUNY Board of Trustees held its first in-person hearing since the pandemic began. At this hearing at the Graduate Center, PSC members addressed issues being raised in the union's upcoming contract campaign.

Speaking directly to the trustees and the chancellor, members spoke about low pay and high workloads for part-time and graduate student instructors, highlighting how this exploitative employment is detrimental to undergraduate education. Full-time faculty spoke about how the historic underfunding of CUNY has led to a shortage of faculty for core college courses and an inability to hire enough full-time tenure-track faculty.

UNIFIED MESSAGE

While the union has had numerous in-person demonstrations and marches since the pandemic began, members have not, until this October, had the chance to address the chancellor and the trustees face-to-face – literally – to tell them how CUNY is falling short in its mission and what the university can do to change that.

Union members delivered a unified message stating that the Board of Trustees and CUNY Central both have a responsibility to push for the full funding of CUNY in the upcoming state and city budget negotiations. The push would be a win for students and their education. More money could be used to upgrade campus infrastructure and full funding for CUNY would raise the prospects of securing a contract with CUNY that includes fair raises for faculty and staff.

Below are excerpts from some of the testimonies delivered at the meeting. They have been edited for print publication.

Grads exploited

So much of CUNY's functioning hinges on graduate students, who are, by and large, some of the system's most precarious workers. During their careers, Graduate Center [GC] workers like me are sent out to CUNY's various campuses to teach students and assist professors. We are the lifeblood that circulates through the entire system, ensuring its functioning and interconnection. Often in our teaching assignments, we are the first educators that undergraduates encounter, because the majority of our students are freshmen and sophomores. For these students, we are the face of CUNY and what CUNY has to offer them.

And yet we are unable to do our work because our livelihoods are deteriorating. A recent study of graduate student wages and stipends found that, adjusted for cost of living, the GC's English department, where I study, ranks second to bottom in income. This ranking is within the entire United States, meaning that compared to all other English PhDs in the country, the English depart-

Part of a push for fair pay



Zoe Hu, PSC chapter chair at the Graduate Center, testifies about the exploitation of graduate workers.

ment at GC is the second-to-worst department in terms of an attendee's standard of living. Added together, my stipend and wages are around \$28,000 a year, pretax. The average rent in Brooklyn right now is \$3,000. It is a simple fact of math that one cannot survive in New York City on GC pay alone, even as one performs full-time Graduate Center work.

Furthermore, as an English PhD student I am lucky, because English is the rare department within the GC where all graduate students are fully funded. Other GC PhDs have no stipend funding at all and are taking on two or three part-time jobs in addition to their teaching loads. It is easy to imagine what all of this does to our work as educators and researchers.

Many graduate workers try extremely hard for their students, but they are still too overtaxed, too tired and not paid nearly enough. They are teaching 50 students in a room and being paid nothing for some of that work, because nonteaching hours – during which we grade, offer feedback and do some of the most important aspects of educational labor – are often unremunerated. The work suffers, and so do the students.

Meanwhile, next door at NYU and Columbia, where graduate students recently went on strike, graduate workers make an average of \$45,000 a year. The salary at Rutgers, a public university in a state where cost of

living is lower, is \$43,000. That CUNY pays its grad workers what it does is an embarrassment. It is an embarrassment for what is supposed to be one of the greatest public university systems in the country. And it means that prospective graduate students, many of whom do get accepted to the schools I mentioned, are no longer even considering CUNY as an option.

I went to CUNY because, as I said, I believe in its values and mission. But everywhere I look, it feels as if my colleagues are barely able to sustain themselves. They are taking seven, eight years to complete their PhDs. They are juggling multiple jobs. They are grading on subways. And the entire university is greatly disadvantaged because of it. As graduate workers, we deserve not just a livable wage but a fair wage. It is time that CUNY leadership does the right thing, not just for us, but for the system as a whole.

Zoe Hu
PSC Chapter Chair
The Graduate Center

Hiring crisis

There is a crisis in faculty hiring. Although I have been retired for four years, I was asked as an adjunct to teach physical chemistry, the third-to-fourth year course I had taught for most of the 52 years I taught at City

College [CCNY]. Another course for seniors and master's students, inorganic chemistry, is still not assigned; a faculty member could be assigned, at the cost of finding someone else for the more difficult task of teaching the introductory course, and an adjunct is being sought at this time.

The central problem is obvious: The CCNY chemistry department has not been allowed to hire since 2015. There have been several retirements since then, including mine. The faculty shortage has become critical. If for some reason it were only this department, then it should be possible to cure the problem with a couple of hires. However, as far as I know, the problem is more general. If the problem is as general as it appears to be, the entire college, at least, and possibly the entire university, is at risk.

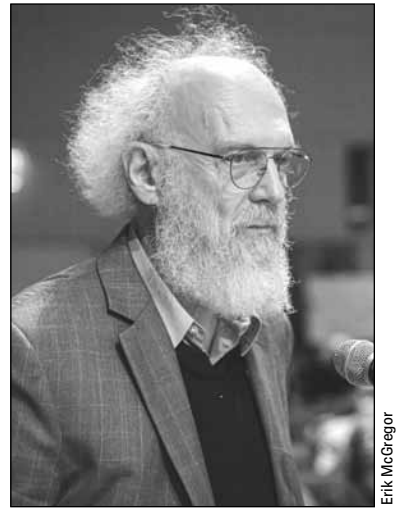
While I am not aware of the reason for the hiring block, as far as I can see, the college, and perhaps the university, is being strangled. It no longer matters what the reason is, but there must be a cure quickly. It is not appropriate to be seeking adjuncts at the last moment for advanced courses. In such a case, it is impossible to guarantee the quality of the instruction. I understand CCNY is to be allowed a grand total of eight tenure-track hires, which probably does not cover retirements for a year. Lecturers are [an insufficient] answer, as they do not fully participate in the department.

Michael Green
Professor, Chemistry, retired
The City College of New York

Capital needs

We are excited about the life science hub that will house the Hunter College School of Nursing and the Hunter College School of Health Professions and look forward to the many opportunities created by bringing together multiple institutions. However, our concern is that many faculty, staff and students are barely hanging on in crumbling and dangerous working and learning conditions. At Hunter College, my alma mater, the biology and chemistry departments have a challenging time retaining faculty because of the state of their facilities. Some of our colleagues have left. For years, the faculty and staff have been hoping construction would resume at the building on 74th Street as set out in CUNY's master plan. Again, we were hopeful after fighting hard to get more resources from Albany.

Brooklyn College is another



Michael Green, retired CCNY professor

campus with severe infrastructure needs. Poorly maintained labs have negatively affected the recruitment of grad students in the biology department, and it was reported that a professor wears a helmet in case tiles fall from the ceiling in Boylan Hall. I, too, share my colleague's fear, because while teaching at the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center [BEOC], a projector screen came loose and it hit my hand. Luckily, I was not seriously injured.

Another issue I would like to bring to your attention is the mold found on campuses. Bronx Community College, City Tech and the BEOC are three campuses where mold was found. This is unacceptable. I find that the administration does not remediate the issue properly because why is the mold reappearing? Also, there needs to be transparency on how the issue is being remediated.

I am here to say that our teaching conditions and students' learning conditions are in dire need of repairs. The state of CUNY's infrastructure sends a message that we are not valued. Faculty, staff and students do not feel safe. Look at the many social media feeds that document the crumbling infrastructure of CUNY.

Increasing CUNY's capital budget in next year's budget request is essential to mediate the backlog of major repairs needed at our university's buildings, many of which are more than 50 years old. More funding is essential to retaining and recruiting future faculty, staff and students to the people's university.

Felicia Wharton
PSC Treasurer

Professors needed

The rate at which the university is hiring lecturers at the expense of professors is alarming. The proportions established this year, with the

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Unity: the PSC's strength in bargaining

By ARI PAUL

There is no doubt that the union faces strong challenges, including high inflation and a possible recession ahead, but the PSC's member engagement, unity of purpose and allies are the strengths that faculty and staff will draw on to win a just and fair contract with CUNY. That was the message PSC President James Davis and fellow union leaders delivered to nearly 1,200 rank-and-file members at an October 26 virtual mass meeting focusing on the union's upcoming contract campaign.

"The only way that we will win is with solidarity and organizing," Davis said, noting that he welcomes member participation in upcoming talks with CUNY. "We want you in those rooms with us. We want you at the bargaining table. And we want your voices there."

PAST GAINS

The union's principal officers and members of the bargaining team (see story below) discussed both the present political moment and members' priorities for bargaining, including general pay raises for faculty and staff.

The officers also highlighted major contract gains made in the last two decades, using the past as a guide for the future. PSC First Vice

Members discuss contract priorities



Members across the university are discussing ideas for the upcoming contract campaign.

President Andrea Vásquez presented highlights from those bargaining achievements, including salary differentials, paid parental leave, multi-year appointments for adjuncts and across-the-board pay increases. She also discussed the union's strong defense over the

Nearly 1,200 members attend mass meeting.

years against CUNY's demands for union concessions. Management has sought to increase workloads, remove department chairs from the bargaining unit, create an unlimited number of part-time lines and eliminate HEO job security (contractually known

as 13.3b), she said. Thanks to the union's steadfast unity, Vásquez observed, "none of those demands saw the light of day."

CONTRACT CONCERNS

Members discussed some of their central bargaining concerns. How can HEOs who reach the top

pay step move up in income? Can the union stop late paychecks and last-minute class cancellations for adjuncts? Can the union implement meaningful anti-bullying language in the contract? How does the pattern bargaining enforced by the City and the State impact the union's pursuit of raises beyond inflation? Can contract bargaining also be an arena that advances the interests of students and faculty alike, such as limiting class sizes?

THE UPCOMING CAMPAIGN

The current PSC-CUNY contract will expire next year on February 28, and the union plans to hold a contract campaign rally. Under state law, contract terms stay in effect after the expiration date until a new contract is ratified and implemented.

The next few weeks and months will be important. The bargaining team is strategizing, campus action teams are in formation and each chapter's PSC delegates will soon be ratifying demands that the union will present to the CUNY administration. Chapters are holding campus meetings with members about their contract priorities and discussing how local organizing can go forward. As Davis noted, "This is a really pivotal moment for our union and our university."

Contract bargaining team assembles

By ARI PAUL and SHOMIAL AHMAD

The union's bargaining team is made up of 17 members of the PSC Executive Council, consisting of full-time and part-time faculty and HEO and CLT representatives. Some members have served on previous PSC bargaining teams. Some are new. This year, to assist the bargaining team, the Executive Council has formed several demand development committees in areas of critical importance to members: educational technology and educational quality, contingent and part-time work, work-life balance and professional respect, and common good and health and safety.

A BARGAINING AGENDA

The current PSC-CUNY contract expires at the end of February 2023. All bargaining team members have voiced a commitment to winning a fair contract.

George Emilio Sanchez, a senior college officer on the PSC Executive Council, is looking forward to serving on the union's contract bargaining team for the first time. "It just feels like it's a very important role," Sanchez said. "The responsibility is pretty intense."

The bargaining team meets regularly to devise the bargaining agenda that PSC delegates will later ratify. This process includes long delib-

Developing contract demands

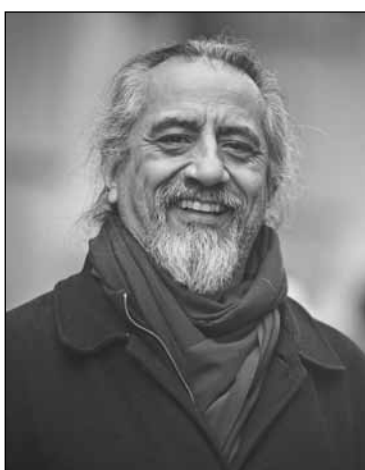


Amy Jeu

erations over union priorities and members' needs, outreach to different constituent groups and research to formulate the best arguments to persuade and move management. Members should prepare to mobilize. Sanchez believes it's going to be a big fight to win pay raises that go beyond inflation.

DEEPENING COMMITMENTS

For Pamela Stenberg, a part-time personnel officer, serving on the bargaining team is a way to deepen her longtime commitment to advocating for colleagues and students. "I'm



George Emilio Sanchez

looking forward to sitting across the table from CUNY rather than thinking of how many times I've yelled at them at Board of Trustees hearings," she said.

Stenberg hopes to make the process of negotiating a contract more accessible to PSC members. She also hopes to build on the union's progress on adjunct wages in the last contract and professionalize their role in the university community.

Ángel Martinez, a part-time personnel officer, wants CUNY management to really know what the life of an adjunct is like. "Driv-

ing across the George Washington Bridge to get to work is one thing if you're a full-timer, but another thing if you're a part-timer. To travel from one campus to another could be a daunting task," he said. "This is New York City. The cost of living has skyrocketed. I have this obligation to put a human face on this.... We have homeless adjuncts. We have adjuncts who live in precarity."

FOCUS GROUPS

The bargaining team also has former leaders who have served on previous bargaining teams. This is the third time Sharon Persinger, former PSC treasurer and current university-wide officer, has participated in bargaining. This year she serves on the Educational Technology Demand Development Committee.

The pandemic made online teaching more complicated, she noted, which has inspired members to build off the previous contract gains that regulate online teaching observations. Improved labor and academic freedom protections can be won this time around in terms of online teaching, she said, noting, "We taught online for more than two years. There were a lot of things that were accepted because we were in a crisis."

Professional staff are also focusing on issues that are needed for

the titles they represent. Amy Jeu, a cross-campus officer and a college laboratory technician at Hunter College, noted that some CLTs are working multiple jobs in order to survive on CUNY salaries and that the workload is increasing. Like many CLTs, HEOs and library faculty members, she wants to explore

'The cost of living has skyrocketed.'

contractual provisions for remote work options in addition to across-the-board raises.

PSC Treasurer Felicia Wharton is another first-time bargaining team member. Along with her fellow team members, she has been busy listening to different sectors of the union, including the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee, HEOs and CLTs. "I like to listen to the members and really get an idea of their experiences," she said. "By actively listening, [you think of] ways of how to construct [an issue] as a demand."

THE BARGAINING TEAM

The other members of the PSC bargaining team are Michael Batson, senior college officer; Lawrence Bosket, university-wide officer; Iris DeLutro, vice president for cross-campus units; James Davis, PSC president; Luke Elliott-Negri, university-wide officer; David Hatchett, vice president for senior colleges; Penny Lewis, PSC secretary; Youngmin Seo, university-wide officer; Lynne Turner, part-time personnel officer Sharon Utakis, vice president for community colleges; and Andrea Vásquez, PSC first vice president.

City Tech fails to respond to shooting

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

On the afternoon of Wednesday, September 7, a 15-year-old was shot and killed at McLaughlin Park in downtown Brooklyn across the block from a City Tech building. During the shooting and in the days after it, City Tech administration sent no alerts – no text messages, no emails, no bulletins – to the college community, according to several PSC members who work at the college.

One member, who works in the Howard Building, said she learned of the shooting when she left work that day and saw news crews and yellow police tape everywhere. She never received information from the administration, on the day of the incident or in the days following.

In fact, Carole Harris, the PSC City Tech chapter chair and associate professor of English, didn't even hear about the McLaughlin Park shooting until late October when *Clarion* asked her about it.

Administration inaction worries PSC members

"I did not receive any type of communication or alert," Harris told *Clarion*. "To learn only now about the killing of a teenager near City Tech feels shocking to me," said Harris, who is signed up to receive CUNY Alert through CUNY's emergency notification system.

Violence around campus is not the only issue on members' minds. There are concerns about vandalism, visitors wandering buildings without checking in with security, the limited number of entrances to the college's buildings, and general safety when working at night.

NO EVENINGS, PLEASE

"I stopped requesting evening classes because I found the Namm building so creepy after hours when it's very empty," Harris said. "In those evening hours, I would often ask a student to accompany me back

to my office after class because I did not want to be there, even for a few minutes to gather my things, alone."

Harris said that over the years, members have asked the City Tech administration what the proper protocol should be in the case of an active shooter. There hasn't been much follow-through, she said.

Clarion asked City Tech administration whether any communication was issued on some of the recent public safety incidents, what the administration defines as public safety and what the proper protocol is to receive a public safety alert.

"We are acutely aware of the recent troubling incidents in downtown Brooklyn, including the tragic loss of a high school student," said City Tech Vice President of Administration and Finance Miguel Cairol in response to *Clarion's* inquiry. "The safety of stu-

No public safety alerts

dents, faculty and staff is a crucial priority, and we maintain consistent communication with the local police precinct, who advise immediately should there be any conceivable risk to our community."

In the college's response to *Clarion*, there was no protocol included nor did the administration indicate that it issued any type of communication to the City Tech community regarding the September 7 fatal shooting.

The procedures outlined in the City Tech Department of Public Safety 2022 Annual Security Report that public spaces that are not directly "contiguous" or "immediately adjacent" to the campus may not require "timely warnings."

DIFFERENT STANDARDS

McLaughlin Park, where the September 7 killing occurred, is across the street from the City Tech Academic building; yet, it is not considered "contiguous to the campus." In contrast to City Tech, when an incident involving shots fired occurred about a month later on October 4 near the New York University Tandon School of Engineering in downtown Brooklyn, NYU quickly alerted its campus community. The shooting was less than a block away from the engineering school and a few blocks

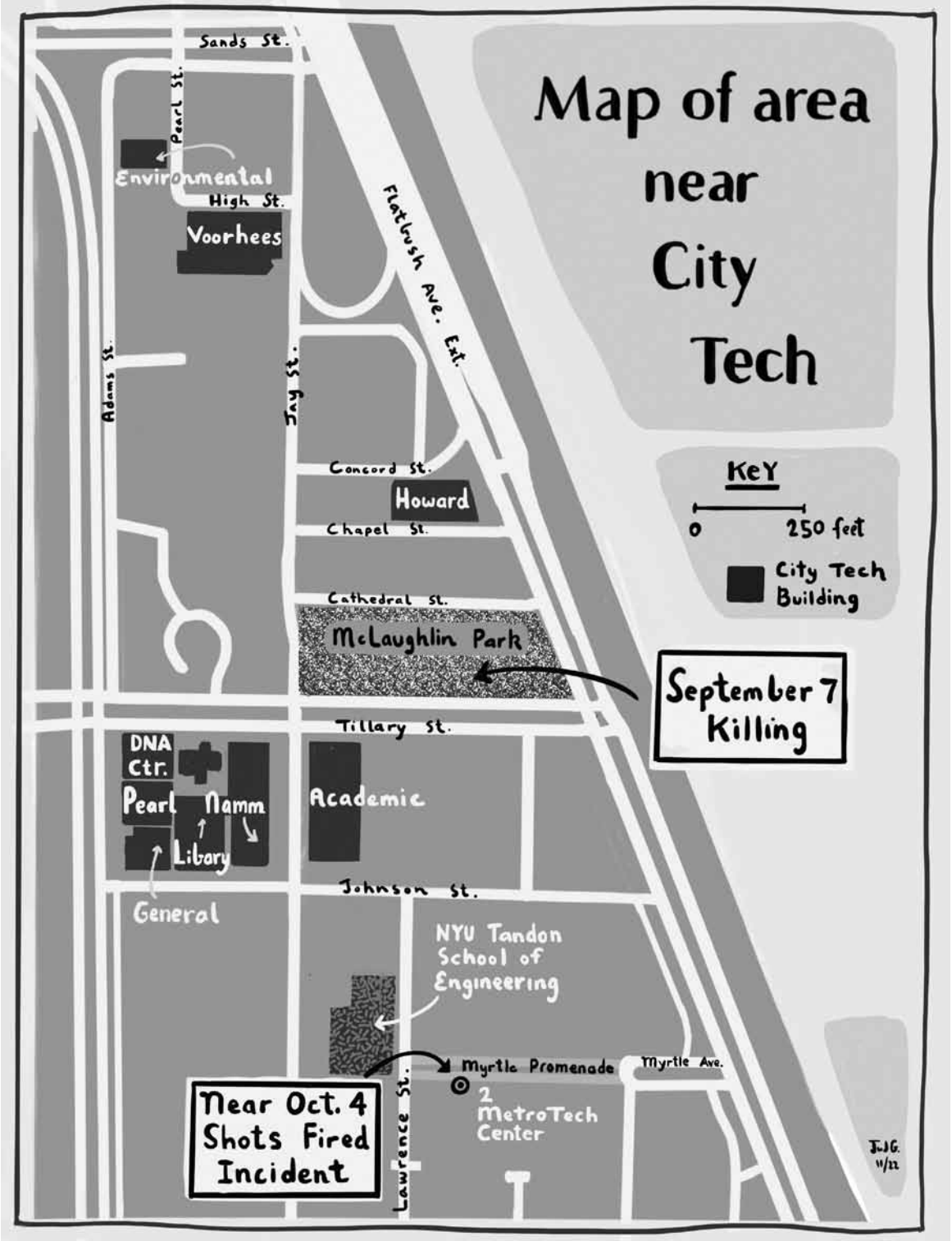
away from City Tech. PSC members expressed dismay that NYU was quick to act on a similar incident close to its campus while City Tech did not.

NYU Campus Safety's Twitter account issued alerts to the community on October 4 from 10:47 am until 12:18 pm, until the police advised there was no "further threat." According to the Twitter account, the NYU administration also sent out safety alerts by text message.

PSC members at City Tech are also worried about what they believe are a limited number of security entrances for the main City Tech buildings, where most classrooms and offices are located. There used to be several entrances to access the college's main buildings – Pearl, Namm, Namm Hall and the library – now, there is only one, according to Cynthia Bink, City Tech's director of counseling and a PSC delegate.

"The number of entrances that are closed make accessing the college cumbersome. It also sends a message that the campus is not yet fully open. Students should be able to enter all the buildings using multiple entrances," Bink said. More public safety personnel would be needed.

Cairol, from the City Tech administration, did say the college has secured approval from the CUNY Board of Trustees to supplement public safety personnel with an unarmed security guard service in order to ensure safety coverage across campus.



PSC Vent Squad visit prompts Hostos fixes

Inadequate airflow at CUNY Start

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Five out of six basement offices for CUNY Start at Hostos Community College lacked proper ventilation, the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs found in a mid-August PSC Vent Squad assessment with the college's administration present. Several weeks later, Hostos administration did their own assessment, found inadequate ventilation in the same offices and fixed the issues causing poor airflow.

"The fact that [management] went back to those spaces and assessed those spaces and did something right in those spaces is really positive," Craig Bernardini, the PSC Hostos Chapter Chair and a professor of English, told *Clarion*. Bernardini attended the ventilation squad assessment, where college administration accompanied union officials. "But we have to close the loop. We have to go back to members and say, 'Okay, right, are you noticing a difference?'"

Closing the loop means talking to people like Rachel Cholst, an

academic advisor at CUNY Start and a PSC member who works in one of the offices cited for improper ventilation. In the vent squad assessment, PSC watchdogs found that one of the two vents in her office was not receiving proper airflow. Hostos officials fixed the problem and now the vent has sufficient airflow.

"[There's] an overpowering air current directly over my desk. It's freezing in here, but I'll take that over the alternative," Cholst told *Clarion*.

UNHEALTHY CONDITIONS

CUNY Start is an academic program that prepares students for college-level courses in key subject areas, including English and math. Cholst started working at CUNY Start in 2016, and she noticed that she was coming down with respiratory colds about every two months no matter what time of year, forcing her to call in sick. And her coworkers would get sick periodically, too.

Recurrent colds, chronic headaches and poor air

Continued on page 9

Members push for healthy workplaces

By CLARION STAFF

Mold, inadequate ventilation and lack of heat are perennial problems throughout CUNY. Unfortunately, members at several campuses are currently working under these conditions and are urging their administrations to fix them. Years of deferred maintenance and an aging building infrastructure contribute to these problems, but they are not the only factors.

While increased state and city funding can address campus infrastructure needs, many times health and safety issues at CUNY are the result of inadequate action from management. Below are stories of recent health and safety issues on CUNY campuses and how the union and PSC members are working to make them better.

Mold grows in Brooklyn

In September, a state licensed mold assessor found 880 feet of mold on a closet door, under tables, on chairs and hiding in other spaces at the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center (BEOC) in downtown Brooklyn.

This mold isn't the typical mold found at CUNY.

"Usually mold conditions come from leaks. The roof is leaking or the risers that carry the water is leaking. This is really different from that. That's why it is [almost] invisible," said Jean Grassman, a PSC Environmental Health and Safety coordinator and an associate professor of environmental, occupational and geospatial health sciences at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy who attended the September 21 inspection.

HIDDEN MOLD

A May 31 inspection done for the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY), which oversees many CUNY buildings but not necessarily offices rented by CUNY, did not find any evidence of mold. But after the September 21 inspection, spearheaded by the union, CUNY agreed to have the BEOC custodial staff clean the mold off all the surfaces. CUNY also agreed to have a professional engineer evaluate the building's HVAC system.

"In order to clean it, you have to turn everything upside down," said Grassman. "It's not going to be fun for them."

Members raised issues about mold and a lawsuit by Legal Aid, another tenant in the building where BEOC rents out space at 111 Livingston, documented rampant mold found by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOH). In November 2021, the DOH issued multiple summonses to the building's landlord, the Lesser Group, when it failed to remediate the mold in Legal

Poor conditions from Bronx to Brooklyn

PSC organizes to fix bad working conditions



Queens College officials need to deliver room-by-room ventilation reports, says former PSC President Barbara Bowen.

Aid's offices. *Clarion* first reported about the issue in May 2022.

"The pattern of [mold] growth is consistent with elevated humidity and condensation," wrote Ed Olmstead, a union-hired industrial hygienist, in his indoor environmental report of the BEOC offices. "The elevated humidity and associated mold growth is caused by the operation of the building ventilation system."

On the day of the walk-through, union leadership learned that they would only be getting access to a secondary HVAC system serving the library, not the building's main HVAC system. That's where Olmstead first found mold.

"It was on the [closet] door," recalled Grassman.

CUNY administrators didn't dispute the presence of mold, but refused to sample and test it. More mold was found elsewhere.

As *Clarion* went to press, CUNY had yet to tell the PSC when it would fix the mold issue or inspect the building's main HVAC system. The union plans to give members temperature and humidity monitors to keep an eye on conditions.

"I hope that CUNY and the BEOC administration take this matter seriously and take the appropriate steps to remediate the situation," said PSC Treasurer Felicia Wharton, who was previously PSC BEOC chapter chair. "There are no shortcuts when deal-

ing with members' health and safety and mold remediation."

—Shomial Ahmad

Editor's note: PSC members can learn more about what mold is, how it grows, the range of health impacts its existence can cause and what regulatory steps are needed for its effective remediation. On December 7, from 6 to 8 pm, Ed Olmstead, the industrial hygienist who inspected the BEOC offices, will be holding a Zoom meeting on Mold and Workers' Health. To register for this meeting, go to tinyurl.com/PSC-mold-zoom-meeting.

Little breathing room in Queens

When Barbara Bowen returned to in-person teaching at Queens College (QC) after two decades serving as PSC president, she didn't expect such an unpleasant welcome.

In testimony to the CUNY Board of Trustees, she described her assigned classroom as "windowless, cramped and with cinder block walls."

"It has a small UV air purifier, [where there is] no indication that the filters are ever changed, and one filthy, decrepit fan for ventilation. Every class session, we have to choose between the fan that makes it impossible to hear each other, or the noise of the corridor if we leave the door open for air, or the stifling heat, or worse, [keeping] the door closed."

But she isn't alone at QC. "Many are in windowless, poorly ventilated rooms like mine," said Bowen, an associate professor of English. "One colleague resorted to buying her own carbon dioxide monitor. The recommended level of carbon dioxide, indicating sufficient fresh air intake and reduced risk of viral transmission, is below 1,000 parts per million. Her classroom measured 2,500."

What's worse, Bowen said, is that the QC and CUNY administrations have not been forthcoming with any reports on campus ventilation.

"The Queens College union chapter had to submit a FOIL request to get the report produced by Ramboll, [CUNY's] consulting firm. But the Ramboll report was not [a] room-by-room [assessment] and seemed designed only to provide written clearance that the buildings could be reopened," she said, airing frustrations about the lack of information on ventilation. "That [CUNY has] failed to provide ventilation data is bad enough. That you have done so while imposing a ban on requests that students wear masks is reckless and absurd," said Bowen.

NO EXCUSES

The administration can't blame this inaction on lack of funding, Bowen said. QC was allocated \$55 million in federal stimulus money, and in the college's report on those funds, she said, "indicates that it still has unspent funding and lists zero

expenditures on 'implementing evidence-based practices to monitor and suppress coronavirus in accordance with public health guidelines.'"

"Why hasn't the federal money been spent to commission a true room-by-room ventilation report, publicize the report and act on its findings? It's not too late to do a report now," Bowen said. "Until you do, you need to tell us why any of us should risk our health and our lives in rooms where the air may not be safe to breathe."

—Ari Paul

Cold in the Bronx

October hit, the temperatures dipped and several Bronx Community College (BCC) buildings were left without heat. Heat was restored more than a month later, but in November most classes were moved online due to "intermittent heating issues," BCC's president said.

"The campus gets heat from several boilers, but the system is so old that they need to both repair the boiler and the vents," said Yasmin Edwards, the PSC BCC chapter chair.

The chapter asked the "administration [to] distribute heaters and we were told by the Vice President for [Administration and] Finance Kay Ellis that they would, but this never happened," Edwards said, adding that, "No one is willing to make the call to move classes that can be moved to a remote modality." Meanwhile, she said, "Some HEOs are purchasing space heaters, but the more this happens, [the more] it strains the substandard electrical system."

Inside Higher Ed reported that according to Edwards some "mornings dipped into the 40s and could be felt in the older buildings on campus," inspiring some faculty members to "[choose] to hold class sessions online as a result."

CONSTANT PROBLEMS

As Yogi Berra would say, "It's déjà vu all over again." In February 2020 *Clarion* reported that the BCC Faculty Council issued a vote of no confidence against Ellis for "allowing gross physical deterioration throughout campus, including a lack of proper lighting and inadequate indoor heating under her watch." Last year, the PSC had to fight to shut down Nichols Hall due to "inadequate ventilation and mold in the building." And in April 2019, *Clarion* reported that decades of neglect at Colston Hall led to burst pipes that resulted in an immediate shutdown of the building.

While union pressure finally forced the BCC administration to restore heat, PSC members believed a month-plus wait was far too long. The whole affair, they said, underscored the deteriorating infrastructure at CUNY that negatively impacts its hardworking students.

"We should not be complicit in having our students sit for hours in cold classrooms," said Edwards, an associate professor in biological sciences. "This is unconscionable."

—Ari Paul

PSC celebrates 50 years of or

ON SEPTEMBER 22, the PSC held a gala event celebrating the union's 50th anniversary. Hundreds attended. Current and former union leaders and longtime activists recalled some of the most monumental struggles and victories in the union's history. City and state elected officials and current and former PSC staff were also present. The event included a

slideshow of the union's history and a celebration of the two decades of leadership of Barbara Bowen, who led the union as president until 2021. The event was one of several this year commemorating a half-century of union accomplishments not just for CUNY, but for the labor movement and public higher education.



(L to R) PSC Secretary Penny Lewis and First Vice President Andrea Vásquez



Former PSC President Barbara Bowen



PSC Treasurer Felicia Wharton



President James Davis welcomes attendees to the gala.

ganizing, struggle and victory



Former First VP Steve London



Remysell Salas, adjunct lecturer in ethnic and race studies at Borough of Manhattan Community College



Members from across the university celebrate together.



Members, retirees and allies gather for the anniversary event.



Members and guests enjoy cocktail hour.



State Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon

Workers mobilize against health cuts

By ARI PAUL

One of the many reasons Renee Bell chose a career at CUNY was the “guarantee of a dignified retirement.”

In an interview with *Clarion*, Bell, an assistant professor of mathematics at Lehman College, said, “We are all future retirees! Retirees are being targeted because the City views them as being vulnerable. We have to be in solidarity with them.”

As *Clarion* reported in October 2022, “The Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) approved a plan to join Mayor Eric Adams administration in calling on the City Council to change city law to remove the floor on city contributions to the cost of health insurance for city employees, retirees and their dependents.” This approval followed a court decision that blocked an earlier attempt to partially privatize municipal retiree health coverage by charging retirees \$191 a month to stay in traditional Medicare. City Hall has, according to municipal labor leaders, stalled contract talks with unions on grounds that the health-care costs must be achieved before bargaining can go forward.

Since then, thanks to the activism of PSC members and thousands of retirees and their allies citywide, no council member has been willing to sponsor the proposed change in the law, and no council committee chair has scheduled hearings on it. PSC members have sent more than 5,000 letters to council members and have met with virtually all the key council members about this issue.

CITY ULTIMATUM

In response, City Labor Relations Commissioner Renee Campion issued an ultimatum. She informed MLC Chair Harry Nespoli in an October 28 letter that, if the Council didn’t come up with a “swift timeline” to change the administrative code by November 4, the City would ask Arbitrator Martin Scheinman to “order immediate implementation of a Medicare Advantage (MA) plan with the elimination of all other plans that otherwise would have been offered to retirees.”

As *Politico* reported, the “Office of Labor Relations said it will have to enroll retired city workers in the Medicare Advantage health plan and get rid of other plan options if the City Council does not change the administrative code to make way for the privatized plan,” because, as Campion said in her letter, “The City continues to lose \$50 million a month for every month this plan is delayed, putting our shared goals in significant jeopardy.... We must move forward with the MAP plan in any way that we can, as quickly as we can.”

Legal experts advised that there are serious questions about the legality of the City’s threatened move, and retirees and their supporters redoubled their activism in response to the threat. At press time, Arbitrator Scheinman had not issued the threatened decision.

Saying ‘No’ to privatization



Mayor Eric Adams, right, has pressured City Council to act. How will City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, left, respond?

The *Daily News* reported that the MLC and mayoral “request is gaining little traction in the Council,” quoting an anonymous source saying that the response from the City Council was “lukewarm at best.” It remains to be seen whether City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams will garner the votes necessary to make the mayor’s plan a reality.

While the PSC is one of several MLC member unions that opposed the plan to amend the administrative code, pressure on the municipal unions to bend to City Hall on this issue has been intense. The proposed legislation has the backing of the *Daily News* editorial board, which said that the proposal’s detractors “should be aware that the new initiative is expected to save the city \$600 million a year, set to be reinvested into a fund that supplements care for retirees.” And by all accounts, Mayor Adams has told the major municipal unions that City Hall will negotiate union contracts for municipal workers only after an agreement on reducing municipal worker health-care costs is achieved.

DELAYED BARGAINING

“The City made one thing clear: in order to get the raise we deserve, we must resolve the issue of health care,” District Council 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido said in a message to his members. “Without a long-term solution to control inflated hospital charges and other increasing health-care costs, the City of New York will be forced to charge workers for health insurance, a benefit we have been able to protect and provide at no cost for active members, retirees and our dependents for decades. That means any pay increase we secure will be completely

absorbed by your out-of-pocket expenses for health care.”

In a November 7 letter to members, PSC President James Davis reflected on these concerns:

“While we organize against these harmful, anti-worker plans of the Adams administration, we realize it is not enough just to say, ‘No’. We have advocated that the City work with the MLC on other ways to contain the skyrocketing

cost of health care, including self-insurance, collective drug purchasing, dealing aggressively with exorbitant hospital charges and issuing a formal request for proposals for a comprehensive benefits plan so the City’s current provider is incentivized to do better. We believe in the long run a single-payer health insurance program is necessary, but we also recognize the urgency of the moment and believe that the City must not place the burden of saving \$600 million annually on the backs of municipal retirees and their dependents by forcing them into a Medicare Advantage plan or into premiums for opting out. We have advocated for an alternate source of funding from the City’s current reserves and are pressing for this alternative approach with council members and the MLC leadership.”

Several former municipal deputy commissioners signed a joint letter to city lawmakers, urging them to vote against any change to the law. “This action is being taken without any involvement of about 250,000 retirees who are not represented by any union,” the letter stated. “Many retirees, including the undersigned, entered city service understanding there would be stability in advanced years while opting for lower salaries and intense commitment of time and energy in exchange.”



Renee Bell, an assistant professor of mathematics at Lehman College, is one of many active PSC members who are in solidarity with retirees.

Bell noted that reducing health-care benefits for retirees could hurt public employment in the future, because fewer people will want to take jobs with the City and State. “The problem will get worse and destroy public services,” she said.

Many retirees reject the notion that municipal unions must offer health-care savings before any kind of collective bargaining with the Adams administration can go forward. “Savings comes at someone’s expense, and it’s always at the cost of labor,” said Michael Frank, a PSC retiree. “The city is awash in money. Budgets are political documents.”

DEVisING SOLUTIONS

And Barbara Caress, an adjunct assistant professor of health policy at Baruch College, wrote in *Crain’s New York* that the amendment to the city law would allow the City to have “every incentive to demand – and the leverage to achieve – more health-care cuts in future years, including an ‘alternative’ not just for retirees but also for ‘classes’ of active city employees.”

Caress, the former director of strategic policy and planning at SEIU Local 32BJ Funds, echoed PSC President Davis in advocating solutions that reduce costs without inflicting additional economic pain on union members and retirees: “Rather than shrink health coverage, the City and the MLC can engage in the difficult process of changing it. New York City has taken the first step by soliciting bids from other insurers for active employees. Other relatively straightforward steps are possible, including moving to self-insurance and cooperative drug purchasing among city unions.”

In addition to seeking legislation that would amend retiree health care,

the City is also appealing the court decision blocking the original plan.

In an article for the Center for New York City Affairs, Caress outlined why municipal retirees distrust the idea of reforming retiree health plans. “Evidence about other existing Medicare Advantage plans, however, makes the City’s contention implausible,” she said. “The most comprehensive study, published five years ago, found that only 46% of Medicare physicians also participated in MA plans.”

Privately administered Medicare Advantage plans have taken a beating in the national media as well. *The New York Times* recently reported that a “review of dozens of fraud lawsuits, inspector general audits and investigations by watchdogs shows how major health insurers exploited the program to inflate their profits by billions of dollars,” and that eight “of the 10 biggest Medicare Advantage insurers – representing more than two-thirds of the market – have submitted inflated bills, according to the federal audits,” while “four of the five largest players...have faced federal lawsuits alleging that efforts to overdiagnose their customers crossed the line into fraud.”

A TROUBLED SECTOR

And CNBC noted in October that “CVS shares fell 5% in premarket trading, following a downgrade of one of its Aetna Medicare Advantage plans in annual ratings issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.”

As the PSC continues to forcefully advocate specific, smart, short and long-term solutions to out-of-control health-care costs that don’t harm active city workers, retirees and their families, all eyes are on the Adams administration.

PSC Vent Squad visit prompts Hostos fixes

Continued from page 4

Cholst described her work conditions as gloomy, unhealthy and at times unpleasant. “CUNY Start works in a windowless basement with a door that leads directly into the faculty parking lot. During particularly heavy summer storms, the parking lot floods the hallway and the surge in stormwater causes the toilets to overflow as it makes its way through the pipes,” Cholst said. “At times, the office can be stuffy, and at others it can be freezing.”

Flooding and lack of air weren’t the only health and safety problems for the basement offices where CUNY Start relocated to in 2015 to accommodate the expanding program’s need for more space.

THE SMELL OF EXHAUST

“Early on, problems crept up,” said Anitta Santiago, a reading and writing instructor with CUNY Start. “A smell of exhaust would permeate the classrooms, black dust would fall from the vents and some students and staff were experiencing headaches and fatigue after several hours in the basement.”

Santiago said that they met with management, who were empathetic, but failed to truly fix the problems. The smell of exhaust came from trucks illegally idling outside near the building intake; trucks were told not to idle there. Later, other smells, including the smell of marijuana would permeate the classroom air. Flooding in the bathroom was “fixed” by blocking bathrooms on days of expected rain. This summer, CUNY Start employees raised concerns because their office seemed too warm. In July, the chapter did an informal walk-through with the CUNY Start Di-

rector Andrea Gabbidon-Levene to identify health and safety issues in the CUNY Start space.

During the August 15 vent squad assessment of the Hostos CUNY Start offices, the team took measurements from ceiling supply vents with an anemometer, a handheld device that measures airflow. The team also measured carbon dioxide levels, temperature and relative humidity.

By the end of September, the issues were fixed.

“Hostos Community College takes the health and safety of its faculty, staff, and students to be of the utmost importance. All issues regarding ventilation raised by the CUNY Start office have been reviewed and addressed,” said a Hostos College spokesperson, who added that the college plans to install new air handling units on all floors of the building, and urged members who have a health and safety concern to contact the college’s environmental health and safety director.

It is the employer’s responsibility, not the union’s, to provide a safe and healthy workspace, but it often takes union pressure to force management to do the right thing. In the case of CUNY, the union’s vent squad provided the informed assessment that prompted change.

REPEATED COLDS

“We want to gather that data to encourage that responsibility to show them that there is an issue, [where] they need to take whatever action that is needed to get better ventilation in the spaces our members are working,” said Susan Fountain, the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs coordinator who led the ventilation assessment



Susan Fountain, left, of the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs, with Rachel Cholst, an academic advisor at CUNY Start.

at the CUNY Start offices at Hostos. “We want [management] to get to the root of the problem.”

Poor ventilation can cause health problems, such as airborne illnesses, including colds and COVID-19, and it can cause a buildup of carbon dioxide, which can cause headaches and fatigue. The CUNY Start community was not immune to those issues, members noted, with repeated chest colds and chronic headaches and fatigue. Cholst does note that since the improvements took place this semester, she has not had a chest cold with the same severity that she did pre-pandemic when she worked in the office.

But the CUNY Start ventilation problem is not the only health and safety issue on campus at Hostos. The PSC Hostos Chapter has been actively taking on health and safety issues, from early concerns about lack of personal protection equipment,

inadequate ventilation and better scheduling to ensure proper social distancing in the college’s Dental Clinic in the Fall of 2020 to a needed HVAC upgrade in a rented building where CUNY CLIP instructors work.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ORGANIZING

In June 2020, the local PSC chapter set up a health and safety committee that conducted a chapter-wide survey on health and safety issues on the campus. More than 100 members responded. By the Spring of 2022, the committee began a semi-regular dispatch on campus issues to members.

“Overall, working with the administration has been a mixed experience,” said Haruko Yamauchi, the PSC Hostos Chapter Health and Safety Committee chair and a library teaching coordinator. “We vacillate between a wary attempt to make progress together and utter exasperation on both sides.”

Health and safety advocacy has prompted more member involvement at Hostos, chapter leaders said. When CUNY campuses were partially reopening, Bernardini noted that PSC Hostos Chapter meetings doubled in attendance.

“It’s one of these issues that touches on every title,” said Bernardini. “Because we all, in one way or another, are going to be in the classrooms and our offices working.”

Bernardini notes that there’s no golden road of steady progress when working with management, but it’s a give-and-take with a certain amount of pushback.

He did say that there is one necessary ingredient to successful campaign organizing.

“Being relentless,” Bernardini said. “Staying on top of [an issue], that’s going to allow us to get the gains that we need with members.”



Union rallies for reproductive rights

PSC members join hundreds of other activists at an October 8 demonstration in lower Manhattan in favor of reproductive rights and women’s health care.

Calls for CUNY funding

Continued from page 2

\$53 million in new funds for full-time faculty, are not sustainable. CUNY’s budget request indicated an intention to hire 500 professors, 500 lecturers and 75 nonteaching research professors. But, in fact, only 30% of the funding designated for full-time faculty went to professorial hires, \$16 million out of \$53 million. That decision permitted the university to authorize only 120 professorial searches, as compared with 475 lecturer searches. If the university continues to appoint only one professor for every four lecturers, CUNY will not maintain a research-active faculty, which is critical for serving our students, our disciplines and the public.

CUNY lost 383 full-time faculty to retirement and attrition over the past five semesters, the vast majority of them professors. The 120 new pro-

fessorial appointments won’t begin to backfill that loss, not to mention the massive deficit in professorial lines that occurred over the previous decade, dating back to the recession of 2008.

There is an important place for lecturers, and the PSC supports lecturer searches as a path for our highly qualified adjuncts to full-time employment. At the current rate, however, CUNY will give the appearance of addressing the full-time faculty shortage, but will eviscerate the scholarly and research capacity of academic departments. With \$53 million in recurring annual funds, the university should have hired more than 120 professors universitywide. It must do better going forward.

James Davis
PSC President

JOIN THE PSC

- ▶ New to CUNY and not yet a PSC member?
- ▶ Already a member but want to recommit to the union?
- ▶ Want to sign up new members in your department or program?

For new CUNY faculty and staff, joining the union has never been easier. Learn about the benefits of union membership. Go to:

psc-cuny.org/join-psc/

Sign up and learn more about the amazing benefits of union membership.



ONLINE EDUCATION

PSC concerns about CUNY Online

By PENNY LEWIS

PSC Secretary

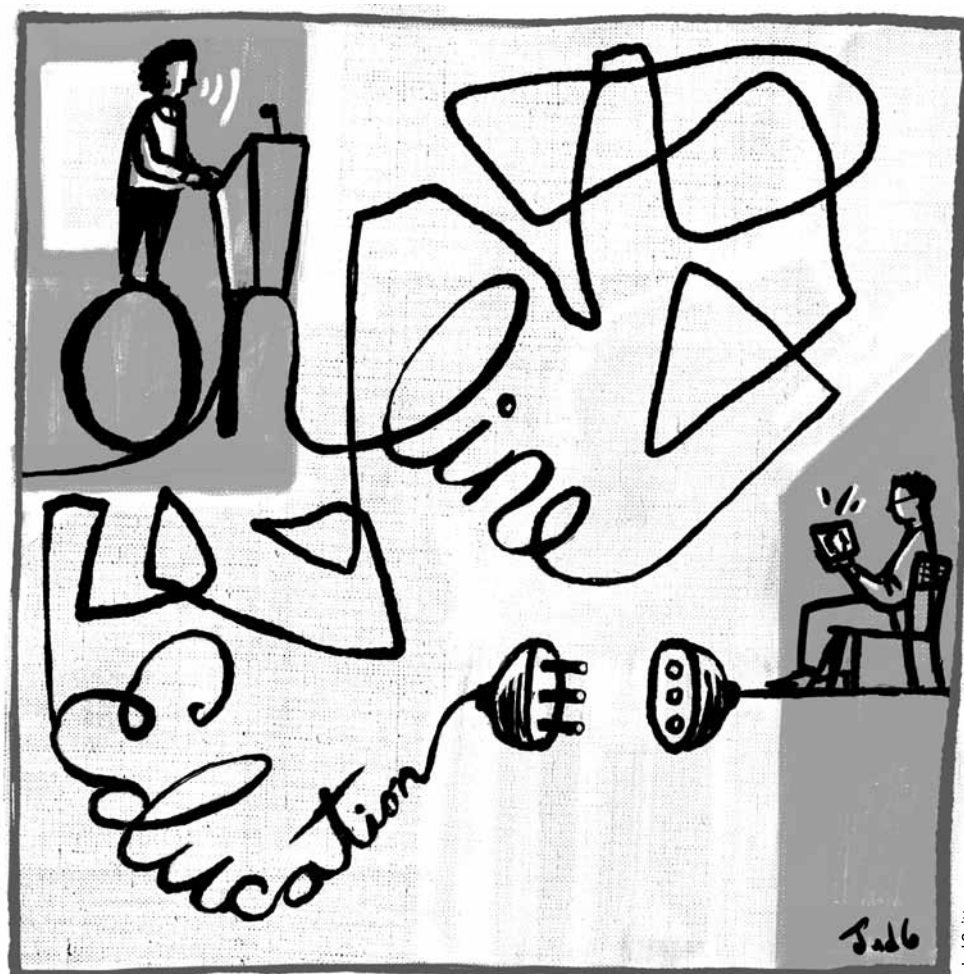
Editor's note: On September 22, the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education held a hearing on the future of online degree programs in the city. Below is a version of the testimony delivered by PSC Secretary Penny Lewis. It has been edited for print publication.

We have heard from CUNY and see that CUNY is committed to expanding its online degree programs and presence. We come to you to express our concerns about the possible directions these programs are already taking, and we share our ideas of some best practices that should be in place as any online expansion is considered. First and foremost, we would like CUNY to be completely transparent about their goals. They should actively and consistently consult with the union and faculty governance bodies, recognizing the critical roles each group plays in creating high-quality online degree programs. In particular, CUNY should be consulting with the union and governance bodies regarding the “CUNY Online” initiative, about which we heard nothing from CUNY in their testimony today. Specific questions about this program can be found near the end of this testimony.

Further, we are concerned that online is best only for certain students. Its expansion without adequate support for students, appropriate screening of students and support for faculty teaching the courses will erode academic standards and decrease student learning and success at CUNY. We know that our colleagues who are currently developing online programs provide many high-quality online classes at CUNY. But we have two related concerns. Expansion without investment will leave our online students stranded without necessary support. And, on the other hand, prioritizing online degrees over the in-person needs of our students will hurt our in-person students.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

For CUNY students, especially in their first year and those returning to their studies after some time away from college, in-person classes provide a continuum of support that is not available in remote classes. Building relationships is central to an educator's work, as it also is for advisors and counselors, and remote school makes this connection complicated. Historically, face-to-face classes and meetings allow these connections to thrive. Many students continue to struggle with injustices that COVID magnified: not having regular internet access, lack of a quiet place to attend an online class or study, dealing with family and friends' deaths and illnesses and unemployment. Online programs offer flexibility, but we hear from colleagues in faculty and union meetings that this flexibility can be a mirage for many students. While attending synchronous classes, many times students are off camera, at work or commuting, and faculty are frequently concerned that students are therefore unable to meaningfully engage or learn. While doing asynchronous classes, our colleagues



report that many students are unable to navigate the self-directed work that such online courses demand, and as a result, there is not adequate classroom engagement to ensure learning outcomes. There are definitely many students who do navigate both synchronous and asynchronous work well. But again and again, we hear that students are too often not really learning. This fact should not be a surprise. K-12 education has found clear evidence of the same.

TIME INTENSIVE

For faculty, prepping for and conducting online classes takes longer than in-person classes. Encouraging adequate engagement and providing meaningful assessment of students is often more time intensive than in-person classes. At most campuses, CUNY faculty are often paid a small stipend for developing an online class, but across the campuses there's rarely additional support beyond that initial investment. A 2019 study recommended the ratio of student to faculty in online classes be 12-to-1. In order for the courses to be successful, more faculty are therefore required. Though they may exist, we know of no online degree programs at CUNY that approaches this best practice for class size. Online courses across the university are frequently over enrolled. At some campuses, there are jumbo courses with hundreds of students, with limited teaching assistant support. It's not uncommon to find courses with already too-high class size caps of 25, 35 and 40 students. We are deeply concerned at the PSC that CUNY will explore online education as a cost-saving path, when in fact,

online education done well demands substantial investment in faculty training, ensuring small class size and consistent and expansive technical supports for both faculty and students.

Finally, we are concerned that faculty expertise and rights, in addition to general concerns for student success, are being overridden by administrative pushes for wholly online, asynchronous degrees, as in CUNY Online. Last spring in April 2022, CUNY's University Faculty Senate (UFS) received a report prepared by its Committee on Libraries and Information Technology. The report raised central questions regarding the expansion of online degrees, especially those developed by the CUNY Online “online program manager.” Below are excerpts from the UFS report, highlighting several key issues:

Integration of an “independent unit,” [CUNY Online], with the principles of shared governance at CUNY

- What representative bodies govern the development of CUNY Online?
- What committees will interact with the unit and what mechanisms will ensure faculty involvement in decision-making?
- What kind of ongoing support and training will the OPM [online program management] instructional designers have, and what rights and responsibilities will they have to engage in decisions guiding the direction of online education at CUNY?

Access to campus resources for fully online students

- Will online students have full access to their campus libraries, computer labs, campus Wi-Fi and printing services? Will

they pay the same student activity fee and student technology fee to support such services?

- Will fully online students have access to advisors, counselors, food pantries, wellness centers, accessibility/disability offices, etc.?
- Will fully online students have the same opportunities and access afforded to students who are able to access their home campus or another CUNY campus?

Quality of instruction and educational standards

- What level of orientation to online learning will be provided to students (before and after enrollment), including minimum tech standards and self-identifying “characteristics of successful online learners”?
- Will the online course development adhere to principles of universal design for accessibility?
- What plans for continuing assessment will occur with the expansion in online programs, and how will this be communicated to elected faculty representatives in the UFS?

The union has raised additional questions with management concerning the job titles and job descriptions of the positions suggested in the CUNY Online materials. The question of faculty rights to intellectual property is also critical, which the UFS report also raises. The concerns raised in the UFS report are all questions that CUNY should substantially answer before there is greater investment in more online degrees. The UFS report notes that SUNY Online provides direct assurance that “the faculty that teach online classes are the same faculty that students learn from on-campus.”

NO ‘CUNY LITE’

The report concluded, “CUNY Online must not become a substandard version of CUNY or ‘CUNY-lite.’ If the online degree programs do not uphold existing standards for academic excellence, if students are not adequately supported throughout their studies, how will CUNY protect its hard-earned reputation for providing high-quality, affordable education? We are concerned that this rapid expansion of CUNY's fully online degree programs runs the risk of creating a two-tiered university experience that will ultimately diminish the perceived value of a CUNY degree.”

We recognize that remote education allows students who need the flexibility to better manage work-life issues. Many CUNY students are juggling jobs, childcare and eldercare, and a remote degree would be attractive to them. At the PSC, we believe tuition and the cost of attending college should not be a barrier, nor should not having access to affordable and convenient childcare. As you know, in last year's budget, we advocated for free tuition and expanding access to affordable childcare. In the New Deal for CUNY state legislation, supported by the City Council, we ask for more full-time faculty and mental health counselors and more investment in our deteriorating campuses. We hope that you and CUNY will address these key issues that we believe are barriers to attending in-person classes in advance of efforts that potentially minimize supports for in-person teaching and learning.

Remote education has its costs



ACTION ALERT

Sign up to testify

The CUNY Board of Trustees will be discussing CUNY's annual budget request at its December 5 hearing. The union plans to deliver a united message: It is time for the State to fully fund CUNY. The event is part of the PSC's "union week," a set of actions demanding full funding for public higher education.

How does chronic defunding of CUNY affect your campus, your classes and CUNY students? Join your colleagues in talking about the everyday effects of disinvestment, and how better funding can live up to CUNY's ideals. Sign up and recruit one colleague to testify too at tinyurl.com/PSC-testimony-sign-up.

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NEWS

Clarion | December 2022

CUNY initiatives help, but more needed

By ARI PAUL

The CUNY administration, with the help of the City and State's top leaders, has taken some important steps to make college more affordable, increase enrollment and enhance education at CUNY. But the only real way to bring CUNY up to its full potential, in the PSC's view, is for Albany to enact the New Deal for CUNY legislation (ND4C), which calls for funding CUNY and making the university tuition-free once again.

This summer and fall, CUNY shared plans it believed would improve campus life for students and make college more affordable. In September, CUNY and Mayor Eric Adams announced the Inclusive Economy Initiative, a \$16 million plan for career development that CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez said in a statement, "builds on proven models for connecting students to in-demand careers and expanding the capacity of CUNY campuses to grow and sustain talent pipelines with employers across multiple fast-growing sectors – such as tech, health-care and green jobs."

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

That announcement followed the unveiling of a CUNY joint venture with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, which awarded "six CUNY colleges...\$3.98 million in city funding to help train the next generation of professionals for climate-smart careers," according to a statement.

CUNY has also partnered with the New York City Council to address the decline in enrollment to recruit students who have left college without completing their degrees. City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams said in a statement, "This \$4.4 million pilot initiative in the city budget will serve thousands of returning students this Fall, and hopefully tens of thousands more in future expansions."

And with the support of the PSC, Governor Kathy Hochul launched in August a \$150 million expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) which will now provide TAP

Extra programs don't fully fund CUNY



CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez (center) praises the mayor's \$16 million plan for career development, but some members worry that the university may be putting too much emphasis on vocational programs.

to approximately 75,000 additional students who are pursuing a degree part-time.

Last year, the union kicked off efforts to push the New Deal for CUNY, landmark legislation that would make CUNY free, increase the number of full-time faculty and staff and repair the university's infrastructure. The legislation has dozens of supporters in both chambers of the state legislature. While the state budget agreement reached earlier this year increased full-time faculty, the union believes that the bill must be passed in order to correct years of disinvestment that has led to deteriorating campus buildings, declines in enrollment and not enough staff or faculty to meet students' needs.

Sharon Utakis, the union's vice president for community colleges and a Bronx Community College English professor, embraced many

of these initiatives, but noted that none of them address CUNY's core problem, which is a lack of full state funding.

The illusion of fully funding CUNY

Further, Utakis feared that the quick fixes that CUNY has announced would change the educational mission of the university. One program that concerns her is the Inclusive Economy Initiative.

"Initial funding is \$16 million. Almost any additional money spent on CUNY students is good, but this initiative raises several questions and concerns. One aspect of the program is connecting students to internships, with an emphasis on students from community colleges. Will these be paid internships? How will our students be protected from exploitation by employers? The emphasis on community college students could be seen as part of the general push towards vocationaliza-

tion of community colleges, with an emphasis on certificate programs and non-degree courses that lead to jobs, while many community college students enter college with the hope of transferring to a four-year school," Utakis said.

NOT ALONE

Utakis isn't alone in her concerns. "All this focus on things like job programs are not designed to encourage critical thinking," said Rebecca Smart, an adjunct lecturer in psychology at Borough of Manhattan Community College and Baruch College. Adding that many of these programmatic needs are made by administrators and not faculty, she said, "Pedagogy and curriculum decisions need to be in the hands of the people who are educators."

"I'm pleased to see the governor's extension of TAP to part-timers," she said. "There has been too much

emphasis in the past several years on students taking extra credits: 15 hours instead of 12, which is unrealistic for a great number of our students. Part-time TAP recognizes that our students sometimes are taking classes, working full-time and also caring for their families, all at the same time. If we want students in those situations to continue [to pursue] their college degrees, we need to make it possible for them to afford to attend part-time. Of course, TAP wouldn't be an issue if we had a New Deal for CUNY, which would be a much better way to approach fully funding CUNY and making tuition free."

STOPGAPS

Scott Cally, the PSC chapter chair and professor of theatre arts at Kingsborough Community College, concurred.

"These stopgaps are well and good and have their value, but it doesn't solve the fundamental problem of why they're needed to begin with, which is that we're underfunded," Cally said, noting that these initiatives are a short-term form of funding, covering for the fact that the university needs far more to meet student, faculty, staff and community needs. "I worry that when these programs come out, it gives the politicians a way to say they're funding CUNY without funding CUNY."

UNION WEEK!

12/5 – 12/9

**Wear Red for Higher Ed.
Testify at the CUNY Board
of Trustees on December 5.
Join your campus activities.
Come to the Bronx press
conference on December 8.**

**Be union proud and join the
fight for a just contract.**

**Go to psc-cuny.org for more
details.**