

Clarion

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MAY 2023



HOUSING Grad rent increases

Grad Center housing is raising the rent, again. Members fight back. **PAGE 9**



Erik McGregor

MEMBERS ARE FIGHTING FELO'S FOLLIES

Union organizing has forced Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez to reconsider some of CUNY Central's austerity directives, but more work must be done to fight the administration's cuts. **PAGES 3 & 5**

CITY Mobilize against the mayor's cuts

Eric Adams is seeking devastating cuts to CUNY that would cripple community colleges. The PSC and its community allies are organizing to stop the austerity. **PAGE 2**

CONTRACT Members fight for increases

CUNY Research Foundation workers are demanding fair pay increases and a formalization of their current remote work schedule. Management is stalling. **PAGE 4**

BUDGET The campaign in Albany

Governor Kathy Hochul is playing hardball against the state legislature in the budget process, while the union continues mobilizing for full funding for CUNY. **PAGES 6-7**



ANTI-RACISM The union seeks justice at KCC

Faculty at Kingsborough Community College are pressuring the college administration to come clean about how it handled an incident with students last year. **PAGE 8**

Stopping brutal City Hall cuts

By ARI PAUL

By all accounts, Mayor Eric Adams' executive budget proposal is based on austerity. He has "proposed reducing the size of the budget from the current year's adjusted spending plan – by roughly \$5 billion," after last year ordering "city agencies to cut city-funded expenses by 3 percent for the current fiscal year and 4.75 percent for the following year," according to *The New York Times*.

The mayor's austerity has hit education with deep cuts to K–12 schools, public libraries and CUNY community colleges, which heavily rely on funding from New York City Hall. As *Gotham Gazette* explained, the mayor's "preliminary budget for CUNY for the city's 2024 fiscal year, which begins July 1, is \$1.27 billion – a \$168.5 million cut compared with the budget adopted in June 2022 for the current fiscal year," adding, "that's on top of the \$13.7 million cut in city funds for CUNY that the mayor made in the middle of the current fiscal year and is already being felt at the schools."

CITY BUDGET

In the coming months, the PSC and CUNY Rising Alliance (CRA) are working with other unions and community organizations to tell Mayor Adams and the City Council that this year's budget agreement must reverse cuts to public education and social services. Instead, these vital institutions need to be funded. The union will hold a major demonstration on May 11 to put more pressure on City Hall (see page 12).

At a rally outside the NYC Department of Education's downtown headquarters, Ethan Milich, CRA coordinator, said that thanks to City Hall's previous cuts, CUNY had lost 80 positions, and "more [cuts] are coming." He added that the mayor should reverse course and "invest further" in CUNY, so that it can hire more full-time faculty, mental health counselors and advisors, as well as provide resources to programs like ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs).

"I'm a proud CUNY alumna," City Council Member Shahana Hanif said at the rally, insisting that a united front of labor and community activists could bring about a better budget this year. "This is what power looks like."

City Hall's frugality has already contributed to the CUNY administration's belt-tightening. Union officers warn that if the mayor's proposed budget goes into effect, the result would compound fiscal problems so badly that entire programs and initiatives like the Accelerate, Complete and Engage (ACE) program could be completely wiped out.

"CUNY administration has called on each college to develop a savings plan that outlines 'sustainable' expense reductions and revenue enhancements," said Sharon Utakis, the union's vice president for community colleges. "The primary way

PSC and others unite in budget fight



City Council Member Shahana Hanif, center, leads an anti-austerity rally in downtown Manhattan.

to enhance revenue is to increase enrollment, which is difficult right now, especially at the community colleges, where enrollments have not fully recovered from the pandemic, among other things. As a result, colleges have been focused on cuts, rather than increasing revenue. At first this has meant hiring freezes and understaffed lines that won't be replaced. But when that's not enough, the colleges are turning to cutting the jobs of some of our most vulnerable colleagues, contingent faculty and part-time staff."

Utakis, the former PSC chapter chair at Bronx Community College, noted that at her campus, "I've been hearing that the plan is to cut three-year adjunct appointments, again, which again undermines our contract."

HITTING TWO-YEARS

Union activists have noted that cuts at the city level hit community colleges the hardest, at a time when they need more investment.

The mayor's budget will directly hurt community colleges, said Susan Kang, an associate professor of political science at John Jay College and a faculty liaison for CRA.

"As community colleges are the most accessible path for higher education for so many of our students, these cuts will disproportionately affect our working-class [students],

immigrants and students of color, hurting their access to the great social equality engine of our city," Kang said. "Adams, despite being a CUNY grad, wants to pretend that these are rational cuts, but they are politically motivated ways to push the agenda of a pro-business, anti-progressive agenda in our city."

The union and its allies organize.

The city's cuts to CUNY, Utakis said, hurt students and PSC members alike.

"These cuts are horrible for those who lose their jobs, [and] demoralizing to all involved. They increase the workload of those who keep their jobs," she said. "At the community colleges, this increase in workload coincides with the increase in workload brought about by a greater number of underprepared students, and a greater level of underpreparedness of those students. Because of the pandemic, students have been traumatized by the loss of family members and by economic struggle, and their educations have been disrupted."

In testimony before a City Council panel this March, PSC President James Davis outlined the necessary investments the next city budget could put into CUNY. Davis advised that the final budget agreement should put \$35.5 million into student support and advising, especially into ASAP, which "provides comprehensive student support and advising at

a ratio of 1 advisor per 150 students, as well as other supports, including tutoring, textbook subsidies and transportation assistance through free MetroCards.

"CUNY needs \$10 million to hire 58 full-time mental health counselors, working in-person to bring campuses closer to the recommended ratio of counselors to students," Davis said. "To train more mental health professionals at CUNY, \$10 million is needed to fund a public loan forgiveness program, along with \$1 million for new faculty to implement this program at CUNY."

Meanwhile, college administrators are under pressure to reduce their operations.

"This year, campuses are being told to cut their budgets," said Heather James, an assistant professor of political science at Borough of Manhattan Community College. "Yet the city's revenue picture is better than expected."

Indeed, the Independent Budget Office said in its budget forecast that it "projects that the city will end fiscal year 2023 with a \$4.9 billion surplus, \$2.8 billion more than the surplus projected by the Office of Management and Budget in the preliminary budget."

IMAGINARY CRISIS

Even with that positive outlook, City Hall is forcing CUNY and the entire public education system in

New York City to live like the financial sky is falling. While Donald Trump's arraignment in Manhattan distracted the world's attention in April, City Hall issued more economic pain. *The New York Times* reported that the mayor's budget director "directed the leaders of nearly every city agency, including the Police Department, to cut their budgets by 4 percent for the coming fiscal year, which begins in July," adding that "Only the Department of Education and the City University of New York will be subject to smaller cuts of 3 percent."

NO AUSTERITY BUDGET

"This cannot be allowed to stand," James said. "We all know that austerity budgets have reduced staffing levels across the system for decades. CUNY is already lean. With support from allies in the Council and vocal advocates outside the system, we are working hard to push back against another \$10 million in employee cuts due to attrition as was proposed in the mayor's fiscal year 2024 preliminary budget. These cuts – called Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) – have already cost CUNY over 200 faculty and staff positions with another 55 on the line."

James said it was important for PSC members to transition from fighting for a state budget to a city budget campaign, because a lot is on the line.

She said, "We will keep fighting for comprehensive advising to move all students closer to the recommended ratio of 1 advisor for every 150 students, mental health counseling and other wraparound services."

SIGNS OF HOPE

There are already signs of hope: City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams and other city lawmakers announced in April that they had identified \$1.3 billion that could help reverse the mayor's cuts, and the Council's budget proposal includes strong funding for CUNY.

The union praised the Council's position, saying in a statement, "The Council wants exactly what CUNY needs: full restorations of the Mayor's cuts, funding for desperately needed academic advisors, a stronger CUNY Reconnect program and more."

James reiterated that it was important for PSC members to continue to put pressure on City Council members to pass a budget that funds CUNY.

"City electeds live in our neighborhoods," she said. "With continued pressure and partnership, we will have an impact. Our future is their future. Let's make sure they know it."

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Winning against CUNY austerity

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

The directives from CUNY Central were sudden, extreme and would hurt CUNY workers across titles. In early February, Central administration announced a hiring freeze, cuts to college budgets by 5 to 7% and the reestablishment of a CUNY Central Vacancy Review Board (VRB) to oversee almost all hiring decisions. The administration also singled out adjunct budgets for the chopping block.

Department chairs across CUNY organized. Many PSC members gave powerful accounts at a March 20 Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting on how the looming cuts would affect their campuses. “The savings plans and VRB are destabilizing and disrespectful. They should not be implemented,” PSC President James Davis told the CUNY Board. “They should not have been announced to begin with, because the message they send is that CUNY can absorb additional cuts. We cannot.”

SOME CHANGES

Two days after those testimonies, CUNY administration partially reversed course. On March 22, Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez sent a letter to college presidents and deans, saying that the CUNY Central VRB will not be required to review “budget neutral” or “cost savings” positions, which would instead be subject to an internal college process, including approval by a college-level VRB. In short, Central would refrain from interfering in searches already authorized by colleges that did not add to the college’s budget. Hires that result in a cost increase would still require Central approval.

The backpedaling was the result of union organizing and department chair pressure around Central administration’s overreach in college and departmental matters. And while the union considers that a victory, it continues to pressure the administration to withdraw the savings plans that were drafted by colleges and suspend all VRBs. To add your name to that letter, go to tinyurl.com/against-CUNY-cuts-letter.

Partial success in reversing course



Larissa Swedell, left, and Michael Newman initiated a department chair letter against the CUNY directives.

“CUNY colleges have lost hundreds of full-time faculty and staff in recent years. Our students do not have the support they need, and the remaining workforce is overstretched in every direction. Unmet needs abound,” states the union letter to Matos Rodríguez and CUNY BOT Chair Bill Thompson. “Our students deserve greater investment, not accommodation to austerity.”

DEPARTMENT CHAIR LETTER

A March 12 letter signed by 110 department chairs across CUNY protested the measures “undermining the search process” and “micromanaging the hiring process.” The letter was sent to Matos Rodríguez, Thompson and BOT Vice Chair Sandra Wilkin. By April, 170 department chairs, more than a third of all the department chairs at CUNY, had signed the letter.

“It came out of outrage and frustration,” said Michael Newman, a professor and chair of linguistics and communications disorders at Queens College and one of the chairs who drafted the statement. Newman objected to the suddenness of the cuts and CUNY Central’s micromanagement from afar. “They were deciding for our college what areas they needed to cut, which hires were not going to go through, after they had authorized all these hires. They suddenly took over as if the colleges were incompetent to make cuts on their own.”

Department chairs noted that vital, hard-won positions were now in limbo, at a time when there is nothing left to cut in their departments. They wondered if CUNY Central was also subject to cuts.

“They’re basically running out the clock on searches that are un-

derway and guaranteeing that they are failing,” said Larissa Swedell, professor and chair of anthropology at Queens College, who co-drafted the statement with Newman. “[For] searches [that] are at the end of the process, they’ve already had their interviews, they’ve chosen a candidate and they’re not allowed to make an offer because they’re waiting for two to four weeks for VRB approval,” said Newman.

While more local control in hiring matters is welcome, the budget cuts and hiring freeze still stand. And they are significant. Hector Batista, CUNY’s executive vice chancellor and chief operating officer, announced the cuts in a February 3 memo to college presidents and deans, giving colleges six weeks to come up with a savings plan for fiscal year 2024 (from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024).

‘It came out of outrage and frustration.’

In short: more cuts on top of cuts already required in fiscal year 2023. Batista didn’t offer a reason for the increased squeeze. However, he stated that CUNY will be monitoring enrollment data and funding from the state and city. A union analysis of CUNY data shows that enrollment is down CUNY-wide by around 20% from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022. Batista directed one specific area to cut: adjunct budgets.

“[Do] an in-depth analysis of adjunct costs considering the University’s declining enrollment and hiring of 595 new full-time faculty by the Fall 2023 semester,” stated the memo.

ADJUNCT CUTS

Adjuncts across CUNY are fearing for their jobs. At some campuses, there were rumors of limiting adjuncts on three-year appointments, a contractual provision won by the union in 2016. The union is organizing against this prospect and to resist any of these job cuts or layoffs. Appointment letters come on or before May 15.

“Batista’s memo places a bull’s-eye directly upon the livelihoods of the more than 13,000 part-time faculty and staff that our union represents,” said Lynne Turner, the PSC vice president of part-time personnel. “These austerity cuts will, if implemented, deepen the vicious cycle of layoffs, under-enrollment, class cancellations, larger class sizes and further cuts and job loss with dire consequences for CUNY students and all our members.”

The irony of these cuts was not lost on members. Some of CUNY’s most vulnerable and lowest-paid workers were facing the threat of job loss, while Hector Batista, the CUNY administrator who wrote the memo, received a 27% pay increase to his salary late last year, from \$330,000 to \$420,000; a raise that goes retroactive to December 31, 2021. Batista “also gets a car and is driven by various university peace officers,” an insider told the *New York Post*.

JOB SECURITY

While top-level administrators secured exorbitant raises, the future of many adjuncts remains unknown. At Bronx Community College (BCC) there have been some efforts for shared governance around the cuts, but it’s unknown how the cuts will play out, said Kathleen Urda, who serves as co-chair of the Council of Chairs at BCC.

“I feel like I’m in limbo right now, and there is anxiety and low morale on campus because it’s unclear what the upshot will be,” said Urda, a professor and chair of the English language and literature department. “I have faculty asking me whether they’re going to be hired back, and I have to say, ‘I really don’t know right now.’”

Holly Clarke, a long-serving adjunct in the public management department at John Jay College, testified to the BOT that she’s afraid of losing her job. She’s been teaching at the college since the late 1980s.



CLTs at Queensborough Community College gathered petition signatures.



Carolina Bank Muñoz, PSC chapter chair at Brooklyn College

Continued on page 5

Retirees outraged at health plan

By CLARION STAFF

PSC members, both active and retired, joined other municipal workers in outrage at City Hall's contract with private insurer Aetna to cover all municipal retirees.

The move comes after years of organizing against a plan by City Hall to move retiree health coverage into a privately managed plan in order to reduce health-care costs. (The PSC is a voting member of the Municipal Labor Committee, but has been in the minority of affiliated member unions in opposing the plan.)

NEW CONTRACT

Politico reported, "The five-plus year contract will go into effect Sept. 1. Retirees who are currently enrolled in the city's Senior Care plan will automatically be transferred to the Medicare Advantage plan. Retirees have been urging the Adams administration to select 'Option C,' a provision that would have allowed them to remain on traditional Medicare at no additional cost. When asked if the city is considering 'Option C,' a City Hall spokesperson said, No."

Cecelia McCall, a PSC retiree delegate, told a crowd gathered outside

City Hall seals privatization deal



PSC active and retired members rally at City Hall against the deal.

City Hall that retirees were inspired by French trade unionists striking and demonstrating against their government's move to raise the retirement age.

"We are as strong and determined as the French. Just like them, we will not give up until we have the health

care we were promised," she said. "The city has reneged on a contract they had with us when we were active workers. The bargain was sacrifice wages now but when you retire and when you need it most, you will have public, premium-free, quality health care."

Retiree health care under attack

She blasted the idea of privately managed health care for municipal retirees.

"Their bottom line is more important than our lives," she said. "They will make a profit by denying care."

The PSC said in a statement: "Mayor Adams missed an opportunity to honor the city's most es-

sential promise to retirees when he signed the Medicare Advantage contract between the city and Aetna. He had the option to continue traditional Medicare with high-quality, premium-free Medicare supplemental insurance (Senior Care), while still saving the city more than \$300 million annually. But he chose not to do so. And now, as we fight on for retirees, we note Commissioner [Renee] Campion's communication to Municipal Labor Committee leaders that legislation, litigation or 'some other event' could still compel the city to offer retirees the choice of traditional Medicare plus premium-free Medicare supplemental insurance."

FLAWED APPROACH

It continued, "The city's current approach to funding health care is flawed, and Medicare Advantage does not offer a permanent solution. Rising hospital and prescription drug costs mean Medicare Advantage will not solve the funding shortfalls. Public-sector workers – active and retired – should oppose further privatization of our health care and erosion of benefits. Hospital price controls, self-insurance, cooperative drug purchasing, accountability mechanisms for insurance companies and other cost-saving measures that are proving effective in other municipalities must be pursued here."

RF workers demand raises, flexible work

By ARI PAUL

PSC members at the Research Foundation of CUNY's Central Office (RF Central) are turning up the pressure as management continues to resist their contract demands in the current round of negotiations.

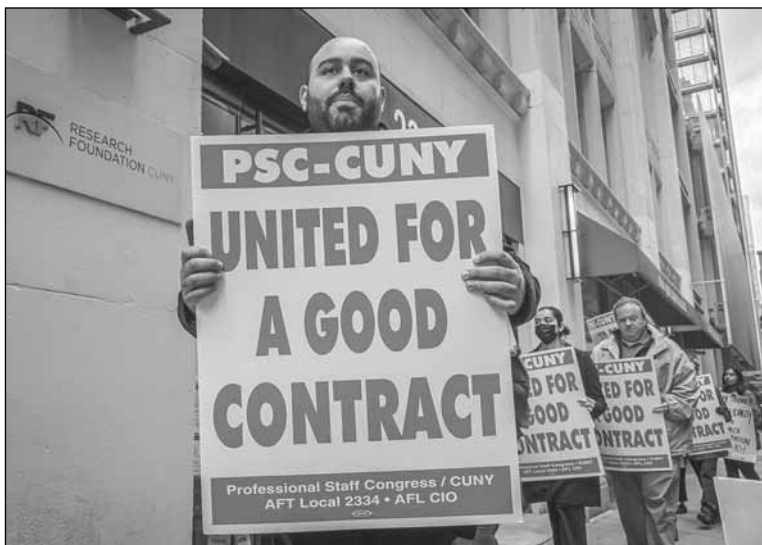
A PSC pamphlet read, "Management at the CUNY Research Foundation is offering a low-ball average annual raise of 3.25% to Central Office workers after we've worked through COVID and almost two years of near-record inflation. Our raises have gotten smaller and smaller. We're paying almost twice what we used to pay for health insurance, and we aren't going to take it anymore."

BARGAINING DEMANDS

The workers are demanding 4 and 5% raises. Members said they are also demanding contractual language to enshrine the office's current policy of a 50% remote work schedule, which management refuses to include. Management also refuses to accept language mandating "reasonable workloads," members said.

The Research Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization that is technically separate from CUNY, but the chancellor and several CUNY campus presidents sit on its governing board. PSC members at RF Central are not governed by the state's Taylor Law and thus can legally conduct a strike. Bargaining for RF Central is a separate process from bargaining for the main PSC-CUNY contract.

Pressure rises in contract fight



Research Foundation members march for a contract.

Evan Michelin, a senior desktop specialist at RF Central, said management's economic proposal is not acceptable given the current rate of inflation.

"I feel like we're in a recession right now," he told *Clarion*. "I don't understand why 4% is so hard."

Michelin said management's current economic offer is insulting, largely because the RF's 990 filings show that its chief executives earn annual salaries above \$200,000. "For them, they don't feel a staggering recession," he said.

Laurence Furman, a project administrator, agreed.

"It's not enough," he said of the RF's economic offer, adding that the union's demand was necessary because "with the rising cost [of living], which is not going to get better, we need this."

The members at RF Central also demand that the next contract include language enshrining the workers' current schedule, which is 50% in-office and 50% remote. "Why can't they put it in the contract?"

Why can't they put it in writing?" Furman asked.

Maintaining some kind of remote work structure for non-faculty members is a major priority for the PSC in its bargaining for PSC-CUNY and RF contracts. This hybrid work is not just for COVID safety but because remote and flexible work schedules have been vital in improving members' work lives and productivity.

REMOTE WORK

Michelin said that he believed a 50/50 remote work schedule was important because even though the pandemic has calmed down, another catastrophe could happen in the future. Workers should be ready to continue their work even if conditions bar them from coming into the office safely. "The pandemic is not going to [be] the last crisis we have," he said. "The 50/50 [split] is something that's important for everybody."

For RF Central members, management's low-ball negotiation has been unacceptable because the workers need more money to keep pace with rising costs, and they want to improve their working conditions. There is also a fundamental issue of respect. Members said they worked extra hard during the pandemic to keep the RF Central office afloat, but management won't recognize that.

"It's a kind of 'We don't really need you' feeling," Michelin said. "I do feel disrespected."



Glenn Magpantay

A Hunter prof, fighting for civil rights

By ARI PAUL

Glenn Magpantay, an adjunct assistant professor in the Asian American studies program at Hunter College, is a newly appointed commissioner on the U.S. federal Commission on Civil Rights, an agency that advises Congress and the White House on civil rights issues and future policy.

As a veteran civil rights attorney, Magpantay hopes to highlight the needs of Asian Americans and the problems they face today. As a CUNY part-time instructor, he hopes to highlight the power of public higher education.

"The last time the commission did a full-on study of civil rights concerning Asian Americans was in 1992. It's been 30 years," said Magpantay, who is the only Asian American on the

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Organizing against preemptive cuts

Continued from page 3

“Many of the adjunct faculty, who will lose courses and income or be laid off altogether, (likely 500 to 1,000 faculty), have taught for years in their departments. They have experience with our CUNY students and often teach introductory and lower-level courses, courses that are key to student retention,” Clarke, an adjunct lecturer, told the BOT. “They are not disposable or easily replaceable.”

In mid-April, PSC President James Davis sent guidance to all CUNY department chairs on the directive to cut the adjunct budgets, saying that adjuncts should not be treated as “interchangeable” and “disposable.”

“The entire adjunct budget of all the colleges combined is only 8.2% of CUNY’s \$4+ billion total operating budget. There are other ways to meet the current fiscal challenges without harming faculty members or impairing the student experience,” Davis said.

He outlined a list of recommended priorities to department chairs, including avoiding assigning teaching overloads to full-time faculty members; reappointing adjuncts currently on three-year contracts; appointing adjuncts eligible for three-year appointments who have been reviewed satisfactorily, along with adjuncts who rely on CUNY for their health insurance; communicating with other departments and programs across the university to help find positions for adjuncts they are not able to appoint; and convening discussions with full-time faculty to see if they’re willing to teach an underload that can be made up later.

VACANCY REVIEW BOARDS

The union also plans to turn out members to the May 8 BOT hearing in Queens to protest the cuts, especially at the adjunct level. (See page 12 for details.)

The CUNY Central plan still requires the colleges to vet revenue-neutral positions with their own newly created VRBs. Most of the boards at CUNY campuses consist of only CUNY administration, but at Brooklyn College (BC) there are faculty and staff on the local VRB. Carolina Bank Muñoz, the PSC chapter chair for Brooklyn College, is one of the five voting members on the board. It’s thanks to the BC chapter’s persistent organizing work that they have a seat at the table.

With the latest directive from Matos Rodríguez, it’s unclear how it will play out on the campus level because in order to establish something as “revenue neutral” or “cost savings,” it needs to align with the college’s proposed budget cuts submitted to CUNY Central, Bank Muñoz said. At the latest BC VRB at the end of March, 16 positions were approved, and half of those positions could stay at the college level and await final approval. By the end of March, the BC VRB approved around 50 positions, and fewer than 10 have been officially approved.



Lynne Turner, PSC vice president for part-time personnel

Bank Muñoz told *Clarion* that faculty and staff are very demoralized on campus, and feel they can’t continue to absorb more cuts.

“I want to be clear these are political choices they are making with people’s lives,” Bank Muñoz said.

For instance, short-staffed and relying on college assistants to do the work of HEOs who had left. Now it’s those college assistant positions – and in some cases their extended hours – that are on the chopping block.

“It’s going to lead to speedup, which is already a huge issue on the campus,” she said, referring to the fact that staff will be doing more work in less time.

The Baruch PSC chapter leadership wrote to their president in mid-March, demanding management share the savings plan, open up the campus VRB from being a management-only board and participate in a university-wide town hall on the budget cuts. At this point, there has been no movement from administration on these fronts.

At Hunter, Brooklyn, Borough of Manhattan Community College and perhaps other colleges, administra-

tions are seeking to help achieve their savings targets by increasing revenue, or by addressing what Batista calls in his memo “historically low student collection rates.” One source of revenue at Hunter is the resumption of the practice of sending “delinquent” student accounts to collections.

LOW MORALE

City College of New York (CCNY) faculty who teach four-workload-hour composition courses were informed that beginning in the summer, those courses would be three hours. The English department is pushing back, and the union immediately filed a grievance. The fourth workload hour has been in practice for three decades and it’s similarly used for many CCNY math and science courses. *City* reported that at City College, “16 adjuncts and six full-time faculty members, all of whom teach composition, held a ‘grade-in,’ sitting in the hallway in front of the dean’s office grading student papers,” along with “the support of close to a dozen undergraduate students.”

At City Tech, where there has been a low HEO-to-student ratio,

there is an acute need for more staff, especially in financial aid, billing, registration, counseling and academic advisement.

“Students struggle to make appointments in counseling or financial aid as those offices are understaffed. Personnel work excessive workloads and hours because someone has left a position and is not replaced. Weary faculty advise randomly assigned students from a wide range of majors with complicated requirements because of a lack of advisors on campus,” Carole Harris, PSC chapter chair at City Tech, told the BOT.

A common theme on all campuses is discontent and overwork, with little sign of shared sacrifice from administration.

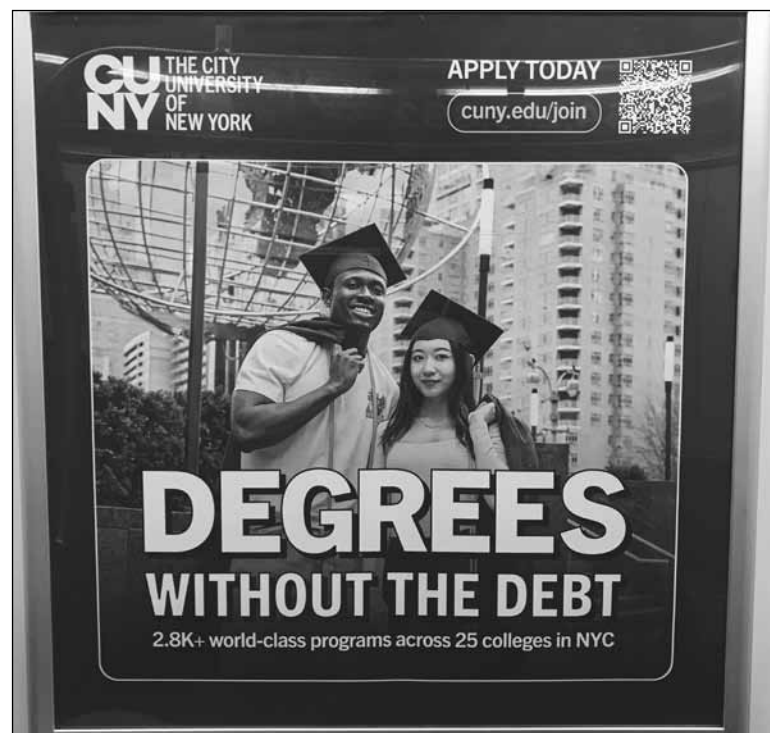
“Morale has definitely been impacted. The austerity measures of budget cuts and a hiring freeze make it that much harder for us to do our jobs effectively,” said Carlos Parker, assistant director of admissions at City College. He said now

there’s about half the number of full-time staff, as compared to when he started working in the office in 2008. “Members are starting to lose hope for relief, and that’s bad for everyone, our students most of all.”

CLT ISSUES

At Queensborough Community College, adjunct CLTs and nonteaching adjuncts face the threat of non-reappointment, while administration plans to unilaterally relocate eight long-serving CLTs from their home departments to a new technology support and service center housed within the existing academic computing center, where there is a shortage of staff. In April, members presented to their college administration a petition with hundreds of signatures denouncing the move.

“For a long time, CLT staffing levels have been operating at the bone. These recent budget cuts cut into the bone and deep into the marrow,” said Amy Jeu, a cross campus officer on the PSC Executive Council and a CLT at Hunter College. “People are overwhelmed, exhausted and reaching burnout. As an employer, this is something CUNY should be paying attention to.”



CUNY’S cuts undermine recruitment efforts.

Union holds first hybrid Delegate Assembly since pandemic began



PSC delegates gather in person and online for a hybrid Delegate Assembly in March, the first of its kind since meetings went fully remote in the Spring of 2020. PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez, right, leads members in union songs.



The state budget: how we go

The anatomy of the campaign

By ARI PAUL

Nearly two weeks after the state budget was due, PSC activists and allies told the governor: It's party time.

With beach balls bouncing, activists one by one did the limbo on Third Avenue on an unseasonably warm and sunny day and asked, "How high can you go, Governor Hochul?" Gathered outside of the governor's Midtown Manhattan office on April 13, PSC members and other CUNY advocates, including State Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assembly Member Karines Reyes, demanded that the governor lift the bar higher for funding public higher education.

At the time of the spring break-themed rally, the state budget had not yet been settled, despite it being past its April 1 deadline. News reports suggested that the governor had held up the budget to force through reforms of the state's progressive bail laws, which have long been the target of conservative politicians.

BUDGET CAMPAIGN

The PSC and its allies – CUNY Rising Alliance, student groups and other public higher education unions – have spent months lobbying, demonstrating and organizing for the budget campaign. Hochul's budget proposal issued earlier this year was already more generous than budget allotments for higher education under the previous governor, Andrew Cuomo.

As *Gotham Gazette* noted, Governor Hochul's budget proposal "include[s] \$5.7 billion in appropriations for CUNY, including \$1.92 billion in state assistance for oper-

ating funds, \$3.15 billion from various funding sources (federal aid, grants and scholarships, tuition and fees) and \$643 million in new capital funding (in addition to \$3.44 billion reappropriated for capital projects)."

MORE FUNDING

But Hochul's plan for CUNY this year is still less generous than what CUNY received in the first budget settled under Hochul. "It's a little better than when Cuomo was in office, but we need to lift that bar," said Andrea Vásquez, the PSC's first vice president, in reference to the first state budget agreements under Hochul. "We need to lift that bar way up, and it has to happen this year."

The state legislature is pushing for more funding for CUNY than what the governor is seeking. "We deserve that investment," James Davis said at the April 13 rally. "CUNY needs to be a top priority, not an afterthought."

(Incidentally, *The New York Times* also revealed that the governor had spent a whopping \$2 million on consultant fees to assist her State of the State speeches, which outline her annual budget priorities.)

Winning a good state budget for CUNY is only one step in a larger fight. The union must also organize to fight cuts at the city level. And winning more state and city money is a step forward in the PSC's contract campaign. The union also fights for CUNY on principle: The union believes that a free, high-quality public education is a fundamental public good that the working people of New York City deserve, and it is an institution that, if properly funded, can go



Students lead a march for CUNY funding across the Brooklyn Bridge in March.

a long way in fighting inequality and racism in our society.

So it is important to understand how the union campaigned for the state budget this past year.

INCREASED SUPPORT

It all began in the fall, when the PSC organized members to pressure the CUNY administration to insist that the state increase funding to CUNY. The administration's budget ask – approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees – was admirable, but not enough to meet all of the university's needs. At the time, *Clarion* reported: "The request, which was approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees in December, asks for additional operating funds of \$339 million from Albany and \$80 million from City Hall over the current budget, in addition to asking

for \$983 million for capital projects. In short, CUNY is asking for a 16% increase in state support and 13% in city support, as well as a tuition freeze."

The PSC's New Deal for CUNY (ND4C) legislation would go further by returning to tuition-free CUNY and increasing the number of full-time faculty and staff members.

In December, the PSC held Union Week, a set of events throughout the university, where faculty and staff demonstrated and organized around linking the struggle for the state budget with the campaign for a just PSC-CUNY contract.

STATE LOBBYING

These events showed that the union and its allies would need to work around the clock and use multiple avenues to pressure the state

legislature into backing the union's New Deal for CUNY agenda in this round of budget negotiations.

Things heated up this spring when PSC leaders, union members and students took multiple trips to Albany to lobby lawmakers in both chambers. In March, the PSC, along with the United University Professions (the SUNY faculty and staff union) and the New York State United Teachers (the PSC's state-level affiliate), held a massive rally for full funding for public higher education on the Million Dollar Staircase at the capitol building in Albany, followed by a lobbying blitz. Numerous state lawmakers rallied with the PSC and other unionists and students on the steps of the capitol.

Davis also testified before a joint hearing of the Senate Finance Com-



Assembly Member Harvey Epstein supports increased CUNY funding.



Jen Gaboury, right, leads a teach-in at Hunter College on the ND4C.



Students and union members rally in Albany

t here

mittee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee on the need for increased CUNY funding.

The PSC joined students for several rallies calling for greater investment and free tuition at CUNY, including a march across the Brooklyn Bridge, a rally at Baruch College and speak-outs at several Board of Trustees hearings.

The union also used mass media to spread its message, airing television advertisements highlighting the importance of fully funding CUNY and taking the message to social media.

Numerous media outlets amplified the PSC and its allies' message about full funding for CUNY. *The Wave*, the local paper of the Rockaways, called proposed tuition hikes "ill-conceived."

SOCIAL MOBILITY

State Senator Iwen Chu of Brooklyn wrote in an op-ed for the *BK Reader* that the fight for full funding for CUNY was personal. "I have seen firsthand how CUNY invests in people, in families, and our communities," she said. "CUNY is key to building social mobility – especially for students coming from low-income, immigrant, and minority backgrounds. I represent some of the most diverse neighborhoods in Brooklyn and it is not a surprise that my district has the greatest number of CUNY students. Many immigrant families come to this country for the great opportunities for their children and recognize CUNY as a path to a sustainable career. The fight to keep CUNY affordable and accessible to immigrant and working families is personal for me."

Similarly, Assembly Member Reyes, coauthor of the New Deal for CUNY, spoke at the April 13 rally about why CUNY was so important to her. "I know what CUNY provided for me," said Reyes, who attended Baruch College. "It was a ticket to the middle class."

She added that investing in CUNY meant investing in the training of the city's workforce: nurses, teachers



At a rally for a tuition-free CUNY at Baruch College, CUNY students oppose tuition hikes.

Erik McGregor

and other public servants. "CUNY is a jewel in the crown of New York," Reyes said. "We need to invest in it like that's the case."

STUDENTS' FUTURE

Two Beacon High School students, noting the popularity of CUNY campuses as college choices for their peers, wrote in *City Limits* that the state should pass the New Deal for CUNY legislation. "We need to fully fund CUNY in this year's state budget, make it tuition-free again, hire more full-time faculty, advisors, and counselors, and fix outdated and crumbling buildings," they wrote. "Passing the New Deal for CUNY is making an investment in OUR future, the future of current and future New York City high school students who will one day walk through CUNY's

doors. We believe education is a right for all, and passing the New Deal for CUNY helps us make that a reality."

Even the *Daily News* editorial board celebrated CUNY's public service by touting how well CUNY schools rate in national college rankings, saying "CUNY schools are over-performing when it comes to some of the metrics that really count for their students and graduates."

The union plans to build on this momentum in upcoming campaigns. Over the next few months, it will need to build pressure at the city level to stop the mayor's proposed austerity budget (see page 2). And earlier this semester, the union's contract with CUNY expired. The PSC delivered its contract demands to management, and pressure on CUNY will surely build in the foreseeable future.



PSC members do the limbo outside the governor's Manhattan office.

Paul Frangipane



before a lobbying blitz.



Assembly Member Karines Reyes (left), a prime sponsor of the ND4C, protests outside the governor's Manhattan office.

Paul Frangipane

Patrick Dodson

KCC Public Safety prompts faculty questions

By ARI PAUL

Two Kingsborough Community College (KCC) students are facing campus disciplinary action for a dispute in which they say they did not do anything wrong. Faculty and staff at the college have been demanding KCC's administration answer questions about how it handled the incident. So far, PSC members at the south Brooklyn campus are not satisfied with how KCC is responding, prompting more questions about campus policing.

Much like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, accounts of what exactly transpired can vary. On November 3, according to faculty sources, after a meeting of the student anti-racist group Common Ground, Student A allegedly began arguing with a group of students, many or all of whom were Black. Student B allegedly stood up and confronted Student A, who, according to sources, allegedly used racially inflammatory language. Allegedly Student C also rose up and stood between Students A and B to separate them and de-escalate the situation. CUNY public safety officers arrived and detained Student C, taking him to their office and later to the nearest NYPD precinct, where he was charged by the police with disorderly conduct.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

The criminal charges were later dropped because the CUNY public safety officers involved in the detention did not show up to court, PSC members said. However, according to sources, the administration has invoked the CUNY Code of Conduct, known as the Henderson Rules, to bar Student C from registering for classes, while placing Student B on probation and pressuring him to sign an admission of guilt regarding the incident. He has refused to do so, faculty sources said.

PSC members at KCC are voicing frustration because the KCC administration has not been honest or transparent about the disciplinary charges against students and how the situation was handled.

"On several occasions, including in a public town hall in November, college officials, up to and including the president [Claudia Schrader], stated that no charges have been brought by the college against any student in connection with this incident," said Scott Cally, the PSC chapter chair at KCC. "This position was repeatedly represented to the union throughout November and December."

Cally, a professor of theater arts, added, "This inaccuracy was discussed at our labor-management meeting in late February, where the president was asked about this issue specifically as well as the college's overall response to this incident in general. The answers were such that I felt compelled to abruptly end the meeting and walk out. It is simply unacceptable to mislead the union."

Concerns about racism and campus policing



PSC members at Kingsborough Community College say the administration has not been open about an on-campus incident.

He continued, "Credibility is essential for effective college leadership, and its loss will have far-reaching effects at Kingsborough. It is incumbent on President Schrader to address this situation with the entire college community, as well as to hold herself accountable for the actions of her administration."

Emily Schnee and Anthony Alessandrini, both professors of English at KCC, drafted a letter to the administration on November 21 in response to the incident. That letter has been signed by more than 150 CUNY faculty and staff. The letter, reproduced here,

'Credibility is essential for effective college leadership.'

demands the administration address the nature of the charges against the students, why the NYPD was called onto the campus and why students have been prevented from handing out literature about the incident.

"KCC management still has provided no information about why the NYPD were brought onto the campus in violation of the Memorandum of Understanding between CUNY and the NYPD," said Alessandrini, who also chairs the PSC Academic Freedom Committee. "They have provided no information about why at least one student was, as far as we have been able to determine, arrested and charged with disorderly

conduct, and why other students have apparently been charged with violating the Henderson rules.

'WALL OF SILENCE'

Schnee, a member of the union's Executive Council, added, "The intent behind the letter was meant to break through this wall of silence."

And Michael Spear, an assistant professor of history at KCC, noted, "While I understand there are legitimate issues of privacy and due process, I see no reason why the college could not have provided some information about key questions about how and why the campus public safety officers acted, was it necessary for

the police to be called, and why some students were charged. And to make matters worse, when the Kingsborough administration did provide the chapter some information (about whether students had been charged), it appears that it did not provide the full facts. If the administration cares about campus climate (as it says it does), it should accept the fact that it needs to communicate better and more honestly with the chapter and the rest of the college community."

COLLEGE RESPONSE

When asked for a comment in response to the letter, a KCC spokesperson told *Clarion*, "Kingsborough Community College is committed to a diverse and inclusive community where all students feel safe, welcome, and free to pursue their studies. The College is required to adhere to FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] rules and cannot comment on any students' records or pending matters."

For Common Ground's two faculty advisors – Patrick Lloyd, an associate professor in chemistry, and Ryan Schiavone, a lecturer in allied health – the college's handling of the incident was an outrage.

"Public safety, instead of de-escalating a heated situation, in which no one had touched anyone, they escalated the situation," Lloyd said. "They did not request to talk to the student. They assaulted the student, who was 17 years old. They charged him. They dragged him with handcuffs to the precinct. Imagine the effect that has on a child."

Schiavone explained that KCC's handling of the November 3 incident has sparked a larger conversation about racism across CUNY. He said he has spoken about the incident to faculty and staff at other colleges already.

"Attacks like this expose the racist system for what it is," he said.

Below is the November 21 letter to KCC President Claudia Schrader, signed by more than 150 faculty and staff:

Dear President Schrader,

We write as members of the Kingsborough community and of the Professional Staff Congress to express our deep concern about the events of November 3.

Like many members of the college community, we have been waiting anxiously for over two weeks for more information about what happened at the college on that afternoon. Despite pledges to investigate, the college administration has provided insufficient information to the Kingsborough community and our concerned colleagues across CUNY.

We understand that FERPA regulations and respect for our students' privacy limit the information that can be made public. However, there are urgent questions the college has a responsibility to address and *must* answer.

First, we are deeply concerned about reports that a KCC student was arrested on campus by the New York Police Department. The college community needs to know:

- Were charges ever pressed against any KCC student involved in the incident?
- What were those charges?

- Furthermore, were disciplinary charges by the college leveled against any KCC student involved in the incident?
- Have those charges been dropped?

Second, it is urgent that the college community be informed as to why the NYPD was called to campus. The 1992 Memorandum of Understanding between CUNY and the NYPD clearly lays out the terms for NYPD access to CUNY campuses. For non-emergency situations such as this one, the MOU specifies that NYPD personnel will only enter CUNY campuses "upon the request or approval of a CUNY official designated by CUNY as having authority to make such a request." So we need to know:

- Who requested and authorized the entry of NYPD officers on campus?
- Was the person who called the NYPD authorized by CUNY to do so?
- What, exactly, is the college's protocol for involving the NYPD in any campus incident? According to the MOU, this must be public information.

Third, we are deeply concerned about allegations that students have been prevented from distributing flyers about the incident on

campus. This would be a clear infringement of the principle that colleges should be sites of free expression where debate and discussion of contentious issues are at the heart of academic life. As the American Association of University Professors declared in its 1994 statement on freedom of expression, "On a campus that is free and open, no idea can be banned or forbidden. No viewpoint or message may be deemed so hateful or disturbing that it may not be expressed."

So, once again, a number of questions need to be answered:

- What exactly is the college's policy on the distribution of flyers by a student group and is this policy in conformity with the spirit of freedom of expression in public educational spaces?
- Were Public Safety officers or others told to prevent students from distributing flyers on campus?
- Why would Public Safety, as has been alleged, play any role in enforcing adherence to a policy on the distribution of flyers?

We call upon President Schrader to provide us, as well as the larger college and CUNY community, with detailed answers in writing to these questions.

Anger at GC housing rent hike

By ARI PAUL

The Graduate Center (GC) brags on its website that “graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and members of the faculty” can take advantage of its residential building in East Harlem. Sharing a plaza with the Hunter College School of Social Work, the GC apartment building “offers bright, modern, airy, and affordable housing, as well as providing an easy commute to the Graduate Center.”

But the rent is going up. Again.

Zoe Hu, PSC chapter chair at the GC, blasted the 3.75% rent hike, set to go into effect this August. She urged the university to revoke the plan at the CUNY Board of Trustees hearing.

INADEQUATE SERVICES

“Months after CUNY closed down Brookdale, the only low-income housing for Hunter students, it has begun raising the rent of Graduate Center housing. This is the third time in five years that rents have been raised on those in the building,” she said. “Moreover, building management has had to provide residents with space heaters because central heating does not work, though inhabitants continue to pay utility bills, which are exorbitant because the building is commercially zoned. They also continue to pay for nonfunctioning building Wi-Fi, even as most apartments are forced to purchase personal setups.”

Hu saw this as economic warfare on GC workers.

“That CUNY is both employer and landlord for these students means that this rent measure is essentially a wage cut,” she said. “Because the stipend and teaching wages represent separate portions of the overall graduate student package, CUNY can

Akin to a pay cut, members say



Paul Oder, a doctoral student and a resident at the Graduate Center's apartment building in Upper Manhattan, is fighting a rent increase.

give with one hand and take with the other. I fear we may be in a one-step-forward, two-steps-backward situation, unless CUNY looks away from the bottom line and takes seriously the well-being of graduate students.”

PUSHING BACK

Simon Kostelanetz, a PhD student in French who lives in the building, said that the rent hike announcement has forced residents to consider how they can organize to stop it

“It was kind of expected, but this time a lot of the tenants were like,

‘We cannot do this again. We can’t let it slide. We can’t let them do this every single year,’” he said.

Giacomo Bianchino, a PhD candidate in comparative literature at the GC, added that many residents had not re-signed the lease. GC members are planning next steps on how to fight back against the hikes, he said.

“The 3.75% rent increase goes into effect in August, as part of the new ‘license’ agreement between tenants and the university. This follows three similar hikes in the last five years:

two at 3% and one at 3.25%,” he said. “This affects international students disproportionately, who comprise a large share of the 120 people that use the building. It’s also a staff issue, with recent hires often living at the building while they search for more stable housing.”

MAINTENANCE ISSUES

He added, “The residents think the rent hike is unfair, given the stagnancy of their stipend, a soaring inflation rate and some major maintenance issues of the building that were carelessly dealt with by the [building] administration last year. Last winter, the heating went out for a month and administration provided scanty and dangerous replacement [heaters], or advised people to buy space heaters. Tenants still received heating bills for this period.”

Kostelanetz told *Clarion* that GC officials told residents that the rental increases were due to financial strains caused by the pandemic.

“We understand that the pandemic has put financial strain on CUNY,” Kostelanetz said. “But it also put financial stress on CUNY students. We shouldn’t have to bear the burden of CUNY’s financial problems.”

GC housing residents met with GC officials in March to discuss their concerns. The administration is still sticking to its rent increase. Paul

Third hike in five years

Oder, a doctoral student in the criminal justice program, said that he hoped to rally the GC community, not just the building residents, to their cause.

“Our stipend has been stagnant for the last couple of years,” he said. “That is an issue not just for GC housing residents, but all GC students.”

Agitation brings food back to GC

By ARI PAUL

When faculty, staff and students at the Graduate Center (GC) issued a statement of “no confidence” in the GC’s top leadership in the fall, they listed many problems. One of those problems was a lack of food service at the Midtown Manhattan campus.

The no-confidence statement cited numerous examples that have caused “widespread demoralization” and hindered community building. “The lack of adequate food services aside from vending machines has furthered a sense of detachment, alienation and anomie,” the no-confidence letter said.

THE PEOPLE’S PANTRY

Thanks to faculty, staff and student agitation this spring through setting up a People’s Pantry at the GC, the administration has listened and will take action to bring food options to campus.

Win in the no-confidence push

“This semester, the People’s Pantry has heightened awareness of the need to secure a consistent supply of quality, nutritious food that will support community needs,” GC President Robin Garrell said in a March 28 email to the campus community. “We also recognize that the GC must comply with city health and safety regulations. We have therefore consulted with the Food Bank for NYC to assist the GC in setting up and supplying an on-site pantry that is sustainable and safe.”

She added, “The Graduate Center is partnering with John Jay College on a joint food services contract. We expect to issue a request for proposals by May 1, with the goal of restarting on-campus food services in Café 365 and the Dining Commons, as well

as catering services, by Fall 2023. A forthcoming message will say more about the campus consultation process and timeline.”

Giacomo Bianchino, a PhD candidate in comparative literature at the GC and a PSC delegate, said that GC activists created the People’s Pantry in February. It started with a few tables, offering things like food, sanitary goods and books to anyone who needed them. “One of the groups that used it the most was the facilities staff,” he said.

The PSC GC chapter blog hailed this news as a major organizing victory.

“In just two months, *we, the GC Community*, have forced the administration to do something they repeatedly said was ‘impos-

Victory through direct action and solidarity

sible.’ We did this through direct action, solidarity and a huge public showing of mutual aid,” the blog post said. “We should relish the scale and speed of such an achievement. But we must be clear-eyed about the next steps. Although they are thanking and congratulating one another already, our administration may (probably will) drag their feet on this; it’s as much an attempt to shut us up as to actually fix the problems.”

NEXT STEPS

The chapter said that it will continue to monitor the situation as it develops.

“We want a direct say in how the food services are developed and how the pantry is run,” the blog post said. “We want to make sure that these services are handled with the principles of inclusion, accessibility, nutrition and labor justice.”

For Bianchino, Garrell’s letter marked a victory for grassroots organizing.

“It’s one of the clearest examples of direct action getting direct results,” he said.

Fighting for civil rights

Continued from page 4

commission. “Asian Americans are the nation’s fastest-growing racial minority group. We’re the largest segment of new immigrants, and yet we still face discrimination in employment, housing, voting [and] public spaces. Those are issues to bring out in specificity.”

Magpantay is the first LGBTQ Asian American commissioner, and he is the first Filipino American commissioner since the commission’s creation under President Dwight Eisenhower, according to a commission press release. He also has his eye on the spate of anti-Asian hate crimes.

“I think everybody knows about the violence Asians have faced since COVID, and the violence South Asians have known since 9/11,” he said. “It is a diverse community that works hard [and] that has built America. Yet so often we are marginalized by America.”

AGAINST INVISIBILITY

He added, “Asians are scared. My students are scared. I try to teach them that they should stand up for themselves and their community.”

Magpantay, who thanked Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer and Congress Member Grace Meng for his appointment, said that he hopes that his position will also call attention to the needs of CUNY students.

“I’m a tough professor, and I am because when I demand excellence from my students, they deliver excellence,” he said. “My goal is not [only] for them to pass my classes and graduate, but to be the future leaders of their city and of America.”

But far too often, he said, CUNY shortchanges its students because of low faculty pay and relying on part-time faculty instead of hiring full-timers. “Our students have high potential, but they need faculty and mentors who can bring that potential to the fore.”

MENTORSHIP

This mentorship is a personal mission for Magpantay, who said his public school and SUNY instructors were vital in helping him navigate the world as one of the few out-of-the-closet gay men in his community in the 1980s.

“It was because of faculty that I survived. They pushed me, and I realized the potential that I never even knew I had,” he said. “That’s why I teach at CUNY, because I see these kids who were just like me 40 years ago.”

Magpantay teaches Asian American civil rights, Asian American queerness and an introduction to Asian American studies at Hunter. The program is fulfilling, he said, added that students deserve more.

“What I want to do is to bring more attention to CUNY and to Hunter,” he said. “Hunter has CUNY’s only Asian American program, and it’s not a department. All the faculty are part-time adjuncts. We’ve been trying to get a line, a tenured faculty line.”

Magpantay will continue to work at Hunter while he embarks on this new federal role.

OUTSOURCING

CUNY Online raises troubling questions

By PENNY LEWIS
PSC SECRETARY

On March 27, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved a nearly \$8 million contract with O'Donnell Learn, an instructional design firm, the execution of which has the potential to fundamentally transform the university. While CUNY has not yet responded to the union's demand for a copy of the contract, the RFP slates 1,300 classes for creation in the coming three years, which, combined with hundreds of classes already on the books, will constitute the over 100 degree programs that together will comprise CUNY Online.

As planned, this new version of CUNY Online is supported and coordinated by CUNY's central administration, but individual degrees are developed and housed at any CUNY campus that seeks to develop them, rather than (as initially proposed) the School of Professional Studies. The controlling stipulation from CUNY Central, and from the contract that the Board approved, is that all these degrees be fully asynchronous, which means that there can be no expectation that students and faculty, or students and students, meet in real time, either in person or remotely.

NEED TO BARGAIN

The union has repeatedly demanded to bargain over the terms of this contract, as it proposes outsourcing the work of instructional design, currently performed by members of our bargaining unit. CUNY has thus far refused to do so, and the union is preparing charges to file with the Public Employment Relations Board.

We are still learning about this initiative, and please find at the end of this article an address for members to contact us with your own thoughts and information about CUNY Online at your campus.

But what we do know so far has given us cause for alarm. CUNY met with the union in January to explain its objectives in pursuing this program. They argued that fully asynchronous online degree programs are attractive to adult learners who have work and family responsibilities, that CUNY has fewer such programs than other comparable systems, and that CUNY's goal is therefore to bring new, untapped pools of students to CUNY.

MANY QUESTIONS

But we have many questions and concerns about these stipulations, and beyond.

As I noted recently in testimony to the CUNY Board of Trustees, campuses were just asked to provide plans for 5% budget cuts. It seems extremely likely that this massive online initiative will draw resources away from other, including teaching modalities, in-person and hybrid. CUNY has not taken its vision of this massive project to the campuses for meaningful collective review; most of our colleagues don't even know it's coming. This makes a mockery of true shared governance.



PSC Secretary Penny Lewis testifies to the CUNY Board of Trustees in December.

CUNY has a school that specializes in fully online asynchronous degree programs – the School of Professional Studies (SPS). Recognizing that in-person social and collective supports for academic work and study are missing in this individualized and possibly isolating mode of study, SPS invests a significant amount of its personnel resources toward support for these students.

FACULTY INVESTMENT

What SPS does not invest in is full-time faculty. According to the most recent available data in the Student Data Book, as well as CUNY's Midyear Report, in Fall 2021 there were 26 full-time faculty teaching 4,072 full- and part-time students at SPS, or one full-time (FT) faculty member for every 156 students at SPS. CUNY-wide, 6,745 full-time faculty taught 243,389 students that same semester, or one FT faculty for every 36 students. If the rest of CUNY looked like SPS, we'd have over 5,000 fewer full-time faculty at CUNY.

Comparing full-time equivalent students, the numbers are slightly better, but there would still be over 4,000 fewer FT faculty at CUNY. CUNY's experience with SPS raises the very real possibility of expanded online asynchronous programs

accelerating a wholesale deprofessionalization of the faculty role, and a marked decline in campus commitments to future professorial lines, compromising the education of all CUNY students.

STAFF STRETCHED THIN

As far as student support staff goes, CUNY Online threatens to worsen a situation where staff are stretched to the brink. In fact, at least one CUNY learning center director was informed that CUNY is currently planning to assign all CUNY Online tutoring duties to the home campus of the student, rather than the home campus of the course itself. This would mean that, for example, a tutor at Baruch College would be expected to work with a Baruch student taking a Hostos-based course with a Hostos-based instructor. This tutor would therefore need to be familiar with a new universe of classes at Hostos and would have little of the fine-tuned understanding that campus tutors develop for the courses on their campuses.

This is already a problem with e-permit courses, but the scale of this expansion would drastically increase the workload of tutors and support staff while diminishing the quality of the support students receive. Some online program support offices and

staff are already having their time redirected from supporting instruction happening now to attending meetings around the creation of new, asynchronous courses.

My school, the School of Labor and Urban Studies, was once affiliated with SPS, and I served on its governing body. I heard repeatedly from my colleagues that online asynchronous worked for some students, but that in their experience it is not a modality that works for many, even most students. SPS faculty argued that SPS served particular populations – self-directed, highly motivated and well-organized learners – that the modality depends upon for success.

But overall, graduation rates for fully asynchronous programs lag behind face-to-face programs. Many current CUNY students will be drawn to these programs because of their seeming ease and convenience, but they are unlikely to succeed. What safeguards will CUNY create to guide students toward the best paths for their learning? We are concerned that CUNY's eager embrace of this modality will set up many of our students for failure.

QUALITY AND FREEDOM

The pressure to support our students through their courses, especially for adjuncts lacking job security and vulnerable to student complaints, could encourage an erosion of standards. Just as we don't want our students to fail in asynchronous settings poorly designed for their needs, we don't want CUNY to approach the "degree mill" status to which some online programs have sunk across the country.

We are further concerned about academic freedom. The guidelines that colleges received on developing fully asynchronous courses imply that the course be reusable, and do not acknowledge the necessity of or explicitly anticipate resources for the ongoing revision of content. Who will own these courses? Who will have the right to revise them? Will faculty be compensated for the labor-intensive work of ongoing revision and renewal?

LABOR INTENSIVE

In sum, a fully online asynchronous modality is labor-intensive to develop, teach, revise and support, and it is not an optimal modality for most of the students we teach. What kinds of training, support and compensation will faculty and staff receive for this work? What kinds of support will students receive? Without guarantees of adequate resources, compensation, and broad freedoms for faculty, online asynchronous degree programs risk becoming purveyors of rigid outdated curricula, stifling academic freedom, providing insufficient or undirected supports for students, and thereby diminishing educational quality and experience for our students.

Enrollment decline across CUNY appears to be leveling off, but the university is certainly not where it needs to be. Yet this enrollment gamble, relying on completely online asynchronous degrees, comes with many risks. A broad and deep conversation about the wisdom of this CUNY Online path should be taken up in our departments, offices, programs, governance bodies and union chapters. We will be hosting a Zoom-based town hall in May to raise some of these and other questions. We also invite members to share their perspectives on this initiative, at the address below and with *Clarion*, in the form of letters to the editor.

To contact the union about your experience with CUNY Online, send any correspondence to: C.O.Online@pscmail.org.

Looking into the new online deal

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Many fronts against austerity

By JAMES DAVIS
PSC PRESIDENT

Austerity is a policy decision. Overcoming it requires organizing. When informed of proposed cuts to college budgets, PSC members are told that structural deficits are to blame, that there are only so many levers management can pull to save money. While it is true that CUNY enrollment is down from pre-pandemic levels and the university's federal stimulus funds are about to dry up, CUNY's budget gaps are the result not of disembodied structures but of policy choices made by people. We must continue organizing to change them.

New York State has resisted raising taxes on large corporations and moved instead in the other direction. The state's corporate tax rate has been held below 8% since 2001 and was cut by Governor Andrew Cuomo to 6.5% in 2016, suppressing state revenue. By comparison, the corporate tax rate in New Jersey is 11.5%, Pennsylvania is 9%, and Massachusetts is 8%. In 2021 under Governor Kathy Hochul, the rate increased slightly to 7.25%, but with a provision to revert to 6.5% in 2024, absent further action. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, this relatively small, limited hike alone generated \$3.4 billion in new state revenue over three years. Imagine what could be done for public institutions of all kinds if the corporate tax rate were increased. As a percentage of total state collections, corporate tax revenues yielded twice as much in 1980 as they did in 2020! By declining to fairly tax corporations with over \$5 million in annual profits, New York has foregone much needed revenue and failed to properly support the public sector, including public universities.

SUPER-RICH EXODUS

The myth that the super-rich will leave the state in droves if its tax code becomes more progressive has been dispelled. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of New York State taxpayers making \$1 million or more per year increased by 48% to 84,366. The wealthiest of these super-rich are the 107 billionaires who reside in New York City; their net worth in 2022 was \$640 billion, according to *Forbes*. Last year, Wall Street bonuses fell 26% from the empyrean heights of 2021, according to the state comptroller, and despite that drop the average bonus was still a whopping \$176,600. This bonus alone represents two-and-a-half times the entire annual income of the median NYC family. As a result of these conditions, New York has the dubious distinction of being the country's most economically unequal state, where the average annual income of the wealthiest 1% of families is more than 40 times the average annual income of the other 99% of families. Wealth inequality is also highly racialized in New York and across the country. According to a November 2022 report by the Fiscal Policy Institute, white households hold 86% of all wealth and 92% of extreme wealth nationally.

The problem is not that CUNY's needs cannot compete with other areas of acute need, such as affordable housing or home-care



PSC President James Davis speaks at a rally outside CUNY headquarters in February.

workers or pre-K-12 schools or resources for asylum seekers. The problem is that all of these public goods have been made subordinate to New York's persistent stratification and concentration of wealth.

The governor's executive budget for fiscal year 2024 sought savings through programmatic cuts to CUNY, including a proposed SEEK program reduction of \$1 million and a \$1 million cut to mental health services from the prior year. It was audacious and misguided for the governor to propose a 3% tuition hike at CUNY to generate operating funds for our colleges, and for the CUNY chancellor to support this proposal rather than call for additional public investment. CUNY's own budget request exceeded the governor's FY 2024 executive budget by \$340 million, yet all of the public pressure on the state to fund CUNY has come from the PSC, the CUNY Rising Alliance and allies.

INSURANCE STRUGGLE

The struggle over city health insurance staged a similar dynamic locally. Rather than devise a sustainable, progressive solution to skyrocketing health-care costs, the city is seeking to impose a Medicare Advantage program privately administered by Aetna onto municipal retirees as a cost-saving measure. The Aetna plan is superior to the original Medicare Advantage contract that the city hoped to sign, but that misses a key point. Seeking \$600 million in annual savings by destabilizing retiree health care and eliminating the premium-free Medigap insurance supplementing Medicare, the city made a decision not to pursue safer, more durable means of achieving health savings. The Aetna Medicare Advantage plan could have been offered with an option to allow retirees to keep their Medicare and city-provided Medigap plan, an option expressly provided in the Aetna contract

that would have saved the city more than \$300 million annually.

However, rather than forego the additional savings – less than three-tenths of 1% of the city's \$102.7 billion budget – the Adams administration foreclosed that path in favor of forcibly enrolling all retirees into Medicare Advantage. And for what? Certainly not to avert fiscal ruin for the city. The city is projected to close out FY 2023 with a large

budget surplus, according to the NYC Independent Budget Office, and healthy reserves on which to draw in case of a recession. Moreover, the Medicare Advantage plan will not address ballooning hospital charges and prescription drug costs, the main sources of rising city health costs.

DEFINING 'PUBLIC'

Why are public goods discarded and devalued? It has everything to do with who defines the public and whether that public is understood as deserving, according to our CUNY colleague, Heather McGhee, distinguished lecturer of urban studies at the School of Labor and Urban Studies.

"When the people with power in a society see a portion of the populace as inferior and undeserving, their definition of 'the public' becomes conditional," McGhee writes in *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone, and How We Can Prosper Together*. "It's often unconscious, but their perception of the Other as undeserving becomes so central to their perception of themselves as deserving that they'll tear apart the web that supports everyone, including them. Public goods, in other words, are only for the public we perceive to be good."

The PSC will continue to insist, in the face of prevailing norms and prejudices, that CUNY students – the majority of whom are people of color, and many of whom are immigrants and/or the first in their families to attend college – are indeed deserving, and that state and city funding for CUNY is not a handout but a critical benefit for the entire city and state. We will continue to assert that the faculty and staff who make the university run – those of us who help students to become their best selves and transform their communities – are also deserving of increased public investment.

Rutgers University historic strike



Unions at Rutgers University who represent adjuncts, graduate workers, full-time faculty and other titles staged a five-day strike, where at the time of *Clarion* publication, they received a tentative framework for major issues. The four-year contract would provide a 43% pay increase for adjunct professors, according to *The New York Times*. The raises for full-time faculty would be \$5,000 in year one and 3.5%, 3.25% (merit) and 3.5% in subsequent years, according to a union announcement. "We all were out there and students were out there and we did this as a university," Amy Higer, the president of the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union, told *The New York Times*.

The struggle for the public good



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

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Tell 'em, No CUNY cuts!

Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez is imposing unnecessary austerity throughout the University. As CUNY embarks on a massive ad campaign in order to draw potential students into the system, the union must assert that the university needs more – not less – investment into its educational resources.

Send a letter to the chancellor and CUNY Board of Trustees Chair Bill Thompson, telling them that “CUNY cannot be cut. Our students deserve greater investment, not accommodation to austerity. The central Vacancy Review Board should be suspended. The ‘savings plans’ should be withdrawn.”

Sign the letter: tinyurl.com/against-CUNY-cuts-letter.

ACTIONS AGAINST AUSTERITY

The union has two upcoming actions against cuts to CUNY.

MAY 8 AT 4:30 PM

The CUNY Board of Trustees is holding a public hearing at LaGuardia Community College’s Mainstage Theater. The union will lead an in-person action to protest the administration’s “savings plans.”

MAY 11 AT 12:30 PM

Join other PSC members, CUNY students and allies in a demonstration outside of New York City Hall, protesting ongoing cuts to CUNY that will cause devastating economic hardship for CUNY. Protestors will convene before the Council’s stated meeting. With negotiations happening between the mayor and city council around the budget, the time is right to show broad and vigorous support for CUNY.

