

Clarion

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



NOVEMBER 2023



BARGAINING Members speak up

Faculty and staff present demands in bargaining sessions with CUNY.

PAGE 2



Erik McGregor

FROM THE BRONX TO BROOKLYN TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

PSC members brought their demands for a fair contract and full funding for CUNY to all corners of the city. This is just the beginning.

PAGES 4-5

HEALTH AND SAFETY Contract protections

Many PSC contract demands concern pay and benefits. The union also puts forth strengthening health and safety measures, a contract priority. **PAGES 6-7**

FREE EXPRESSION CUNY must protect speech

Recent incidents show the CUNY administration's failure to protect the university community's right to free speech and expression. **PAGE 8**

POLITICS A PSC activist rises

BMCC political scientist Heather James knows a thing or two about city politics. Now she's the union's top legislative activist. **PAGE 8**



ORGANIZING Chapter fights HR failures

The PSC chapter at LaGuardia Community College says top-level mismanagement in Human Resources has taken a toll on faculty and staff. **PAGE 9**

Putting human faces on PSC demands

By CLARION STAFF

In many of the bargaining sessions between the PSC and the CUNY administration, union members have made presentations to management about the importance of the issues the union is bringing to the table.

This bargaining tactic is powerful not just because it brings more members into the bargaining process, but because it puts a human face on these issues for management.

In recent sessions, members have focused on a number of important topics. One area of concern was to protect multiyear appointments for part-time instructional staff, a key job protection feature for adjuncts. This was a hard-won contract gain for the PSC that is now under attack.

Another concern that members presented was the need to codify hybrid schedules for professional staff in the next contract. Members' presentations are reproduced below.

REMOTE WORK NOW

I have been on the faculty at Brooklyn College for 24 years and have been the head of Library Reference since 2008. In that capacity I supervise and am the timekeeper and chief scheduler for a group of nine reference and instruction librarians and other support staff. I co-chair the CUNY reference managers group, where we regularly discuss scheduling. I am also chair of the PSC-CUNY library faculty committee – in that role I am in regular contact with library faculty across CUNY and can speak for them.

I have been asked to share with you about the library faculty experience with remote work.

As you're undoubtedly aware, librarians at CUNY are faculty, and we also have a 35-hour work week. For the last two years, we have been successfully implementing the 30% remote work schedule. Much of our work can be accomplished working remotely, including both backroom work such as electronic resources management and public services work, including chat reference and research instruction for online and hybrid classes. As a result of working remotely, we have firsthand knowledge of the challenges and affordances of the online CUNY experience, which allows us to better serve students, faculty and staff. I am confident that a 40% remote schedule is practicable and advantageous.

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

A remote work option that allows for flexibility will work well – especially given that our libraries are typically open from 8 am to at least 9 pm, and on weekends.

A flexible environment is one where library faculty work with their supervisors to determine how to best accomplish the work of the library and meet the needs of students, faculty and staff – whether through modified start and end times, condensed work weeks, regular remote days or shifting remote work to

Members present to CUNY management



Mariana Regalado, a librarian at Brooklyn College, says hybrid work options are practical.

times in the year that are less busy. Flexible scheduling is not a new idea; remote work only increases its benefits collectively to both individuals and our University.

Remote work options are now standard in academic libraries – as revealed in a 2023 survey by the Association of College and Research Libraries, our professional association. Codifying flexible remote work at CUNY will keep us competitive for attracting, hiring and retaining the best candidates.

Mariana Regalado
Associate Librarian for
Reference and Instruction
Brooklyn College

ONLINE FREEDOM

The University today has an opportunity to marshal the collective expertise of our faculty to develop a capacity for ethical engagement with technology and to usher in a digital transformation of teaching and learning that builds upon the rich legacy of CUNY providing access to a quality education for all students.

As a librarian, I value privacy and I recognize its role in the safeguarding of intellectual freedom. Librarians know that freedom of inquiry is impossible without the promise of confidentiality that we provide our patrons, our students and our faculty. We know that people ask different questions when they feel they are being watched or recorded or otherwise

monitored – when they are not able to explore information and ideas freely. And this is why we institute policies to protect the confidentiality of patron records. In a digital world, our library technologies and the systems we implement must support our professional principles; our ability to adhere to our code of ethics is dependent on the design of the digital tools we use in our everyday tasks.

Similarly, the expansion of classroom teaching into online spaces, whether for distance learning or as an enhancement to in-person instruction (or some combination of the two) requires thoughtful and intentional design of the tools and technologies adopted for the course. Faculty, as the constituency responsible for academic and curricular concerns, must direct the selection and deployment of educational technology for use in our online classrooms.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Educational technology does more than “deliver course content.” For example, the design of a learning management system dictates the manner in which an instructor engages with students; it affects everything from the display of teaching materials to the assignments we create, and the way we assess learning. It sets the tone of interaction between faculty and students. The decision to use a learning management system is itself a pedagogical choice. There

are alternative tools and technologies that may be a better fit for the learning goals of a specific course. In fact, very few faculty make full use of the features included in a learning management system simply because they are unnecessary. Sometimes all you need to teach online are a class roster, shared file storage and a videoconferencing platform. You don't need an online gradebook for a thesis-writing workshop. And beyond even being unnecessary, sometimes a learning management system is actually inappropriate for the course.

Technology that fits teaching needs

Some faculty at my campus prefer to use open technologies as a matter of good pedagogy – for teaching public scholarship, for example. Learning management systems are so-called “walled gardens,” closed platforms that limit students to a controlled environment, making the LMS a poor fit for any course that aims to teach real-life digital skills, like the effective use of collaboration technologies – learning, say, how to provide peer feedback within platforms such as ArcGIS StoryMaps. Classes where students and faculty co-create digital exhibits or publish group writing on WordPress blogs. And the advantage is that students develop a facility with the same platforms they'll encounter in the modern workplace instead of a closed system. I've yet to meet a student who would put Blackboard as a tech

skill on their résumé.

THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

We often hear about the need for consistency in online course development. But consistency and ease of use are not the same as uniformity. Our job as educators is to guide students toward new knowledge. Adapting to different environments is a life skill; it's a career skill. We should be celebrating the individuality of a course as a reflection of the faculty's distinct approach to the subject matter, not offering a one-size-fits-all learning experience.

Cybersecurity is an important issue that deserves to be taken seriously, much more seriously than CUNY has in the past. But we cannot rely on third-party vendors to remove all risk, nor should we absolve ourselves from the core responsibility we have to ensure our students have secure and equitable access to a quality education online. A more sustainable solution to these modern-day challenges in the digital learning environment is to invest in the faculty who teach and design our courses, so that we develop – together – a shared commitment to accessibility, privacy, security and user experience. We need to invest in the instructional staff who support the teaching faculty through our Centers for Teaching and Learning, the libraries and other professional units. We need to consider what we are a part of, and what we are providing access to, when we incorporate digital technologies into our classrooms, and build on the shared expertise that is already present on our campuses.

'FREEDOM TO TEACH'

Individual faculty have the right to determine matters within their own classrooms, and this extends to the digital sphere. The AAUP calls this the Freedom to Teach: It means that faculty are free to develop an individual approach to the subject informed by our own research expertise and our own personal strengths. It means that faculty have the right to select the materials for the course and develop our own assignments and assessments. Even in contexts where standardization and consistency across a multi-section course is desired, faculty come together collectively to make those determinations; they should not be handed down by administrative fiat, and certainly not by an IT administrator. This freedom extends to the individual faculty's choice of modality, as well as the collective faculty's deci-

Continued on page 9

Clarion NOVEMBER 2023

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We're all bargaining with management

By ARI PAUL

The union is aggressively pursuing its bargaining agenda both at the bargaining table – where members are packing the room to observe the sessions and put pressure on management – and on the streets.

On a September 28 Zoom meeting with nearly 1,000 union members, PSC President James Davis gave a critical assessment of ongoing contract talks with the CUNY administration, citing concerns over management's unacceptable demands and its reluctance to invest in faculty and staff to ensure a bright future for CUNY.

"They cry poverty," Davis said at the mass meeting. "The thing that CUNY needs to understand [is] the CUNY budget is not static," Davis noted, adding, "It's not a zero-sum game."

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

The union is seeking wage increases that account for inflation. In addition, union leaders and members of the bargaining team updated members about other demands. Management has not presented a specific economic offer to the union.

Lawrence Bosket, a bargaining team member and assistant director of admissions at Brooklyn College, told members that the team has presented its demands for hybrid work, underscoring how flexible schedules increase morale and retention. "They see it as a benefit at their discretion," he said.

Davis also criticized management's demand to bar faculty members with union positions from serving in governance. In addition, management wants to remove many HEOs from the bargaining unit, as well as department chairs.

The latter issue was particularly irksome for Fabiola Salek, chair of world languages, literature and humanities at York College. Not only would it strip many professors of union protections and rob the union of dues money, she explained, but many chairs play an important role in fighting cutbacks at the campus level that impact faculty members. "We have a dam there that would be gone," she said of chairs who defend fellow union faculty members from cuts imposed by the administration. "Because as chair, you can make sure there aren't as many cuts." At a later speak-out event at her college (see p. 4), Salek said, "I would never be a chair if I had to be administration."

One focus of the union's bargaining strategy is to have rank-and-file members in the room as observers. The union sees this as a key organizing tactic. Members are, in fact, eager to see what's going on during talks and to share their observations with their colleagues on campus.

Veronica Schanoes, an associate professor of English at Queens College, was taken aback at CUNY's desire to compare CUNY faculty and staff salaries to those at small

PSC builds power for contract demands



Fabiola Salek objects to CUNY's demand that department chairs like her be taken out of the bargaining unit.

colleges in less affluent regions well outside of the tristate area.

"What I observed was how good the PSC team was at responding on their feet to the information distributed by CUNY and what CUNY hoped to imply with that information," she told *Clarion*. "For instance,

CUNY distributed a document supposedly putting our salaries into the context of comparable public institutions of higher ed in the Northeast. Immediately, our team pointed

out that comparing our salaries to those paid by a college in rural Maine or Pennsylvania was absurd, that we were New Yorkers, we were being charged New York prices for the things we needed, and we needed New York salaries. I very much appreciated how on the ball our negotiating team was, and how unimpressed and unshaken they were by CUNY's transparently absurd tactics. It really made me feel even more confidence in our bargaining team's ability to advocate for us."

CUNY VALUES

For Renee Bell, an assistant professor of mathematics at Lehman College, attending a bargaining session was "one of the most engaging and informative union activities I have been involved in so far," and a boon for transparent, strong and democratic unionism.

"Management was unable to conceal how far removed their values and goals were from the mission of CUNY, and how little they care about our working conditions and student learning conditions," Bell said. "They cherry-picked data and talked out of both sides of their mouths, which suggests that they anticipated our arguments and would be unmoved by them. For example, they argued that, broadly speaking, our union-



Renee Bell says that management is showing how little it cares about faculty, staff and students.

won benefits make up for the enormous salary deficit compared to nearby universities, and yet they deny both benefits, like job security, and wage parity to adjuncts."

Bell, however, saw the experience in a positive light, because it meant that the members' message was getting across to CUNY.

MANAGEMENT'S APPROACH

"They clearly recognize the potential power of our bargaining unit," she said. "From the beginning, management has tried to restrict and police our presence in the bargaining sessions, and they've stated that their offensive demands were 'not meant to anger anyone.' The power of a strong demand is its ability to galvanize and mobilize members, and we should spread the word about what we are

fighting for and the irreconcilable character of who we are fighting."

Ángeles Donoso Macaya, a professor of Spanish at Borough of Manhattan Community College, attended two bargaining sessions. In the first, she reported that management was hostile to both the union's demands at the table and to the presence of member observers.

"The attitude of CUNY management was somewhat dismissive," Donoso Macaya said.

"They didn't offer any definitive counterargument other than Columbia, NYU, and the like 'were not comparable institutions to us.' When we debriefed, an adjunct grad worker smartly pointed out that, in fact, these institutions were comparable to us, because many adjuncts who teach at CUNY sometimes teach

the same or similar courses at these other institutions, where they make twice the money. Another moment worth evoking was when they attempted to discuss our presence in the room, which clearly made them uncomfortable."

"[CUNY's chief negotiator] asked James Davis how he intended 'to control' the audience – as if we were kids who don't know how to behave – and how was he going to ensure that we didn't do anything that was out of protocol."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The union has pointed to other issues in bargaining. In a recent bargaining update, leadership told members: "Troubling, CUNY management proposed structural changes to the administration and purpose of the two professional development funds for HEOs, CLTs, NTAs, lecturers, graduate assistants, CLIP and CUNY Start instructors, and adjuncts. For decades our contractual agreement has been a peer review of funding requests, administered by the union, a procedure that has successfully funded hundreds of CUNY employees each year. CUNY's demand is for these funds, which are paid for entirely by our contract settlements, to instead be jointly administered and requests jointly reviewed. Most grants to professional staff support their attendance at conferences and professional development coursework, but CUNY seeks more direction of the funds' expenditures. The union observed that CUNY itself is responsible for providing the professional development that the administration wants for its employees."

NYC SALARIES

And as far as raises are concerned, the leadership said in another bargaining update: "In previous sessions, the PSC presented our demand for salary increases with reference to other major colleges and universities in the tristate area...Initially, CUNY management countered our comparisons with salary data from 278 colleges and universities across the entire northeast US. The PSC objected to the invalid, overbroad comparison, and on October 5 management responded with a narrower range of comparators within a 150-mile radius of New York City. The PSC said that despite having refocused the salary data, management's approach remains misleading, primarily because it does not account for our high cost of living. The crux of our argument for real raises, we reiterated, is that our current salaries fail to recognize the value of the work we perform and the expense of living and working in the city."

Members who observed the bargaining sessions said the union has been putting up an excellent fight against management. Donoso Macaya said, "Overall, I believe the PSC bargaining team has been doing a great job in terms of standing by their terms, and they should continue to do so."

Taking the message across the city

By CLARION STAFF

More than 20 speakers from CUNY campuses in Queens participated in a speak-out action to bring awareness to issues including unsanitary working conditions, a lack of funding for faculty and staff positions, and a failure by CUNY Central to advocate for critical city and state funding for the University. Those coming together to raise awareness included full-time faculty, higher education officers, college laboratory technicians, students, lecturers and part-time faculty.

Speaking to a lunchtime crowd at York College on October 24, Ian Hansen, the York PSC chapter chair, said that during the latest round of contract negotiations, the administration was “pulling the austerity argument yet again – and yet again, we’re not buying it.”

CUNY CRIES BROKE

Karen Weingarten, the PSC chapter chair at Queens College, dismissed the administration’s cries of poverty. “It’s made up,” she said. “There is no budget crisis. It’s a city and state crisis.” She added that it was the responsibility of college presidents and the CUNY administration to demand more funding from the city and state.

The event was part of the PSC’s massive citywide action plan, “5 Boroughs in 5 Weeks,” to press for a just contract and a fair allocation for CUNY in the state budget.

In Staten Island, members campaigned for their labor contract and an increase in state funding for CUNY and the College of Staten Island. Brooklyn members held a Halloween-themed protest in downtown Brooklyn, with chanting and speak-outs. The Brooklyn event featured dancing and music by the Rude Mechanical Orchestra, with members dressed in costumes presenting the horror of austerity and CUNY budget cuts.

Brooklyn City Councilmember Lincoln Restler said at the Brooklyn rally: “CUNY is the place where economic opportunity occurs, where people have a chance of actually achieving the middle class. It is because of the work that each of you do each and every day, investing in our young people, that we are achieving real change, and you all deserve real investment.”

BRONX ACTIONS

And as this newspaper went to press, members at Bronx campuses – Lehman College, Hostos Community College and Bronx Community College – also planned to march to their respective college president’s office to demand a just contract and full funding for CUNY.

In Manhattan, the CUNY Board of Trustees cancelled its in-person meeting at City College, where the PSC had planned its main actions, but the PSC was undeterred. Thinking quickly on its feet, the union hosted a gathering at its offices at 25

Members mobilize for CUNY



Erik McGregor

Karen Weingarten: Don't believe CUNY's cries of poverty.

Broadway. There, members offered virtual testimony to the board as their fellow members stood behind them on camera, holding PSC signs for the trustees to see.

Below are some excerpts from the testimonies PSC members delivered at the virtual board meeting and at the York College demonstration.

MONEY PROBLEMS

I love being part of New York City, and it is my dream to be able to retire here. I turn 63 in early No-

vember. This summer, I moved into a small one-bedroom apartment, and at the end of the two-year lease, the owner has said that he would sell the apartment to me, a minor NYC real-estate miracle that would make my dream of retiring possible. But when I reflect on the facts – (a) that I do not have the benefit of intergenerational wealth (both my parents died penniless in Texas decades ago), and (b) I work at CUNY, which disrespects me by not paying me what I am worth. I don’t know how I will be able to re-

alize this dream of buying an apartment and retiring in New York City if I stay at CUNY.

CONSTANTLY BEHIND

I have been a professor at Hunter College since 2009 (a full professor since 2011) and my checking, savings and credit card balances tell the tale of not being paid what I am worth.

I am constantly paying down the credit card balance only to run it up again with work-related expenses. The numbers simply don’t add up to get ahead in this robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul game, much less save for a down payment on an apartment.

There is a name for this practice: It is called strip-mining idealism. The people with the power to control the budget at CUNY are balancing their books on our backs. You count on our idealism about the mission of CUNY to exploit our goodwill and pay the faculty paltry sums, even as we’ve watched the CUNY administration enrich itself with pay raises of \$90,000 on top of already existing six-figure salaries.

This hurts CUNY students as well. Over time, the practice of exploiting faculty – at all levels – limits our ability to work with and elevate our students, who deserve our care and attention. Instead, we are forced to offer them the scraps we have left over from our constant struggle to survive within CUNY. If we, faculty at all levels, had more resources to succeed in our fields, then we would, of course, be lifting students as we climb, involving them in our research, taking them to conferences with us and connecting them to scholars at other institutions. Instead, because of your decisions, we – faculty, staff

and students – keep being forced to deal with the bare minimum as you all enrich yourselves.

Jessie Daniels
Professor, Sociology
Hunter College

USED AND ABUSED

I don’t earn a living wage. My pension would not pay for my cat’s medicine, and I don’t get to the end of my working life with benefits that carry into retirement. No, when I finally collapse from exhaustion, I lose health insurance, etc.

And when I say I don’t earn a living – this semester, as with every semester, many York adjuncts weren’t paid until the third pay period.

First, the York administration blamed the New York State Department of Finance, but they must have been told to back off that one, because this Friday, they gave the excuse that it was the adjuncts’ fault, the chairs’ fault, really, everyone’s fault but theirs.

It happens every semester. It is not an accident; it’s a way of saving money so more can go into the bottomless pockets of administration. More parties. More photo ops. More international vacations.

Jillian Abbott
Adjunct Lecturer, English
York College

PUT A HOLD ON MOLD

On August 31, 2021, I joined over two dozen faculty and staff members who rallied outside Medgar Evers College to call out what we saw as unsanitary conditions at the school.

Hurricanes Henri and Ida damaged the campus library, compounding what was already a lowly situation. Their impact resulted in a six-month closure of the library and water damage to other parts of the campus’s footprint. Two years later, the individuals who access the library have to deal with constant mold and mildew issues. In addition to the environmental slights, those who have raised these concerns have been gaslit and stigmatized when questioning the superficial remediations. Two weeks ago, we formally raised concerns about these persistent issues with the administration, only to be met with a retort about the college’s inability to act appropriately.

Buildings, classrooms and libraries – education infrastructure – are crucial elements to learning environments. High-quality infrastructure supports student learning outcomes, improves instruction and reduces dropout rates.

PEST ISSUES

Coupled with mold and moisture-ridden spaces, bed bug and rodent issues, and a capital footprint in desperate need of an upgrade, this further disadvantages the students that Medgar faculty and staff serve.



Paul Frangipane

Members and supporters gather for a Halloween-themed demonstration in Brooklyn.

From its inception, the lack of a proper investment in Medgar Evers College has been well documented. Let's change that paradigm. CUNY cannot truly live up to its mission without addressing these issues in earnest. Medgar Evers College cannot thrive when decisions about education infrastructure investments chronically have been made under uncoordinated and decentralized models, driven by ad hoc needs and limited funding availability, rather than a strategic approach that addresses both the short-term and long-term needs.

Kevin Adams

**Director of Community Standards/
Student Conduct Officer
Medgar Evers College**

MULTIYEAR NEEDS

Over the years, I witnessed what can happen to individuals and institutions with budget cuts and the massive shift to a marginalized, part-time workforce. My part-time colleagues were well-educated, highly prepared, dedicated and gave a great deal to their students. But because they were not consistently available from semester to semester, year to year, our wonderful, hardworking students could not get the benefit of their relationships with many adjunct professors. Once adjunct faculty were laid off or went to other colleges and universities to pursue their careers, our students were left without their valued guidance and support. Students almost never ask if a faculty member is part- or full-time. Students create relationships where and when possible. Statistically speaking, half of their opportunities for relationships with faculty would be with adjuncts who were ultimately less reliable mentors, due to no fault of their own. The long lines waiting for conversations during faculty office hours bore testimony to our students' hunger to develop these deeper relationships with their professors, people who serve them as role models, sources of information and support for their educational and career aspirations over the years.

STUDENT CORRESPONDENCE

Though I retired eight years ago, I still get requests from former students, some of whom I taught in the late 1980s, for career advice, recommendations for new job and educational applications, and sharing their publications and personal announcements. These relationships tie us together as people and as a University. They build trust, care and shared purpose. These are exactly the kinds of experiences that support our students as they move into the middle class and assume important positions in their jobs, communities and families. If you can't find your old professor, you've lost a connection to your University and to your past.

Our excellent part-time faculty need to have the stability of long-term appointments with decent salaries so that they can fully participate in this transmission of knowledge and support at CUNY. We have the honor of taking the best and the brightest of working-class



PSC President James Davis, right, speaks at York College.

New York and helping them achieve their dreams and aspirations, elevating their families and communities through their own education. Trustees, the support you give to our adjunct faculty – their job security, working conditions, economic stability – is a gift to our students, their families, their communities and to our city. Let's not educate our students on the backs of low-paid, precarious labor, but through great relationships to help them achieve their dreams. Part-time faculty need multiyear appointments with full-time work, good salaries, clear tenure or Certificates of Continuous Employment processes and secure status. We have a strong, smart and willing workforce ready to take that on, and students who need them.

Nancy Romer
PSC Retiree Officer

NEED TO MOVE UP

I come before you today to offer my perspective as a higher education assistant (HEA) working in the department of Student Success and Enrollment Management, and to convey my dismay at the lack of professional advancement in CUNY's "non-promotional" HEO/HEA series and the lack of structure exhibited in the reclassification process once a bid is submitted. This month, I am celebrating my seven-year anniversary at Medgar Evers College. Prior to my position at CUNY, I worked at the New York City Department of Education, as well as for education ministries outside of the United States. I also possess work experience in corporate and network media in New York City and abroad. It is this varied amount of professional work experience and perspective which leaves me perplexed by the "non-promotional" status of HEO positions. I can't help but ask: Why would an institution prevent professional staff from promotion?

COMMITMENT

As in any other professional positions held, I am committed to my duties. Yet despite my professional

commitment, development and success, promotion remains elusive. Such a limited professional trajectory often forces me to question a future career path at MEC.

I am a good example of an HEA who has remained in the same classification for seven years at CUNY, while my job description has changed four times with the complexity of my work portfolio being increased each time. This past June, I was finally able to apply for reclassification after our Reclassification Committee appeared to lie dormant. Preparation for such a bid required a great deal of time and effort, and once submitted, little insight was extended by the Reclassification Committee: no confirmation of receipt, no timeline for review, no timeline for outcome notification and, to my

understanding, no rationale if denied. Upon my request, I finally did receive a confirmation of receipt, but to date I have not received anything further.

CLEAR FRAMEWORK

I ask the Board of Trustees to consider creating a clearer framework around the reclassification process requiring Reclassification Committees to provide more transparency with their processes, such as providing timelines, and constructive rationale for acceptance or denial. Such transparency would only strengthen and validate the body and its process. I also urge the Board of Trustees to revisit the "non-promotional" status of HEO positions. We are committed professionals who deserve the same

opportunities for promotion as is the norm in other institutions of higher education and other professional sectors.

Esther Llamas

**Academic Student Support Program
Specialist
Medgar Evers College**

A STUDENT'S STORY

I'm here today to tell you about a student, Abdoulaye, who might stand in for so many others I have worked with over the years. Abdoulaye is in his late twenties and has a young daughter. He's a transfer student from Kingsborough Community College, an English major at Brooklyn College and a poet who has also taken three acting workshops, as well as courses in philosophy, politics, Caribbean society, children's studies and more.

A PERSONAL TALE

I met Abdoulaye when he took a class with me in the Spring of 2022. He was relatively quiet in class, but intensely curious. His contributions to discussion were often not comments, but questions. Abdoulaye wanted to probe deeply, to get to the root of things, to understand new issues and ideas. A year later, Abdoulaye enrolled in a Mellon Foundation-funded research program for transfer students that I co-direct, and set out to explore depictions of Haiti in US literature. We met individually every week or so as Abdoulaye read several novels and also critical writing by the late, acclaimed University of Chicago anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot, himself a Brooklyn College alum. Abdoulaye wrote an astonishing paper on a 1934 novel by Brooklyn writer Guy Endore called *Babouk*, about slavery on Saint-Domingue and the Haitian revolution. Reflecting on this historical novel, Abdoulaye wrote: "The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us . . . [that] history is literally present in all that we do . . . And, it is with great difficulty that one begins to realize this and to assess the history which has placed one where one is and formed one's point of view."

Abdoulaye is exceptional, but not in my experience unusual. He is one of countless CUNY students making the most of their educations in the face of poverty and alongside family responsibilities, long commutes, and paid and unpaid work of all kinds. CUNY students are not only people who need good jobs; they are artists, parents, citizens, thinkers of the highest order. They deserve nothing less than the best: small classes, campus Wi-Fi that works, clean classrooms without peeling paint and leaking ceilings, libraries with working elevators, staff and faculty – especially adjuncts – who are well compensated and have time to nurture students' incredible, inquisitive minds. For the sake of our students and their potential and manifest brilliance, I urge you to find or fight for the funding to make CUNY the jewel it could be. I look forward to your response.

Joseph Entin
**Professor, English
Brooklyn College**



Members for a just contract in Brooklyn.

Putting health and safety in the co

By JEAN GRASSMAN

With the presentation of the union's contractual health and safety demands, I'd like to provide some additional details. The first statement of Article 39.1 simply reiterates the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970, which states that the place of employment should be free of recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious harm.

We believe we can do better than simply prevent death or serious harm in the workplace.

Hence, the proposed next sentence specifies that the workplace be "free of physical or environmental conditions that interfere with teaching and learning or with the ability of employees to perform their assigned duties."

UNHEALTHY CONDITIONS

Our proposed expansion of the General Duty Clause specified in Article 39.1 is not without precedent. Article 32 of the contract between the AFSCME Administrative Clericals bargaining unit at the University of Connecticut and the state simply says that "The Employer shall provide a workplace free from unsafe or unhealthy conditions."

The focus on improving working conditions comes with many levels of benefits – not only does it reduce the burden of illness and injury for our members, but it also permits us to better do the work that we love at CUNY.

Here are three examples of deficiencies in physical and environmental conditions from this year alone, all of which have the demonstrated potential to adversely impact health.

First, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explicitly recognizes SARS-CoV-2 as an airborne pathogen, and while COVID continues to circulate, air purifiers are being removed from classrooms and offices because they are no longer "required."

Second, at Brooklyn College, students and instructors suffered terribly at the beginning of the semester when temperatures in art studios reached the 90s. When a work order was submitted, they were told that an immediate fix was not possible because there was a delay in obtaining a part. This would be understandable, except the excessive temperatures have happened in these spaces every September for the past five years.

And third, water pressure at Kingsborough Community College has been so low recently that toilets don't flush – yet people continue to use them.

RECOGNIZED HAZARDS

Airborne pathogens, temperature extremes and a lack of sanitation are most certainly recognized hazards as stated by the OSH Act.

And while nobody has died – yet – all of these scenarios demonstrate

Expansion of health and safety measures



Jean Grassman presented the union's health and safety demands to the CUNY Bargaining Committee.

situations that place our members at risk while severely impacting their ability to do their best work.

The proposed expansion of the General Duty Clause is necessary to protect our members' health. Plus, the improvement of conditions will provide a number of benefits to CUNY, like less resistance to in-person work and enhanced student satisfaction – definitely a positive change in a time of dropping enrollment.

CUNY should demonstrate best practices by adhering to existing standards and guidelines that are widely recognized and authoritative.

NEW FRAMEWORK

An example of this is the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers' recently released "Standard 241, Control of Infectious Aerosols," which applies the lessons learned during COVID to formulate recommendations to reduce hazards in occupiable spaces, including universities.

This standard employs a new framework, the "equivalent clean air concept," which permits flexibility in the controls being instituted while maintaining the goal of reducing the risk of illness. Implementing this internationally recognized guidance would protect the occupants from all airborne pathogens, not just COVID, thereby reducing sick time for employees and students alike.

It would also give CUNY flexibility in how it attains the goal of equivalent clean air, something that should be welcome when existing

ventilation systems have performance limitations (e.g., some HVAC systems can't take above MERV 8 filters, but could meet the goal of achieving equivalent clean air by increasing flow rates and/or modifying the amount of outdoor air).

The second change we are demanding is to remove the language stipulating that health and safety grievances cannot proceed beyond Step 2. Instead, they should be handled like other grievances.

The current practice is out of alignment with other unions. For example, both the Public Employees Federation and the Civil Service Employees Association use the same procedure with progression to arbitration, for all grievances.

The current practice is not effective based on what we've seen with grievances around mold and indoor air problems – they've languished. This is not fair to our members and it does not resolve situations.

With the knowledge that health and safety grievances do not effectively move forward, employees resort to other mechanisms such as PESH complaints, 311 calls and reaching out to the news media.

We believe the change to the standard grievance procedure in place, which permits progression to arbitration, would be an improvement over the current truncated procedure.

The third change we bring forward is in regard to the reporting of conditions at CUNY sites. A compelling reason for this demand comes from the leaks we saw after this fall's

rain event where buckets were everywhere at CUNY. These weren't new leaks, just old ones made obvious because of the amount of rainfall, but they amply demonstrated the problems with our infrastructure.

These deficiencies will need to be addressed through capital funding, and all of us are aware that will take time.

ADEQUATE REPORTING

In the meantime, a system of public reporting would alleviate growing concerns among students, staff and faculty about their safety and their work conditions. Our members are knowledgeable when it comes to their working conditions.

For example, due to COVID, there is now a very high level of awareness of the importance of good ventilation. Many people now know that 6 ACH and 100% outdoor air is the goal, and that MERV 13 or higher filtration is essential.

We've already had proof of concept of the benefits of reporting when several campuses posted their ventilation data (ACH, filtration, outside air).

Members noticed when the data appeared; they also noticed when it was removed.

Accordingly, we request that specific information about ventilation, water and facilities maintenance be made available to our members.

NEEDED INFORMATION

We would welcome an internet-based dashboard page that consolidates the following environmental data. We acknowledge that some of this information is already distribut-

ed in emails, but based on numerous meetings between our members and the Administration, messages get misdirected or are difficult to locate (multiple senders, etc.). A unified, easy-to-find page on the school's website could provide all of this in one location.

Each semester, we expect:

- Ventilation by room (ACH, filtration, percentage of outside air) – based, at a minimum, on ASHRAE Core Recommendations for Reducing Airborne Infectious Aerosol Exposure. If ASHRAE Standard 241 is instituted, we request data on how the equivalent clean air was achieved.
- Water quality – results of drinking water tests at point of delivery (drinking fountains) using "EPA method 200.7 Determination of Metals and Trace Elements," "EPA method 200.8 Determination of Trace Elements" and tests for coliform bacteria as performed by an accredited laboratory.
- Legionella – data demonstrating adherence to the New York State cooling tower requirements, including Legionella culture analysis and disinfection records, and links to New York City's cooling tower inspections.

As needed, we expect:

- Advance notification of activities such as construction, asbestos abatement, pest control, cleaning, disinfection or other activities that may involve the use of substances that may be hazardous.
- Prompt notification regarding the status of work orders relating to the workplace environment with regular updates. Here, we're not referring to simple repairs but posting notifications of work that relates to health and safety conditions for all to see and follow. Depending on the work order system (there are many of them at CUNY), often only the filer of the request has access, and in addition, not all are permitted to file work orders. Therefore a public transparent version is needed.
- Information on maintenance of HVAC systems (age of systems, dates of repairs or upgrades, dates of filter replacements).
- Information on repairs to leaky roofs and windows, and degraded plumbing systems that may contribute to water intrusion and mold growth.
- Details about mold remediation, including whether such remediation has been done by a licensed contractor as required by law.
- Notification when there are limitations in ADA accessibility, including but not limited to compliant bathrooms, entries, lifts or elevators.
- Links to Safety Data Sheets on products used for cleaning, disinfection, pest control, mold remediation, etc. (OSHA Hazard Communication Standard 29 CFR 1910.1200 (g)).
- Advance notification of electrical work that may cause outages, or HVAC work that may interfere with heating or cooling.

Dave Sanders

ntract

These are not hypothetical needs. Each of these examples comes from an actual situation where poor facilities maintenance compromised our members' safety because of an unsafe work environment.

Reporting and transparency are increasingly part of the future in all aspects of life. We would like to see CUNY as a leader, not as a reluctant follower, when providing information about the state of the physical plant.

A possible direction comes from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. It has created the Model State Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Act, which is a framework to develop legislation aimed at improving IAQ in all public buildings, including universities. Although just released, it's gaining traction, and among the recommendations is one that building owners post the results of indoor air quality on publicly accessible websites.

NECESSARY CHANGE

The fourth change addresses joint labor-management committees on health and safety. While the current version of Article 39.1 establishes a joint committee on health and safety, there are no requirements that it conduct meetings. This change corrects that deficiency by requiring two meetings per semester.

This change is clearly needed, as the joint committee has not met since prior to the pandemic. The meetings are valued, as they foster communication, and the shared knowledge can be put to constructive use.

We also call for campus-based health and safety labor-management committees. These have existed on an ad hoc basis and have campus-level benefits similar to those seen with the joint committee.

COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

There is precedent for the model of CUNY-wide and campus-based health and safety labor-management committees in other contracts, which provide for both system-level and local health and safety committees.

In summary, what we bring forward provides a communicative and collaborative health and safety framework – starting with an enhanced and more protective version of the General Duty Clause accompanied by better communication through joint health and safety committees at the campus and CUNY-wide levels, along with a mechanism for greater data transparency and a grievance process that all will view as more effective.

Jean Grassman is an associate professor of environmental, occupational and geospatial health sciences at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. She also serves as the organizational secretary on the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health. A version of this piece was delivered in-person to the CUNY bargaining team.

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CUNY RISING ALLIANCE

PSC CUNY

Union stands up for free speech at CUNY

By ARI PAUL

Chilling incidents at Brooklyn College and beyond have raised questions about CUNY Central's commitment to protecting community members equally and the right to free speech on campus – and the union is speaking up about it.

Tensions have been running high on college campuses since the start of the ongoing conflict in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip. Having condemned the Hamas attack of October 7, the PSC has also sought to ensure that the rights to open dialogue and peaceful demonstrations are protected.

ARMED ON CAMPUS

On October 13, City Council Member Inna Vernikov, a firebrand Republican from South Brooklyn who also serves on the Higher Education Committee and Committee on Standards and Ethics, was “charged with criminal possession of a firearm after images posted on social media showed her carrying a gun in her waistband at a pro-Palestinian rally at Brooklyn College the previous day,” the *New York Times* reported. She also “surrendered her weapon – a Smith & Wesson 9-millimeter pistol – and her permit.”

As the *Times* explained, while “New York issues permits to carry concealed firearms,” Vernikov was “openly carrying a firearm,” which is illegal.

A number of her colleagues and political groups have called for an investigation into the matter, and several have called for her expulsion from the New York City Council.

The CUNY community has reported that other demonstrations in relation to the conflict have been suppressed.

PSC President James Davis addressed these concerns on October 25 in a letter to Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez.

“The administrations at three colleges then prevented members

CUNY silent on open carry of gun at BC



The fiery NYC Council Member Inna Vernikov (right) is “Inna” lot of trouble for violating New York’s no open carry law.

of the CUNY community from holding pro-Palestinian rallies on their campuses....

“At one, students were informed that class attendance was optional on the day of the demonstration. This restriction and guidance prioritized the rights of one segment of the CUNY community over another, which was equated with terrorist sympathizers who posed a danger,” Davis said.

Davis added, “When a manifestly dangerous action did occur, you and your administration were silent. The Brooklyn College demonstration was loud but peaceful. When a City Council member brought a pistol to the event, openly visible at her waist, she was arrested the next morning for criminal possession of a firearm, a class E felony, and CUNY said nothing. We cannot imagine you condone the council member’s actions, yet your silence in the face of real danger to students and employees, a clear act of intimidation by an

elected official, is deafening. We urge you to call publicly for accountability for Inna Vernikov, as many New York City and State leaders have.”

But the problem with free speech and expression at CUNY goes beyond the issue of turmoil in the Middle East. CUNY advocates were stunned in October when the CUNY Board of Trustees converted its regular in-person hearing to an online-only event. Advocates fear that the administration is using widespread anxiety about the Middle East conflict to clamp down on other forms of expression.

STUNNED RESPONSE

“You and the Board of Trustees also violated the state’s Open Meeting Law and a bylaw of the board. The October 16 Manhattan public hearing was moved fully online with one working day’s notice and without explanation,” Davis said. “Dozens of PSC members had registered to attend to speak about our contract demands and the board’s responsi-

bility to secure funding for CUNY. But no member of the public could see or hear other participants, nor were they informed of a location to observe or deliver testimony, pursuant to Section 103(a) of the Open Meeting Law.”

PROPER DIALOGUE

Davis added, “Only a declaration of a state disaster emergency or the mayor’s declaration of a local state of emergency allow a public body such as the CUNY Board to suspend the statutory in-person requirements. We are stunned by the disrespect shown by you and the board for the law and spirit of open meetings. It is antithetical to a public university’s operation and serves to suppress expression and dissent.”

In addition, York College administration attempted to shut down a planned PSC speak-out on campus in October. The event eventually went on as planned, but union activists were stunned that campus safety was invoked to forestall a

contract campaign rally for faculty and staff.

For the PSC, this is a fight about the value of dialogue, learning and discussion throughout the University and academia. Indeed, student activism continues, as *Gothamist* reported on October 25: “Students at CUNY, Columbia University, NYU and several other New York City colleges walked out of their classes” to show “support of Palestinians as tensions in New York City over the Israel-Hamas war continue to mount.”

CURTAILING FREEDOMS

“The PSC has expressed support for those seeking to create the possibility for just, humanitarian solutions rather than escalating violence,” Davis said. “Students, faculty and staff have a right, indeed an obligation, to speak up on issues about which they feel strongly.”

But in the eyes of the PSC, CUNY administration has not shown that commitment. “Your recent decisions threaten to chill public speech and assembly, not only about the war but also on issues such as labor contracts and funding for our colleges,” Davis said.

University Faculty Senate (UFS) Chair John Verzani said that CUNY should strive to adopt a more concrete policy toward free speech on campus. “CUNY has yet to adopt a Freedom of Expression policy,” he said. “The UFS has been advocating and encouraging CUNY to adopt a policy for many years that could support the faculty, students and leadership in better meeting the challenge and promise of intellectual discourse during moments fraught with conflict and disagreement. As we continue to observe, additional difficulties confront us as a public university when public news media describe events in terms that amplify controversy and suspicion, and pressure public figures to react quickly. A Freedom of Expression policy might better help the University navigate the tough times ahead.”



Heather James has led union campaigns for years.

James to lead union political outreach

By ARI PAUL

Heather James has always been attracted to political action. Before and after college, she was involved in advocacy groups, and later the Manhattan Young Democrats.

But when she became an assistant professor of social science at Borough of Manhattan Community College in 2016, she decided to step away from “real world politics” and focus on “teaching American government and inspiring students.” CUNY and public higher education are a part of her life. She received a master’s degree in gender studies from the Graduate Center and then received her PhD from Rutgers University. Her

A dedicated union activist

dissertation surveyed the challenges women candidates face in 50 states.

Alas, her itch to get back into politics was too strong. “I started volunteering for the union, and it became clear that I was not going to be able to hold on to my personal ban on real-world politics,” she told *Clarion*.

DELEGATE ELECTION

James was chosen by the union’s delegates in September to become its new legislative representative, taking over for Luke Elliott-Negri. In this role she will continue doing much of the political work she’s

already been doing. James will be leading member activists on the city and state budget campaigns as well as other political work to bolster the union’s power.

For James, a big task ahead is building up more focus on the city budget, which has been a major source of austerity for CUNY under Mayor Eric Adams.

“I have absolutely no plan to back off our state work,” she said. “Any city focus won’t come at the expense of the state. We have no choice but to fight more at the city level.”

James added that in the previous

city budget campaign the PSC made major inroads with the City Council, inspiring lawmakers to advocate for a fully funded CUNY.

“The city folks are the ones we need to be advocating for us,” James said.

James believes that it is going to be a hard road ahead, but the challenges are worth it, and she said that she is looking forward

to working closely with other member activists. “It’s a big, new role, it’s a lot of trust,” she said. “It’ll be a little bit of a learning process. I feel very well supported and I feel like this is going to be a sometimes hard, but very fulfilling journey.”

Dedicated to PSC political action

HR problems at LaGuardia

By ARI PAUL

The Office of Human Resources at LaGuardia Community College (LGCC) has recently come under fire from PSC members who say that concerns over a host of problems, ranging from denials and delays in disability accommodation requests to critical health coverage HR snafus, have been met with contempt by current director Marta Clark. The issues have impacted people's pay and even delayed some members' retirements.

On November 1, PSC members told their president: Enough – it's time for a change. More than a dozen activists marched to the office of LGCC President Kenneth Adams to deliver a letter signed by 220 faculty and staff members that outlined the PSC chapter's concerns and demands for improving the situation.

ANGER ON CAMPUS

Laura Tanenbaum, the PSC chapter chair at LGCC, told *Clarion* that the anger on campus over the problems with administration has reached a fever pitch. "This has mobilized people, because it's so personal," she said.

Tanenbaum, a professor of English, said that members believed the HR issues go beyond bureaucratic mistakes and constitute systemic mismanagement at the highest levels of administration. "It's outright hostility," she said.

In the wake of such gross ineptitude, "In a way, the chapter has become HR," added Tanenbaum, since members often come to the union

Members demand change



Laura Tanenbaum (left) leading a member action at the LGCC president's office.

chapter when their HR requests are mishandled. "We do manage to solve people's problems, but it's a lot of stress and headache."

President Adams was in a meeting at the time of the union action and chapter activists handed the letter and expressed their concerns to the president's chief of staff.

SURVEY RESPONSES

"In response to a survey about Human Resources we put out in June 2023, nearly 100 colleagues reported dissatisfaction with the department," the letter said. "These colleagues

shared anecdotes about their experiences, including being denied benefits or accommodations for no apparent reason (decisions that were almost always overturned when challenged or appealed), receiving misinformation, not having crucial paperwork submitted to the correct office in a timely manner and being treated with disrespect by the Human Resources director. Several of the stories involve people with serious medical conditions being denied access to medical leave, or expecting parents being denied access to the leave guaranteed to new parents."

The letter noted that the chapter has heard "too many stories of neglect, with urgent messages unreturned and vital paperwork mysteriously lost time and again."

Members at LGCC said the HR problems have undermined faculty and staff morale. "Rather than treating workers at the college as people it should serve or for whom it should advocate, our administration is sending a message that it is defending the college against the needs of workers," the letter said. "HR is communicating that its main role is to protect the college from the very appropriate needs, concerns and entitlements that its workers can only access through HR."

The chapter puts the blame squarely at the top of the campus leadership. "We are appalled that the leadership of LaGuardia Community College, a public institution of higher education, is working to cultivate this kind of approach toward the people who make it run. Every day we hear about another instance of the college working to take away benefits from its workers as a group and to deny benefits or support to individuals."

FOUR DEMANDS

The chapter issued four demands that members believe will address the problems in the HR department:

- "Given the departure of HR's benefits coordinator, we demand that the administration send a message to all faculty and staff clearly laying out how they are to secure benefits

or receive assistance regarding sick leave, parental leave, retirement and other benefits, and that this include a pledge to reply to all emails in a timely fashion.

- "Given that so many LaGuardia faculty and staff have been unable to get timely, correct responses, or any response at all, from Human Resources, we demand that LaGuardia administration send a message to the community outlining a clear process for faculty and staff to pursue if their requests are ignored or if they receive hostile responses or inaccurate information.

Poor management frustrates members

- "Given the atmosphere of hostility outlined above, we demand that the administration send a message to all faculty and staff clearly stating that this administration believes faculty and staff have a right to access their contractually ensured benefits in a timely manner and without hostility or undue suspicions, and stating its commitment to rebuilding the trust that has been broken by this situation.

- "Finally, we demand that the administration communicate with all faculty and staff in a timely manner about the search for a new HR director as well as the filling of the empty position of benefits coordinator."

It remains to be seen how the administration will respond to the chapter's action. Kristen Gallagher, the PSC vice chair and a professor of English, called the buildup to the October action an opportunity for union organizing, as members from different departments came together in protest in anger over LGCC's mismanagement of their pay and benefits.

"Putting the petition together really brought people together," she said.

Bringing human faces to PSC demands

Continued from page 2

sions about the appropriate modality for individual courses. For example, the faculty of a math department might agree that in-person exams are necessary for an otherwise full online course because of widespread concerns about cheating.

Faculty routinely exercise academic judgment in teaching and assessment. We develop our own courses with unique approaches that draw on our own research and intellectual concerns. And we expect our freedom to teach to be respected online just as it is in a traditional classroom.

Roxanne Shirazi
Dissertation Research Librarian
Graduate Center

AN ADJUNCT SPEAKS

I am now in the first year of my second three-year contract. I first started teaching at Queens College in the Fall of 2015, while still working on my dissertation at the University of Michigan. I completed my dissertation in January of 2020 and my plan was to start looking for a full-time college teaching job that summer. And then, of course, by the spring it became clear that COVID had decimated an already fragile

job market. But that spring I had also qualified for my first three-year contract. I spent most of June agonizing over my inbox, waiting for CUNY management to confirm that I would actually be given my contract, while hundreds of my colleagues on other campuses were laid off. I was lucky.

PANDEMIC TIMES

We all lived – and continue to live – through this pandemic, so I don't need to tell you how significant it was to have this sense of stability in a time of so much instability. I knew I would have a salary. I knew I would have access to benefits. I knew I would have the opportunity to keep teaching our students, who managed to bring curiosity, engagement and devotion to remote classes amid so much personal, national and global chaos. Teaching allowed me to make the choice to stay an adjunct at Queens College, to focus on teaching and to focus on my research without trying to navigate a wrecked job market, which I know from my colleagues was its own full-time job.

Especially in an institution where benefits, including this contract, are dependent on consecutive semesters of service, knowing that the next six semesters were at least somewhat

guaranteed gave me the ability to devote myself to my teaching and research. Over the past three years of my first contract, I have taught 14 classes and roughly 320 students. I have attended department meetings, professional development events and now perform service through my work with the PSC. I have performed research, published, presented at conferences and, as of October, I will sit on the executive boards of two professional organizations in my field.

Continuing to have employment means that though I do not get monetary support for my research, I do at least have a salary and access to benefits that can in part support my household so that I feel stable enough to take some time for my research, even though our salaries still do not meet the cost of living in the tristate area. I have institutional affiliation, which is still key for entry into academic spaces, and I have access to a library, which is a basic necessity for research.

But I also want to underscore what adjunct job security gives our students. Our students need continuity in their education; that is lost if they are taught by a revolving door of adjuncts. Our students need to form lasting relationships with their

professors and need to know that they will be able to find us once they leave our classrooms on the last day of the semester. The only semesters I do not have repeat students are the rare semesters when I have taught the same course in a row, and in those semesters I will have students ask me if I know when I will teach other classes they may need to take. And while I cannot tell them what classes I will teach, I can at least encourage them to look for me in future semesters in our department course offerings. I have former students tutoring my current students in the writing center and they are familiar with my assignments and teaching and can advise them from this knowledge base. I had a student take me for a second class two years after the first, and she said that when she saw my name she knew she "had to take Schnur again."

HELPING STUDENTS

I wrote a recommendation letter for this student when she applied to a master's program at John Jay, and then again two years later when she applied to law school.

Three years after she took my class, another student got in touch with me to discuss her potential plans for graduate school. Another student who last took me in 2017 wrote to me because she needed a

new letter of recommendation to re-apply for grad school after COVID disrupted her first attempt. Former students come to my office hours to share with me current projects, to ask about future classes, to ask me to help them with internship applications or to interview me as a source for stories in our campus newspaper.

FELLOW ADJUNCTS

In 2020, some former student's friends emailed me to ask if I would record a congratulations message for her in a video they had put together in replacement for the in-person graduation COVID denied her.

My fellow long-term adjuncts all have these stories of how we continue to teach our students beyond that first semester when we meet them in one particular classroom.

These relationships are integral to a student's college experience and to their success after college. They foster guidance and mentorship and they enhance letters of recommendation. I know that my own career is indebted to my professors at Queens College – both full- and part-time – who devoted hours to advising me. I would never have considered pursuing my PhD if my professors did not show me this investment.

Kate Schnur
Adjunct Assistant Professor, English
Queens College

DEVELOPING ONLINE LEARNING

Is CUNY Online going too far?

By LUKE WALTZER

Like many PSC-CUNY members, I am concerned about CUNY Online, about the speed of its development and about what it means for the identity of the University. CUNY Online is a necessary and overdue investment that could bolster our infrastructure for online learning. But the ways in which the program is taking shape represent a missed opportunity to build broad, sustainable capacity for innovative digital and on-line instruction across the University.

CUNY Online is imagined as a quick solution to the University's enrollment crisis, designed to attract new students: partial college credit holders and adult learners for whom total flexibility is paramount. It's a worthy goal to extend access to new constituencies. Yet we must also ask just what these new potential students are being given access to.

AN INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITY

The ideal CUNY Online would harness the University's vast and deep institutional knowledge, accumulated and developed through years of experimentation with digital learning in a variety of modes. The pandemic also radically broadened faculty experience with online education and the flexibility it affords, leading to a deepening



Luke Waltzer, left, testifies at a City Council hearing with fellow PSC members Barbara Bowen, center, and Remysell Salas.

of collective knowledge across CUNY. But neither experience has been examined, evaluated, interrogated or harnessed for institutional transformation here. As it

currently stands, CUNY Online sidesteps meaningful engagement with the longer- as well as shorter-term knowledge we've accumulated at CUNY, and risks pushing the University away from its historic mission to combine excellence, access and democratic principles.

PROGRAM'S TRANSFORMATION

CUNY Online, initially conceived by a 2016 task force, was reanimated in Spring 2022 as CUNY leaders saw the opportunity to use federal stimulus funds to jump-start a program they hoped would offset enrollment declines. Oversight would be located within CUNY's School of Professional Studies, which had an established infrastructure for the development and support of online courses. CUNY committed \$8 million. A director and a team of instructional designers were hired, and a structure similar to the "online accelerator" imagined in 2016 was put into motion.

Campuses were invited to propose new programs, with a modest goal of seven to 10 new degrees in the initial phase of

development. All courses would be fully asynchronous, but more flexibility would be granted in the future. CUNY Online would help build courses, and each campus would be responsible for staffing and supporting them and would keep any revenue generated.

In Summer 2022, CUNY Online moved suddenly from the School of Professional Studies to the Office of Academic Affairs at CUNY Central, and was integrated into a new office that is also overseeing the University's transition to a new learning management system. Previously hired CUNY Online staff were let go. Ambitions for CUNY Online dramatically expanded, with more than 100 new, fully asynchronous programs planned for development by 2025.

VAST UNDERTAKING

The CUNY Online portal currently advertises over 180 fully online programs, far more than were imagined less than a year ago. It's unclear how many of these programs are new or how many had previously existed. CUNY Online promises mental health, financial aid, advisement, professional development and career services, as well as one-on-one around-the-clock support, but the University has, to date, made no evident investment in these areas.

There is also not yet a consistent way for students drawn in by the promise of a flexible degree to complete general education requirements. CUNY is hastily assembling a CUNY Online Passport, featuring select campuses that have been asked to contribute asynchronous Pathways general education courses as part of a consortium that will be open to all students.

CUNY Online will most certainly impact policies and expectations around working conditions, including workload and intellectual property agreements, academic governance, academic support, continuing faculty oversight over the curriculum, resource allocation and the freedom to teach. The speed of the program's development and the limited communication and transparency around CUNY Online upsets expectations for collective bargaining and consultation in each of the pillars of university labor. It's unclear whether this is by design or is



CUNY advertises both a traditional education (top) and its online curriculum.

simply a byproduct of the urgency senior leadership feels to immediately put up new programs. Consultation and communication remain limited. The Committee on Academic Technology, which contains two representatives from every campus and has met monthly since 2008 to discuss pressing issues affecting the use of academic technology at CUNY, has not yet been convened in the current academic year (as of the end of October). And the

IT Steering Committee, which used to be a conduit for information from the CUNY Office of Computing and Information Services to the campuses and the University Faculty Senate, no longer meets.

PROGRAM TRANSPARENCY

It's important for PSC members to continue to ask questions of the administration and advocate for a commitment to shared governance. CUNY approved a

\$5.2 million contract with O'Donnell Learn (now Alchemy) to provide instructional design services for the rapid development of asynchronous courses. CUNY also commissioned UPCEA (an organization of professional, continuing and online higher education programs) to produce a "gap analysis" that used jobs data and market analysis of competitors to score the revenue potential for each of CUNY's programs. Though it has not been shared publicly, CUNY Central has used its recommendations as a basis for outreach to campuses to recruit specific academic programs.

External vendors like UPCEA and Alchemy are not accountable to CUNY students, faculty and staff, nor the wider communities served by CUNY. The guidance they give CUNY is only that – guidance. The rapid and chaotic implementation strategy for CUNY Online begs the question: What kind of future does our leadership imagine for our curricula and work?

There are reasons to be worried: Consultants hired in the past three years by West Virginia University, New Jersey City University and other institutions have made recommendations that have radically restructured the identities of these institutions. These recommendations are often presented as a response to fiscal exigency and they almost always favor restructuring curricula in the same way: Liberal education is narrowed, the humanities are marginalized and programs are evaluated primarily for how they prepare students for specific jobs.

DEVELOPING PEDAGOGY

PSC members are also concerned that CUNY Online's massive investment and promotion of asynchronous courses as the primary mode of online learning could lead to decisions that impact how we serve the students we already have. The configuration of the new learning management system, academic policies, workload definitions, the role of academic support units, access to library resources – each of these areas – will have to accommodate a potential influx of students whose primary reason for attending is guaranteed flexibility.

While asynchronous courses do provide flexibility, they limit the tools at a professor's disposal and require significant time and labor. To be successful in asynchronous programs, students must be self-motivated, organized and disciplined. They must have the resources and ability to remain consistently connected and engaged.

The affective components of pedagogy – the sense of personal connection which has been so important to what's happened in CUNY's classrooms since COVID – are more elusive in an asynchronous learning environment. Sociality is constrained and the courses tend to be content heavy and designed for consumption. Group work, experiential learning, peer learning, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies – all "high impact practices" that CUNY has promoted over the past decade or more – are harder or simply impossible to pursue in asynchronous courses.

NO HASTY PROGRAM

There is considerable risk to the reputation of the institution, to the nature of our work and, most importantly, to the well-being of new and existing students in recruiting them into programs that are not fully supported or integrated into the broader life of the University. CUNY faculty and staff must continue to advocate for guardrails that ensure that investments and curricula at CUNY open pathways to all that higher education can offer.

Online education at CUNY should not be a quick path to a credential or a quick fix for enrollment challenges, but rather should be an ongoing effort to unlock the potential of digital technologies for vibrant and engaged learning. The way to do this is through the hard work of deliberative consultation; the gradual, intentional and coordinated development of programs in a range of instructional modes; and sustained investment in local infrastructures to support teaching, learning and student success. There are no shortcuts.

Luke Waltzer is the director of the Teaching & Learning Center at the Graduate Center.

Questions about the pedagogy

GOT UNION?



Esther Llamas
Higher Education Assistant



Kevin Adams
Higher Education Officer

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





15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Sign-on letter for CUNY

The PSC and its allies are organizing now to demand full funding for CUNY in next year's state and city budget.

While the budget negotiations begin next year, members can sign on to a CUNY Rising letter now. It will be sent to many state and city electeds, including the governor, the mayor, city council members, state senators and state assembly members. It demands that the state pass the New Deal for CUNY and that City Hall's proposed cuts be averted.

Sign the letter at: <https://cunyrisingalliance.org>.

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Check your pension contributions

PENSIONS at CUNY are a result of years of union struggle, and we demand accurate records.

The PSC Contract Enforcement Department receives too many calls from active members who discover that their pension payments are not being properly made by CUNY, or their contributions are not being properly deducted. PSC members have been required to pay exorbitant amounts of money to keep their pensions intact because of CUNY's poor recordkeeping.



CHECKING CONTRIBUTIONS

Start by looking at your pay stubs for TRS or TIAA deductions. Then review your annual TRS or TIAA statement. If you work at multiple colleges, confirm the

statement for each campus where you work shows the proper deductions. If you have prior year statements, confirm that the proper deductions were taken at previous colleges where you worked. You'll have to pay any deficits that were not paid, so the

sooner you identify a deficit, the better.

FINDING DEDUCTIONS

If you find pension deductions on your pay stubs and annual statement, contact the college Human Resources (HR) department, and make sure

the records match. If you do not find deductions on your pay stubs or annual notices, or if the information HR has is incorrect, contact Greg Douros in the PSC Contract Enforcement Department for assistance by emailing gdouros@pscmail.org.