

## Admin power grab rankles faculty, union

By ARI PAUL

The CUNY administration is proposing several changes to the CUNY bylaws that would move a substantial amount of authority over department scheduling from department chairs to college administrators. The PSC opposes these proposed measures.

A change in the description of the role of college presidents is among the farthest-reaching proposals. In the bylaws and the contract, the president is a college's "principal academic officer." The bylaw changes would substitute the corporate title, "chief executive officer," eliminating any reference to the president's academic responsibilities. Such a change could dramatically alter the expected qualifications for the position and the practices of college presidents. This is not the only disturbing proposal. Deans and provosts would have more control over a department's recruitment, evaluation, and scheduling of the faculty, meaning heightened managerial oversight of department chairs. Department chairs are members of the PSC bargaining unit, elected by their peers, and the PSC has fought hard to retain union protection for these faculty members.

### 'SWEEPING OVERHAUL'

PSC President James Davis called for the immediate withdrawal of these proposals, saying they "represent a sweeping overhaul of shared governance" and "purport merely to clarify the respective roles of department chairs, deans, provosts and presidents, but in fact seek to redefine these roles dramatically and would alter the very character of our colleges." He and other PSC officers made their displeasure clear in a March labor-

### More oversight of department chairs?



John Verzani

management meeting with the CUNY administration.

Among the union's chief concerns, Davis said, was specific language that would alter Article IX, section 9.3, of the CUNY Bylaws.

"If implemented, these changes would give department chairs, faculty members elected by their peers, far less authority over departmental matters such as curriculum and scheduling, while saddling them with far more responsibility to carry out the administration's budgetary and curricular vision," he said. "Consider the decorated department chairs throughout CUNY history, from John Hope Franklin to Mina Shaughnessy, to so many others. These proposals are an evisceration of a vision of the department chair as an academic leader, and in its place the department chair as appendage to a dean."

### UNION RESPONSE

"The PSC will conduct a legal review of these proposed changes and urges all members, regardless of title or rank, to request a copy of the proposed changes from your faculty governance leaders and raise your concerns with



Karen Weingarten

them and with University Provost Wendy Hensel," Davis said. "Provost Hensel has indicated the administration's intent to hear from faculty and finalize these changes at the June meeting of the Board of Trustees. It is critical that your college's governance leaders hear from you."

PSC members are certainly worried.

"I find these proposed changes very concerning because it shows that CUNY management wants to take away the most important responsibility assigned to chairs – control of their departments' schedules – and give that power to deans, and in turn the administration," said Karen Weingarten, the PSC chapter chair at Queens College and a former English department chair. "This change seems to be an attempt to undermine faculty governance and make chairs into no more than paper pushers who have no real agency when it comes to shaping their departments' course offerings."

### COLLEGE GOVERNANCE

She added, "While I think student-centered teaching is important, we can't always offer

the courses students want. Curriculums and majors often have unpopular courses for various reasons, and sometimes those courses are necessary for a degree program."

### MORE HIERARCHY

Penny Lewis, PSC secretary and former department chair, noted that the proposed bylaw changes ignore the careful, detailed work that chairs perform in their position closest to their program's students and faculty. "Despite assuring us that its intention is to describe shared governance, the language of these proposals creates a hierarchy where deans, far from the ground, set the terms for hiring and scheduling – core department functions."

She added, "The elaboration of the dean role would inevitably direct more resources and hiring toward these non-faculty titles, in

line with the destructive national trend of a corporate model of staffing universities with deans and dean-lets at the expense of full-time faculty and skilled staff."

John Verzani, chair of the CUNY University Faculty Senate, said it was too early for the governing body to take a position on the matter. But Verzani, a professor of mathematics at the College of Staten Island, said of the proposals, "I personally hope much will be changed, if not just dropped altogether, as I have reservations about most of the substantive changes, particularly where it seemingly takes some academic judgements out of the department and places them into the administration."

### More admin control over department scheduling