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March 17, 2008

**AN OPEN LETTER ON THE CONTRACT  
TO MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN, CUNY CHANCELLOR,  
FROM BARBARA BOWEN, PSC PRESIDENT**

Dear Chancellor Goldstein:

The PSC-CUNY contract expired on September 19, 2007. It is now nearly six months later, and your representatives have still made no financial offer to the faculty and professional staff. We understand that CUNY must gain authorization from both New York City and New York State for any financial settlement with the PSC, but it is an abuse of our loyalty to expect us to continue giving our all to CUNY without even discussion of a raise. The City and State have now settled or are close to settling contracts with other public employee unions. CUNY needs to come to the table with an offer.

I am writing this open letter to give voice to the needs of CUNY faculty and staff and to advance the process of settling a contract that addresses those needs. The best way to transform the students' learning conditions is to transform our working conditions.

CUNY's salaries have reached the point of crisis. The "pattern bargaining" system adhered to by the City and State—and never contested by CUNY management—has been ruinous for CUNY salaries. Years of below-inflation contracts, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s, have chipped away at the value of our salaries, until some are 40% lower in real-dollar value than in the mid-1970s. CUNY salaries are now thousands of dollars behind salaries at other public universities in the region, such as the University of Connecticut and Rutgers, and totally uncompetitive nationally. Now, at precisely the moment CUNY must replenish the ranks of full-time faculty and hire a new generation to replace those nearing retirement, our salaries have become, as one department chair put it, "a joke." In conversations with faculty and staff across the University, I hear again and again that CUNY cannot compete with peer institutions. In one department, four tenure-track lines went unfilled because no one could be found to take them. In another, the chair struggles to get people to serve on a search committee because no one believes the searches will result in a hire. In yet another, half of the current full-time faculty are actively and openly seeking other jobs.

The PSC finds this situation unacceptable. CUNY's expensive advertising campaign urging New Yorkers to "study with the best" may have succeeded in cramming more students into our classrooms, but it cannot disguise the lack of competitive salaries and working conditions. The faculty and staff want more than the *appearance* of a great university; we want the real thing. And that takes decent salaries—across the board. Your salary proposal in this round of bargaining is to take away our negotiated salary steps—which represent the

American Federation of Teachers Local 2334

New York State United Teachers • New York State AFL-CIO

American Association of University Professors • New York City Central Labor Council



only financial incentive many programs can offer—and instead force us to compete over scraps of “merit pay.” Your proposal would do nothing to alleviate the crisis; for all but the chosen few, it would make the crisis worse. The faculty and staff are not interested in illusory answers to the salary problem. Many of us, especially the newly hired, the part-time, those with families and those at the lower end of the salary scale, are having trouble simply making ends meet. All of us, whether we are at the top or the bottom of the salary scale, are frustrated because our salaries are below those for comparable positions elsewhere. The only way to advance toward nationally competitive salaries at CUNY is to provide across-the-board salary increases above the level of inflation.

Having waited this long for a financial offer, the faculty and staff expect the offer you bring to the table to be large enough to begin the restoration of our salaries and address other urgent needs. As the general economic outlook worsens, it becomes increasingly important that CUNY allow the economic portion of contract discussions to begin. While we appreciate CUNY’s legal requirement to gain approval from the City and the State, the University’s financial offer is ultimately a statement of the University’s priorities. Is restoration of our salaries a priority or not?

As chancellor, you have shown that you can be an outspoken advocate before the City and State for your priorities for CUNY, lobbying successfully for such items as a new science center or tuition increases or a larger capital budget. You have also made extensive use of media coverage and spent millions of dollars on advertising to advance your agenda for the University. If nationally competitive salaries are really a priority, we expect the same level of public advocacy for investment in the faculty and staff. The infrastructure of a university is not buildings; it is the *people* who do the teaching, the research and the support of students. There can be no renaissance at CUNY without the ability to recruit and retain the best of the next generation of scholars, teachers and professional staff.

The PSC negotiating team is prepared to work with you, and with the City and the State, to address the CUNY salary crisis. You and I have worked together in previous contracts to solve problems many thought intractable—such as raising sabbatical pay to 80%, providing research time for junior faculty, improving Welfare Fund benefits, and ensuring fair pay for adjuncts to hold office hours with students. The union’s primary goal in this round of bargaining—to make a substantial start on restoring salaries that have lost 40% of their value—is ambitious. The faculty and staff realize that we may not fully restore CUNY salaries in a single contract. But the restoration must begin. The union bargaining team believes that there are creative ways to achieve higher salaries while enhancing our ability to conduct research and work closely with students.

This is the year to tackle CUNY salaries. The preliminary report of the New York State Commission on Higher Education, issued in December 2007, called for major re-investment in CUNY and SUNY—“not just for one or two years, but for the foreseeable future.” The Commission’s report marks the first time in a generation that New York has officially recognized the extent of its disinvestment in CUNY and the importance of higher education

to the future of the state. But any future investment is put at risk if CUNY continues to offer substandard salaries. You cannot build a first-rate university by paying third-rate salaries.

The faculty and staff represented by the PSC choose to work at CUNY because we are committed to offering a first-rate college education to the *public* in New York—“the children of the whole people,” as CUNY’s founding documents expressed it. Creating the university our students deserve means taking steps to end the salary crisis now, before it is too late to recruit the next generation of CUNY faculty and staff. It means reducing the teaching load so faculty have time to sustain their research careers and give students individual attention. It means providing health insurance to CUNY’s lowest-paid instructors—adjuncts and graduate employees—so they do not have to worry about whether they can afford a doctor when they want to be working with students. It means not forcing the next generation of faculty and staff to choose between having a family and having a career. It means refusing to tolerate intolerable wages and working conditions for the thousands of adjuncts without whose work CUNY would not have survived. And it means lifting salaries at every level so that CUNY can define for this century, as it did for the last, what greatness in an urban public university means.

Your financial offer to the union will represent your choices about CUNY’s future. Without a commitment to raising our salaries and addressing other serious economic needs, CUNY’s claims about “studying with the best” will be hollow. The PSC believes that the students of CUNY are entitled to a first-rate public university; we call for a financial offer that makes such a university possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Bowen".

Barbara Bowen  
President