

Uncompetitive salaries hurt CUNY

By DANIA RAJENDRA

"We're not even in the ballpark," explained Assistant Professor Patrick Lloyd of the Physical Science Department at Kingsborough. "We have lines that have been open for more than a year, and we just can't fill them."

CUNY salaries are low. That fact is keeping CUNY from recruiting and retaining full-time faculty, PSC members say.

"We had interest in the job from someone with a PhD from Columbia and a post-doc at Berkeley. We made an offer, and this person ended up turning us down to work for the New York City public schools for \$20,000 more than we offered," Lloyd said.

"We're simply not competitive," explained Baruch Sociology Department Chair Glenn Petersen, who has taught at CUNY for 30 years. In that time, the value of CUNY salaries has dropped steeply in real dollars.

Top steps in most titles have dropped 31% to 37% since 1971, after adjusting for inflation. The bottom and median steps showed even bigger declines in value, between 40% and 50%.

DECLINE

This means that in 2007, a professor or a Higher Education Officer on the top step now earns about \$59,000 less in real dollars than a top-step professor or HEO did in 1971. An assistant professor on the median step earns about \$45,000 less, after inflation.

Salaries for lecturers, college lab technicians, assistants to HEO and part-time faculty and staff have also seen major declines in purchasing power, slightly moderated by equity increases. The hourly rate for adjunct lecturers in 1971, in today's dollars, is equivalent to \$108 – compared to a rate of \$69 today. Yet today CUNY is far more dependent on its part-time faculty, who teach about half of its courses.

The PSC shared these numbers with CUNY administration over the bargaining table last Spring. But so far, management has made no proposal to repair the damage. Instead, CUNY has demanded the elimination of salary steps, to replace them with a system of raises given at the college president's discretion. (For details, see page 11 of the September 2007 *Clarion*, at www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm.)

"The salary steps provide real advances for our members, each step increasing pay by 3½% to 4%," said PSC First Vice President Steve London. "The problem is, the value of the steps is eroding – so it is as if our members are walking up a downward-moving escalator."

From 1971 to 1983, during the NYC fiscal crisis, all titles saw a steep decline in real wages. Median salaries dropped in value by 30% to 40%, ac-

Full-time faculty lured away

counting for most of the loss to date. The PSC negotiated increases in the mid-80s that made up between half and one-third of this lost ground – but real wages declined again throughout the 1990s, going even lower than before. It wasn't until the contract signed in 2002 that salaries began to stop sliding. The 2000-2002 agreement provided increases somewhat ahead of inflation, while the following one, like other City agreements at the time, was somewhat behind. The net result is that, despite some periods of progress, CUNY salaries have lost close to half their value in a generation.

HUGE GAP

Phil Eggers, a professor of English at BMCC, has worked at CUNY since 1974. "It used to be that if you told somebody you taught at CUNY, they'd say, 'Oh, you guys are paid well.' I don't hear that anymore. Now they just sort of shrug and say, 'How do you manage?'"

If management tried to cut pay by 40% in one year, said Eggers, they would face a rebellion "It's been relentless, but you don't necessarily perceive it from year to year. It's when you put it together over 10 years, 20 years, you realize how large a change has come about."

Eggers was chair of his department for 18 years, and he said that CUNY's salary slide had a serious effect on recruitment. "Our workload is very heavy, and the cost of living in New York has gotten absurd," he said. "So it's become very hard to bring in new faculty from outside."

One department chair, who asked not to be identified, said their own department recently carried out

"the widest search we have ever done." After interviewing five finalists, the job was offered in turn to each of the three top choices. All negotiated with the dean, but ultimately declined the position. "We were

left with having offered the position over several months and still not having somebody. So we reopened the search." After another round of interviews, the job was offered and rejected twice. Finally, the department hired the sixth person to whom they'd offered the job.

This chair praised the new hire as a scholar with a lot to offer CUNY – but noted that even with a happy ending, the prolonged search was a drain on faculty time and energy that the department could ill afford. "It entails a tremendous amount of work," said the chair. "And we have very little money to bring people from other parts of the country to interview, despite being required to do a national search."

Retention is just as large a problem as recruitment. CUNY loses promising young scholars every

year – faculty members like David Kazanjian.

Kazanjian moved to the University of Pennsylvania in 2005, after eight years at Queens College and the Graduate Center. "It might seem like an obvious choice to go to the Ivy League," he told *Clarion*. "But it was quite difficult. I loved CUNY. In fact, I had turned down a job at the University of Michigan two years earlier. They offered me \$20,000 a year more than I was making, and a spousal hire. At the time, my partner was teaching in Rhode Island." Kazanjian negotiated with Queens, but, he said, "they didn't really do much for me. Nonetheless, I decided

various college presidents receive substantial subsidies for housing – but faculty and staff do not.

SHELTER

"I'm at Baruch, we're in the middle of Manhattan," said sociologist Petersen. "But we can't offer housing, or even a housing allowance. The only people who live near the college are junior faculty who have some small place they lived in as graduate students. With few exceptions, all our senior faculty live in the suburbs."

"In my department, we have people who live in Connecticut and New Jersey," said Lloyd of Kingsborough. "It affects their availability for the students. I live in Brooklyn – in a 400-square-foot apartment."

In addition to competition from

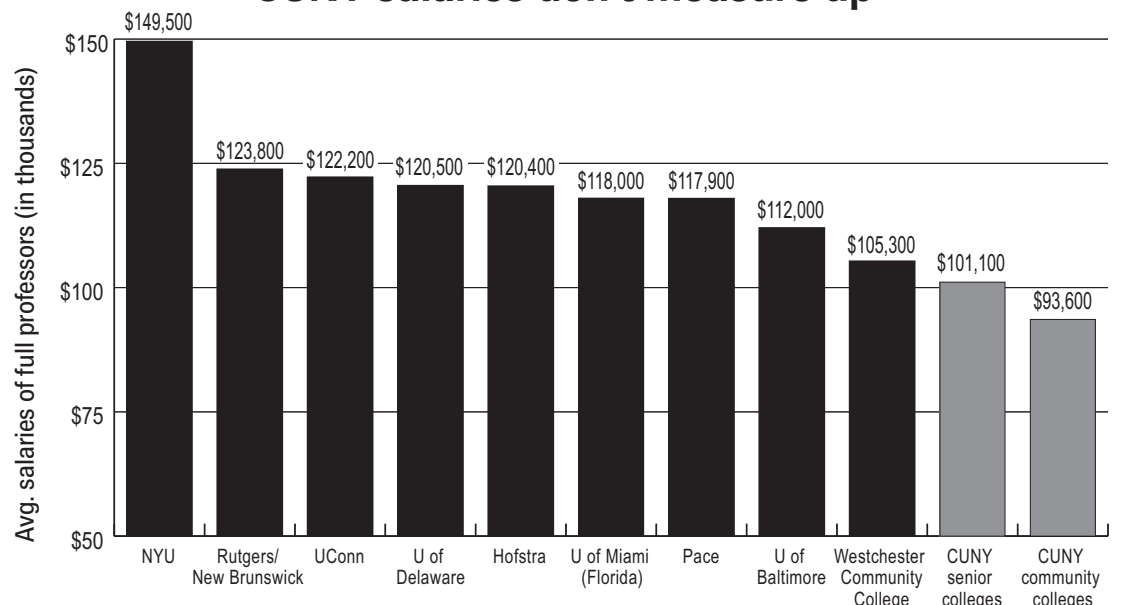
new faculty. But this means veteran faculty may find that their newer colleagues make more – sometimes much more – than they do.

Department Chair Masako Darrough explained, "A full professor could make 60% of what the rookies are getting."

Neimark said that this is "terrible for morale," and Darrough agreed.

"I think the senior people feel undervalued," she told *Clarion*. "When the gap becomes quite large, it becomes very tempting to move." Darrough cited three tenured professors her department has lost. "The only way Baruch is willing to reconsider a salary is to have an offer from another school," she said – but by the time faculty have gone through another institution's search process,

CUNY salaries don't measure up



Source: Annual AAUP salary survey, fall 2006 data.

to stay." His move to Penn increased his salary by about \$30,000 but he noted, "I still live in New York. I had to go work at Penn to keep up with the cost of living."

DOUBLE DISADVANTAGE

CUNY's pay is below that of comparable schools nationally (see chart). But CUNY is doubly disadvantaged, because it pays below-par wages in a city with a very high cost of living. And today those low salaries hurt CUNY's recruitment and retention more than ever: "The [increased] college hiring trend is nationwide," reports *Crain's New York Business*, "but New York City, which has become the top destination in the country for students from around the nation, is seeing the sharpest growth." That means other universities in NYC are "aggressively recruiting academics," and departments at CUNY generally can't match their offers.

The low salaries at CUNY are particularly tough because of New York's expensive housing market. According to *Crain's*, in NYC, "often universities subsidize rents or give housing stipends to new professors." At CUNY, the chancellor and

other NYC universities, many CUNY departments also face competition from outside academia. "The nursing faculty shortage is as bad or worse as the national nursing shortage," said Mary O'Donnell, chair of the nursing department at College of Staten Island. "Students who come out of our associate's degree program and pass the licensure exam earn around \$65,000. We're lucky if we can hire a faculty member with a PhD for that salary."

O'Donnell told *Clarion* that this poses serious problems for recruitment. "There are nurse practitioners with a master's degree to whom we say, 'We'd love to have you teach full-time, but you really need your PhD, or at least be close to that.' They're earning \$80 to \$90,000. They'd need to stop what they're doing and go back to school, in order to earn less." Despite the attractions of a tenure-track job, she said, "Why would they do that?"

A similar problem exists in the accounting department at Baruch. "Low salaries are absolutely a major problem at Baruch," said Professor of Accountancy Marilyn Neimark. Baruch has used provisions for overscale pay to recruit

they are more willing to leave. "It's very wasteful," she concluded.

Frank Kirkland, chair of philosophy at Hunter, said that he has received support for addressing salary imbalances in his own department. "I have been fortunate in securing some upgrades in salaries for recently tenured faculty because of the low-balling of their initial hires," he said. "But many chairpersons have not been as fortunate. This speaks to the need for restoration of competitive salaries across the board," Kirkland said.

RESTORATION NEEDED

Repairing the damage done to CUNY's salaries since the 1970s is a necessity, said Petersen of Baruch. "The University is cutting its own throat," he told *Clarion*. "It is a mockery for [Chancellor Goldstein] to say he wants to build a much finer university when he is not fighting for salaries to hire people."

"In the late 60s and 70s we recruited a generation of faculty with competitive salaries, and they are now retiring," said London. "As we recruit a new generation, we need to make the same investment in them – and in CUNY's future."