

 <p>PSC/CUNY Professional Staff Congress AFT LOCAL #2334</p>	<hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">MARCH 2ND UPDATE</p> <p>“Obviously, this must be the beginning of a serious political discussion in the union. If management agrees to our proposal, the proposed settlement would go first to the union’s Executive Committee and then the Delegate Assembly before it is submitted to you for ratification. At every stage of that process we will take the opportunity to have open debate about the political choices that led to our presenting a proposal that falls short of the goals that thousands of people fought for.”</p> <hr/>
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March 2, 2006

Dear CUNY Colleagues,

The PSC bargaining team met yesterday, March 1, with representatives of Chancellor Goldstein, together with the New York City Commissioner of Labor and his staff.

Speaking for Goldstein, Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone rejected the union’s proposal that management provide additional funding for enhanced sabbaticals. Despite Goldstein’s repeated claims about his concern for the faculty, the truth is that he has failed to come through. His representatives offered nothing but the substandard economic package that has been the norm in this round of bargaining with the City and State. Their repeated message was that they are not willing or able to go beyond the “pattern” of collective bargaining settlements for public employees. It makes no difference to them that this pattern damages the University. Nor, apparently, does it matter to the City and State that the parameters that may be acceptable to other unions—whose members are not recruited through national searches—are ruinous at CUNY. I am not the only person whose department is finding that job candidates who express a strong preference for CUNY eventually turn us down because of the impossible salaries and workload.

Management also said there was little flexibility in getting full value from the 1.5% we are willing to take from our package for the Welfare Fund. Because of the City’s historical way of valuing Welfare Fund contributions as part of contract settlements, the proposal made by management would provide only 58 cents on the dollar of Welfare Fund money. The union cannot accept that.

In responding to management, the union voiced the anger felt by CUNY faculty and staff—first at the unconscionable delay in this contract, and second at the failure of our collective bosses to offer anything like an appropriate settlement. Despite having agreed in November to an imaginative framework that (while far from perfect) would have met many of the union’s needs, CUNY management has now aligned itself with the punitive contract settlements that no union in this round has yet been able to defeat.

The PSC negotiating team, then, was faced with the decision of either working within this inadequate framework or walking away from the table with no contract. As you can imagine, this was a difficult choice, but the majority position of the negotiating team was to try to work within the parameters in the most principled and imaginative way we could to fashion a settlement. In this spirit, we offered the following counterproposal as a way to reach final resolution:

- First, the Welfare Fund reserve would be restored, providing stability to the Fund, by using a portion of the retroactive pay, including some of the retroactive amount in year two.
- Second, we proposed that the City would agree to allocate a smaller amount than 1.5% on a recurring basis to the Welfare Fund, but that this amount would go into the Fund at its full value. The result of this would be stability for the Fund, but probably not enough money to enhance the dental benefit.
- Third, we proposed that the remaining funds from this 1.5%, plus the value of the \$500 management had offered to employees with “permanent” status, be used to create the necessary funds to provide sabbaticals, with no cap on the annual number, at 80% pay. We argued that using the \$500 in this way creates a lasting benefit for permanent employees, and that unlike the \$500 bonus, it would not be lost when each individual leaves or retires.
- Fourth, we proposed that because of the impact on future faculty of the legislative change in the tenure clock, junior faculty should have access to the equivalent of a full year of paid research time to prepare for tenure. Thus we proposed that the additional research time for future junior faculty (to begin when the tenure change begins) would be 15 hours at the community colleges and 9 hours at the senior colleges.
- Fifth, we indicated that the settlement would need to include the two additional “equity” items to which we had agreed in the fall. They are the provision of paid sick days to the hundreds of part-time College Lab Technicians and non-teaching adjuncts; and the groundbreaking new proposal for 100 full-time positions reserved for eligible CUNY adjuncts.
- Sixth, we said that the \$800 added to base salary on the last day of the contract would have to be applied to all members of the bargaining unit, including Continuing Education faculty.
- Finally, the union reminded management that we also represent the four Educational Opportunity Centers and the Hunter Campus Schools. We need to have the across-the-board raises applied to the EOCs and to resolve some professional issues at the Hunter Campus Schools.

This, in addition to some questions and technical points we raised, was our proposal. It leaves unchanged the annual salary increases of \$800 in cash in the first year, 2.5% in the second year, 2.75% in the third year, and 3% in the fourth year, with an additional \$800 on base salary on the final day of the contract, after an extension of ten months. It also includes flexibility of up to three days on the starting-date for the fall semester; the equity items to which we had already agreed; and the provision that the union would support legislation changing the time to tenure from five years to seven (except for CLTs and Hunter Campus Schools teachers).

Management responded that they would consider each of the elements of the union’s proposal, and did not foreclose the possibility of agreement. They also provided answers to some of our technical questions, and a further technical meeting is scheduled for today, March 2. We got a commitment from CUNY and the City to return to the bargaining table for a full session next week.

Obviously, this must be the beginning of a serious political discussion in the union. If management agrees to our proposal, the proposed settlement would go first to the union’s Executive Committee and then the Delegate Assembly before it is submitted to you for ratification. At every stage of that process we will take the opportunity to have open debate about

the political choices that led to our presenting a proposal that falls short of the goals that thousands of people fought for. The mobilization for this contract is the best this union has ever done; never before have we had this level of membership commitment and fight, this kind of organization on the ground, this network of over 400 picket captains. Your effort, led by the union's Executive Council and chapter activists, is what forced management to move beyond its previous economic offers, agree to several important advances for faculty and staff, and take off the table such demands as reduced job security for HEOs and removal of department chairs from the union.

Now, however, it's clear that it will take far more than even that mobilization to break through the punitive contract patterns being forced on unions by the City and State—and now embraced by CUNY. When we reached an acceptable framework for an agreement with CUNY, they failed to gain City and State approval. The question the union faces together is when and how the PSC is best positioned to undertake a breakthrough fight. Members will take different positions on that question, and the discussion will call on us to analyze exactly what political forces we're up against and what it will take to wrest from them a transformative contract.

As soon as we hold the next session, I will report to you on whether management has agreed to a settlement. Thank you again for your support, your comments and what is sure to be an important discussion in the coming weeks.

In solidarity,

Barbara Bowen
President