

From the May 11, 2007, *Chief*

## *Out to Curtail Tenure*

# CUNY to PSC: Do More, Get Less

By **MEREDITH KOLODNER**

The City University of New York has proposed a daunting list of demands in its preliminary negotiating sessions with the Professors' union, including merit-based pay increases, a rise in the use of part-time instructors, and the specter of a permanent, full-time non-tenure track position.



BARBARA BOWEN: CUNY going wrong way.

The current contract expires Sept. 19, and the two sides are trying to avoid a repeat of the last round when Professional Staff Congress members worked under an expired contract for 3-1/2 years. Both sides say they want to avoid "negotiating in the press," but their at-odds demands put them on opposite tracks with much ground to make up in the coming months.

### PSC: 'We're Alarmed'

"We recognize that we are very early in the process, and we are eager to hear what management has to say," said PSC President Barbara Bowen, "but we are very alarmed about the idea of an open-ended, non-tenure track position."

CUNY wants to lift the cap on the number of Distinguished Lecturers allowed in the system, currently at 80, and to remove the five-year time limit. The position has traditionally been occupied by practitioners who may not be eligible for tenure, such as an expert in nursing who does not have a Ph.D., but may have something special to offer students. Other universities have used similar titles to bring in politicians or artists for a limited period of time.

In reference to its bargaining offers, CUNY spokesman Michael Arena said in a statement, "It is the University's longstanding policy to respect the collective-bargaining process which provides the framework for discussion of the salient issues." Another demand causing concern among PSC members is a new salary structure that would forgo the traditional step-pay increase in favor of a minimum and maximum wage scale. Raises would be merit-based, decided on by the college President.

Currently, most Assistant Professors start in the mid-\$40,000 range, with a large degree of flexibility allowing for much higher pay in places like the business school. The top salary for Professors is \$102,235. In exceptional circumstances, management can grant up to 65 percent more than the top rate, but that situation applies to less than 5 percent of the teaching staff.

### Building Workload

CUNY is also seeking to increase the number of classes that a part-time instructor can teach from four to five per semester. Part-time instructors, also known as adjuncts, can earn up to \$3,000 per course. Currently about half of CUNY courses are taught by adjuncts.

Under CUNY management's plan, adjuncts would earn about \$30,000 per year for a full-time teaching load, well below the starting salary of about \$42,500 for a city school Teacher. Full-time Professors also must fulfill research requirements and administrative duties that adjuncts do not incur.

"It increases the use of non-full-time people who are not on a tenure track and deepens their exploitation," said Ms. Bowen. "That's the opposite direction to the direction the PSC wants to go."

The two sides began bargaining in January for a deal to replace the one that expires in September. PSC members worked under an expired contract from November 2002 until June 2006, when the current 58-month pact was ratified. PSC bargains directly with CUNY, but the deal must be approved by the city and the state.

### Joint Lobbying on Aid

Even as the two sides meet biweekly to hash out positions at the negotiating table, they are collaborating on an effort to convince the city to allocate more money for CUNY. The union has collected 13,000 postcards addressed to the Mayor and City Council and is gearing up for a May 9 Lobby Day at City Hall. The PSC is pushing for more faculty counselors and support personnel for students in the wake of the devastating shootings at Virginia Tech last month. The Mayor's executive budget includes \$59 million less than CUNY requested for its operating needs and \$39 million less in its capital budget. The city contributed about \$405.4 million to CUNY's operating budget in fiscal year 2007, which ends June 30, and the Mayor has proposed to spend \$373.9 million next year, a drop of more than \$31.5 million.

But CUNY and the PSC will still be negotiating after the budget is approved, which by law must be by July 1.

In addition to representing 6,200 full-time faculty and 8,200 part-time faculty, the union also represents 1,100 continuing education instructors, 2,400 administrative personnel, 900 laboratory technicians and 600 graduate assistants.

## Union Priorities

The union wants the next contract to include increased top pay and a decreased gap between adjuncts and full-time instructors, reduced course loads, and more money for the union's Welfare Fund, although officials have yet to attach dollar amounts to any of these changes.

"The PSC demands offer a real vision of what CUNY could be," said Ms. Bowen. "Decent salaries that make us competitive, with workloads that allow us to give real attention to students and make significant contributions to research. Management's demands lack that kind of vision."