

## STATE BUDGET

# Lift CUNY out of poverty

By BARBARA BOWEN  
PSC President

On February 8, I testified before the New York State Legislature's fiscal committees on the need for a significant increase in public funds for CUNY. The PSC is the leading voice for the importance of making a major investment in CUNY this year, when New York is poised to make historic additions to K-12 education funding. This column is adapted from my testimony, updated to reflect the most recent budget figures; the full testimony and budget testimony by rank-and-file PSC members is on the union website at [www.psc-cuny.org/budgethearing07.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/budgethearing07.htm).

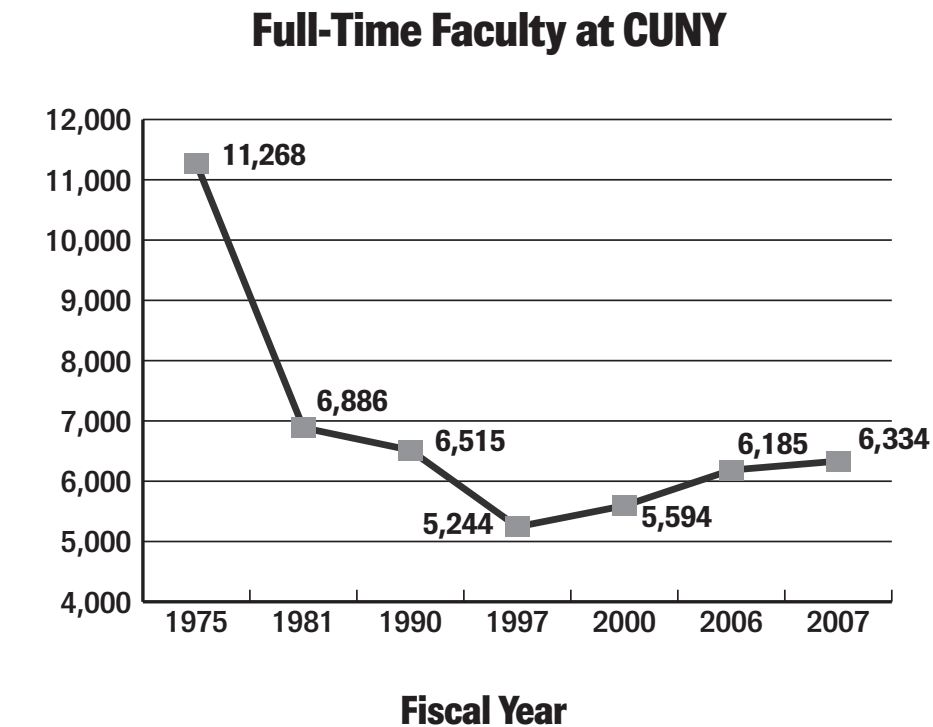
We start from a different place this year, not only because we have a different governor, but because you, the legislature, heard our message. In your budget last year, you demonstrated that you understood the importance of public higher education, you registered that public higher education in New York has historically been underfunded, and you were willing to invest political capital in starting to make up that deficit. Rejecting the notion that public higher education can be restored through tuition increases, you refused the requests from Governor Pataki and from CUNY for increased tuition.

This year, when we begin with a higher platform in the Executive Budget, we ask you to build on that platform and make an investment that would make a difference. Because Governor Spitzer's budget this year does not call for tuition increases, does not significantly reduce TAP and does not underfund mandatory costs, the legislature has the opportunity to do more than bail CUNY out. For the first time in more than a decade, you have an opportunity to make CUNY great. I am here to ask you to do that.

## OUT OF POVERTY

But I will be frank with you. Restoring CUNY, lifting the university out of poverty – because that's where it is – will take more than minor adjustments. It will take a visionary investment. The PSC supports CUNY's request for additional funding but differs with Chancellor Goldstein on the nature of the crisis in our institution. It is true that the faculty, staff and students do more and more with less; it is true that we publish books and produce prize-winning students and make major contributions to the state's economic, intellectual and cultural life. But we do that in spite of the conditions in which we work, not because of them.

Fortunately, we have before us this year a powerful model of what can be done by going



beyond business-as-usual. Building on the courageous grassroots effort of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Governor Spitzer has pledged a major new investment in K-12 education. His proposal for a massive infusion of funds recognizes historic inequities and responds to the need for a dramatically different approach. This is the education year for New York State. Make it the investment year for CUNY.

CUNY is the only college within economic reach for the majority of the students who will be served by the enhancement in the public schools. And CUNY has by far the state's largest enrollment of students of color and students from new immigrant families. 72% of CUNY students are people of color; 59% are from families whose total annual income – in New York City – is under \$30,000. It is no accident that this is the population whose educational opportunity has been jeopardized by years of disinvestment in CUNY.

If New York is to attain the real value of its new investment in education, an investment in CUNY must be part of the plan. Not to invest in CUNY at this critical juncture is to put at risk both our children's future and the state's historic investment in education.

The good news is that a relatively modest investment in CUNY would be transformative. While the funds needed to enhance opportunity in the public schools are in the

billions of dollars, an additional investment of \$76 million beyond the governor's proposed budget would *remake* the City University of New York. Because of CUNY's historic importance to the project of public education, the renewal of CUNY would also be a landmark educational achievement nationwide. It is within your power to create a university worthy of the twenty-first century's "children of the whole people."

The PSC requests that you invest in six major priorities for CUNY:

### #1: Funds for Programmatic Improvements:

The governor's budget does not authorize a tuition increase, but leaves a \$24.3 million gap in critical operating funds CUNY expected to achieve from increased tuition. That gap should be filled by public funds – not by our students.

**#2: Aid to Community Colleges:** The governor's proposed increase of \$100 per full-time-equivalent student will not bring the state near its statutory requirement for community college funding. The PSC calls for an additional \$150 per student, for a total of \$9.4 million.

**#3: Full-Time Faculty:** Our sharpest need is for full-time faculty. In 1975, when CUNY enrollment was close to its current level, CUNY employed 11,268 full-time faculty.

Even with recent hiring initiatives, the total is still only 6,334 – a loss of about 5,000 positions. We request funding this year for an immediate increase of 500 full-time faculty lines, at a cost of \$25 million. Our initiative includes proposals for increasing racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and for converting a number of part-time positions to full-time.

### #4: Additional Full-Time Professional Staff:

We propose that CUNY be funded to hire 50 additional professional staff, at a cost of \$2.5 million, in positions that directly serve students – both to respond to the increased enrollment and to provide a richer base of support for our students.

**#5: Student Mentoring Fund:** We propose the creation of a new fund to support intense, hands-on mentoring of CUNY students, with an investment this year of \$5 million. One of the secrets of small private colleges and large elite universities is that they work to ensure that their students do not fail. CUNY students are entitled to no less.

**#6: Support for Graduate Students:** At almost every other graduate institution, certainly at institutions whose programs rank as high as CUNY's, doctoral students receive full tuition fellowships, plus stipends and health insurance. A small investment, of \$5 million annually, would stabilize graduate student support and allow the university to offer these students healthcare.

## A VISION OF RENEWAL

On behalf of the faculty, staff and students of the City University – and on behalf of the people of New York State – the PSC requests additional funding in these six areas, for a total of \$76 million in increased funds. That may sound ambitious – and it is. But small plans will not lift CUNY out of decades of enforced poverty. Governor Spitzer said in his State of the State address that "we must begin an effort to make our higher education system the best in America." After 20 years of disinvestment, it is a delusion to imagine that that can be done without significant funding.

There is a wonderful poem by the British poet Stevie Smith, in which a dead man lies on the beach and moans:

*I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.*

For the past 20 years, CUNY has been not waving, but drowning. The Executive Budget allows us, for the first time in many years, to tread water. What we're asking is to swim.

Enough of doing more with less.

## Clarion MARCH 2007

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## Take action

Ask your state elected representatives to support CUNY by visiting the PSC website, [www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org). Sign onto a letter urging your state lawmakers to add \$76 million to Gov. Spitzer's proposed CUNY allocation and continue last year's commitment from the legislature to address the years of underfunding. This increase will fully fund CUNY's budget request and allocate almost \$52 million for the six PSC priorities listed above.