

**INCREASE FACULTY COUNSELORS AT CUNY:
A NEED MADE NEWLY VISIBLE BY THE VIRGINIA TECH TRAGEDY**

An Initiative from the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

The Professional Staff Congress/CUNY proposes an additional \$6.3 million in funding to the City University of New York for the purpose of adding urgently-needed psychological counseling faculty at the six community colleges. We make this proposal in addition to our request that the Council support CUNY's proposal for \$34.8 in restorations and \$7.3 in enhancements to the FY 08 CUNY budget. Our proposal for additional faculty counselors is in place of the union's original, related proposal for City Council Diversity Scholars.

For several years, the PSC has focused on the need for additional faculty counselors at the community colleges. The City Council has also addressed this issue. Under the leadership of Councilmember Charles Barron, the Higher Education Committee held a hearing on the subject and elicited powerful testimony about the shortage of counseling faculty. The PSC's initial proposal, first discussed last year with the City Council, called for a general increase in full-time faculty at the community colleges, with a special focus on diversity among the faculty and the need for more faculty counselors.

The events of April 16 at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University moved us to change our proposal. While the causes of the massacre at Virginia Tech are multiple and complex, one clear issue that emerged was the importance of psychological and mental health counseling. The long-standing shortage of faculty counselors at CUNY suddenly appeared more urgent.

We are asking the City Council to provide funding for an additional 51 full-time faculty counselors at the CUNY community colleges and for a program to allow closer mentoring of individual students by full-time faculty in other academic disciplines. A history of budget cuts from both the City and the State has left CUNY short of full-time faculty in every area; CUNY has 5,000 fewer full-time faculty now than it had in 1975—yet enrollment is at a thirty-year high. The shortage has been particularly acute among faculty counselors. The International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) has defined minimum standards for college counseling programs. These include the requirement that the director have an earned doctorate in an appropriate psychological counseling field, and the need for staff members with the highest-level degrees in their fields. The IACS also requires, at a minimum, a ratio of one trained psychological counselor for every 1,000 to 1,500 students. Many professional organizations call for ratios closer to 1:500. At the CUNY community colleges, the ratio is 1:1,628.

That ratio is unacceptable on any college campus; it is especially unacceptable at CUNY. If any students in the country should be provided with adequate counseling faculty, it is CUNY students. Statistically among the lowest-income college students in the nation, CUNY students face pressures unknown at many academic institutions. They hold down jobs, they support families, they contend every day with racism and poverty, they translate and mediate for parents, siblings and community. Among all CUNY students, 72% are people of color, 48% work at least 20 hours a week; 23% support children; 48% speak a native language other than English. We in the Professional Staff Congress, who are privileged to teach and learn from these students, are aware of their remarkable resilience. It is a tribute to their commitment to a college education that they co-exist at CUNY largely in harmony and stability.

Imagine how much more these students could achieve, however, if they had the necessary support. One of the surest routes to increased retention and improved graduation rates is access to one-on-one counseling with faculty. A fully staffed psychological counseling service is also an important part of maintaining the safety of any college campus. In the light of the haunting events at Virginia Tech, CUNY's crisis of counseling faculty can no longer go unaddressed.

This is an opportunity for the City Council to offer leadership. The conversation nationwide in the aftermath of Virginia Tech has focused on campus security, but few public universities have yet announced a program to increase psychological counseling. With this initiative, New York City could demonstrate that while security is vital, it is not enough. Some of the deepest needs are met only by counseling. **The PSC proposal is to add 51 faculty counselors to the existing total of 44 full-time faculty counselors serving the general student population at the community colleges, at a cost of \$4.3 million, and to support a program of one-on-one mentoring of community college students by faculty in other academic disciplines, at a cost of \$2 million—for a total cost of \$6.3 million.** The addition of 51 faculty counselors, while it would not yet bring the CUNY community colleges to the optimum ratio of one counselor for every 250 students, would bring the ratio to 1:750. If funded, this initiative would offer a blueprint of a responsible way for a community to answer some of the questions raised for every college by Virginia Tech.

A final, critical element of the PSC initiative is the proposal that a substantial number of the 51 new faculty counselors hired be people of color. Diversity within CUNY is not just a goal; it is a statutory requirement, codified in the 1979 New York State Education Law:

Only the strongest commitment to the special needs of an urban constituency justifies the legislature's support of an independent and unique structure for the university. Activities at the city university campuses must be undertaken in a spirit which recognizes and responds to the imperative need for affirmative action and the positive desire to have city university personnel reflect the diverse communities which comprise the people of the city and state of New York. (Section 6201)

Arguably, there is no academic discipline in which diversity is more important than counseling. Many students feel more comfortable speaking to a counselor if the counselor is a person of a similar race, gender, sexual orientation or age. If this proposal is funded, CUNY colleges could be encouraged to draw on the outstanding pool of diverse men and women who enter into the counseling field.

On behalf of the 20,000 faculty and professional staff we represent—and of the 400,000 students we serve—we submit that CUNY cannot wait to address its crisis of counseling faculty. The City University must be given the funds to support this need. Not to do so, when the need is both longstanding and newly urgent, could be dangerously short-sighted.

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PROPOSED BUDGET

PART A: 51 FACULTY COUNSELORS

Current total full-time faculty counselors at CUNY community colleges*:	44
Current student population at CUNY community colleges served by these counselors*:	71,610
Current ratio of faculty counselors to students at CUNY community colleges*:	1:1,628
Faculty counselors needed to increase ratio to 1:750	95
PSC proposal for additional counselors to reach ratio of 1:750	51
Salary cost for each new full-time faculty counselor:	\$65,000
Fringes benefit costs per full-time faculty counselor:	\$18,200
Total cost for 51 full-time faculty counselors:	\$4,283,136

* Totals for faculty counselors and student population do not include the College Discovery Program, which on some campuses includes additional counselors but whose counselors do not serve students outside of College Discovery.

PART B: ONE-ON-ONE MENTORING BY FACULTY

Support for 600 full-time faculty to be engaged in one-on-one mentoring:	\$2,000,000
<u>GRAND TOTAL FOR PSC FACULTY COUNSELOR INITIATIVE:</u>	<u>\$6,283,136</u>