



**December 2015  
Academic Year**

**Issue 3  
2015-2016**

**RETIREES  
NEWSLETTER**

**Professional Staff Congress**  
Joan Greenbaum, editor  
[psc-cuny.org/retirees](http://psc-cuny.org/retirees)

**CHAPTER MEETING—  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 7 1- 3  
PM**

From 1 – 2:30 pm, the chapter meeting will center around a discussion of ***Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*** by Atul Gawande (2014). At 2:30 pm, we switch gears with questions and answers about the new **Welfare Fund Pharmaceutical Prescription Plan**.



**BEING MORTAL.** Gawande a practicing doctor, and a powerful storyteller, makes this book a must read. Come even if you haven't read the book, as it will be introduced by a short panel of speakers, touching on our own lives as seniors. They will focus on the ways the book talks about the kind of doctors we deserve, the type of senior housing America is rather slow on providing, and the ways that communities can

help us to enhance well-being in aging.

We devoted our lives to programs and teaching about critical thinking. Isn't it time we spent a little of that critical thought and energy applying some of our experience to ourselves?

The speakers will link their own experiences with the broader issues of the book:

**Lolly McIver**, a former professor of English as a second language at BMCC, reader of *Being Mortal*, and a writing consultant, will introduce the book.

**Joan Greenbaum**, professor emerita, LaGuardia Community College & the Graduate Center, union activist and grandmother, will talk about compelling arguments for forming communities.

**Tucker Pamela Farley**, professor emerita, Brooklyn College, department of English. Tucker established of the Women's Studies Program at Brooklyn and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY. She will talk about the living essentials of attractive senior housing alternatives.

[An interesting review that also can serve as a summary of the book appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and is available at [tinyurl.com/BeingMortalNYR](http://tinyurl.com/BeingMortalNYR).]

**The Retirees Executive Committee** will meet at 10 AM in the Dec 7 meeting in the PSC's Justice Room, 15<sup>th</sup> floor. Executive Committee meetings are open to all members.

As always, the Chapter meets at 61 Broadway, 16th floor, in PSC Union Hall, 1–2:30 PM. Light refreshments will be served. *Being Mortal*—beats the alternative. Come for *Being Mortal* and stay for:

**PRESCRIPTIONS**  
**Welfare Fund**  
**Changes Plans**



**2:30 PM.** Welfare Fund Executive Director, Larry Morgan, accompanied by Donna Costa and Patrick Smith, will discuss the change to the CVS/Caremark prescription drug benefit by the **PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund**.

**CLIMATE JUSTICE WORKING GROUP—3-4:30 PM.** An outgrowth of last month's Chapter meeting welcomes new participants.

**WINTER LUNCHEON—  
JANUARY 11**

**CUNY And The Civil Rights  
Movement**

**Bearing Witness:  
Mississippi Summer/ Selma**



*The Student Voice*, the 1964 newspaper that SNCC published in Mississippi

Many CUNY students participated in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer and the 1965 Selma marches. **Mark Levy**, who was one of several Queens College students who journeyed south for the Mississippi Summer, will speak. **Stephen Somerstein**, who in 1965 was photo editor of the evening student newspaper at CCNY, has graciously provided us with digital photos chronicling Selma from his ten-month exhibit at the NY Historical Society, which just closed.

A handful of members of our retiree chapter also bore witness in Mississippi and/or Alabama in 1964-5. They are invited to break bread with us on our dime (simply contact us at [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org)). For everybody else, reservations are

\$26. The reservation form is available at [tinyurl.com/Jan11reservation](http://tinyurl.com/Jan11reservation) (or accompanied this newsletter if you received it by snail mail).

### **PSC RETIREE WRITERS' WORKSHOP—DEC 15, 2-4 PM**

The first ever PSC writer's group was formed last month. Join please if you are interested in leaving your apartment and sharing your writing. Bring up to four pages of something you want to share, along with six copies for others. Connie Gemson, LaGuardia retiree, coordinates this workshop held at 61 Broadway, 15<sup>th</sup> floor. Email Connie for more information: [chgemson@aol.com](mailto:chgemson@aol.com).

### **RETIREE CHAPTER ELECTION**

The Retirees Chapter will elect its officers for 2016-2019 in April.

There are 19 chapter positions up for election: chapter chair, vice chair, secretary, four officers-at-large, six delegates to the Delegate Assembly, five alternate delegates to the Delegate Assembly and one representative to the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council.

The deadline for filing a Declaration of Candidacy is January 6. Nominating petitions will be circulated in February. Ballots will be mailed April 1 and counted on April 29. If you are interesting in serving, please email us at: [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org).

Full details and an election notice are available on the PSC website.

### **FLORIDA RETIREES AND SNOWBIRDS: SAVE THE DATE**

The annual Florida Branch Benefits Seminar and Luncheon is set for Monday, February 8 at the Lakeside Terrace in Boca Raton.

An invitation and reservation form will be sent to all PSC retiree residents in Florida in a few weeks. If you are a snowbird and wish to be included in the mailing, contact the chapter at [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org), providing us with your name and mailing and email addresses.



In late October, retirees received a letter soliciting contributions for PSC/CUNY COPE, the union's political action fund. Retirees responded generously, contributing over \$4,000 (with an average donation of over \$50) within two weeks of receiving the letter. At a minimum, we would like to double that total.

We need to elect advocates in New York City, Albany and Washington who will promote the interests of our students, faculty, professional staff and university and work to expand

the safety net so essential to us as retirees. If you have not contributed, please do so by sending a check in the prepaid envelope provided with the solicitation letter. If you misplaced the mailing, you can simply make out a check payable to PSC/CUNY COPE and mail to:

PSC/CUNY COPE  
Fifteenth Floor  
61 Broadway  
New York, NY 10006

## **WORLD CLIMATE SUMMIT 2015, PARIS**

Our November meeting gave a kick-start in helping us parse the December Climate Meetings in Paris. The City of Light will be the epicenter of world-wide climate talks beginning November 30.

**Dr. Reginald Blake**, associate professor of physics at City Tech, presented us at the meeting on November 2 with the scientific principles underpinning climate change. With colorful graphics he displayed and discussed, among other issues, the greenhouse effect, and amused us into absorbing the material with short quizzes. He demonstrated how fossil fuels contribute to climate change, and outlined what changes we may expect in weather patterns in the coming years. Blake concluded with “we have already done such damage to the atmosphere that stopping tomorrow would not stop some of the impacts already in action.” Future

generations must be informed and take action. “We need to become very militant and very serious about climate change.”



**Dr. Lara Skinner**, of the Global Labor Institute, Cornell University, reflected upon the Peoples Climate March last year. She believes that the 300,000-person action was the first mass march about “climate justice.”

Skinner has been working with many labor unions to help them become more proactive in the climate movement. A ninety-minute, interactive training curriculum has been designed to explain the scale and urgency of the climate crisis, including who and what is causing it. The training outlines the impact of the climate crisis on unions and working people and activates workers and union members to develop and advance a worker-oriented response to the climate crisis.

She reminded us that “the wealthiest 20% of people in the world are responsible for 80% of emissions, but that working-class people have been most impacted by this

problem.” The impacts of climate change are not felt equally, with the greatest burdens placed upon the least wealthy, “exacerbating existing inequalities.”

We all know about the huge sums of money being spent in political lobbying, and in funding climate change deniers by the fossil fuel industry. Skinner’s work stressed that a pro-worker, pro-labor strategy can create a movement from below, and advance a climate jobs initiative for New York State. By promoting clean energy and union jobs in the solar and wind power industries, labor can address both the climate crisis and the crisis of inequality.



**Sean Sweeney**, of the CUNY Murphy Institute, focused on what to look for and what might be missing in the Paris talks. Today, most new emissions are coming from China; with the most cumulative emissions coming from the U.S. (21% with 5 % of the world’s population). The Kyoto treaty of 1997 expired in 2012. Attempts were made in

Copenhagen, in 2009, to fashion a new treaty, which would enforce an 80% reduction by 2050, based on 1990 levels, with a goal to limit warming to within 2 degrees Celsius. But, Copenhagen, Sweeney reported, “was a fiasco.” Several governments, including the U.S., supported a plan whereby each country would state what it was prepared to do to meet a 2-degree benchmark. Yet scientists are now indicating that the benchmark should be 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Sweeney argued that if the Paris agreement results in a standard of around 2 degrees of warming, “this will be hailed as a massive success in the media.” But he cautioned, “that it is not where it needs to be.” Also, the agreement doesn’t take effect until 2020, with emissions continuing to rise within developing and developed economies. In regard to the labor movement and its strategy, Prof. Sweeney observed:

“The U.S. has always been held back by some unions that are active in the climate debate. They are afraid that a stronger agreement might have an effect on their [i.e. fossil fuel, auto and related construction] industries.”

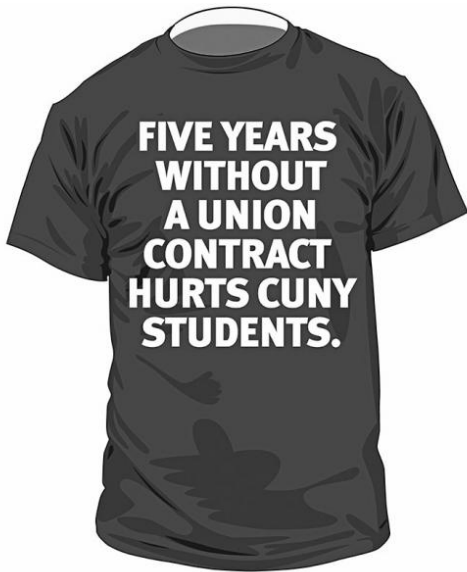
Following the meeting, John Hyland and others called together a newly forming **PSC Climate Justice Working Group**. Its next meeting will be in the Union Hall following the chapter meeting on December 7, 3-4:30 PM. Interested activists are encouraged to attend!

-Joel Berger

College of Staten Island, Retired  
PSC Retirees Vice Chairperson

## RETIREES IN THE STRUGGLE

Jim Perlstein, Cecelia McCall and I had the “pleasure” of being retirees who took part in the **November 4 civil disobedience action** in support of the PSC bargaining team. Linking arms, we sat down in front of the CUNY headquarters and chanted, “Tax the Rich, Not the Poor, Stop the War on CUNY!” and “No Contract, No Peace!” for fifteen minutes before being arrested.



Clarion Staff

It was energizing to be together with 52 other PSC members from many campuses, young and old, men and women. We continued to chant loudly and refused to budge as the police commander warned us we would be arrested if we didn't leave. As we were being handcuffed, we

were buoyed by the many hundreds of our colleagues (including my wife) who chanted and cheered for us.

My group of six arrestees spent two hours in a police van in the parking lot of One Police Plaza, with our arms handcuffed behind our backs. But the time passed quickly as we exchanged stories about our campuses and academic interests. We spent another few hours in a holding cell inside, in similar high spirits and with stimulating conversation.

When we were finally released, late in the evening Barbara Bowen and staff members were waiting for us with water, food and congratulations. I'm proud to be a member of a union with so many wonderful comrades eager to stand up for themselves and their students.

-Glenn Kissack  
Hunter College High School, Math  
PSC Executive Council Retiree

## IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS: PSC RETIREEES WALKED THE LOWER EAST SIDE

**On October 19** about twenty retirees enjoyed a walking tour of the Lower East Side. Many retirees had personal association with this iconic community through friends and family. The tour's leader, Stephen Levine's knowledge and lively presentation made the experience enriching for us. Levine teaches *The History of New York City* at CUNY's Center for Worker Education.

The tour started at the famous Katz Deli and visited the Tenement Museum. We also had a chance to find out more about so many well-known neighborhood markers: the Jewish Daily Forward, the Educational Alliance and the Henry Street Settlement House. We learned about the political debates that occurred on these streets and the numerous immigrant groups that called this neighborhood home.



Despite the chilly weather, we enjoyed a look back at a vibrant history and the current community of this special neighborhood. Thank you Stephen, for making this special outing possible. We look forward to additional tours in the future to learn about the past, present and future of New York City neighborhoods.

-Constance H. Gemson

LaGuardia Community College,  
Retired

## **STUDY ABOUT OLDER ADULTS WITH OR WITHOUT DEMENTIA**

PSC retirees are members of the Alliance for Retired Americans. The New York City chapter of the New

York State Alliance for Retired Americans held its monthly membership meeting on October 28. At that meeting, Dr. Wingyun Mak (Lehman College, department of psychology), explained the study she is conducting: Purpose in Life and Well-Being in Late Life.

Professor Mak wants to find out what purpose in life and well-being mean for older adults. She is interviewing 50 'normal' people and 50 people with mild to moderate dementia in order to compare the two groups and find out if there is a difference in the way they experience purpose and well-being. She will use the information she gets to develop community applications to improve the quality of life of older adults and older adults with dementia.

If you know someone who may want to participate in this study or would like more information, please contact Dr. Wingyun Mak, (718) 960-8717 or [wingyun.mak@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:wingyun.mak@lehman.cuny.edu).

### **Francine Brewer**

PSC Retiree Representative

### **MONEY IN THE KITTY**

NYS Comptroller [DiNapoli reports](#) there the state will have a \$1 billion surplus to start the next fiscal year. That money could be used to fund an acceptable PSC contract — including a sizable increase in the poverty-level salaries of adjuncts — as well as prevent further tuition increases and raise the level of financial aid for needy students. Will it be used for that, or will the

Governor distribute more tax breaks to large banks and corporations and his wealthy backers?

## **TRANSITIONING TO AND WITH-IN RETIREMENT**

As we are finding out, retirement isn't one thing. There are many ways of transitioning into it, and indeed many changes we may initiate or encounter along the way. Email us and tell us your story about how and where retirement is taking you. Write to Joan Greenbaum, newsletter editor: [joanbaum@ix.netcom.com](mailto:joanbaum@ix.netcom.com).

### **WEAVING INTO RETIREMENT**

I learned to weave in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico on a sabbatical from City College in 1992. I then returned to Mexico every intersession and every summer to weave and have continued to do so after I retired in 2011. Now I spend a bit more time in the winter weaving in Mexico, and have had a number of shows both in Mexico and New York City.

I started in City College as a student in 1959 and began teaching there in 1969, so I have deep roots at CCNY. In retirement, I miss the students, and the chance to share my years of academic and political knowledge as well as being an advocate for the union.

The weaving here was done on the occasion of my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of graduating from CCNY. The name of the piece is "Lavender, my Lavender" The bottom panel is that color—and represents the school song of the same name. The center

panel has the well-known initials of the college. The top panel contains the words to which I have dedicated my life and which were a slogan during the many struggles for education I have participated in, as both a student and a teacher.



It now hangs in the Administration Building in City College. I want everyone who sees it to feel encouraged to see education as a right for all. In this piece I have woven together my history, my politics and my hope for the future.

Elizabeth Starčević  
Professor Emerita, City College of New York  
[www.estarweaver.com](http://www.estarweaver.com)



## NO MORE WORRIES?

I've worked ever since I was a 14-year-old kid. Early on I learned that, even in the kind of part-time jobs that kids had, you had to watch yourself if you wanted to be back the next day. That low-hanging threat stayed with me into my adult years. Of course, the presence of the union at CUNY meant that I wasn't alone. But I learned all too well to guard my flanks.

## What, Me Worry?



A figure our generation can relate to, even those of us overwhelmed by angst: Alfred E. Neuman of Mad Magazine fame (circa 1950s).

Retiring changed that, eventually freeing me to speak my mind more forthrightly – and, I think, fearlessly. In a very important sense, it was liberation on a personal level.

On another level, work imposed a daily structure to life. As one of my colleagues said in these pages last month, working had me worrying about my next class, what I was

supposed to teach and even where the classroom was. Or anxious about any other obligation I had: did I finish some report, review an essay that was due, did I forget to attend some meeting? (O! Mon dieu—I once even forgot a meeting I was scheduled for, with an airline ticket and hotel reservation in my name!)

The challenge, and also the joy of retirement is that I can now choose what I want to do, what I most value. I'm no longer wracked with anxiety, wondering if I'll forget where my classroom is. Now I don't ever forget to pick up my grandkids on my appointed days, and I've learned that the agenda for my life is pretty much my own. Everyone deserves that privilege, which I like to believe is well earned.

Steve Leberstein CCNY,  
Center for Worker Education at City  
and the Graduate Center for Worker  
Education at Brooklyn (44 years at  
CUNY)

## NAME THIS NEWSLETTER

As we expand our activities and explore the wide range of members' interests, we might want to consider naming this Newsletter. Our Retirees' chapter is one of the largest in the union, maybe there is some name worthy of our dedication, energy (such as it is), humor and collective experiences. Send suggestions—alliterative, wry, iconic, ironic, or irreverent to:

[retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org).