



**ORGANIZING**  
**Fighting budget cuts**

Senior college members oppose austerity.  
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# CONTRACT RATIFIED



With the largest voter turnout for a contract ratification in the union's history, PSC members overwhelmingly approved a memorandum of agreement that lifts wages for all and delivers substantial salary gains for part-time instructors and other titles. Now comes the next step: implementing the contract and organizing the membership for the campaigns ahead.

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## ADJUNCTS

### New paid office hours

The addition of a paid office hour for part-time instructors will boost adjunct pay. We look at what this major change will mean once it is implemented.

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The PSC is working to address this common workplace problem through legislation, organizing and a new labor-management campaign.

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### Mold haunts City Tech

Campus administration says it has dealt with a mold problem that sickened a handful of members. But workers say health concerns remain.

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### Tools to take on the status quo

Humanities professors teach "critical thinking," but do they really teach students to confront societal problems? One scholar weighs in on the question.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. EMAIL: APAUL@PSCMAIL.ORG.

# PSC and the campaign ahead

● With the voting concluded in the contract ratification process we face what comes next: building our power outside the table, through the rank and file. The next move forward is to organize toward building enough power to leverage the larger CUNY community to demand transformative change. We must also embrace a diversity of tactics and authentically engage membership in their goals and ideas, rather than using a push for a strike as a replacement for analysis and power-building.

We present some specific suggestions about how to move ahead:

● The union must stop accepting austerity logic and framing achievements through the lens of austerity. The bargaining team won tens of millions but CUNY needs and the state can afford a billion dollars. To break out of pattern bargaining is a win only if it heralds a change in rejecting austerity logic moving forward. We must provide a counter-narrative to austerity, articulating a positive vision for the CUNY we believe in through public-facing media and policy campaigns.

● We should conduct research that enables us to identify and expose the political and financial elites that benefit from CUNY's imposed austerity. This research is necessary to have a complete understanding of our battle's political terrain.

● The creation of long-term "Bargaining for the Common Good" alliances with students and New York City working-class communities that rely on CUNY. This means bringing everyone to the table and incorporating their needs into our union's vision, platform and public messaging.

● The activation of what Frances Fox Piven names as "disruptive power," which, together with building relations and advancing a forward-looking vision, is capable of generating the urgency and leverage to step up and provide the force we need behind our demands. These could include creative workplace and public actions, escalating direct action. A strike authorization or strike readiness campaign will likely be a crucial part of this step.

● A more radical legislative strategy might include things like public actions, targeted district visits, protests outside of electeds' offices, bird-dogging and crucially making funding CUNY an issue that all electeds have to take a stand on. A legislative strategy should center the new narrative as described above and it should be tied to other proposals such as the millionaire's tax.

Rosa Squillacote  
Graduate Center  
Lynne Turner  
Graduate Center



PSC members marched with thousands of other unionists during September's annual Labor Day Parade in Manhattan.

*A version of this letter was read at the Special Delegate Assembly in November and republished online on Medium and Portside.*

*PSC President Barbara Bowen responds: Thank you, Rosa and Lynne, for the sharpness of your opening paragraph, where you rightly remind members that a call for a strike – transformative as strikes can be – should not replace analysis and the building of power.*

*And I agree: we must use the momentum of this contract to deepen the urgency and leverage with which our union challenges austerity. Suggestions about building power are always welcome, especially from activists as engaged in union work as both of you have been. But many of the tactics you call for are precisely what the PSC has been doing for years, and they have been critical to the successes we have had in Albany and City Hall. Direct action, protests outside electeds' offices, targeted district visits, advocacy for the millionaires' tax, building alliances and participating in coalitions for more revenue – all have long been part of our arsenal, as has a powerful articulation of a counter-narrative to austerity.*

*Defeating an entire political regime based on concentrating wealth in the hands of the rich and under-educating the poor, however, will take much more than a counter-narrative. The key, as you suggest, is expanding our power beyond our own union, large as it is. That work has also been underway, but it needs to grow, and suggestions like yours should be part of the discussion.*

## Not so simple

● "New chairs for HEOs, campuses and RF" in the September 2019 *Clarion* gives the misleading impression that Scott Cally, the current chapter chair at Kingsborough Community College, won in a contested election against former chapter chair Rina Yarmish. Nothing could be further from the truth. Scott Cally ran with Rina Yarmish on her Faculty First slate and Yarmish, a longtime chapter chair at Kingsborough, is still very much a part of the chapter leadership. She currently holds the position of delegate. To characterize Scott Cally as representing a new era of union leadership on our campus would be a mistake.

Emily Schnee  
Kingsborough Community College

*Editor's note: The article stated that Cally replaced Yarmish, which could be read to either mean he directly challenged her incumbency or that he merely succeeded her. Yarmish chose not to run for the chapter chair position again. In the piece, we write that Cally "was elected in a contested election, replacing Rina Yarmish," and Yarmish was, later on in the piece, listed as an elected delegate for the Kingsborough chapter. Although this was a true account of the events, it left room for ambiguity. We regret any confusion.*

## Math lesson

● The only votes counted at the Special Delegate Assembly on the memorandum of understanding were the "no" votes, which came out to 20. No one counted the "yes" votes or figured out if there were abstentions. The only other number we know for sure is the 205 delegates that signed in. The early assumption was that if 20 voted no (about 10 percent of the 205 in attendance), then 90 percent voted yes. However, we don't know this because we don't know how many were in the restroom or sitting on their hands, so all we could say for

sure was that 20 voted no and that the MOA passed overwhelmingly.

In *Clarion* (November 2019), the back page article says that "nearly 200" voted for it. I'm confident that if you'd known there were only 205 people able to vote, you would have realized how that would have been possible only if at least half of the people who voted "no" also voted "yes."

Normally, I wouldn't make an issue of a simple little error like this, but I am very annoyed at the use of incorrect numbers in our union because they seem always incorrect in the direction that helps push a certain agenda.

Ruth Wangerin  
Lehman College

*Editor's note: We're glad that members value accuracy and precision in reporting. Clarion stands by its account of the Special Delegate Assembly on the memorandum of agreement. The chair took a "show of cards" vote at the Special DA, and because the "yes" vote was overwhelming a count wasn't taken. Using photos and the number of delegates and alternates who signed in, we were confident in our assertion that "nearly 200" of those present raised their cards to vote yes. We believe we accurately reported the result.*

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# Members ratify new contract

By ARI PAUL

The members have spoken, and they have spoken clearly.

With 86 percent voting in the affirmative, members voted to ratify a memorandum of agreement with CUNY that will lift across-the-board pay for everyone by 10.4 percent, substantially increase pay for adjunct instructors, grant equity raises to some of the lowest-paid full-time titles, and address important non-economic issues such as new language regarding observation of online courses. Some 15,976 PSC members, or 75 percent of those eligible, participated in the vote, for the highest ratification turnout in the union's history.

## A UNION WIN

PSC President Barbara Bowen said: "The PSC's ability to win salary increases for all, together with increases for adjunct faculty averaging 45 percent and as high as 71 percent, should give us confidence in our ability to demand and accomplish even more. At this moment of rising labor power nationally – a moment from which

## An equity contract

the PSC benefited and to which our contract contributes – we are in a strong position to take on new challenges."

From the moment the delegate assembly voted to send the MOA to the membership to the last vote cast before midnight on November 26, the union members' outreach and debate on the ratification process demonstrated the breadth of the union democracy that defines the PSC. Chapters across the five boroughs held meetings to discuss and debate the provisions of the deal, with close to 30 campus meetings crammed into a period of three weeks. Activists and staff phone-banked, texted and did door-to-door conversations on campuses to ensure that every member in the bargaining unit had the information they needed and the opportunity to vote on the contract.

The effort to win a good contract began two years ago and involved an ambitious set of demands; the

resulting contract is a complex package. Many of the new provisions are, without question, a departure from the past. All adjunct faculty who teach courses of three hours or more will be paid for and be responsible for weekly office hours; and, by the end of the contract, most adjunct faculty will no longer be on salary steps. Instead, they will be on new, higher single rates of pay per title, with the Adjunct Lecturer minimum at \$5,500 for a three-credit course. These and other new provisions raised lots of questions that led to lots of discussion.

## Gains for titles with lowest pay

## NATIONAL NEWS

The plight of low-paid adjuncts in America is a much-talked-about issue nationwide, and the PSC contract, with the gains it makes for teaching adjuncts, is no ordinary labor deal. The local and national press covered the agreement between the union and CUNY.

"[The MOA will] be good for CUNY's predominantly low-income learners, who will benefit from a more stable, more attentive teaching corps that's less likely to be rushing to second and third jobs to pay the rent... Adjuncts now handle more than 60 percent of the coursework at the system's 11 four-year senior colleges, and about half of it at the seven two-year community colleges," said the editorial board of the *New York Daily News*.

And the *Chief-Leader's* editorial on the contract said, "[T]his contract went a long way toward meeting the union's goals... The strides made on fair compensation justified Ms. Bowen's declaration that the deal looms as 'of national importance in higher education.'"

Now comes the next phase of the union's fight: implementing the agreement and making sure that it is respected by management on every campus. First, the CUNY Board of Trustees must vote to give formal approval to the contract, as they are expected to do at their December 16 meeting. Then, the union will campaign to ensure

that pay raises are implemented promptly, that members receive the back pay they are entitled to quickly and that new gains are respected on campuses. The adjunct raises, for example, include one paid office hour for each three-, four-, or five-hour course starting Spring 2020. The union will work with departments to ensure that expectations for the office hour are consistent with the language of the MOA and with departmental practices for full-time faculty.

## LOOKING AHEAD

"I spoke to several hundred members at meetings leading up to the ratification vote, and the other officers spoke to hundreds more," Bowen commented. "The overriding message we heard, regardless of members' position on the contract, was that PSC members are prepared to fight for their vision of what New York City's public university should be. Winning this contract was a major part of the fight, but there is much more to be done – and a new phase of our work, especially for full public funding for CUNY, starts now."

# Paid office hours for adjuncts

By ARI PAUL

The most newsworthy gains in the new contract, ratified in November, are the salary gains for adjunct faculty, whose pay will significantly increase over the life of the agreement. One of the main goals of the bargaining team in this two-year contract struggle was to gain pay for the work adjuncts performed outside the classroom. It was a long and arduous fight, but ultimately the union won something quite significant in addition to the general salary hikes for part-time instructors: a paid office hour every week for every three-credit course.

## A BIG WIN

President Barbara Bowen said, in an email to members, that "paying adjuncts for more of the hours they actually work is a progressive provision and a centerpiece of the new contract" and that the "provision for paid office hours means that adjuncts are paid for substantially more of the hours they work; it recognizes the professionalism of adjunct faculty; and it guarantees and expands students' access to their instructors outside of class."

Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez, when he announced in October that the proposed agreement included the paid adjunct office hour, said, "all of our faculty will now devote more time to meeting

## Recognizing work done outside the classroom



Carly Smith, VP for part-time personnel, explained the new contract provisions at the special delegate assembly in November.

with and advising students" and that "[t]his will be crucial to our efforts to increase graduation rates, enhance learning and remain a premier university."

## RECOGNIZING WORK

For Meg Feeley, an adjunct lecturer at Kingsborough Community College and an executive council

member who served on the PSC bargaining team, the paid office hour constitutes a formal and compensated recognition by the administration of the hard work adjuncts have always done outside of in-class teaching hours.

"Historically, teaching adjuncts have made 40 percent more per hour than non-teaching adjuncts,

and that was supposed to reflect the fact that teaching adjuncts must perform work outside the classroom," she told *Clarion*. "But that 40 percent only begins to pay for the time teaching adjuncts spend meeting with students, prepping and grading. The bargaining team, informed by early meetings among adjunct activists

about this 'ghost workload,' saw this as the opportunity to stretch the city and state 'pattern' of 2 percent a year – barely enough to keep pace with inflation – to bring more pay to teaching adjuncts. Besides getting paid now for one hour per course three, four or five credits per week, teaching adjuncts are – for the first time – being paid *specifically* for the time we work outside the classroom. That's one of the historic things about this contract."

## PENSION BOOST

She added that beyond putting more money into adjuncts' pockets, the provision will also help part-time instructors in terms of their pensions. "We are now to be credited with hours that will make us eligible sooner for a full year of service in [The Teachers, Retirement System]," Feeley said.

As members debated and discussed the terms of the MOA, some adjuncts were concerned that the requirement of a paid office would mean an increase in workload, or, at the very least, provide a way for the administration to manage the time of adjuncts outside of class. But, as Feeley maintained, the office hour is work many adjuncts have already been doing.

"Some are concerned that this is a form of 'workload creep,'" Feeley said. "No one is arguing for a longer work week. The fact is, we adjuncts are hourly employees, not salaried."

And as Luke Elliott-Negri, the PSC chair at the Graduate Center,

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# Mobilizing against CUNY budget cuts

By ARI PAUL

At a breakfast forum on the fourth floor of the Queens College student union in late September, Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez was on a panel speaking about the role technology and business play in higher education.

David Gerwin, PSC Queens College chapter chair, stood up toward the end and pointed to the dire budget cuts affecting faculty, staff and students at the college, where Matos Rodríguez had been president until becoming CUNY's chancellor in May. Specifically, Gerwin pointed to the looming cut of 800 seats in introductory English classes out of 1,200 seats slated for the Spring semester. The way Gerwin saw it, English classes were going to be awarded to students in a lottery process where only the lucky ones could be assured access to their required courses.

"We're out there lobbying for more investment," Matos Rodríguez responded, alluding to the issue of state funding for CUNY. "We all know about the public good that we do... We need to be more effective at telling that story so that electeds get it."

## GETTING FUNDING

While he added that "you have my commitment to do that," the chancellor made it clear that he wasn't talking solely about the PSC's key budget demand, which is that the state must address its systematic underfunding of CUNY. The chancellor underscored the need for more philanthropy, including fundraising that goes beyond the regular alumni outreach.

Gerwin was unmoved. The college's planned budget cuts are broader than the situation in the English department, and the cuts, if enacted, would mean laying off adjuncts. He noted there are cuts scheduled for other departments, there is currently no director of counseling services, no director of the tutoring center, no registrar and no director of graduate admissions. The counseling center staff was reduced from seven full-timers to four.

After the event, speaking to *Clarion*, Gerwin invoked the crusade by New York City Transit Chief Andy Byford, who implored the Metropolitan Transportation Authority board of directors to demand a specific number for a budget increase to meet the demands for the subways and buses. The CUNY chancellor, Gerwin said, wasn't doing that.

"It falls short," he said. "Telling us we need to be advocates? He should stand up."

Gerwin was part of a chapter-wide demonstration at the breakfast to bring the scheduled budget cuts to the attention of the chancellor and the wider community.

Urban studies adjunct instructor Erin Lilli said her department has taken a 15-percent budget cut and cost reductions hurt the most

## A major campaign for the union



David Gerwin, PSC chair for Queens College, questioned the chancellor on his school's budget cuts.

vulnerable: part-time faculty who lose classes (which means a loss in pay and, potentially, their health coverage) and students who do not get the education they deserve. "It's sending the message to students: The university doesn't care about you," Lilli said.

Julie George, an assistant professor of political science, agreed, telling chapter members, "If you have to balance the budget on adjunct salaries, you've gone so far that you've ceased to be an institution of higher education."

In at least one extreme case, the budget for the Irish studies program, the oldest of its kind in the country, was reduced by 100 percent. The chair, Sarah Covington, said that in the past she had received a small budget to hire adjuncts, but now she must go "hat in hand" to the administration for money for new courses.

"The administration said to raise outside money, but we have no secretary, no space, nothing," said Covington, a historian. "It's frustrating because we've done a lot of innovative work. We had a program on marriage equality in Ireland, we had a conference on the abortion referendum that was covered in the press, we have a massive oral history project."

## ZERO DOLLARS

The cut does not necessarily mean the death of the program – Covington can still raise money independently to hire instructors. But she fears that this may signal the end. The program has always been small, but the cut to zero was demoralizing, she said, and the pain went beyond the school, as the program had served as a resource for the local Irish-American community.

"The administration doesn't care," she said. "The classes we have will

fold into history and English. It's going to die. They clearly don't want it."

As Queens chapter members told *Clarion*, the college's administration has not replaced some professional staff who have resigned or retired, forcing HEOs in those offices to perform work they were not trained for. HEOs in these offices are often assigned to work beyond their 35-hour-per-week limit and complain that they are not fully compensated for the extra time. The members noted that when the registrar left the position, formerly a full-HEO position, the work was distributed to assistant to HEO staffers.

Queens College is not alone. Budget cuts are a problem throughout CUNY, especially at the senior colleges, which receive funding from the state. PSC activists have noted all fall that senior college administrations were instructed to look for cuts of at least 2 percent to their budgets this

year. PSC leaders challenged the assertion by some CUNY presidents that the budget cuts were necessary to fund the anticipated raises in the PSC contract. "The root problem is the policy decision by Albany not to fund normal annual cost increases at CUNY – inflationary increases, rent and electricity increases, collective bargaining," said PSC President Barbara Bowen.

At Brooklyn College, James Davis, the PSC chapter chair, told *Clarion*, "Adjunct budgets have been reduced for academic departments, chairs in some departments have been asked to 'increase class size' and sections that show low enrollment as the semester approaches have been cancelled, combined with another section of the same course or 'converted' into an independent study, sometimes within a week of the semester's start."

## A massive hit for CUNY's senior colleges

Davis, who also serves as a senior college officer on the PSC executive council, added, "The pace at which full-timers are leaving or retiring continues to surpass the rate at which new full-time faculty are hired" and "despite steady undergraduate enrollment, key student support offices – academic advisement, bursar, financial aid, registrar – are understaffed."

## SAFETY ISSUES

Albert Sherman, chair of the PSC College Laboratory Technician chapter, reported that at his home campus, City Tech, part-time CLT hours have been cut dramatically. Sherman noted these cuts were also a student safety issue: complicated, dangerous machinery is not getting the required worker attention.

At the College of Staten Island, Carol Hartman, a biology lecturer, paints an equally dire picture: broken microscopes not being replaced or fixed, printers without paper and six full-time faculty members have left in the last few years and not one has been replaced.

"We're not getting supplies for the students: in biology we need reagents, we need live material and we're not getting it," she said. "I've been here 21 years and it's worse than it's ever been."

City College's administration also promised its workforce a fair degree of belt tightening in a briefing delivered to its faculty senate this fall. At the main campus the ongoing deficit will "require additional reductions." And "continued cost control measures must remain in place" and the report said that a "hiring freeze must continue."

CUNY faculty and staff have been long acquainted with inadequate public funding, and they are used to being told to "do more with less". But the consensus among PSC activists around the four-year colleges is that the intensity of the budget cuts is more severe than it has been in years past. "This is crossing a line," Gerwin said right after his interaction with the

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Andrea Vásquez, the union's first vice president, testified about CUNY budget cuts at a State Senate Higher Education Committee Hearing at Brooklyn College.

Ellen Moynihan

Dave Sanders

# Confronting workplace abuse at CUNY

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Constant belittling, being ignored at meetings, repeated removing of work responsibilities without cause – all are forms of workplace bullying. Experts say that at least one in five workers has experienced bullying in the workplace, and that the incidents often go unreported. The PSC has repeatedly pressed CUNY administration to do something about this pervasive workplace problem, and, in the most recent round of contract negotiations, management agreed to take steps to address the issue.

“People deserve to go to work and be treated with dignity and respect,” said Iris DeLutro, a PSC bargaining team member and vice president of Cross-Campus Units. DeLutro has advocated for years for state legislation and a CUNY policy against bullying. “I hope there’s serious commitment [from CUNY management] to see how rampant this problem is and to provide remedies. We have to create safe spaces and training.”

## CONTRACT RESULT

In final settlement talks on the PSC-CUNY 2017-23 contract, CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez agreed to a joint labor-management campaign to address workplace bullying.

PSC President Barbara Bowen commented, “I am hopeful about a campaign because a campaign will be public, and workplace bullying thrives on silence and shame.” Bowen continued, “The campaign has to involve equal commitments by labor and management, because creating a culture free of workplace bullying – especially under austerity conditions – will require an openness to change at every level. The preliminary conversations the PSC officers have had with management have been promising.”

## Pushing anti-bullying bill



Graciano Matos of City College spoke about the bullying he faced.

The PSC, along with its parent union, NYSUT, is pressing for state legislation to address the issue. Earlier this semester, the HEO and CLT chapters organized a panel about workplace bullying and its effects. PSC members packed the union hall to address the issue and the steps that can be taken to eliminate bullying in the workplace. Panelists talked about the psychological effects of bullying and the way disinvestment in the university can foster bullying because employees are forced to do more work with less training and supervision.

“It is often the best and the brightest [who are bullied],” said Victoria

O’Shea, an ASAP student advisor at Queensborough Community College. “Our supervisors don’t see how this bullying can affect the office.”

Bullying can lead to less commitment at work, decline in performance and the quality of work, and bullied employees seeking work elsewhere, she said.

## BIG IMPACT

O’Shea said some of the psychological effects of bullying include depression, anxiety and panic attacks.

Graciano Matos, a laboratory hygiene officer at City College, said, “It’s hard to admit as an adult that you’ve been bullied.”

Matos, who worked in high-stress environments before he arrived in New York City, thought that once he started working in professional environments the constant lack of respect would stop. But it did not. He has done what he can in order to improve the situation, including working with the union on his case, but he said that people and organizations need to unite to create a shared policy.

## LEGAL ACTION

O’Shea and Matos advised people in the audience to document instances of bullying when they occur, report any incidents to their supervisors and consult with a PSC grievance counselor immediately to find out if they can file a formal or informal complaint. (A grievance must be filed within 30 working days after an incident becomes known.)

If the bullying is directed at the victim because of race, sex, national origin, sexual orientation or disability, it could be harassment and a violation of state and city law. The Healthy Workplace Bill – which the PSC, NYSUT and other unions are supporting – is proposed state legislation that defines workplace bullying as including repeated verbal abuse or work sabotage that could cause physical or psychological harm.

If the bill passes and is signed into law, employees will have a chance to file a lawsuit against the alleged bully and could hold employers liable if reasonable preventative measures were not taken. With Democrats in control of both houses of the state legislature, unions like the PSC are hopeful about the bill’s prospects.

The law has its limits, though, said William Herbert, the executive director of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the

Professions at Hunter College. The only recourse is a lawsuit, he said, and many employees cannot afford to hire a lawyer. Herbert worked as a labor and employment lawyer for two decades, and, he said, unions need to consider representation for the victim and the alleged bully when devising a policy, because oftentimes both are union members.

Policies also need to include accountability measures and training components, otherwise they are ineffective, said Clara Wajngurt, a professor at Queensborough Community College who has studied bullying policies at other academic institutions.

## Bullying thrives on silence and shame.

“Bullying takes place over a period of time,” Wajngurt said. “[We need] to create a campus policy and communicate it clearly to staff and faculty so that [they] are all accountable for what [they] do.”

The continued lack of investment in public higher education creates an environment where bullying becomes more prevalent. Increased workloads, for example, create stressful working conditions.

## TOP-DOWN ABUSE

“Managers are passing more of the work down as they get more work from above,” said PSC Legislative Representative Mike Fabricant. “Bullying has always existed and it has increased with the working conditions we are experiencing at CUNY.”

Many panelists stressed the importance of speaking out when one of their coworkers is being bullied and communicating that the behavior is unacceptable.

“The law will not change behavior immediately. It comes down to how we behave,” said Herbert. “[It’s about] building a union and developing a sense of solidarity and sense of unity.”

# Mobilizing against CUNY budget cuts

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chancellor, saying that the cuts dramatically alter the pedagogical experiences future students will have as compared to their predecessors. “It really changes what it means to be a student here.”

President Barbara Bowen has told members that the fight for a fair budget will be a major focus for the union in this academic year. She wrote in a message to members: “The claim made by some college presidents that tuition must be raised to cover contractual increases is divisive and false. The reason for budget shortfalls at CUNY is systemic underfunding, not our contractual increases.” She added that the newly ratified contract, particularly the provision for paid office hours by adjuncts, will drive tens

of millions of dollars in additional funding into the colleges from both the city and the state. Bowen told *Clarion* that she believes the union can build on the momentum of the additional public investment represented by the contract to tackle the biggest problems of underfunding.

## A NEW DEAL

The union’s first vice president, Andrea Vásquez, pressed the case for more funding to the State Senate’s Higher Education Committee during a hearing at Brooklyn College in September.

“There is money to support the vision of a New Deal for CUNY,” she said in her testimony. “It would take a small portion of the state’s \$175 billion budget. There is money to be had by passing tax reforms

that make the rich and corporations pay higher taxes. The governor has the power to set spending and revenue limits in the budget, but the legislature can and has negotiated for more progressive taxation and critical investments.”

She continued, “The legislature showed last year that laws once thought impossible to change can be rewritten, that provisions once assumed outside of New York’s reach can now become law. In the Senate, you passed progressive legislation last year with the alacrity of a new majority. The PSC urges you to attack the funding crisis at CUNY this year with the same urgency. We ask you to approach the problems of affordability and access with the same ambition and imagination. And we urge you to get started today.”



Victoria O’Shea, an ASAP student advisor at Queensborough Community College, said the “best and the brightest” are often singled out for harassment.

# Members fight mold at City Tech

By ARI PAUL

City Tech has had a mold problem this year. Worse, PSC members there think the administration is not addressing it properly.

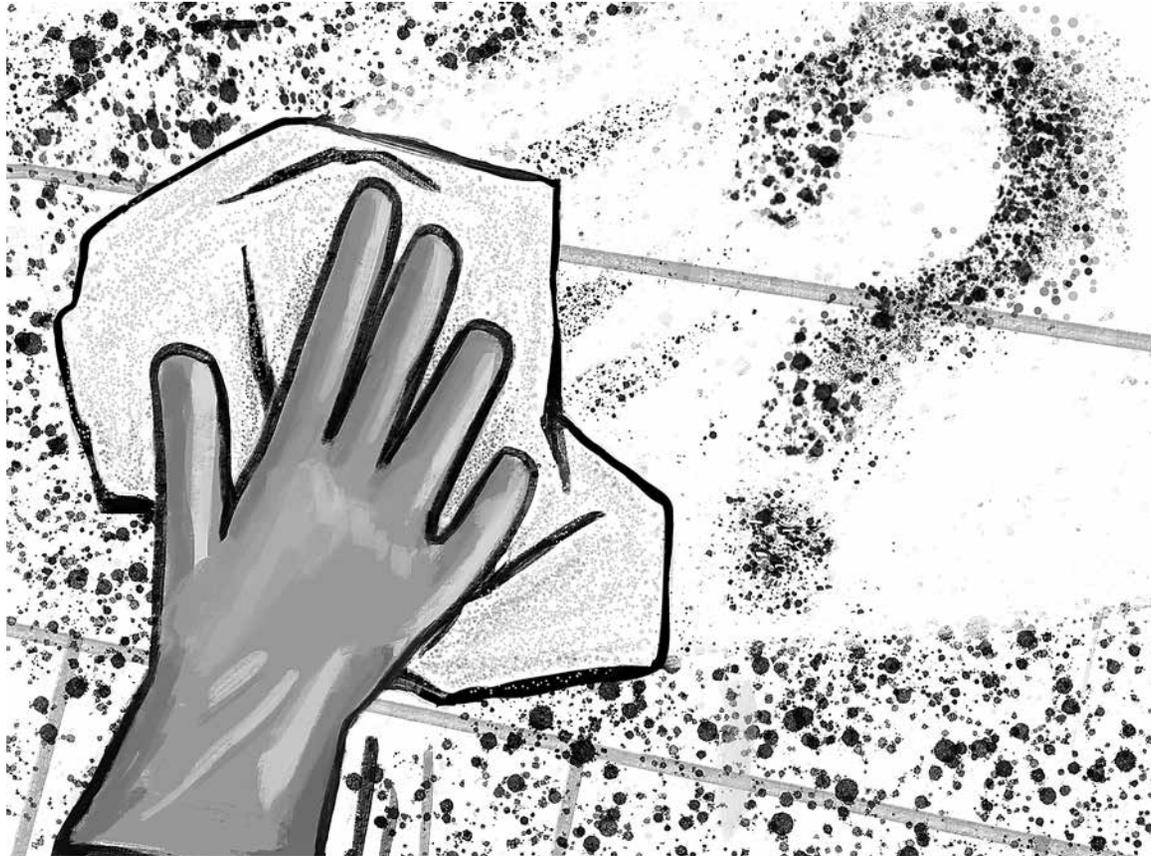
The PSC chapter suspects that mold is responsible for more than two dozen workers in admissions, registrar and financial aid reporting in sick during the Spring 2019 semester. The union chapter leaders contacted the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs, and they arranged for the PSC to contract with Microecologies, a leading indoor environmental testing firm in the city, to conduct an independent inspection of City Tech. Microecologies found black mold (stachybotrys) in the pipe-and-ceiling tiles of the registrar's office file room and evidence of water intrusion in both the registrar's and admissions offices. The inspection, which took place this summer, also found rodent droppings in the admissions office.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In its report, Microecologies made several recommendations, including having the registrar's office file room cleaned by a licensed mold-removal contractor. The report recommended thorough inspections of other offices and noted that such work could be disruptive to the day-to-day flow of life on campus: the cleaning work would require the removal or covering of all furniture in the area, isolating the work area, the use of protective gear for the workers involved and other precautions.

The campus administration has not appeared to take the report seriously or remediate the problem in the appropriate fashion. HEO Chapter Chair Cindy Bink, who works at City Tech, said in an email to members, "Our efforts seem to have spurred efforts to remove the mold, but the administration has failed to truthfully disclose the nature of their actions [in

## Admin says it's fixed, but union not convinced



response to the findings]. This is of concern because removing mold by law must be done by a licensed mold remover. Done incorrectly additional mold spores can be released into the area causing even more problems."

## CHALLENGING RESULTS

Bink added that there was another problem: the college was contesting Microecologies' findings. "The college administration reported that they were not agreeing with the union's mold assessment for a couple of reasons," Bink said. "First [the administration] said Microecologies was not authorized to test for mold at City Tech... They also stated that they were not required to do their own mold tests because

New York State law did not require them to do so. Basically they were saying, 'We cleaned up the room, we did not test for mold because we are not required to by law. And because we did not test mold, we can clean the area using our own in-house maintenance staff.'"

PSC members said that the union did not receive "permission" to bring Microecologies on campus.

The situation leaves some members worrying that mold problems will return. "We discussed this in three labor-management meetings with the administration," City Tech PSC Chapter Chair Ben Shepard told *Clarion* in November. "To date, the administration does not acknowledge that the mold ever existed. They

cleaned some of the areas where mold was found without acknowledging there was mold. I hope it does not come back. We still see rat feces in the building. I wish the administration took a little more pride in the building's upkeep."

Jacqueline Elliot, a PSC Executive Council member and a senior college laboratory technician who is based at City Tech, recalled that the chapter started taking action in the Spring.

"People were getting sick," said Elliot, who is cochair of the union's health and safety team. "We got everybody's names and symptoms and we brought it to the administration's attention. They looked at it and they talked to their environmental safety officer, who called PESH (Public Employee Safety and Health). And PESH came in and gave an inspection, but they weren't going to dig as deep as we would."

## LACKS OVERSIGHT

The inspection by PESH, the statewide government agency that oversees workplace environmental and occupation safety at state and city government employers, appeared to underplay what workers were experiencing, she said. A PESH report from the summer concluded, "Air monitoring conducted during this consultation visit did not indicate any exposures which would constitute violation of any applicable PESH standards."

Elliot noted that the administration has done some work on the affected areas since the Microecologies inspection, but it has not informed the chapter what kind of work has been done. She said, "The bottom line is: Who came in? Were

they licensed or did they just have someone from facilities do the job? That's a big issue, because it needs to be done right."

She added, "People are pissed off and people are scared."

City Tech administration maintains that it has cleaned the affected areas. Miguel Cairo, City Tech's vice president for administration and finance, stood by the PESH report, noting that PESH inspectors took samples from the affected areas and conducted interviews with workers.

## CUNY RESPONSE

"With respect to the Microecologies report, the college was not informed of their visit, and did not participate in any way in the sampling or any other of their activities. Nevertheless, we reviewed the report, investigated the issues they raised and took action whenever we found it was needed," he told *Clarion*. "The college has responded to the concerns expressed by the local PSC leadership, investigated every issue raised and taken appropriate action."

"We also took the members of the leadership on a tour of the areas they had brought to our attention and showed what had been done to correct any problem found. Our health and safety officer continues to monitor any of the previously identified areas and any new concerns brought to our attention."

## A serious health issue at City Tech

The problem with the administration's response, according to Jean Grassman, cochair of the union's

health and safety team, is that while PESH does work to protect general occupation safety and health, Microecologies is a mold expert. Specifically, she said, the college is not in compliance with New York City Local Law 61, which states, "Mold assessment, abatement or remediation for a project for such building shall be performed by a person licensed to perform such work..."

The chapter is continuing to press City Tech administration to take the union's inspection report and its recommendations more seriously.

In the meantime, chapter leaders have told members that if they see a potential mold problem they should inform Buildings and Grounds as well as the PSC's Health and Safety Watchdogs. The chapter leaders were not aware of people currently sick from environmental issues, but said any members who do get sick should seek help immediately.

Shepard told *Clarion* that if members get sick or see mold they should document it.

"If the administration didn't do a proper clean-up, people are going to get sick again," he said. "The administration knows they're on watch. They know that we have our eyes on it."

The union's health and safety team can be contacted at hswatchdogs@pscmail.org.

# Unionists marching for the planet



PSC members joined a student-led walkout against climate change in September.

# HEOs aid HEOs with increases, issues

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Rank-and-file activists are bringing the union's services directly to other members – and they're seeing some positive results. When Judith Kubran, an Assistant to HEO, applied for the HEO salary differential, she found the process “demanding” and “overwhelming.” As an assistant program officer in the PhD program in psychology at the Graduate Center (GC), she is no stranger to completing complicated applications. But when she found out that PSC delegates at her campus were holding one-on-one HEO information sessions, she decided to check it out.

“My job and responsibilities have expanded a thousandfold since I started my position in 1985,” Kubran told *Clarion*. “I wanted to present the best possible package.”

## LOTS OF PAPER

Applying for the \$2,500 salary increase is a detailed, sometimes onerous process. Making a strong case requires assembling documents that describe increased responsibilities or excellence in performance and that can include supervisor recommendations, letters from colleagues, the original job description and a self-written job description that explains one's actual responsibilities.

The provision for HEO differentials was won in 2016 when the PSC settled the 2010-17 PSC-CUNY contract. In the recently ratified PSC contract, the union secured matching funding for the salary differentials so that colleges will not have a financial reason to deny applications from eligible employees.

## Organizing HEOs locally



Judith Kubran (left) and Zee Dempster (right) discussing HEO issues at the Graduate Center.

To apply, Assistants to HEO, HEO Assistants and HEO Associates have to be at the top of their salary schedule for at least one year. The union also won contractual time frames for responses to applications. The PSC bargaining team refused to settle the contract without agreement on time frames for HEO applications, and agreement was reached only on the last night of bargaining.

Starting January 1, 2020, HEOs who submit applications by January 1 for any year must receive a

decision no later than June 30 of the same year; those who submit applications by July 1 must receive a decision no later than January 15 of the following year.

## LEARNING SESSIONS

“We knew that applying for the differentials took time and many people would be intimidated by the process,” said Zee Dempster, a PSC HEO delegate at the GC who was part of the steering committee that organized the information sessions. “[Attending the sessions] makes

members feel a greater connection with those representing them.”

PSC delegates at the Graduate Center began what they call HEO “office hours” last spring, where HEOs can learn about union campaigns and their rights and benefits from HEO delegates at the GC's Midtown Manhattan building. They typically hold five or six one-hour sessions at the GC each semester. Dempster said that it is important to create an on-campus presence for the HEO chapter so that HEO delegates are accessible to their union coworkers.

“I like the office hours because people feel like they get responsiveness to their individual issues,” said Gerry Martini, an assistant director of admissions at the Graduate Center. “It allows us to connect with, and support, each other one-on-one in a great way, and it allows people to see how their union can help them with their own specific problems too.”

Martini added, “[The sessions] are great in terms of helping get colleagues the advice they need, and it is useful for camaraderie because it's just another way we can show that we're in it together. Pulling together helps with both individual and universal issues.”

Attending the HEO office hours is also easy. All Kubran had to do was and walk down the hallway during her lunch break. She came to the session prepared with documents and questions. Dempster, who was staffing the one-on-one session, helped Kubran prioritize and organize her documents.

“They're there to advocate for you,” said Kubran, who found it helpful to have someone else to talk

through the process with her. “It's a way to empower people with information and action.”

And in the end, her application was successful. Her base salary increased by \$2,500 a year and the raises from the new contract will be added to that.

## Meeting with members individually

HEO delegates in the Central Office chapter also began information sessions last spring.

“We are bringing the union to them,” said Lucy McIntyre, a Central Office delegate who developed the idea as part of her project with the PSC's Next Generation Leadership Training. “We're letting them know we're here to represent you.”

McIntyre said union members come to the sessions with questions about potential grievances, union benefits and contract negotiations.

## CORPORATE CULTURE

The Central Office chapter is scattered, with five different offices across the city. The chapter decided to hold their sessions twice a month at each site. McIntyre said that holding the one-on-one sessions for HEOs increases the union's visibility at all CUNY Central Offices, where the work culture is more like a corporate environment.

At the GC, HEO delegates hope to get more people involved in being active in the chapter.

“At the larger meeting, we keep saying there is no ‘you’ and ‘us’ in a union,” said Dempster. She said the sessions help build personal relationships with the union. “It is breaking down those walls or barriers in a friendly way.”

# Strengthening HEO pay differential

By ANDREA VÁSQUEZ

At a recent PSC chapter meeting at City Tech, a member rose to say that as a result of the 2017 contract, he received a HEO discretionary salary differential of \$2,500 and wanted to know if that existing provision was still intact for his colleagues. It is – and, in this new contract, the provision is even stronger.

Thanks to the concerted efforts of PSC members, nearly 100 HEOs have received the differential and hundreds more are eligible. The PSC was able to learn from the implementation of the 2017 provision and win significant improvements in the new contract that will help fund the differentials and improve the process. We are urging HEOs to apply as soon as possible and consider reapplying if you were denied in the past.

## HOW IT WORKS

Because the HEO series is “non-promotional,” meaning that when HEOs reach the highest salary step

## How members can benefit

in the title there is no established or automatic path to move to a higher title, the PSC has fought to establish new ways for HEOs to be compensated for the work they do. The \$2,500 salary assignment differential was created to recognize “excellence of performance or increased responsibilities within the title.” Assistants to HEO, HEO Assistants, or HEO Associates are eligible. Applications go through an approval process that first goes to a HEO Labor Management Committee, then to the College HEO Committee and then to the college president for final approval.

## FUNDING AVAILABLE

Since implementation of the provision in 2017, most colleges have processed and awarded the differential to some or all of those who applied. However, insufficient funding in college budgets has sometimes been used as a reason

to deny the differential. In the new PSC contract, funds have been provided for CUNY to supplement the college's funding when they grant HEO salary differentials. This will allow colleges to approve more applications and should incentivize HEOs to apply. **Funding becomes available on Jan 1, 2020**, and all eligible HEOs are urged to apply as soon as possible.

## TIMETABLE

While most colleges moved prior applications through the process swiftly and respectfully, others did not. Contract language now lays out deadlines for final decisions: “Eligible employees who submit completed applications to the college HR office by January 1 of each year shall receive notification of the President's decision no later than the following June 30. Eligible employees who submit...by July 1...no later than the following January 15.”

Ordinarily it has not taken a full semester for an applicant to be informed of a decision but the PSC hopes that this timetable will speed the process at any colleges that were slow.

## RECLASSIFICATION PROCESS

Establishing structures for salary advancement for any member constituency is a significant victory in a contract because it can be expanded upon in future agreements. It can also have other side benefits. College HEO committees will now meet at least once each semester to make recommendations on the differentials. They should also make recommendations on HEO reclassifications. The new timetable means that applications for reclassification should move through the process more quickly.

## HOW TO APPLY

For information on how to apply, go to <https://psc-cuny.org/rights/heo-rights-and-benefits>. After

you read the basic information, you may also contact a HEO advisor on salary differentials and reclassifications at [HEOadvisor@psccuny.org](mailto:HEOadvisor@psccuny.org) to discuss your application. HEO Chapter Chair Cindy Bink has done this advising for the past two years, assisting scores of HEOs with their applications. Now, HEOs Marcus Richardson and Gogie Padilla will be taking over and are eager to assist applicants.

We are pleased that members were able to identify problems in the process for granting salary differentials and so were able to demand improvements in this contract. Now we encourage all eligible HEOs to consider applying. If you are uncertain if you are eligible, you can look up your job history on CUNYfirst or call your HR office.

One contract provision cannot address all the issues facing HEOs, who have given extensive service to CUNY, but it is a victory that over time will affect the compensation and professional respect of HEOs across the university.

*Andrea Vásquez is the PSC first vice president and the former chair of the union's HEO chapter.*

# Multiyear adjunct appointments extended

By CLARION STAFF

“My body chemistry changed when I got a three-year appointment,” one adjunct commented in a recent meeting on the contract. Discussion about the new 2017-23 contract, ratified in November, focused on adjunct pay, but previous contracts have made headway against contingency, the other main structural problem with the adjunct labor system. The biggest fight in negotiations for the previous PSC contract, covering 2010-16, was for increased job security for long-serving adjunct faculty. The union won a pilot program creating secure three-year appointments for adjunct faculty who meet the eligibility requirements and are recommended after a comprehensive review.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

The program has been even more successful than union negotiators anticipated, thanks to the strong records of adjunct faculty and the support of department chairs. More than 2,500 adjunct faculty are currently on three-year appointments that guarantee at

## Building on a major win

least six contact hours of teaching or the equivalent number of non-teaching adjunct hours.

The union bargaining team was determined to build on that success in the most recent round of negotiations. They won agreement to extend the pilot program for another three years, through the end of the 2023-24 academic year. The gain means that thousands of long-serving adjuncts who had not yet qualified for consideration under the previous contract will now have an opportunity to receive a three-year appointment. Meanwhile, adjuncts who began a three-year appointment in the Fall 2017 semester will be up for consideration during Spring 2020 for a second three-year appointment starting Fall 2020.

“Those adjuncts who are completing their third year of the appointment should be sure that at least one teaching observation has been conducted during their appointment, and that it is in their personnel file,”

said Renée Lasher, the PSC’s director of contract administration.

Under the program, adjuncts on three-year appointments are automatically considered for a subsequent three-year appointment, subject to a comprehensive review of the adjunct’s performance, as well as the fiscal and programmatic needs of the department. To receive another three-year appointment, adjuncts must receive a positive recommendation from their department personnel and budget committee and the college president.

“That means any additional positive commentary or achievements should be documented in the personnel file as well,” Lasher continued.

## ‘LOOK-BACK’

When the program was first negotiated, the union pushed hard for the “look-back period,” the years of service required before being considered for the appointment, to allow flexibility for adjuncts who

had experienced interruptions of a semester or more in their past service. CUNY management would not agree to the initial program on these terms. In the renewal of the pilot program, however, management agreed to an expansion of eligibility.

## MORE DETAILS

Starting with the Fall 2019 semester, the look-back period has been extended to 12 semesters to cover circumstances when an adjunct was assigned to teach six contact hours but was not able to do so because of illness or losing a course, resulting in a lack of continuity of service. According to the new contractual language, an adjunct who has taught six contact hours per semester for 10 of the 12 most recent consecutive semesters will be eligible for consideration for a three-year appointment, “provided that the adjunct was initially assigned to teach at least six contact hours in the semester(s) resulting in the lack of continuity and that the adjunct lost no more than one course owing to insufficient enrollment or reassignment of the course to another faculty member and/or that the adjunct lost one or

more courses owing to medical reasons in the semester(s) at issue.”

The expansion of eligibility is not all the union wanted, but it addresses two of the major reasons adjuncts lose continuity, and it should open the program to many adjuncts who had previously been ineligible.

Adjuncts with six or more contact hours in a single department in 10 of the last 10 semesters will continue to be automatically considered for a three-year appointment. But long-serving adjuncts who were not considered previously because of one of the circumstances described above must take action with the college and provide documentation to ensure that they receive consideration. Teaching adjuncts who believe the circumstances described in the eligibility expansion apply to them *must self-identify to the colleges human resources office and their department chair* no later than the end of the second week of the spring semester. The college will determine if the adjunct meets the eligibility criteria for consideration and will notify the adjunct.

# Paid office hours for adjuncts

Continued from page 3

wrote in *Gotham Gazette*: “Adjunct faculty at CUNY are as dedicated as any to the students they teach. They have long held office hours and met with students as much as those students need, but mostly without compensation. This new hour of pay for every course begins to recognize the many hundreds of thousands of hours of uncompensated labor that CUNY adjuncts perform every semester.”

In an email to members at her home campus of Baruch College, Carly Smith, the union’s vice president for part-time personnel and a member of the bargaining team, said, “I have heard some concerns from members about potentially unfair, unreasonable monitoring of these hours and the possibility of adjuncts being coerced into performing additional uncompensated labor... During negotiations, we on the bargaining team advocated for the strongest possible language to guard against any new avenues of exploitation. I pressed on this issue, as an adjunct myself.”

## FORMALIZING PRACTICES

Smith continued, “While I do think this provision will be complicated to implement, we should recognize that we have power in the union’s fundamental position: The additional paid office hours should be formalized according to the existing, typical practices of a department, according to the same requirements as full-timers. Also

note that the language of the agreement doesn’t specify that the office hours must be spent literally sitting in a department office, but rather ‘on campus’ and ‘available’ to students. We adjuncts are already doing this work and will now be getting paid for more of it. And yes, we absolutely need to be ready to fight back against any administrative abuses of this provision.”

## STUDENTS WIN

Anthony Gronowicz, an adjunct lecturer in political science and history at Borough of Manhattan Community College, was excited about the paid office hours. “Teaching two three-hour courses at one college and one course at another in the CUNY system, one can get three additional office hours a week, the equivalent of another course,” he explained. “And it benefits our students, who, after all, are the people we serve.”

Department chairs are preparing for implementation of this new arrangement.

“From my perspective it’s making progress toward paying adjuncts for the work they already do when they respond to student emails, prep for their courses and grade,” said Karen Weingarten, the interim chair of the English department at Queens College. “We’ve never policed how adjuncts use their office hours in our department, and we’re not planning to start doing so. We’ve also been fortunate in our department to be able to give adjuncts office space –

no more than three adjuncts share one office, and we try to keep it to two when possible.”

Union leaders and staff are already planning for implementation of this major new provision. They are working to identify creative, cooperative ways to open up office space for adjuncts, and have prepared to ensure that the office hours are implemented correctly.

## Paying adjuncts for work outside class

are to be used to meet with students;

Bowen firmly stated that the union would not allow the university to misuse this provision, stating that “the adjunct office hours may not be used for any purpose other than meeting with or being available to meet with students” and that if the “union learns of any attempts

by colleges to repurpose or take over these hours, we will immediately challenge the college and, if necessary, file a grievance. CUNY management, the city and the state agreed to pay for these hours on the basis that they

the union is determined to protect that purpose.”

## LOOKING AHEAD

“With every new gain and new contract provision, inevitably we will face new challenges,” said Carol Rial, an adjunct grievance counselor. “How adjunct office hours will be managed will vary campus by campus and department by department. We don’t know specifically what to expect, but we are ready to face whatever calls and concerns adjuncts may have about the implementation of this provision in the future.”



President Barbara Bowen at the special delegate assembly on the contract in November.

# Pres. Irwin Polishook, 1935-2019

By ARI PAUL

## Led union for two decades

Irwin Polishook, a founder of the modern PSC whose two-decade presidency helped shape the union's contractual framework and who led the union during the fallout from the city's financial crisis, died on September 13 at the age of 84.

Polishook, who taught colonial American history first at Hunter College and later at Lehman College, helped found the PSC when, in 1972, CUNY's Legislative Conference and the United Federation of College Teachers merged to form one union. He became the union's founding vice president, serving under Belle Zeller.

### DEEP CUTS

As PSC retiree activist Irwin Yellowitz explained, Polishook led the charge against an attempt by the state to cut City College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College and Queens College from the system and transfer the campuses to SUNY in a misguided effort to alleviate CUNY's devastated finances. "He was a major force against the dismemberment of CUNY," Yellowitz said.

Polishook tried to stop the laying off of individual professors, although some departments were closed down and several thousand were laid off (some were brought back), and won the repayment of two weeks' lost pay, with interest, when faculty and staff were put on furlough in 1976. "No one said it could be done," Yellowitz said, noting that it took seven years for all the money to be repaid.

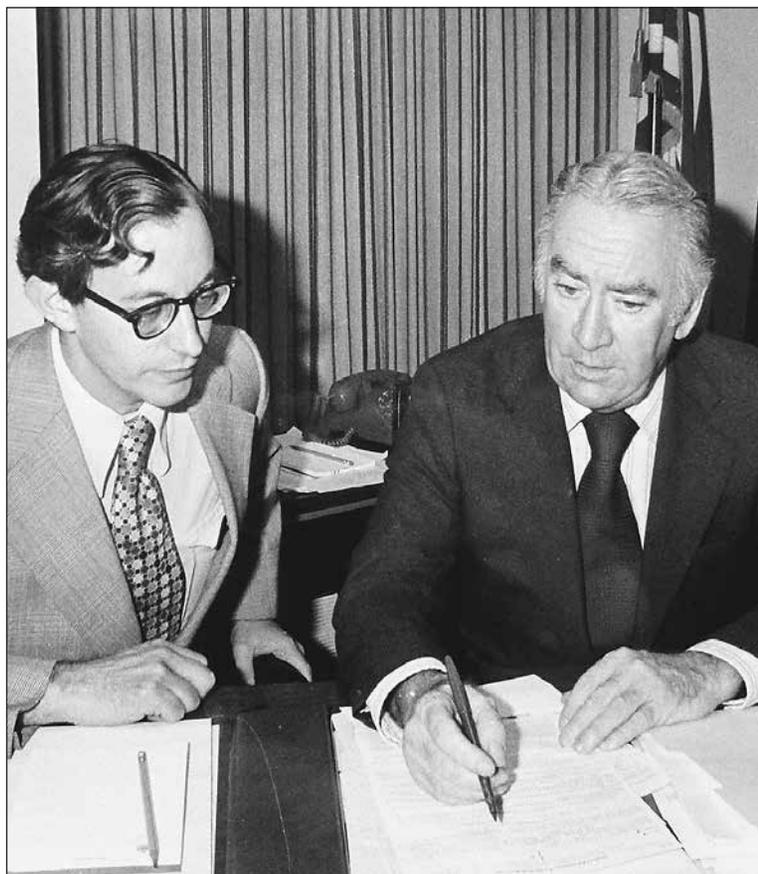
### GETTING THE GOODS

Polishook was also important in strengthening CUNY faculty and staff benefits. Perhaps most important, he pressed the city to contribute to TIAA pensions rather than solely to the city-controlled Teachers' Retirement System. His team also revamped the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund.

Through Polishook's efforts, the union now has the majority of appointees to the Fund's board, giving the union and the membership a significant say in how the fund's benefits are managed.

Writing in the PSC's Retiree Chapter newsletter, Yellowitz said, "It had been an independent body, and the union opposed some of its policies as being too limited to serve the entire faculty and staff."

The union, under Polishook, played an important role in combating gender discrimination at CUNY. When an assistant professor of English at Brooklyn College, Lilia Melani, embarked on what would become a class action lawsuit against the university for paying women instructors less than their male colleagues (filed in 1973), she originally did not go through union channels. When Melani sought representation from prominent labor lawyer and civil



Irwin Polishook with Governor Hugh Carey

rights advocate Judith Vladeck, however, the union agreed to pay the legal fees. A federal judge ruled against CUNY in 1983, resulting in \$60 million in damages and back pay.

### Came to leadership during the financial crisis

Austerity began to deepen even after the city eventually recovered from the financial crisis of the mid-'70s, most notably in 1989 when both the city and state faced budget deficits. Polishook advocated for the faculty and staff, as quoted in the *New York Times*, "Class size has risen dramatically, the faculty workload is much higher than that at comparable research universities, support services have been shredded and library purchases are at a minimum."

### ROUGH YEARS

The 1990s were tumultuous for the PSC. Beginning with Governor Mario Cuomo and continuing with Governor George Pataki, in addition to a right-wing City Hall with Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the university faced ongoing budget cuts that inspired long-time and tenured faculty to seek employment elsewhere, according to news reports at the time. The union saw several 0-percent raises in the 1990s.

### CHALLENGED

The drama of the 1990s led to the first contested PSC presidential election in 20 years with Brooklyn College political scientist Steve London running with the New Caucus. London would later serve as PSC first vice president and he

is currently a PSC executive council member.

Speaking to *Clarion*, London said, "Among Polishook's chief accomplishments were maintaining the unity of the union and maintaining the structure of the University. But during the 1990s, the pressures were very severe and he responded



Irwin Polishook with civil rights leader Betty Shabazz

with policies that were inadequate to deal with the salary structure of full-timers and the increasing use of adjuncts."

Polishook retired in 2000, just before the next PSC leadership election. Barbara Bowen, who was the Queens College chapter chair at the time, and challenged Polishook's policies, won the presidency with the support of the New Caucus.

### LEGACY

As Yellowitz explained, Polishook's legacy at the PSC is rooted in the fact that he aggressively bargained contracts.

In addition, Yellowitz noted, Pol-

ishook will be remembered for being not just a CUNY faculty and staff leader, but someone who used his role as a leader in the PSC, AFT and the New York State United Teachers to advocate for public higher education in the same way the labor movement would fight for other essential public services.

"He is credited with the PSC being a solid union," Yellowitz said, "the leading union in higher education."

According to his obituary, donations in his memory may be made to the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust Fund, which provides an annual graduate scholarship in his name. (Send c/o PSC, 61 Broadway, New York, NY 10006).

## The next generation of scholars



Recipients of the Belle Zeller Scholarship were honored at an event at City Tech on November 4. In the back and center is Graduate Center PSC Chair Luke Elliott-Negri.

# Five questions for Martin Lucas

By CLARION STAFF

Martin Lucas is a professor of film and media at Hunter College. A videographer as well as an educator, his productions – which have appeared on television and other media – have covered a wide range of topics from the AIDS crisis to indigenous groups in Guatemala. A media-maker with a vision, he has worked with anti-war television and been involved with a variety of grassroots media organizations.

For the latest in an ongoing series of member interviews, *Clarion* recently spoke to Professor Lucas about his work.

**Your first film, “Tighten Your Belts, Bite the Bullet,” was about the 1975 financial crisis. With inequality on people’s minds today, what lessons from that era inform the present moment?**

I came to New York to go to school in 1975 and was struck immediately by this sense of a city in ruins. It was still a place that you could afford to move to and getting some kind of work wasn’t that hard, but the city was engaged in a policy of “planned shrinkage,” shutting down fire stations, hospitals, day care centers. Tuition was imposed at CUNY. People were fighting back, but with very limited success.

And then the banks took control of the city budget. At the time, my colleagues and I were documenting the beginning of what later became known as neo liberalism. Ordinary people’s lives were being made notably more difficult, while the dominant narrative was all about how the bankers, led by Felix Rohatyn of Lazard Freres, were “saving the

## How to make media for the people



Hunter College Professor Martin Lucas and his equipment.

city.” My sense is that today the neo liberal consensus is at an end, that we’re entering a new economic period, that the ’70s and ’80s suggest that working people will only get out of this current moment what they fight for.

**You’ve seen technology in film and video change a lot over the years. Is it harder or easier to make independent media now?**

On the technology side, making films is a thousand times easier. I have seen decent documentaries shot on cell phones. An example would be Behrouz Boochani’s *Chauka, Please*

*Tell Us the Time* (2017), shot while Boochani was detained in a refugee camp in New Guinea. It was successful in exposing the conditions at Australian-run camps. And editing software comes with your laptop.

On the other hand, at least for independent media, there is not really a market, and it’s very hard to imagine making a living. Streaming is not really a source of income. Film festivals have gone online, and are flooded with entries. It reminds me a bit of what the music industry went through a few years ago with the death of the album.

**The internet has been game-changing. How do you think unions and community groups can better use web-based film to spread their message?**

As far as I am concerned, you can’t go wrong trying to represent your cause and your point of view in an audiovisual form. There are many ways to make effective media, and having a professional style is not necessarily the first component. As a kind of “thought experiment” I went on YouTube and searched for videos about the 2019 teachers’ strike in Chicago. Basically,

**A wide range of work in film and video**

## Lacking black faculty

By CLARION STAFF

CUNY might be a diverse place, but it is lacking in black faculty, according to city lawmakers and faculty at a hearing of the City Council’s Higher Education Committee in November.

Committee chair, City Councilwoman Inez Barron told CUNY officials that while the percentage of non-white faculty at CUNY was nearly twice the national average, its black faculty remained at 12 percent between 2014-17.

### STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

“Until we deal with the structural power centers in the University...there’s not going to be a lot of black folks,” James Blake, president of the Borough of Manhattan Community College Black Faculty and Staff Association, said in his testimony, adding, “We’re generally at the lower levels of faculty

appointment.... As we retire, we’re not replaced with people of color.”

Brenda Greene, the executive director of the Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, testified that the state of black studies programs throughout the University were “diminishing” because of the “non-replacement” of black faculty who leave the system.

The hearing came just days after CUNY announced a \$500,000 city council grant for the founding of a Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding at Queens College with the aim to address bias on campus and promote “dialogue between diverse groups.”

Councilwoman Barron suggested that the University look to replace college interim presidents with non-white permanent replacements. “This is a golden opportunity for CUNY,” she said.



City Councilwoman Inez Barron, chair of the higher education committee.

CUNY officials said the University was reviewing its policies about being proactive in hiring new non-white faculty members and that it was planning on sub-

mitting proposals on how to increase faculty diversity to the Board of Trustees in the spring.

Compiled from news reports.

all of the videos that come up were made by professional news organizations. Extensive scrolling showed one video by the AFT and no “unofficial” media at all. To me, there are missing voices there.

**Ever since the FCC changed its rule on net neutrality, there’s been a general fear that the internet will be a less free forum than it has been. Do you see that? How can we fight it?**

While the end of net neutrality is a threat, to me there are other issues that seem significant. One is that all of us are using a few privately owned social media platforms, platforms owned by the modern equivalent of the Golden Age robber barons. They may be more ethical as individuals, but the power equation is terribly out of balance.

The other thing is that new forms of power online are not always visible. Whether we’re talking about algorithms steering people to extremist content, or trolls drowning our belief in the possibility of finding real answers in a river of junk, the production and distribution of real information online is not easy. My sense is that the plus side for unions and community groups is that your online presence and your physical presence in the workplace or in your neighborhood can be mutually supportive.

**What specific film and video projects are out there right now that you think progressive-minded people should look at?**

We don’t really live in a shared media culture. For me, I find some things in places where they’re easy to find. Steven Soderbergh’s *The Laundromat* (2019) is readily available on Netflix. It will give you a surprisingly good sense of how dirty money works on a global scale in an easy-to-digest package. Other work I see in smaller contexts, either local places like UnionDocs in Williamsburg, which focuses on documentary, or at festivals.

One work I would recommend highly is *The Prison in 12 Landscapes* (2016), by Brett Story. The film looks at how the prison industry is built into the American scene in a way that really brings new understanding.

Another recent film I like, maybe because it hits on issues I teach, is Kirsten Johnson’s *Cameraperson* (2016). The film uses footage from films Johnson worked on as a cinematographer, mainly in situations of war or conflict, to explore the complex ethical issues that emerge when we make it our job to film other people. The other film I’d love to see is one that tackles the abandonment of public higher education by the state.

*If you know someone who might be an interesting candidate for Clarion’s “Five Questions,” please send their information to the editor at apaul@pscmail.org.*

## ACADEMIA

# Against 'critical thinking'

By ANTHONY ALESSANDRINI

I get asked a lot: How could I possibly be against critical thinking? In a moment dominated by “truthiness,” “fake news” and Donald Trump – who, as Masha Gessen notes, blatantly lies in order “to assert power over truth itself” – don’t we need critical thinking more than ever?

I’m not against critical thinking. But I would argue that there is an institutional formation – let’s call it Critical Thinking – that is preventing those of us in the humanities from actually using critical thinking to oppose corporate and government power.

In some ways, Critical Thinking is a victim of its own success. Every few months, the *Wall Street Journal* or *Forbes* will run an article about how corporations need employees with strong Critical Thinking skills. And we repeat this back to our students – the philosophy department at Kingsborough Community College, for example, offers this reason for studying philosophy: “Employers cannot find enough people to hire who are skilled in Critical Thinking.”

## TOUGH QUESTION

As a result, we humanities professors tend to justify our work by declaring: “We teach Critical Thinking.”

But philosophy teaches us that once something becomes ubiquitous, it also becomes essentially meaningless. If *everything* we do counts as Critical Thinking, then *nothing* actually functions as critical thought anymore.

As critical theorists, we’ve struck a collective bargain in order to maintain a few crumbs of public support for the humanities. In return for being allowed to continue to teach “nonmarketable” (i.e. “useless”) areas of study – literary studies, art history,



Anthony Alessandrini asks if humanity professors are confronting power.

philosophy, critical theory and any forms of historical and foreign language study not directly tied to US foreign policy or business interests – we have told students (and ourselves) that these subjects would prepare them for the job market. Why? Because studying the humanities teaches them Critical Thinking.

But if Critical Thinking is one of the prerequisites for success in corporate and neoliberal society, as students are constantly

being told, can it still be part of a fundamental critique of this very success and this very society?

Today’s compromised, institutional version of Critical Thinking is the pedagogical expression of what Mark Fisher has called “capitalist realism,” which acts as “a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.” Most Critical Thinking textbooks claim to make students question everything, but immediately limit the context

## Are we giving students the right tools?

of their questions. For example, Richard Paul and Linda Elder’s authoritative *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life* sets out “Universal Intellectual Standards” for judging critical thinking. Describing the standard of “clarity,” they offer an example of an “unclear” student question: “What can be done about the education system in America?” They go on to suggest a “clearer” version of the question: “What can educators do to ensure that students learn the skills and abilities which help them function successfully on the job and in their daily decision-making?”

## PRESERVING ORDER

It does not take much effort to see that Critical Thinking, in this case, is designed not to encourage students to question the status quo, but rather to “ensure” that they preserve the current state of affairs in order to find their place in the contemporary pecking order.

But today’s college students – saddled with massive debt and facing a bleak job market marked by gaping inequality – are seeking not just job skills, but ways to confront the deeply dysfunctional political, economic and educational systems they have inherited. Recent studies suggest that a large percentage of college students have serious critiques of capitalism and increasing support for socialism; even the *Wall Street Journal* has noted the trend.

The right-wing press blames “indoctrination” by insidious leftist faculty. But students are simply reacting, in true critical fashion, to what they see all around them. Young people leading the climate justice movement see capitalism hurling the world toward total annihilation. Students leading movements against gun violence, police brutality and institutional racism understand that young people in the United States are 23 times more likely to be killed by guns than their peers in other high-income countries – and that young people of color are disproportionately affected. They see a future of student debt, un- or underemployment and a political system that refuses to respond to them.

## CREATING A BETTER WORLD

So yes, students need critical thinking today more than ever, but not a compromised, market-friendly version. The task is to defend the knowledge produced by the humanities, which can help students better understand and change their structural realities, not as fancified job training but as a good in itself – indeed, as a public good that should be freely available to all. And since the most traditionally disenfranchised students are most affected by cuts to education funding – which tend to hit the humanities first – we need to be clear: the so-called “crisis of the humanities” is in fact a form of class warfare.

Our job shouldn’t be to help students “succeed” in the world our generation has created, but to rather give them the tools to create a better world.

Anthony Alessandrini is a professor of English at Kingsborough Community College and of Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Center.

## The state of academic freedom today



The union’s Academic Freedom Committee held an October 23 forum on the state of academic freedom in the Trump era. From left to right are Victoria Chevalier (associate professor of English at Medgar Evers College), Hank Richman (chair of the American Association of University Professors’ Committee on Academic Freedom), Steve Leberstein (chair of the PSC Academic Freedom Committee) and Joan Scott (adjunct professor at the Graduate Center).



## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

### New members for 2020

The union's network of organizers, delegates and campus activists has worked hard to meet the new CUNY workers and tell them about the benefits of being a dues-paying member. But there is more work to be done.

To start 2020 off right, members can meet new hires and have one-on-one discussions with them about membership. Ask your chapter chair or organizer about who is new on your campus. Joining your union is easy. One can sign up online at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/join-psc>.

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# PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS-CUNY NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – SPRING 2020

Chapter Officers, Delegates and Alternates to the PSC Delegate Assembly and PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council

Term of Office: 3 Years

### ELECTION SCHEDULE

1. Deadline for filling the Candidate Declaration form will be January 6, 2020.
2. Pre-printed nominating petitions will be available upon request from chapter chairpersons or the PSC office on February 3, 2020.
3. Properly completed nominating petitions must be received at the PSC office, 61 Broadway, Ste. 1500, New York, NY 10006, by 5:00 pm, March 2, 2020.
4. Ballots will be mailed to members' home addresses on April 1, 2020.
5. Ballots in uncontested elections must be received at the PSC office by 5:00 pm on April 29, 2020.
6. Ballots in contested elections must be received at the office of the designated ballot-counting organization by 5:00 pm on April 29, 2020.
7. Ballots will be counted at 10:00 am on April 30, 2020.

### OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED

In each of the Chapters listed below, voters will elect the Chapter Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, four Officers-at-Large, Delegates to the Delegate Assembly (in addition to the Chapter Chairperson, who shall automatically be the initial Delegate to the Delegate Assembly) and Alternates to the Delegate Assembly according to the listing in the table on this page.

Relevant portions of the ELECTION RULES are summarized below. The complete rules may be obtained from Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office, or viewed on the PSC website: [psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/Rules%20Governing%20Elections%206-15.pdf](https://www.psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/Rules%20Governing%20Elections%206-15.pdf).

**DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY:** Candidates must submit a signed declaration

of candidacy no later than January 6, 2020, to Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office. The declaration must specify the office(s) being sought, the candidate's name, college and department, and, if the candidate intends to run as part of a slate or caucus, the name of the slate or caucus. Slate or caucus declarations should be submitted through the slate or caucus designee. A sample declaration form is available on the PSC website – [psc-cuny.org/declarationofcandidacy](https://www.psc-cuny.org/declarationofcandidacy) or from Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office.

**ELIGIBILITY FOR HOLDING OFFICE:** Members shall be permitted to hold chapter-level office who have been members in good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 2, 2020.

**VOTING ELIGIBILITY:** Members shall be permitted to participate in the nomination process and to vote who have been members in good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least four (4) months prior to the mailing of the ballots on April 1, 2020 (i.e., they must have been a member as of December 2, 2019).

**NOMINATING PROCEDURES:** Nominations of an individual or of a slate *must* be by official nominating petition signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) members of the chapter in good standing, or by no fewer than twenty-five percent (25%) of the members of the chapter in good standing, whichever is less. For *all* candidates, petitions shall include: (a) the printed name, signature, department and college of each petitioner; and (b) the printed name, department and college of the nominee, as well as the office being sought by the nominee. For chapter elections, members may only sign nominating petitions of the chapter to which they belong. **A candidate's signature on a Declaration of Candidacy shall constitute that candidate's acceptance of the slate designation.**

**SLATE REGULATIONS:** A slate of candidates will be recognized if it consists of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the officers to be elected, and if it submits, prior to the close of nominations: (1) a listing of caucus officers, all of whom must be members in good standing, including the person designated

to authorize nominees for that caucus' slate; and (2) a nominating petition including the printed name, signature, department and college of each petitioner, and the signature for each candidate running on the slate. The candidate's signature on the Candidate Declaration form shall constitute that candidate's acceptance of the slate designation.

**BALLOTING:** All voting must be on the official PSC ballot. Write-in votes are permitted. A write-in vote shall be valid if the intent of the voter is clear; written, printed and typed names are acceptable. A write-in candidate must meet the same eligibility requirements as a regular candidate. In chapter elections, any nominated or write-in candidate must receive at least ten (10) votes or ten percent (10%) of the votes cast for that office, whichever is less, in order to be elected. Write-in candidates who are elected must submit written acceptance of office to the Elections Committee within ten calendar days of notification that their election has been certified.

**CAMPAIGNING:** Declared candidates may mail literature at their own expense, either directly or through the PSC mailing house (Century Direct, 30-00 47th Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101). At the request of the candidate and at cost, the PSC will provide Century Direct with a home-addressed electronic download of the membership, or will provide candidates with college-addressed list, and electronic download of the membership. Candidates must notify the PSC five business days in advance of the mailing to allow sufficient time for the ordering of downloads. Please see Barbara Gabriel at the PSC for further information and to file the required forms.

**ELECTION TALLY:** Each candidate, or a representative of the candidate, is entitled to be present at the counting of the ballots.

### PSC-CUNY WELFARE FUND ADVISORY COUNCIL

At each of the colleges listed below, voters will elect the designated number of members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, in accordance with the above schedule and rules and the by-laws of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund:

Colleges	Council Members
Baruch	2
Bronx Community College	2
Brooklyn	2
City College	2
CUNY Central Office	1
Graduate School	2
Guttman Community College	1
Hostos Community College	2
Hunter	2
John Jay	2
LaGuardia Community College	2
Queens	2
York	2

**VOTING ELIGIBILITY:** All members in good standing of the PSC at the above colleges, who have been members in good standing for at least four (4) months, including Higher Education Officers, Registrars and College Laboratory Technicians, as well as faculty, will elect the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council members running at their respective colleges.

**ELIGIBILITY FOR HOLDING OFFICE:** PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council members must be CUNY instructional staff members who have been members in good standing of the PSC for **two (2) years** prior to the close of nominations, March 2, 2020.

**NOMINATIONS:** Advisory Council members shall be nominated by written petition signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) or twenty-five percent (25%) whichever is less of the CUNY instructional staff members at each unit who are also PSC members. Slate nominations will be permitted.

Chapter	Members	Delegates	Alternates	Petition Signatures Required
Baruch	851	Chair + 8	5	25
Bronx Community College	666	Chair + 6	5	25
Brooklyn	935	Chair + 8	5	25
City College	974	Chair + 9	6	25
College Lab Technicians	785	Chair + 7	5	25
CUNY Central Office	403	Chair + 3	4	25
Graduate School	1,267	Chair + 12	7	25
Guttman Community College	74	Chair	1	13
Hostos Community College	414	Chair + 3	4	25
Hunter	1,358	Chair + 13	7	25
John Jay	1,008	Chair + 9	6	25
LaGuardia	807	Chair + 7	5	25
Queens	1,243	Chair + 11	6	25
York	513	Chair + 4	4	25