Revised and Expanded In-Process Agenda
Based on Minutes from the May 18th Meeting

Twenty people attended the first meeting of the heretofore
unnamed Cultural Anthropology student union. Due to issues raised
in Gerry Sider's Class and Culture in the American South seminar
on May 17th, several students decided that we needed to meet to
discuss the general conditions of student life in our department,
which many of us have found wanting. Gerry reported that many of
the professors in the department were concerned over students' lack
of academic motivation and skills; i.e. we don't read enough, we
come to class late, we leave early, etc. These are complaints we
have heard before, and given general grievances circulating amongst
students, we think it high time to quash this rumor-mongering
before it thoroughly demoralizes us all and destroys the positive
aspects that brought us into this department in the first place.

In light of past experiences in which issues brought to the
department head were diffused in a flurry of smiles and nods; and
in which a general atmosphere of isolation and atomization has left
students without organized peer support, we think it important to
form an ongoing, organized student-run structure to address common
problems. Issues raised at the first meeting were:

**The mandate of the Graduate Center and of the anthropology
department:** Within a drastically underfunded public educational
system with an open admissions policy, the Graduate Center was
supposedly formed to retain higher quality faculty. The elitist
aspirations of the Graduate Center in general and of the
anthropology department in particular contradict its public
educational mandate. Therefore, we have a situation in which 25
or 30 students are accepted each year, but the money and the
intentions are not there to support us all. This basic
contradiction leads to all sorts of problems:

o   Tuition is increasing, but funding is decreasing. Almost all
     of us hold down jobs or squeeze our kin networks to attend
     this institution. Thus we have less time and energy to do our
     work. What we can do about this is anyone's guess, but it
     seems to have led to a loss of faith from the faculty.

o   In order to mete out what few dollars we've got, the faculty
     resorts to social darwinistic tactics such as a yearly student
     review. Supposedly, students are classified as those few who
     will be highly funded, those who will receive a pittance,
     those who will get no funding, and those who will be
     encouraged to leave. **This is not an open process, and we
     think it should be. There should be full disclosure of the
     student funding process.**

o   Financial stress compounds faculty anxiety about the
     performance and quality of individual students which is an
     aspect of a larger undervaluing of public education.
     Invidious comparisons between CUNY and well-funded, private,
     elitist universities disgust students who chose CUNY in part
     because it is not the latter. Students feel coerced,
     intimidated, beat upon instead of proud, encouraged,
     appreciated. **We need peer-run advocacy procedures for
     individual students.**

     **The structures of the Graduate Center and of the department
     individualize student experiences here.** The fact that faculty so
     rarely can be found in the building precludes open discussion of
     intellectual concerns, career strategies, departmental procedures,
     or anything else. This creates the perfect environment in which
     rumors can foment and in which students are dealt with on a totally
     personalistic basis. As well, it leaves structural and procedural
     decisions up to the faculty and allows them to manipulate what
     little student involvement there is in decisionmaking. To correct
     these problems, we need:

o   **More opportunities for student and faculty communication,
     including:**

          monthly open forums to discuss departmental issues, etc.

          ongoing advising for students before and after they have
          formed their committees. Faculty advisers should be
          assigned to incoming students on a better ratio than 1:10
          or 12 and should meet regularly with students on a better
          than once-a-semester basis.

          small groups of students and faculty for advocacy for
          individual students, for grievance, for general
          information flow. These small groups can be appointed
          from amongst our student union on a rotating basis.

          use of the brown bag slots for regular strategy reports
          from faculty to let students know what, when, how, why
          to manage the various aspects of our careers in and
          outside of the department.

o   **Evaluations of each class by students to be filled out at the
     end of the semester and posted openly.**

o   **Student representatives should be voted onto faculty
     committees (Executive, First Exam, etc.) by students. There
     should be students sitting on the Admissions Committee.**

     Other issues that were raised at the meeting which as well
     have to do with the structure of contradictions in which we find
     ourselves are:

o   **The position of minority students within the department.** We
     need better recruitment and support of minority students.

o   **The disappearance of faculty members mid-semester** to
     conferences, the field, etc. which would seem to reveal an
     apathy toward teaching.

o   **Lack of use, misuse, and abuse of existing resources.** The
     library is not chockful, space on the eleventh floor is scant,
     the autotron is under lock-and-key, but we could better use
     what we've got.

o   **Students have nowhere to meet.**   Our "lounge" has been
     appropriated for classes and conferences. We need a real
     lounge with places to sit and a coffee pot.

    In order to address these and other concerns, we propose the
formation of a Cultural Anthropology students' union as per our
statement of purpose. We spoke at the last meeting about our group
structure, which we decided would be democratic and
nonhierarchical, including rotating chairs and committee members.
Please note that the above is a composition of suggestions and open
ideas generated from our first meeting, and not ~~a manifesto~~
a manifesto.   Everything is always open to
revision on a point-to-point basis and generally. As well, we need
a name.