

The Envoy

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For Faculty and Staff, Still No Contract

PSC Union President calls for CUNY to address salary "crisis"

Tatyana Gulko
News Editor

An open letter written by Barbara Bowen, the president of the union that represents CUNY faculty and staff, placing pressure on CUNY to fix what she calls a salary "crisis," has only triggered a lackluster response from the university administration, as staff and faculty continue to work without a contract.

Bowen's letter, dated March 17 and addressed to CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, marked six months that CUNY faculty and staff have been working without a contract. And though negotiations have been ongoing for over a year, the union, called the Professional Staff Congress, has yet to see an economic offer. The PSC has continuously raised the issue of salary erosion as a key demand in negotiations. "Since 1971, the salary steps for CUNY faculty and staff have lost between 27 percent and 51 percent of their value when adjusting for inflation," said PSC spokesperson Dorothee Benz.

In her letter, Bowen wrote that "it is an abuse of [the workers'] loyalty to expect [them] to continue giving [their] all to CUNY without even discussion of a raise ... CUNY salaries are now thousands of dollars behind salaries at other public universities in the region, such as the University of Connecticut and Rutgers, and totally uncompetitive nationally."

Goldstein's response to Bowen's letter, which was emailed out on CUNY e-News at the end of March, stressed the importance of being "factual and accurate" during the collective bargaining process, adding that her letter "has a significant distance to go in helping to achieve that vital need."

His letter went on to explain how CUNY is "bookended" by the settlements of city and state employees, such as SUNY faculty and staff. "Only when CUNY and SUNY can work together and speak as a unified voice will we be able to break out of outdated approaches to funding and garner the necessary resources," said Goldstein.

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Jackie Fernandez, Associate Director of CRAASH, discusses the organization's efforts to increase the administration's support for Hunter's Asian American Studies Program on Fallout Central's weekly podcast.

photo courtesy of Olivia Lin

Asian Studies Crisis?

Dean Scott responds to CRAASH's letter-writing campaign

Tracy Neiman
Associate News Editor

A letter-writing campaign initiated by the Coalition for the Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter, to demonstrate the nationwide support of its mission to the Hunter administration, has provoked an adamant rejoinder from Dean Shirley Scott.

The letter to the Hunter administration penned by the CRAASH core team last month highlighted what they view as a complete lack of financial support for the Asian American Studies Program, as well as a lack of full-time faculty members. But their claims, said Scott in a reply email, are fallacious.

According to CRAASH, there is a

zero dollar budget for the AASP with \$500 allotted for supplies, but Scott maintained that AASP has had ample opportunities to access funding. Jennifer Hayashida, the acting director of AASP, "has been successful in garnering goodly support for the work of the program," said Scott. She added that the department she presides over, the Arts and Sciences, has consistently provided AASP with necessary tools and finances.

Scott cited her department's donation of two computers to AASP, as well her assistance in helping Hayashida attain financial support to attend the 2008 Conference for Asian American Studies. She also mentioned that through collaboration

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The Times, They Are A-Changin'

Enrollment drop sends Film and Media staff into a frenzy to improve departmental conditions

Vera Zukelman
Staff Writer

Over the past few years, there has been a drop in enrollment in the undergraduate courses offered in the Department of Film and Media Studies, as well as a decrease in the overall number of Media majors. And though there has been talk at Hunter about many changes that will be taking place within the department, the majority of Film and Media staff have repeatedly denied these assertions.

According to statistical tallies obtained from the Registrar, from 2003 to present enrollment in media courses has dropped from 4,011 students to 3,220—a difference of 791 students. There has also been a drop in Media majors. In 2003, the department had 567 majors in total; in 2004, it had an all-time high of 598 students. In 2007, however, the department had 482 majors—a drop in 85 students since 2003.

The majority of the department's staff declined to comment on the enrollment issues, but Professor and Media Studies Advisor Larry Shore said the department is taking steps to address the decline in enrollment.

"This is a very large department," Professor Shore said. "Some courses are not filling in as we like, but we are trying to improve them."

Many of these changes are being made just in time for the Middle States Review, a self-study that all universities must complete every ten years and send out to the Middle States Committee of Higher Education in order to be re-accredited as a fully functioning institution.

Every department of Hunter College must be checked and progress reports issued on the functioning of the department and how it interacts with students. Hunter started the process in late 2007 and is currently conducting reports until 2009. Next year, after all reports have been submitted, officials from the Middle States Committee are scheduled to come and inspect Hunter College for three days making sure all of information in the reports are valid and accurate.

"Middle States is very important

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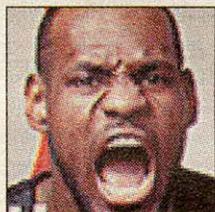
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Goldstein added that while the PSC believes that an economic offer is needed to advance negotiations, "with state and city settlements in place, it is not difficult to envision the likely economic parameters within which we will be working."

But Bowen's letter did acknowledge the issue of the tight fiscal climate that CUNY must work around. In fact, she said that while she recognizes "CUNY's legal requirement to gain approval from the City and the State, the University's financial offer is ultimately a statement of the University's priorities. Is restoration of our salaries a priority or not?" she asked Goldstein.

But Goldstein said that "it is a mistake for anyone to pit compensation for faculty and staff against CUNY's many needs."

He also wrote, that while he recognizes the need for a fair contract, "The need for a fair contract is not exclusive of the University's other needs for modern facilities on its campuses, a rational tuition policy, a strong program of science research, and active communications and fund-raising campaigns. These and many other components are necessary to a vibrant university—and all of them support the work of our faculty and staff."

But Bowen maintained that CUNY's infrastructure would not survive without the "best of the next generation of scholars, teachers and professional staff."

The PSC was disappointed with Goldstein's response. "He has been a very aggressive champion of certain projects and priorities," explained Benz, adding that "he has to advocate for faculty and staff needs—particularly competitive salaries—with the same kind of energy and commitment."

Benz also noted that the previous CUNY contract took over three years to achieve.

In the mean time, the PSC is seeking increased funding for CUNY and their advocacy before the State and City legislatures.

Just last week, New York City Council Members attended the annual CUNY Day legislative breakfast sponsored by the PSC, which kicked off PSC's campaign to restore budget cuts and increase funding for CUNY, in general.

City Councilwoman Maria del Carmen Arroyo, who is also co-chair of the Council's Black, Latino and Asian Caucus, which was honored at the breakfast by the PSC for its support of CUNY as they continue to fight for CUNY funds in the City's Budget, spoke about the importance of securing CUNY's affordability. "An investment in CUNY is an investment in New York," she said. The other co-chair of the Caucus, Robert Jackson, agreed as he vowed to keep fighting to restore the \$65 million in budget cuts proposed by the Mayor.

Benz said that it is important that CUNY, as well as community groups and political leaders in New York, "understand just how important restoring our salaries is to the health of our University. I think the letter also helped do that."

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with other related departments, AASP has been able to organize many successful events relevant to Asian American Studies. In addition, Scott alluded to the grant provided to AASP by the Hunter Auxiliary Enterprise Board as yet another source of support from the Hunter administration.

But the CRAASH core team insists that Scott's examples of support for AASP are not adequate. "The measly AEB grant that Acting Director Jennifer Hayashida applied for and received," said CRAASH in an email response, does not reflect support from the Hunter administration. Instead, they say, it reflects Hayashida's commitment to "strategically [planning] the growth of AASP for the future" when her time could be better spent focusing on the AASP curriculum and students.

The email added, "The AASP would not have to compete for this scarce amount of money if the administration allotted the program its proper funding. It should not have been granted a zero dollar budget with 500 dollars allotted for supplies in the first place. Even student clubs receive substantially larger funding than the AASP from Hunter College."

The CRAASH core team further asserted that "the Hunter administration deserves none of the credit" for the previous and upcoming events hosted by AASP. "There was no concrete financial and institutional support for the development of those events," they said. AASP's ability to have had such a successful year, CRAASH said, comes solely from "the determination and resourcefulness of Ms. Hayashida, AASP faculty members and students."

CRAASH also used Scott's argument that the current AASP office has two computers given to them by the School of Arts and Sciences to point out that the AASP does not have a permanent office space. They deem the current space "a miserable excuse for an office ... meant for four to five staff members," in which "professors are forced to meet with students."

Because AASP's lack of permanent office space was not addressed in CRAASH's initial email to the Hunter administration, Scott did not refute this point. She did, however, maintain that the "perception that there are no full-time faculty involved in the program is simply wrong." Scott went on to list dozens of faculty members, both old and new, "whose area of specialization is in the field of Asian American Studies and who teach in the program."

Scott added that there are currently fewer than 20 individuals minoring in

AASP but that those who are have many opportunities to apply their academic work to outside experiences. According to Scott, "Under Ms. Hayashida's guidance the minors have been applying for nationally competitive internships and grants, and faculty [members] have been sponsoring the minors for internships in magazines, arts organizations and community advocacy groups."

Scott further alluded to the recent conference AASP hosted about Asian American Studies in the university curriculum. AASP hosted a workshop at the New York City Asian American Student Conferences, which enabled AASP students and faculty to network with "similar groups at NYU, New School and Columbia," she said. Scott made additional mention of the recent partnership between Hunter and the Asia Society, which will provide "various academic and cultural opportunities for students in the Asian American Studies program."

"All in all," Scott asserted to conclude her email response, "this seems to me to have been a successful year for Asian American Studies."

To that, the CRAASH core group retorted, "All in all, it has been a successful year for Asian American Studies at Hunter College, all because of recent efforts from students, AASP faculty and Acting Director Hayashida—NOT because of the Hunter administration."

In a brief reply, Scott explained that the "Asian American Studies program was set up as an interdisciplinary program, not as a free standing department," thus accounting for its current circumstances.

But CRAASH does not believe the AASP's status as a program justifies its present condition. Chui-Hung Wong, one of CRAASH's core members, maintained that, "Even though it's a program, it's not a well-functioning program." The state the program is currently in, she said, whether it is a free standing department or not, is unacceptable.

Wong further emphasized that Scott's "argument was kind of just circling around but not really getting to the point, which was frustrating." She pointed out that the professors Scott cited as being involved with AASP are from other disciplines, like Mandarin or Politics of India. While they may teach in the program, their primary responsibilities are to other departments.

"The whole field of academia," Wong stressed, "is about expanding knowledge and learning more. To say that you are putting a limit on Asian American Studies," she emphasized, "limiting learning" as a whole.

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to us," said James Roman, Chair of the Department of Film and Media Studies. "The faculty has been concerned about that. After reading the External Review reports we try to implement their recommendations."

Similar to the Middle States, the External Review is also a study of various departments within Hunter College by accredited outside visitors. Their job is to review the department, address any problems, and suggest possible improvements.

According to the External Review report, the main problems in the department are the lack of new digital media equipment, "inadequate facilities for screening and teaching films, no dedicated budget for maintenance, replacement and upgrade of equipment software, the need for the installation of a proper HVAC system and a need for a 40-75 seat screening classroom."

"We now have 1 million dollars from City Council," said Roman. "We will have a new screening room, renovate the space, improve the HVAC system and have upgraded the media labs." In addition to the above changes, the department will also hire six new faculty members and is currently building a television studio.

Since the reports were released, the department has begun the process of implementing changes. However, Roman said that the changes in the department should not be attributed to pressure to look good in front of the Middle States Committee; rather, he said the department simply wishes to achieve a positive response from students in the department.

If the drop in enrollment and Media majors comes because of the lack of equipment and inadequate facilities as stated in the External Review Report, then hopefully all of the positive changes will attract more students to the department in coming years, said Roman.

Deputy Chair and Advisor, Kelly Anderson, candidly spoke about her concerns for the department and noted that tougher standards for entry into the department may be one explanation for the decline in enrollment.

"We implemented a rule where students had to get a B or better in Media 180 to declare a Media Major," said Anderson. "It was our plan to reduce the majors. Maybe that drove away some students who did not receive the grade."

Still, said Anderson, "We don't know why [enrollment is declining], but we are working hard to fix it."

Got something to say? Write a letter to *The Envoy*.

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