

From: Barbara Bowen <psc2334b@pscmail.org>
Date: Thu, Mar 12, 2020 at 3:14 PM
Subject: PSC Response to CUNY Coronavirus Plan

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to update you on what the union knows so far about the impact of CUNY's plan in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the actions the PSC is taking in response. More messages will follow as we learn more. We are all facing a situation few of us have faced before, and conditions are changing quickly.

First, a reminder: today is the union's long-planned budget emergency action day. The pandemic has newly revealed the danger of relentlessly underfunding public institutions, including CUNY. There is no better moment to send this letter to Albany demanding an end to the fiscal starvation of CUNY.

Thank you for your support during the past few days. The union's steady and public pressure on CUNY management to protect the safety of its employees, together with the sharp intervention by the student government and hundreds of social media messages, clearly influenced the administration's decision to begin to act. CUNY management agreed yesterday to negotiate with the PSC, as required under the law, about the effects of their plan. The union has notified CUNY that bargaining must begin immediately. The PSC will advance the demands we published earlier this week as well as many new issues arising from the transition to distance learning for all classes.

The most obvious issue is that CUNY's plan, announced yesterday, creates very different conditions and levels of isolation for teaching faculty than for non-classroom faculty and professional staff. We are one union, and the PSC will continue to fight to keep every one of our members safe, whether you are full-time or part-time, staff or faculty.

Under CUNY's plan, colleges will remain open throughout the semester, and "all instruction" will be moved to a distance-learning mode starting March 19. The period between today and March 19 will be an "instructional recess," used to prepare to move classes to a distance-learning mode (and to continue teaching classes that are already fully online). The PSC calls on CUNY management to designate Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of next week as a "service recess," during which professional staff and non-classroom faculty would be freed of most other responsibilities and have time to work with their supervisors to be ready to conduct their work remotely, if necessary.

The PSC has received confirmation that all teaching faculty, part-time as well as full-time, will continue to receive their full biweekly pay during the preparation period of March 12-18 and throughout the rest of the semester. Therefore, adjuncts who are currently participants in the

New York City Health Benefits Program because of CUNY teaching will continue their eligibility uninterrupted.

I am sure we are all pleased that our students' education will continue and that they will not be subjected to the dangers of crowded classrooms or large gatherings, especially given the difficult conditions of many of their daily lives. And I am confident that PSC members will rise to the occasion and support each other and our students in these new conditions. Staff and faculty are already well advanced in thinking creatively and collectively about how to meet the current challenge. As a unionized workforce, we already have the practice of working together; that practice is immensely valuable now.

But CUNY management's plan leaves many issues unresolved. Management continues to fail to anticipate the needs of the entire university, which includes many non-traditional teaching programs as well as thousands of staff who are not in the classroom. The safety and health of all CUNY employees is equally important. CUNY's plan makes a major change in the working conditions of classroom faculty but contemplates little or no change in the working conditions of non-classroom faculty and professional staff, whom the University expects to continue to be at work and travel to work. The union will address the plan on both counts.

We have not yet received confirmation that University management will permit all non-classroom faculty, such as librarians and counselors, and all professional staff, such as HEOs, CLTs and Non-Teaching Adjuncts, to work remotely if they are in a higher risk group for COVID-19. If you are in this group, or if for any other reason you feel you must not come to campus, the PSC urges you to go immediately to your supervisor and the college HR office and assert your need to work from home or other off-campus location. If you are refused, contact the PSC office right away. Our grievance counselors have already begun intervening for members in such situations.

Provisions for those at higher risk to work at home may not be enough. Our health has to come first. The World Health Organization is now calling on everyone in an affected area to maintain a meter's distance from other people in order to decrease the spread of the virus. While it might be possible to maintain that distance in one's office or college library, it is not possible on public transportation or even many city streets.

The PSC leadership is currently determining how best to call for much wider latitude for working remotely. There are many ways staff can continue to serve our students even while not on campus. While the intent of CUNY management's plan was to eliminate large gatherings and protect students, it also has the effect of subjecting non-classroom faculty and professional staff to very different conditions than teaching faculty. We all need to be safe.

The PSC is also seeking answers to many other questions about what CUNY's plan will mean. Questions have been raised about science labs and other classes, such as studio art, that normally require equipment and physical presence in one space. Other questions concern protecting adjuncts' rights under the new office hour provision. Fortunately, the union was able to negotiate provisions in our new contract for observation of classes using distance technology,

but questions may arise with new users of such technology and all classes being taught through distance-learning technology.

Questions have also arisen about whether the plan for distance learning has taken into account the special circumstances of Continuing Education faculty or the Educational Opportunity Centers. Some professional staff routinely meet with large groups of students in financial aid information sessions or other meetings. They ask how they can conduct such meetings remotely when their office computers are often so out of date that they lack the capacity to conduct online video meetings. Other questions concern the cost of installing the necessary equipment and Wi-Fi access to work remotely for those who do not have such access already.

The PSC also seeks answers to questions about the safety of campus facilities as long as they remain open. The need for safety on campus does not end with the transition to distance learning. As long as CUNY stays open, it must guarantee that all restrooms are adequately supplied for hand-washing, that an enhanced cleaning and decontamination schedule is made public, that all workers on campuses, whether they are represented by a union or not, have paid sick days, and that dining halls and other food service facilities are made safe and clean.

The PSC leadership recognizes that adjusting a huge institution to the conditions of a pandemic is a major challenge. Our members are deeply committed to CUNY students and to supporting their education even in the most challenging times. The union was prepared to work with management as they formulated their plan, and if management had agreed, we believe the plan could have been improved. But the PSC is ready to work now to make sure that the health of all comes first. We believe our students' education can continue and even flourish while the safety and health of the faculty and staff is protected.

In solidarity,

Barbara Bowen

President, PSC

PSC/CUNY | 61 Broadway, 15th Floor, NEW YORK, NY 10006

.