

# Twitter campaign spurs repairs

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

On many CUNY campuses, you don't need to look hard to find evidence of disrepair and decay, some serious enough to endanger the health and safety of students and employees. In many cases administrators allow issues ranging from broken doors to heating and air conditioning problems to remain unaddressed long after complaints are filed.

At Brooklyn College, PSC members decided they had had enough. Taking to social media, chapter members crafted a campaign designed to reveal to the world the sorry state of the college's physical plant, using the hashtag #BrooklynCollege (pronounced Broke-lyn).

"We're hoping to stimulate some action where in the past we've heard excuses," PSC Health and Safety Watchdog Co-Chair Jean Grassman told *Clarion*.

## #BROKLYNCOLLEGE

Starting last month, PSC members at the college took to Twitter, posting pictures of things that need to be fixed: dysfunctional toilets covered in plastic wrap, an air conditioning unit leaking fluid, a desk with a protruding sharp steel arm, a water fountain with exposed pipes, and a ceiling with missing tiles draped with a tarp to catch debris and rain that drops from above.

"Our students deserve better," wrote PSC member Timothy Shortell in one tweet. A professor in the sociology department and one of the union members spearheading the campaign, Shortell says some of the items in need of repair highlighted by #BrooklynCollege have been broken for years.

"The purpose of this campaign isn't just to get that fountain fixed," Shortell said at a September 10 chapter meeting. "We are calling on the administration to develop a health and safety plan. There is none." Nearly everyone present at the meeting said they had also encountered infestations of mice on campus.

## A MAINTENANCE PLAN

Chapter members say they want their college to develop a systematic approach to addressing problems in consultation with students, staff and faculty. Having a plan in place, chapter leaders say, would help ensure that small issues do not turn into major problems. At the September chapter meeting, Shortell encouraged faculty, staff and their students to post pictures of health and safety issues on social media using the #BrooklynCollege hashtag.

The tweets came in. John Anderson, the director of the college's broadcast journalism degree program, posted a 15-second video of his office's leaky air conditioning unit with the caption, "Legionnaires, anyone?" Sociology student Brandon P. Martinez posted a photo of a glaring, uncovered fluorescent tube light in an elevator, tweeting,

## Brooklyn College members' hashtag activism



Faculty and students posted pictures of disrepair on social media, including this photo of a broken door to Boylan Hall.

"Exposed lighting in James Hall elevator. Can I call the landlord?"

Assistant Professor Mobina Hashmi tweeted a picture of the entrance to Boylan Hall, the main administrative building on campus,

with a handwritten note posted on its wooden door that demanded, "Fix this door already!!" The next day, the student publication *Brooklyn College Kingsman* posted a photo of the same door on its Insta-

gram feed, now featuring a number of written demands: "Fix exposed pipes in classrooms," "Fix Brooklyn College's pest problem" and, referring to the West End Building, "Fix WEB's trigger-happy fire alarm."

Since the campaign began, some progress has been made, says Jean Grassman, an associate professor of health and nutrition sciences and a member of the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee. The door to Boylan Hall was fixed, some water fountains have been repaired and a vendor has been secured for dealing with the college's rodent problem. The college at last hired a new director of Environmental Health and Safety, a position that went unfilled for more than a year. Earlier this month, PSC members met with college officials to address health and safety issues, and both parties say they plan to make such meetings a regular practice.

## PROFESSIONAL WORKPLACE

Grassman says it's common to view advocacy for health and safety issues as a simple service. A thing breaks; the union presses management to fix it. But this campaign, Grassman says, aims for more. It takes on larger issues around governance, working conditions and curriculum.

"This campaign is about respect, respect for faculty and respect for students," Grassman told *Clarion*. "We're professionals, and we seek a professional environment in which to do our work."

*Editor's note: What's broken on your campus? Tweet photographs to @Clarion\_PSC with the hashtag #FixCUNY, or email them to us at clarion@pscmail.org.*

# Poll: Rising support for labor

By ADELE M. STAN

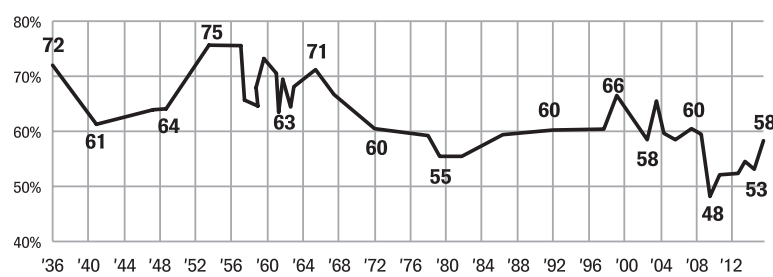
Recent polling from the Gallup organization shows support for labor unions on the rise. Around the time of the economic crash of 2007-08, public opinion about unions reached an all-time low, with just a 48 percent approval rate in 2009, perhaps fueled by persistent demonization of organized labor by right-wing politicians and the organizations that back them. But since then, Gallup reported in August 2015 that public approval of organized labor climbed by 10 points to 58 percent.

Predictably, the Gallup survey found support for unions strongest among Democrats, and weakest in the South. More novel is the breakdown along gender lines: Women approve of unions in much higher numbers than men, with 63 percent of women reporting their support, compared with 52 percent of men. Likewise, greater numbers of women reported wanting to see unions gain more influence in the political process, 41 percent, compared with the 33 percent of men who said they did.

A brief issued this month by the White House Council of Economic Advisers may offer a key to

## Women, millennials pro-union

Do you approve of labor unions?



GALLUP

that finding. Union membership, the authors write, has "become more representative of the population, with the share of members who are female or college-educated rising quickly." The brief goes on to explain, "These demographic shifts have been driven in part by the rise of public-sector unions, since public-sector union members are more likely to be female and college-educated than their private-sector counterparts."

## Union membership has become more diverse.

A strong majority of young people, Gallup found, view organized labor favorably, with 66 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 expressing support for unions, compared with 53 percent of those in the 35- to 54-year-old age group. Among those in the younger age group, a plurality wanted to see labor's influence grow in the political process.

In its brief, titled "Worker Voice

in a Time of Rising Inequality," the Council of Economic Advisers notes a positive spillover effect on the children of union members, or even those who grow up in geographic areas with higher union density, citing research that shows higher earnings by those who grow up in union households, or in union-dense areas. But that alone can't account for the impressive support for organized labor by millennials, which is likely also influenced by the growth of the so-called "gig economy," and unregulated work schedules, as well as the fact that wages, according to Amy Traub, senior policy analyst at Demos, "are frozen."

## ALL WORKERS BENEFIT

In its brief, the Council of Economic Advisers notes that unions improve standards for all workers, a fact to which the public may be catching up as the gulf widens between the haves and have-nots. "Unions today represent a very different workforce - one less male, more concentrated in the Northeast, and more educated - than they did at their peak in the 1950s," write the authors of the White House brief. "For these workers, unions provide an important channel for worker voice and have historically afforded benefits for both union members and other workers."