

Union forces safety about-face by BCC admin

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

At first, the Bronx Community College (BCC) administration said there was no mold in Colston Hall, which had been shuttered for six weeks after dozens of pipes burst and flooded the seven-floor building in January. But a leading national mold inspector found otherwise.

Sharon Utakis, the campus PSC chapter chair, pressed the administration to do detailed mold assessments in the rooms affected by the flood. The university and college administration said no – until recently.

“The months of pressure from departments, faculty council, the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs, PSC leadership and the BCC PSC chapter worked,” wrote BCC Chapter Chair Sharon Utakis in a May 2 email update to chapter members. She explained that BCC and the CUNY central administration had agreed to replace the drywall in water-damaged rooms in Colston – exactly what had been recommended months ago by Microecologies, a mold inspector the union had hired.

“We can’t let them completely off the hook now,” Utakis added. “We need to follow up and make sure they do what they say they’re going to do.”

CONSTANT PRESSURE

The administration’s about-face did not occur by accident – it was the result of escalating union pressure. When the BCC administration was adamant that there was

BCC agrees to remove mold

no mold, Utakis was insistent that a thorough evaluation be done. The administration then agreed to allow the union to bring in Microecologies, a nationally recognized mold consultant, to inspect the building. But in the end, the administration ignored the inspector’s full recommendations.

Burst pipes caused chaos in the Bronx.

Microecologies found mold or the suggestion of mold in half of the eight rooms they inspected. They recommended that drywall be replaced in rooms where the pipes had burst and in the rooms below. They also asked for additional air sampling once the work was complete.

The BCC administration stuck to their position and own methods. They “cleaned and sanitized” the areas identified by Microecologies, a February 28 administration email stated. Management’s position seemed to be that the mold issue had been addressed.

But the PSC persisted.

“Mold could be hiding behind soaked drywall, impossible to see with painted drywall, or developing in porous materials that remained wet after the flood,” Jean Grassman, an associate professor at CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs cochair, told *Clarion* in March.

PSC members at BCC voiced their frustration with the administration by talking to the press and

politicians. They gathered petition signatures while wearing respirator masks.

In April, PSC leadership wrote to BCC President Thomas Isekenegebe, asking again for a thorough inspection of the more than 40 rooms that were impacted by the January flood. As a result, a conference call was scheduled with PSC leaders and BCC and CUNY administrators on April 30. On the call, administrators agreed to change the drywall in more than a dozen rooms where water had soaked through it.

WORK AHEAD

The PSC said the reversal was a big victory for the chapter and for every student and worker who uses Colston Hall.

There is still a lot of work to be done to make BCC a safe working and learning environment, Utakis said. In late March, several pipes burst in another BCC building, Guggenheim Hall, which was temporarily closed. Changes at Colston are a step in the right direction.

“We were successful because we were persistent and because we were right. This was a situation where the problem was apparent – permeable drywall was wet for over 48 hours and therefore subject to mold growth,” Grassman said. “In the end, the easiest action for the administration was to do the right thing.”

See *Clarion’s April 2019 issue for the full story on Colston Hall.*

Matos taps new chiefs

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

He didn’t waste any time.

On his first day as CUNY chancellor, May 1, Félix Matos Rodríguez, the former Queens College president, made five top-level appointments, many of them internal CUNY promotions.

Lehman College President José Luis Cruz will become executive vice chancellor and university provost. An electrical engineer, Cruz began his career as a faculty member at the University of Puerto Rico and served as provost at California State University, Fullerton. PSC Lehman Chapter Chair Robert Farrell said that Cruz has been supportive of union issues and has called on increasing adjunct pay significantly.

“He’s a believer that you have to have a seat at the table to make positive change,” Farrell said. “Now that he’s at the table, we hope he can work with the new chancellor and the government to realize some of his ideals.”

MORE PROMOTIONS

Glenda Grace, who worked closely with Matos Rodríguez at Queens College as general counsel and chief of staff, and had worked with him when he was president of Hostos Community College, will become senior vice chancellor for institutional affairs, strategic advancement and special counsel. PSC Queens College Chapter Chair David Gerwin, currently on leave, said Grace was “cordial and constructive,” but added that making progress on campus labor-management issues was “slow” and “intractable” because of CUNY’s bureaucracy.

The other appointments include:

- Maite Junco, appointed vice



Ellen Moynihan

CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez made big appointments on his first day on the job.

chancellor for communications and marketing, has been a journalist for more than 20 years and taught for a year at the CUNY’s journalism school.

- William Tramontano, appointed interim president of Queens College, is a cellular biologist who served as an academic administrator at Hunter, Brooklyn and Lehman Colleges.

New CUNY chancellor puts together his team.

- James Muyskens, appointed interim president of the Graduate Center, is a philosopher who was president of Queens College for 12 years and has taught at Hunter College and the Graduate Center.

All appointments will need to be approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees at their May and June meetings.

Two wins for adjunct multiyear appts.

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

The PSC recently secured important victories in two cases that expand eligibility for adjunct three-year appointments. The two settlements expand eligibility for three-year appointments to adjuncts who receive additional workload credit for teaching oversize or “jumbo” courses, and who teach in programs with links to an academic department. Both settlement agreements went into effect this Spring semester. Newly eligible adjuncts should be considered for appointments for the 2019-2020 academic year.

“Both settlements increase the number of adjuncts eligible for the appointments, and while they are not perfect, together they represent an increase in the fairness of the contractual provision,” PSC President Barbara Bowen said in an email to department chairs, involved in the comprehensive review

Settlements with CUNY

process to determine three-year appointments.

The college human resources office or the provost’s office is responsible for determining eligibility (not department chairs), and they should be applying these recent settlement agreements when determining eligibility for consideration this spring.

CONTRACT WIN

The pilot program for three-year adjunct appointments was one of the major improvements secured in the last contract. The appointments give eligible long-serving adjuncts increased job security, because adjuncts with three-year appointments have guaranteed assignments and income and cannot be dismissed without just cause.

The settlement involving jumbo courses is in effect only at colleges

that have the existing practice of paying adjuncts for more hours for teaching especially large courses. Under the new settlement agreement, if a college pays six contact hours for a three-hour jumbo course, the adjunct will now be credited with six contact teaching hours that can count toward their eligibility for a three-year appointment. A number of CUNY colleges do not have an established practice of paying adjuncts extra or giving full-time faculty extra workload credits for teaching unusually large courses, so an adjunct teaching an unusually large course should inquire at the college provost’s office about the college’s compensation policy for “jumbo” classes taught by part-time and full-time faculty. Contact an ad-

adjunct grievance counselor at PSC if you are concerned you are not being compensated in a way that is consistent with the college’s practice.

The settlement agreement covering adjuncts who teach courses offered by “programs” with links to academic departments, such as – at some colleges – “First Year Initiative” or College Now, affects every CUNY college. Adjuncts’ workload credits for teaching in specified programs with links to academic departments will be counted toward eligibility for a three-year appointment by that department. Each college handles the relationship between programs and departments differently, so refer to Appendix B in the Programs Settlement Agreement to identify them. The agreement can be found at this link: tinyurl.com/Programs-settlement-agreement. Adjunct appointments

Building off the gains made for adjuncts

to certain programs are handled by administrators, such as provosts, not academic departments, and the University was unwilling to count teaching credits in those programs for eligibility.

To date, more than 2,200 adjuncts have received three-year appointments. These settlement agreements are the result of class-action grievances at the university level that the PSC filed in 2017 when certain adjuncts were improperly excluded from consideration for multiyear appointments.

Stan Wine, the PSC adjunct grievance counselor who worked on both class-action grievances, said the cases represent CUNY trying to “maximize its advantage and minimize any pay or benefits afforded to adjuncts.” The union prevailed in both cases, he said, because members across titles – adjuncts, a PSC chapter chair and department chairs – were ready to testify. If you have questions about the settlements, contact the PSC at (212) 354-1252 and ask to speak to an adjunct grievance counselor.