Governor Cuomo’s proposed budget is now public and it holds little promise for SUNY New Paltz and other SUNY comprehensive colleges with zero restoration of funding. Unfortunately, the public sector continues to suffer the brunt of the financial crisis caused by the deregulation of the financial industry and an unfair taxation policy that benefits the wealthy. Across the nation, public employees have been targeted and blamed by Tea Partiers and others for the decline in state budgets because of their hefty salaries and generous benefits packages. The attack on workers’ rights and collective bargaining is the just beginning for those with an ideological agenda to turn back the clock and eliminate progressive programs that provided a safety net for many Americans for over 80 years.

On our campus each day there is growing concern and anxiety among faculty and staff as we move toward late April, the administration’s deadline for releasing its budget plan. Some expect that programs or departments will be eliminated or consolidated and personnel non-renewed. We have already learned that a substantial number of adjuncts will not be renewed and that non-renewals of professional faculty have already begun. Some of our adjuncts have taught here for many years and with the loss of their position, they will lose health care and other benefits which will negatively impact their families and communities.

Even though the use of the “R” word, retrenchment, is often avoided, we must be prepared for this possibility. Retrenchment is a word synonymous in the corporate world with restructuring, rebalancing, or reorganization in the name of greater efficiency and flexibility, the creation of a leaner and more nimble institution. In the public sector, financial exigencies often provide a rationale for restructuring even though it may not be in the best interest of an institution or agency. If and when programs and personnel at SUNY New Paltz are affected, UUP stands ready to ensure that those professional and teaching faculty affected receive due process and protections according to article 35 of the NYS/UUP contract. Article 35 provides time frames and protections for those affected by retrenchment, including the possibility of alternative employment in other departments or units. However, in order to provide the support and representation each member deserves, it is imperative that affected individuals contact UUP as soon as they are notified. Let us hope for the best, but be fully prepared for the worst. 👀
Wither Public Workers’ Rights?
Richard Kelder

Recently in the NY Times Opinionator, Stanley Fish proclaimed “we are all badgers now” in solidarity with Wisconsin public employees, an unusual statement coming from an academic who has not always been a friend to unions. However, these are not usual times. The political landscape and party loyalty are shifting as the nation divides along ideological lines. The attack on public employees and collective bargaining is just the tip of the iceberg of what is to come. As I write there are number of bills circulating in the legislative chambers of various state governments in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Florida and other states to eliminate collective bargaining and deprive public employees of their legal rights. It is not a surprise that the Tea Party and the recently elected Republican governors see the current economic climate as an opportunity to realize its ideological agenda and use a budget crisis for a shameless power grab to insure their political ascendancy.

The attacks on unions demonstrate just how far Republican governors have moved away from the political center and are ready to violate a social contract based on the American dream of equality and opportunity. If successful, these bills will eliminate a safety net for many working Americans and abolish the right to organize collectively and fight for fair wages and safe working conditions. Such action will further increase the growing inequality of income between the haves and have not’s and lead more working and middle class families in the race to the bottom.

Lest we forget, the right to engage in collective bargaining is engraved in the very fiber of American society and without it we would not have been able to create an industrial society, a strong middle class, and opportunities for greater social mobility and equality. Indeed, the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights reaffirmed this basic human right in a universal context. Without our unions there will be a diminished civil society and one less organization to uphold democratic ideals and values and challenge those whose ambitions may be motivated by power, greed and a search for profit. As we look at the number of autocratic and totalitarian states throughout the world, we find that unions are non-existent as are other progressive social and civic groups. Unions provide an opposition to those who would rule by dictum and decree, subject to no one except their own will and desire for power.

What is the role of unions in higher education? Unions in higher education have always received mixed reactions. Some academics have dismissed unions as blue collar and authoritarian organizations more appropriate to the waterfront than the classroom. For others unions conflict with their identity as scholars who are solely in charge of their careers. For these academics participation in professional and research organizations is central to their work. Union political activity such as lobbying, organizing campaigns, and other activities does not carry the same cachet. However, this may change as public employees, academics included, continue to be attacked and threatened with the elimination of collective bargaining and other contractual protections. Without unions, with each person on his or her own, the slogan on the T-shirt will ring true: “united we negotiate, alone we beg.” Perhaps, we ARE all badgers now. ☝

UUP members demonstrate in NYC rally: We Are One

Photos courtesy of Susan Lehrer
Responses to New Paltz Oracle Questions
Glenn McNitt

Members of the UUP New Paltz Community:

Here is a list of questions that I received from the managing Editor of the Oracle. I will pass along my responses.

1. What is your stance on implementing a rational tuition policy?

My opinion, personally, is this: I am against the various versions of such a policy put forward by the Chancellor, the campus administration, the University Senate, and others. My main concern is this: the funding of a "Public State University" is the responsibility of the the legislature and the governor, not the students who enroll. The reason for creating a public university is so that those who do not have the financial wherewithal to enroll in private universities can have accessibility to higher education. Having public facilities permits many strata of society, especially working and middle income families the opportunity to pursue potentially life changing experiences. Every time tuition increases occur, the opportunities for these groups diminish. Tuition Assistance Policies and academic scholarships do not make up for the reduced opportunities either. Public goods must stay public; increasing tuition moves SUNY toward privatization.

2. Currently, Interim President Christian and some members of UUP and CSEA are advocating for a rational tuition policy. As a former Union President that is still very involved, do you agree with their advocacy for this policy, why or why not?

Given what I just wrote, I obviously do not agree with those who support rational tuition policies, whatever their form. Advocates focus on "rational," meaning that they do not want huge spikes in tuition rates from one year to the next, and it is difficult to argue against rational in that sense. However, the policy essentially endorses increases in tuition in a fairly short period of time. The Chancellor's proposal is a 5 year one, with tuition increasing $400 the first year, and increasing an additional $300 each year for the remaining 4 years. Add it up; that's $1600 increase in tuition, making tuition $6570 in the fifth year. Meantime, students have numerous fees and other charges that currently push the cost of attending SUNY to close to $20,000 per year now. Why add another $1600 on top of that? Especially, since we know well the debt that students across the country are saddled with when they leave school.

3. What advantages does rational tuition have? What disadvantages does it have? And why does one outweigh the other?

The only advantage I see of rational tuition policy is knowing what the increases will be year after year. I guess it is better to know than not to know. The disadvantages, other than those I mentioned earlier, are they take the legislature out of the tuition setting role. Don't forget; the legislature has given NYS residents the lowest tuition in the northeast, if not the whole country. Should we not be proud of the legislature for doing that? Campus presidents and the Chancellor want to raise tuition, and all they talk about is the first 5 years. Do they have another plan for the next 5 years? 10 years? Do they want to completely privatize SUNY and charge tuition rates equal to the private colleges? Surely there are enough private colleges in NYS.

4. With the budgetary issues SUNY is currently facing, how do you think this policy would affect SUNY funding?

The Chancellor and campus presidents have a simple plan for dealing with the budgetary issues of each campus--reduce the budget at each campus by reducing its course offerings, increasing class size, reducing the number of employees, and increasing tuition. Get less but pay more. Unless the Governor, who proposes the budget for public higher education, agrees with the tuition hikes AND also agrees to sustain the current state support for SUNY, it is likely that with each increase in tuition, a commensurate reduction in state support is likely to occur. That is how things worked in the past, and there is no guarantee that it will not happen again in cash strapped NYS. If the governor sees that SUNY tuition increases can keep the system open without needing funds from NYS General fund, he could redistribute those funds to other needy areas of state government.

5. Do you think it would ease financial ache in any way?

It would ease the State's ache, but not SUNY's. Campuses would still have lost $685M in three years, and there is no plan to restore any of those funds.

6. If there's anything else you think I should include that would help my article, please let me know.

The rational tuition policy, proposed in conjunction with SUNY Flex—the "new name" for PHEEIA and similar proposals to de-couple SUNY campuses from one another and create one or more flagship campuses within SUNY (and simultaneously, develop a large group of "row-boat" campuses of which New Paltz would be one) appears to be in the genre of reducing public goods—a kind of anti-government trend sweeping the country. How is this different in results than the attacks on teachers and other public employees in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, South Dakota, New Mexico and other states? Privatizing and Outsourcing have been the tactics, along with belittling public service, that have been the actions of choice of Republicans and the Right for a while now. This is no different.

These are my personal opinions and assessments, not those of any organizations to which I belong. ▲
Damage control for part-time teaching faculty
Yvonne Aspengren

As a part-timer, I’m sure you’ve heard that one way
the Administration intends to address budget cuts is
to offer fewer classes taught by adjuncts. Although the
Administration will not announce its plan until the Budget
Forum on April 22nd, particular courses have already been
eliminated in some departments and some adjuncts have
been informed that they will not be rehired in the Fall.
Departments have been instructed to find ways to cut
their PST budget (expenses related to courses taught by
adjunct instructors) by 50%. The Fall schedule of courses
is online; some decisions seem to have been made already.

As a part-timer, you know how little job security you
inherently have. Your contract specifies that your em-
ployment is contingent upon enrollment and program
need. A number of factors beyond your control determine
whether or not and how much you will be working in
the Fall; seeing your name on the schedule or having a
contract is no guarantee. You could be ‘bumped’ when a
colleague’s class does not fill. Your department may be
restructured, full-time colleagues may need to teach more
courses, minimum enrollment expectations may change...
until you are actually in the classroom, you cannot know.
This is especially hard for those of us who depend on the
benefits for ourselves and our families. To suddenly lose
health insurance, on top of our income, is disastrous.

I like to be prepared for change when I see it coming. Two
things to consider:

At the end of the semester you may be qualified to receive
unemployment insurance benefits. Last summer many
part-timers applied and most did receive benefits. The UUP
Part-Time Concerns Committee will be holding another
Unemployment Benefits Workshop on Wednesday, May
4, from 12:15-1:30 in CSB 110. Come if you’d like to learn
more.

If you are 55 or older, are currently benefits eligible and
have 10 years of benefits eligible service with New York
State you may be qualified to retire. I am planning to retire
this semester for health insurance purposes. If you are
interested, you will need to meet with someone in Human
Resources; they can give you the information that you
will need in order to make a decision. We are holding a
Retirement for Part-Timers Workshop Thursday, April
14 from 3:30-4:30 in the UUP office, LC 06. Gina Blume
from HR will be there to answer questions.

Both of these workshops require an RSVP. Please email me
at aspengry@newpaltz to reserve a spot! 

Hey You!
Ed Hanley

Yes, you. We recently held a town hall meeting about the
SUNY and SUNY New Paltz budget crises. For those of you
who missed it (and that was most of you), a student was
invited to address the assembled multitude. Honestly, no
multitude had actually assembled – the phrase just sounds
more impressive than “sparse crowd.” But I digress.

It seems some of our students are now planning an event
at which they will voice their displeasure with SUNY
budget cuts in their own creative way. Refreshingly, their
strategy suggests they have intuitively grasped a lesson
most of us seem to have forgotten. A lesson some of us
“dinosaurs” learned firsthand – and sometimes the hard
way – 40 years ago (give or take a few years). And that
lesson it is simply this:

Show up.

There is absolutely, positively no substitute for showing
up. And simply showing up is more important than ever
because so few people do it anymore. Probably because
there are so many other options available today. We can
tweet. Facebook. Text. Email. Blog. Call our Senators. Fax
our Representatives. Petition online. Simply put, there
are far more – and far easier – ways to make a point than
there were forty years ago. All have increased our abil-
ity to communicate with each other. All are useful. But
none, individually or in combination, are as effective as
just showing up.

Consider the number “100,000.” That’s a big number. Yet
one hundred thousand emails can be quickly and eas-
ily deleted with one finger a single mouse click. On the
other hand, there’s no way on earth to make one hundred
thousand people quickly and easily disappear. That many
highly motivated, like-minded people showing up in the
same place at the same time for the same reason is every
authority figure’s worst nightmare - be they dictator,
government bureaucrat, or captain of industry. Because
when a group that size gathers in order to make a point –
there’s not a thing in the world anybody can do to stop that
from happening. There’s no way to intimidate a group that
size. There’s no way to control a group that size. There’s no
way to hide a group that size. Most importantly, there’s
no way to ignore a group that size.

A group that size WILL be heard.

That said, I doubt our students are planning to host
100,000 people on March 8th (though wouldn’t it be
interesting if that many people actually showed up?).
Even if they were, I expect a somewhat more modest
turnout is likely. But that shouldn’t be a problem. As
turnouts in the 100K+ range aren’t nearly as common as
they once were, I think any reasonably large gathering will still get people's attention. The groups now protesting in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Ohio don't number anywhere near 100,000 strong, yet those protests are front page news across America. Why? Because people aren't just sitting in seclusion sending emails; they're showing up to visibly and vocally protest in person. Clearly, ten thousand people can still get the job done; perhaps five thousand will do. On a small college campus a gathering of even a thousand people would be a major event.

Make no mistake – we can discuss and plan and network and organize all we want. But in the end the thing that really matters is how many people show up when it's show time. Because THAT is the measure others will use to decide whether or not to take us – and our cause(s) – seriously. So you can either be there or be ignored.

It really is up to you.

Blog
Linda Smith

What is going on in your department? What are you worried about? We know there is a lot going on but we may be hearing only bits and pieces. We know UUPers are worried about their students, their classes and / or their departments and their jobs. Where can you post your concerns? Where can you "talk" about this? We had a list which was seldom used. So, we set up a "not-quite-ready-for-prime-time" blog where you can post your questions, concerns, comments, etc. We will send an email with a link later in April. The crisis is ongoing; we need to hear from you at our nUUPaltz blog site.

Professional Lunch Meeting
Linda Smith

On the last day of classes for the Spring semester, May 10th, from Noon – 1PM our new Labor Relations Specialist, Bill Capowski, will be on campus to meet with Professionals. Bill will begin the discussion of career related topics by discussing SEI, Tenure and Promotion and the process you should follow to become permanent. We think meeting after the final budget reduction plan is announced will give you time to think of questions you want to have Bill address. The UUP will provide lunch; you will provide questions and concerns. (We are attempting to reserve SUB100.)