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The Advocate

The City University of New York Graduate School and University Center

V o l u m e 6 N u m b e r 7

Henderson Suspensions at BMCC Lifted: Victory for Student Government

Tom Smith

On November 29, 1994, BMCC's Acting Dean of Students Daisy Alvario suspended each of the four-member executive committee of BMCC's Student Government Administration (SGA): Candice Camilo (President), Manuella Jean-Pierre (Vice-President), Denise Esposito (Executive Secretary), and Camille Wynn (Treasurer). They had led demonstrations of hundreds of students on the BMCC campus, and organized the same numbers to participate in City Hall rallies, to protest Giuliani's new \$1 billion round of massive budget cuts, totalling \$7 million for CUNY. In what were obviously form letters, dated November 28, Alvario accused the students of "dangerous and disruptive behavior on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 22 and 23, 1994," on which days, alleged Alvario, each of these students "blocked students' entrance and egress from the third floor South entrance and closed the doors to the escalators on the second and third floor South." In addition, each of the students were told that they had allegedly and repeatedly "entered almost all of the classrooms on the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth floors of the college demanding that the instructors and the students leave their classes in protest of the proposed budget cuts." Their actions were thus, according to Alvario, "in violation of Henderson rules # 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7." A disciplinary hearing was scheduled for December 2nd.

The Henderson rules were passed in 1991 by the Administration in response to the CUNY takeovers in protest of yet another round of Cuomo's budget cuts and tuition hikes. The rules for which these students were specifically found in violation forbid University members to

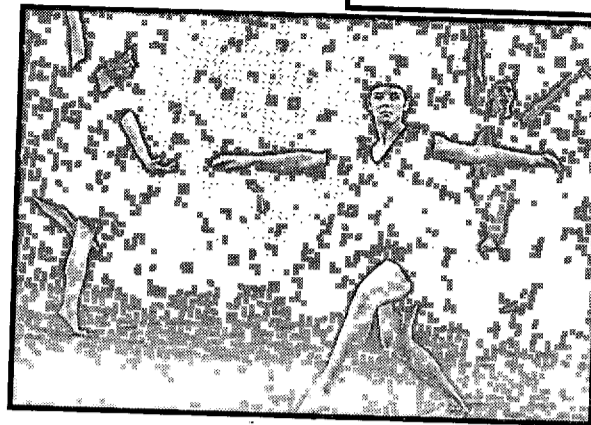
- #1. "interfere with the institution's educational processes"
- #2. fail "to comply with lawful directions issued by" University officials.
- #3. occupy without authorization "University/College facilities or blocking access to or from such areas."
- #7. engage in "disorderly or indecent conduct."

In addition, rule #6 states "Action may be taken against any persons who have no legitimate reason for their presence on any campus. . . ." Presumably this rule is being interpreted to hold the student leaders responsible for outsiders' actions. Thus these rules, especially under such free interpretations, provide extremely severe restrictions on students' exercise of their constitutional right to political protest.

According to these students, escalators were not blocked for any length of time sufficient to threaten anyone's physical safety (nor have any medical reports of injury been produced as yet by the Administration). In addition, the demonstrators blocked escalators and entrances only until guards asked them to leave: then they stopped.

The students charged are all from the Nursing Program, which would be most heavily affected by the cuts as proposed by the Mayor. The program already has very stiff entrance requirements: a 3.4 GPA, for example. These cuts would make it even more difficult for many impoverished students to enter this very popular career-track field.

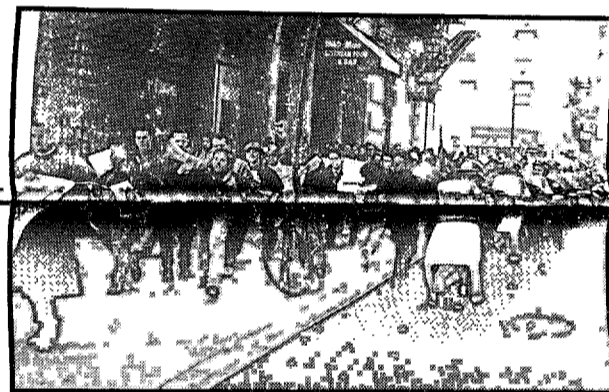
The BMCC budget alone will be cut \$1.5 million. As a result,



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Interpretation of Dance through Writing
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Garbage!
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Student Rally at City Hall Draws Crowd

Michael Spear

On November 23, while the City Council met inside City Hall to consider Mayor Giuliani's budget proposal, including over \$7 million in cuts to the CUNY junior colleges, nearly 700 CUNY students including a dozen or so from the Graduate Center demonstrated outside to protest the proposed cuts. Besides demonstrating for over four hours at City Hall, the students marched to the nearby campus of Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

Despite the fact that this proposed round of cuts would affect only the CUNY junior colleges (7,000 students forced to defer entry, over 1,000 classes cut, and the literacy program eliminated), students from many of the senior colleges came out to the demonstration in anticipation of future cuts that no doubt will target them.

The demonstration was one of several in recent weeks opposing the \$1.1 billion reduction proposed by Giuliani to reduce the City's deficit. In all, more than 3,000 people have demonstrated against the cuts at City Hall in the two weeks running up to the November 23rd City Council meeting. Groups protesting included the Council on Alcoholism, the United

New Directions for Computing at the GSUC

by David Kirschenbaum

A report has been issued about the state of computing at the Graduate Center leading to the organization of a Task Force to discern in which direction the University's computing should head. The Treitman Report, a \$12,000 study, was compiled by a firm which two years ago did not exist, has previous ties to the University, and was not subject to competitive bidding.

Put together by Treitman Research, Incorporated, with a full title of Strategic Re-Alignment of Information Services, Computing and Network Resources, the report was issued this past May. Richard Treitman interviewed a number of students, faculty and computer center representatives, to help establish the proper path which the University should take toward increasing the viability of its computer services.

The University has worked with Robert Treitman, the owner-operator of Treitman Research, Incorporated, before. As an IBM employee he helped the University obtain a number of computer stations for the Computer Science Department, according to Pam Reid,

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Editorial

The Message from BMCC

Thirty years after the student Free Speech movement at Berkeley, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are again under attack at the City University of New York. After three successful rallies and a walkout to protest Mayor Giuliani's proposed budget cuts to the CUNY community colleges, on Monday November 28th the four members of the executive branch of the Borough of Manhattan Community College student government arrived on campus and were promptly served with suspensions by the college administration. BMCC's Acting President Marcia Kiezs invoked emergency measures to suspend the four students without a hearing.

CUNY-wide regulations require a prompt hearing in cases of suspension. As soon as the hearing was convened, on Friday, December 2nd, the BMCC administration lifted the suspensions. The independent hearing panel then granted an adjournment requesting the University 1) to produce a "bill of particulars" itemizing the complaints against each defendant, and 2) to submit to the defense a list of witnesses along with 3) a promise not to prosecute *post facto* any students who might come forward to testify for the defense. All three requests were later rejected by the University's legal counsel.

The BMCC administration maintains in the suspension papers that the four women violated several sections of the Henderson rules which govern conduct on campus. Without particular charges directed at the individual defendants, the executive branch of the student government at BMCC is effectively being charged with a conspiracy complaint and is being held responsible for actions taken by other students during the organizing of the protests and the mobilization of the student body.

On the part of the four student defendants, the protests could not have been better-intentioned or targeted to a more legitimate cause. The Mayor's \$7 million cuts to the community college budget will force the University to cancel many course sections, decrease student services, and even close entire programs, the Adult Literacy Program among them. These cuts will deeply compromise the academic integrity of the community colleges and possibly bring de-accreditation.

The implications of the BMCC administration's interpretation and implementation of the Henderson rules could not be clearer nor more ominous. If you and I were to be held responsible for every mishap indirectly resulting from our exercise of the right to assemble and speak out, the First Amendment would amount to nothing but words on a piece of parchment. Plainly, the intent of the BMCC administration is to silence the voice of student protest. As a voice of student advocacy it is the duty of this newspaper to condemn that effort and denounce the threat it poses to the future of a student movement so crucial in a time of crisis to the University.

Letters

To the Editor:

One Fag to Another: A response to Hollander's "The Personal and the Political: Silence and Shrieking Cries" (November Advocate, p.8)

I was dismayed at Robert's view that his loss of a CUNY friend to AIDS was in no way political, but in "the domain of affect...a kind of aesthetic loss." As if emotions and art were not political. First, in another case, a memorial was not held because the administration refused to mention that the student had in fact died of AIDS—a clear case of homophobia.

If it does not become as normal to say that someone died of AIDS as it is to say that someone died of pneumonia, then people with AIDS will continue to be marginalized and stigmatized. Silence allows us to believe that none we know have AIDS, that AIDS happens to other people—to gays, people of color, drug users. Silence = Death = Politics.

"I shared with him an indifference to self-politicization. I have never viewed my own sexuality or sexual preferences as any more political than the color of my eyes...I never experienced the least discrimination or hardship on account of my sexual preference." These statements are tantamount to a black person saying that racism is not a problem because she had never personally experienced an overt racist act. Really Mr. Hollander! If you had lived in a society where the color of one's eyes determined power/hierarchy, then you would not be so cavalier about eye color. We do live in a society where power is structured along lines of gender and sexual orientation. Who one goes to bed with is a matter of (hetero)normative sanction, of life and death, of politics. Alas, we do not live in a world where one's sexuality is as unimportant as one's eye color. Which transcendent realm does Bobby Boy exist in?

"Unless you make a point of it, most people neither know or care". Is

Robert suggesting that gays hide their sexuality in the closet? Straight people make a point of it all the time. If Robert really believes that most people neither know nor care, then I dare him to make out with another guy on an escalator in rush hour traffic. Robert goes on to say that "gayness is easy to hide. No one has to know, and by and large, unless you tell them they don't know until they get really close, and even then they can only guess." Contrary to his disclaimer that he's not advocating a closet, he is indeed doing so. Why should we have to hide gayness? Why should it be something that no one has to know? Because it's easy for some to "pass"? Why should anyone have to pass for something they're not?

Robert's position is not far from that of Bruce Bauer who suggests that gays would be accepted by mainstream society if only there were no flamboyant drag queens in the Gay Pride Parade. If the "fringe" of the gay society

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33 West 42 Street

New York, New York

10036

212.642.2852

Ask most CUNY graduate students and they will tell you that the Mina Rees Library (the Graduate Center library) is a daunting place to conduct research. Although the library houses quite a respectable reference collection, specialized research tasks meet with obstacles at every corner, those obstacles coming in the form of the library's dolefully limited collection of books and periodicals.

Last semester, while undertaking weekly research assignments for a very demanding class in literary scholarship, the library's lack of resources drove me almost to distraction. But as one of the Reference Librarians at the Mina Rees reminded me, our library is the youngest in the CUNY system, and after all, a great collection is not built overnight. I decided to have patience. There is a limit however, to what one can endure. And many of us, already stressed from trying to meet the demands of our programs, of our teaching assignments, and frequently of other work as well, are unwilling to have patience with a collection that fails to meet our most basic needs.

Putting aside the often esoteric research assignments that I had to complete last semester, let us consider a more mainstream example. For the Milton course which I am currently taking, the professor provided a bibliography of recommended texts on Milton. Of the 29 books listed, 23 are available within the CUNY system, but only six are in the Mina Rees collection. Of the texts which are not owned by the graduate center library, some are available in multiple copies at undergraduate schools within the system. In addition, our library subscribes to only one of the two major journals dedicated to Milton scholarship.

Students in other departments report similar problems. Hugo Benavides, a student in the Anthropology department reports that he has a very difficult time finding materials relating to his research in archaeology. Things have gotten so bad, he says, "I don't even try anymore. Queens has a much better library; I can usually find what I need there." Like many students, Hugo identifies two serious deficiencies: the library does not subscribe to the journals he needs for research; and the collection is particularly bare of recent works in his area.

Hollis France, a student in Political Science who also works in the Mina Rees Library, isn't too upset about the graduate center's limited holdings; he simply uses other libraries. He does say that he has to "run around trying to find basic resources" for his research, but he's grown accustomed to using the

libraries at Brooklyn College and Baruch. He acknowledges that "we don't really have any periodicals," but points out that the New York Public Library does.

Bibliographically Challenged:

Everything's in Short Supply at the Mina Rees Library—Books, Periodicals, Hours ... and Community Interest

Among those who have been forced to rely on other libraries, Andre Minott, a student in Environmental Psychology, has become an expert. Andre states bluntly, "I never found anything that I needed there." The only reason he uses the Mina Rees at all, he says, is to find out where the texts he needs are located. He conducts most of his research (in tourism, historical preservation, culture, and aesthetics) at the libraries of other universities, notably Columbia and NYU.

Andre raises some other issues surrounding the Graduate Center's modest library resources. His experience is that other scholars sneer at our library and his impression is that the meager holdings and subterranean nature of our research facility do not inspire the confidence of other scholars. Andre says that his friends at NYU, who disdainfully refer to our library as "the basement," call into question the credibility of an individual who conducts his research in such an environment.

In a recent interview, I confronted the library's Marilyn Geels (Acting Head of Readers' Services) with some of the problems identified here, and her response was largely sympathetic. Prior to the interview, I had expected that an inappropriately limited budget was probably the sole cause of the dearth of books in the library, but Ms. Geels believes this situation is only part of a problem that extends far beyond the Graduate Center's restricted budget. That problem is based in large part on the fact that there is a disturbing lack of interest in the library on the part of the would-be users.

Ms. Geels pointed out that the library has very few active faculty users. Despite the fact that, for a number of years, the only way to order new books

for the library was to have them put on reserve, Ms. Geels says that typically, fewer than half the institution's faculty members put books on reserve for the classes they teach at the Graduate

Center. And in fact, budget conditions have changed dramatically; the library currently has a budget surplus. But when the library sent a letter to departments asking them to submit book orders, the response was very poor.

Unfortunately, past financial limitations and the uninviting location of the Center community begins to consider the library a kind of lost cause.

Faculty members who conscientiously order books for their "home" libraries forget that they have the same responsibility at the Graduate Center. Faculty who are well aware of gaps in the Mina Rees collection send their students to the New York Public Library, to other university libraries, or to libraries on other CUNY campuses, all the while omitting to place book orders that would begin to fill these gaps. In one case, a faculty member has even made it a policy to lend his personal Columbia University library card to students in his department so that they can conduct research and borrow books from that school's much larger collection. Faculty members in one department (and probably in others) have worked together to build a kind of private departmental collection to meet the specialized needs of their students. While circumstances like these show a commendable interest and involvement on the part of faculty members, they also work to confirm the library's condition of neglect. If we all had full access to a library like Columbia's Butler (with its two million volume collection), why on earth would we have any interest in develop-

ing the resources of the Mina Rees with its scant quarter-million volumes?

Along these same lines, Marilyn Geels and I also discussed the Graduate Center's library hours. After all, one of the things that keeps both students and faculty away from the Mina Rees is that it's not always open when we need it. The Graduate Center library hours are from 10am-9pm Monday-Thursday, from 10am-5pm on Fridays, and from 10am-6pm on Saturdays; there are no hours on Sunday (one of the few days when most CUNY graduate students do not have other working commitments) nor are there any additional hours for use of a quiet study area, reserve items, or reference materials. Now compare current library hours at Columbia University's Butler Library: from 9am-11pm Monday-Thursday (Reading Room and reference collection open until 1am), from 9am-9pm on Fridays, from 11am-6pm on Saturdays, and on Sundays from 12n-11pm (again, the Reading Room and reference collection are open until 1am). In addition, the University provides a 24-hour study area within Butler Library while school is in session. At New York University's Bobst Library, hours are from 8am-11pm Monday-Thursday, from 8am-7pm on Fridays, from 8am-11pm on Saturdays, and on Sundays

While keeping our library open more hours would certainly be a challenge to both the budget and the library personnel, that's not even the biggest problem. According to Ms. Geels, about four years ago, at the behest of student activists, the library conducted an experiment, significantly extending its hours for a one- or two-week period. At the conclusion of the experiment, both students and librarians agreed that student presence during the extended hours was so limited that it wasn't worth the money and the effort to try to put a permanent program of extended hours into place. But again, the condition of limited hours is self-perpetuating. Since students and faculty have grown accustomed to the fact that the Mina Rees keeps relatively early hours, they learn to rely on other libraries when they are working on time dependent projects (which among graduate students is almost always).

One of the reasons that students and faculty give up on the Mina Rees so quickly is that the collection of periodicals doesn't begin to meet the needs of the people who would otherwise study there. According to Acquisitions Librarian Ofelia Rabassa, that situation is one dictated exclusively by financial considerations. Ms. Rabassa explains that the library has two separate acquisitions budgets, one for

books (monographs) and the other for periodicals. While the library does entertain requests for new subscriptions (from Department Heads), Ms. Rabassa makes it clear that she is forced to maintain a fixed number of subscriptions; if you add one on, another must be canceled. The obvious problem, Ms. Rabassa argues, is that subscriptions are not one-time purchases, but rather are an ongoing cost, and one that frequently increases from year to year, even without additional purchases.

While the expense of maintaining (or increasing) periodicals holdings is considerable, an improvement in this area may be the rehabilitative acts that spurs a kind of renaissance for our poor, neglected library. A superior periodical collection would be of such value to our users that any increased cost would certainly be justifiable, and the resulting increased use of our facility might well spark interest in improving the quality of other collections as well.

There are, of necessity, numerous issues surrounding these questions which I have been unable to address herein. And though they may be most noteworthy, I have chosen instead to focus on what I believe is the key con-

Center community: it is neither healthy for us, nor healthy for our institution for us to continue to rely so heavily on the resources of other libraries. While we ought, certainly, to have access to and a knowledge of other research facilities, failure to invest in the one under our noses simply hurts everyone.

It seems that the Mina Rees Library is laboring under a number of crippling restraints: too few books, too few periodicals, too few hours, too little money, too dark and recessed a location, and too little interest altogether. Unsurprisingly, these conditions are, in turn, adversely affecting the ability of Graduate Center scholars to conduct their research. Worst of all, things don't seem to be on the road to improvement. For many, if not for most, the library and its collection is a lost cause. So, not only are we denied a fitting research facility, but future generations of CUNY scholars will also have to live without the books we ought to be collecting for them right now. Indeed, a substantial library is a key element in attracting top-quality graduate students, so our failure to build a collection could result in a lowering of CUNY's academic reputation, something that certainly affects us all.

[Significantly, Sundays were not included in the experiment with extended hours. Had they been, the results might have been more positive.]