



UNITED
UNIVERSITY
PROFESSIONS

YEARS







uup

United University Professions

**KEEP
SUNY**



FIFTY YEARS.

UUP HAS BEEN A UNION FOR 50 YEARS

If you're counting, that's 600 months, 18,262 days, 438,288 hours, 26,297,280 minutes or nearly 1.6 billion seconds.

It's also plenty of time to make a difference, something UUP has done for decades—five decades to be exact.

That's why we're closing our yearlong golden anniversary celebration with this, our 50th anniversary commemorative book. It's more than just a keepsake; this book chronicles UUP's long and storied history.

This compendium spans our union's first 50 years, starting with UUP's formation and its first Delegate Assembly, May 14, 1973. You'll see photos from UUP's past, of dedicated unionists who saw the importance of collective bargaining and the necessity of pulling SUNY academics and professionals together to speak in one unified voice to fight for important job protections, fair compensation and the SUNY system itself.

You'll read about our presidents and our union's many efforts and causes, including advocating for social justice; fair pay and family policies; and for diversity, equity and inclusion. You'll learn about our many battles with the state of New York over funding for SUNY and how UUP's tenacious nature and political clout resulted in win after win.

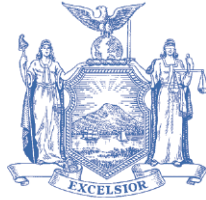
The heroism of our members during the pandemic, the fight to save SUNY Downstate University Hospital and so many of the amazing gains we've made as a union, it's all here.

I'm proud to share UUP's history—our history—with you, our members. Here's to the next 50 years of making a difference!

In solidarity,

Frederick E. Kowal, President
September 27, 2024

This compendium spans our union's first 50 years, starting with UUP's formation and its first Delegate Assembly, May 14, 1973.



State of New York
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
Albany, NY 12224

KATHY HOCHUL
GOVERNOR

ANTONIO R. DELGADO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

September 27, 2024

Frederick E. Kowal, President
United University Professions
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear United University Professions,

I want to extend my sincerest congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the United University Professions. Since its formation in 1973, United University Professions has been a stalwart advocate for the rights of faculty, staff, doctors, and medical professionals, ensuring that the SUNY system remains a model for public higher education.

The SUNY system is instrumental in the culture and integrity of this state. Our universities have been a consistent place for young people to become civically engaged and develop into our future leaders, and the United University Professions is key to enabling this amazing work to continue and to grow.

I am truly grateful for the work United University Professions has completed over the past 50 years and would like to give a special shout out to President Frederick E. Kowal and his team for his exceptional leadership since 2013.

I wish the organization continued success and am looking forward to many more years of collaboration and achievement.



Sincerely,

Antonio Delgado,
Lieutenant Governor
State of New York



State of New York
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
Albany, NY 12224

LETITIA JAMES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

September 27, 2024

Frederick E. Kowal, President
United University Professions
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear Friends,

A warm welcome to everyone who has gathered for the United University Professions' 50th Anniversary. Your participation supports UUP's crucial mission.

Formed in 1973, the United University Professions is the nation's largest education union that represents the professional faculty of the SUNY system. From its humble beginnings, UUP has grown from 3,500 members to currently representing more than 42,000 members.

By advocating for and protecting the rights of the faculty, staff, doctors, and other medical professionals; UUP is making the State University of New York a world-class university. This would not be possible without the commitment and enthusiasm of its leaders and members who propel the union toward greater achievements.

Once again, congratulations to the UUP on celebrating its Golden Anniversary. I am sure it will be a memorable occasion. I wish the United University Professions much continued success with its future endeavors.



Sincerely,

Letitia James,
Attorney General
State of New York



State of New York
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER
Albany 12236

September 27, 2024

Frederick E. Kowal, President
United University Professions
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear Friends,

Greetings to all those gathered today for the 2024 United University Professions Fall Delegate Assembly marking the golden anniversary of the UUP's founding. For five decades, the UUP has worked to make the State University of New York a world-class university system while safeguarding the rights of the faculty, staff, doctors and other SUNY professionals serving communities across the state.



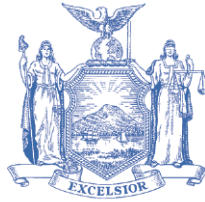
Congratulations are due to UUP members receiving special recognition from the Delegate Assembly. Their outstanding leadership, service and devotion to the principles of democratic unionism are truly worthy of your recognition.

Founded in 1973 through a merger of the Senate Professional Association (SPA) and the State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT), United University Professions was created to provide a strong voice for all SUNY teaching and non-teaching professionals. The union has grown in numbers and influence and today represents more than 42,000 members, 32 chapters on 29 state-operated campuses. The dedicated UUP officers, local affiliates and members are building solidarity and a thriving organization that advocates for educational opportunities and a brighter future for all.

Best wishes for a joyful celebration and continued success.

Sincerely,

Thomas P. DiNapoli
State Comptroller



THE SENATE
State of New York
Albany 12247

Toby Ann Stavisky, Senator, 11th District

September 27, 2024

United University Professions
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear Friends,

I want to congratulate UUP as you celebrate fifty years representing SUNY faculty and staff. For five decades, you have provided students with a world class, affordable education, innovative research and public private partnerships.

UUP's origins go back to the late 1960s and the passage of the Taylor Law when educators began to replace their professional associations with unions and the nascent UUP emerged in 1973. You were able to bring disparate individuals together in a common mission: to speak with one voice, to bargain collectively, to improve working conditions and to receive health and pension benefits.

As your partner, the legislature has included in the last several budgets unprecedented increases in funding to SUNY. When we announced our plans to improve TAP, UUP stood with us, and we stand with you.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to SUNY. UUP members kept classes and programs open, minimizing disruption to students' education. Specifically, your faculty and staff at the four university health centers provided life-saving care. Downstate hospital became a COVID only facility. UUP members met that challenge and this year, UUP, together with the higher education community, worked to oppose the threat of closure.

There have been challenges along the way and UUP has overcome many obstacles. As a preeminent voice for higher education, you have earned immense respect. Dr. Kowal has been a remarkable leader for the last eleven years and I thank him for all he has accomplished. Thank you, Dr. Kowal, and your staff members for your service.



Sincerely,

Toby Ann Stavisky,
Senator, 11th District



THE ASSEMBLY
State of New York
Albany 12247

Patricia Fahy, 109th District

September 27, 2024

United University Professions
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear United University Professions,

Warmest congratulations on reaching your 50th anniversary! For five decades, United University Professions has been unwavering in its dedication to enhancing the State University of New York system, elevating it to a pinnacle of excellence in higher education. Your tireless efforts in advocating for and safeguarding the rights of faculty, staff, doctors and other medical professionals have been pivotal to SUNY's enduring success and esteemed reputation.



Since your inception in 1973, UUP has navigated and triumphed over numerous challenges, all while upholding the integrity of the SUNY system. Your unwavering commitment to ensuring that public teaching hospitals deliver life-saving care to all New Yorkers is truly commendable and embodies the very essence of public service and education.

Visionary leaders like you, who recognize the paramount importance of a robust public university system and are willing to champion its cause, have been the cornerstone of UUP's achievements. It is an honor to align with an organization that shares such a deep-seated commitment to public higher education and health care.

I am delighted to join in celebrating this remarkable milestone with you and eagerly anticipate the continued success of UUP as you uphold the values of education, health care and public service.

Best wishes for a memorable and joyous celebration of your golden anniversary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia Fahy".

Patricia Fahy,
Assemblymember, 109th District



June 27, 2024

Fred Kowal, President
United University Professions, #2190
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110

Dear President Kowal and members
of United University Professions, #2190,

Congratulations! United University Professions, #2190 has reached a milestone.

June 1, 2023, marked the 50th anniversary of your charter as a local of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

It was a historic day in 1916 when the AFT was formed by the members of a group of eight autonomous local teacher unions. Since that day, our strength has come from our members in all constituencies and from local unions with a proud history like yours. In the tradition of the AFT, you have worked diligently to improve members' lives and the lives of the people we serve, as well as to help your members achieve dignity in the workplace.

Your success is our success, and it has made the AFT one of the fastest growing unions in the AFL-CIO. Your strength and perseverance over the past 50 years are a source of great pride and inspiration to all of us. It gives us incentive to continue working to make our union even stronger at the local, state and national levels.

Again, congratulations. I wish you many more years of success.



Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten,
President, American Federation of Teachers



FREDERICK E. KOWAL
President

CAROLYN KUBE
Vice President for Professionals

ALISSA KARL
Vice President for Academics

JERI O'BRYAN-LOSEE
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Published September 27, 2024

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UUP is Local 2190 of the American Federation
of Teachers (AFL-CIO) and is affiliated with NYSUT
and the National Education Association.



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www.instagram.com/uupinfo | uupinfo.org





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FYI

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For Your

SUNY/United

September 7, 1973

The SUNY/United negoti-
coming negotiations.

il Hotelling (SUATC-Del.
ony Brook Health Science Center), Janet Havens (SUNY-Albany), Bruce Lercher (SUNY-
inghamton). Michael Robbins (SUATC-Farmingdale), Edward Schaffer (SUC-Plattsburgh), Samuel

judgment complaints top result

SPA files 179 grievances in 1971-72

After one year as overseer of the
SUNY grievance procedure, the Senate

Prof. O. Michael (State Medical Center), John Valter (SUNY-
Bruce Lercher (SUNY-
Edward Schaffer (SUC-Plattsburgh), Samuel
was also on

SPA President Robert Granger points to
another interesting

S.U.F.T. NEWS

PUBLISHED BY THE STATE UNIVERSITY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

JANUARY 1971, NO. 4

SUFT DEMANDS END TO SUNY FREEZE; VOWS FIGHT FOR FULL UNIVERSITY BUDGET

REQUEST MEETING WITH GOVERNOR ON UNIVERSITY CUTBACKS

"The cutbacks ordered by the State Budget Director
are crippling the state university system and must be im-
mediately restored," stated Don Leon, SUFT president



Don Leon, SUFT President

SUFT GAINS PLURALITY
IN SUNY ELECTION

Tempo Picks Up in SUNY-United Activities

President Larry DeLucia recently met with
representatives of the New York State Legislature
regarding the status of the legislative hearing on
negotiations.

The meeting, which was held in New York City,

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rying out staff

1 September 6 at

ion in Pennsyl-
's services

SPA SPOKESMAN

Senate Professional Association of the State University of New York

October 1971

SPA Leadership Conference scores success

A massive conference of SPA chapter presidents, grievance chairmen, and delegates to the
Association's Representative Council, plus the Executive Committee, concluded with a
charge to "serve as architects of improvement for SUNY and all elements of the University
community."

The conference, consisting of workshops in grievance processing, leadership development,
organizational development and business sessions, brought together leaders from every
unit in the statewide system.

BEFORE THERE WAS A UNION

*The founding of UUP was part of the organizing movement
in higher education that started more than a century ago
but really took off in the 1960s*

In the early days of organized labor, recruitment efforts were focused on blue-collar laborers. Conditions for workers were often abysmal; factory workers in particular suffered greatly, working long, grueling hours for little pay. In short, many physical laborers were displeased with the status quo and sought change. They were not the only ones.

The turn of the 20th century brought with it sweeping reforms for standardized education, and calls for unionization began soon after. As the country approached entry into the First World War, teacher's unions began to crop up: the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915 and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in 1916, though college faculty were not allowed to affiliate with the AFT until 1918. The first AFT college local was founded at Howard University immediately following the war.

Academics were driven to unionize for many of the same reasons as physical laborers, hoping to win standardized working hours and pay raises, among other things. They were unhappy with their professional status, and were threatened by the shifting control of boards of trustees on college campuses. Unlike physical laborers, academics faced a significant obstacle in anti-communist sentiments, which would hinder efforts by educators to unionize. Paranoia began to grip the country in the interwar period. It would only grow worse during the Second World War and peak with the Second Red Scare, which occurred immediately after World War II. Many academics were viewed as "radicals" and were subjected to fierce criticism and retaliation by their employers.

The 1960s ushered in a new era of collective bargaining. College enrollment grew and the business of higher education grew with it, and faculty began to organize once again to improve their working conditions.

By the end of the decade, faculty at dozens of colleges across the United States had petitioned for collective bargaining rights, including a small group of schools in the State University of New York system that would later go on to found United University Professions.



Birth of a **UNION**

UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

THE NATION'S LARGEST
HIGHER EDUCATION
UNION
WORKING FOR YOU!



WE ARE THE
STATE UNIVERSITY
OF
NEW YORK

W

hen UUP first came to be over half a century ago, academic unions were only just

beginning to gain traction again after decades of blowback from anti-communist forces in the government. In 1967, New York State passed a law which would turn the tides for these groups: the Taylor Law, which allowed public employees to collectively bargain.

Academics wasted no time after the law's passage; less than a year later, the State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT) filed a petition seeking collective bargaining rights at five SUNY schools,

UUP had to carefully balance the needs of each person it represented, be it a professor or a nurse practitioner. It did so spectacularly.

with a separate bargaining unit, the State University Professional Association (SUPA) being created the following year to represent non-teaching professionals. Soon after, academics and professionals recognized the power their combined voices would yield. Around that time, SUPA became the Senate Professional Association (SPA).

SPA and SUFT continued to find their footing throughout the early 1970s, as several groups

contended for the right to be SUNY's sole bargaining unit—only one group could represent university employees in contract negotiations with the state. SPA would win this right in 1971, and two years later it would merge with SUFT to create SUNY/United. The name would later be changed to United University Professions.

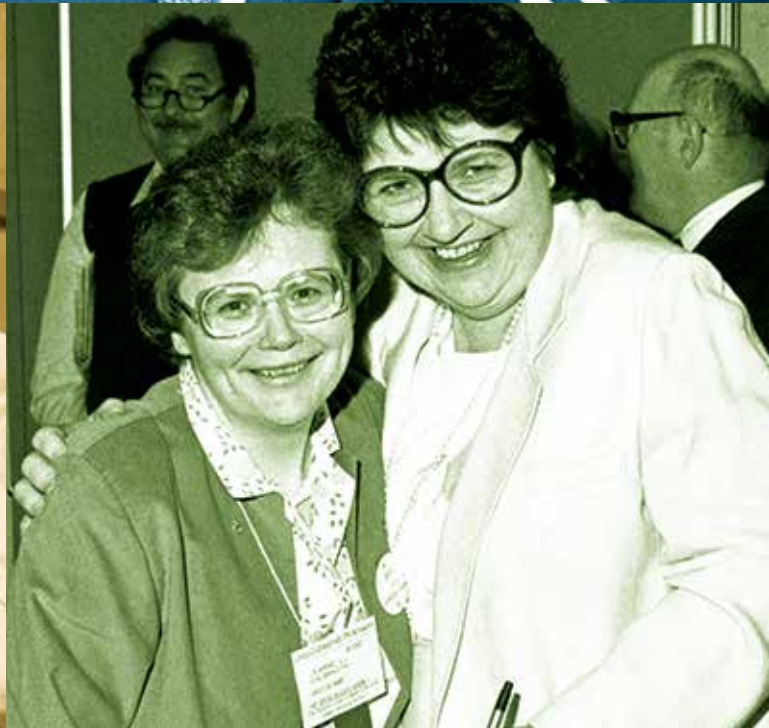
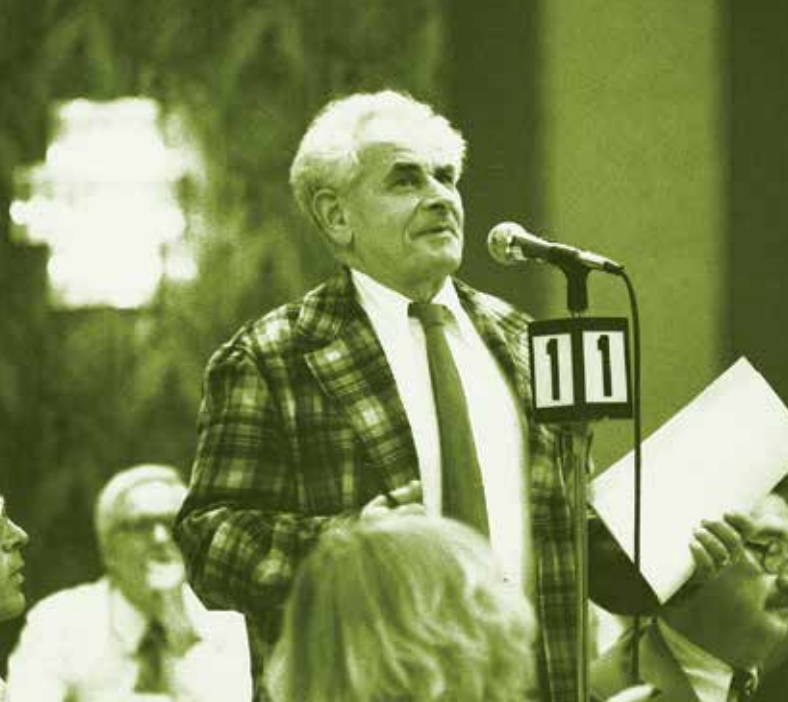
UUP's formative years were spent establishing itself as a representative for the entire SUNY bargaining unit, bolstering the union's membership and addressing internal concerns among both academic and professional staff who were concerned about the union's ability to meet the needs of both groups. SUNY is a diverse system, offering world-class education in a broad range of subject areas, and UUP had to carefully balance the needs of each person it represented, be it a professor or a nurse practitioner.

It did so spectacularly, securing permanent appointment status for professionals in its first year and achieving major gains in family sick leave, sabbatical leave and the creation of minimum salaries in the late 1970s. Forbidden to strike under the Taylor Law, UUP instead uses public demonstrations to make its voice heard, including rallies, marches and other campaigns to push state legislators and SUNY management

to give academic and professional staff the support they deserve.

UUP's main purpose is and has always been to improve the working conditions of those it represents. In 1973, UUP represented 3,500 members; today it represents 38,000. UUP has fought some long, hard battles over its 50 years but has emerged victorious, and will undoubtedly continue to do so for the next 50 years to come.

College faculty have overwhelmingly stood up to have their say and United University Professions, as the largest higher education union in the country, has always been at the forefront of this movement.





**GALLERY OF
PRESIDENTS**

UUP PRESIDENTS

Frederick Kowal

2013 - present

Fred Kowal's 11 years as UUP president have included one challenge after another—a relentless sequence of events Kowal has met with unflappable calm and the conviction that righteous and just actions eventually will prevail.

Under Kowal's leadership, UUP has gained national recognition as the nation's largest higher education union. Before he led UUP, Kowal was a professor of political science at SUNY Cobleskill and a scholar of Indigenous history and customs in the native lands that would become the United States. He often invokes those formative years for their influence on his approach to unionism (he comes from a family with strong union values), and he also often refers to the work of UUP members as a sacred duty of service to SUNY students, patients at SUNY hospitals and the campus communities.

Challenges during Kowal's tenure include the coronavirus pandemic and the first-ever shutdown of the SUNY system during a national emergency. They include repeated efforts by New York state to close

or severely downsize Downstate University Hospital in Brooklyn, which is the teaching hospital at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University. The latest attack by the state on Downstate University Hospital sparked a relentless, all-out effort by UUP to keep the hospital whole and viable. As of this writing, the full story of Downstate has not been written. Kowal has said the push to protect the hospital, which marked the beginning of his UUP presidency and has spanned a decade, is the single most important challenge he has faced in leading the union.

There have been other upheavals and unpredictable events.

A major threat to the labor movement came with the *Janus* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ended public-sector unions' ability to charge agency fees to nonmembers in their bargaining units.

The Supreme Court's 2022 ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* raised serious concerns about health care for women everywhere, and



especially for women dealing with prenatal medical emergencies—even though abortion remains safe, legal and widely available in New York. The massacre in a Buffalo grocery store that left 10 people dead, gunned down in a racist killing by a teenager, led to UUP’s work to publicize and combat the mental health crisis. In the last two years, severe budget shortfalls at more than half the state-operated SUNY campuses, accompanied by major program eliminations at three of those campuses, are just the latest challenges in UUP’s long effort to secure fair, full funding for the entire SUNY state-operated system.

Yet Kowal’s tenure has also been marked by notable triumphs, including the best SUNY budget in more than a decade, for the fiscal year 2023-2024. Another victory: one of the best-ever contracts with the state in UUP’s history, retroactive to 2022 and extending to 2026—an agreement which lifts up UUP’s lowest-earning members with substantial pay increases and is geared toward improving the work conditions of contingent faculty, health care workers, entry-level faculty members and medical residents.

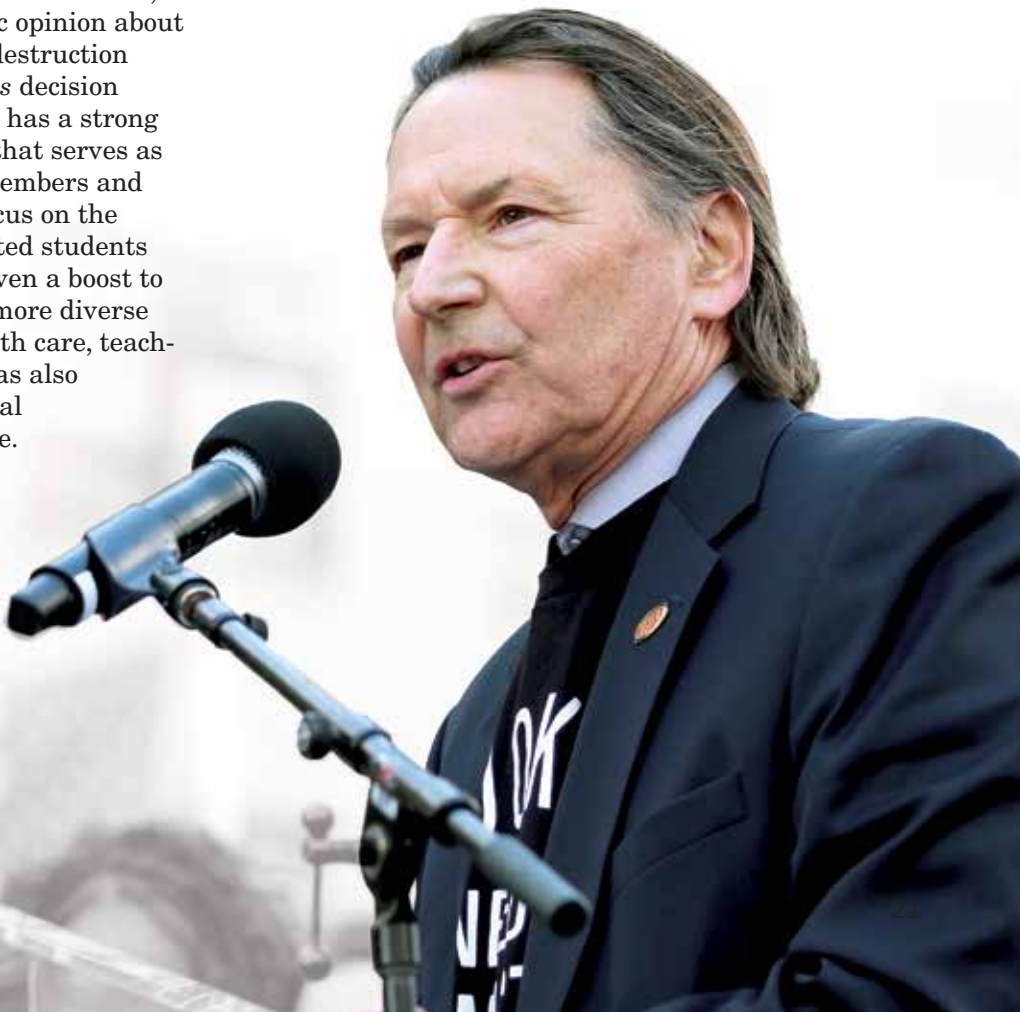
UUP opened its 50th anniversary in 2023 sound, solvent and riding a high tide of public opinion about the labor movement. The threatened destruction of the union movement after the *Janus* decision didn’t happen; as of this writing, UUP has a strong organizing and outreach department that serves as a national model for attracting new members and retaining existing members. UUP’s focus on the most underserved and underrepresented students of SUNY and members of UUP has given a boost to career paths that desperately need a more diverse group of licensed professionals in health care, teaching and mental health services, and has also helped SUNY faculties and professional staffs more fully reflect society at large.

Kowal summarized his approach to his presidency in a column in the Spring 2021 issue of UUP’s membership magazine, *The Voice*. UUP’s challenge that spring was to pursue a legislative agenda packed with social justice efforts and a relentless push for funding for SUNY, even as the coronavirus pandemic continued to upend members’ lives.

“Make no mistake: UUP always puts its members first,” Kowal said. “We will always demand better salaries, better benefits and stronger protections for our members. From fighting for hazard pay for our brave front line workers at SUNY’s public teaching hospitals to ensuring that our members receive pay raises delayed by the state due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are dedicated to defending our contract and fighting for our members.

“But we will also stand for issues that are right and just. Why?

Because we must. Our students are watching us, and they will judge us by the actions we take on behalf of the world that we are—in fact—borrowing from them and all the generations to come.”



UUP PRESIDENTS

Phil Smith

2008 - 2013

Q uiet, scholarly, self-effacing and possessed of a low-key style of speaking, Phil Smith was an unlikely candidate for UUP president. Active in the union for years before he ran for president, Smith

brought a unique perspective to his presidency.

“I’d never been considered an insurgent in my entire life,” recalled Smith, a retired professor of cell biology at Upstate Medical University. “I had a general philosophy that the president of UUP was the least important person in the organization.”

Smith was indeed an insurgent when he challenged incumbent Fred Floss.

The UUP Executive Board named Floss as acting president to finish out UUP President Bill Scheuerman’s unexpired term. Smith ran a quiet but effective campaign in which he used the internet to gauge concerns about the union, members’ jobs and SUNY. He won in a special election in February 2008.

He took office determined to follow the practices he established in his candidacy.

“One of the things I did right away was form a council of chapter presidents to talk about issues on campuses, and how the UUP contract could address them,” he said.

That approach, however, couldn’t help him deal with the SUNY central administration. SUNY chancellors commonly delivered budget testimony that never mentioned the three SUNY teaching hospitals, never mentioned the severe under-

funding and never advocated for realistic funding.

Smith led UUP’s pushback against SUNY’s proposed Resource Allocation Model, or RAM, which would have cut the amount of state funds SUNY doles out to 20 of the 29 state-operated campuses. SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher admitted that

UUP was among the “stakeholders” SUNY listened to in reaching the decision to drop RAM.

One of Smith’s biggest successes was defeating a state initiative known as PHEEIA—the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act. PHEEIA would have essentially privatized SUNY, removing it from state and legislative oversight—allowing it to arbitrarily raise tuition and enter into contracts, leases and other ventures.

Under Smith’s direction, UUP members spent months urging legislators to kill the proposal, sending them thousands of e-letters in the process. UUP created a Save SUNY website, ran television ads and took

to social media to protest PHEEIA. By 2011, the threat was over.

Smith faced upheaval a month into his tenure when Gov. Eliot Spitzer resigned on accusations that he had been hiring prostitutes. The loss was keen: Smith had found the governor refreshingly supportive of funding for public higher education. SUNY funding again lagged during the administrations of David Paterson, who succeeded Spitzer, and then

Andrew Cuomo. Smith realized he could not fix SUNY’s chronic underfunding in his time as president, a herculean task faced by President Fred Kowal when he took office in 2015.

“I think the biggest problem I had as president was advocating for a university system that really didn’t give a damn about itself,” Smith said.



UUP ACTING PRESIDENT

Fred Floss

November 2007 - February 2008

An urban economist by training, Fred Floss brought a keen understanding of the New York state economy and budget process to his brief tenure as UUP acting president.

The UUP Executive Board appointed Floss as acting president in November 2007, after UUP President Bill Scheuerman resigned to become president of the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland. Floss served until February 2008, when Phil Smith won election as president.

A Scheuerman protégé and a professor of economics and finance at SUNY Buffalo State University, Floss entered office with a strong background of union leadership. He was a past statewide vice pres-

ident for academics and was chief negotiator for the 2007-2011 contract, a role he continued after becoming acting president.

“I was spending most of my time trying to get the contract passed,” Floss recalled of his time as acting president.



He also made the UUP staff a priority, by expanding the number of staff positions and adding new staff members as the needs of the union changed. Floss' tenure as UUP acting president unfolded during the short-lived administration of Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who took office in January 2007.

Floss lost his bid for the presidency in a contested election. As his successor, Phil Smith, took office in February 2008, the brief good times for SUNY funding came to an end.



UUP PRESIDENTS

William Scheuerman

1993-2007

Bill Scheuerman, UUP president from 1993 to 2007, seamlessly fit into an era in New York politics defined by the so-called “three men in a room.”

He is the only UUP president to be arrested, which occurred during a rally for unionized graduate students at NYU. He displayed a zest for the attention-getting part of his job, but also behind-the-scenes maneuvering.

The “three men in a room” referred to Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Republican Gov. George Pataki. Nothing got done without their approval—including funding for SUNY.

Scheuerman, professor emeritus of political science at SUNY Oswego, was well-schooled in the art of bargaining. He was UUP’s chief negotiator for the 1988-1991 contract, which at last defined the criteria that qualified part-time academic and part-time professional employees for health insurance.



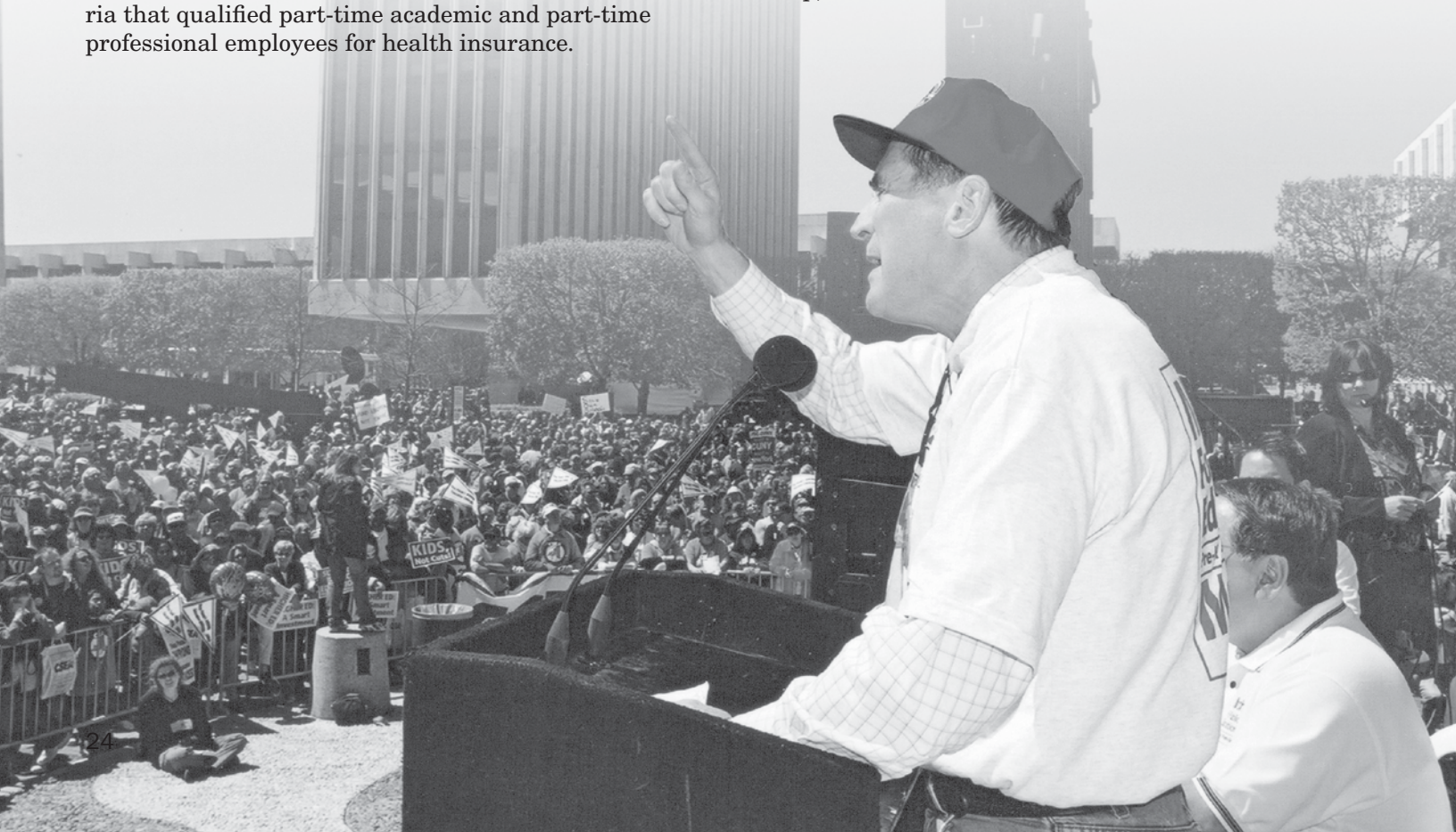
“That was a really good gain,” Scheuerman recalled of the health insurance. “That struck me that we really had to build a political operation.”

He needed that foundation when Gov. Pataki started talking about closing SUNY campuses and ending tenure. UUP’s campaign to fight back included printing fake “SUNY Bucks” and sending them to SUNY vendors to warn of possible campus closures.

“It was just so much fun,” Scheuerman recalled. “It was a game; it was a competition.”

Scheuerman stepped down in November 2007 to become president of the National Labor College in Maryland, which has since closed. He left a union that made its mark in statewide politics, and he set the stage for UUP to become nationally recognized.

UUP’s scholarship for graduate students, the William E. Scheuerman Post Baccalaureate Scholarship, is named for Scheuerman.



UUP PRESIDENTS

John “Tim” Reilly

1987 - 1993

Tim Reilly, a dedicated unionist and nationally recognized champion for social justice, served as UUP’s fourth statewide president.

An English professor at the University at SUNY Albany, Reilly won important TIAA-CREF pension reforms and helped to create the AFT’s Division of Higher Education.

He was the union’s chief negotiator and negotiations chair for three contracts, which resulted in the creation of joint labor/management committees and dealt with part-time concerns. He strengthened the legislative and political action arm of the union.

“Tim was a man endowed with a clear vision of how things ‘ought to be,”
former UUP President



Nuala McGann Drescher told *The Voice* in a 2004 story following Reilly’s death. “But unlike many visionaries, he also possessed a practical understanding of how to translate that vision into reality. He was a man who really made a difference.”

As an academic, Reilly was a noted expert on author Richard Wright, writing the afterwords for two of Wright’s books. He also wrote extensively on popular literature, winning the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America and the George Dove Award for Distinguished Work in Crime Literature from the

Popular Culture Association.

Reilly received the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service in 1994. In 2004, he was honored by the NAACP for his lifelong commitment to civil rights.

The John M. Reilly Legislative Intern Program is named for him. Reilly died in 2004.



UUP PRESIDENTS

Nuala McGann Drescher

1981 - 1987

Nuala McGann Drescher made history in 1981 as UUP's first (and to date, only) female president. Drescher has been a longtime presence at the University at Buffalo teaching history and social studies education; she was named a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor in 1992, and is now a professor emerita.

Under her guidance, UUP made great strides toward better funding for public higher education and benefits for both academics and professionals. She oversaw the ratification of two three-year contracts with the state. The union curbed proposed layoffs during her tenure as president, leading to the addition of \$15.9 million to the state budget, and overturned a SUNY rule forcing tenured faculty to retire at age 70.



"I just worked so hard to make it all work while I was active," Drescher told *The Voice*, UUP's membership magazine, in 2013. "When I came into office, a lot of people didn't care or were positively hostile, and we eliminated a lot of that hostility."

Drescher's work led to the creation of what is now the NYS/UUP Joint Labor Management Committees. One of those programs, the Dr. Nuala McGann Drescher Diversity and Inclusion Leave Program, is named for her; the program provides funding for junior, tenure-track faculty and professionals to take research

leaves. The program helps academics achieve tenure and professionals achieve permanent status; it is designed to help underrepresented populations in the SUNY system.

She was awarded the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service in 1990.



UUP PRESIDENTS

Samuel Wakshull

1975 - 1981

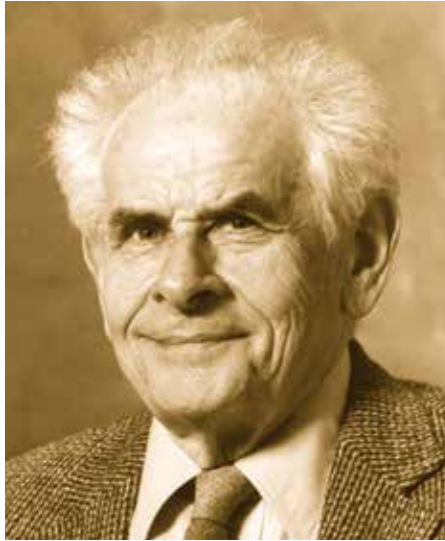
Samuel Wakshull had his work cut out for him when he became UUP's second president in 1975.

UUP had formed just two years before, and it was Wakshull's job to convince skeptical SUNY academics and professionals that joining a union—specifically UUP—was a good idea.

“(UUP) didn't have that many members and it was a challenge to organize right from the start,” Wakshull told *The Voice*, UUP's membership magazine, in 2013.

“When we merged the two unions, we had to decide (which side) would be the power and that raised all kinds of other internal problems. For a couple of years, it wasn't a pleasant place.”

Wakshull, who came to SUNY Buffalo State in 1963, helped found the State University Federation



of Teachers (SUFT), which would later merge with the Senate Professional Association (SPA) to become UUP.

But Wakshull's goal to build UUP's membership—buoyed by the union's focus on winning better wages, and health benefits for part-time employees—was his greatest success as UUP president. The union's membership nearly tripled—to 11,500—during his tenure as president.

Under his leadership, UUP made gains in women's rights, overturning a SUNY policy which banned pregnant women from working. The union also halted

potential SUNY budget cuts multiple times, launching the Save SUNY campaign in 1980 to advocate for better public higher education funding.

Wakshull was one of the first recipients of the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service, in 1989.



UUP PRESIDENTS

Lawrence DeLucia

1973 - 1975

Lawrence DeLucia had little interest in becoming UUP's first president.

But at UUP's first Delegate Assembly in 1973, delegates agreed he was the right man at the right time for the job.

Hailing from the Bronx, DeLucia taught economics at SUNY Oswego. He oversaw the merger of the Senate Professional Association (SPA) and State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT) in 1973 to form UUP.

"Larry kind of got drafted," said longtime Cortland Chapter member Harvey Inventasch during a 2013 interview in *The Voice*, UUP's membership magazine. "After (the merger of SPA and SUFT), he was the guy who everyone agreed would work. He was an economist and he was a very pragmatic guy who had his head screwed on straight."

DeLucia's leadership allowed the union to find its footing in its early years and paved the way for temporary workers to receive permanent status at SUNY

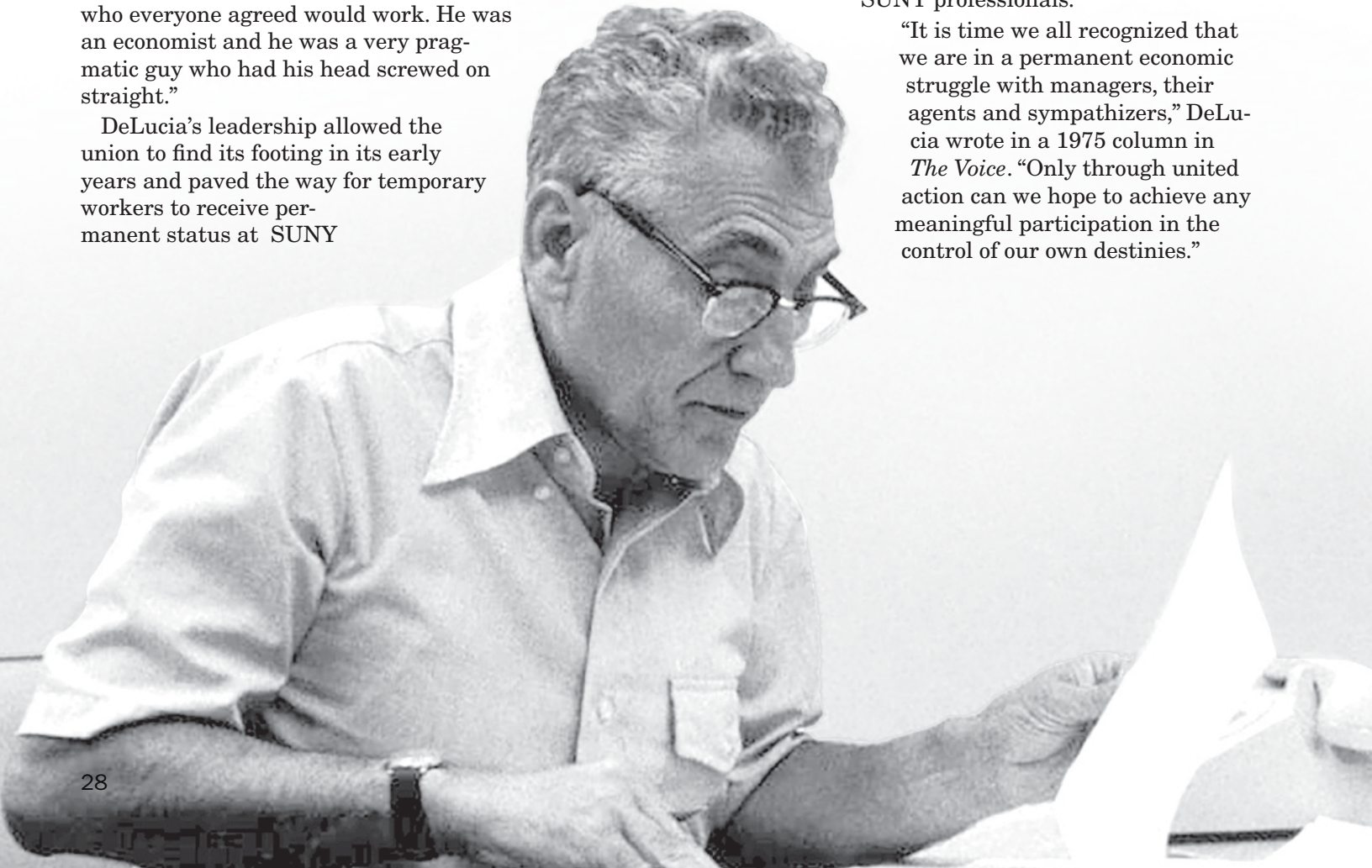


campuses. His biggest challenges were to organize the young union, increase membership and work toward securing a contract with the state—and none were easy to accomplish.

"We weren't sure what to even negotiate for because it was all new territory for us," said Inventasch, who was on UUP's statewide Executive Board in 1975 and served on UUP's first contract Negotiations Team.

DeLucia and his Executive Board laid the union's foundation. They nailed down UUP's first contract with the state—which included a provision for permanent appointment status for professionals and five days of family sick leave—and fought off a 1974 attempt by CSEA to represent SUNY professionals.

"It is time we all recognized that we are in a permanent economic struggle with managers, their agents and sympathizers," DeLucia wrote in a 1975 column in *The Voice*. "Only through united action can we hope to achieve any meaningful participation in the control of our own destinies."



UUP's 30-minute president

Through its 50-year history, UUP has had seven presidents and one acting president.

Well, two acting presidents—sort of.

John Marino served as UUP's statewide vice president of professionals from 2000 through 2011. He was also UUP's acting president for about 30 minutes as UUP's Executive Board prepared to appoint Fred Floss to that job on Nov. 30, 2007.

That's also the date that longtime UUP President Bill Scheuerman tendered his resignation—with just months left in his seventh term—to become president of the Maryland-based National Labor College.

According to the UUP Constitution, in the event that the union's president is "absent," one of UUP's two statewide vice presidents—the vice president of academics or vice president of professionals—automatically becomes acting president.

Since Scheuerman was an academic, Marino became acting president—marking the first and only time a professional has led the union—even if it was for just a half hour.

Marino said he took about 30 minutes after assuming the role of acting president to get a "clear understanding of what my duties were." He returned and



led the meeting. Minutes later, the board voted to appoint Floss as acting president.

Floss served as acting president until the Winter Delegate Assembly in February 2008. Phil Smith, who was statewide vice president for academics from 2000 through 2004, won the election, 185-155.

— Mike Lisi



A decades-long push for equity



UUP's support for family policies, pay equity in the workplace dates to 1970s

By Liza Frenette, special to UUP

United University Professions has shown itself to be a lion in advances for gender equity and fair family policies, with a history of advocacy for these issues almost as old as the union, and one that continues today.

Time, travel, research, data, countless meetings, rallies, committee work, volunteer lobbying and sweat equity by UUP leaders and members have contributed to advances in members' rights. UUP has achieved improvements in family leave; gender-inequity data; family time for adoption and foster care; financial support for a historic lawsuit in the 1960s on unfair pay for women; and hard-line, successful negotiating.

Hard-fought lessons and victories have come from many UUP members, including those featured here.

Prioritizing paid family leave

UUP achieved a major negotiated benefit for bargaining unit members in 2018, one which recognized how many families struggle to balance parenting with work. Under that achievement, UUP became the first public sector union in the state to bargain into coverage under the New York State Paid Family Leave law for partially paid leave in its 2016-2022 contract. This achievement included favorable eligibility requirements for part-time employees. Members ratified the contract containing that benefit in September 2018.

Leave time for UUP-represented SUNY employ-

ees got even better with the 2022-2026 contract, which members overwhelmingly ratified in August 2023. Under that agreement, UUP also bargained into coverage under the state's Paid Parental Leave policy. The expanded leave allowed members up to 12 weeks of parental leave with pay.

The Paid Parental Leave benefit and UUP's other contract provisions for leaves can be used successively to maximize a family leave situation, said Jamie Dangler, a Cortland Chapter member and former statewide vice president for academics. If taken consecutively, the total family and parental leave benefits provide up to six months of leave for new parents, with at least three months of that time providing partial pay, and the other three months providing full pay. The policy applies to adoptive and foster parents, as well.

Under this agreement, the Paid Family Leave benefit and UUP's other contract provisions for leaves can be used successively to maximize a family leave situation, said Dangler.

A sociologist with a special interest in work-life balance, especially for women, Dangler brought that background into her statewide leadership with UUP.

UUP has been investigating and taking on targeted concerns about potential harm to its members with the creation of committees including the Women's Rights and Concerns Committee, and with the 2001 formation of the statewide Family Leave Committee.

First chaired by Dangler, the Family Leave Committee used member surveys and focus groups to document members' family leave needs and

Watershed improvements in family leave, gender inequity, family time for adoption and foster care, fair pay for women, and successful negotiating have all been achieved by UUP.

1967

New York passes the Public Employees Fair Employment Act, more commonly known as the Taylor Law, which grants public employees the right to organize and form unions.

1968

The State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT) files a petition seeking collective bargaining rights at five SUNY campuses.



problems, and to inform members of the economic and career consequences of inadequate family leave. Over the next few years, the state met with UUP on the concern.

A change came in the 2007-2011 contract, when annual family sick days were doubled from 15 to 30. The family sick days could also be used by non-birth parents, as well as for care of ill relatives or elder care, encircling many family situations.

Groundbreaking findings on pay inequity

During this contract period, Dangler plunged into a study to explore gender pay inequity, working with SUNY Cortland economists Kathy Burke and Lisi Krall. They studied differences in salary by gender in the SUNY system.

Key findings from salary analysis at seven SUNY campuses for both academics and professionals revealed that academic females were paid less than males at statistically significant levels, and compression was affecting salaries at those sample campuses. The total difference between male and female salaries was \$11,111; rank, years of service, discipline-specific market salaries and terminal degree accounted for \$6,617. Unexplained was a \$4,306 gap, which the study authors reported “may be due to inequity.”

Further, cost-of-living adjustments granted by SUNY were not keeping up with market trends in academia—and females experienced this lag more than males, the authors reported.

“Across institutions, male salaries appear to be consistently higher than

Top: VPA Alissa Karl, left, stands in solidarity with other supporters of reproductive rights. Although abortion remains safe, legal and accessible in New York, UUP issued a statement condemning the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 ruling that overturned the constitutional right to abortion. The union’s position on reproductive freedom followed its decades of advocacy for pay equity and policies that support working people and families.

Facing page: Statewide VPA Jamie Dangler, right, demonstrates in support of paid family leave. Dangler worked on a groundbreaking UUP study of gender pay inequity in SUNY, as UUP negotiated the 2007-2011 contract. Demonstrating with Dangler are, left, Bill Simons of Oneonta and former statewide MDO Tom Hoey.

1970

The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) orders a SUNY-wide, single-unit election which is won by the Senate Professional Association (SPA).

1971

SPA affiliates with the National Education Association (NEA) and is certified by PERB as an exclusive bargaining agent.

female salaries, particularly within male-dominated engineering schools,” the report stated.

“There was considerable variation across campuses, and within academic disciplines and schools within the campus,” Dangler noted in the report’s summary. The situation needed to be studied in a more extensive way than UUP had the ability or access to do.

“When salary compression is addressed, it will help to mitigate salary disparity regardless of what those disparities may be caused by,” she said, noting that race and gender might be linked to disparities. Salary compression occurs when market salaries rise faster than the salaries of existing employees. UUP’s 2016-2022 contract began to address salary compression with money earmarked for many members to receive additions to their base salaries.

In recognition that more needed to be done, UUP’s 2022-2026 contract includes salary increases for many of the lowest-paid UUP-represented employees, as well as changes to holiday pay, location stipends and on-call pay for hospital workers—many of whom are women working in some of the lower-paying jobs in health care. And, as Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin has noted, this effort will not stop with the current contract.

A loss in court brings change to Stony Brook

For UUPer Judith Wishnia, salary inequity was standard when her faculty career began. Her activism on gender inequity began as a mother of three working at Stony Brook University.

“In my case, I was hired as an assistant to the man who ran the international studies program. My salary was \$9,000; one third of his. I did most of the work and then he went on sabbatical. I took over the department, still earning \$9,000,” said Wishnia.

Like many other women, she was not about to sit back on her heels.

“A group of women met on campus and formed the first chapter of Suffolk County NOW (National Organization for Women). We heard from so many women: hired at lower salaries, no tenure, etc. So, we decided to start a suit,” Wishnia said.

The 28 women faculty members and professionals filed a class-action lawsuit



“A committee structure means people get a chance to speak up. A bottom-up organization is the nature of the union.”

VICKI JANIK, CHAIR, UUP WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND CONCERNS COMMITTEE



against Stony Brook University in May 1976, and the lawsuit received national attention when the *New York Times* reported on it.

Wishnia reached out to union colleagues for support at a UUP Delegate Assembly. The lawyer was handling the suit pro bono, but money was needed for depositions and other case-related expenses.

“The (UUP) reform caucus not only supported me, they made sure I would speak,” the 93-year-old recalled. “I made my pitch and was overwhelmingly supported by the DA.” She said \$20,000 was donated.

The women lost the lawsuit, Wishnia said, with a ruling that Stony Brook did treat women differently than men, but that such disparity was the norm in society.

Despite that legal defeat, Wishnia noted, “[The lawsuit] did change Stony Brook. They became aware of the dissatisfaction and began to pay women better salaries. I still remember that I had been teaching four years, had a Ph.D., and they hired a man who had never taught and was still writing his thesis. He was to be paid \$15,000 and I was earning \$13,000. I complained, mentioned the suit, and got my raise.”

While still teaching, Wishnia was working on a book—which would have gotten her a raise when it was published—when she was asked to serve on UUP’s contract Negotiations Team.

“I decided that several hundred people might read my book, but over 30,000 union members would benefit from a good contract, so I gave up the book. We were out for two years but finally avoided the state’s desire for contracting out,” she said, noting that she traveled from Long Island to Albany every weekend for two years for work with the Negotiations Team. Contracting out would have meant job losses for faculty and professionals; it was an end run around union jobs.

Unions, she said, are “critical. My father, a union man, always said, the bosses will give you nothing unless you organize and fight. But unions are not just about wages and working conditions. It’s also about the respect for our efforts to do a good job. Unions are also active in campaigns for social justice.”

Personal experience informs activism

Coming from a family of unionists also helped shape the beliefs of Alissa Karl, statewide UUP vice president for academics. Her mom’s California state job provided health care and a steady income, and now her mother has a pension.

As a faculty member at Brockport, Karl gave birth to her daughter 11 years ago. She said she was misinformed about the Family and Medical Leave Act, and only had sick leave to use, combined with the college’s winter break. It was her responsibility to find colleagues to fill in for her classes while on sick leave. The dean further asked her to modify her syllabus based on how those colleagues would teach courses—not how she would.

Male colleagues, she said, asked her personal details about her pregnancy—worried that she might deliver her baby early and they would have to cover more classes for her.

“There was no culture around an individual’s right to be pregnant,” she said. She recalls grading papers for her graduate class with a week-old baby. “All over this union you can find these stories.”

Karl said she is proud of the work that UUP has accomplished to advance the rights of workers. UUP’s Legislative and Political Department continues its work for legislation to broaden health rights, including getting into the 2023 state budget a requirement that all public campuses make medical abortion pills available through campus health centers or with nearby community partners.

“We’re working on a bill to provide 24/7 access to emergency contraception,” she said, likely through vending machines.

Eileen Landy is another UUP leader who experienced inequity. She began

1972

United Teachers of New York (UTNY) and the New York State Teachers Association (NYSTA) merge to form New York State United Teachers (NYSUT).

1973

SPA and SUFT merge to form SUNY/United, later renamed United University Professions (UUP), and Lawrence DeLucia of SUNY Oswego is elected president.

UUP tackles women’s issues, fighting against antiquated policies which force pregnant women to stop working.

TIMELINE

1974

CSEA petitions PERB for the professional portion of the bargaining unit; PERB rejects the bid, keeping the union intact. UUP membership grows to 4,000.

1975

Samuel Wakshull of Buffalo State is elected president.

1976

UUP stages its first informational picket outside the state capitol, protesting a plan to cut over \$52 million from the SUNY budget. The proposed cuts led to widespread student protests throughout the SUNY system.

teaching at SUNY Old Westbury in 1976, and she did not get a salary bump when she finished her Ph.D. within two years. She joined the UUP chapter on her campus, familiar with unions from her dad's job as labor organizer for the International Union of Electrical.

She lauded UUP's efforts to address salary compression through bargaining. As former chair of the sociology department, she hired people at higher salaries than she was making.

Firsthand experience with family leave also motivated her activism. In 1983 Landy had a son, and she had to get permission from the college president for a Title F leave—a state regulation that covers certain types of extended sick leave and leaves of absence—so she could have one semester at home with her infant. The leave was at his discretion.

UUP's achievements in securing better family leave for members are huge, she said.

As a former chapter vice president and president, she met with other UUP chapter presidents. By exchanging ideas, "we found ways of solving issues we never thought of," she said.

Landy served as statewide secretary for 16 years, beginning in 2001. She worked on negotiations committees and UUP's participation with the fledgling national Campaign for the Future of Higher Education, a think tank to support higher education unions. Her equity activism included serving as UUP liaison to the national Coalition

of Labor Union Women and taking part in many rallies, including the 2017 Women's March on Washington. In 2019 she received the Nina Mitchell Award.

Colleague Vicki Janik, another Mitchell Award winner, has worked on equity issues as a faculty member, activist and chair of UUP's Women's Rights and Concerns Committee.

"A committee structure means people get a chance to speak up," Janik said. "A bottom-up organization is the nature of the union."

Janik said the committee has responded to women's pay, hostile workplaces—a concern being investigated since a 2020 UUP survey netted 3,100 responses—international women's freedom, paid parental leave, child care costs and reproductive health care.

Janik said the committee has focused on pay to adjunct staff. Data presented to UUP showed that an adjunct staff member teaching four courses a year might earn \$12,000, while the federal poverty level for a family of one was \$11,880.

In its 2022-2026 contract, UUP won historic minimum pay rate increases for contingent staff to \$5,500 per course at comprehensive and technical campuses and \$6,000 per course at University centers and health sciences centers by 2026.

The committee's examination of child care issues took form with a 2022 study of eight SUNY campuses, revealing that a SUNY employee earning \$50,000 spends an average of 37% of their net pay on campus child care—and as high as 51% at one campus.

Additional approaches to family concerns came when the WRCC presented a UUP resolution against the Supreme Court's 2022 *Dobbs* decision, which overturned the constitutional right to abortion.

So the story of gender-equity and family issues continues, with a new generation of members ready to carry this fight forward in the next 50 years.

"I always thought that one of UUP's strengths was how it engages people at the chapters."

**EILEEN LANDY,
SUNY OLD WESTBURY**

What's in a name? UUP becomes UUP

U

UP wasn't always named UUP. The union started out as SUNY/United but was forced to change its name just weeks after forming in 1973.

To find out why, let's go back to the before times, before UUP was even a union at all.

In 1968, a group called the State University Federation of Teachers, or SUFT, petitioned the New York State Public Employment Relations Board, or PERB, for exclusive collective bargaining rights for professionals at five SUNY campuses—Cortland, New Paltz, Brockport, Buffalo State and Delhi.

But in 1969, PERB refused to certify the election and instead ordered that an election be held to select one union to represent all SUNY academics and professionals. SUFT appealed that decision, which was upheld by the state Supreme Court's Appellate Division in April 1970.

With a certification election looming, contenders emerged from all directions. The SUNY University Senate, the Faculty Association of SUNY (FASUNY), CSEA, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Senate Professional Association (SPA), the State University Professional Association (SUPA)—which merged with SPA in 1970—and SUFT all made bids to represent SUNY workers.

Four groups qualified for PERB's certification election in fall 1970—SPA, backed by the National Educators Association; SUFT, which had the support of the American Federation of Teachers; AAUP and CSEA.

The election quickly became a competition between SPA and SUFT, but despite months of vigorous politicking, there was no clear-cut winner. Finally, SPA won a runoff election in January 1971

by less than 700 votes and was PERB-certified as the bargaining agent for SUNY employees.

But that's not the end of the story. By 1972, SPA and SUFT—which harbored deep distrust toward each other—were talking merger, spurred by a serious outside challenge for UUP representative rights. SPA leaders saw a merger as a way to rebuff the challenges and survive.

In May 1973, both groups met, each with proposals for constitutional amendments and candidates' slates. Putting their disagreements aside, they elected officers and merged to become a new organization called SUNY/United.

Weeks after forming, SUNY/United found itself with a new problem: The union needed a new name. SUNY didn't want to share its name and told the union to stop using it.

But just weeks after forming, SUNY/United found itself with a new problem: The union needed a new name. SUNY didn't want to share its name and told the union to stop using it. The SUNY/United Executive Board decided to bring four names to delegates, who would vote on the one they liked best at a delegates' meeting Oct. 12, 1973.

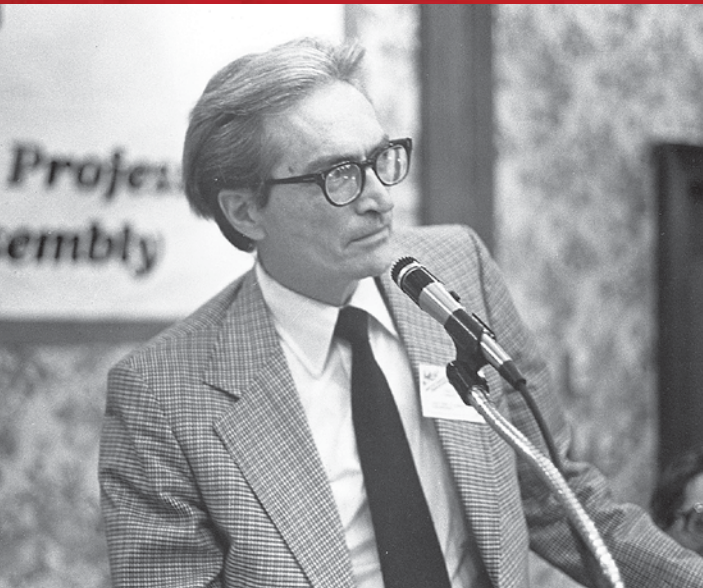
There, delegates voted to change the union's name to United University Professions, which took effect Jan. 24, 1974. A month later, PERB amended the union's certification, changing its name from SPA to UUP.

— Mike Lisi



UUP IN THE 1970s

Newly formed UUP sends the message, "We're here to stay."

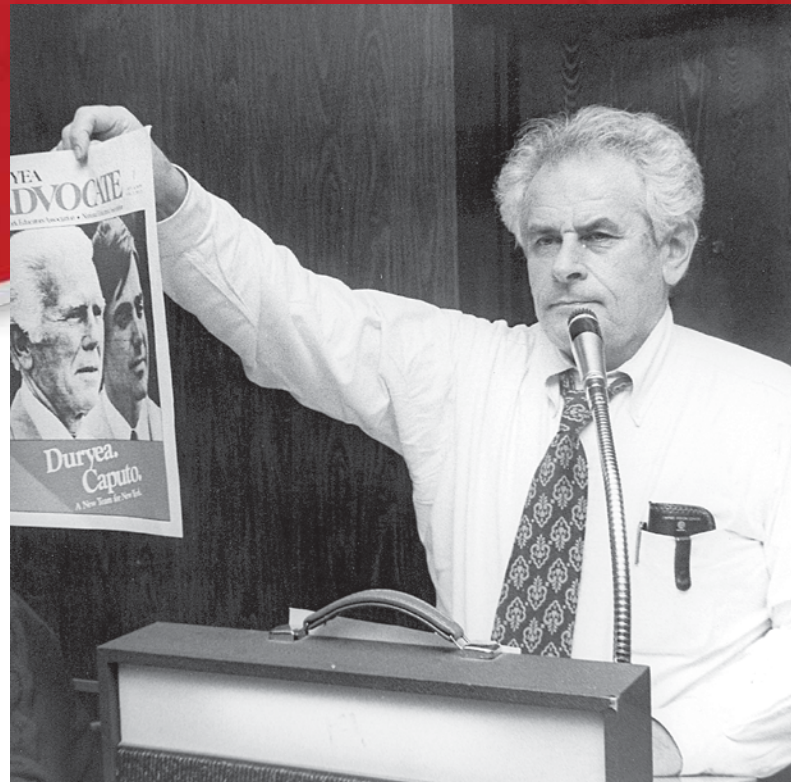


In the formative years of UUP, delegates numbered in the hundreds, and the emphasis was on gaining credibility and recognition as a union. In the 1970s, UUP was many years away from having the political strength to tackle any of the larger societal issues of the day as it would in later decades. The 1970s were a time of growth, of defining the union's mission and goals and of sending a message of strength and solidarity to the state.



Early leaders emerged at that time, many of whom would play key roles in UUP for decades: Fred Miller, top left; Ed Wesnofske, center photo, second from left; Nuala McGann Drescher, fifth from left; Samuel Wakshull, second from Drescher's left; and facing page, center photo right; Lawrence DeLucia, left; and Ivan Steen, bottom right.





Ed Drummond, above, second from right, was a longtime president of the Stony Brook HSC Chapter and a pioneering advocate for employees of color at that campus. Samuel Wakshull, top right, and Lawrence DeLucia, on left in center right photo, were UUP's second and first presidents, respectively. Ivan Steen, bottom right photo, was Albany Chapter president and spoke out against UAlbany cuts to the Humanities in 2010.



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Professional Sta
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Coalitions add strength, effectiveness to UUP's mission

By Darryl McGrath



he American labor movement was built on the power of coalitions. This is how the AFL-CIO formed as a collective of industry and craft unions, and it's how the National

Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers gained prominence.

UUP has long recognized the effectiveness of coalitions to advance its messages of social justice; racial, gender and economic equity; concern about the environment; and, always, appropriate funding and work conditions throughout public higher education labor. For a union, there is truly strength in numbers.

Coalitions have also helped UUP members connect with colleagues around the country across a wide spectrum of higher education. At different times in UUP's history, members have aligned with graduate students; contingents; medical residents; professionals; and tenured and tenure-track faculty throughout the country and across a range of higher education systems, from community colleges to university centers.

UUP's involvement in coalitions has taken many forms in the last 20 years. Examples include:

The community-wide effort led by UUP to save Downstate University Hospital.

Founding memberships in two national coalitions to promote solidarity in higher education: the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education and Higher Education Labor United.

A 2022 march across the Brooklyn Bridge with community groups, social justice organizations, unions and student groups to highlight the need for better funding for public colleges and universities.

The Women's March in Washington, D.C., in January 2017.

Participation in two national coalitions of contingent faculty: the New Faculty Majority, and the Coalition

of Contingent Academic Labor. A UUP member and longtime activist on behalf of contingent faculty, Anne Wiegard, was a co-founder of the New Faculty Majority.

UUP's founding membership in New York Renews, a prominent statewide coalition of labor and environmental groups.

Participation in the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, an anti-poverty movement led by two Protestant ministers, the Rev. William Barber II and the Rev. Liz Theoharis. UUP has long shared many of the ideals embraced in the movement's platform, including anti-racism, efforts to alleviate poverty and a push for environmental justice, and Barber has supported the effort by UUP to achieve greater funding for public higher education in New York.

Union strength; national attention

Participation in a coalition can be empowering, said Eileen Landy, former UUP statewide secretary and the lead UUP representative in the formation of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education more than a decade ago.

UUP is no longer active in CFHE and its influence has lessened over the past several years. Hampered by a lack of money to pursue its ambitious national agenda and lacking a solid organizational structure with which to advance its ideals, the CFHE nevertheless counted major higher education labor unions as members in its early years: UUP, the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY and the California Faculty Association.

Then-UUP President Phil Smith asked Landy to represent UUP at the CFHE's first meeting in Los Angeles in 2011.

"It was thrilling to be a part of that," Landy recalled. "It was so affirming to meet people from all over North America and find out we all shared the same issues."

UUP TIMELINE

1977

The Agency Fee law signed by Gov. Hugh Carey directs that non-members must pay a fee equivalent to dues to the union representing them in collective bargaining. UUP successfully overturns a SUNY Board of Trustees policy banning pregnant women from the workplace.

1978

UUP wins a PERB-ordered election and is certified as an exclusive bargaining agent. The union negotiates guaranteed minimum salaries for full-time employees and benefits for part-timers and secures contractual guarantees to curb unilateral decision-making by college presidents.

Union membership grows to 9,000.



Faith and labor have often forged powerful coalitions seeking social justice and equity for workers. UUP and other education unions have worked with the Rev. William Barber (foreground, lower right), co-chair of the anti-poverty program Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival. In this 2015 photo, President Kowal (center) is joined by Rowena Blackman-Stroud, to his right; Eileen Landy, in front of Kowal; and AFT President Randi Weingarten, (lower left) at a rally led by Barber on the Million Dollar Staircase at the State Capitol building. (Photo credit: New York State United Teachers.)

UUP eventually served as the host union for one of the CFHE's national meetings, which included panel discussions by student activists from around the country. Landy also credits the CFHE's concern about students with helping launch the annual Higher Education Advocacy Day, a cooperative effort with the student-based NYPIRG.

"I think we benefitted generally, we learned a lot and obviously, the concept of coalitions continues," Landy said.

UUP has long been affiliated with a network of statewide and national unions: the AFL-CIO, the AFT, the NEA and NYSUT. UUP has also had a long collaborative relationship with the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY, and these two prominent public higher education unions share the goal of seeing the SUNY and CUNY systems fully funded. United, their advocacy can make a powerful statement.

A can't-miss march

Never has that been more evident than in the March 2022 rally in New York City organized by UUP and the PSC. The event started on the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge, and then more than 1,000 students and members from UUP, the PSC, other unions, community groups and other coalition members marched from one end of the bridge to the other. The New York City Police De-

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congratulations to the
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on the occasion of their
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UUP TIMELINE

1979

UUP stops the state Division of the Budget from making huge cuts to SUNY funding. The proposed cuts would have lopped nearly \$11 million off the budget and raised tuition by \$100 per student.



UUP has long supported other workers as they organize for the first time or seek a new contract. Here, UUP members join the picket line with striking IUE-CWA Local 81359 workers at the Momentive Performance Materials in Waterford, N.Y., Dec. 9, 2016. The strike ended in February 2017 with a new contract for the workers



partment closed the Manhattan-bound lanes across the bridge for the marchers, who carried the UUP-PSC banner ahead of a column of supporters that stretched for hundreds of feet. Pedestrians lined the adjacent walkway to take in the colorful scene as they cheered, called out encouragement or shouted their own union affiliations.

Shutting down part of a landmark bridge made for such a powerful, attention-getting demonstration of union strength and solidarity that UUP used that technique a second time—also in New York City and also for an event that called together labor allies in a coalition of faith leaders, unionists and community residents.

The date was Feb. 29, 2024, and the event was a rally to tell Gov. Kathy Hochul that “Brooklyn needs Downstate.” UUP obtained a permit to shut down the street in front of the hospital, and an impressive range of community, state and national leaders in the labor and social justice movements took to a stage in the middle of Clarkson Avenue and demanded that the state reverse its plan to close Downstate.

THE TACTIC WORKED; as of this writing, Downstate University Hospital remains open, and a state commission has been formed to study the future of this desperately needed hospital.

The precedent for this event was a similar coalition formed a decade earlier, when the late Rowena Blackman-Stroud, the longtime UUP Downstate Chapter president, led a series of rallies and news conferences to prevent threatened cut-backs at the hospital. That effort led to national recognition for Blackman-Stroud and formed the basis of a

**As UUP looks to the future,
coalitions will always be part
of the union's identity.**



UUP TIMELINE

1980

UUP launches the Save SUNY campaign, which mobilizes thousands of members to protest budget cuts and advocate for better funding for public higher education.

1981

Nuala McGann Drescher of Buffalo State is elected president.

1983

UUP protests a proposal by Gov. Mario Cuomo to lay off 3,000 SUNY employees; the protest leads to the addition of \$15.9 million to the budget, eliminating the need for layoffs. Meanwhile, UUP opens the Member Benefits Department and awards the first Friend of SUNY Awards to Sen. Kenneth LaValle and Assemblymember Mark Alan Siegel.



solid relationship with the community around the hospital that UUP turned to again in 2024.

As UUP looks to the future, coalitions will always be part of the union's identity. They're one of the most effective ways for UUP to spread its messages of hope and activism. As UUP President Fred Kowal noted during a New York City march in April 2022 that brought together dozens of unions and social justice organizations under the banner of the Poor People's Campaign, "Throughout its nearly 50-year history, UUP has consistently stood with those who are victims of injustice."

With the solidarity afforded by coalitions, UUP will continue to do just that.

UUP was a founding member of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education in the early 2000s. A bold and innovative idea for its time, the CFHE united higher education unions from around North America to address common concerns of pay, tenure and workload. Then-UUP Secretary and UUP's CFHE liaison Eileen Landy speaks at a CFHE meeting in New York City.



UUP repels challenge to represent SUNY workers, wins 7% yearly raises in second contract

In the spring of 1979, UUP's Negotiations Team reached a tentative agreement on its second contract with the state.

And it was some contract.

The three-year pact, which extended from 1979 through 1982, included 7% across-the-board raises in the first year plus another 1% for discretionary awards. The second and third years carried raises of up to 7%, depending on the rate of inflation.

It also included improved medical and maternity benefits and a fund to retrain employees who had lost their jobs due to SUNY retrenchments.

But that summer, just 73% of UUP members who cast ballots voted to ratify an agreement that would be considered incredible by today's standards. UUP's latest contract, a hard-fought, impressive four-year pact that ends in 2026, contains a 2% retroactive pay raise for 2022 and 3% raises in each year from 2023 through 2025. More than 96% of members who voted cast ballots to approve UUP's latest contract.

But according to the July/August 1979 issue of UUP's member publication *The Voice*, almost 1,500 of the 5,300 members who considered the contract voted no. What would keep those members from overwhelmingly approving that contract?

Upheaval from within

As UUP negotiators hammered out that agreement with the state, the union was in the middle of a nasty challenge by rival unions over the right to represent and collectively bargain for SUNY employees.

UUP members were split over whether to support UUP, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, or the New York Educators Association—the latest challenger for SUNY bargaining rights—backed by the National Education Association.

A year before, in 1978, NYEA filed a petition with the state's Public Employment Relations Board to decertify UUP as SUNY's bargaining unit representative. NYEA was poised to make a serious bid to put an end to UUP, which had formed just five years earlier.

There was certainly no love lost between NEA and UUP. UUP and its statewide affiliate, NYSUT, voted to disaffiliate with NEA in early 1976. NYSUT and UUP have long since resumed NEA affiliation.

New York Times reporter Damon Stetson, in a November 1978 story, captured the big picture. With an NYEA victory, NEA would be able to better reach colleges and universities nationally.

In an open letter to UUP members in the September 1978 issue of *The Voice*, UUP President Sam Wakshull had harsh words for NEA, claiming it was desperately trying to “buy its way back into New York” after the UUP/NYSUT disaffiliation. As for NYEA, he said “NYEA cannot win representation rights at SUNY. Its posture is that of a spoiler.”

Two months later, *The Voice* devoted a two-page section in the middle of the eight-page pullout with the headline “NYEA/NEA Propaganda Glutted With Untruths.” There, UUP took on 12 “misrepresentations, falsehoods and the ‘Big Lie’ technique” it claimed NYEA and NEA used during its campaign to win SUNY collective bargaining rights.

Finally, on Dec. 23, 1978, the *New York Times* reported the election results. UUP received 6,067 votes and NYEA got 4,092 votes. More than 1,100 people voted for no union at all.

Wakshull told the *Times* that he was glad the fight was finally over. There was a new contract to negotiate.

— Mike Lisi



An injury to one...



UUP'S LONG HISTORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Individuals carry the union's message near and far

By **Liza Frenette**, *special to UUP*

“What do we want?”
“JUSTICE!”
“When do we want it?”
“NOW!”

From bullhorns on Broadway to the cornices of the Capitol, these rallying cries have been raised by United University Professions members since the union was created. Gathering momentum with crowds is a longstanding strategy to raise awareness about social injustice, and it is only part of UUP's bold playbook to help resolve injustices and prevent them.

Social justice can be as close as helping neighbors in need, or it can be reaching across the globe to help right wrongs. UUP's advocacy comes in the form of education, outreach, financial assistance, protests, promoting legislative action and showing up. UUP members have taken action on issues through work in their local chapters, throughout New York, across the country and even on different continents.

The concerns are many and often heated. Currently, for example, UUP is fostering diversity, equity and inclusion on state-operated campuses in the face of bans across the country on books and curricula addressing these issues.

A pioneering member's early efforts

Ed Drummond, a former longtime chapter president of the UUP Stony Brook Health Sciences Center Chapter, has been witness to the injustices of discrimination and exclusion for many decades. Many of his social justice actions have been about taking on wrongs in race, gender and age.

“UUP has been very active in fighting discrimination,” he said. “I'm so proud of UUP: chapter and statewide.”

When Drummond came to work for SUNY Stony Brook HSC in the department of pathology, he said the Health Sciences Center was “a hole in the ground when I arrived. They were digging it.” He was recruited to start a laboratory of electron microscopy, examining cells that make up tissue.

But early on, he knew his work would include far more than that. He got involved with the local union chapter and members' community outreach to provide social justice in action. Members picked up litter, helped build a park in Central Islip and cleaned up derelict houses. The Stony Brook campus is the site of a state veterans' home, and he said the chapter donates to their fundraising golf tournament.

Drummond, who has been retired for 14 years but still serves on the chapter's executive board, remains part of a group called the Black Faculty and Staff Association. The group helps people of color working at Stony Brook HSC assimilate into the community and deal with discrimination in pay, promotions, hiring and time off. In the 1970's, housing discrimination was prevalent, he said, and Black people were often denied housing. They would be told a house was unavailable, but then the faculty and staff group

TIMELINE

1984

UUP campaign for more state aid for SUNY restores millions to SUNY budget.

UUP membership reaches 13,000.

1986

UUP puts an end to forced retirement for tenured faculty at age 70.

would send a white family over to the property and the house was suddenly available.

“It was hard to find places to live, or to get haircuts,” he said. “We made up a booklet of where to live, what churches to go to, where to get haircuts ... As a chapter, we got involved with people who had housing issues.” Those concerns remain part of their mission.

Drummond has been among those UUPers marching on Washington, including in the original Million Man March. To honor Labor Day, he joins UUP colleagues in the annual boisterous parade in New York City.

“I’ve been very involved with the union. They are very responsive to social justice issues... UUP’s interest in diversity and how they treat their members (is) phenomenal,” he said. “Fred [Kowal, UUP president] is involved in [addressing] any kind of discrimination, statewide or countrywide. It’s fantastic.”

“Unions are ... active in the campaign for social justice,” said Judith Wishnia, SUNY Stony Brook retiree, longtime UUP activist and recipient of UUP’s highest award, the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service to United University Professions. “For example, we fought for NYSUT to support Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid in South Africa. We were on the first unions to support U.S. Labor Against the War when we invaded Iraq.”

Outreach starts close to home

Tom Matthews, former statewide treasurer and vice president for professionals, has helped out on numerous social justice actions for the Geneseo Chapter where he served as president, and for UUP on the state level. He served on the NYSUT Board of Directors for 30 years.

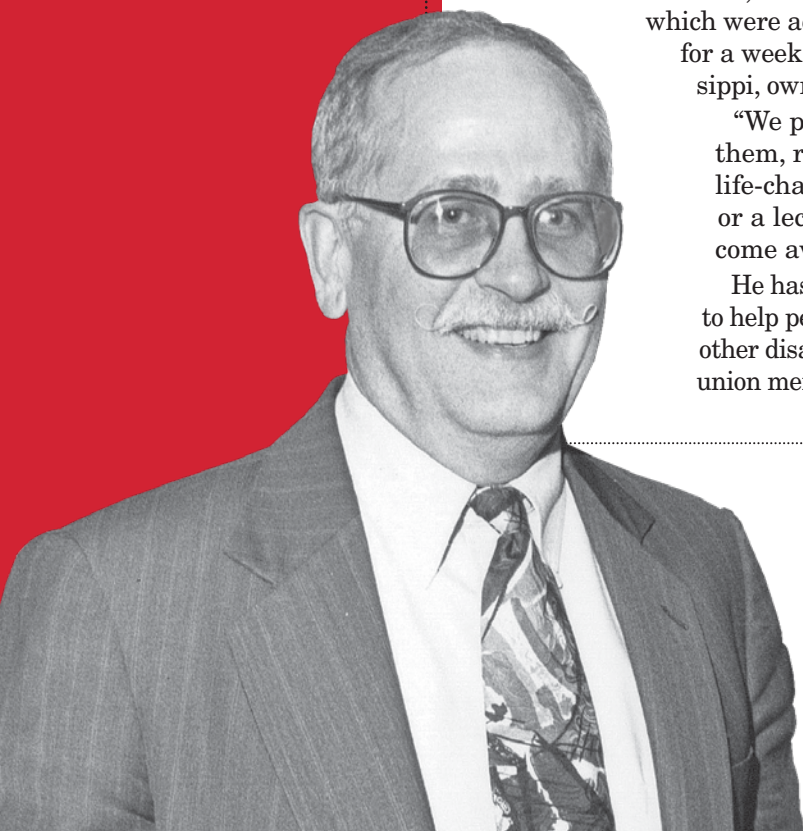
He has inspired many others to take action. As director of student activities, he created a student leadership program that he ran from 2000-2018, where sessions included lessons on diversity, equity and inclusion. He also teamed faculty and staff with students for leadership through outreach. When Hurricane Katrina walloped communities in the South, he helped create Livingston County Cares, and went on service trips to help those who lost homes, businesses and entire neighborhoods in the 2005 mammoth natural disaster.

Serving social justice with hammers, nails, wood and sweat

Students, faculty and community members took part in these trips, which were active for more than a dozen years. Volunteers would work for a week to rehabilitate homes in New Orleans and Biloxi, Mississippi, owned by people earning low incomes and living in poverty.

“We probably worked on 100 houses,” Matthews said, gutting them, removing ruined wallboard and cleaning out debris. “It’s life-changing for students. You can’t learn poverty from a book or a lecture. When you’re there, you hear their stories and you come away with a different view.”

He has traveled with groups to Puerto Rico, Houston and Florida to help people who have lost their homes in hurricanes, flooding and other disasters. The Geneseo Chapter contributed funds, and many union members have volunteered time and skill.



Tom Matthews—former statewide treasurer and VPP, former Geneseo Chapter president and a longtime activist in UUP—made social justice outreach a core part of his union work. He spread that message far and wide as he introduced the concepts of service, diversity, equity, inclusion and humanitarian outreach to countless students throughout his long career.



“It was hard to find places to live, or to get haircuts. We made up a booklet of where to live, what churches to go to, where to get haircuts. As a chapter, we got involved with people who had housing issues.”

ED DRUMMOND, FORMER CHAPTER PRESIDENT, STONY BROOK HSC

“I committed myself to do those things because of my engagement in social justice through union work,” he said.

As part of the union’s negotiating teams, he worked successfully with colleagues to help gain health benefits for part-time employees, who suffered for years without this coverage.

“It’s a year-round benefit and a major social justice accomplishment,” he said.

This natural-born leader helped in the fight against the state’s proposal to contract out SUNY jobs—including the state’s plan to eliminate financial aid officers and substitute an 800-number for their work, limiting students’ ability to access financial aid information.

“We showed how it would be difficult and expensive. We saved jobs,” Matthews said. “It was a social justice issue. We said ‘We can’t let them get away with this.’”

When former Gov. George Pataki also proposed eliminating dental, optical and prescription drug coverage for faculty and staff, “we stayed out fighting the battle, following the governor around,” said Matthews, a former trustee of the UUP Benefit Trust Fund. Union leaders made two tours of the entire SUNY system.

As a leader with the American Association of University Professors representing UUP, Matthews also chaired the Committee of Academic Professionals to highlight and gain recognition for higher education professionals.

An inclusive reach to all members

Another leading higher education professional, Idalia Torres, has also been tangibly involved with UUP on the social justice front. Born in the mainland United States, Torres moved to Puerto Rico when she was a year old and moved back to the mainland as an adult. She has worked at SUNY Fredonia for 32 years, most recently as a senior security analyst.

UUP

TIMELINE

1987

John M. “Tim” Reilly of SUNY Albany is elected president.

The Joint Labor/Management Committee on Fair Labor Standards negotiates the first on-call rate for members required to return to work.

Membership climbs to 16,000.

1988

UUP secures \$3 million to cover salary disparities in new contract; funds were distributed through the New York State/UUP Joint Labor/Management Disparity Committee.

The union awards the first Eugene P. Link College Scholarship Trust Fund awards to three SUNY undergraduates.



Congratulations UUP on 50 great years!



Local 1000 AFSCME, AFL-CIO

Mary E. Sullivan, President

The Professional Staff Congress/CUNY, representing 30,000 faculty and professional staff of the City University of New York, is proud to join UUP in celebrating its 50th Anniversary.



James Davis
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CONGRATULATIONS!

On behalf of the more than 50,000 members of the Public Employees Federation, we congratulate United University Professions on their milestone 50th anniversary.

This year, we proved that when we stand together and move together, the future of our institutions, like SUNY Downstate, can be preserved. UUP is a force to be reckoned with and PEF is with you every step of the way. Today, we celebrate with you. Our best wishes for a productive and joyous Fall Delegate Assembly.



Wayne Spence
President



Joe Donahue
Secretary-Treasurer



New York State
Public Employees Federation
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**UNION
STRONG**

1989

UUP protests SUNY's plan to impose parking fees on campus. The union awards the first Nina Mitchell Awards for Distinguished Service to Harold Cannon of SUNY Albany, Samuel Wakshull of Buffalo State and Morris Budin of SUNY Binghamton.

UUP reaches tentative agreement on a three-year contract that for the first time includes health insurance coverage for part-time employees.

UUP members overwhelmingly approved the contract.

1990

UUP completes a three-year-long oral history project comprised of more than 40 interviews detailing the story of UUP's founding and growth.

Membership hits 21,000.



Fredonia Chapter member Idalia Torres, shown here with Tom Matthews of Geneseo at the UUP Fall 2007 Delegate Assembly, has been a quietly but deeply involved part of UUP at the chapter and state levels. When she chaired the statewide Black and Latino Faculty and Staff Concerns Committee, she focused on ways to help faculty and staff of color feel less isolated.

“I wasn’t aware of the union until I needed it,” she said. After being denied a promotion, she went to her union and a grievance was filed. Torres was encouraged to get involved with UUP, and since it aligned with many of her own social justice motivations, she went all in.

She served as vice president for professionals for the Fredonia Chapter for 16 years and was acting president for a year. She is a UUP statewide Executive Board member. Known as a stalwart unionist who quietly gets the job done, Torres is a person UUP has turned to in times of need, to fulfill a number of roles in negotiations and statewide help to her fellow members.

“As an executive board member, we represent everybody,” she said. “I have an open mind and I don’t have my own agenda. I want to be able to contribute to solve the issues that affect all our members: academics and professionals, from a comprehensive campus or a hospital.”

Torres is a member and former chair of the statewide Black and Latino Faculty and Staff Concerns Committee, which encourages involvement on campus and statewide, along with working with legislators.

“Some campuses have very few members of color, if any,” she said. “We will try to work with the chapters to address concerns and identify and refer them to local or state resources.” In her department, she is the only person of color and one of only two women.

While there is more emphasis today in many organizations and companies on hiring employees from underrepresented communities, she said at SUNY there is often little support once they are hired, and they often end up leaving. Faculty coming from other countries—Asia, Afghanistan, Africa, to name a few—can also be at a loss.

“We lose that person at the college, and also in the community,” she said, noting that many SUNY campuses are in rural locations. “The community loses also. We should support them and their families in every way so they can

“Unions are active in the campaign for social justice. We fought for NYSUT to support Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid in South Africa. We were one of the first unions to support U.S. Labor Against the War when we invaded Iraq.”

JUDITH WISHNIA, SUNY STONY BROOK



1991

New York's four largest public employee unions (CSEA, PEF, Council 82 of AFSCME and UUP) join forces to protest an Executive Budget proposal threatening to cut thousands of workers from the state payroll.

stay and enrich our communities.”

Support can be basic. “For example, I live in a rural area. They want to know where can they go to do their hair, to (attend) church, and where are there places to hear their native language?”

Torres said many years ago there was a cross burning on campus, and faculty and staff of color started a coalition.

“We met with the president every month; we were invited on search committees...and prompted by us, the college got an affirmative action officer and multicultural affairs office,” she said.

Social justice: Making positive change

The group also hosted dinners for Black and Latino students, serving ethnic food like Torres' own rice and pigeon peas, and there is movement to restart that. She also served as advisor for a Latino student group and with a local Latino group for progress and education, helping with scholarship dinners and rides on Election Day. She served with the local NAACP chapter and helped establish its first Juneteenth celebration, which has been going on now for two decades.

Torres' leadership roles and committee work tie in with causes that she marches for: the Women's March on Washington; Labor Day parades with her UUP colleagues, and a national American Federation of Teachers march to demand funding for public schools.

She has served on UUP negotiations committees, and, as a UUP leader, joined conferences to address the needs of Latino people of New York. She also served as acting statewide membership development officer.

At a recent conference, she spoke with internationally known labor leader and activist Dolores Huerta, who, with Cesar Chavez, was a co-founder of the United Farmworkers Association. Torres had first met Huerta at a child labor conference in Washington, D.C.

“She inspires me,” Torres said. “The strength; the courage. I'm in awe of people who have that conviction.”





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On behalf of the 1.75 million members of the **AFT**, congratulations to the **United University Professions**, on its 50th anniversary. We are proud to support UUP, the nation’s largest higher education union, representing the faculty and professional staff of the State University of New York (SUNY) system.

UUP has always acted in the best interests of its members, and thousands of UUP members, the SUNY community, and the state of New York benefited from these efforts.

We stand with you as champions of **great schools and colleges** that fulfill the promise of public education, **good jobs** that support a middle-class life, **affordable healthcare** for all, the **fight against discrimination and hate**, and the **defense of democracy**.

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UUP IN THE 1980s

A rising presence in New York's halls of power



UUP solidified its power and its presence in the 1980s, and the union took bolder public stances to press for better treatment. Members appeared more often in rallies, protests and parades.

The crowds at these events got bigger, and the UUP voice got louder—literally, as members used bullhorns and the symbolic bully pulpit of the Capitol steps to be heard. Nuala McGann Drescher, photo at left, third from left, became UUP's first and so far only woman president; she served from 1981-1987. Her predecessor, John "Tim" Reilly, waves to members, facing page, top left.

The 1980s defined UUP as a confident presence in New York, a nascent but growing political presence in Albany and a likely future player in the national labor movement.







THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

**Members showed strength, courage
as global crisis shut down SUNY**

By Darryl McGrath

The coronavirus pandemic was the most unexpected emergency UUP has ever faced, a deadly and terrifying time that hit with a ferocity that surprised even the experts who predicted for years that something like this could happen.

Before late 2019, no one in the United States had ever seen a patient with COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus. No one knew how to treat it. At first, no one even knew that the coronavirus spread through the air. It was not until well into the pandemic that health care professionals at Stony Brook University Hospital realized their first few cases occurred in October 2019. Lab staff eventually retested stored samples from patients who suffered from what seemed to be an unusually virulent form of influenza, and learned the killer virus had infiltrated the hospital months before anyone expected to see it.

The federal government declared a national public health emergency Jan. 31, 2020. Then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo declared a state emergency March 7, 2020. Twelve days later, SUNY shut down its campuses and offices. Most students and all but the most essential employees could no longer be on SUNY property.

The rapid sequence of events did not catch UUP unaware, and changes the pandemic wrought for the union would last far longer than the restrictions. Some of those changes are permanent or likely to become so, as three-plus years of the pandemic have highlighted huge gaps in access to child care, in long-standing inequities in pay across the bargaining unit and in work schedules and the growing

appeal of telecommuting. UUP focused on some of those pandemic issues in negotiating its current contract, and the union achieved real gains born in part out of that first year of the shutdown.

“I have never been so proud to be a member of UUP as I was during those first weeks and months of the pandemic,” UUP President Fred Kowal said. “With almost no time to prepare for this devastation, our members risked their lives and gave their all to protect students and care for patients. The word ‘heroic’ has been used a great deal to describe people’s reactions to this terrible time, but it really does describe the response of the UUP membership.”

A fearless effort

Indeed, UUP members across the state demonstrated calm and professionalism and set aside fears for their safety as the world waited for a vaccine.

Doctors, nurses, therapists, laboratory technicians and other health care professionals focused on their patients and faced exposure to an illness they already realized was killing people quickly and brutally in their own hospitals as the virus attacked the respiratory system. Members working in residential life stayed on campus at tremendous risk to be with students from overseas who could not return to their own countries because of travel bans. Some members died of COVID-19 or long COVID—although UUP was never able to confirm the exact number.

Health care professionals cared for patients dying in agony as their lungs shut down, working long shifts for days at a stretch with barely a break. Many staff members in direct patient care did their jobs in those first weeks without adequate supplies of protective gear, so instead of using a face mask



In the first weeks and months of the pandemic, UUP took the following actions to help those members at greatest risk:

The union negotiated a telecommuting arrangement that covered most of the bargaining unit and protected UUP-represented employees by defining the terms and conditions of the unprecedented mandate that they work from home;

UUP paid for members working in direct patient care at Stony Brook and Downstate University hospitals to stay at hotels between shifts to reduce the risk of spreading the virus at home.

UUP bought more than 150,000 pieces of personal protective gear for hospital staff and members required to work on state-operated campuses during the shutdown.

The union conducted regional and statewide virtual meetings with members and state lawmakers as a better way of communicating updates and union business—a move that permanently changed the way UUP works with members. The union now routinely uses virtual platforms to conduct town halls with lawmakers, panel discussions hosted by statewide committees, forums on topics of interest to UUP and clinics on student debt.

UUP formed the Ad Hoc Health and Safety Committee, composed of medical experts in the membership who offered science-based guidance to UUP about vaccine requirements, the wearing of masks and other issues.

once and discarding it, members reused masks and medical gowns.

The danger was unprecedented. Accounts that began to surface from the hard-hit two SUNY hospitals in the New York City metro area—which dealt with the first wave of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020—were searing and heartbreaking.

At Stony Brook University Hospital, some members unwittingly carried the virus home and sickened family members, some of whom died.

In Brooklyn at Downstate University Hospital—which was featured on several national news programs as a symbol of the pandemic in the spring of 2020—one UUP member described the filled-to-capacity ER as a charnel house. The hospital converted the cafeteria and break rooms into treatment areas and triage space, and stored the dead in refrigerated trucks when the morgue could hold no more bodies. At first, no one even knew if it was safe to perform an autopsy on a COVID-19 victim.

UUP leaders responded quickly and calmly from the first day of the shutdown. Years of fiscal responsibility meant the union had the reserve funds to help members at greatest risk.

Members lead the way

At first, many people hoped the pandemic might be like a bad flu season—intense but brief, with case numbers declining in warmer weather. Within days of the shutdown, it became clear this was nothing like even a terrible influenza outbreak; it was like nothing in memory. As that realization sank in, members began using their talents to help as best they could. No one knew how long they would have to do that, and at a national and international level, talk turned from “Let’s see where we are in the spring,” to “Let’s see where we are in a year.” Weeks turned into months; months stretched into one year, then another. As of August 2024, COVID-19 is still considered a significant public health threat by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the pandemic is still ongoing.

Members at all three SUNY hospitals established emotional support services for their colleagues in direct patient care and for the support staff who dealt with patients and their families—the social workers, the chaplains, the discharge and admissions staff. Members at campuses including SUNY Polytechnic Institute, New Paltz and Binghamton used their digital design skills, their engineering prowess, their machining abilities and their knowledge of biomedical engineering to produce face shields, ultraviolet sterilizing lamps, better masks, adaptors that allowed more than one patient to be connected to a single ventilator. Unable to access campus workspaces, members at home turned garages, basements and spare rooms into design and production labs. Members stitched cloth masks, volunteered for clinical



The coronavirus pandemic hit the New York City metropolitan region first in the spring of 2020. The SUNY hospitals at Stony Brook and in Brooklyn went into full crisis mode, and the state declared Brooklyn's Downstate University Hospital a COVID-only hospital, closed to all other services. Downstate staff are shown here at the height of the spring 2020 pandemic surge. It wasn't long before the surge hit the Upstate and Western New York regions.

trials of the coronavirus vaccine and developed tests for the virus.

UUP's expertise came to the forefront. At Stony Brook University Hospital, Dr. Sharon Nachman, an expert in pediatric infectious disease, oversaw the hospital's clinical trials of a COVID-19 vaccine for children. At Upstate Medical University, Dr. Frank Middleton played a key role in the development of a highly accurate saliva-based test, which SUNY used to check more than 140,000 students for COVID-19 before they went home for their Thanksgiving break in 2020, and which was used at college campuses all over the country. Upstate's Dr. Stephen Thomas, a nationally known infectious disease expert who had also worked on the West Africa Ebola outbreak of 2014-2016, became a voice of calm who translated complex science into plain English in numerous interviews with news outlets.

Chapter leaders handled tremendous responsibilities. At the state-operated campuses, leaders tried to allay the concerns of contingent faculty who worried that they would face non-renewal during the shutdown as word of declining enrollments began to spread. Although some contingents did receive non-renewal notices, the numbers were never as large as initially feared—but that was small comfort to someone who'd just lost their health insurance as well as their job.

Longtime UUP member Ed Quinn was president of the UUP Stony Brook Chapter for eight months when the shutdown began in March 2020. He knew this was an emergency, that Stony Brook had to get everyone off the campus except a small number of

essential employees. Quinn, UUP's former statewide membership development officer and a statewide Executive Board member, had a close working relationship with then-Stony Brook HSC Chapter President Carolyn Kube and the other HSC chapter leaders, all of whom had backgrounds in health care. Based on his conversations with his HSC colleagues, Quinn knew this was no time for bureaucratic business as usual; the need to clear the campus was urgent. He was stunned to learn that administrators at his campus were trying to get signatures on paperwork to put the shutdown order in effect.

He called the campus human resources office.

"I know how long it takes to get signatures," he recalled saying. "This is not going to work. We need to get people right off campus, right away, and deal with the paperwork later. Otherwise, people are going to die."

Three and a half years later, that moment symbolizes the urgency of the situation for Quinn.

"We just had to act on getting people safe," he recalled. "That was the main thing that I pushed, and HR agreed with me—we need to get everybody off, we need to get people safe."

So the campus largely emptied, and "that gave us the rest of the semester to set up a safe environment on campus," Quinn said.

How did he hold up in the ensuing months?

"A lot of it was [the working relationship] between Carolyn [Kube] and myself," Quinn said. "We kind of supported each other, and it was not easy. A lot of it was having a really good relationship with HR. I didn't ask anybody to do something I wouldn't do."

TIMELINE

1993

William Scheuermann of SUNY Oswego is elected UUP president.

UUP names 1993 “The Year of Ag and Tech” and promotes SUNY’s two-year state-operated colleges to lawmakers and the public. The union establishes a legislative intern program named after former UUP

President John M. Reilly; the first intern is Mary Jo DeBernardo, a graduate student at SUNY Albany.

Across the street, Carolyn Kube thought she was prepared for the worst. She quickly realized there was no way to prepare for much of anything in the pandemic.

“We knew it was going to be bad, but I don’t think anyone was ready for the exponential growth of the patients,” said Kube, who is now statewide vice president for professionals.

Stony Brook University went into lockdown March 22. Stony Brook University Hospital soon had more than 100 COVID patients. At the peak of the pandemic, the hospital had over 500 COVID patients in the 640-bed hospital. Stony Brook University Hospital would end up treating the most COVID patients in the New York City metropolitan area, and had some of the best outcomes on Long Island, Kube said. Kube attributes that to the fact that the hospital was able to increase intensive care unit beds by converting existing inpatient space to ICU areas for the treatment of COVID patients. The hospital also converted the ambulatory care center to a huge ICU.

Kube remembers the pandemic as a time that upended the usual, the expected, the normal. Medical residents were promoted overnight to attending physicians to help deal with the caseload. Nurse managers who had not worked in direct patient care in years found themselves assigned to bedside nursing in the COVID units on almost no notice. For some, the situation created a terrible conflict between their professional obligation to care for ill and dying patients, and their personal terror of transmitting the virus to family members at home.

“Anybody who was an RN in our bargaining unit and had a 9-to-5 job was re-deployed to bedside and had to work evenings and weekends. Their entire lives were turned upside down,” Kube said.

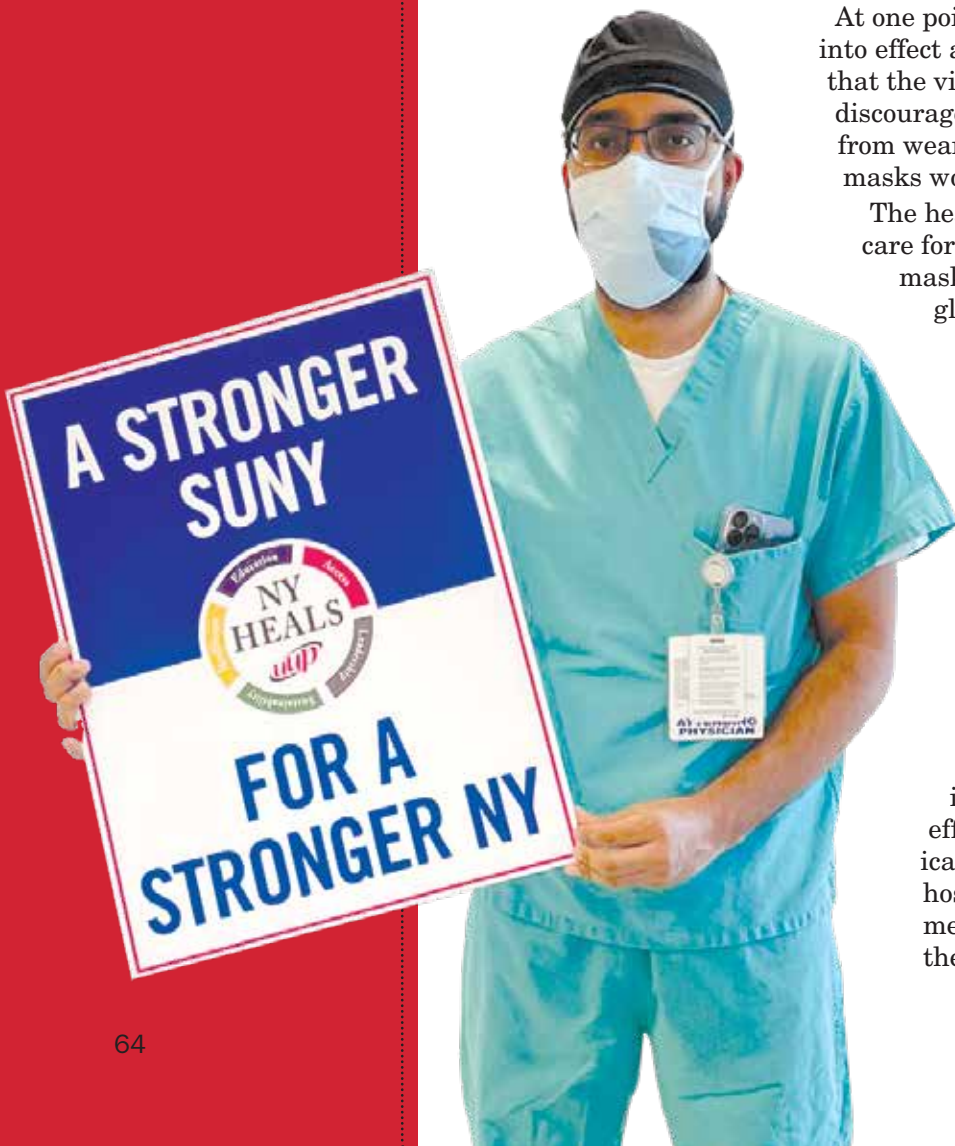
At one point, before state masking mandates went into effect and before it was entirely understood that the virus was airborne, some hospital officials discouraged health care staff in hospital clinics from wearing masks because they thought the masks would unnecessarily frighten patients.

The health care professionals providing bedside care for patients, however, knew they needed masks and full protective garb, including gloves and gowns. Kube and other hospital chapter leaders alerted UUP that their hospitals didn’t have an adequate supply of protective equipment and were quickly running through what they did have.

“We got PPE from the union faster than the hospital,” Kube recalled.

“We were at the point where we were going to run out of PPE for our people and they were going to have to start to reuse N-95s.”

Kube and the late Rowena Blackman-Stroud, longtime UUP statewide treasurer and Downstate Chapter president, were leaders in the multi-union effort to get pandemic hazard pay for medical staff at the SUNY hospitals. Private hospitals throughout the New York City metropolitan region provided hazard pay to their staff, but SUNY hospitals never did.





Kube believes UUP's campaign for hazard pay, however, laid the groundwork for some of the terms in the contract with the state that members approved in August 2023. Those terms included longevity pay, additional pay for members living in the extremely high-cost regions of the New York City metropolitan area and the lower Hudson Valley, a boost in on-call pay for hospital employees, across-the-board pay increases and additional pay increases for medical residents and the lowest-paid members. Many of these newly negotiated terms helped UUP members at the hospitals.

Lack of preparation exacts its price

The PPE shortage that Kube described would be remembered as one of those “You can’t make this stuff up” scenarios that not even the most hardened cynics could have imagined.

Within days of the SUNY shutdown, UUP statewide leaders and chapter leaders at the hospitals learned with a growing sense of horror just how ill-prepared the hospitals were to deal with a public health emergency involving a wildly contagious virus. The last pandemic which required PPE of this sort was the 1918 influenza pandemic over a century before the COVID crisis, so hospitals no longer kept stockpiles of protective gear; they had enough for those who used PPE regularly—surgeons, oncologists, ICU nurses, etc.— but no more. Supply chain disruptions ground to a halt when the shutdown began, exacerbating the issue.

Blackman-Stroud was often described as a force of nature. She was that and much more in her effort to get adequate protective gear for all SUNY hospital staff during the height of the pandemic. The COVID death of Dr. James Mahoney, a beloved physician at Downstate who is believed to have contracted the illness while caring for patients early in the pandemic, highlighted that need. Blackman-Stroud worked tirelessly, pushing and encouraging UUP staff in the union’s central administrative offices in Albany to track down the extremely scarce bulk supplies of protective gear—masks, gloves, gowns—and get those supplies delivered to the hospitals and campuses.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo declared Downstate a COVID-only hospital in March 2020—as was his prerogative during the state emergency. The designation lasted nine months and did little to improve the supply chain of protective gear even as it further damaged the already strained finances of the hospital, which serves one of the poorest neighborhoods in the Northeast.

UUP TIMELINE

1995

Delegates vote to shift the status of the two statewide vice presidents from full- to part-time.

1997

A week of demonstrations across the state in February shines a light on stalled contract talks, proposed budget cuts to SUNY, and the suspension of the UUP Benefit Trust Fund.

1998

Operation Safeguard SUNY focuses attention on the impact of SUNY campuses in communities across the state. UUP and NYSUT support the Sweatshop Free Campaign, which opposes the sale of any sweatshop-produced merchandise to any institution of public education.



“When some patients get to us, there’s already severe lung damage and very little left that we can do.”

**THE REV. SHARON CODNER-WALKER,
DIRECTOR OF PASTORAL CARE AT SUNY DOWNSTATE,
ON THE EMOTIONAL TOLL THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC TOOK ON CLINICAL STAFF**

Blackman-Stroud died in December 2022 after a brief illness not related to the pandemic. Her successor at the Downstate Chapter, Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, worked in the hospital's emergency department during the pandemic and was friends with Dr. Mahoney. Nichols held many patients' hands as they died, because family members were not allowed to be at their bedsides. The memories are vivid; the anguish remains.

"I still need to give credit to that incredible staff during the pandemic," Abrahams-Nichols said in July 2023. "I don't think we gave enough credit to our members for going to work when they knew they could die. And I think that's been lost."

Racing to stop the spread

Throughout the SUNY hospitals, some of the most important and frightening work of the pandemic took place largely behind the scenes, as UUP members whose jobs kept them out of public view and often out of news coverage raced to complete new discoveries related to COVID-19. Other members valiantly struggled to simply keep doing their jobs in research and clinical laboratories.

Hospital laboratories charged with processing coronavirus tests faced unprecedented stresses, starting with the understandable concerns that lab technicians had about handling the earliest samples.

So little was known in those first weeks about how the virus would behave that one UUP member—Michael Mira, associate technical director of the Stony Brook molecular genetics/cytogenetics labs—slept in his basement when he went home at night because he was afraid of transmitting the virus to his family.

Mira recalled in an interview published in the spring 2022 issue of *The Voice* that coronavirus testing started out at a manageable level, but that soon changed. The lab converted to a round-the-clock operation and added temporary employees and more automated equipment. It was frightening to work with a new virus; just opening the first samples for testing was unnerving, out of fear of unleashing a deadly disease that was still so little understood. Some lab staff developed repetitive stress injuries. The number of coronavirus tests kept rising, from about 300 a day to a high of 956 on one memorable day in December 2021.

At Buffalo HSC, Tom Melendy—a molecular virologist who is now the chapter president and was the chapter vice president for academics during the pandemic—remembers the sense of urgency in his laboratory as the magnitude of the emergency became apparent.

His lab had been focusing on how some of the viruses known to cause cancer make copies of themselves. Almost overnight, he recalled, "The entire lab shifted. We had other work, and that was put on the back burner." The thinking was, "What can we do? How can we use our skills right now?"

That brainstorming led to the development of a system for rapidly screening drugs to determine their effectiveness at inhibiting the coronavirus. The scientific community reflected the sense of urgency that researchers such as Melendy and his laboratory team felt, and the larger community accelerated the review and publication process. Melendy and his research teammates published their work in September 2021 in the journal *Antiviral Research*. Melendy also served on the review panel that evaluated applications to the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases' Antiviral Drug Discovery Centers for Pathogens of Pandemic Concern. That effort was funded by the \$3 billion that the Biden administration designated for antiviral drug discovery as part of the American Rescue Plan of 2021.

"Anything that could have helped was on a fast track to publish, and journals were expediting reviews," Melendy said. "It took us about 14 months to go from original concept, designing and validating and showing that it worked, and then getting it published."

1999

In an unprecedented vote of "no confidence" in the SUNY Board of Trustees, the union and Faculty Senate charge trustees with failing to advocate for strong financial support for SUNY and with disregarding long-established shared governance practices.

2000

UUP wins year-round health insurance for the union's part-time employees. The union calls on state lawmakers to scrutinize SUNY's proposed land lease deals with private corporations. The two statewide vice presidents are returned to full-time status.

TIMELINE

2001

UUP takes an active role in Campus Equity Week, designed to strengthen the role of part-time and contingent employees on campuses nationwide. UUPers volunteer at Ground Zero in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

2003

UUPers handed out SUNY Bucks symbolizing the dollars generated by SUNY campuses. The action was UUP's response to a proposed \$183.5 million SUNY budget cut that threatened 4,000 faculty jobs. The March for Public Education draws 40,000 unionists to Albany.

The experience, the urgency, the sense of racing to try to help shut down the pandemic, made a lasting impression on Melendy.

"I didn't go into this thinking there would be a pandemic. Intellectually, I knew this would happen sometime, but seeing it happen was a shock. When it happened, I was nervous, I was pretty scared and apprehensive, but I knew what had to be done."

The second wave

Six months after the coronavirus overwhelmed the New York City metropolitan region, the city began edging toward a slow, often-hesitant return to pre-pandemic life. It was a matter of one step forward and sometimes two steps back, with restrictions applied unevenly—city schools closed again as cases climbed, but restaurants, bars and gyms remained open.

At the height of the first outbreak in New York City, national news outlets documented hospitals filled to capacity, patients piled up in waiting rooms as exhausted staff tried to triage them, bodies piled up in refrigerated morgue trucks and people dying before medical staff got to them.

During this first surge of the virus, the Central Upstate and Western parts of the state watched and waited. The coronavirus did reach those regions in the spring, but in such smaller numbers that it was tempting to wonder: Would the more rural, less densely populated parts of the state be spared what New York City faced?

The answer was no, as UUP members in those regions learned in the fall of 2020. The fall surge hit Upstate New York hard at a time when the public was weary of pandemic restrictions, and news stories about overflowing hospital triage areas and emergency rooms didn't hit with the same impact and urgency as before.

This second surge in Central and Western New York preyed on all the special vulnerabilities of upstate communities. Rural small towns with limited transportation, limited internet access and isolated populations made it difficult to deliver public health messages about vaccinations and COVID precautions. Those special circumstances also made it tough for many residents trying to obtain a vaccine to even find out how to access registration websites.

Once again, devastating scenes played out in hospital emergency departments as UUP members risked their lives to care for stricken patients. At Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, the situation was made worse by the high daily number of COVID patients under intensive care, coupled with the high daily number of staff members either sick with COVID or unable to work because of recent exposures.



UUP secures dental, optical, prescription coverage for members after contentious contract battle

After more than a year of combative negotiations over a new contract with the state, UUP was finally making progress in the spring of 1996.

UUP had extracted a number of concessions from the state that took the bite out of Gov. George Pataki's plan to allow SUNY to outsource jobs without restrictions—including union-negotiated hiring restrictions.

However, the state would not back down from a plan that would let SUNY hire employees from the SUNY Research Foundation, campus-related Auxiliary Services corporations, a campus foundation or other "in-house" entities SUNY created that weren't subject to the Taylor Law.

This "contracting-in" plan, as UUP called it, would allow SUNY to essentially outsource jobs to itself, bypassing protections previously negotiated by UUP.

The other public sector unions had already agreed to outsourcing provisions in their contracts, leaving UUP as the sole dissenter—and placing major pressure on the union to agree to the measure. UUP stood firm and contract negotiations ground to a halt.

But there was a twist this time.

STATE NEGOTIATORS, UPSET OVER the latest impasse and UUP's outright refusal of the contracting-in proposal, did something they'd never done in previous negotiations with UUP—they refused to fund UUP's Benefit Trust Fund.

That meant that in about a month's time, UUP bargaining unit members would lose prescription, dental and vision coverage.

UUP countered by filing an improper practice charge with the Public Employment Relations Board April 10, 1996, claiming that the loss of prescription drug coverage was a life-and-death issue.

The union won the case and PERB petitioned the state Supreme Court to prohibit SUNY from defunding prescription drug coverage. The court ordered an injunction April 30, but by then, the BTF was broke and UUP closed it down.

Members lost their dental and optical insurance for more than a year, as both sides lurched toward agreement on a new contract. To comply with the PERB and court rulings that members could not be denied prescription drug coverage, the state began charging members \$16 a month for that coverage—or just over \$31 in today's dollars.

UUP didn't take the attack lying down. A union letter-writing campaign generated 20,000 letters, all sent to Linda Angello, the new director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. Informational picket lines were hastily assembled on campuses across the state.

STILL, THE UNION HELD FIRM. In spring 1997, Tom Matthews, UUP's vice president for professionals, told the SUNY Board of Trustees that UUP would not agree to a new contract unless the state dropped its contracting-in demand.

UUP's tenacity prevailed. In August 1997, the state dropped its contracting-in demand and both sides agreed to a new four-year deal with a one-time \$1,250 payment, two 3.5% across-the-board raises and a sick leave increase for family illness.

Yes, there was outsourcing language in the contract—Pataki demanded it—but UUP negotiated a 27-page addendum spelling out how it would take place, providing important protections for members.

The Benefit Trust Fund was replenished and reopened, and members once again began receiving dental, vision and prescription drug coverage. To keep the state from bankrupting the BTF again, the contract included language that payments to the fund would be required past the end of a contract.

— Mike Lisi

TIMELINE

2004

UUP thwarts an attempt to privatize the SUNY teaching hospitals and unveils the Disability Rights and Concerns Committee report on disability access at SUNY campuses. The union files a suit in the New York State Supreme Court against the company managing the state's prescription drug program, charging a breach of fiduciary duty and deceptive practices.

Former UUP President John "Tim" Reilly dies unexpectedly at his home. He was 70.

UUP member Dr. Jay Brenner, director of the Community Hospital Emergency Department at the Upstate campus, knew all too well about how legitimate information about COVID was often scarce and misinformation was rampant. He recounted treating a young Black woman who died in the emergency department before the staff even realized she had COVID. Her family knew she was desperately ill but was unable to persuade her to seek treatment earlier.

The first wave left those still standing overworked and exhausted. Retired physicians and nurses stepped forward to relieve Upstate staff assigned to direct patient care. Non-clinical faculty and staff were pressed into service as supply runners to the hospital's COVID units. Upstate Chapter President Rich Veenstra said the patient caseloads were triple what Upstate members saw in the spring of 2020.

Three hours to the west, UUP members at Buffalo HSC also saw for themselves what the Downstate region faced six months earlier.

"I think we were all afraid of dying," said Phil Glick, a professor of surgery and management at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the University at Buffalo, and also the Buffalo HSC Chapter president during the pandemic. "I really felt bad for our members. It was really frightening."

Glick chaired UUP's Ad Hoc Health and Safety Committee, formed in response to the pandemic to provide guidance to UUP leadership in developing positions on such topics as vaccination. Although the committee served only in an advisory capacity, Glick credited UUP President Fred Kowal with really listening to the input of committee members.

"UB was so concerned about enrollment and so concerned about tuition, and I think health and safety was a secondary concern," Glick said. "UUP was much more on the ball than the state."

More than four years later, Glick's most vivid memory of the coronavirus pandemic reflects the recollections of other front line health care workers in UUP: the heartbreak of watching COVID patients die in isolation, without family members at their side.

"They were dying alone. That put more burden on the caregivers," Glick said. "It was a terrible thing that I hope we all learned from."

Lessons learned?

That question of how much the state and the country learned from the coronavirus pandemic has yet to be answered.

UUP leaders who spoke for this story point out that as terrible as the pandemic was, it could have been much worse. Unfortunately, the "much worse" scenario might have been the only thing that could have scared the country into a better state of preparedness for the next time nature unleashes a killer virus into the human population.

Melendy, who has spent his career studying viruses, thought for years that the U.S. underinvested in research about viruses. The general population has no idea how much people in his line of work worry about avian influenza jumping from birds to humans, he said.

"I think [the attitude] is changing





somewhat, but not as much as you would expect, because we were pretty effective at stopping it,” he said of the coronavirus. “So there are lessons still to be learned.”

Redetha Abrahams-Nichols at Downstate still wonders if state health care officials and the hospital’s administration learned any lasting lessons from those nine terrible months when the pandemic was at its worst in New York City. The hospital is not prepared for another pandemic, she said, and anyone who works in public health knows that another pandemic could happen.

“I think so many resources have been depleted, our staff has been cut ... I thought the pandemic would show people how much acute care matters, but I think the opposite has happened,” Abrahams-Nichols said. “No lessons have been learned for that.”



UUP

TIMELINE

2005

UUP names 2005 “The Year of the Part Timer” and wins a class-action grievance forcing SUNY to pay minimum salaries to faculty/physicians classified as geographical full-timers.

2006

UUP unveils its new logo and creates a new Member Services Trust Fund to offer members a broad range of discounts and services. The union successfully pushes the state Legislature to overturn Gov. George Pataki’s veto of \$60 million in funding for SUNY.

1998

UUP celebrates its 25th anniversary

U

UP celebrated its 25th anniversary at its Spring Delegate Assembly in May 1998. And by UUP standards, it was quite the star-studded affair.

America Federation of Teachers president Sandra Feldman spoke at UUP's silver anniversary event, according to the May 1998 issue of *The Voice*, UUP's official membership magazine. She took the opportunity to pledge the AFT's commitment to public higher education, and to challenge UUP members to "shape the new university according to our ideals and dreams."

State Comptroller H. Carl McCall, four years away from making an unsuccessful 2002 run for governor and more than a decade before he'd join the SUNY Board of Trustees, also spoke. He called a SUNY ed-

ucation "a financial lifeboat for our people, a lifeboat that can weather even the roughest of economic seas."

Two former UUP presidents, Samuel Wakshull and Nuala McGann Drescher, were honored by the more than 300 delegates at the event. And several members who were there when UUP formed in 1973 were also in attendance. They included a pair of Dorothys: Dorothy Gutenkauf, UUP's first statewide secretary; and Dorothy Codkind, a member of UUP's first statewide executive board.

Ed Alfonsin, who served as UUP's statewide secretary and statewide membership development officer, wore a denim shirt adorned with buttons and pins from UUP, other unions and national political campaigns.

And yes, there was a birthday cake. UUP President Bill Scheuerman led a chorus of happy birthday before blowing out the candles on the huge cake.

— Mike Lisi



Past and present UUP officers and Executive Board members, taken at UUP's 25th anniversary gala in 1998. They each received service certificates. From left to right: D. Jo Schaffer, past statewide MDO, Executive Board member; Tom Matthews, past treasurer, VPP, Executive Board member; Ed Alfonsin, past secretary, MDO, Executive Board member; Rowena Blackman-Stroud, treasurer, past Executive Board member; John Hunt, past treasurer, Executive Board member; Bill Scheuerman, UUP President, past VPA, former Executive Board member; Richard Reddy, MDO, past Executive Board member; Jeanne Galbraith, past secretary, Executive Board member; Fred Miller, past VPA, past Executive Board member; Tom Corigliano, secretary, past VPP, past Executive Board member.



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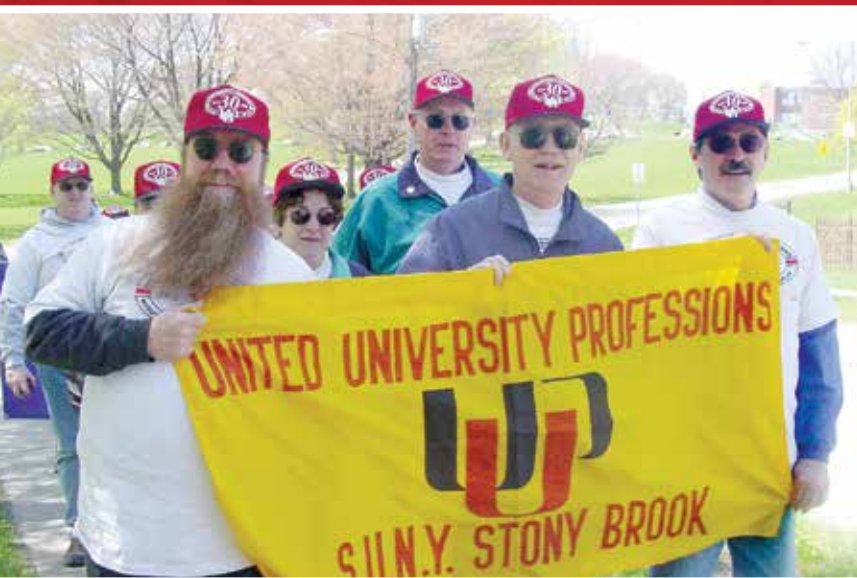


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UUP IN THE 1990s

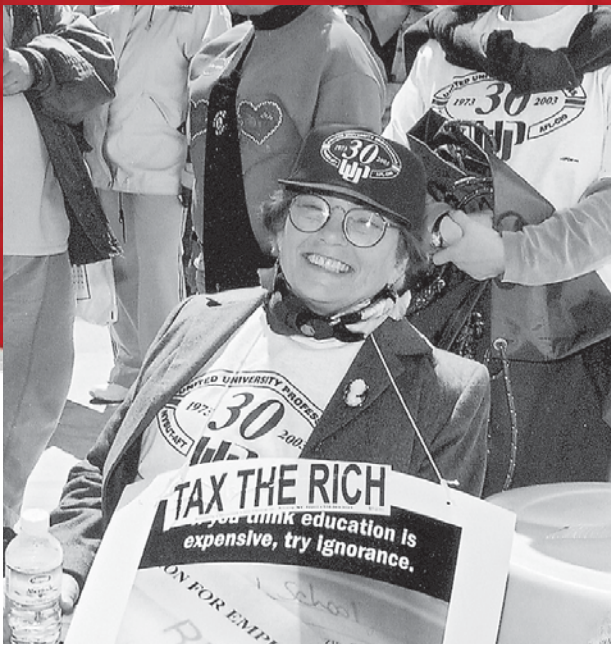
Fighting for students, for SUNY ... and for members



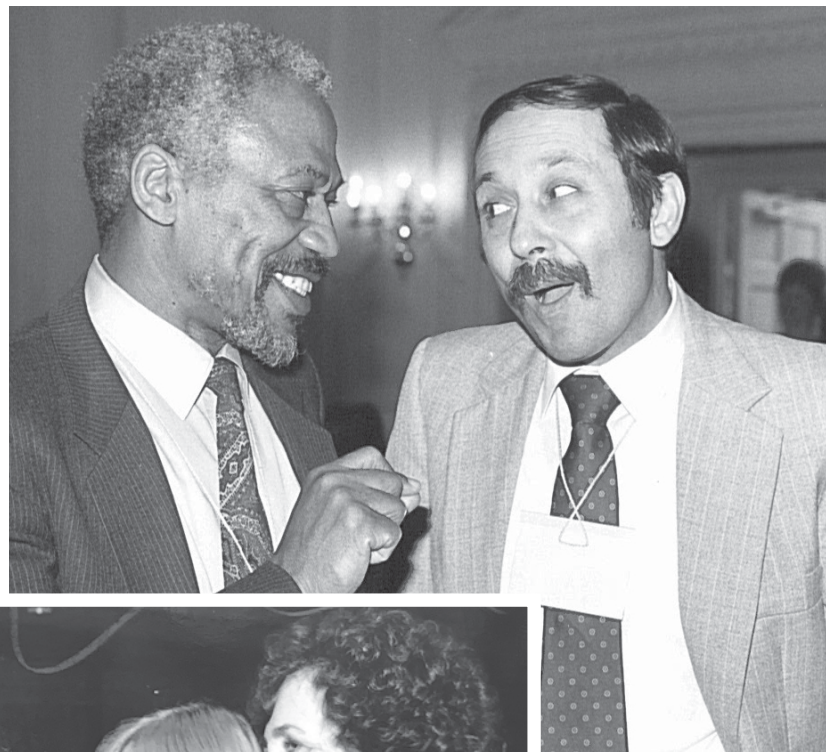
UUP fought not only for its members in the 1990s, but for the SUNY system itself. The state cut funding to SUNY, reduced faculty lines and floated early plans to remove SUNY's teaching hospitals from the SUNY system.

Although the hospital plan never came to pass, and some of the periodic funding cuts were restored, the 1990s marked the beginning of a long effort by UUP to get the state to fully fund SUNY—an effort that continues today.

UUP fought back hard. In an era when a handful of political leaders controlled the SUNY budget, the union aggressively challenged threats by Gov. George Pataki to close campuses and end tenure. UUP members responded by rallying and marching. Advocacy efforts increased, with UUP expanding outreach to lawmakers in their home districts in 1993.



UUP named Alfred Chapter member Gertrude Butera, above, as an honorary trustee of the Eugene P. Link College Scholarship fund in 1994. Butera was beloved by members for her tireless work to raise money and awareness for UUP scholarships.





UUP PROTECT
TRANS
LIVES

STRONG FOR THE RIGHTS OF ALL

By Darryl McGrath

Long before the acronym “DEI” became part of the political discussion in the United States, UUP was wrestling with the realization that racism existed in the labor movement and in subtle ways in its own union.

UUP took its first steps to address that problem in its own house with the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Affirmative Action in 1975, under the leadership of then-UUP President Samuel Wakshull.

Long before the U.S. Supreme Court declared in 2015 that same-sex marriage was constitutional, UUP was negotiating the recognition of domestic partnerships in a contract with the state nearly 20 years ago.

As the nation reeled from repeated mass shootings—and one that hit especially close to home, in Buffalo in May 2022—UUP boldly called for a ban on assault weapons and held forums on ways to address the mental health crisis in New York state and across the country.

And as the pandemic threw the plight of low-wage workers into sharp relief, UUP began laying the groundwork for a new contract with the state that would help the union’s lowest-earning members achieve greater pay and working conditions.

A growing divide has emerged in U.S. culture in UUP’s first 50 years, revealing disparities that had been in the country since its founding. Those disparities became more evident with sharper political and cultural differences that veered left or right but

seldom reached consensus. Cultural debates revolved around gun violence, hate crimes based on racial and gender identities, the restriction of women’s reproductive rights and the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic.

So UUP’s definition of what a union does expanded, and UUP gradually tackled issues that would have been unimaginable 50 years ago for a higher education union. It’s been a long, slow progression, but one that has set UUP ahead of many other unions for its strong stance on issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice.

“It is appropriate that we talk about diversity, equity and inclusion at a time where there have been such assaults on what we teach and learn,” UUP President Fred Kowal told an audience during a forum on DEI hosted by UUP and its statewide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee in February 2023.

“These assaults have been about political power plays,” Kowal said. “They are about racism; they are really about the worst of all of us. In our history as a union—UUP—and the general labor movement, there have been too many times when we have been racist, when we have been exclusionary. We must examine and determine what is happening in our own home, our own union.”

Kowal’s words came at a troubled time for the country, as well as UUP. How did UUP, and the nation, get to this point? And how has UUP responded?

Nine months before Kowal spoke at the 2023 forum, a white teenaged boy—an avowed racist—committed a mass shooting in a grocery store in Buffalo’s

UUP’s commitment to inclusiveness was decades ahead of its time.

2007

After months of protests, advocacy and opposition, UUP thwarts the Berger Commission's recommendation to privatize SUNY's teaching hospitals.

UUP pushes lawmakers to sign Optional Retirement Program legislation to eliminate employee pension contributions to the program for employees with at least 10 years of state service.

President Bill Scheurman steps down to become president of the National Labor College in Maryland. Vice President for Academics Frederick Floss of Buffalo State is named acting president.

UUP sues the state to derail the Berger Commission's mandate to remove Upstate Medical University from SUNY.



The UUP Affirmative Action Committee tackled tough issues of pay equity and diversity years before many unions considered these problems. Committee members here at the UUP 2010 Spring Delegate Assembly are, left to right, Maritza Torres, Tina Manning and Lydia Johnson.

largely Black East Side. He killed 10 people. The shooting shook members at UUP chapters at the University at Buffalo and Buffalo State. While many U.S. mass shootings have appeared to be random, many have also specifically targeted groups who have too often been the victims of ongoing discrimination and oppression: people of color, the LGBTQ-plus community and low-income populations.

A month after the Buffalo shooting, the U.S. Supreme Court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, thus throwing the question of legal abortion back to the states.

And both events occurred during the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout that national public health emergency, UUP was also painfully aware of the difficulties faced by its lowest-paid members who worked in the SUNY hospitals on the bottom rungs of the health care profession, or as contingents. Actions taken by UUP in the past five years have built on those incidents, but also on a gradual shift into a social justice profile by the union years in the making.

A larger mission for UUP

UUP could not possibly have known 20 or 25 years ago that the country would end up so torn. But our union has changed with the times, making steps to address social justice issues through a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Among those steps:

Creating the statewide SOUL Committee (Sexual Orientation United for Liberty) more than 20 years ago. Delegates to the UUP Spring 2023 Delegate Assembly approved a constitutional amendment that changed the committee's name to the Gender & Sexuality Interests Committee, chaired by Kelly Keck.

Forming the statewide Affirmative Action Committee, following an ad hoc committee on that topic. The Affirmative Action Committee became the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, now co-chaired by Darleyne Mayers and Lisa Marie Anselmi.

A varied membership

UUP once represented playwrights in the New York Theatre Institute

Our union represents members in more than 500 job titles across SUNY, including doctors and dorm directors and even a supply officer on SUNY Maritime's academy training ship.

But during the 1990s and early 2000s, UUP had a chapter that represented nearly 50 actors, playwrights, technicians and designers who created productions and taught theater education at the New York State Theatre Institute.

Created by the state in 1974, the theater—then known as the Empire State Institute for the Performing Arts—presented hundreds of family friendly plays and musicals and offered educational residencies and arts education programs to students across the state.

UUP delegates voted to create the NYSTI chapter in January 1993 after the theater was moved out of SUNY and was established as a public benefit corporation; that's when it became the New York State Theatre Institute.

Nearly two years earlier, SUNY proposed a 75% budget cut to the theater and sent retrenchment letters to 45 staffers represented by UUP. SUNY to hire some employees back—as non-union workers—to finish out the theater's 1991-1992 season.

That didn't sit well with Albany Chapter President Ivan Steen, who counted the theater workers as part of his chapter. Steen, a strong NYSTI advocate, objected and insisted they be rehired as UUP members. SUNY reluctantly agreed.

To help retain the NYSTI employees as members, UUP's Executive Board authorized the workers to form their own UUP chapter. Delegates to UUP's 1993 Winter Delegate Assembly made it official, approving a resolution allowing the new NYSTI chapter into UUP. John Romeo was the chapter's longtime president.

But the measure did more than just accept NYSTI



Chapter members and supporters of the New York State Theatre Institute rallied in Albany in a last-ditch effort to save one of UUP's most unique chapters. The chapter disbanded after the NYSTI Board of Directors shuttered the theater in December 2010.

into the UUP fold. It also invited other unorganized, non-SUNY workers to affiliate with UUP. That opened the door for UUP to represent non-SUNY employees, such as the New York State Lifeguard Corps.

As for NYSTI, the financially beleaguered theater managed to survive until December 2010, when its board of directors—controlled by appointees of Gov. David Paterson—voted to suspend operations December 31. Paterson slashed state NYSTI funding by half in the 2010-2011 budget.

UUP did what it could to keep NYSTI open. Then UUP President Phil Smith urged Paterson to use state discretionary funding to keep NYSTI afloat. And UUP contributed nearly \$8,000 to a fundraising drive to help NYSTI finish its 2010-11 season.

Alas, it was not meant to be. The chapter had less than 20 members when it shut down. Its final play was Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

TIMELINE

2008

UUP influences lawmakers to pass a bill making the agency shop fee permanent for public employees under the Taylor Law. Phil Smith of Upstate Medical University is elected president.

2009

Results of a two-year union-sponsored gender-equity study of SUNY academics and professionals show an “unexplained inequity” in academic ranks and among professionals in grade five or higher. In the former, women earn nearly \$4,400 less; in the latter, women earn 20% less than men with comparable years of service.

Statements by UUP in response to the 2022 Buffalo gun massacre and anticipated overturning of *Roe v. Wade* that granted a federal constitutional right to an abortion.

A major focus on mental health issues, which became urgent during the pandemic. UUP has hosted several forums on mental health issues, including on the effects of systemic racism on communities of color. The union has also proposed that SUNY create a pipeline program modeled after SUNY’s Educational Opportunity Program to encourage a more diverse range of students to enter the mental health professions.

A 2022 forum examining ways to help LGBTQ-plus youth as bans on curricula and books addressing gender-identity issues took off in public schools and colleges after the pandemic.

The 2022-2026 contract with the state specifically aimed to provide better pay and working conditions for the lowest-paid members of the bargaining unit. Hundreds of these members work in SUNY hospitals, at some of the lowest-paid jobs in health care. Many are members of color, so the improved pay and work conditions also addressed inequity in more ways than one.

A statewide DEI training program for UUP members, so that campuses would have knowledgeable people available to help set up programs and forums and offer resources and discussion about making their campuses more inclusive and welcoming to all.

A planned DEI webpage as part of the UUP website. Carolyn Kube, the UUP statewide vice president for professionals, is overseeing the development of the webpage, which will contain forums and podcasts hosted by UUP, as well as resources for members looking for teaching materials or seeking to enhance their own understanding of these topics.

Change coming from within

Pioneering UUP leaders who helped steer the union toward these accomplishments say they remember support not only from the UUP leadership, but from the members at large, as they took a stand.

“I knew I became known as the pit bull for LGBTQ issues, but I knew I had the privilege to do it,” recalled Patty Bentley, a retired Plattsburgh member and longtime statewide activist and former UUP Executive Board member. She openly identified as a lesbian years before many UUP members felt they could come out on their campuses, especially the more rural campuses.

“When I started attending more DAs and union events, it became evident to me that UUP really was aware of the power of advocacy for social justice, and

Patty Bentley, now retired, was a longtime UUP statewide activist and advocate for LGBTQ-plus rights. She carried this NYSUT poster, covered with supporters’ signatures, to a 2015 rally in Washington, D.C., as the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in the case that eventually would legalize same-sex marriage. The poster is now in the archives of the Library of Congress.



**2010**

UUPers attend the One Nation Working Together march in Washington, D.C. for jobs, justice and public education. The union unveils saveSUNY.org, a micro-website designed to educate students, citizens and lawmakers about the deep cuts to SUNY. The site urged visitors to sign an online petition and contact the governor and other representatives.

2011

UUP undertakes two surveys: one to investigate pay inequity based on race and a second on technology issues. The union awards its first William E. Scheuerman Post-Baccalaureate Scholarship to a SUNY graduate or professional college student.

utilizing terms and conditions,” said Kelly Keck, Delhi Chapter president, chair of the statewide UUP Gender and Sexuality Interests Committee and a state-wide Executive Board member.

“If we improve the working conditions of those who are most vulnerable among us, we improve the working conditions for everybody,” Keck said.

An openly gay man, Keck points to his election as chapter president as proof that the union has embraced inclusiveness.

“I feel I work at a fairly conservative campus in the system, but regardless of that, I won in a landslide,” he said.

Darleyne Mayers, co-chair of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, and her former co-chair of that committee, statewide Membership Development Officer Patrick Romain, credit UUP with being way ahead of its time with the creation of the 1975 ad hoc committee on affirmative action. That laid the foundation for UUP’s Affirmative Action Committee.

In its present and dramatically revised form, the Affirmative Action Committee—now known as the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee—has expanded far beyond its original focus of tackling inequities of pay, hiring and advancement for members from underrepresented groups at SUNY.

Now, through the DEI Committee, UUP is addressing issues such as systemic racism and the generational trauma that racism imposes on communities of color.

The expanded role of the DEI committee is “...something that as a union, we should be very proud of,” Mayers said. “That history laid the foundation for today.”

Where will UUP’s focus on social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion lead this union in the next 50 years? Kowal believes these traits will help UUP broaden its appeal to a younger group of members who didn’t grow up in union households and expect their union to expand its mission.

“Generally, the history of unions has been solely on economic interests,” Kowal said. “Times are changing, for the better. If a union is only focused on the economic interests of the membership, that’s a trip to oblivion. The union won’t survive. UUP has always had a history of being, as I like to say, more than just a union. We will always be strong for the rights of all.”



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THE 2000s AND BEYOND

New York needs SUNY ... and SUNY needs UUP



Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, second from right, poses with Gov. Kathy Hochul. Also shown are Downstate VPA Samuel Marquez, left; and Optometry Chapter member Sidney Contreras.

UUP adapted to a rapid succession of governors in the first years of the 2000s, leading to the election of Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2010. Cuomo's tenure brought a decade of cuts to the SUNY budget that threatened the SUNY hospitals and placed a growing burden on students, whose tuition formed an increasing part of SUNY operating funds.

In a series of hard-hitting advertising campaigns, UUP pointed out that support for SUNY was support for the future of New York.

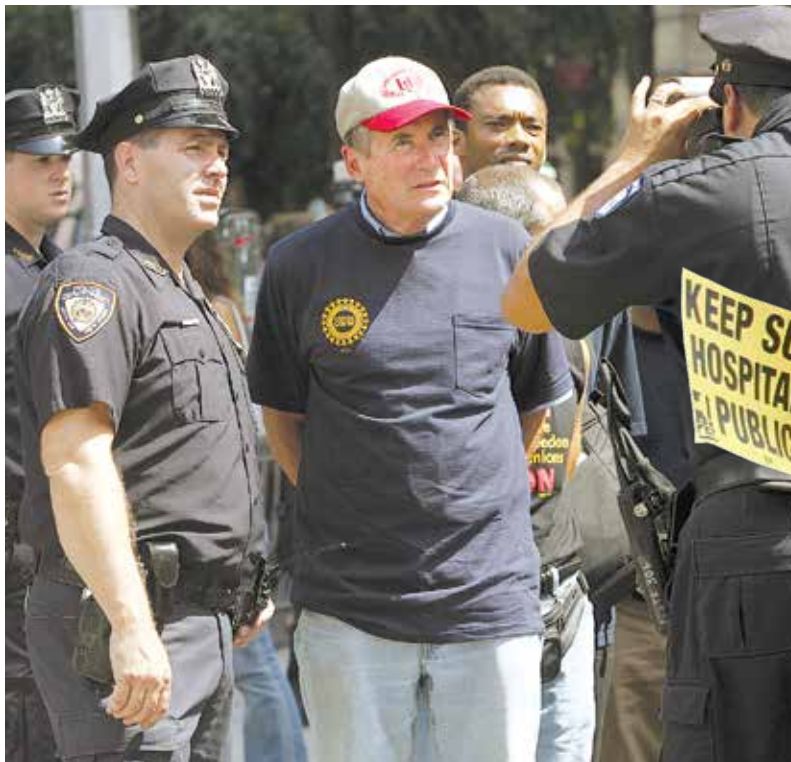
The coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 hit all the SUNY hospitals hard, and set the stage for better benefits, pay and working conditions for UUP-represented employees at the hospitals under the 2022-2026 agreement with the state.



Former statewide VPP Tom Tucker, left center, lifts his voice at a March 2020 rally for public education funding, days before the coronavirus pandemic essentially shut down the state. UUP President Bill Scheurman, right bottom photo, left, rallies to restore SUNY state funding cuts



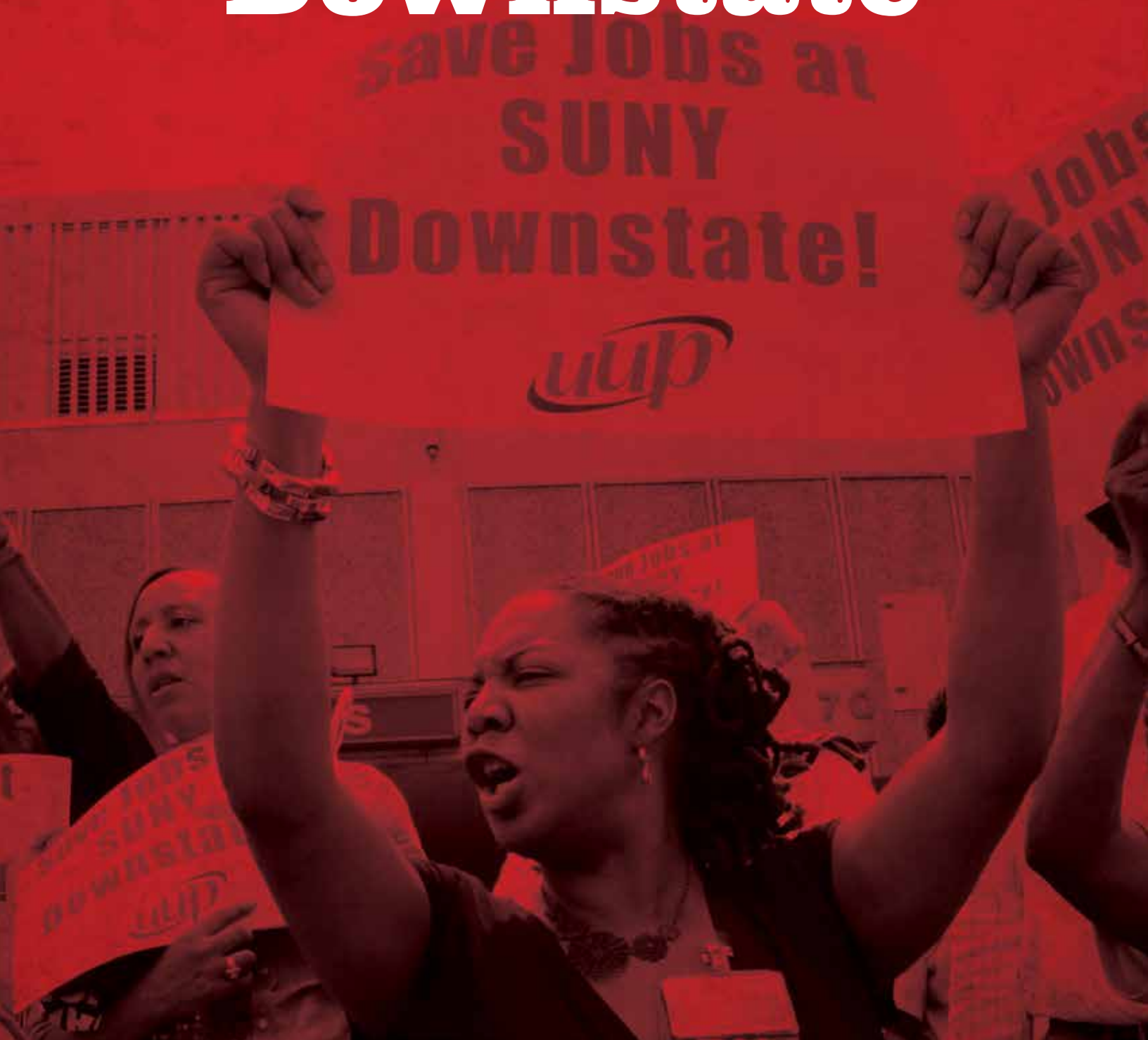
UUP President Phil Smith, at top left, is pictured with his successor, Fred Kowal, and Jamie Dangler, longtime statewide VPA. Fredonia Chapter President Ziya Arnavut, top right, protests state cuts to SUNY.



Rallies and public action became a regular part of UUP. President Bill Scheuerman, above, was the first and so far only UUP president to be arrested for his work as president, at an August 2005 rally in support of graduate students in New York City.



The fight to **SAVE** Downstate



Saving SUNY Downstate: UUP's most important fight yet

By Kate Morano

The date was March 28, 2020, and the United States had just surpassed Italy and China as the country with the most coronavirus cases—over 100,000 and counting.

That day, more than 30,000 of those cases were in New York City, which quickly became an early epicenter of the pandemic, according to the NYC.gov website. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported more than 200,000 laboratory-confirmed COVID cases in New York City in the first three months of the pandemic; almost 23,000 people died in New York City during the first coronavirus wave.

To help mitigate the spread of the disease, then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo made the unprecedented decision to designate SUNY Downstate University Hospital as a COVID-only facility.

Suddenly, Downstate doctors, nurses and medical staffers found themselves at the forefront of a public health emergency unlike any seen before, and they rose to the challenge. To circumvent a shortage of ventilators, Downstate doctors hooked up multiple patients to one machine. Front line workers dealt with severe shortages of crucial medical supplies like N95 masks, gloves and other personal protective gear. Patients and medical professionals alike were falling gravely ill every day, and still Downstate's front line workers persevered.

The CDC stopped tracking COVID cases in May 2023. By then, the Borough of Brooklyn had seen over 970,000 cases. Downstate UUP members on the

front lines of the pandemic put their own lives on the line—and by extension, the lives of their families—to provide necessary health care services to New York residents during the worst public health crisis since the 1918 flu pandemic.

Four years later, SUNY repaid the heroics of Downstate front line workers and rejected the hospital's 168-year history of treating all who walked through its doors by attempting to shut down the hospital—and depriving hundreds of thousands of Central Brooklyn residents the health care they so desperately need.

In January 2024, SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. announced a plan to shift most of Downstate Hospital's services



The late Rowena Blackman-Stroud, longtime Downstate Chapter president, was the voice and face of UUP's fierce effort to protect the hospital from downsizing, sale or closure.

TIMELINE

2013

Frederick E. Kowal of SUNY Cobleskill is elected president. UUP fights off a plan to cut thousands of jobs at SUNY Downstate and attends the March for Jobs and Justice in Washington, D.C.

2014

UUPers picket for the future of public higher education in Lake Placid as billionaire reformers attempt to institute damaging reforms.

to other Brooklyn hospitals and house those left in a wing at nearby Kings County Hospital Center. That the plan came as a shock was an understatement; UUP leaders, state Senate and Assembly members, hospital employees and community members weren't consulted, or even informed that a plan to "transform" the hospital was imminent.

"SUNY is calling its vision for Downstate a transformation, but it is anything but that," UUP President Fred Kowal said. "Let's call this what it is: SUNY is closing Downstate.

"If you moved the programs offered at my home campus, SUNY Cobleskill, to nearby colleges and turned the campus into a shopping center, do you still have a SUNY Cobleskill?" Kowal asked. "Of course not. And that's what's happening at Downstate. If there is no building, there is no hospital."

King's closure plan is just the latest state attempt to defund, close or privatize the hospital. This has been going on for decades and UUP has fought off the threats tooth and nail each and every time.

"Saving this hospital is the most important thing we've ever done," Kowal said. "We're not just fighting for a hospital or a medical school. We're fighting for the future of public higher education in this state. If we let them take an inch, they'll take a mile."

Rowena Blackman-Stroud: Downstate's greatest defender

The Great Recession in 2008 caused significant financial difficulties across every sector of public life, and health care did not emerge unscathed. UUP had already beaten back an attempt to privatize SUNY Downstate and SUNY's teaching hospitals in Stony Brook and Syracuse in 2007, following the recommendations of the Berger Commission.

By 2012, Downstate was under attack once again. That year, New York state and the SUNY system announced a plan to downsize and privatize SUNY Downstate, which included plans to cut hundreds of jobs.

Labor leaders were incensed by the proposal, none more so than the late Rowena Blackman-Stroud, then-president of UUP's Downstate Chapter. An ardent union supporter who cared deeply about her members and providing high-quality health care to Central Brooklyn, Blackman-Stroud immediately took action. She singlehandedly assembled a vocal faith/community coalition, held rallies at the hospital's Emergency Department entrance on Clarkson Avenue, and made sure her chapter's members were decked out in red "Save Jobs at SUNY Downstate" apparel.

Fueled by her memory of all that Downstate University Hospital endured during the coronavirus pandemic, Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols (left) worked tirelessly with UUP leadership to stop the state's plan to close the hospital in early 2024.



2015

UUP comes out in opposition of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Opportunity Agenda, which would institute performance metrics for SUNY campuses to earn funding and proposed closing teacher preparation programs throughout the state based on student test scores. The union issues a strong rebuke against petitioners in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a lawsuit that could have destroyed public sector unions.

2016

UUP and NYSUT join forces against SUNY's flawed and overreaching TeachNY plan. The union endorses Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.



UUP President Fred Kowal (left) had worked with Abrahams-Nichols' predecessor, Rowena Blackman-Stroud (right), a decade earlier in a previous threat to downsize, sell or close the hospital.

Blackman-Stroud died in December 2022 after a brief illness. Her death was mourned greatly by the union, especially the Downstate Chapter members, who knew that the next time the state came for the hospital, they would be missing their greatest defender.

"It's like she was on the front lines of the battle. She was Downstate, the one person everyone knew at Downstate," said Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, who succeeded Blackman-Stroud as Downstate Chapter president. "She put so much work into saving this hospital every time they came to close it. She gave her whole life to Downstate."

Brooklyn to Albany: Downstate must stay open

At Blackman-Stroud's funeral service in New York City, Kowal spoke of her unrelenting commitment to her hospital, and emphasized that her commitment remains through her UUP siblings. With this in mind, UUP went on the offensive within hours of the SUNY chancellor's January 2024 announcement, releasing a series of scathing press releases and spearheading a campaign to save the hospital. More than 500 UUP Downstate members crowded into a meeting room at the hospital to hear Kowal speak January 29; all were glad to receive the support of their union and eager to fight for their hospital.

A week later, Kowal and over 100 UUP members were joined by state Sen. Zellnor Myrie, a Brooklyn native and the hospital's most fervent supporter in the state Legislature. They gathered at the Capitol's Million Dollar Staircase to deliver a loud message to SUNY and Gov. Kathy Hochul about Downstate's importance during the pandemic and to urge them to keep the hospital open.

Kowal embarked on a 90-minute tour of the hospital February 12, accompanied by AFT President Randi Weingarten and NYSUT President Melinda



Person, both of whom have staunchly supported keeping the hospital open and have thrown the weight of their unions' memberships behind the effort. King has sought to paint a dreary picture of Downstate as a decrepit, broken-down hospital but the union presidents instead found a hospital in working condition, with some obvious repairs needed.

Meanwhile, SUNY went into damage-control mode. In what UUP referred to as a “shoddy public relations stunt,” SUNY hastily assembled themed focus groups to ascertain public opinion about the transformation plan—public opinion which SUNY neglected to get before it released the closure plan. King himself traveled to Brooklyn to meet with faith leaders at Lenox Road Baptist Church, just a few blocks from the hospital; UUP members and other activists arrived in droves outside the church to vocalize their displeasure at the so-called “transformation” plan. Central Brooklyn turned out again February 29, 2024, when thousands of employees and supporters arrived for a spirited rally outside the hospital.

The massive demonstration, which shut down the entire block of Clarkson Avenue in front of the hospital's main entrance, featured speeches from more than two dozen labor leaders, lawmakers, community activists and faith-based advocates for Central Brooklyn.

The rally, a triumph for UUP, was just the beginning; the union returned to Albany and entered the month of March with more vigor than ever. The AFT issued a survey March 4; nearly three-quarters of respondents were against the closure plan, and of those, more than half strongly opposed shuttering the state-operated teaching hospital.



2017

UUP signs on as an official partner of the Women's March on Washington. The union condemns the racist violence in Charlottesville, VA, and opposes efforts by the federal government to repeal the ACA and DACA.

Clearly, it wasn't just UUP leadership outraged by this plan, it was the members themselves. UUP hosted a series of virtual panels in mid-March with medical experts from Downstate, all of whom painted a dismal picture of life in Central Brooklyn without the hospital.

Downstate provides unique, specialized life-saving services that other hospitals won't or can't afford to offer. The hospital has an interventional cardiac catheterization lab and is home to the only kidney transplant center in Brooklyn. Around 60 transplants are performed at Downstate each year, according to Dr. Allen Norin, professor of cell biology and director of transplant immunology at the hospital, who called the chancellor's plan to move the program elsewhere a "pipe dream." Dr. Christopher Lange, professor of radiation oncology at Downstate's medical school, noted that the hospital's most profitable programs have already been closed at Downstate, which was why the hospital was hemorrhaging money.

Dr. Ann Harris, who works in Downstate's electrophysiology department, said that Central Brooklyn patients will be forced to go to another Brooklyn hospital if Downstate is closed. New York-Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital, the closest hospital that provides specialized cardiac care, is a 30-minute drive from Downstate.

A scorned community lashes out

Efforts to save the hospital reached a climax by the end of March 2024, when over 100 Brooklyn residents gathered at Public School 235 to tell their own sto-



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ries about Downstate and to implore Gov. Hochul to stop the closure plan in its tracks.

Wayne Knight, a local resident who was treated for epilepsy and three strokes at Downstate, once spent multiple weeks receiving treatment at the hospital, and praised the nurses for their above-and-beyond care. He was visibly emotional at the thought of the closure, fighting back tears as he shared with the crowd his experience at Downstate. Alithia Alleyne works for Downstate’s occupational therapy program and has two children who were treated at Downstate. A nurse at the hospital helped her daughter join a program to receive occupational therapy as a toddler; her daughter is now in medical school, and Alleyne remains adamant that the care she received at Downstate changed the trajectory of her life.

A recurring theme throughout the evening was outrage at the closure plan and at the lack of consideration for the thoughts and opinions of the community.

David Gallimore, a stroke and cardiac patient at Downstate, warned legislators that there would be repercussions on Election Day if the hospital was closed, echoing sentiments from Sen. Myrie at the February 29 rally. In essence, Brooklyn put its foot down that day and sent a clear message to the state: Any harm done by the hospital’s closure would not be forgotten.

Faith leaders expressed similar sentiments at a prayer vigil the following month, urging Gov. Hochul and her supporters to remember the loyalty shown by Brooklyn during the 2022 election. While lawmakers struggled to button up the FY 2025 budget, over two weeks past the deadline, Brooklyn prayed for Downstate hospital, and encouraged Albany to do the right thing.

The final budget, approved April 21, 2024, placed the hospital firmly back into the safe zone, at least as of this writing. The budget included \$100 million in operating aid to cover a projected deficit, and it established a nine-member community advisory board to assess the future of the hospital. UUP President Kowal will have a seat on that panel.



Contingents:

**From overlooked
to executive board**



Long push for recognition brings gains, but effort continues

By Darryl McGrath

Contingents have long been the underappreciated support system of higher education—the employees who have many of the same responsibilities as their tenure-track peers, but for a fraction of the pay and recognition.

Although contingent employees in higher education celebrate their contributions and highlight their concerns annually during the national observance of Campus Equity Week, contingents in UUP have worked hard to bring their concerns to the forefront year-round. They’ve also made significant gains far earlier than their counterparts in many other higher education unions.

The 1988-1991 contract with the state, for example, included for the first time in SUNY’s history the criteria that part-time academic and part-time professional employees had to meet to qualify for health insurance through their jobs at SUNY. Although it was technically possible for some part-timers to claim health insurance without a contractual guarantee under some circumstances, based on how much they worked, it could be complex and time-consuming for part-time employees to know if they qualified—and then convince their employer that they did. Having contract language that set out the criteria was a huge gain.

While it would be difficult to state with any certainty whether this was the first higher education contract in the country to clarify access to health insurance for part-time employees, it can be said

that this negotiated right for UUP-represented employees came at a time when health insurance for most contingent workers in higher education was an elusive wish-list item.

As contingents know, they are still underpaid and are often overworked. In UUP, however, they have had a seat at the negotiating table for many years, and now, for the first time, they have a designated seat on the statewide UUP Executive Board. Cortland Chapter president Jaclyn Pittsley, a longtime contingent activist, is not the first contingent to serve on the Executive Board, but she is the first to fill a seat specifically reserved for academic contingents on the board.

In addition to the clarification on health insurance eligibility and the designation of a dedicated Executive Board seat, gains for contingents include:

The creation of full-time lecturer positions in 1999, with four levels of advancement.

Per course salary minimums for part-time academic faculty in the 2022-2026 agreement with the state.

Maximum per-course salaries will nearly double for some contingent faculty under this contract, with up to \$6,000 at University Centers and up to \$5,500 for Comprehensive and Technical campuses.

Under a 2022 state law backed by UUP, the definition of “work time” for contingents was expanded to include out-of-classroom obligations such as preparation and office hours. The expanded definition also defines full-time employment as 30 hours a week, which means that contingents are far more likely to qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness.



Anne Wiegard, (left), and Jaclyn Pittsley, (above, inset) are two of the many UUP members who have worked hard to help contingents achieve better recognition, benefits and pay.

2020

SUNY Downstate becomes New York's first COVID-only hospital. UUP provides members working in SUNY public teaching hospitals with hundreds of thousands of pieces of proper protective gear. UUP members at SUNY campuses go above and beyond to keep schools open during the pandemic, quickly setting up and adapting to holding courses online.



The late Fayez Samuel of Farmingdale, center, an early advocate for his fellow contingents, chaired committees devoted to the concerns of part-time members at the chapter and state levels.

Early push from the top

Several contingent activists in UUP credit former UUP President Phil Smith with setting in motion changes that led to greater recognition and respect.

“Phil did a lot for contingents,” said Beth Wilson, New Paltz Chapter president. Wilson started at New Paltz in 1994 as a replacement for a faculty member on sabbatical. A full-time lecturer since 2008, she vividly remembers the anxiety at the end of each academic year, when she waited for an appointment letter that meant she would be renewed for another year.

“When you’re stopping and starting on the payroll, it’s the kind of stuff that people who are full time—even if they are sympathetic—they don’t realize these are the things adjuncts deal with,” Wilson said. She would eventually be named to a statewide part-time concerns committee, a precursor to the current Contingent Employment Committee.

“There was a concerted effort by a collective group of union contingents who moved the needle within the union,” Wilson recalled. “I was proud to be there, proud to stand with those people.”

It was also during Smith’s tenure that Steve Street, a UUP contingent faculty member who taught at Brockport and Buffalo State, died of cancer. Street was the Buffalo State Chapter’s officer for contingents, a delegate and a member of the statewide Contingent Employment Committee. He was also a 2010 recipient of UUP’s Fayeze Samuel Award for Courageous Service by Part-Time Academic and Professional Faculty. UUP honored his memory with the creation of the Steve Street Scholarship Award.

UUP part of a national effort

In 2009, Smith asked Cortland member Anne Wiegard to chair a task force on contingent employees in the union. Wiegard, a delegate and contingent faculty member, would eventually gain a national reputation as an advocate for her contingent colleagues. The task force issued its report in February 2010.

“We made several recommendations, most of which were implemented in the years following,” Wiegard recalled. The overall tone of the report: “To give [con-

“There was a concerted effort by a collective group of union contingents who moved the needle within the union.”

**BETH WILSON
NEW PALTZ CHAPTER PRESIDENT**



TIMELINE

2022

UUP issues a statement condemning the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The union launches its podcast, “The Voice,” hosted by UUP President Fred Kowal.

2023

UUP holds rallies at cash-strapped SUNY campuses across the state to point out the absolute need for state funding for SUNY. Years of budget cuts and underfunding caused created multimillion-dollar deficits at 19 campuses. UUP’s relentless advocacy resulted in victory: nearly \$300 million in new funding for SUNY, including \$163 million in direct aid to campuses.

tingents] more equity as workers, and part of that was to give them more power in the union.”

Wiegard would be one of many members who achieved prominence as an advocate for contingents. A delegate to UUP, the AFT and NYSUT, she served on the Negotiations Team for the 2011-2016 UUP contract, the statewide Executive Board and the AFT Higher Education Program and Policy Council. She was a co-founder of the New Faculty Majority, a national organization of contingent faculty, and would serve on another national organization, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor. She won the 2020 Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service to UUP, and in early 2024, UUP created the Anne Wiegard Award for Courageous Service by Full-Time Contingent Academic and Professional Faculty.

For contingent employees represented by UUP, “I think generally the track record has been progressive,” Wiegard said. “Fred [Kowal] has been a real ally and advocate for contingent faculty. There are many competing interests in UUP, and the challenge in our very diverse union is to get everyone to realize how contingency affects everyone.”

Jaclyn Pittsley, a full-time contingent who holds the academic title of Lecturer IV in English at Cortland, was elected at the UUP Spring 2024 Delegate Assembly as the first member to serve in the newly created statewide Executive Board seat for contingents. She also served on the UUP Negotiations Team for the 2022-2026 contract. She co-chairs the statewide UUP Contingent Employment Committee, along with Anne Fearman of Fredonia.

Aiming for across-the-board unity

Pittsley also has seen progress for contingents over the years.

“I think that since I became active in the union in 2009, we have improved by leaps and bounds,” Pittsley said. “We have had more and more progressive

Steve Street, left, taught at Brockport and Buffalo State. He made his mark as a delegate, an office for contingents and a member of the statewide Employment Contingent Committee. Street died of cancer in 2012; he is memorialized with the UUP Steve Street Scholarship Award. He is shown here with former statewide Executive Board member Peter D.G. Brown of New Paltz—another advocate for contingent members.



leadership. I came on at a pivotal time, when change was starting to happen with great leaders like Phil Smith, and was carried forward by Fred [Kowal]. We have firmly established that contingents need to be represented.”

Job security remains an issue for contingents. When colleges and universities started to shed jobs during the coronavirus pandemic, contingents were often the first to go. In SUNY, the number of nonrenewed contingents was never as high as UUP feared it might be, but any job losses were a major concern.

“It’s time to abolish the notion that full-time contingents erode tenure.”

JACLYN PITTSLEY

“I really would like to see the full-time lecturer position become more universal and less at the discretion of the department chair,” Pittsley said. “It’s time to abolish the notion that full-time contingents erode tenure.”

with shared goals, regardless of their title.

“There are many people who feel that not having the title ‘professor’ degrades them professionally, especially if they have a tertiary degree like a Ph.D.,” Fearman said. “Language matters, absolutely, but at the same time, the purpose of a union is to represent all of us. That’s one of the things I’ve seen in the last 10 years from the union – to depersonalize the language. It unites us.”

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UUP
TIMELINE

2024

In its most crucial fight yet, UUP fights to stop SUNY Chancellor John King and Gov. Kathy Hochul from closing Downstate Medical Center.





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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This commemorative 50th anniversary issue that celebrates the first half century of United University Professions is first and foremost the work of the UUP members, past and present. This issue celebrates their courage, their accomplishments and their dedication to the ideals of this union and the labor movement.

Several people on the UUP administrative staff contributed their skills as managers, artists, researchers, journalists and editors to turn these celebratory 50 years into the book you now hold.

UUP President Fred Kowal supported this project from the start, and we thank him for his confidence in the Communications Department's vision for the 50th anniversary book.

UUP Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee oversees the UUP Communications Department, and she steered this project through to completion.

Communications Director Michael Lisi served as the day-to-day director of the project's pace and content. He also wrote several articles and helped select photographs.

Mark Hempstead, UUP's graphic artist, had the monumental task of creating the layout and design, starting with the stunningly simple cover.

Managing editor Darryl McGrath did extensive reporting and writing, and worked closely with Mark Hempstead as the design of the book came together.

Communications assistant Angell Villafañe was the primary researcher for the project, using her extensive knowledge of the UUP archives at the University at Albany to help find obscure photographs.

Staff writer Kate Morano contributed several articles and took on the difficult task of constructing an accurate timeline of UUP's history, which is presented on page margins throughout the book.

Former UUP staff writer Liza Frenette brought invaluable institutional memory to her reporting and writing of two comprehensive articles.

All of us hope you find this commemorative book informative and interesting.

Thank you for being members of this great union.

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**“Justice does not
burst forth on
the field of human
endeavor unbidden.
It only does so through
the unrelenting efforts of
young and old, black
and white, brown and red —
all those endowed with the
means to till the soil,
nurse the crop and
harvest the bounty
of freedom and
equality.”**

UUP PRESIDENT FREDERICK E. KOWAL





1973 - 2023

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