

Not Who and What, But, When and How Rouses

Tech-Fee Protests

*A News Analysis/Opinion:
It wasn't only \$25 that
stirred up the tension*

BY WILLIAM KLINE

CO EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It wasn't so much the amount of the increase of the student technology fee, nor the prospect that tuitions would climb, that angered most students. It was, as University Student Senate Chancellor Robert Ramos put it, the "cloud of the suspicion" that spawned much of the rejection swirling around the July vote by CUNY trustees.

As much as they may not like it, students understand the complications that arise when running an institution. If you've survived a black-out this summer, you understand the strain that a downed computer or a general lack of electricity can cause.

We need computers. We need the Internet in order to YouTube videos of The Colbert Report. When Wikipedia fails, we need J STOR. When we clear out our G-Mail inbox, we'll finally check that crusty old CSI account. All of this costs a lot of money unless you're a celebrity and can hook up a free Mac.

In February 2002, CSI determined that it would be unable to cover the costs of student access to technology. It charged each full-time \$75.00 and each part-time paid half--\$37.50. That fee remained constant until July, when CUNY's Executive Committee voted to increase that by \$25.00 for full-timers. Part-time students will now pay a flat \$50.00.

Multiple reasons justify the CUNY move.

First, student populations have gone up, which has created more of a demand for access to computers and Internet access. Remember those busy days during finals when all of the terminals were filled up? Now picture that with several more hard-drive hawks circling and stalking the PC's as if they were spots in parking lot 3.

Software, hardware, and computers need continual updates. Last year's Razr is this year's iPhone. As we do less and less with our hands, we spend more on that which we do on the screen. Many students have access to equipment worth much more than \$50 or \$100.

Let's face it, CUNY is not an institution bloated with excess capital. Governor David Paterson recently

announced that he planned to cut 1 billion dollars from the State budget. As a result of that plan, CUNY would lose \$50 million in state funding. This leaves the University in a financial pinch of sorts.

So the fee hike itself, makes perfect sense at this point, over 6 years later. But, the lack of sufficient disclosure undercut student trust on a particularly contentious issue.

Most CSI students found out about the hike thru a letter with their semester bill, which informed them of the increase. When the university-wide student representative finds out while at work, only days before the meeting, it raises questions about timing, or at least preparedness. No student knew unless they looked real hard. During the summer, that's not likely.

So when Chancellor Goldstein took offense to what Ramos called "a cloud of suspicion," it wasn't that any heinous conspiracy was suspected. It just seemed as if the timing prevented any real student mobilization. And despite the fact that CUNY alerted each college of the fee hike, they should have made sure each institution followed through on their instructions. Instead, they shirked responsibility by basically passing off the blame on Student Life.