

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for ___City Council_____ (Borough President, City Council, Comptroller, District Attorney, Mayor, Public Advocate,)

City Council District: _10th Council District___

Borough: __Manhattan

Name: _Ydanis Rodriguez_____

Campaign Address: __618 W 177th St. NY, NY 10032_____

Telephone #s: __347-577-7713_____

Email Address: __ YdanisforCityCouncil@gmail.com _____

Political Party Affiliation: _Democratic_____

Occupation: _Teacher, Gregorio Luperon Preparatory School_____

Current Employment / Employer: _Gregorio Luperon Preparatory School_____

Are you an incumbent: Yes_____ No__X__ Number of years in office __None_____

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to serve? _____

Education:

High School: _____

College: _BA Political Science, City College of New York_____

Graduate / Professional: _MA Bilingual Education, City College of New York_____

1. I received support to pay for college from:
(Please check all that apply)

Pell Grant

NYS Tuition Assistance Program
Scholarship

Student Loans

Family

Self

Other Source _____

2. In my view, paying for public higher education (CUNY) should primarily be the responsibility of:

(check only one)

- Students
- Parents / Family
- Government**
- Employers
- All of the above

(Please attach additional sheets as necessary to answer the following questions.)

3. Public funding to public higher education has fallen sharply over the last two decades. Since 1991, NY State funding per student for CUNY senior colleges fell 14% and, for CUNY community colleges, it fell by 25.6%.¹ Though NY City began to restore funding to CUNY community colleges five years ago, proposed budget cuts this year will eliminate this advance. What would you do to increase public investment in CUNY?

Not only my long history as a leader of the CUNY student movement, but also my long time experience as a public school teacher demonstrates my fervent support for affordable higher education for poor and working families. It is very unfortunate that many of our brilliant young men and women cannot pursue or complete a college or graduate degree for lack of financial support. Addressing their predicament will be a top priority for me.

I will use my knowledge and experience in the field of education to promote the importance of higher education and build widespread support for more public funding in this area. I will use my position in the City Council to introduce and endorse legislative initiatives designed to preserve and strengthen both the economic viability of CUNY and working families' access to it. An integral part of this effort is to ensure adequate compensation for CUNY faculty and personnel to preserve and expand the institution's academic talent at the faculty and all levels of the university.

Moreover, I would make sure the quality of education at CUNY is enhanced by advocating for more resources for the different academic programs. I would then support a public relations campaign to raise awareness of the quality of a CUNY education and its value to our city and our state, thus increasing the willingness to invest in public higher education.

4. More than 50% of CUNY students come from households with annual income below \$40,000, but students will pay 15% more on average next year to attend a CUNY senior college and 14% more to attend a community college if tuition hikes go through. Overall, student tuition makes up 40% of CUNY's total operating revenue and the CUNY Master Plan ("CUNY Compact") calls for regular, annual tuition hikes.

4a. Do you support or oppose the current tuition increases? Oppose

4b. Do you support or oppose the CUNY Compact's call for annual tuition increases? Oppose

4c. What would you do to relieve the burden on students and families to pay for CUNY?

With worsening recession and public funding for higher education falling, many families face economic hardship, therefore discouraging many of our young talented people to attend college. In order to relieve some of the financial burden many students and families face, I would have more scholarships available and also would like to make financial aid more easily accessible.

- 4d. Some economists argue that earning a college degree enables a student to get a good-paying job upon graduation, and, therefore, government policy should be structured around an expectation of students to finance their education by taking out loans. Do you agree or disagree with a higher education financing policy that is structured around students taking out loans to finance tuition increases? Why or why not?

¹ Fiscal Policy Institute Report: "New York State's Underinvestment in Public Higher Education," January 15, 2009

While I oppose the tuition increase, especially in this recession time, if there must be a tuition increase, I agree with higher education financing policy where students can have easy access to loans. It would at least provide students with low income household with the opportunity to receive higher level education.

5. CUNY enrollments are higher than at any other time in its history, but in 1975 (the last enrollment peak), CUNY had 11,500 full-time faculty and now it has 6,800. Similarly, there has been a decline in the number of professional and support staff. CUNY now has 9,000 adjunct faculty and 1,000 adjunct professional staff who are part-time and low-paid. The dramatic decline of the full-time workforce and reliance on an exploited and over-stretched part-time workforce compromises the quality of education and the University's ability to deliver educational services to students.

- 5a. What specific policies would you advocate to provide CUNY with the resources to hire more full-time faculty, counselors, professional and other staff?

Full funding of CUNY's Fiscal Year 2010

- 5b. What specific policies would you advocate to improve the wages and working conditions of part-time adjunct faculty and staff that currently provide half the instruction at CUNY?

NYS legislation for adjunct unemployment insurance

6. What are your views on New York City's current tax structure? If you are elected, what specific tax and revenue policies would you advocate?

Current New York City tax structure does not cover the tax base fairly for everyone and I will advocate fair share tax reform by enlarging the state's tax base to cover the two new tax brackets for New York's wealthiest residents.

7. What fiscal policies would you advocate to help New York City maintain public services during the current recession?

With a worsening recession, I would practice judicious fiscal policies by eliminating pork-barrel projects and with careful review of the spending, therefore curtailing unnecessary spending and focusing on important expenses such as maintenance of public services.

8. In your view, where does CUNY stand, as a priority, in New York's economic development and economic recovery?

CUNY definitely stands as one of the most important priorities of New York's economic development and economic recovery. Because producing viable members of the work force for our community to face the challenges of the future has direct correlation to our community's economic development and recovery, quality and affordability of education at CUNY requires high attention.

9. Academic freedom is important because adherence to it allows colleges and universities to best serve the public interest. For this reason, the university must be a place where all ideas, even those that are unpopular, may be freely expressed and debated without interference from management, trustees or public officials. Yet, for short-term political advantage, politicians have undermined academic freedom by publicly attacking unpopular speech by faculty and calling for punitive action by college or university managements. Such public calls go beyond simple disagreement.

- 9a. Do you agree that it is necessary to uphold academic freedom at CUNY and other colleges and universities? Will you agree to avoid taking unfair political advantage of unpopular speech on campuses?

As stated above, I believe academic freedom is important because it allows colleges and universities to best serve the public interest and to promote the common interest of its communities.

- 9b. Academic freedom also extends to pedagogical practices, academic standards and curriculum and program decisions. Who do you believe is best placed to make determinations about these matters: faculty, college administrators, community organizations, private businesses, or public officials?

Decisions for making academic standards and curriculum should be dependent on faculty who are most familiar and knowledgeable in the field. Faculty has the best understanding of the academic system to create the most efficient academic environment. Any decisions by other group such as public officials, private businesses, community organizations and college administrators would bring in other factors in the decision making process.

10. Do you believe that public employees should have the same right to strike as private employees? Please explain?

Protest is one of the ways for workers to represent themselves, effectively make their voices heard and demonstrate their ideas, and these rights should be extended to public employees as well and they should not be penalized for practicing this right.

11. In general, public employees have had more generous health and pension benefits than private employees. Some politicians have used this disparity to argue for a diminution of public employee benefits and blamed New York's fiscal problems on such benefits. Do you believe public employees' health and pension benefits should be maintained, reduced, or enhanced? Please be as specific as possible.

Public employees' health and pension should be maintained but not reduced because public employee should set the example for the private employees, therefore government can set the standard for the rest of the country to follow.

12. Incumbents, please list your committee and subcommittee memberships and indicate if you are chair:

I have not yet had the opportunity to serve as a city council but I had founded the Dominican Youth Union and Dominicans 200, two organizations that serve our community.

13. Please list the bills you have introduced or co-sponsored in support of CUNY and higher education, or other actions you have taken in this cause:

I have not yet had the opportunity to introduce or co-sponsor bills in support of CUNY but as a leader of the CUNY student movement in 1989, 1991 and 1993, I organized demonstrations in defense of affordable higher education for poor and working families. As a result of that movement, tuition was not increased in 1989.

14. Please list other legislation that you have introduced or co-sponsored in the last two legislative sessions:

I have not yet had the opportunity to serve on the city council but if I become a Councilperson I would promote legislation and programs that preserve affordable housing, enable construction of new housing and renovation of abandoned and occupied buildings, foster constructive dialogue between the community and its law enforcement agencies, target mistreatment and excessive force by police against civilians, sensitize people to ethnic, racial, religious, sexual diversity, and gender equality, strengthen domestic violence laws, guarantee universal healthcare coverage and widen access, protect workers' rights to unionize, to collectively bargain for better wages and living conditions and monitor and improve the environment in our neighborhoods.

15. Please describe other actions you have taken in support of union-related initiatives:

I have participated in the teaching organized by the P.S.C I also have participated in several rallies demanding fair contracts for P.S.C. I also spoke out in solidarity defending the workers of Estella D'Oro.

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

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Fax: (212) 302-7815
Attention: Amanda Magalhaes
amagalhaes@pscmail.org

We encourage you to send the questionnaire and attachments via email or by fax.