

# 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: \_\_\_\_\_ 26 \_\_\_\_\_

Borough: \_\_\_\_\_ Queens \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Jimmy Van Bramer \_\_\_\_\_

Campaign Address: 45-18 Skillman Ave. \_\_\_\_\_

Sunnyside, NY 11104 \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone #s: (718) 313-0569 \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: jimmyvanbramer@gmail.com \_\_\_\_\_

Political Party Affiliation: Democrat and Working Families Party \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: Chief External Affairs Officer \_\_\_\_\_

Current Employment / Employer: Queens Library \_\_\_\_\_

Are you an incumbent: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X Number of years in office \_\_\_\_\_

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to serve? 3

Education:

High School: Bryant High School \_\_\_\_\_

College: St. John's University \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate / Professional: \_\_\_\_\_

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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%.<sup>1</sup> 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?

*In these tough economic times, it is increasingly clear that we need more investment in the CUNY system. By improving access to, and the raising the quality of, our higher education system, New York can turn its economy around and secure prosperity for the long run. Students should have access to the CUNY -- regardless of their financial ability -- to train and re-train for the new economy. Education is the lynchpin to the betterment of our society and of our city; therefore as a member of the City Council, I would vote and fight to increase the public investment in CUNY to ensure the future of our educators and next generation of leaders.*

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? *Support Brian – so we oppose the current increase but favor CUNY Compact increases? Why is that? It's not specifically addressed below.*

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

*Greater funding from all levels of government is required, so that everyone, regardless of their economic status will be able to attend the college that best suits their needs and desires. Until we can achieve that goal, families in New York City need increased support for their students' higher education now more than ever. Studies have shown that increased tuition does not result in greater economic freedom for universities, but it does add stress onto families and students trying to pay for their education. I would support the CUNY Compact increases because they ensure protection for students in low-income families and are small enough and steady enough to allow students and families to plan for those increases.*

- 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?

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

*I do not agree with a public higher education financing policy structured on loans. The primary support for students should come from the general public, not a burden put on students. We have a responsibility to help those students who need assistance to receive a good and proper education without being severely limited in their options after graduation. This fall, my nephew will start his freshman year at a SUNY school through the help and support of scholarships and grants for those in financial need. The kind of assistance made available to him and to other low-income students is critical to our society's future.*

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?

*First of all, we need to be sure CUNY never goes backward by allowing budget cuts or hiring freezes that do not replace faculty on a 1 to 1 ratio. A situation where the number of full-time professors actually decreases is not acceptable, especially when enrollment is steady or continues to rise. The best policy is to make avenues of advancement for adjunct and part time professors less prohibitive. Greater freedom should be afforded to staff and administrators to retain and promote those adjunct and part time professors who have shown themselves to be effective in the classroom or excellent researchers.*

- 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?

*My first change would be to extend health benefits to adjuncts and part time staff in their first semester of work. Waiting until the third semester of employment is not acceptable, as I believe health coverage is a right. Additional office and preparation hours to better serve students are also a step in the right direction. Over the long term, CUNY should be working to reduce its overall number of adjunct professors to not only improve the quality of life of those working for the University, but to improve the quality of education afforded to its students.*

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?

*I support increasing the progressivity of New York City's tax structure. I also believe the city will need to maximize the use of stimulus and other federal funds, and do a better job of making the case to our city and state representatives that the net transfer of billions of dollars out of New York City is damaging to the country as a whole, as it undermines the capacity of the city as an economic engine.*

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

*Cutting public services during a recession makes it more far difficult for the economy to recover. While we should always look to cut spending that is truly wasteful or inefficient, I agree with most mainstream economists who say that during tough times, government must pick up the slack created by reduced private spending. As mentioned, I support a progressive tax structure and better use of public funds.*

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

*CUNY, as part of the strong educational foundation upon which our society has been built, is clearly a very high priority for New York's economic development and recovery. Educating the next generation is vital to the economic development and recovery of New York. Therefore, as a Council member, I will fight to protect our CUNY system and continue to make improvements, rather than scaling back with damaging cuts that will hurt our economy in both the long and short run.*

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?

*Yes, I agree to both points.*

- 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?

*I believe that academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas are essential to the college experience. The classroom should be a safe space where all ideas -- even those that are unpopular or controversial -- can be expressed, challenged and discussed. Therefore, I believe that it is in not only in the interest of the students, but all of society, to allow for the major decisions on academic freedom to be made by those who are most qualified in the classroom, the faculty.*

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

*Yes, I believe that public employees should have the same right to strike as private employees.*

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.

*I believe that public employees, especially those charged the invaluable task of the education of our youth, should have enhanced health and pension benefits. I believe in universal health benefits for all, and feel that we should be working towards this common goal at all levels of government and in all businesses.*

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

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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:

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

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

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Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

Professional Staff Congress / CUNY  
61 Broadway, Suite 1500  
New York, New York 10006  
(212) 354-1252  
Fax: (212) 302-7815  
Attention: Amanda Magalhaes  
[amagalhaes@pscmail.org](mailto:amagalhaes@pscmail.org)

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

**Jimmy Van Bramer** is a lifelong resident of Western Queens and the son of two active union members. While growing up Jimmy sometimes followed his stepfather, a public-school custodian, to work. As he watched his stepfather polish classroom floors and scrub desks so that children and teachers could have a clean learning space, Jimmy learned the importance of hard work, and the powerful impact that small efforts can have on working people's lives. Jimmy has carried those lessons throughout his life.

Jimmy's career has been devoted to making our community stronger and making life better for Queens families like the one he grew up in. Currently, he serves as the Chief External Affairs Officer of the Queens Public Library. As the library's link between community members and government, Jimmy works to protect and expand important library services, such as after-school programs and English language classes. He also leads members of the Queens community on annual trips to Albany and Washington, D.C. to help them make their voices heard by government officials. Jimmy also works to improve our neighborhoods outside of his job, by serving as a member of Community Board Two and its Land Use Committee.

Before joining the leadership of the Queens Borough Public Library, Jimmy fought to protect the rights of regular people in the democratic process by working on the Clean Money, Clean Elections campaign. As the organization's Deputy Field Director, Jimmy brought together Queens community leaders and working people from every walk of life to win important changes in election laws. Jimmy has also worked as a reporter for Lesbian and Gay New York (LGNY), now Gay City News, a community newspaper, where he brought attention to the AIDS epidemic and bias/hate crimes.

The ideals that Jimmy has worked for over his entire career--respect for working people, equality for all, and the importance of improving quality of life in our community--were instilled in him by his family and strong Catholic upbringing here in Queens. His father, William Van Bramer, was a lifelong member of Printers' and Pressman's Union Local 2. Elizabeth Van Bramer, Jimmy's mother, helped support the family by taking a variety of jobs in their neighborhood, and she was a member of Local 1893 of the International Brotherhood of Painters.

Jimmy is proud to have been educated in Queens' public schools. He graduated from P.S. 70, J.H.S. 10, and William Cullen Bryant High School. Jimmy then worked his way through St. John's University, where he was active in campus politics and served as president of the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance.

Jimmy currently lives in Sunnyside Gardens with Dan, his partner of ten years. He represents his neighborhood on the New York State Democratic Committee. Additionally, he is the President of the West Queens Independent Democratic Club and a member of the Board of Directors of the Ridgewood Democratic Club.