

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: 39th

Borough: Brooklyn

Name: Brad Lander

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Email Address: brad@bradlander.com

Political Party Affiliation: Democratic (also a Working Families Party member)

Occupation: city planner / adjunct professor / not-for-profit director

Current Employment / Employer: Director, Pratt Center for Community (at Pratt Institute)

Are you an incumbent: Yes _____ No X Number of years in office 0

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to serve? 3 consecutive terms in total (2 after the one that begins January 2010, if I win this election)

Education:

High School: Parkway North High School, St. Louis, MO

College: University of Chicago, Chicago, IL; A.B. in Fundamentals: Issues and Texts (w/honors)

Graduate / Professional: University of London; M.Sc. in Social Anthropology; Pratt Institute, M.S. in City and Regional Planning

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

- Pell Grant
- NYS Tuition Assistance Program
- X Scholarship (University of Chicago Honors Scholarship; Harry S. Truman Scholarship)
- Student Loans
- X Family
- X 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
- X 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?

I believe strongly that free (or very substantially reduced cost) public higher education for New Yorkers is one of the keys to our long-term success – in the past, present, and future – in creating opportunities for people to join the middle class. For millions of working-class and immigrant New Yorkers, CUNY has been the critical bridge from poverty to success on local, national, international scales. President Obama has publicly recognized the necessity of post-secondary education for everyone. For people who are not wealthy, this generally means either beginning their adulthood with crushing debt, or having access to high-quality public higher education. This is especially important during an economic downturn, when families have fewer resources, and will therefore be forced to forego long-term investments in higher education if tuition rises. We must keep the promise that CUNY represents for today’s students, by restoring budget cuts and increasing public investment. I am pleased that the State Legislature and City Council work hard to restore proposed cuts this year; but increased vigilance will be needed in the future.

I therefore commit to working closely with PSC/CUNY in campaigns to increase public investment at the city, state, and federal levels. This will include putting CUNY senior and community colleges high on my priority list for resources during City budget negotiations; working with PSC/CUNY on public education, outreach, and organizing to call attention to CUNY’s importance, its successes, and the threats the cuts pose; joining in public actions and demonstrations; being willing to support new tax revenue sources; fighting for restorations and increases as part of the budget process; and lobbying colleagues in state and federal government to work for increased support at those levels.

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

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

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

The primary way to relieve the burden on students and families is to provide sufficient public investment so that a CUNY education can be free for as many students as possible, and at a lower cost for all students. As noted above, this requires fighting for resources on a city, state, and federal level. This is especially true in an economic downturn, when the public must make long-term investments in our future, since many families (particularly working-class, low-income, and immigrant families) are simply unable to do so. I would therefore fight for increased public resources for CUNY, to insure reduced burdens for as many students and families as possible.

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?

While loans to finance tuition are appropriate for private universities, I do **NOT** believe this is the appropriate approach for **public** higher education. We are increasingly realizing that post-secondary education is universally necessary for people to succeed. It is not a luxury, or something that only a modest portion of Americans needs; it is something that everyone needs. It should not, therefore, be based on a "risk/reward" calculation. If higher education requires substantial debt (in addition to the lost household revenue represented in the time the student takes to attend), millions of families will simply conclude that they cannot afford it, and millions of students will forego higher education ... to their own, and our country's, long-term detriment.

For those students and families who are able to make the "risk/reward" calculus, and spend more money on private higher education in the hopes of long-term additional return, taking out loans to finance more expensive, private higher education is appropriate. However, for CUNY and other public universities and community colleges, students and families must be able to enroll without taking on crushing long-term debt that will discourage many from attending, and hamper others for many years to come.

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?

Wherever possible, public resources restored by the City and State should include requirements and benchmarks that emphasize full-time faculty, counselors, professional, and other staff. For example, resources for particular schools and programs should be contingent on not undercutting current full-time

staffing levels, and should aim to improve those levels. When the City Council fights for restorations or additional resources, it should make sure that these resources are used to increase the number of full-time faculty, not to expand the student body at the expense of full-time faculty and staff. In addition, I would support the PSC in its contract negotiations with CUNY, as it works to fight for these goals.

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?

As a long-time adjunct faculty member at Pratt Institute, I am highly sympathetic to the needs of part-time adjunct faculty and staff. At Pratt, unfortunately, adjuncts and part-timers are NOT eligible to become members of the union. I strongly credit PSC/CUNY for representing adjunct faculty, and fighting for equity ... as a result of which adjuncts have a much stronger set of benefits and rights at CUNY than at Pratt (or many other places).

I would work with PSC/CUNY to continue to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for part-time adjunct faculty and staff, by including improvements in negotiations for budget restorations, increases, and new programs. This means (a) fighting for increases in the number of full-time faculty and staff, (b) giving adjuncts priority for the newly created positions, and (c) continuing to improve pay, benefits, and working conditions for adjuncts.

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?

There are many inequities in the New York City tax structure. We rely too heavily on property and sales taxes, rather than on more progressive income taxes. Within the property tax, owners of 1 and 2 family homes, and some co-op buildings (even luxury ones) are taxed very little, while multi-family and commercial properties are taxed very highly. Owners of vacant land are taxed very little, even if they intentionally blight the neighborhood (e.g. leaving construction sheds on a site for many years). And we double-tax freelancers with the unincorporated income tax. I would work to address these inequities, by:

- (a) pushing for a more progressive City income tax structure that exempts low-income families, and places a surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers,
- (b) calling for a commission to address the long-overdue restructuring of our property tax system,
- (c) increasing taxes on holders of vacant property who do not commit to developing the property with meaningful public benefits (affordable housing, community facilities, etc), and
- (d) exempting freelancers from the unincorporated business tax.

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

It is essential that New York City not make the mistake of the 1970s, of cutting and under-investing in core public services. That mistake weakened the city for years to come. We must continue to make NYC

a place where **both** middle-class families choose to stay (because they are confident in public education, the safety of their communities, etc) **and** low-income and working-class families see that they can access long-term opportunity. I will therefore work to maintain public investments, beginning with public education (including public higher education) and public safety. This will mean some hard choices, of course, in either/both increasing revenues and/or reducing other expenditures. The NYC Independent Budget Office lays out an extensive range of options from which to choose. Here are some of the options I believe we should take:

- (a) Adopt a more progressive City income tax structure that exempts low-income families, and places a surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers.
- (b) Establish a progressive commuter tax.
- (c) Increase taxes on holders of vacant property who do not commit to developing the property in a defined time period with meaningful public benefits (affordable housing, community facilities, etc).
- (d) Extend the general corporation tax to insurance company business income.

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

CUNY is one of our most important economic development and recovery programs. I place it as a significantly higher priority than the large-scale real estate development projects that have been far too large a focus during the Bloomberg Administration. I was pleased to see CUNY figure significantly into the Center for Economic Opportunity, providing recognition that CUNY is an essential anti-poverty program. However, I believe that this risks pigeonholing CUNY as a social service program, rather than as a key economic driver of opportunity for the city at large. I would therefore push to have CUNY included in the city's economic development and recovery plans.

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 strongly support – and have benefitted personally from – academic freedom (including of politically unpopular speech) on university campuses. After writing critically about the suspect relationship between a private developer (Atlantic Development Group) and a public agency (the NYS Housing Finance Agency, during the Pataki Administration), I was attacked by the developer and their attorney, with a letter to the president of Pratt Institute calling for my reprimand, which resulted in a meeting with members of the Board of Trustees. I am very pleased that the Pratt president and trustees supported me, and that the information that we provided to the public resulted in a substantial transformation of the HFA, restoring

public trust and accountable practices. This was a small-scale attack (relative to what has befallen others), but it was a stressful time for my family and me, and made me sensitive to the problem. In addition, I am a long-time supporter of PEN and other organizations that defend academic freedom around the world. I commit to uphold academic freedom at CUNY, and not to make politically-motivated attacks on unpopular speech on campuses.

- 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?

All of these groups are important stakeholders in insuring high-quality public education, and all should be consulted in setting broad standards (e.g. employers should be consulted in establishing credentials for training in their fields so graduates will prepared for their jobs, and community organizations should be consulted on outreach and recruitment so that incoming students are appropriately selected and prepared). At the same time, as a university faculty member, I believe that faculty have a unique experience and perspective that must be honored in establishing pedagogical practices and standards. I therefore believe that a great deal of room should be given to individual faculty members to determine their syllabi, to faculty committees in establishing criteria for their programs, and to faculty senates for setting overall academic standards. Their decisions should have strong weight, and guide decision-making as much as possible, including in decision-making by broader groups of stakeholders. Furthermore, where decision-making will be done by non-faculty bodies, it is essential that these bodies include significant representation from faculty, and represent the full range of stakeholders, including students, community groups, businesses, and other relevant interests.

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

I believe that the right to organize – and to strike if necessary – is a basic right that all workers should have. It is true that our city relies on public sector employees; however, this makes it all the more important that employers treat them fairly and negotiate with them in good faith. I therefore support a substantial restructuring of the Taylor Law to establish a more level playing field for public sector employees. Currently, the Taylor Law gives employers too little incentive to bargain in good faith and reach timely contracts (as the PSC well knows). The law should be amended (as proposed by NYSUT) to provide better provisions for impasse resolution, impose penalties on employers that do not negotiate in good faith, and reduce penalties for striking.

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-sector employment in New York, with high-quality health and pension benefits, has been a centerpiece of creating a more just economy, and a more livable city. For all New Yorkers, our public schools, parks, libraries, transportation, and services are the foundation of a strong quality-of-life in our neighborhoods. Relative to so many other places in the U.S. that have opted repeatedly for private over public, New York City profoundly demonstrates the benefits of investment in the public sector. These benefits are not possible without quality public sector employees. And for millions of people over the years, a public sector job that – often while not paying as much as comparable private sector opportunities – provided strong health, pension, and other benefits has been the key to the middle class. This has been a key to New York City’s success, as many neighborhoods have been built and maintained as strong working and middle-class neighborhoods by public sector employees. I therefore believe that we should work hard to maintain the health and pension benefits for current and future public sector employees. While there may be appropriate places where benefits should be modernized, these must be negotiated with public sector unions in good faith, and not with a narrow goal of saving money, but with a long-term goal of insuring a high-quality public workforce that enables public sector employees to be confident and contributing members of New York City’s middle class.

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

N/A

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:

14.

N/A

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

N/A

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

I am proud to have worked in support of union-related initiatives, and for causes that benefit union members and working-class New Yorkers in general, throughout my career. Some examples include:

- Standing with DC37, CWA, and others in opposing Giuliani’s “work experience program.”
- Working closely with SEIU 32BJ in establishing wage standards for the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning and reform of the 421-a property tax exemption program.
- Working with a range of unions (SEIU 32BJ, UFCW Local 1500, RWDSU, Hotel Trades Council, Laborers, Carpenters, etc) to push for good jobs, affordable housing, and public benefits in many rezoning and redevelopment projects proposed by the Bloomberg Administration.

- Fighting for tenants' rights and affordable housing, as a citywide leader in these struggles, for nearly the past two decades, often standing together with labor allies.
- Working closely with UFCW Local 1500 on their "good food, good jobs, good health" initiative to open and preserve high-road grocery stores in low-income communities.
- Working with trade unions and public housing residents to establish the TRADES campaign and program, which has resulted in more union jobs, and in public housing residents have improved access to those jobs.
- Developing a "responsible contractor/developer" policy for Brooklyn's Community Board 6 (of which I am the housing/community development chair).
- Co-authoring the One City, One Future report (www.onecityonefuture.org) that brought together labor, community, housing, environmental, religious, and other organizations to shape an economic development vision for New York City.
- Joining many labor actions and demonstrations over the years, both as an individual, and in my roles with the Fifth Avenue Committee (executive director), Pratt Center for Community Development (director), and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (co-chair).
- Serving on the boards of directors of NYC Jobs with Justice (and as a member of their Workers Rights Board), and the Center for Working Families.

As a result of this work, I am pleased to have the support of the vast majority of the labor unions and organizations who have made endorsements in my City Council race, including:

- Working Families Party
- Coalition of School Supervisors & Administrators
- Communications Workers of America District 1
- Detectives Endowment Association
- New York Hotel & Motel Trades Council
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ
- United Auto Workers Region 9A
- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1500

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

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Fax: (212) 302-7815
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We encourage you to send the questionnaire and attachments via email or by fax.