NIH gives SLU $2.2 million to design a cure for Hepatitis B

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

IMAGE: JOHN TAVIS, PH.D., IS A PROFESSOR OF MOLECULAR MICROBIOLOGY AND IMMUNOLOGY AT SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY. view more>

CREDIT: SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

ST. LOUIS-- With proof-of-principle in his pocket and a new $2.2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), SLU scientist John Tavis, Ph.D., will take his 25 year mission to finally develop a cure for the hepatitis B virus into the next phase.
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ST. LOUIS-- With proof-of-principle in his pocket and a new $2.2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), SLU scientist John Tavis, Ph.D., will take his 25 year mission to finally develop a cure for the hepatitis B virus into the next phase.

Tavis, who is professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at Saint Louis University, says his team has built a warhead that will kill the virus; now, it's time to design a cruise missile that will deliver the drug.

After exposure, the hepatitis B virus can linger, causing chronic infection in many people. Over time, the illness causes liver damage. While current treatments can suppress the virus, they cannot fully kill it, and it will return if treatments are stopped.

More than 350 million people are chronically infected with the hepatitis B virus. Of those infected, up to 1.2 million die from liver failure and liver cancer each year.
Because current treatments are costly, lifetime medications, scientists are keen to develop better options, likely in the form of combination therapies, to knock out the virus for good.

Tavis and his team have finished one stage of research and are moving on to another in their quest to design a new drug.

"We've achieved the first stage of the laboratory research. We've developed the warhead of a drug, the portion that does the actual activity that the drug is designed to do. We did this with a class of compounds called alpha hydroxyl tropolones.

"We have advanced beyond what is called 'target identification and validation'," Tavis said. "We found something to hit in the virus and proved that it is a good thing to hit. Then, we identified about 35 inhibitors. This tells us about the types of compounds needed to block the viral activity. This is the first step to drug development. Now, we're done with proof-of-principle part of the work.

"The inhibitors we found are the warhead of the drug, but this is only one portion of a drug. The next part is the delivery, which involves all kinds of things. We must design a molecule for minimal toxicity, that can be absorbed by the body and that can last long enough for therapeutic benefit. Then, we've got to package it so people can take it in a pill. Ideally, we'd like to avoid injectables, which are difficult for people to take.

"So, now we've got to design the package -- the cruise missile -- that will hold and deliver the warhead."

The recent NIH grant will allow Tavis, his key collaborators Ryan Murelli, Ph.D., of the City University of New York and Marvin Meyers, Ph.D., director of medicinal chemistry at SLU’s Center for World Health and Medicine, and the rest of his team to take their promising findings a step closer toward drug development. This stage will focus on medicinal chemistry, testing the drug in repetitive cycles aimed at optimizing the drug and limiting toxicity.

"We need an inhibitor that is safe enough and good enough to give to people," Tavis said. "This is very hard work. While this new grant won't get us all the way there, if we are very successful we will get deep into the preclinical stage in preparation for clinical trials."

Tavis credits early support from the NIH and SLU, as well as the unique collaborations possible through partnership with SLU's Center for World Health and Medicine (CWHM) with allowing his work to progress.

"Drug design has not traditionally been done in academia," Tavis said. "The work is not always compatible with academic duties and it requires an interdisciplinary team. It can be difficult to organize the workflow. But, the Center for World Health and Medicine at SLU is a unique resource. It has enabled those of us in the basic sciences to advance our work."
Initial research funding for Tavis's work included seed grants that allowed him to gather enough data to publish early findings and attract NIH funding.

"This project is a result of 25 years of background studies in basic science funded by the NIH," he said. "And, the initial stages of the more recent work were generously supported by seed grants from SLU through the President's Research Fund. We also received funding from the "Friends of the Saint Louis University Liver Center" and from SLU Cancer Center, as well as Washington University's Institute of Clinical and Translational Sciences. All of those different organizations saw value in this work at an early stage, invested, and now we are seeing the payoff."

Read about the 19-year problem Tavis cracked that led to his scientific breakthrough in the search for a cure for hepatitis B here: http://www.slu.edu/rel-tavis-24.

Established in 1836, Saint Louis University School of Medicine has the distinction of awarding the first medical degree west of the Mississippi River. The school educates physicians and biomedical scientists, conducts medical research, and provides health care on a local, national and international level. Research at the school seeks new cures and treatments in five key areas: cancer, liver disease, heart/lung disease, aging and brain disease, and infectious diseases.

SLU's Center for World Health and Medicine is dedicated to the development of medicines to treat diseases that affect the world's poor and underserved populations. The center consists of a multidisciplinary team of former pharmaceutical company scientists with extensive translational research experience. They have the skills to discover and develop small molecule drugs, and they are experienced in advancing such agents into clinical trials.

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Heliospectra to Present at the Viridian Cannabis Investor Symposium in New York City
December 15, 2015: 08:00 AM ET

Heliospectra AB (OTCQB: HLSPY) (FIRSTNORTH: HELIO), a world leader in intelligent lighting technology for plant research and greenhouse cultivation, is pleased to announce that it has been invited to present at the Viridian Cannabis Investor Symposium in New York City on January 13, 2016.

Entitled "Investing in the Emerging Cannabis Industry While Managing Risk" this invite-only event will provide information and insight for investors seeking to capitalize on growth in the cannabis market. Investors ranging from Private Equity firms to family offices will be attending the conference. The Viridian Cannabis Investor Symposium will include presentations from companies in the fastest growing sectors of the cannabis industry, followed by a series of smaller, more intimate meetings with investors and the CEO's of presenting companies.

For further information please click: https://viridianca.com/upcomingevents/

The conference will be held at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, an international leader in educating for justice. The college brings together Pulitzer Prize winning faculty and undergraduate/graduate students in diverse liberal arts disciplines to engage with issues of justice and diversity. The John Jay College of Criminal Justice is located on 59th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues, southwest of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

The New York event is the first in an investor series hosted by Viridian Capital Advisors, a financial and strategic advisory firm dedicated to the cannabis market, and Equities.com, a leading news source and data portal designed to connect self-directed investors with emerging growth and innovative companies.

About Heliospectra AB Heliospectra AB (OTCQB: HLSPY) (FIRSTNORTH: HELIO) (www.heliospectra.com) specializes in intelligent lighting technology for plant research and greenhouse cultivation. The Company's lighting system provides an effective and durable technology for cultivating greenhouse and indoor plants by combining several different groups of versatile light emitting diodes (LEDs) with optics, remote sensing techniques, and a robust heat dissipation solution. This proprietary setup gives growers the ability to control the intensity and wavelengths of the light emitted, creating a spectrum specifically adjusted to different plant species and growth stages to better facilitate photosynthesis. The complete, highly-engineered lamp produces crops that look better, taste better, and have a longer shelf-life than those grown under HID lamps. The technology not only reduces energy consumption by up to 50%, but also helps stimulate growth characteristics and improve plant quality. Other benefits include reduced light pollution, lower mercury use due to the avoidance of traditional HID/HPS bulbs, and less HVAC investment and monthly expense requirements. Heliospectra products are based on in-depth knowledge in plant physiology and photosynthesis along with a unique way to utilize modern LED technology. After six years of development in Sweden, the company has now begun to expand into the international market. The company has raised more than $21 million in capital and has received more than $2.6 million through academic scholarships and grants. It has also received numerous awards for its forward thinking technology.


Forward-Looking Statements The statements in this press release constitute forward-looking statements within the meaning of federal securities laws. Such statements are based on our current beliefs and expectations and are inherently subject to significant business, economic and competitive uncertainties and contingencies, many of which are beyond our control. In addition, such forward-looking statements are subject to assumptions with respect to future business strategies and decisions that are subject to change. Potential risks and uncertainties include, but are not limited to, technical advances in the industry as well as political and economic conditions present within the industry. We do not take any obligation to update any forward-looking statement to reflect events or developments after a forward-looking statement was made.
Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration says it has made progress on its OneNYC plan, the policy document that sets a course for the city’s efforts on environmental and climate change resiliency — from solar at City Hall to a new tool to control buildings’ energy use.

“This morning, the Mayor announced that of the nearly 3,000 public buildings with any significant energy use, almost one-third already have retrofits in place or underway,” Nilda Mesa, head of the mayor’s Office of Sustainability, told a joint hearing of the City Council Committees on Recovery and Resiliency and Environmental Protection on Monday. “The City has installed nearly four megawatts of solar on its buildings in the last year alone, bringing the total to nearly five megawatts.”

The public buildings already getting retrofits account for roughly half the greenhouse-gas emissions from city-owned buildings, and City Hall itself is installing a solar installation and a fuel-cell generator, she said.

The city has also issued requests for proposals for another 15 megawatts of solar — including 66 schools, Bellevue Hospital, Hostos Community College, the Bronx Hall of Justice, the Queens Museum and the Abe Stark Ice Rink, among others.

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- Housing activists press de Blasio

Already, private buildings have doubled their solar installations since the end of 2013, going from 25 megawatts of solar to 54 megawatts currently across 3,500 installations, Mesa testified.
The administration also announced a new program to measure and control energy use in large buildings — the New York City Energy and Water Performance Map, a tool created in partnership with NYU's Center for Urban Science and Progress that lets building owners and managers analyze water and energy consumption.

That map uses data culled from Local Law 84, which requires private buildings 50,000 square feet or larger and public buildings 10,000 square feet or larger to publicly disclose their water and energy consumption.

Mesa also ticked off a series of energy and environmental measures already announced by City Hall — including thousands of new electric cars, new select bus service routes, the city's plan to run entirely on renewable energy, increased organics collection and the recently completed clean-heat program that eliminated nearly all No. 6 heating oil from city buildings.

"We're greening every public building, with retrofits now in buildings representing half of all public building emissions," de Blasio said in a statement. "Our progress is clear, but we won't stop leading by example — and providing the tools for the private sector to do the same — because our very future is at stake."

Mesa's full testimony, as prepared, can be read here: http://politi.co/1SXamui
Essay: Creating Opportunity Beyond Community College

by VICTORIA BROWN

Everyone loves inspiring, up-by-the-bootstraps academic narratives, stories of successful students who are also ex-convicts or former welfare mothers or persecuted immigrants, and many students who participate in Vassar College's Exploring Transfer program have beaten harrowing odds. But the program's candidates share a less sensational categorization: they hail from a class of families without a college attendance legacy—many, if not all, are the first in their immediate and often extended families to enroll in community college, far less at a prestigious, private institution.

Several weeks after the pomp and circumstance of Vassar's 151st commencement, the program's 30th class graduated, the ceremony held in the tucked-away Blodgett Hall auditorium classroom. If not for Exploring Transfer, these students might otherwise never crack the entry code to some of the nation's best institutions of higher learning.
The program, familiarly known as ET, began between Vassar and LaGuardia Community College and has since expanded to accept applicants from across the country. Earlier in 2015, NYTimes “Big City” columnist, Ginia Bellafante, wrote a three-part series detailing hurdles LaGuardia and other junior college students must often overcome.

They juggle full or part-time coursework with service-industry jobs, in flux immigration status, elderly parents and dependent children, even homelessness. They possess the potential and drive to succeed, but burdened, take far longer than two years to achieve even their Associate Degrees.

I URGED THE 2015 GRADUATING CLASS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION THAT MATCHES THEIR ABILITY NOT THEIR BIOGRAPHY.
The rewards for the ones accepted to the competitive transfer program, and who can then arrange to suspend their lives for five summer weeks, are life changing.

In a true meritocracy a hard-luck biography would not be a determining factor in one's college placement, but too often working class students have no access to traditional college grooming: knowledgeable guidance counselors, application letter coaches, volunteer opportunities, AP courses, SAT prep courses, and of course, a family history of seeking higher education.

Exploring Transfer is one way to compensate for this lack of preparation. Temporarily relieved of quotidian demands on their personal resources, the program serves as boot-camp for what is expected at a competitive residential college and, despite Justice Antonin Scalia's recent "slower-track school" suggestion, proving ground to show them they are capable.

Selected students take two of three offered inter-disciplinary, liberal arts classes. Each year they are initially flummoxed by the quantity of work, the number of books to read, presentations to give, and papers to write. There is no phoning it in; if for any reason students are unable to complete the courses, they may officially request a grade of Incomplete, the same procedure required of full-time Vassar students.

Importantly, students are not tossed into uncharted territory without support. Classes are team taught by a Vassar and a community college professor. Participants have full access to Vassar's library and reference librarians, a writing specialist, and six classroom counselors, three of whom are recent Exploring Transfer graduates and three current Vassar College students.

The transfer rate is impressive: Program graduates have been accepted not only to Vassar, but also to Smith, Columbia, SUNY and senior CUNY colleges, Amherst, NYU, and Cornell. This summer, Dr. Yolanda Martin (LaGuardia 02, Vassar '05, CUNY Graduate Center, Sociology '11) co-taught Criminology and Society with long-time Vassar professor, Sidney Plotkin. Dr. Martin had been Dr. Plotkin's student in the summer, 2002 program. Another alumna, Bernetta Parson (LaG, Mount Holyoke '96), served as this year's Interim Director, and is a second-year PhD candidate at Syracuse Higher Education Department.
NEW YORK - MAY 10: 2007 New York University graduates celebrate during commencement ceremonies in Washington Square Park May 10, 2007 in New York City. The event was NYU's 175th commencement celebrating the graduation of approximately 15,000 members of the Class of 2007. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images) Mario Tama / Getty Images

The networking opportunities perpetuate well beyond the program. Students and graduates of smaller private colleges like Vassar have access to unpublicized internships and endowed fellowships, receive more personalized letters of recommendation, and join enviable alumni associations.

Lest we think enrichment flows only one way, traditional and legacy students benefit greatly from studying with those whose social and economic backgrounds differ from their own (though, please let me stress, it is not the responsibility of non-traditional students to provide an alternative perspective to children of privilege). Advantages endure for all long after having sat together in lectures.

Take my own example. As an immigrant LaGuardia student I completed Exploring Transfer in 1996, graduated from Vassar in 2001, and earned an MA from the University of Warwick in 2002. Years later a former Vassar professor, the author Nancy Willard, asked if I had continued to write and would I like her to read any of my work. I sent professor Willard my manuscript-in-
Progress, which she forwarded to her agent and before long I had sold my first novel. The vast majority of community college students are not forging lasting relationships with their rotating, underpaid adjunct instructors or overloaded full time professors.

**VERY RARELY DO THE BRIGHTEST POOR AND WORKING CLASS STUDENTS APPLY DIRECTLY OR TRANSFER TO THE NATION'S TOP-TIER SCHOOLS.**

Nineteen years after completing Exploring Transfer I returned as commencement speaker. Above all, I urged the 2015 graduating class to understand their right to an education that matches their ability not their biography, and to replace some of the awe at their surroundings with ire at a system peddling an American Dream narrative without an instruction manual.

In his January 2015 State of the Union address President Obama proposed free community college tuition, a step that would make only the first rung of post-secondary education conditionally accessible to need-based students. More can be done, now, to identify and mentor meritorious students.

Very rarely do the brightest poor and working class students apply directly or transfer to the nation's top-tier schools. Programs like Exploring Transfer help match these promising scholars with institutions that build on their community college foundation and provide academic challenge as well as the cultural capital vital for staking a claim in America's shrinking middle class.
These Students Are Demanding Higher Education at Lower Costs

At last, a nationwide movement for free college is taking off.

BY Rebecca Nathanson

In the past three decades, average tuition at U.S. public universities has more than tripled.

On Nov. 12, 2015, students at the University of California, Berkeley, redecorated their idyllic campus with a “wall of shame.” On pieces of paper taped to the administration building, students proclaimed how much debt they had assumed in order to attend the prestigious university—for some, more than $160,000.

With chants of, “Free college: That’s our right. What do we do? Fight, fight, fight,” the students called for an increasingly popular solution to the growing burden of student debt: abolishing tuition entirely at public colleges and universities.

Throughout most of the 20th century, many public colleges and universities were free, or nearly so. California’s landmark 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, for example, was essentially a pledge to educate all residents of the state who wanted an education for free or for a nominal fee. But the plan was soon attacked by Gov. Ronald Reagan, who painted free public higher education as welfare for privileged twenty-somethings and began shifting costs to students when he took office in 1967. Today, the total cost of tuition and fees at the state’s public University of California campuses stands at $12,240 for in-state residents. City University of New York (CUNY), likewise, didn’t begin charging tuition until 1976. It now costs $6,330 per year for in-state students, not including fees.

The idea of free higher education has gained new political life thanks in part to a high-
profile champion. Sen. Bernie Sanders has made tuition-free college a signature issue of his presidential campaign, calling it the key to a "stronger economy and a stronger democracy." Under Sanders’ plan, the federal government would cover the cost by imposing a financial transaction tax on Wall Street. Sanders has stressed that public universities are already tuition-free in Germany, Mexico and many other countries, and said in a June 2015

Students rose to the challenge this fall, staging a Million Student March on Nov. 12, 2015 with demonstrations on more than 100 campuses. The protests centered on three demands: tuition-free public universities, a $15 minimum wage for all campus workers and cancellation of student debt.

In the past three decades, average tuition at U.S. public universities has more than tripled. The money has gone to offset deep cuts in state funding, but also to fuel a ballooning of administrations and state-of-the-art campus facilities. Given that students have borne the brunt of these changes—average student debt at college graduation grew from $18,550 in 2004 to $28,950 in 2014—one might ask, why weren’t U.S. students flooding the streets sooner?

Places with far lower higher education costs have seen the rise of militant student movements opposing tuition hikes and privatization. In 2012, tens of thousands of students in Québec, Canada, boycotted classes and took to the streets in response to a proposal to raise university tuition. A province-wide student strike lasted more than 100 days—the longest in Québec’s history—and won a tuition freeze. Beginning in 2011, Chilean students held two years of mass protests, organizing hundreds of thousands of students through the Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile, a national coalition of student unions. In January 2015, the Chilean Congress passed a landmark law prohibiting state-subsidized schools and universities from operating as for-profits, but protesters continue to demand free education for all.

However, both Québec and Chile had long histories of student activism around affordable education, with coalitions that could mobilize students quickly across campuses. While U.S. colleges have historically been key battlegrounds for a range of social issues—sexual violence, international human rights, environmental justice, and most recently, racial justice—they lack the same tradition of student unionism. Organizing across geographically disparate campuses also presents a hurdle.

But student organizers from New York to California are rising to the challenge, led by CUNY and UC students who want to revive their schools’ missions to provide universal access to education. “Being able to build student power system-wide and even statewide is the place to start,” says Art Motta, a senior at UC Santa Cruz. The Million Student March was the first nationwide action; organizers came together from activist groups across the country via Facebook and conference calls. They are considering a follow-up in the spring. Although most organizing takes place on the campus or at the statewide level, there are a handful of national student organizations with members or chapters throughout the country. The largest, United States Student Association, focuses primarily on using its extensive network to push for legislative change, rather than mass direct actions.

Politicians are beginning to take notice of growing public support for the idea: Though she opposes Sanders’ plan for tuition-free college, Hillary Clinton has a $350 billion plan to reduce debt in higher education by cutting costs at public universities and expanding income-based loan repayment, among other measures. Clinton has also endorsed tuition-free community college, a proposal that is currently being pursued by President Obama, based on a policy in Tennessee. And by joining forces with workers demanding a $15 minimum wage, students may be able to draw on the power of the labor movement. At the UC Berkeley march for tuition-free college, members of the California Nurses Association showed up in the hundreds to lend support.

To truly make higher education accessible to all, any plan will have to address not only its
cost, but its history of segregation and exclusion of students of color, notes Daisy Villalobos, a junior at CUNY’s Hunter College. The two issues are far from separate: 42 percent of African-American families had student loans in 2013, compared to 24 percent of white families. And the debt protests have coincided with a wave of student protests highlighting other ways that institutional racism functions on campus. While the two student movements have only just begun to articulate their links, some campuses included racial justice in their Million Student March demands.

“I do believe that a student movement is growing,” Villalobos says. “But I think it’s going to have to be about changing what higher education looks like in America to better fit our needs as a nation.”

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Rebecca Nathanson is a writer and activist in New York City. She has previously written for n+1, The Nation, Village Voice, Feministe, and NYU Local. Her work has also been cited on the New York Times' blog.

More information about Rebecca Nathanson
New York Governor Vetoes Maintenance of Effort Bill

Submitted by Kellie Woodhouse on December 15, 2015 - 3:00am

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Friday vetoed a maintenance of effort bill that would have required the state to cover cost increases negotiated in collective bargaining agreements between trade unions and the state's two public university systems, the City University of New York and the State University of New York.

The bill would have also required that the state fund increases in other operational costs, such as in utilities and rent. The idea behind the bill was to keep the cost increases from being bundled into tuition.

Cuomo said such costs should be discussed as part of the overall public higher education budget. "Isolated changes should not be made outside of the context of broader discussions about higher education policy. Further, given the potential negative impact on the state's financial plan, the issues raised by this legislation are better dealt with in the context of negotiations for the upcoming state budget," he wrote in a veto message, according to Politico New York.

CUNY's faculty and staff union, the Professional Staff Congress, criticized Cuomo's decision, saying it amounted to a "refusal to invest in the education CUNY students need."
Bernie Sanders Urges Cuomo to Raise CUNY Professors' Pay

By KATE TAYLOR  DEC. 14, 2015

While the rest of the presidential field was talking about how to confront global terrorism, Senator Bernie Sanders in recent days had a very local issue on his mind: getting a raise for professors at the City University of New York.

Roughly 25,000 CUNY faculty and professional staff members have been without a contract since 2010, and have not had salary increases in that time. Part of the reason is that the amount of per-pupil funding CUNY receives from the state has declined, adjusted for inflation, since before the recession; roughly 45 percent of the system's $3.2 billion budget comes from the state.

Mr. Sanders, a candidate for the Democratic nomination, on Friday sent a letter to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo that called on him to provide funding for a new contract with raises.

"As a college degree becomes increasingly important for economic security in our vastly unequal society, CUNY has historically represented the possibility that a college education of the highest quality could be accessible to
all," the Vermont senator wrote. "It should continue to represent that possibility.

"That is why I am troubled by New York State's refusal so far to invest in a fair contract for the university's faculty and staff."

While it might seem strange for a presidential candidate to weigh in on a local university's contract dispute, the issue is on message for Mr. Sanders, who grew up in Brooklyn and whose campaign has focused on income inequality. Most of CUNY's 275,000 degree-seeking students are minorities and come from low-income backgrounds.

"Show New Yorkers that your concern for working people and people of color includes a commitment to their ability to achieve a college education," he urged Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat.

The governor, meanwhile, vetoed a bill on Friday that would have required the state to cover predictable rises in operating costs at CUNY and the State University of New York, including inflationary increases in rent, utilities and health care, as well as salary increases that are not tied to contracts.

Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, a union that represents faculty and professional staff members at CUNY and the CUNY Research Foundation, said in a statement: "Cuomo's decision to veto the bill will damage the quality of education CUNY can offer and reduce students' access to the top-quality faculty and staff they deserve. If the aim of the veto was to hurt New York's low- and middle-income communities, that aim has been achieved."

In 2011, the state passed legislation allowing CUNY and SUNY to increase tuition by $300 a year over the next five years. The agreement reached at the time called for the state to maintain its level of funding for CUNY and SUNY, unless the governor declared a fiscal emergency, so that the tuition increases
would not go to filling holes in the state budget.

The state has done that, but it has not fully covered inflationary increases. For CUNY, that meant a shortfall of $51 million this year.

Jim Malatras, the governor's director of state operations, said he could not respond to Mr. Sanders's letter because he had not seen it. He said the funding bill was vetoed because it would have committed the state to another $600 million in spending and the governor believed that should not be done outside of the budget process.

Mr. Malatras also said the state had covered $800 million in new costs at CUNY and SUNY since Mr. Cuomo took office in 2011.


A version of this article appears in print on December 15, 2015, on page A28 of the New York edition with the headline: Sanders Urges Cuomo to Raise CUNY Pay.
Despite Union Tributes, CUNY Not Ready to Make 'Murphy' Independent

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, December 14, 2015 5:00 pm

City University of New York officials last week discounted proposals to establish a stand-alone labor-studies school in the near future, but said they would continue to nurture the Murphy Institute, which emphasizes worker education.

Union leaders urged the university to reconsider that stance during a Dec. 10 joint hearing by the City Council’s Civil Service and Labor and Higher Education Committees. But Vita Rabinowitz, the Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, said CUNY was focused on other major initiatives such as settling an overdue contract with its staffers and the recent opening of the School of Medicine under a tight budget.

Points to Potential Cost

"It’s a major financial commitment, Council Members," she said, noting that it would need significant funding to set up the new school. “We would almost certainly need to hire more faculty and we would need to hire the infrastructure for registration, admissions, financial aid and the like.”

CUNY Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance Matthew Sapienza said there would be significant recurring costs as the senior colleges struggled to fill a $51-million funding gap.

The Murphy Institute, which has 52 full-time and adjunct faculty members, receives $6.9 million from CUNY—and additional revenue from the city, state and student tuition—and enrolls about 1,200 graduate and undergraduate students in degree and certificate programs. The school, which was established at Queens College in 1984, reorganized as a multi-campus institute a decade ago under the School of Professional Studies, and has been a springboard for union leaders and rank-and-file city employees.

Some of those leaders and 42 Council Members in a letter urged the Board of Trustees to reorganize the workers' institute as an independent college within CUNY. The university established a task force to review how it could best realign those programs, which recommended against a stand-alone school in September, citing limited enrollment and funding challenges.
CUNY officials said they accepted some of the recommendations, such as hiring more labor-studies academics, and wanted to develop the Murphy Institute, which Ms. Rabinowitz called “a remarkable interdisciplinary intellectual center.”

**Not There Yet**

“That makes Murphy special, but they did not feel it had reached the stage of development that would merit school status at this time,” she said. She also questioned the school’s hypothetical role in relation to similar programs at other CUNY schools.

The proposed School of Labor and Urban Studies would be composed of two academic departments and two institutes covering labor studies, urban affairs and worker education.

Higher Education Committee Chair Inez Barron said the university should prioritize developing the school and boosting underrepresented minority students.

Anthony Wells, the president of Local 371 of District Council 37 said the Murphy Institute has “served the labor movement as well as the broader community extremely well” and advanced progressive causes.

“This labor school would provide opportunities for people to enter into not just civil service, not just on the union side, but would create a pool of professionals to improve the relationships between the unions and management to improve the services they are providing this city in the public sector or the private sector,” said Mr. Wells, who sits on the school’s Labor Advisory Board.

**Unions Fund Scholarship**

Local 371 established a scholarship fund for union members enrolled in the Murphy Institute and unions have successfully lobbied state legislators to increase Albany’s funding share in the school. Arthur Cheliotes, president of Communications Workers of America Local 1180, said unions raised money for diversity scholarships.

He called the Murphy Institute a beacon for union members to attain degrees, but said it was still vulnerable to budget cuts. “But, with a higher profile, a stable funding base and greater autonomy, in short as a school within CUNY, Murphy will be empowered to take the next leap, ready and able to offer new academic and workforce-development programs that target a broader and more representative population,” he told the Council.

The union leader, who chairs the school’s Labor Advisory Board, said that society needed critical thinkers who understand the value of the labor movement and that CUNY should acknowledge the unions’ role in advocating for social and economic justice. “There seems to be a lack on the part of the university of a commitment to institutionalize the labor movement as part of the university,” he said.