The Slightest Crack

Pitt Against Debt

Wednesdays @ 8 PM

WPU 510

Pittstudentdebt@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/PittAgainstDebt/

Pitt Against Debt
We can still remember when our Pitt acceptance letters came in the mail. We were excited or just relieved that we'd be able to leave our small towns and go somewhere new. Go hours away to Pittsburgh or just move down the street to Oakland. Any change would be good. We wondered who our roommate would be, who would help us study for our first midterms, who would get drunk with us on Fuck Finals Friday. We imagined the moment before college graduation. Walking across the stage, holding our degrees and knowing that we'd have stability in our futures. We'd make money and make lives that would finally make us happy.


Tuition in 2015-2016 was $28,000. Minimum wage in PA 2015-2016 was $7.25.


Photos of student protests courtesy of International Student Movement, International Student Union, and Philadelphia Students Solidarity Coalition.

Back cover design and inside drawings by Naomi Weintraub.
other groups / organizations
to get rad with

Other Groups at Pitt that do rad shit

AID / USAS 31 - Monday @ 9
PEAC - Wednesday @ 9
Pittsburgh Student Solidarity Coalition - Check out on Facebook

Other Groups

Million Student March – http://studentmarch.org/
Strike Debt- http://strikedebt.org/


Occupy Student Debt - http://occupystudentdebt.tumblr.com

Unchain Student Debt - http://occupystudentdebt.tumblr.com

Unchain our Schools - https://www.facebook.com/UnchainOurSchools

Free University NYC - http://freeuniversitynyc.org/

Students United for a free CCNY - http://freecuny.weebly.com/

New York Students Rising - http://nysr.tumblr.com/

Philadelphia Student Union - http://phillystudentunion.org/

Loan payment information

https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans
http://ticas.org/content/posd/top-10-student-loan-tips-recent-graduates
http://ibrinfo.org/

We started taking out $20,000 a semester, $30,000 a semester $40,000 a semester. Signing our names to $120,000 in loans. “We’ll be able to pay this off, right?” we asked as we watched our just-graduated brothers and sisters scramble to find jobs in a soured economy. “That’s why you’re going to school!” The lenders replied as they bought yachts with the money they were making from our debt.

We grimace each time our tuition gets just a bit higher and our debt gets just a bit steeper. But our University of Pittsburgh wouldn’t raise tuition and force us into a lifetime of debt on purpose...would it?

We go to class with whispers in the back of our minds reminding us of the hours of work our parents, our friends, ourselves will have to struggle through to pay off that 8 AM lab. When we hear about our administrator’s salary increases we fumble as we mix guacamole at our low wage jobs. We drag ourselves to our exams exhausted - not from partying or studying but from working our jobs late into the night, consoling our younger siblings as they take out their first student loans, trying to smile through the pain of the “Best Four Years of Our Lives!”
Well, I went down to the admin’s office and I took back what they stole from me. Ain’t nobody gonna walk all over me. Under my feet. Under my feet. Under my feet. Under my feet. Now they’re under my feet. I took back my tuition fees and I took back my dignity. And I took back what they stole from me.

Well, I went down to the chanceller’s office... If there is the slightest crack all our work will be at slightest crack all. Risk. - French colonizers of West Africa in 1908.
We are the people whose lives are shaped by the actions of the University of Pittsburgh. We are the University's patrons struggling under the burden of student debt. We are its workers forced to sustain a living on an unsustainable wage. We are the Pittsburgh community reminded daily of the grip this University holds over our homes, our culture, and our futures.

Decade after decade, tuition has risen at a rapid rate. Plans for the future of this University are made on the assumption that tuition will continue to rise. This rise in tuition, this rise in debt, is debilitating. Students everywhere are shackled to their debt and education has been commodified and defiled. The incursion of debt forsakes autonomy and opportunity for the immediate need for survival. This cannot continue.

We demand an immediate tuition freeze.

We demand the forgiveness of all student debt.

We demand the guarantee of free public higher education for all people.

Gone are the days when we relied on traditional avenues of power. Now is the time for radical action. We call upon all members of the Pittsburgh community to stand with us as we redefine the role of the individual in our struggle against student debt. By regarding every injustice as an opportunity for confrontation, we will prove our power, not as mere customers of this university, but as a movement fighting for a viable future.
When we got to Pitt we took out loans and made adjustments to our life plans. We settled into our dorm rooms not expecting to make any more changes. It was O week when our roommate told us: Pitt was raising its tuition. We pulled up our bank statements. We didn't have an extra $420 sitting around, we barely had enough money for next semester's textbooks. Reluctantly we took out more loans. We were already at least $30,000 in debt, what would an extra $500 each year do?

Taking a look back at Pitt History we realized tuition hikes are a Pitt tradition as old as Sweet Caroline...

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To this end, we demand:

An immediate tuition freeze.

The forgiveness of all student debt.

The guarantee of free public higher education for all people.

To achieve these demands we need:

Pay cuts for administrators.

A stop to the endless construction and renovations.

The University to pay all faculty and campus workers a living wage.

The public to run our University as opposed to corporate insiders.
Currently 69 percent of students at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate with debt averaging $34,000.
The admins and board of trustees have created a big machine of luxurious spending and high salaries that pushes students into massive amounts of debt to keep it running. This machine is tolerated because the admin and their advisors pass off their high-spending as necessary to create an elite education. More importantly, this machine is tolerated because it employs large segments of the community and helps boost the Pittsburgh economy. However a lot these jobs - including adjunct and campus worker jobs - are often low paying and involve menial tasks. The question arises: How much is Pitt boosting the local economy? How much is Pitt keeping the Pittsburgh economy stagnant and beyond the control of local communities?

Regardless of the merit of this system, 18-22 year old kids should not be forced to finance it through their loans. This is basically one generation taking from another. And to make things even more perverse, every year the administration sends the students to Harrisburg to lobby for them to give Pitt more money. It is an amazing scheme.

What’s it mean to have debt?

It means taking a job that you didn’t go to school for.
It means not starting a business with the extra money you earn from work.
It means renting instead of buying.
It means moving in with your parents instead of living on your own.
It means choosing money over morals.
It means not having kids so you can afford necessities.
It means financing an education system that is going to collapse.
It means your life is determined by a decision you made when you were 18.
It means a six figure salaries for administrators and poverty wages for faculty.
It means paying for an education that should be free.
I am going to leave Pitt with over 30k in debt. My family and I struggle with just paying the amount reduced by grants and loans every semester. The fact that both of my parents are not able to work due to physical disabilities causes me great financial stress that will hang over me forever. In order to pay off my tuition fees, I plan to spend the majority of my income during the school year in order to pay off my tuition fees. I worry about how much I am going to have to work over the summer and about the low numbers in my bank account and how I will be able to pay off my debts. My parents have four children, including myself, who recognize a higher education degree is next to essential in today’s job market. We all help each other in paying off our immediate fees, but the encroaching student debt that I will face is debilitating. On top of that, my future humanities degree does not come along with the idea of financial stability. I am struggling with deciding between following my passions and foregoing my dreams by seeking a different major that will provide a more secure future. I often worry potential to ensure a more secure future. I often worry about the low numbers in my bank account and how I will be able to pay off my debts. My parents have four children, including myself, who recognize a higher education degree is next to essential in today’s job market. We all help each other in paying off our immediate fees, but the encroaching student debt that I will face is debilitating. On top of that, my future humanities degree does not come along with the idea of financial stability.
Every year students see their tuition rise, while high-paid Pitt employees see their salaries grow. [6]

Salary Increases for High-Paid Pitt Employees

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“Just work your way through college…”

We’d heard our parents talk about working at the local pizza place and paying for their college tuition. Our grandparents goaded us to get a job, to stop taking out loans and just work hard and pay for our expenses.

So we started looking for jobs and realized...

It would take 3,862 hours or 160, 24-hour days at a minimum wage job to pay for a year of Pitt’s tuition [3]
Student debt is a system of exploitation that compounds the oppression that already marginalized groups experience in America.

- In the last 14 years around 50% of black students graduated college compared to 35% of white students.
- Four out of five black students take on loans to go to college.
- Black students have an average debt burden of $28,692, as opposed to the average burden of $24,742 held by white students.
- 69% of black students who don't finish school cite the burden of high student loan debt as the reason, compared with 43% of their white peers.

Utilities 2015 - $48,974,000
Utilities 2014 - $48,719,000

Maintenance and facilities
2015 - $46,410,000
2014 - $44,046,000
The amount that Pitt has spent on construction is one year of tuition from 11,994 out of state students or 19,755 in-state students...which is more than the total undergrad population when Pitt can’t pay for the construction the expenses turn into tuition hikes for students.

If so many students can’t pay for their education, a University that attempts to “advance teaching, research, and public service and educate diverse students from the region, the nation, and the world” should, logically, adjust its expenses to lower its price. But instead, our admin are enjoying a shopping spree...
The University puts forward a money-sucking cycle of endless construction...

Pitt Construction Expenses:

- 2009: $68,114,409
- 2010: $57,620,283
- 2011: $62,172,693
- 2012: $84,874,375
- 2013: $63,055,252
- Total: $335,837,012

And there's more spending that hasn't been disclosed!