

How many of you have faced tuition hikes in your universities and not received more financial aid? Have you had to take time off from school to save money to pay higher tuition? Given up extracurricular activities to take on more work hours? How many of you are taking on unmanageable debt or are going through college without any health insurance? How many of you are graduating high school and beginning to think that maybe college is just not worth the price? How many know friends or siblings that are facing these issues? Unfortunately, like so many other essential services, higher education is becoming less and less accessible to working class, poor, and immigrant youth.

Think financial aid will help you deal with these costs? Think again. Public financial aid has simply not kept up. Even though five million students (a third of all undergraduates) depend on them, the federal government put a freeze on Pell grants at \$4,050 for the past three years. This is only 34% of the estimated yearly cost for a four-year public college in 2005. On top of the damage done by the freeze, the federal government is now cutting Pell Grants by \$327 million. Nearly one million students will lose their grant money and the remaining students will have their grant size decreased because of the budget cuts.

Of course, students will do whatever it takes to get an education. Today, that means taking out staggering loans, which after graduation become nearly impossible to repay (anything more than 8% of yearly income is considered unmanageable). The average undergraduate student debt in 2002 (that is, before the latest rounds of double-digit percentage tuition hikes) was \$18,900. Republican law-makers are trying to end locked low interest rates for student and replace them with variable rates, making loan repayment much more expensive. Who profits in the end? Unscrupulous banks - who, it's recently been revealed, are making over a billion dollars a year from a loophole that allows them to charge the government when student loan interest rates drop below 9.5%.



Illustration: Michael McNeal

Immigrant students also face steep barriers to accessing public higher education. Anti-immigrant regulations in many states charge young immigrants out-of-state prices for universities, even if they grew up in the state. Immigrants also do not have access to federal grant programs for low-income students.

Tuition hikes, financial aid cuts, variable loan rates, restrictions on immigrants: something shady is definitely going on here. The federal and state governments are pushing the responsibility to pay for higher education on to the backs of students and their parents. They are privatizing the public higher education system and putting private education even farther out of reach.

In response to these attacks, students across the nation are beginning to organize in protest. Students from North Dakota are pressuring their universities to fight cuts in state funding. Kansas students are pressuring lawmakers to pass Senate Bill 2145 which would allow immigrant high-school graduates who studied at least three years in Kansas to be eligible for in-state-tuition. Wisconsin students are fighting to organize a university-wide book rental system to cut back on exorbitant book prices. Last year, students from SUNY and CUNY schools marched across New York state to Albany to protest the state's anti-education budget. At private Brown and Columbia Universities, students are fighting cuts in grants and increased dependency on loans for student aid. The list goes on.

In addition to these localized protests, the United States Student Association, the largest student organization in the country, constantly works to represent student interests at the national level. State Public Interests Research Groups (PIRGs) are also beginning to organize against state budget cuts and federal cuts to financial aid. And immigrant youth and their allies continue the fight to pass the DREAM Act (HR 1684).

These efforts represent a very important beginning to what needs to be a much larger and more coordinated effort on the part of students to defend our interests. Right now the federal government is spending hundreds of billions of dollars in recruiting and mobilizing youth to join the armed forces with the promise that afterwards they will have their college or professional education financed. These sisters and brothers are then sent to fight an utterly unjust and unnecessary war from which many will not return and many more will return injured-physically, mentally, and emotionally. Is this the cost of higher education in our country? It must not be. For youth, the right to affordable, quality public education is a matter of life and death. Following the example of campus youth fighting backdoor privatization, we need to organize to protect our rights as youth and students.

• **The YCL supports legislation such as the Dream Act (HR1684), which would allow undocumented students in colleges and universities across the country to receive financial aid.**

• **We oppose cuts to federal financial aid including Pell Grants that help millions of students to pay for school. We are opposed to substituting federal loans for grants as part of the financial aid package.**

• **Finally, we call for the federal government to fully fund everyone from Kindergarten through a university education.**

How will you pay for college?

High tuition and constant tuition hikes are arguably the number-one barrier to higher education in the US. Students in 49 out of 50 states attending 4-year public universities and colleges this year will feel the bite of paying more money for the same, or even lower quality, education. Check out these numbers:

- Tuition is up - from 'only' 1.7% in Montana- to 39% in Arizona!
- Oklahoma State University students face a 24% hike!
- State University of NY (SUNY) went up over 28% including another hike of \$800 this year.
- North Dakota got a 16% hike last year and may raise tuition an additional 15-18% this year!
- Maryland students saw tuition hikes of 34 to 54% in the last four years!
- City University of New York (CUNY) senior colleges are up \$800 this year!

It adds up: Since 1993, overall tuition in public colleges is up 47%. Not surprisingly, these double-digit tuition hikes are forcing students to take out more loans, drop out of school, or choose not to go to college. Some choose a two-year college when they would have chosen a four-year school - though on average, two-year public colleges raised tuitions by 13.8% last year.

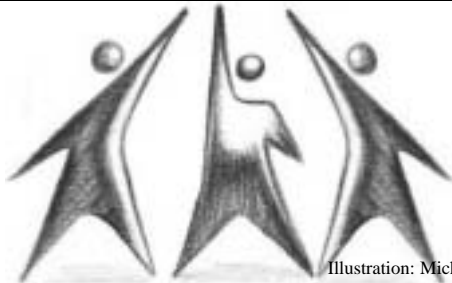


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Fight for Your Future! Join the YCL Today!

The Young Communist League is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic organization of young workers, employed and unemployed, high school and college students, LGBTQ and straight, young women and men. We struggle against racism and oppression and for a socialist USA, peace, jobs, and the right to an education for all.

The YCL has been fighting for the rights of young people for 80 years, and we won't stop until we've won. If you would like more information about how you can get involved in this exciting movement, or would like to apply for membership in the YCL, fill out the form and send it in.

- I want to apply for membership in the YCL!
- Send me more information about the YCL

Name _____

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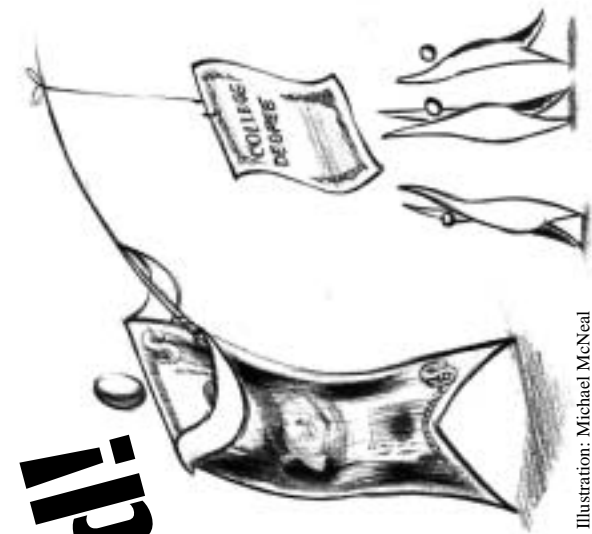


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