



## **Citizen Grievances and Petitions to Cal Poly University**

### **1 Introduction**

The plight of California's college-aged youth is made evident by the titles of recent books about higher education: *The Great American College Tuition Rip-Off*, *The Student Loan Scam: The Most Oppressive Debt in U.S. History*, *Going Broke by Degree: Why College Costs Too Much*, *No Sucker Left Behind: Avoiding the Great College Rip-Off*. The tragedy is that these titles are not exaggerations, but rather give accurate testimony to one of the greatest injustices of our time: the generational theft of billions of dollars from students to institutions of higher education and lenders.

This injustice has come about as a result of ruthless greed by financial institutions, their large lobbying influence in Congress, extensive university agreements whereby schools profit when their students borrow money, and the negligence, selfishness, and indifference of educators and government officials.

Besides being innately unjust, the tuition and student debt situation has reached crisis levels. We are witnessing the exploitation and demoralization of an entire generation, at precisely the time in human history when the creative abilities of the young are most urgently needed.

Students are our future. We need their ideas, their idealism their energy as never before to challenge and change the status quo. Instead we are grooming them to become the greatest debtors the world has ever seen. This is not merely unjust and wrong, it is outrageous. The system is completely broken, and getting worse daily.

The higher education system has demonstrated no serious interest or ability to respond to these challenges. College faculty and administrators are aloof and inactive, while powers in the financial and government sectors run roughshod over the public's interests.

We – the students, parents and citizens of California – demand change!

## 2 **Grievances**

### 2.1 ***Tuition and fees***

College Board statistics show that college tuition and fees have inflated much more than the cost of living. From 1978 to 2008, the cost-of-living, as measured by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased 3.3-fold, while college tuition and fees increased nearly 10-fold, or roughly three times the cost of living increase.

No consistent explanation for this massively disproportionate tuition inflation has been offered. State budget cuts might explain some, but not all of the rapid increase. Other factors, such as excessive administrative costs and imprudent building programs have been suggested as explanations..

Besides being of doubtful necessity, high tuition and fees dissuade many otherwise motivated and interested students from attending colleges and universities, and place unnatural and excessive burden on students who do attend.

### 2.2 ***Student debt burden***

The growing consensus is that the tuition and lending situation at American colleges is a rip-off, and amounts to **generational theft**. The problem is especially pernicious because its victims are young people, who lack the experience and historical perspective to know they are being taken advantage, who lack political power, and who naively trust that adult university officials are looking after their interests.

Students are the future of California. We should not and must not shackle them with debilitating debt just as they enter adulthood. Burdened with debt and associated financial anxieties, they have no choice but to enter the workforce immediately, accepting any menial job, bought and sold by the corporate establishment.

We need young people to be free to apply their energy and creative imagination to solve the urgent problems of the modern world. They cannot do this if we force them to become wage slaves.

### 2.3 ***Corporatism***

Whatever their stated goals and values, colleges and universities today operate more like private corporations than humanitarian institutions of higher learning. Formal and

informal agreements are made amongst universities, banks, lenders, and the federal government which place money and revenue ahead of student and community welfare.

Corporate values are also expressed in curricula. More effort is made to groom students to function in and support a corporate-materialistic society than to question, challenge and improve it.

## 2.4 **Values and Community Orientation**

Californians, like all people, are fundamentally motivated by moral, humanitarian and spiritual considerations. These may take the form of an explicit religious orientation, or simply an intuitive acceptance of certain transcendent principles of Nature and existence. However, universities exclude transcendental values from the curricula, and instead continue to emphasize the same 20th century radical materialistic-empiricism that has produced today's ethical and environmental wasteland.

We should be training a new class of citizens and human beings to solve today's problems. Instead, universities seem bent on cranking out dumbed-down, debtor-consumer-workers who are unwilling and unequipped to challenge the status quo. Nothing demonstrates the mercenary and amoral values of colleges than their callous willingness to place students deeply in debt.

## 3 **Petitions**

We hereby petition Cal Poly University (hereinafter termed the 'university') for redress of our grievances as follows:

### 3.1 **Make data public**

3.1.1 *We petition the university to gather and publish current and historical data on tuition and fees at Cal Poly for each academic year from 1971 to present.*

3.1.2 *We petition the university to gather and publish data on yearly borrowing and total debt by Cal Poly students. If these data are not already available, they should be collected by student surveys or other means.*

Data on tuition/fees and borrowing/debt will be summarized and reported as statistical summaries, including, but not limited to means, standard deviations and frequency distributions, in both aggregate form and stratified by: college (Humanities, Engineering, etc.); school year (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, graduate students); and in-/out-of-state residency status.

Statistical summaries will be presented in a simple, consistent format in both html and machine readable form (e.g., MS Excel files), and placed online in a prominent location.

- 3.1.3 *We petition the university to conduct survey research on an ongoing, yearly basis to estimate the rate of default on student loans by graduates. Results will be published online where prospective students may review them.*
- 3.1.4 *We petition the university to conduct survey research to estimate the percentage of graduates who find appropriate employment (defined as employment consistent with their program of study, and sufficiently remunerative to repay student loans) within 2 years after graduation. Results will be published online where prospective students may review them.*
- 3.1.5 *We petition the university to publicly disclose all financial agreements with banks and lending institutions that pertain to student loans.*
- 3.1.6 *We petition the university to publish current and historical rates of foreign and out-of-state student admissions, with the former broken down by country.*
- 3.1.7 *We petition that any financial arrangements between foreign governments and the university, the UC system, or the California State University system be disclosed.*

### **3.2 Task Force on Tuition and Student Debt**

- 3.2.1 *We petition the university to form an investigative committee or **Task Force on Tuition and Student Debt.***

Membership. The committee will consist of not less than seven members. At least five members will come from the university faculty and senior administrative staff. It will include at least one Cal Poly student and one member of the community.

Duties. The committee will:

- 3.2.2 Study the problems of high tuition and student debt at Cal Poly and investigate the impact of student debt on the current and future quality-of-life of students.
- 3.2.3 Formulate specific recommendations for ways to control and reduce tuition and fees at Cal Poly.
- 3.2.4 Write and publish online a report summarizing the findings by the end of the current academic year (2011-12).

### **3.3 Task Force on Innovation**

#### **3.3.1 We petition the university to form a second investigative committee or Task Force on Innovation.**

Membership. The committee will consist of not less than seven members. At least five members will come from the university faculty and senior administrative staff. It will include at least one Cal Poly student and one member of the community.

Duties. The committee will investigate and make recommendations on alternatives to the conventional physical classroom model of university instruction, with emphasis on reduced- or no-tuition paradigms.

Topics to consider shall include, but not be limited to the following:

#### **3.3.2 Online courses.** Currently several individual UC and California State University campuses are each independently developing online lectures and distance learning modules. This duplication of effort is extremely wasteful. Instead, all public colleges and universities in California should collaborate on a single online, distance learning program.

The best lecturers and instructors in each field should be sought from throughout the entire California higher education system; these teachers should place complete lecture series online. All course reading and audio/visual materials should be online.

The goal should be to place, at minimum, at least two complete years of basic requirements courses online, accessible to all Californians, for free. Users may optionally subscribe to grading and mentor services for a nominal fee.

One of Europe's largest public universities, Britain's Open University, is already based on distance learning. The technology exists and California should be leading, not following in this area. What is lacking is vision, energy, and good faith by the California higher education system.

#### **3.3.3 Third party courseware.** Companies such as The Teaching Company produce college-level courses, featuring top lecturers, for a reasonable price. This model, which achieves an economy of scale by making lectures for a global audience, produces superior education at a lower cost. The State of California should investigate licensing arrangements with these companies.

#### **3.3.4 Free night course program.** University classrooms can be used after hours to teach free classes, equivalent to college-level basic requirements courses, for college credit. Volunteers from the community (e.g., retired professors or professionals) or university faculty working *pro bono* can teach these classes.

- 3.3.5 Community television programming. Better use of community television should be made, with many basic requirements courses supplied for free.
- 3.3.6 Great Books program. Students should be given the option to gain at least 1 year's university credit by following a self-study program based on the Great Books model.  
  
Enrolled students who use this option and do not attend classes should be granted greatly reduced tuition and fees.
- 3.3.7 Accreditation reform. Accreditation hurts the public by allowing existing universities and colleges to have a monopoly on higher education. By eliminating or relaxing accreditation requirements, more small, private colleges will emerge, increasing competition and driving tuition lower. While accreditation arguably serves a purpose in areas like training of physicians and nurses, it makes little sense in the case of Liberal Arts studies, where students are able to judge the quality of teachers and institutions for themselves.
- 3.3.8 The Task Force on Innovation will assess the feasibility and potential benefits of these and similar alternative paradigms. The results will be summarized in a report, to be made public and published online, by the end of the current academic year (2011-12).

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