

Thirteen arrested in California student protest

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A University of California police officer drew his gun at protesting students in San Francisco on Wednesday. The students were peacefully trying to enter a UC Regents public meeting to protest tuition hikes and the assault on pensions for UC employees.

A local TV news video clearly shows the UCSF officer back up, drop his baton and pull out a gun against the unarmed student protesters. Not only students, but members of the public as well were denied entry to the meeting. Police also used pepper spray on the demonstrators in the confrontation, which also resulted in the arrest of 13 students.

“Officers rushed in and started arresting students and pulling them to the ground. And I think, that’s the point when a lot of students were arrested,” declared UC Riverside student Olivia Gonzalez, who also videotaped part of the protest. “After I stopped filming,” she said, “officers pulled out pepper spray and pepper sprayed that whole section of the stairs.”

The regents also discussed, but did not approve, a plan to boost the number of out-of-state students at the University of California from 6 percent of the student body to 10 percent. Out-of-state students currently pay \$23,000 above the tuition of in-state students.

According to UC President Marc Yudof, state budget cuts continue to affect the University of California, even as costs are predicted to increase by \$200 million next year. These include the university’s contribution to the retirement plan, health benefit cost increases for employees and retirees, and purchased utility cost rises, among other mandatory expenses.

Yudof also declared that the UC pension and health benefits were “seriously overextended.” The UC system faces \$21 billion in unfunded liabilities for its retiree pension and health programs. The UC president will propose increases in employee contributions and a

two-tier retirement and health system, with lower benefits for new hires.

The tuition increase, meant to plug a projected UC deficit of \$1 billion, part of a state deficit of \$25 billion, aims to place the burden of a university education on working class students and their families, while protecting corporations and the rich from tax increases. Previous to 1975, UC fees amounted to \$2,000 in today’s prices, one fifth of what students will pay with the latest increase. Since 2001, these fees have nearly tripled in real terms. Following the last increase, thousands of students were forced to drop out and postpone their education.

“A lot of us come from a working class background—parents who earn minimum wage—and we’re trying to pursue an education,” Olivia Gonzales said. “We might be perceived as students who are out there ... to make a ruckus. In reality, we really are looking for an education ... and we want to get what we paid for, especially when the tuition is this high.” She pointed out what is a common complaint among students, that the overall quality of a UC education has deteriorated as classes have been cut.

On Thursday, a subcommittee of 10 UC board members, the majority of whom represent corporate interests from all over California, voted to raise basic undergraduate fees for the University of California system by 8 percent; the recommendation was sent to the entire board of regents. This amounts to \$822, which would raise yearly fees to \$11,124.

On top of that, students are required to pay about \$1,000 to individual campuses and \$17,000 for room and board. The full 18-member board of regents approved the increase a few hours later. While a few provisions were made to extend financial aid and loans

to younger students, many students will see a hefty increase in university costs.

The 8 percent hike takes place in combination with a 32 percent increase imposed earlier this year, adding up to an extraordinary 40 percent rise in tuition. Many students will be unable to continue with their studies, or begin their studies, in the face of such a massive increase.

The regents also approved raises for high-salaried positions, the state fiscal crisis notwithstanding. One of these posts, the vice chancellor of research at UC Davis, will make \$370,000 plus a combined hiring bonus/relocation allowance of \$111,000, in addition to reimbursement for “furnished temporary lodging” and parking for up to 90 days. Total cash compensation: \$481,000. A spokesperson for the regents defended the high salaries, claiming that UC market research has demonstrated that UC officials are generally underpaid.

According to a survey published in Thursday's *Los Angeles Times*, the majority of California residents supports public higher education and opposes the fee increases. Many worry that their children will not be able to afford a public university education.

The report is based on a survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) that was released earlier this year. The survey found that seven of every ten California residents oppose the fee increases; 74 percent of Californians think the state is starving public colleges and universities; 68 percent believe spending for public higher education should be a high or very high priority; and 62 percent reported being very concerned that state budget cuts will result in significant spending cuts for higher education. A very large majority also favored increasing scholarships and grants to poorer students.



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