

University authorities seek to block and isolate Occupy Harvard

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At about 10:30 p.m. Wednesday night, Occupy Harvard protesters began to pitch tents in Harvard Yard. The staking of tents followed an evening of incidents in which protesters' attempts to set up their encampment were repeatedly blocked by university authorities, and campus and Cambridge city police were dispatched to bar entry to Harvard Yard.

Harvard University, established in 1636 and located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. Harvard University's endowment now totals \$32 billion, making it the second wealthiest purportedly nonprofit institution in the world, trailing right behind the Catholic Church. For the 2011-12 year, the cost of attending Harvard College is more than \$52,000 for tuition, room, board and fees combined, minus any financial aid or loans that must be repaid.

Occupy Harvard protesters point to the institution's massive wealth, and the disparity between the salaries of the top management officials and campus service workers. A Thursday morning statement from Occupy Harvard notes the "180:1 ratio between the compensation of Harvard's highest-paid employee—the head of internal investments at Harvard Management Company—and the lowest paid custodial worker."

To begin their protest, Occupy Harvard organizers had planned to hold a rally at 7 p.m. Wednesday in Harvard Yard, then an 8 p.m. General Assembly meeting, followed later that evening with the pitching of tents in the yard. By about 7:15 p.m., however, it became clear that Harvard authorities were attempting to block their plans. Harvard police and security guards positioned outside the gates to Harvard Yard shouted out, "No ID, no entrance," and indicated that only

Harvard students would be allowed inside.

Organizers then began to direct the crowd, which numbered as many as 800 people, up Cambridge's thoroughfare, Massachusetts Ave, to the Harvard Law School campus. The crowd included Harvard students, faculty, as well as students from other Boston-area universities and supporters of the Occupy Boston movement. Also participating were service workers represented by SEIU Local 615, whose contract with the university expires next Tuesday.

Just before 9 p.m., after a meeting in the Law School quad, organizers then directed the group back to Harvard Yard, where the protesters were determined to set up camp. As the crowd pressed up against the iron bars, Harvard police pulled the gates closed and locked them. Inside the yard, students sympathetic to the protest began to pitch tents that had been hidden on the campus grounds.

Protesters continued to converge, march and protest outside the gates until about 11:30 p.m. Some contemplated scaling the fence. Students with valid Harvard IDs, including supporters of the protest and those who simply sought access to their dorm rooms, were kept outside until about midnight, when they were finally allowed to enter Harvard Yard.

On Thursday, campus police continued to man the gates to Harvard Yard, checking IDs, and barring entry to anyone without one, including the media, parents of enrolled students, and members of the surrounding community. Tourists were barred entry to the grounds. One parent who had come to visit her daughter was outraged, commenting, "I pay how many thousands of dollars for my child to attend this school? And this?"

It appears that campus authorities intend to maintain

their checkpoints for the foreseeable future—at least as long as the Occupy Harvard protesters maintain their camp. A statement issued Thursday afternoon by the university provost stated in part, “The University has a fundamental obligation to be attentive to the safety, security, and well-being of its students, faculty, and staff on campus. The events of last night raised safety concerns: the number of demonstrators was large, many of the demonstrators were not from Harvard, and specific behaviors were troubling ...

“The decision by students and other members of the Harvard community to erect tents in the Yard will require that the University continue with heightened security measures for the time being. Most important, no one without Harvard identification will be permitted into the Yard.”

It is clear that university authorities are aiming to thwart the Occupy Harvard protest not only by banning the “riff-raff” and “outsiders” from the prestigious campus. They seek to prevent those involved on campus from gaining wider support outside the Harvard Yard gates for the fight against social inequality and the domination of corporations and the banks over all aspects of life.



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