

Howard University students occupy campus building in Washington, D.C.

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The student occupation of Howard University's Mordecai Wyatt Administration Building entered its fifth day today. Students affiliated with the protest group HUResist have been occupying the administration building since it was revealed that campus employees had inappropriately received college grants and tuition waivers over a nine year period from 2007 to 2016, which in some cases exceeded the cost of tuition at the historically black university.

"We've taken over every floor... We'll be here as long as it takes to get our demands met," Howard student Juan Demétrix announced at a press conference held by the campus activist group on Friday. Local press outlets estimated that as many as 400 students occupied the building's central lobby on Friday evening.

Students have released a list of demands which must be met before they will end the occupation. Included are calls for adequate housing for students below the age of 21, an immediate end to unsubstantiated tuition hikes, increased resources to fight food insecurity and gentrification in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus and the immediate disarming of Howard University police officers.

Students also call for the resignation of Howard president Wayne A.J. Frederick and the executive committee of the school's Board of Trustees, which they accuse of "expediting the deterioration of our beloved university."

Reflecting the political confusion sown for years in academia, student demands also call for measures to "actively fight rape culture on campus" and are couched in the terms of middle class identity and racial politics.

According to the students, Howard University administrators have sold off a number of student dorm

buildings to private real estate developers in the past several years, leaving students at a disadvantage in finding affordable housing in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in Northeast Washington, D.C.

The students claim they were not informed of a March 30 deposit deadline until a day before down payments were due, leaving many unable to fulfill the requirement for students under age 21 of obtaining on-site housing.

In addition, their document notes that executive administrators of the university have seen substantial bonuses even as the price of tuition has nearly doubled. The students call for a publicly accessible database showing the salaries of the school's lead administrators, many of whom occupy influential positions in big business and finance in addition to their posts at the university.

Howard University administrators have shown no inclination of giving in to the students' demands. In a statement from the Howard Board of Trustees chairman Stacey J. Mobley, a retired general counsel for the DuPont chemical company, the university responded to the list of demands by declaring them to be "inaccurate," noting a number of extenuating circumstances such as winter damages limiting the number of available rooms on campus.

A meeting between students and two board members on Friday ended without resolution, as students claimed that the representatives had failed to even acquaint themselves with their full list of demands. Similarly, a Saturday meeting with nine members of the board did not include university president Frederick, an executive committee member.

Founded in 1867 in the aftermath of the American Civil War, Howard University is one of the United States' oldest and most prestigious historically black

private universities. The university has produced a significant number of noted intellectuals, jurists, politicians and entertainers.

The Howard student occupation comes amid a rising wave of militancy among students and workers. Less than a week prior to the campus occupation, nearly one million students and young people converged on Washington, D.C.'s streets and across the US to protest the unending wave of mass shootings in schools.

The occupation also occurs alongside a growing radicalization of teachers in defense of public education, including planned walkouts and sickouts in Kentucky and Arizona, as well as strikes in New Jersey and West Virginia a month ago. Today, thousands of teachers in the state of Oklahoma are striking for increased wages and better education funding with a mass rally at the state capitol in Oklahoma City.



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