

Amid growing coronavirus pandemic

Student organized investigation finds that Pomona College in California has denied 70 percent of housing requests

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Students at Pomona College, a private liberal arts college in Claremont, California, are organizing in order to secure emergency student housing amid the growing coronavirus pandemic which has shut down campuses across the country.

Hundreds of students at Pomona are now facing forced eviction from the campus. “I’m being evicted from Pomona college. I’ve been homeless since I was 16. I come from an extremely abusive home without access to heat, hot water or food” one student, who spoke to the WSWs under the condition of anonymity, explained.

According to the students who spoke with our reporters, the student body was informed on Wednesday, March 11, that they were not to return to campus after spring break because of the pandemic. The students were provided two links: one to petition to remain on campus, and another to request funding for a flight home. They were told to expect a response about staying on campus at noon on Friday, March 13. A student group which has organized against the measures reported that the majority of responses went out at 11:44 p.m., well after the deadline.

Many students were amazed to hear their requests were denied despite their dire circumstances. The group of students which has come to call itself “Occupy Pomona” began conducting their own investigation into the denials after receiving little assistance from college administrators. The group of students polled the student body to find out how many people had applied for housing, what reason they had given, and whether or not their request was approved. The results have been devastating.

Of the 19 students who reported to the administration that they would be homeless if forced to evacuate, 11

were denied extended housing. Over 50 students requested housing because of issues of security and lack of resources—46 of them were denied. At least 24 students reported that they would be returning to a home with family members with compromised immune systems; only 2 of these students were granted extended housing.

Perhaps, most appalling: Three students reported that they wished to stay on campus because of their legal documentation status—only one was approved for housing.

Overall, the student poll indicates that about 70 percent of students were denied housing requests. Those who were approved were told that the decision was conditional and may be revoked. The system for approval appears to have been conducted in a completely arbitrary manner.

The students have focused on developing their own emergency measures: “We have teams working on finding off-campus housing for students as a backup plan, but we have been talking about occupying our rooms anyway.”

Occupy Pomona is offering aid to students through a GoFundMe page, which raised a staggering \$40,000 in a single day from about 500 supporters. The student organization plans to distribute the money based on need, through an “emergency grant” form they have created themselves in the absence of such measures on the part of the college.

The GoFundMe has received funding from students, university alumni and parents across the country. One donor comment reads: “[a]s a Pomona Alum (Class of ‘07), I’m disgusted to hear the reports I’m hearing about the college’s inadequate response to the needs of its most vulnerable students. It is appalling that alumni are feeling the need to step in to support current students who can’t

‘just go home’ when the college has a \$1 billion plus endowment. But I’m donating anyway because these kids need help.”

In fact, the college’s endowment is \$2.23 billion.

Another student explained that the only place he might have been able to go for shelter, under different conditions, was his grandmother’s house. However, that is no longer an option for him due to the growing pandemic: “My aunt takes care of my grandma and she is really sick. My aunt is also a nurse at the local hospital. They are unwilling to have me during the pandemic coming from California. They would not be able to house me in the first place without me paying for food, utilities and rent.”

“Since the pandemic my aunt and my grandma have to take care of themselves and their health. And it would be much worse for me to go to the community I am from which is a low-income manual-labor based, rural community.”

“The dean who told me I could not stay is the dean that I have been working with since I was a freshman and she knows I am a homeless student.”

Many of the students who spoke to the WSWs expressed outrage over the response from administration, which was described as “completely abysmal,” “criminal,” and “predictable,” among other more colorful descriptions. One student pointed out that the university is doing less for students in this crisis than they did in similar crises over 100 years ago: “in their initial email they cited the Spanish flu as a comparable situation. During that time (with less dorms and less tech) Pomona let 500 students stay.”

Another student told these reporters that Pomona students are increasingly angered about the lack of accommodation especially considering that the Harvey Mudd College, a sister college, has reportedly allowed all students who cannot leave for various reasons, to stay. Pomona College and Harvey Mudd are two colleges within the Claremont Colleges consortium, a collection of five undergraduate colleges and two graduate schools, all in the same suburb of Los Angeles.

While there may be well-intentioned administrators, including at Pomona College, working to assist students, more fundamental issues are at stake.

The real responsibility for this crisis, in the final analysis, lies with the entire political establishment, Democratic and Republican alike, who have spent decades attacking public education funding, destroying social services, and failing to prepare in any serious way for a public health crisis of this magnitude.

Pomona College is located in the Democratic Party-controlled state of California, which is also home to the largest share of billionaires in the United States.

The situation at Pomona College is far from unique. The current coronavirus crisis is, in fact, exposing and exacerbating a whole series of on-going crises facing students and workers including homelessness, food insecurity, joblessness, lack of healthcare, among others. Added to this situation is now the fear of bringing the virus into their family’s homes and infecting their loved ones.

The haphazard and negligent manner in which school closures and housing requests have taken place is another stark indication of the complete lack of preparedness within the political establishment to handle this crisis.

The inhuman response to the pandemic by the ruling class, of which the attack on students is apart, is laying bare the real nature of the capitalist system, which provides for the vast enrichment of the few at the expense of the many.

In order to students, youth and workers to secure the most fundamental requirements of civilized society, including housing, requires the overturning of this system and its replacement with socialism.

Through our discussions with the Pomona College students many of these political issues were addressed. One student indicated that he visited the *World Socialist Web Site* before contacting our reporters to “see what we were about.” He had read the recent perspective “Capitalism is at war with society.” In response, he expressed his agreement writing, “We have no public infrastructure. We support Wall Street over people. And we rely on manual laborers as an economy based on slave labor. Honestly this is the time for the revolution.”

The WSWs encourages students and youth who want to tell their stories to contact us today, and to join the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact