

College of Saint Rose in New York slashes programs and tenured faculty positions

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The College of Saint Rose, a small, private liberal arts college in Albany, New York, has announced drastic cuts in its academic program. It will end programs for 16 bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees and three certificate programs.

The impact to the college's faculty will be substantial. By December 2021, 33 of its 151 full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty positions (22 percent) will be eliminated, as well as eight visiting faculty positions.

This action is being taken in order to save \$5.97 million and follows \$8 million in cuts to administration and staff. Programs in art, music, mathematics, science, education and business will be eliminated. The college currently has 3,774 enrolled students, whose choices for academic pursuits will be significantly curtailed.

The immediate justification for this gutting of core subjects and elimination of faculty is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school's budget, with a projected deficit of \$15.8 million by 2023. However, the college had already faced financial difficulties prior to the pandemic and its actions reflect a broader crisis in higher education.

With the decades-long trend toward the financialization of the economy and maximization of wealth accumulation by the financial and corporate elite, there has been ever-expanding austerity for education. As a consequence, colleges and universities across the country have for years sought a range of "economies"—including the super-exploitation of graduate assistants, the growing use of underpaid adjuncts instead of tenure-track professors, and the astronomical increases in tuition and fees. Students and their families have been encumbered with crushing debt in worsening economic conditions under which these obligations will take decades to pay off, if ever.

This trend is rendering a college education unattainable for a growing number of young people. The average annual cost of attending Saint Rose is nearly \$50,000,

saddling a four-year graduate with roughly \$200,000 in debt in the absence of financial aid or scholarships.

The college's interim president, Marcia White, said as much in a posting on their website, writing, "It is no secret that weighty financial challenges are pressing on colleges and universities throughout the country. The higher education sector is in a period of real transformation. We are being proactive by making hard decisions now, as painful as they are."

This was echoed by Jeff Stone, chair of the Saint Rose Board of Trustees, who stated, "We need to build a stronger base—one where operating expenses and revenue align—in order to meet current challenges in higher education and the challenges yet to come."

The terminated programs will impact 10 percent of Saint Rose's undergraduate students and 4 percent of its graduate students. The college says that all currently enrolled students will be able to complete their degrees, but that no new students will be enrolled in the affected programs. Those programs targeted for elimination either had low enrollment or generated less income than their operating cost. In other words, the value of a particular subject to students is judged not on its contribution to his or her overall intellectual development, but to its immediate revenue potential.

Students have reacted angrily to the announcement. Brianna Moss, a sophomore music education major at the college, told the local ABC affiliate, "I chose the school because of the music department. The school was founded on music and education so the fact that that's being taken away, I feel like the school is losing a lot of what it's standing for."

Gianna Montagno, another music education major, said, "Watching how hard our professors have been working throughout this pandemic to deliver a quality education and keep music alive. It was really disturbing. It was heartbreaking to read that email yesterday and we're still

kind of in shock about it.”

This is not the first time that Saint Rose has taken an axe to its educational programs. In December 2015, four years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the college announced plans to eliminate 27 academic programs and 23 faculty positions. These cuts too were justified as necessary to ensure the college’s future viability. In protest, the Saint Rose faculty passed a “no confidence” motion regarding its president. In a Facebook post, one former faculty member described the school as a “hollow shell.”

Cuts in faculty positions are being announced at schools across the country and around the world.

Students at other colleges and universities have been driven to undertake strikes and other protests against the increasingly impossible situation to which they are subject, including across the University of California (UC) system last spring, at the University of Michigan in September, and at other colleges and universities across the US and internationally. Columbia University students are currently planning a tuition strike.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted, the COVID-19 pandemic is a trigger event. It has brought into sharp focus the decades-long rot of the capitalist system in all aspects of life. Education at every level, from primary to tertiary, has increasingly been starved of resources or turned into for-profit businesses as the financial elite seeks to cut to a minimum any expenditure that does not contribute to the expansion of its wealth.

To carry out a genuine struggle against the brutal austerity they face, Saint Rose faculty must form an independent, rank-and-file committee and prepare to mount work actions to restore all funding cuts and faculty positions, and vastly expand education funding through heavy taxation on the wealthiest sections of society. We urge all those who wish to take up such a struggle to contact us today .



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