

Cal Poly Humboldt enacts new profit-driven policies provoking student protests demanding the right to decent housing

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On February 8, several hundred students at Cal Poly Humboldt (CPH) held a five-hour protest to demand their right to decent housing and against the administration's sudden changes to its on-campus housing policy. The result would be the eviction of more than 1,000 sophomores, juniors and seniors to off-campus housing in the Fall 2023 semester in an area facing many years of expensive rentals, housing shortages and homelessness. Many are now saying that CPH stands for "Cal Poly Homeless."

Humboldt is the northernmost of the 23 campuses in the Cal State University system and is located near the Oregon border in Arcata, California.

In a surprise move which sparked outrage and condemnation from both students and staff, the administration of Cal Poly Humboldt made the decision to prioritize its on-campus housing for first-year freshman and transferring students.

Second-year students who are currently living in these dorms will be evicted and left to find alternative housing elsewhere at the start of the next semester. On Saturday, February 4, the university's housing department quietly updated its website to reflect the new policy, and an official notice from the university was given on Monday, February 6.

The university's decision was not publicly announced until after the deadline to transfer to other CSU campuses had passed, essentially trapping students into a cost-of-living crisis on campus.

The only other alternatives for students are to either transfer to a more expensive private college or wait an additional year to be accepted at another university.

At the rally, hundreds of students and their supporters voiced their anger and held up handmade signs denouncing the evictions and homelessness. Lars Hansen, an organizer for the Humboldt Equitable Student Housing Alliance, was loudly cheered as he explained the key demands of the protest.

These include transparency in school and housing decisions, adequate safety requirement for all housing, on and off campus, decent and accessible transportation policies, increased amenities at off-campus sites, and assurance for cleanliness, health and accessibility in all housing run by the school.

On January 26, 2022, the 109-year-old Humboldt State University integrated itself into the Cal Polytechnic State University system, making it the third polytechnic campus next to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly Pomona. Last year Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom dedicated nearly \$500 million to transform it into a campus focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

This has led to an increase in applications, with Cal Poly Humboldt reporting that they have received close to 19,000 applications this year, practically double the amount of applications submitted last fall which

totaled 9,700 applications.

According to Peggy Metzger, interim director of enrollment management for Cal Poly Humboldt, the campus considers 12,000 students attending as "full enrollment," which would be more than half of the population of Arcata, California, which stands around 20,000 people.

According to the university, first-time students will be offered 2,100 beds on-campus, while returning and transfer students will have access to about 1,000 off-campus dorms this fall.

The university has added 350 additional beds to their roster by offering hotel rooms at the Super 8, Motel 6 and Comfort Inn for second-year students to live in.

Other sources reveal that the Cal Poly Humboldt administration is even looking into creating more additional beds for their unhoused students by purchasing a barge and placing it in the middle of the Eureka Bay.

If Cal Poly Humboldt were to receive "full enrollment" with its current stock of on-campus and off-campus housing for students, this would still leave 8,850 students to navigate a price-heavy housing market with little to no prospect of finding housing which they can afford on their own.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Annabel Crescibene and Mikaila Shing-Navarro, a sophomore and a freshman, respectively, at Cal Poly Humboldt, who are both members of the Humboldt Equitable Student Housing Alliance which helped organize the protest.

Annabel, the social media coordinator of the Humboldt Equitable Student Housing Alliance, said, "The biggest thing is I don't want to have to live in a motel. I don't want to have to live on a housing barge.

"You know, we're going to be kicked out of our living situations. There's already been a shortage of off-campus housing. There was a report in 2019 that said that one in five students at Cal Poly Humboldt were homeless. And it's cold up here [near the Oregon border]. It can be freezing. If you live in a tent here, you could easily get hypothermia."

Both Annabel and Mikaila went over how dire the situation is for the students who will be heavily impacted by their university's decision.

"I've heard stories of people who couldn't find housing so they were looking on Craigslist, and they found a man offering free rent," Mikaila said. "The student who stayed with him said, and I quote, to 'keep him company,' which then led to a sexual relationship in exchange for rent. And I know that people have already started looking at those opportunities more seriously."

Annabel said, "We have former foster youth in our group. We have people who are adoptees; we have people who have parents who don't get along. We have people who are orphans and don't have family to go back to. There are people who are disabled or diverse and cannot live in motels because of things like accessibility issues. Some people have emotional issues and need ESAs, or Emotional Support Animals."

Other issues ranged from mold, lack of accessibility and unaddressed

crime on campus, leading students to question whether reasonable accommodations will be made at the current on-campus and off-campus housing as well as the additional motels added to their roster in order to address these issues.

“I believe that all houses around here are prone to mold, but the housing area that is way more prone to the mold is a place called Canyon. They have a bunch of different issues about mold and accessibility,” Mikaila said.

“That’s where my friend who ended up dropping out stayed at. She stayed there and in the first week of school she slipped down the stairs and broke her knee. The housing on campus currently is bare minimum, I would say, especially accessibility-wise. The campus is not really accessible at all.”

Mikaila continued. “It is a humid area, we’re by the sea, but mold is an issue, especially for housing. They don’t do checks for it, they don’t really warn us. People who come from other areas like Southern California that are unfamiliar with the area probably never really thought about that issue, so many don’t worry or look for mold in their house before it’s too late. I also want to say that in the dorms the buildings are so old, I don’t know the exact date, but they’ve been at the university for a really long time.”

Annabel added, “Students with mobility issues were promised disabled housing. But there’s a problem because our campus is so hilly. There are so many stairs to get to the dining halls. To get from my dorm to my classes, I have to go up a minimum of five flights.

“Sometimes you get a place without access to a kitchen. Some students can’t cook for themselves. There are people with eating disorders; some may be vegan or vegetarian and the dining halls don’t provide good vegan or vegetarian food.”

“For those living at a motel about a mile off campus, the university will provide a shuttle. But it’s only a 12-passenger van to serve over 1,000 students living off campus. There aren’t enough shuttles, and disabled students who live off campus cannot get a shuttle to their classes.

“That was another one of our demands,” Mikaila added, “that we’ll need adequate transportation because ... 36 seats for three hotels filled with students who have transportation needs is obviously not enough. That was their [Cal Poly Humboldt’s] original transportation plan.

“I would also like to add that Humboldt County is known for the Emerald Triangle, for the marijuana business here,” Mikaila said. “It’s actually kind of a dangerous county to live in, not so much in Arcata but in the other towns nearby a lot of people go missing because they might need extra cash and take up a job at an unregulated marijuana farm.”

Both Annabel and Mikaila also spoke about the powerful University of California grad student strike by 48,000 students workers in December 2022.

“Yes, I heard about the UC grad students strike,” Annabel said. “The issues are really very similar. Students at UC Santa Barbara were protesting because the university built a housing complex with no windows. We want to get in touch with more people throughout the Cal State University system and the UC system to fight against this. We would love to get help from people who’ve done this and talk to them because we’re not alone.”

Mikaila commented on the formation of rank-and-file committees on the college campuses and workplaces.

“I think that a rank-and-file committee would be a great option in that case,” she said. “I do think that it would be a great thing because I’m so tired of the Democratic Party being the ‘lesser of two evils’ but still being corrupt, and the amount of corruption that goes on in our government is astronomical. ...

“A rank-and-file committee would be great because the working class should be holding some power over the ruling class, and we don’t. I’m not well versed in this topic, but the working class of America can come

together and have their own conversation without anyone else there that’s involved with the government.

“I think that this is a really big problem with our current government situation. The whole thing is vote, vote, vote and then everything will be solved, but we’ve been voting and here we are.”

Annabel and Mikaila also brought up their concern about COVID-19 demands.

“And just like the UC students were raising, we also want COVID protections,” Annabel said. “One of our goals is to have COVID isolation housing again. We had it last year, and it worked. Now we don’t have it. I’ve never had COVID before, but someone in one of the freshman dorms got it.”

“Before the beginning of this year, the government dropped almost all of their COVID protections. Last year when I first went to school, we had to wear our masks in the dorm hallways the entire time. At the beginning of the second semester last year we weren’t allowed to eat inside each other’s rooms, and we weren’t allowed to have guests. There used to be testing and contact tracing, things for a baseline level of safety for everybody. But all of that is gone, and now people are getting sick again.”

Mikaila said, “I know now that one of our demands is for COVID housing, because currently if my roommate got COVID, she would have to stay in my room with me, so I would probably also get COVID and spread it around to people I’m around.

“There’s no COVID quarantine housing. We’re just supposed to quarantine in our dorms, but some people in the dorms are living with four other people, so disinfecting those four other people and where else are they supposed to go? I think that quarantining students with COVID-19 is needed.”

As just and necessary as these demands are, what is necessary to achieve these aims is an independent movement of the working class fighting capitalism, fighting for socialist policies. Appeals to Democratic Party politicians will be met with stone silence or empty promises to rectify the dire situation.

We encourage all students at Cal Poly Humboldt, graduate students at the University of California and other campuses to attend a joint meeting hosted by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee on Saturday, February 25, 3–5 p.m. Pacific Time. The purpose of this meeting will be to have the widest possible discussion and advance a political perspective, a socialist response, to these burning issues.

If you are interested in forming a rank-and-file committee or require more information on Saturday’s meeting, please fill out the form below.



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