

“People should not be pushed into the military because they can’t afford an education”

Students and faculty voice opposition to slashing programs at West Virginia University

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Faculty, staff and students of West Virginia University spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* outside the College of Creative Arts Wednesday afternoon and voiced their opposition to plans to eliminate 169 faculty and slash 39 majors.

About 125 to 150 students took part in a rally called by the West Virginia United Students Union to oppose the cuts. Hundreds of faculty members jammed an assembly that was called to discuss and vote on two motions: one a vote of no confidence in West Virginia President Gordon Gee who was pushing the cuts; the other demanding that all cuts be frozen. Demonstrating the overwhelming opposition to the attack on the land grant university, the faculty passed both motions by 8 to 1.

Most of the students made clear that they were not just protesting for themselves, but for the rights of the entire student body as well as those who had not yet gone to school.

Cheyenne Luzynski, Ph.D is a teaching associate professor of leadership studies in the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. She said:

In the field of leadership, as a scholar and as a teacher who believes in education and sees it as a mission, it is important that we’re standing up and using our right and exercising our votes.

I’m against these cuts because I see that it’s a slippery slope in the democratization of the university system and higher ed at large. I care deeply about this state. I am a transplant to this state. But I see what potential this university can do in a place like this. And I am worried that if we start to minimize and cut down spending and opportunity, that we’re just eliminating the future of future citizens here.

I definitely see this as a response and reaction to a decrease in critical thinking, science [and the] pursuit of truth and understanding, and the dumbing down of America, sadly.

I would say that this all started probably in the 80s when we started having our military industrial complex and the attack on education at its root of communities and families. And it’s been a shifting of priorities. And here’s the results. Now we’re having to fight and stand for just basic human rights and being able to see and create a tolerant, accepting society.

Andrea is completing an English major with a minor in Appalachian Studies. She said that her major is not getting cut entirely, but a number of faculty are being cut.

The faculty was slated to get cut from 40 to 26. We have saved most of those jobs, but we are still losing seven jobs. Three people volunteered to retire early to save the jobs of their co-workers, yet admin [Gordon Gee gets paid \$800,000 a year] refuses to take pay cuts so most people have to leave the university and uproot their lives.

In my major, if we lose more faculty or graduate students, we cannot finish our programs. I will be forced to leave this university because I can’t get the education that I want or need. That is really scary because I can’t really afford to go to many other places. There are only two other places I could look in to and I’m really freaking mad about it, I’m not going to lie.

It is really infuriating the more I think about it, how much these administrators make when I am scrapping by, and I can barely pay rent. My mother pays for me to come here with my father’s Social Security and retirement benefits which she gets now because my dad died. So basically, my dad died so I could come to college, that is the only way I could afford it. So, I’m going to fight for that, because that is a big sacrifice my family has made for me to send me here, so I want to see it through.

These cuts to our international programs are really worrying. It is so hard to connect with people from other countries when you grow up here, because people don't think about it. One of the things about going to college is to learn about the culture that my mom doesn't get to live in anymore.

That's one of the things that I want to save here at WVU.

Asked if she felt these cuts were part of a larger attack on education, both at WVU and throughout the country, Andrea responded:

"It is scary. My nieces are about to go to college. One has just started. I'm afraid of what is going to happen to their programs. I'm afraid for my other friends at different universities, who can just barely afford college education as it is."

Andrea pointed out that by cutting programs, the administration is seeking to push the university towards being a vocational school and sets limits on what students are allowed to think.

"What [does] it really mean for what we can think, what we are allowed to think? [What] opportunities for our young folks [will remain] and [what are] especially our poor young folks allowed to have, when educational access is restricted?"

Asked about the military, Andrea said,

I want people to live healthy, strong lives and not have to worry about these things. (People should) not be in a position to be pushed into the military because they can't afford anything else, because they can't afford an education. That is very common here in West Virginia. Within my own family, my sister went to the military because she couldn't afford (college).

There would be so much less crime and illness if you just gave people a baseline to start with and take care of their health. If you would just invest first in your people, there is so much we could do instead of investing in the military.

Alan Bristow, a professor in Physics and Astronomy said:

Faculty and students need to stand together to protect the university. This is an administrative overreach. This is an attack on intelligence.

In physics we have written letters on behalf of the programs under review. The university is not a series of individual departments and programs. It is a complex institution constructed of multiple pillars dedicated to providing a liberal arts education.

Tim, a senior working towards a double major in history and women's studies, felt the cuts were aimed at the entire working class. He said:

I'm against these cuts because I think they are a blatant bourgeois attack on the working class. That is all about this. They aren't touching the business school. They are making some alterations to the engineering school. But those alterations are all about making it so people make more money for the ruling class.

It is not even a question. They do not care about the people of West Virginia. They want to make it so the people of West Virginia stop thinking and keep working. That's all they care about."

Tim pointed out that these cuts are taking place all over, not just at WVU.

The consulting company they used to decide what they are going to cut are currently—I don't know the exact number of schools that they are reviewing right now—but it is in the tens at least. It is schools around the country. They are working on setting up some cuts at a school in Taiwan even. So it is going to be a bigger problem than just West Virginia.

I've been a longtime opponent of the militarization of the United States that has been ramping up and up. It is a problem. Seventy-five percent of the national budget goes to defense. We have never been in a war of defense since 1812. It is a joke.

I was planning on getting my master's in Public Administration. They just announced either yesterday or the day before that the appeal that the Public Administration department had made was denied. They are still going to cut that.

[As for] me personally, it has stopped my ability to advance my career. It's not going to affect me as a senior since I will be able to get my class done and get out. But I have friends here, I have family that might end up coming here and I want it to be better for them. The people deserve better."

Caleb and Cal, both music majors, also came to voice their opposition to the cuts.

"I am against these cuts," Caleb said. "Every time they start cutting, it seems they want to get rid of the smaller departments and the arts first. Very often the attack will then come to others. The school will get more confident that they can cut more and more."



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