

**CCNY's Activism in Tuition Hikes**

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# CCNY's Activism in Tuition Hikes

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Cuny has been around for a long time. Known for their affordability and accessibility for lower class people around the entirety of New York and City and also many more people. College always seemed like a high luxury of upper class people. Who are able to high tuition costs and become debt free in the process. Majority of people don't have that ability, especially many in New York City who live below the poverty line. College should be an accessible thing for all people and not something for the wealthy. The City College of New York is one school that takes activism very seriously and looks out for their community especially around Harlem.

There was a point in time where Cuny's were free and accessible. However, that soon came to an end during the fiscal crisis in the 1970s. In 1976, Cuny's were no longer free. That also came with city and state budget cuts and a proposed tuition. The board had also not hired any professors. Students were suffering with unreplaced professors and the faculty was getting increasingly smaller. For a university that was known to be accessible, it was so much harder for lower class families and they were devastated.

The huge amount of budget cuts and decreased funding has not stopped there and only got worse. It was particularly difficult in the late 80s and early 90s. The world was continuously changing. The hope for growth and freedom was disrupted by the invasion of Iraq.

"Anthropology in Action" contains multiple authors and accounts from the 1991 strike movement. Issues just continued to worsen and it wasn't looking for students of Cuny. Student mobilization and resistance had stopped a 200 dollar tuition increase. That unfortunately did not

last, as in 1991 Cuomo demanded a 53 million dollar budget cut, 500 dollar tuition increase and reduced aid from the state. With that started one the biggest strikes in Cuny's history.

The strike was systemwide as it had affected every single student. Student activists at City College were the ones who pushed the movement viciously. Students began to take over campuses throughout the Cuny system. The students were demanding that the Cuny administration present a plan to help combat the budget cuts. Students had additional demands targeting inequality. "We spent hours,days, and nights in the building, creating friendships and relationships and debating strategies." These budget cuts show how many students would be impacted by the incoming change. Them going through extreme measures just to help prevent the future change shows dignity. After days of occupation, a compromise was made. The students released the Graduate Center Building after an astounding ten days. The compromise was negotiated with a series of demands from the administration. The conditions allowed students to get out with no repercussions and a statement from the administration showing the hardship and struggles for students against the budget cuts. With that, the students also proposed a Cuny-wide coalition against cuts. With hard work and perseverance, these students were able to make a slight change in their college.

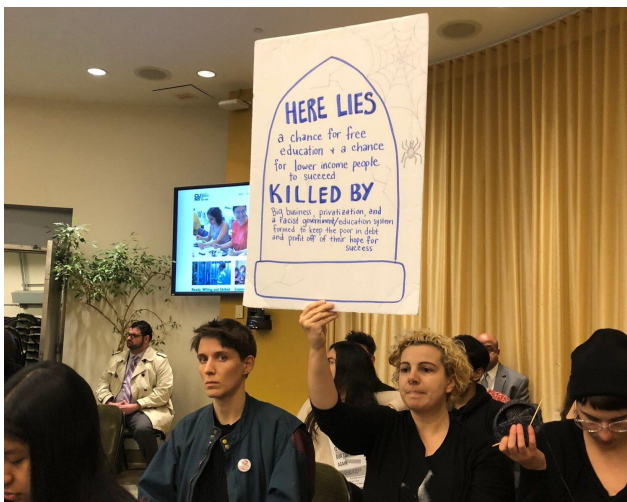
Budget cuts and a lack of funding didn't stop there. Cuny was just under continuous attack throughout the 90s. An attack that would affect a disproportionate amount of people of color and first generation students. Now these students had



to find ways to help alleviate the increased tuition and lack of funding and lower faculty numbers.

Those protest and courageous students had paved the way for future activism in CCNY. Not only are they highly regarded in the campus' history but are still mentioned and talked about in courses. The same movement and ideas are still alive and well even now. 30 years sounds like a while ago but there are still relentless attacks from the government and legislatures that come at Cuny's.

Even as recently as right before the pandemic there was a proposed tuition increase to Cuny schools. In 2019, students were going to see an increase of \$320 to the following school year. The increase was broken down into two parts. The new fee was going to services around campuses and a larger chunk was going to expand health centers, more health counselors and lgbtq students who were facing housing issues and food insecurity. This started another wave of activism among city campuses. Cuny advertises itself as an "upward economic mobility" for their students. Many students live below the poverty line and have to find some way to deal with the tuition increase which costs sacrifice.



Students flocked to the board meetings to help show their displeasement and frustration amongst the new tuition increase. Many were holding signs, shaking coins anc chanting outside the meeting to show strength. Security officers eventually had to step in and escort all the students but all students were let go. Many of their

signs said things like “FREE Cuny” and “don't raise tuition”. Students were upset that there were millionaires on the board. Respectfully so, these people were making decisions costing people in the lower and many people of color to pay for these decisions and suffer.

That wasn't the only attack in the 2010's as well. Going back to people students living below the poverty line. 50% of students have a family income of less than 30,000. It just goes to show the amount of people and families that are affected and disrupted everytime a budget cut or tuition increase is expressed in the news. It must be scary knowing you're not unable to pay for college, when Cuny is the university to help these types of people. Back in 2011, President Barbara Bowen put out a statement, “Cuny needs more public funding, not endless tuition increase.” That came after a proposed 300 dollar tuition increase and an already enacted 230 dollar increase. Public funding was reduced by 300 million dollars from 2008 through 2011. The result is that first generation students, people of color and low income families are helping to fill the void by the state's decision.

It goes to beg the question, could Cuny ever be free again? One big drawback to making Cuny free is the upper class taking the advantage and opportunity away from people of the lower class. It is reported that 66% of full-time Cuny students attend tuition free. All that comes from financial aid and grants and scholarships. So the remaining amount of students are presumably students who are able to pay out of pocket. That is assuming, as there are other qualifications, factors and reasons why these students don't have financial aid and such. A lot of people don't consider that Cuny students are mostly commuters. They're native New Yorkers who have to spend money on other things. Such as food and transportation and basic expenses. There are also many living below the poverty line. It's important to note the Tap gap. Cuny had lost nearly 50 million to fill the Tap gap according to Stump. However, is free tuition the right way to go? Diversity would heavily decrease in Cunys. With free tuition comes a flock of new incoming

students, particularly white people from the upper class, taking advantage of the new system. Which would make for more competition and make it even harder for lower income people for their futures. Experts stress that the focus should be to undergraduate students who make under 20,000 in their household income. Which is 39% of all CUNY students. The future and investments should be made specifically to help that group of people and not students who don't need it.

What better time than the present? Those were students from a decade or decades ago. I conducted a survey to help see how current CUNY students feel about their current situations and feelings toward tuition in CUNY. I asked three extremely insightful questions. First one being if the tuition at CCNY is reasonable. Shockingly, every student had said yes to this question. Every single person felt satisfied and that the tuition was asking for a reasonable amount with no strain. Following that, many students don't have a part time job. Besides a few select saying yes that they had a job, most students have or need a job to help fill their needs for tuition. "It would help with basic necessities" as one student said when I asked him. Just like the huge percentage stating that most CUNY students are covered fully by aid, the survey shows that. Most students who aren't stressed about the current tuition are because they are fully covered by things like financial aid and TAP. Those not receiving aid are helped by parents and family. Lastly, students tended to agree that financial aid provides enough for their students. There are many factors to consider when getting aid so those factors might be in play with the answers. Overall almost every single person was happy with their current state at CCNY and their finances.

Activism has been present at CCNY for such a long time. Those early protests and students inspired many along the way to help share their voice and be vocal. It's important to help get your voice out. As a community that is often ignored and disregarded and looked down upon.

Activism has taught us to stick together and fight for our community. With activism comes great things and better changes for our community. Especially with other conflicts such as inflation, activism is more important than ever in our current world.

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