

NYC F.R.E.E.

the five rights for
equitable education



nyc union of students

NYC F.R.E.E.

Fifty years ago, in 1974, a group of CUNY students and faculty—naming themselves the Newt Davidson Collective—gathered and wrote *Crisis at CUNY*. The project interrogated the complex bureaucracy of the CUNY system, the measures of austerity taken against students and faculty, and the un-democratic leadership at CUNY.

Today, in 2024, we at CUNY face many of the same issues. It strikes us how the same problems our forebears faced still haunt us today. The price of tuition rises, buildings fall apart, class sizes increase, courses are cut, and students go hungry. Meanwhile, the largest landlords in NYC—Columbia and NYU—expand their domain across our city, with the state granting them a free pass on paying over \$300 million in property taxes every year.

We—a collective of students across CUNY, NYU, and Columbia organizing as the New York City Union of Students—carry on the message our forebears wrote on fifty years ago. We gathered over the summer in 2024 to organize, and we have created our Five Rights for Equitable Education (FREE) for NYC:

NYC FIVE RIGHTS FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATION

1. TRANSPARENCY

We have the right to know where our tuition and tax dollars are spent.

2. DIRECT DEMOCRACY

We have the right to decide how our colleges and universities spend our tuition and tax dollars.

3. ACCESS

We have the right to have access to all higher education spaces in New York City.

4. LABOR

We have the right and responsibility to stand in solidarity with our staff and faculty.

5. REPAIR

We have the right to demand that our institutions, both academic and government, support REPAIR.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. our rights
2. a day at CUNY
3. history of CUNY
4. how we win
5. you ask; we answer

appendices

A Spectre Haunting NYC



Preface

In 1974, our forebears at the Newt Davidson Collective referred to the large and complex web of the City University of New York as “immense as one of the pyramids.” Since then, CUNY has only grown. Today, CUNY has 25 colleges across all five boroughs of NYC: 12 four-year colleges, seven community colleges, and six graduate and professional schools. CUNY has 243,000 degree students and employs over 40,000 people. In 2023, CUNY had a budget of \$4.3 billion, with \$3.1 billion for Senior Colleges and \$1.2 billion for Community Colleges. When our forebears at the Newt Davidson Collective wrote *Crisis at CUNY* in 1974, CUNY was still funded primarily by the city and maintained its 130-year tradition of free tuition. Today, 60% of CUNY’s Senior College budget comes from the state. The city covers 47% of CUNY’s community college costs. The burden of the remaining costs are tossed onto the shoulders of students through their tuition, which is approximately \$7,000 per year for in-state students at the Senior Colleges and \$4,800 per year for in-state students at the community colleges (out-of-state students pay 2x to 3x as much.) Each year, CUNY faces budget cuts at the state-level by Governor Kathy Hochul (who proposed to cut CUNY’s budget by \$528 million) and at the city-level by Mayor Eric Adams (who cut CUNY’s budget midway through the academic year by \$23 million, resulting in faculty layoffs and class cancellations just days before the Spring semester.)

However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Ever since the 1975 fiscal crisis, CUNY has faced decades of austerity at the hands of the city and state. In the summer of 1975, millions of dollars were cut from CUNY’s budget; in June 1976, tuition was imposed on students for the first time in CUNY’s 130-year history; capital construction was halted and almost 5,000 faculty and staff members were laid off. The College of Staten Island, which opened in 1976, was the last new CUNY campus to be launched for the next four decades.

Still, CUNY students and faculty persisted. In 1989, when Governor Marie Cuomo tried to push for a \$200 tuition increase, students launched a series of strikes and occupations across 13 of CUNY's campuses, successfully forcing Cuomo to veto the increase. In 1991, when Cuomo demanded a \$53 million cut in CUNY's budget and a \$500 tuition increase, students and workers rallied against austerity. These were not successful as previous protests, and in 1992, Cuomo declared a policy of financial exigency across CUNY, leading to retrenchment—the termination of employees—across CUNY campuses. Throughout the 1990s, similar financial and ideological attacks were lodged at CUNY from Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudy Giuliani. In 1995, Pataki called for a \$116 million budget cut and a \$500 tuition increase. Though 25,000 students went on strike, rallied, and protested against these austerity measures, Pataki pushed his measures through, resulting in a sharp reduction in available classes offered at CUNY campuses. In 1999, Mayor Giuliani formally ended remedial instruction at CUNY's Senior Colleges. In the 2000s, CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein increasingly raised tuition in order to fill the budget gap, opening new CUNY schools such as The CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, CUNY School of Public Health, Macaulay Honors College, and Guttman Community College. Meanwhile Governor Andrew Cuomo divested from CUNY, decreasing state funding by 17% between 2008 and 2016. And as we hit the mid-2020s, Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams continue to divest and cut into CUNY's budget.

But let's make one thing clear: CUNY is only half the story. As CUNY has been carved into and divested from—with the students and faculty still finding a way to thrive in the face of austerity—Columbia & NYU gobble up properties, creating another insidious force in our city that hoards privilege and sucks the life out of our streets. Since the end of the second World War and especially since the 1960s and 1970s—coincidentally, as CUNY funding was cut—NYU and Columbia have been buying up property across New York City. In fact, today, **Columbia is the largest private landowner in New York City, owning 274 buildings. Not to be outdone, NYU owns 148 buildings**, totaling Columbia and NYU's market value at \$3.9 *billion*. Beyond the terrible effects this property accumulation has had on the surrounding communities—namely, Morningside Heights and Greenwich Village, which we will most certainly elaborate on later—Columbia and NYU pay nearly nothing in property taxes back to the city. Due to an archaic 200-year old state law, Columbia and NYU are exempt from *over \$300 million each year in property taxes*. If Columbia and NYU were treated like any other corporation and landlord—which, don't get it twisted, Columbia and NYU *are* landlords who just so happen give out diplomas—the people would be outraged. And guess what? We are. As Columbia and NYU expand their domain across NYC, CUNY is being starved. It is time we say enough and demand that these private corporations who profit off our city pay back their fair share. We—the students of CUNY, NYU, Columbia, and The New School—demand that it is time to **REPAIR: Repeal Egregious Property Accumulation and Invest it Right!**

NYC HIGHER ED IN NUMBERS

Columbia

#1 private property owner in NYC

274 buildings owned

\$179 million in property tax exemptions

\$13,640,000,000 endowment

35,872 students and 20,012 staff & faculty

CUNY

25 campuses across all five boroughs

243,000 students and over 40,000 staff & faculty

82% of CUNY students come from NYC public schools

85% of CUNY students stay in NYC

NYU

148 buildings owned

\$142 million in property tax exemptions

\$5,900,000,000 endowment

61,890 students and over 19,000 staff & faculty

How many CUNY faculty members and course offerings could be saved with over \$300 million? How many CUNY students could be graduating on time instead of held back with over \$300 million? How many hungry CUNY students could be fed with over \$300 million? How many CUNY buildings could be repaired with over \$300 million? 82% of CUNY students went to a NYC public high school, and 85% of CUNY students stay in NYC. Columbia and NYU cannot say the same. It is clear: an investment into CUNY is an investment into our streets, our city, and our communities.

We, a collective of students across CUNY, NYU, and Columbia, organizing as the NYC Union of Students, demand that the New York legislature end the real property tax exemption for those private universities in New York whose annual property taxes exceed \$100 million or more, and to direct the resulting revenues to CUNY. All students in NYC deserve quality education; all students in NYC deserve ample resources and investment; all students in NYC deserve the chance to not only survive and endure through their education, but to grow, thrive, and blossom.

REPAIR is part of a greater whole. Flowers do not bloom only when given enough water. They need—we need—the right conditions. We demand that the conditions of our education be **TRANSPARENT** and **DEMOCRATIC**. We demand full **ACCESS** to all educational spaces in NYC. We stand in solidarity with **LABOR** because we know our teachers' working conditions are our learning conditions, and we learn better when they live better.

This is not just a fight for more funding into public education; this is a fight for students' dignity, livelihoods, and right to a free, prosperous, and beautiful life. University is not merely a space for students to obtain a piece of paper and a job; it is a place for us to be together, learn together, and come into our own as agents of positive change in our communities. We demand Columbia, NYU, CUNY, the New York legislature, and all of NYC: give us our bread, and give us roses, too.

1. Our Rights

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

Shirley Chisholm, Brooklyn College Alumni

How did we get here? Why do we demand these rights—TRANSPARENCY, DIRECT DEMOCRACY, ACCESS, LABOR SOLIDARITY, and REPAIR—out of our institutions? We, the NYC Union of Students, initially came together to organize for REPAIR to demand that NYU and Columbia pay their fair share of taxes—over \$300 million each year—back to CUNY. Our conversations opened up a flood of questions and concerns about the state of higher education in our city. For example, once we win REPAIR in the NY State Legislature, *who gets to decide how that money is spent?* In the wake of the Gaza Solidarity Encampments, we have major concerns about the lack of transparency and democracy in higher education. *How do we ensure that our tuition and tax money is being spent and invested in ethical ways?* We want to create communities across our colleges and the false public versus private dichotomy. *Why are we not allowed on each other's campuses? Why aren't we allowed to learn together, in our classrooms, in our libraries, in our dorms? Why do our institutions keep us*

isolated from each other? As NYU and Columbia hoard wealth, our staff and faculty suffer under austerity. How can we be expected to learn at our best when our professors are being exploited? We all agree that each and every student in NYC deserves a fully funded education. *So why are our institutions funded so unequally, even as we go to classes mere blocks away from each other?*

The goal of this section, then, is to explain how we arrived at OUR RIGHTS. We will point out NYU and Columbia's absurd amounts of wealth, how they use that money to spread across the city like an insidious mold, and how they could be using that money towards funneling back into their communities—indeed, how that money could be used to fund CUNY and NYC. We will examine the purposeful obfuscation of our universities' budgets and investments, and we will rightfully demand that we deserve a say in how our tuition and tax dollars are spent. We will interrogate the way our institutions keep us separate and isolated from each other and our NYC community, and how our institutions exploit our staff and faculty to

the detriment of us all. We demand OUR RIGHTS not out of want, but out of NECESSITY.

The Current State of Things

As things stand, NYU and Columbia receive over \$300 million every year in real property tax exemptions from New York state. This is due to the constitutionally enshrined 200 year old law which grants private universities charitable status. However, calling the egregious property accumulation of Columbia and NYU *charitable* is ignorant at best and malicious at worst. For decades, Columbia and NYU's encroachment onto our city has destroyed neighborhoods, kicked people out of their homes, and decimated communities. It's time to call Columbia and NYU what they really are: not educational institutions, but land developers and landlords who *just so happen* give out degrees.

Columbia's Encroachment into Harlem

Due to the real property exemption, Columbia receives more than \$182 million annually from New York state. What the law really is is an incentive for Columbia to expand their domain across the city—why shouldn't they, when they don't have to pay back New York their fair share? The money Columbia saves every year has skyrocketed from \$38 million just 15 years ago as the university has bought up more properties. And it's not like Columbia needs this property tax exemption to function. Columbia's endowment in 2023 was a whopping \$13.64 billion—which is the GDP of North Macedonia.

But what does Columbia do with their billions? Instead of being good neighbors and investing back into the community and paying their fair share back to NYC, they destroy their surrounding neighborhoods and kick families out of their homes. In the 1970s, Harlem had the largest concentration of working class residents in Manhattan. Harlem was also disproportionately made up of Black residents due to the gentrification that was occurring in the rest of Manhattan; as Wall Street, Penn Station, and Central Park kicked working-class people of color out, they were forced to move uptown. By 1930, 84 percent of Manhattan's Black population resided in Harlem. Due to exclusionary housing practices—including redlining and the lack of investment into disproportionately Black neighborhoods—Harlem fell into urban decline. The lack of healthcare, housing, and employment, as well as the 1980s crack epidemic, hit Harlem hard. Though, in the 1990s, something began to happen. Between 1990 and 2000, the white Non-Hispanic population in Harlem increased by almost 50 percent. In 1995, the average cost of a home was \$190,000; in 2001, it was \$412,000.

How to explain this mysterious phenomenon? Property values do not more than double in six years *just because*. The answer is clear: Columbia came in. Columbia was first established in 1754, working out of Trinity Church in lower Manhattan. It slowly moved up to Park Place, and then 49th and Madison in 1857. Finally, it made its final relocation to Morningside Heights in 1896 under the presidency of Seth Low. It slowly expanded in the neighborhood. In 1968, students, fed up with the university's years-long expansionism, held a

Columbia: a tale of conquest



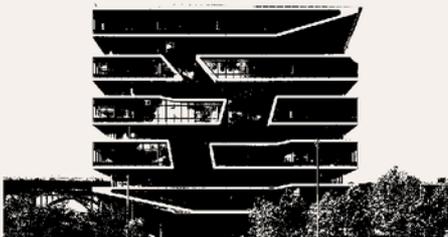
1754: Columbia is founded as King's College on the grounds of Trinity Church in lower Manhattan.

1896: Columbia moves to Morningside Heights with the construction of Low Library.



1968: Columbia students successfully hold a week-long occupation of Hamilton Hall demanding that Columbia stop the construction of a segregated gym.

Late 1990s-early 2000s: A 650-million dollar building program began in 1994. Lee Bollinger became president in 2002, ushering in an age of egregious expansionism.



2007: NYC's City Council approved Columbia's "Manhattanville Project." The project enabled Columbia to use eminent domain to acquire 200,000 sq. feet of space annually in Harlem.

Today: Columbia has displaced thousands, either through the literal demolition of people's homes or through pricing people out of their communities.



week-long occupation of Hamilton Hall, successfully getting the university to stop the construction of a segregated gym. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the next two presidents of Columbia began an expansionist period which sees no sign of stopping today. In 1994, a 650-million dollar-building program began. But this was only the beginning of Columbia's egregious expansion into Harlem and Manhattanville.

In 2007, New York City's City Council approved Columbia's proposal: "Manhattanville in West Harlem Rezoning and Academic Mixed-Use Development Project." The plan, with the help of Empire State Development Corporation's use of eminent domain, allowed Columbia to acquire an average of 200,000 square feet of program space annually in West Harlem.

Yes, annually.

Through the use of eminent domain, Columbia was able to acquire an average of 200,000 square feet of space annually in West Harlem.

Over those 25 years of development laid out in the proposal, Columbia will have annexed an additional 5 to 6 million square feet of these communities for program space, much of which was supposedly for "public use." However, "public use" has really meant that a majority of the new facilities would be used for "academic research" and "housing for graduate students, faculty, and other employees." Only a tiny fraction of the gross square feet seized from the



Columbia student strikers in 1968 occupying Mathematics Hall. They were demanding Columbia to stop the construction of a segregated gym and to cut ties with weapons manufacturers. Both their demands were ultimately met.

neighborhood by Columbia would be open to the public for commercial use.

This expansionism has had detrimental effects on the community. Columbia's development included the demolition and redevelopment of more than five square blocks in the Manhattanville section of upper Manhattan, home to an estimated 5,000 residents. The people—disproportionately working-class and made up of people of color—whose homes weren't literally destroyed are getting priced out of their community. 32,500 blacks moved out and 22,800 whites moved into Harlem between 2000 and 2005. Housing prices on the open market soared 247 percent in the 2000s. Older residents who have lived in Harlem their whole lives are forced to leave, while the young people who were born and raised here can no longer return home. The top-down approach to development by Columbia has left Harlem residents distrustful and angry—and rightfully so.

The Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) between Columbia and the people of Harlem was merely putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound. The CBA gave three objectives: one, a Benefits Fund of \$76 million to the community via a

third-party organization; two, to provide \$20 million for affordable housing; and three, to provide the equivalent of \$20 million in facilities to the community through in-kind benefits. However, as of 2018, only \$100,000 out of the \$20 million fund for affordable housing has been used. Also, only \$400,000 has been used out of nearly \$20 million the CBA set aside to facilitate events in Columbia spaces. That's only 2 percent of the in-kind benefits having been used in 14 years. That's because the space that is supposed to be used by the community is at the discretion of when Columbia so deigns to allow community members to use it. AKA: never.

The total amount the CBA asks for: \$116 million. The amount of real property tax exemptions Columbia receives from New York each and every year: \$182 million. Even if Columbia fulfilled all the promises laid out in the CBA (which, by the way, they didn't), it's still not enough. We demand more. We demand justice. Columbia states on its website that the university "support[s] an equitable ecosystem in Harlem and Upper Manhattan with mutually beneficial outcomes for the University and the community by fostering collaboration among Columbia stakeholders, local residents, business owners, community organizations, and schools."

That's a lot of words that ultimately mean nothing. We demand that Columbia put their money where their mouth is. Support the passing of REPAIR in the NY State Legislature. CUNY educates students from NYC, for NYC. If Columbia insists on expanding into our neighborhoods and communities, we insist they pay back their fair share into our students and our future. An

investment into CUNY is an investment into our great city.

NYU's Takeover of Greenwich Village

Never to be outdone by archnemesis Columbia (a one-sided feud if we ever saw one), NYU receives \$145 million each year in real property tax exemptions from New York state. Since the law rewards gross property accumulation, NYU has devoured Greenwich Village and the surrounding communities in order to flex its conspicuous wealth and move up the college rankings (which rewards expansionism) in a bid for the Top 20. Greenwich Village—rich in its history of protest, bohemia, and activism—has been rolled over by towering glass skyscrapers and cold corporate offices as part of NYU's 2031 Plan. The plan is an outline of NYU's expansionist goals throughout the village, with its most recent physical manifestation—the \$1.2 billion Paulson building at 181 Mercer—looming over residents as an omen of things to come.



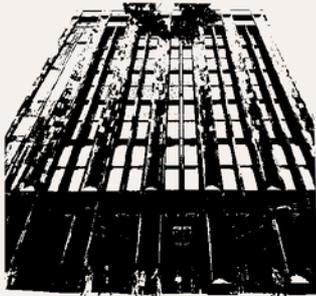
The \$1,200,000,000 NYU Paulson Building at 181 Mercer. Its market value is \$393,599,000. NYU does not pay \$17,729,667 of property taxes on it each year.

NYU: a history of greed



1831: NYU is founded. In 1835, NYU opened the University building on Washington Square East.

1951: NYU opened the Law Center on Washington Square South, evicting 300 people in the process.



1955: NYU, with the help of Robert Moses, acquired three acres in the Village to build Bobst, Washington Square Village, and a student center.

1973: NYU sold its University Heights campus in the Bronx to CUNY, citing "urban decline" in the neighborhood.



2007: NYU President John Sexton announced a 6-million-square-foot expansion called the "NYU 2031 Plan."

Today: NYU continues to expand. The most recent development, the \$1.2 billion Paulson Building, opened in 2023, serving as an omen of things to come...





NYU's University Heights campus was once the pride and joy of the institution; however, NYU closed the campus in 1973 due to "urban decline." Today, it serves as CUNY's Bronx Community College.

This is nothing new, though. NYU was always an unwelcome presence in the Village. Founded in 1831, NYU was actually split between two campuses: one in the Bronx, the University Heights campus, the traditional residential college campus, which opened in 1894; the second in the Village, the commuter professional studies school at Washington Square College. In 1973, NYU sold its University Heights campus to CUNY, which is now the Bronx Community College. NYU cites "urban decline" as the reason why it decided to sell the University Heights campus. In case you didn't know, "urban decline" is code for racism. Indeed, in 1960, only five percent out of the 137,000 in the district were African-American; by 1969, the total population had declined to 127,000, and one-fifth of the residents were African Americans or Puerto Ricans. More than the actual demographics of the neighborhood shifting, white residents were growing scared at the changing population, and the bad press was apparently too much for NYU to bear.

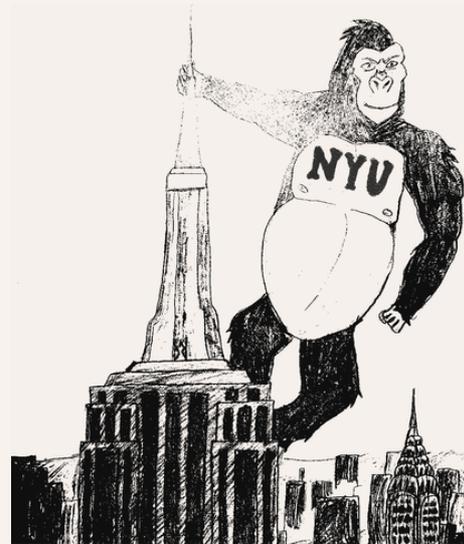
Once NYU decided to shirk itself of its University Heights campus, it focused its sights on the Village. Post World War II, NYU sought to expand its campus at Washington Square. The first goal: the Law Center. The plan to expand NYU's presence on the West side of Washington Square was met with community outrage and protest; over 10,000 signatures were collected in opposition to the development. But nonetheless, NYU bulldozed over concerns, evicting nearly 300 people in the process. The Law Center opened in 1951.

A similar story can be re-told again and again with NYU's presence on Washington Square and the surrounding Village. The tyrant Robert Moses, under the guise of "slum clearance," subsidized NYU's development in Greenwich. Despite community outrage and opposition, in 1955, NYU acquired the three acres for Washington Square Village, a library (Bobst would be met with community backlash due to its lack of respect towards the character of the community and, well, because it is ugly),

a student center, and a classroom building for \$1.2 million. Five years later, NYU acquired more land south of its original acquisition, at what is today known as University Village. This land was originally meant to be used to create a residential neighborhood and elementary school. NYU was forced to make 175 units available to the community; it never built the elementary school.

Again in 2001, NYU acquired an additional 3 million square feet; the community protested and asked for preservation of its history, specifically of Edgar Allen Poe's house; NYU ignored them. In 2005, NYU planned to build a 26-story dormitory on the site of St. Ann's Church on East 12th Street, a gray stone church that dated to the 1840s. The community protested; NYU gave a sad, pathetic attempt at preservation, leaving one stained glass window intact. Similar stories can be said for the demolition of the historic Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments for office space for the Law School in 2008, the 600-bed University Hall dorm on top of what was Luchow's on Union Square, and the demolition of the nightclub Palladium for a 12-story NYU dorm.

There are too many instances to name. But most egregious and most recent is the NYU 2031 Plan. In 2007, then university president John Sexton announced a 6-million-square-foot expansion. The project included development on Governors Island, in Brooklyn, and a 3-million-square-foot construction in Greenwich village. Village residents, faculty departments, and students all rallied against the plan. NYU did not listen. In 2023, NYU opened the \$1.2 billion Paulson Center at 181 Mercer. And



NY State rewarded its construction; NYU receives \$145 million each year from the state in what are essentially incentives to build and expand its domain. The Paulson Center's very presence is the culmination of a century of NYU's practices of ignoring the very community it stands on, its ostentatious amounts of wealth in the face of homeless and hungry students, and its egregious property accumulation. And for what?

Why Our Rights?

Why do these universities—NYU and Columbia—feel the need to bulldoze their way into NYC and take up so much space at the expense of our communities? Why do they feel the need to expand, evicting people out of their homes or driving up the rent so much that generations of families are forced to leave? Why do they not allow for the community to have democratic decision making about what happens in their neighborhood, their streets, their lives? There is a reason why NYU was likened to a “800-pound gorilla in the neighborhood.” There is a reason why Columbia is called “the Overgrown Ivy.” In the bid for a Top 20 spot on *U.S. News' College Rankings*, universities do

whatever necessary to move up. Look no further than Columbia caught fabricating numbers on class sizes in 2023 to move up in the rankings (hilariously, Columbia then dropped from 2 to 18) U.S. News rewards colleges and universities who invest into students and prestige; approximately 30 percent of the college ranking methodology is based on “Financial resources per student” and the nebulous category “Peer Assessment,” which we can only assume is where all the universities gather and brag about the big buildings they’ve built in the past year. Basically: NYU and Columbia are rewarded with carrots and beaten with sticks to get bigger, develop, construct, buy more, and spend more in order to compete in the Top 20.

Columbia: the Overgrown Ivy.



#1: REPAIR. We have the right to demand that our institutions, both academic and government, support REPAIR.

What is the point of higher education? To hoard wealth, spend more, build bigger? To lord above others in ivory towers while CUNY schools are left to beg the government for scraps to fix our leaking ceilings, our crumbling walls, our empty cafeterias, our broken elevators?

No. Higher education is meant to empower everyone to pursue knowledge and uplift themselves, no matter where they come from. CUNY does just that. 76% of CUNY students are people of color. 60% of CUNY students are first-generation college students. According to The New York Times, four out of the top ten schools nationwide for economic mobility were CUNY schools (City College, Baruch, City Tech, and John Jay.) If the purpose of higher education is to support, uplift, and educate every student, CUNY does just that. This is why one of our rights is REPAIR: that our academic institutions take action and exert pressure on the New York State Legislature to pass REPAIR. We must ensure that NYU and Columbia repair their relationship with NYC and pay their fair share back to our city and our students.

#2: Direct Democracy. We have the right to decide how our colleges and universities spend our tuition and tax dollars

REPAIR means nothing if the money is not going to the right places. We do not want CUNY to obtain \$300 million each year only for that money to disappear into CUNY's bureaucracy, line the pockets of administration, or be invested into unjust and unethical practices. This is why one of our rights is DIRECT DEMOCRACY: to decide how our colleges and universities spend our tuition and tax dollars. Our academic institutions need to be held accountable to us and run by us—not the millionaires and billionaires who line the Board of Trustees.

#3: Transparency. We have the right to know where our tuition and tax dollars are spent.

We cannot have DIRECT DEMOCRACY, though, if we do not know how the money is currently being spent. Our universities rely on and exploit our ignorance. They hide the budgets so they can dictate from their ivory towers how we learn, how they spend our money, and how they ruin our communities. Columbia has two budgets: uptown and downtown, both of which we hardly know exactly how the money is spent (see [the appendix](#) for more information regarding Columbia's budget.) Columbia, NYU, and CUNY invest money into real estate and business practices which are widely unpopular and actually cause our institutions to lose money. In fact, [Columbia has underperformed the S&P500 every year since 2016](#). This is why one of our rights is TRANSPARENCY: to know where our tuition and tax dollars are spent.

#4: Access. We have the right to have access to all higher education spaces in New York City.

82% of CUNY students went to a NYC public high school, and 85% of CUNY students stay in NYC. NYU and Columbia occupy our city and yet have the audacity to bar us from entering their campuses. Our institutions rely on us being isolated from each other in order to divide us, separating CUNY students from NYU and Columbia students, hoarding their shiny new buildings for only a small number of NYC students to benefit from while CUNY students are shoved into crumbling classrooms, overcrowded libraries, empty cafeterias, and insufficient student housing.

We reject this division and know that we are stronger when we are together, across class lines. This is why one of our rights is **ACCESS**: that NYU and Columbia's campuses are open to CUNY, which includes, but is not limited to, CUNY students, staff, and faculty having access to NYU and Columbia's classrooms, libraries, community spaces, and dorms.

#5: Labor. We have the right and responsibility to stand in solidarity with our staff and faculty.

The brunt of undemocratically run higher education institutions does not fall solely on the students; our staff and faculty have

faced decades of austerity. As of the time of this writing, CUNY's Professional Staff Congress has gone over a year without a contract. NYU and Columbia have also suffered under the adjunctification of university labor, as the tenured track has all but been disseminated in favor of graduate student workers and adjuncts, who the university can exploit for much lower salaries and benefits. At NYU, adjunct faculty make up approximately 54% of the teaching staff. NYU Dean Ann Marcus once wrote in an email, regarding non-tenure track faculty: "We need people that we can abuse, exploit, and then turn loose."

Our staff and faculty are just as much victims of austerity, financial mismanagement, and undemocratic budgets as we are. This is why one of our rights—and responsibilities—is LABOR: to stand in solidarity with our staff and faculty. Our professors' teaching conditions are our learning conditions. If each and every student in NYC is to obtain an equitable, excellent education, that mission starts with how our staff and faculty are treated. Any expense incurred by NYU and Columbia through REPAIR or a PILOT agreement will not come at the expense of the educational mission of these institutions, including but not limited to staff and faculty salaries, benefits, working/learning conditions, and courseloads.



The campus without walls? Right, NYU?

What is the point of higher education?

NYU and Columbia currently function as real estate companies, hoarding wealth and property in NYC without any intention of giving back. Our institutions are undemocratic and not transparent, run by a small group of millionaires and billionaires on the Board of Trustees who are not held accountable to students in any way. Our schools exploit their workers and seek to isolate students from each other in order to undermine our collective power.

Our vision for higher education is different. We imagine a NYC where each student is able to grow and thrive to our fullest potential. We imagine a NYC where the \$1.2 billion glass tower on 181 Mercer was able to be shared with *our* city, *our* community, and *our* students. We imagine a NYC where Columbia's new \$600 million business school in Manhattanville benefited not just the students who go there, but the City College students who attend classes with leaky ceilings, broken elevators, and crumbling walls just four blocks away. We imagine a NYC where NYU lived up to its promise of being a "campus without walls" and opened up its doors to the very community and city it proclaims to love so much. We imagine a NYC where students are able to know how our tuition and tax dollars are spent, and more than that, are able to decide how that money was spent; after all, as students of these schools, we know better than anyone where money is needed. We imagine a NYC where all staff and faculty were paid fairly and worked under excellent conditions—imagine how much more students could retain and learn if their

professors were not exploited with low wages and inundated with overcrowded class sizes.

The point of private institutions should not be to take away education from public ones; private schools should share their wealth with us in order to uplift every single student. We are not asking NYU or Columbia to stop developing. We are not asking them to stop educating or to stop researching. We are demanding them to pay their fair share to the city of New York—both in terms of money and in terms of the physical space they take up. We are demanding all of our institutions—Columbia, NYU, and yes, CUNY—to be run transparently and democratically.

We are at a critical juncture in NYC's history. NYU and Columbia are larger than ever before, receiving state-sponsored welfare of over \$300 million each year as CUNY crumbles under the weight of austerity. All of our schools have been tested by demands of transparency and democracy over the past few months. We would not be here if we were not forced to by our material circumstances. It is time for every student to stand up and support the Five Rights for Equitable Education (FREE) for NYC!

2. A Day at CUNY

"Your silence will not protect you."

Audre Lorde, Hunter Alumni & CUNY Professor

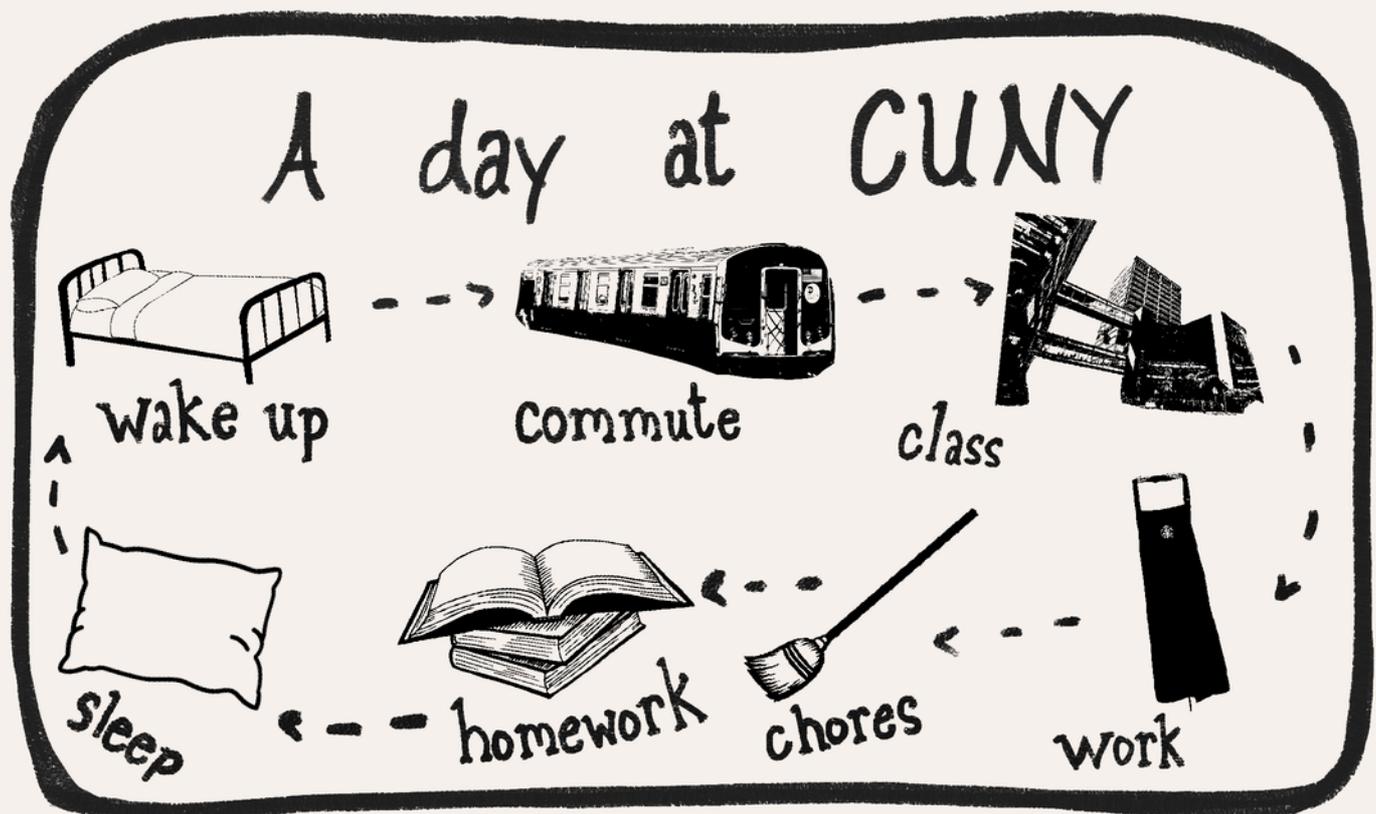
The Students

What is life like for a typical student at CUNY? Well, much like our predecessors in *Crisis at CUNY* noted 50 years ago, there is no such thing as a "typical" CUNY student. CUNY has 25 campuses across all five boroughs, with 243,000 degree students and over 40,000 employees. It is impossible to define a typical CUNY student. But we can consider some possibilities.

Suppose you're a woman, working-class, black, and twenty years old. 76% of students at CUNY are students of color; 58% are women. You are a commuter student, living with your single mother in the home you grew up in, across from the high school you attended in East New York. 95% of CUNY students are from NYC; 82% went to a NYC public high school. Your mother did not go to college. Like 60% of your classmates, you are the first person in your family to attend university, and like 57% of your peers, you are low-income, and pay for college with a Pell Grant.

So, you get up in the morning at six for your 8:00 AM. Your commute to class—you attend Hunter College—is an hour on a good day, but when the MTA decides not to run properly (more often than not, honestly), your commute can be as long as two hours. You'd like to live on-campus to have more time to study, socialize with your peers, and work, but you are not afforded that luxury. Only six of CUNY's campuses have student housing, and of those six, they have far fewer dorms than students. But still, you don't have to pay rent, so you consider it a win, you guess? You're luckier than some of your peers, since you know some of your classmates face housing insecurity; 18 percent of CUNY students have not been able to make a rent or mortgage payment in full in the last 12 months.

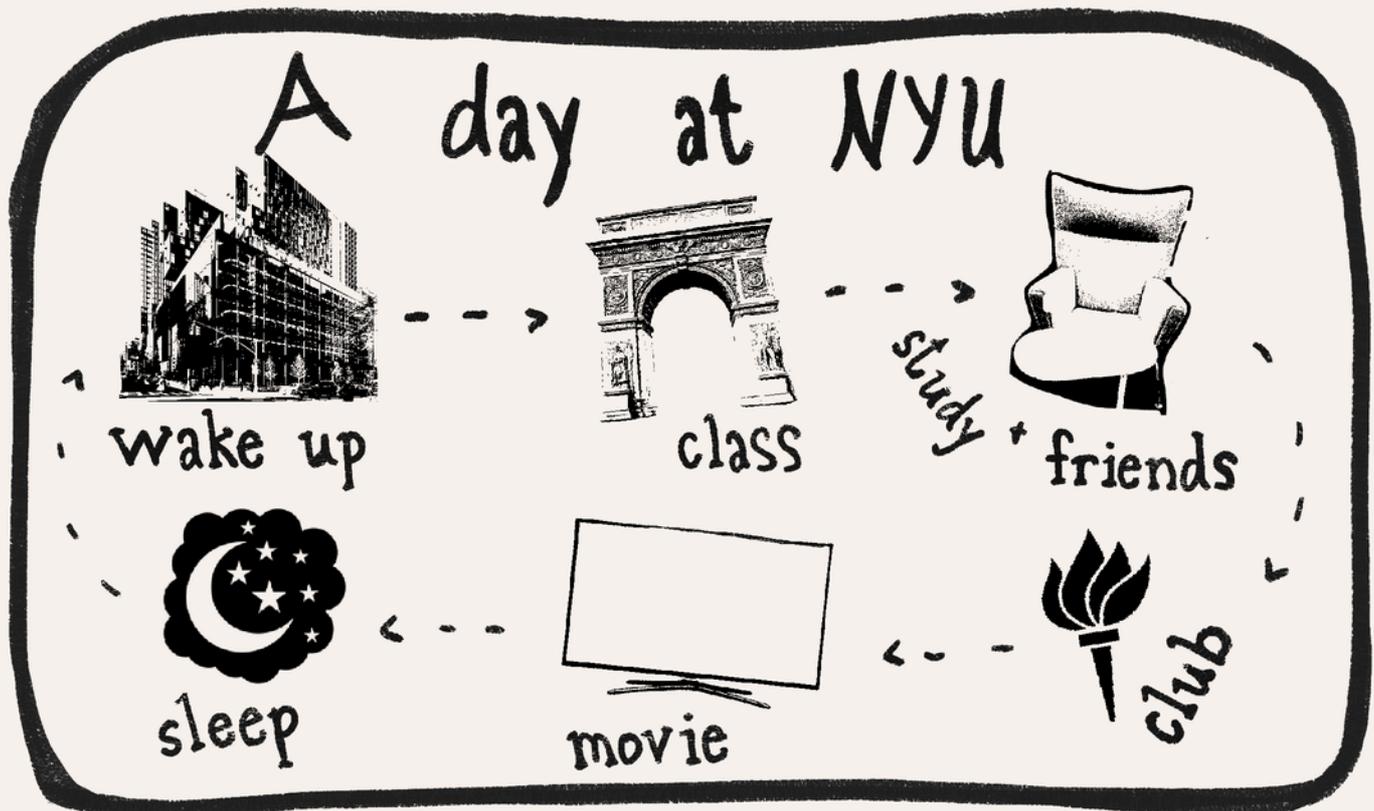
95% of CUNY students are from NYC; 82% went to a NYC public high school.



You help your little sister get ready in the morning (your mother is already at work, so the responsibility falls to you), and because the MTA decided to fuck with you, you just barely get to class on time. Even worse, by the time you get to class, there are no seats left. You're annoyed, but kind of used to it. Overcrowded class sizes are the norm. You find a chair from a different classroom and cram yourself into the back. It's hot as hell (the AC is broken, and no matter how many work requests are made, no one fixes it), but it could be worse, right? This at least was a class you wanted to take, and you were able to register for it, even if it was a nightmare. But one of your friends has been at Hunter for six years, stuck taking extra classes he doesn't even like for two years because Hunter refuses to offer the last class he needs to graduate. His story is

pretty typical, though. Only 27% of students at Hunter get to graduate in four years; 56% get to graduate in six; 59% in eight. Compare this to NYU, where 79% of students graduate in four years, and to Columbia, where 84% of students graduate in four years.

After class today, you'd love to hang out with some of your friends, attend a Book Club meeting (but that meeting was canceled because the school won't let you or your peers book a room), or even just have time to sit down and study (yeah, the Hunter library is overcrowded, and yeah, sometimes you have to sit on the floor because there are no chairs or tables left, but at least you could work on homework.) But you can't do any of that, because like 49% of all CUNY students, you work for pay while being a student to help your family with the bills. You want to have a better sense of community at



your college, and you want to be able to hang out with your friends in the cafeteria (even though there's no food served there), but since mostly all of your peers are commuters, and since half of you work, you always feel isolated and alone in your experiences as a CUNY student.

So you spend the next six hours at work, on your feet at Starbucks, stressing about all the classwork you still have to complete. You finally drag yourself home by 10:00 PM, and while you'd love to be able to finally do your homework, you have to help your mom with the household. By 11:00 PM, you're exhausted, but you still have to complete your classwork. So you spend the next two hours trying to teach yourself the content. You know your professors are trying their best to teach you, but how the hell can they be expected to run a seminar class with forty students? You're studying

History and plan to be a NYC public school teacher. Like over half of CUNY graduates, you're planning to work in NYC's essential services—health care, social assistance, education, and public administration. And you love history, and you love your college, but it's so hard sometimes. You think to yourself: this shouldn't be this hard. You imagined college being some of the best years of your life. And instead you spend it in overcrowded classrooms, with overworked professors, trying to squeeze in a couple hours of time with your friends every week between classes and work, and as you finally lay down to go to bed at 1:00 in the morning, you shut your eyes and wonder: what could my life look like instead?

Now, let's compare what a day looks like for a typical NYU student. NYU's total enrollment is 61,890, so it's once again

hard to define what a “typical” NYU student looks like. So we’ll have to use a bit of imagination.

You’re a white woman, aged eighteen, a Freshman entering in Fall of 2023. 23% of NYU’s Freshmen are white; 17% are Asian; 6% are Black. You’re originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2024, NYU offered admission to approximately 1,000 students from New York City public schools, but the number of students who accepted that offer was never published. And even if each of these students accepted the offer of admission, that is still only 17% of the Freshmen class hailing from NYC public schools (as compared to CUNY’s 82%.) And even if each of these students decided to attend NYU, they’d have to contend with the \$87,448 price tag (and that’s per year, by the way.) For reference, tuition at CUNY is approximately \$7,000 per year for in-state students at the Senior Colleges and \$4,800 per year for in-state students at the community colleges (out-of-state students pay 2x to 3x as much.)

This chair cost \$9,264, and the first floor of NYU’s Bobst Library is loaded with them. Tell us how that helps our education, NYU!



The price tag doesn’t really bother you, though. The median parental income for NYU students is \$149,000. Compared that to Hunter College, where the median parental income is \$57,500. And both your parents work professional managerial class jobs; they both went to college. Only 20% of NYU’s incoming class are first-generation; only 20% of the incoming class will receive Pell Grants.

So, you wake up at 7:45 AM for your 8:00 AM. It’s not ideal (this is your earliest course), but you live in a NYU dorm, in the same building as your class. Four years of housing is guaranteed to all NYU students. You roll out of bed, throw on some clothes, and waltz downstairs. It’s air conditioned (thank God), and it’s a seminar, with about 20 students. The student to faculty ratio at NYU is 8:1.

You’re done with class in the afternoon and are able to catch up with your friends in Washington Square Park before you need to catch up on some classwork you’ve been slacking off on. So after you get lunch with your friends in the dining hall, you walk to Bobst Library to sit on one of NYU’s \$10,000 chairs (we wish we were joking), and you get to work. You get done in the evening, in time to attend the Politics Club you are a part of with your friends. You’re planning on running for leadership next year; it would look great on your résumé, and you plan on applying to law school in California. While 87% of CUNY graduates stay in NYC after they graduate, in 2020, only 2,314 students out of the 18,000 who graduated stayed in NYC (or, 13%). After the club meeting, at around 9:00, you all head to the dining hall together, and spend the next two hours eating and laughing and just being kids.

NYC Higher Ed: Compared

	<u>Columbia</u>	<u>CUNY</u>	<u>NYU</u>
% students of color	49%	76%	26%
% students from NYC	19%	95%	17%
% first gen	19%	60%	22%
% Pell Grant recipients	21%	57%	24%
4-year grad rate	84%	27%	79%
tuition	\$71,170	\$7,000	\$62,796
median parental income	\$150,900	\$57,500	\$149,300
% of students who stay in NYC after graduation	N/A	87%	13%
endowment	\$13.64 billion	<u>\$1.1 billion</u>	\$5.9 billion
student: faculty ratio	6:1	<u>27:1</u>	8:1
undergrad student body	9,704	112,820	29,760

You take the five minute walk back to your dorm (no need to worry about the MTA, thank God), and you leisurely get ready for bed. You and your roommate decide to watch a movie together, and you fall asleep to the hum of the TV, head resting in your roommate's lap, as the two of you giggle and mumble about your midterms you're dreading, and the upcoming long weekend, and how the two of you are going to go thrifting, and you remind each other to set a meeting with your Academic Advisors. You want to line up a summer internship; your roommate wants to change her major but still plans to graduate on time. Your last thought in your head as you shut your eyes is thinking about what coffee you're going to treat yourself to tomorrow before you begin writing your midterm paper.

The point of this comparison is not to act like private school students never face any difficulties. We are also not trying to glorify or fetishize the hardships CUNY students often face. We are not trying to bring NYU or Columbia students down; we are trying to lift CUNY students up. The point of private institutions should not be to take away education from public ones; private schools should share their wealth with us in order to uplift every single student. The fact that NYU and Columbia students go to school fifty blocks away from each other (or like, three stops on the 6), and yet face such dramatically different circumstances is not fair, or just, or right.

NYU and Columbia exist, and will continue to do so. We are not trying to deny that. We are demanding, though, that if they will continue to take up this space in our city, that each and every student has ACCESS to their vast real estate empire and resources, that NYU

and Columbia REPAIR their relationships with the city and help do their part to uplift each and every NYC student, and that NYU, Columbia, and CUNY's use of funding is DEMOCRATIC and TRANSPARENT.

The Faculty and Staff

What is life like for faculty and staff at higher education institutions in NYC? Well, that's a complicated question. CUNY employs over 40,000 people; NYU employs over 19,000; and Columbia has 9,856 full-time employees. Yet, somehow each institution is marked by the same things: adjunctification, austerity, and exploitation. While administration uses our tuition and tax dollars to line their own pockets. At NYU, only 55.3% of your tuition goes to education, while nearly 10% goes to administration, and 13% goes to buying or maintaining NYU's vast real estate holdings.

**Adjunctification = the
gig economy being
imposed onto higher ed**

What is adjunctification?

Adjunctification is the harsh reality of higher education today. Tenure faculty—which grants indefinite employment and job security for our professors—is the gold-standard, but tenure is becoming increasingly rare. Why is that, you might ask? Because tenure is expensive, and adjuncts and contract faculty are cheap.

Adjuncts are the result of the gig economy being imposed onto higher education. Instead of any promise of job security that comes along with tenure, adjuncts are hired on a per class basis.

Adjuncts are paid for each course they teach, and they often do not know how many classes they will teach until shortly before classes begin. This creates severe job insecurity for our professors who cannot plan for their academic careers while they are being exploited for their labor by the system.

But adjuncts are cheap to hire (read: they are not paid a liveable wage), and so, for university administration, they are popular. In 1970, 77.8% of teaching positions in higher education were staffed by tenured, full-time faculty. Today, the numbers have nearly reversed, with seven in ten faculty members being contingent or casually employed.

At NYU, adjuncts make up about a third of faculty. In 2022, the adjunct union—UAW Local 7902—threatened to strike and won a historic contract. They got a \$4,000 wage increase—now being paid at minimum \$10,400 per standard course—and increased health benefits. But don't get it twisted: NYU is not some benevolent employer. The wage increase is still below the industry standard. And

since this historic contract win, NYU has been cutting course loads to adjunct faculty to reduce their wages. While adjunct faculty may have won a contract, the face of austerity remains the same.

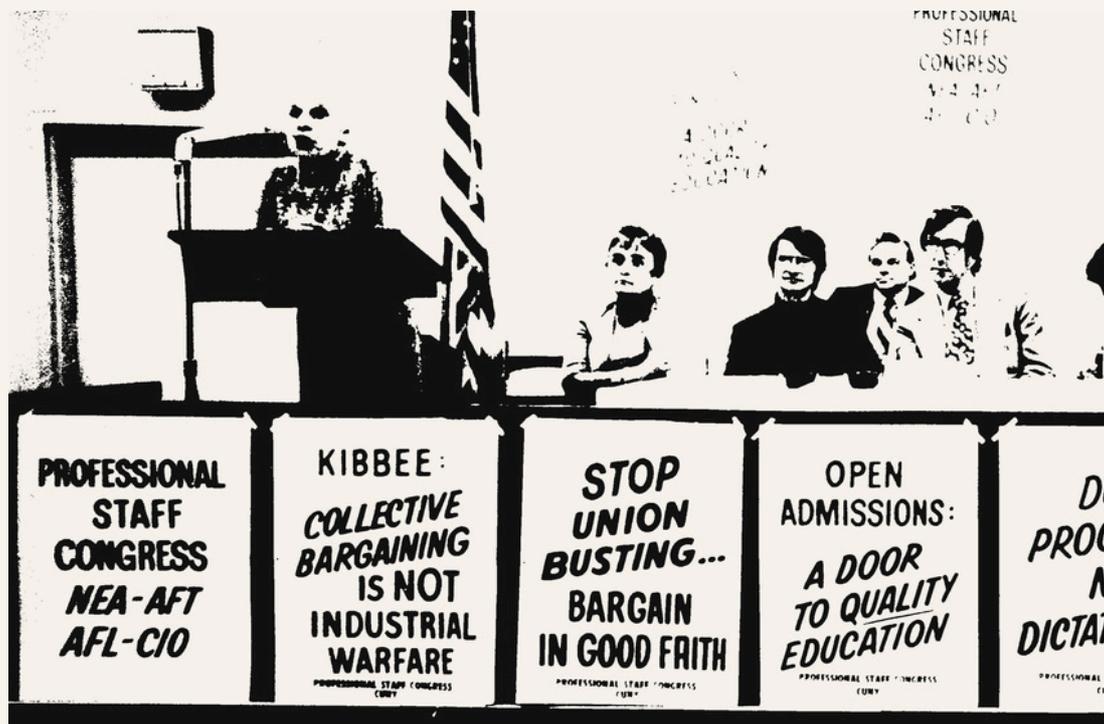
There's also the graduate student workers at NYU. They are graduate students (duh) who are also teaching undergraduates—typically as your Teaching Assistant. The graduate students at NYU are represented by GSOC-UAW Local 2110, and in 2021, went on a historic three-week strike and won a living wage of \$26 an hour and close to complete health insurance coverage.

And this is not to mention the contract faculty at NYU. Contract faculty are hired by, you guessed it, contracts. They make up about half of all the professors at the university. Their contracts are typically for three to five years, but can be as short as one or as long as nine years. Once their contract expires, they must renew it by re-applying for their jobs. Again, they are not on the tenure-track, creating job insecurity. In February of 2024, the

"We need people that we can abuse, exploit, and then turn loose."

- NYU Dean Ann Marcus





PSC President Belle Zeller speaks at a rally during PSC's struggle to win its first contract in 1972–1973. Behind her is Albert Shanker, United Federation of Teachers president, and to his right is Thomas Hobart, New York State United Teachers president.

contract faculty won their union in order to win livable wages and increased benefits.

NYU's contract faculty do the same work as their tenured and tenure-track colleagues, except they tend to have heavier teaching loads while getting paid less. Even among contract faculty, there are extreme pay disparities across the university's different schools. At NYU, the number of contract faculty have increased from 37 to 403 in the last two decades. That's a 1000% increase. By contrast, the number of tenured faculty has increased from 513 to 733, or only 43%.

Why this sharp increase in contract faculty? Let's hear what NYU Dean Ann Marcus had to say about non-tenure track faculty: "We need people that we can abuse, exploit, and then turn loose."

All these different types of workers—adjunct, tenure, contract, graduate students—are just the NYU unions. This is not even to mention the status of labor at CUNY.

CUNY staff and faculty are represented by the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), a public sector labor union which is home to 30,000 members. Adjunct faculty account for 12,489 members. Compare this to the number of full-time faculty: 6,927 (or, adjuncts make up about 64% of your professors.) Throughout the CUNY system, adjuncts teach approximately 22,000 courses a year. And yet, while adjuncts do just as much work as tenured professors, the average Adjunct Lecturer, the title that teaches the majority of those courses, is paid only 5,549 dollars for a three-credit course.

What is austerity?

Austerity is what we see in front of us each and every day. It's what we see when we walk into our buildings and see dilapidated ceilings and crumbling walls. It's what we see when our professors are stressed in overcrowded classrooms, overworked and underpaid. It's what we see when the courses we need to graduate

are canceled a mere ten days before the semester begins due to staff-layoffs.

Austerity can manifest in different ways. At NYU, while administration rakes in millions of dollars (then-NYU President Andy Hamilton made \$3.5 million in 2021) and spends money on criminal conspicuous consumption (those damn \$10,000 chairs), faculty are not paid a liveable wage. At Columbia, administration pays contingent faculty only \$9,000 per course, while lavishing in its \$13.6 billion endowment and providing \$9 million in home loans Columbia gave five current and former administrators.

And at CUNY, austerity looks like Mayor Eric Adams cutting CUNY's budget midway through the academic year by \$23 million. Austerity looks like Governor Kathy Hochul proposing to cut CUNY's budget by \$528 million. Austerity looks like the fact that CUNY was once free, and we now must pay \$7,000 per year, for overcrowded classrooms, crumbling infrastructure, and exploited professors.

What is exploitation?

Exploitation is what the city, state, and our administrations are doing to our professors. The powers that be know our professors love what they do, and so, administration lords the love of learning over our teachers. Our professors want to give us their best, want to pursue their research, want to educate the next generation, and they truly do believe in the role of the university in uplifting students to become their very best. But they cannot do that when their working conditions seek to abuse and exploit them.

We know that our professors' teaching conditions are our learning conditions.

Our professors' teaching conditions are our learning conditions.

We cannot and do not expect them to give us their best when they are being abused and exploited by their employers—the very university administration we give our tuition money to. Instead of being used to provide us with quality education, our tuition money and tax dollars go to line the pockets of administration, enabling them to buy luxurious homes, gobble up real estate for the university, and destroy our communities.

As NYU President Andy Hamilton was paid \$3.5 million a year, we think of our NYU adjunct professors who work three jobs to afford rent and don't know if they'll have a job four months into the future.

As Columbia gave \$9 million in home loans to five current and former administrators, we think of Columbia's contingent faculty who instruct the Core Curriculum, yet aren't paid a liveable wage.

As Eric Adams cuts CUNY's budget, we think of the CUNY professors who were laid-off this Spring Semester, and the

What is

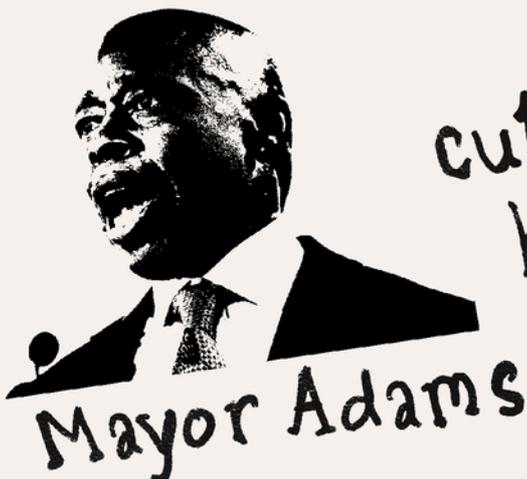
Exploitation?



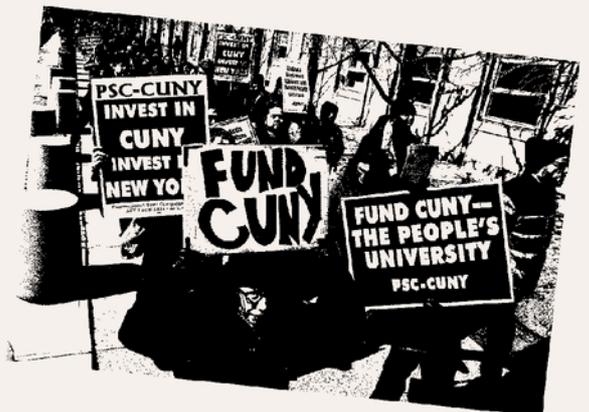
made
\$3.5 mil
a year
at their
expense



gave loans
to adm to
buy homes
while they
can't pay
rent



cut their
budget



students who were not able to graduate because the courses they needed to take were canceled.

Their teaching conditions are our learning conditions. We all thrive when our professors are given liveable wages and benefits, provided small class sizes so they are able to meet each student where they are, and enabled to pursue the research and courses which will uplift themselves and their students. We demand that our institutions allow workers to organize freely and unhindered, and we will forever stand in solidarity with LABOR.

What's Going on Here?

Imagine a system of higher education in NYC which is unburdened by the chains of austerity and exploitation. We would be able to ACCESS all of NYU, Columbia, and CUNY, freely able to move across our campuses, interact with each other, build community, and stand together in solidarity with one another. We would have full TRANSPARENCY over the budgets, and we would be able to DEMOCRATICALLY DECIDE where our tuition and tax dollars would go. We would have FULLY FUNDED universities where every student and all of LABOR could thrive.

Why don't we have this? Why is our higher education landscape marked by isolation and austerity? Why do students have no say in how our universities are run?

Our universities are currently run by the Board of Trustees, a line-up of undemocratically appointed millionaires and billionaires who decide where our money goes. The New York State and City governments also appoint the CUNY

Board of Trustees, who then appoints the Chancellor. All of them are complicit in the current state of things. (See the Appendix for a more comprehensive powermap of our CUNY, Columbia, and NYU.)

It doesn't have to be this way. It is time to transform higher education in NYC. Higher education is meant to be a space and time in our lives to educate ourselves, be in community with one another, learn alongside and from each other, and grow as human beings. We know what higher education needs to look like, and we know it is possible, because higher education wasn't always like this.

3. History of CUNY

"It is essential that we always repeat:
we the people,
we the people,
we the people."

Sonia Sanchez, Hunter College Alumni

Foundations (1847–1945)

CUNY was founded in 1847 as the Free Academy—its double meaning as being both literally free to attend and serving as a beacon of economic freedom and mobility for all. It opened its downtown Manhattan campus in 1849 at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street. The Free Academy was public, tuition-free, municipally taxpayer-supported, and wildly popular amongst the people. In the referendum which authorized the new college, "Free Academy for the poor man's children" was approved by 19,305 votes to 3,409. The Academy's mission, in the words of one of its founders, was "to educate the children of the whole people."

From 1847 to 1945, New York City continued to invest and believe in CUNY and its mission to educate its citizens, regardless of where they came from. More

than 90 percent of CUNY's total operating budget was covered by the city. In 1866, the Free Academy was renamed the College of the City of New York; in 1869, the Normal College (later renamed Hunter College) opened to educate women to become teachers; in 1907, classes begin at the College of the City of New York; in 1930, Brooklyn College was founded from the annexes of CCNY and Hunter; in 1937, Queens College is created. By 1945, then, the city's municipal system held four tuition-free senior college campuses in three of its five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens.

The Academy's mission was "to educate the children of the whole people."

1847

The Free Academy is founded "to educate the children of the whole people." It is tuition-free and funded by the city.



A 1934 rally at CCNY to protest fascism, where 1,500 came to strike and demanded the reinstatement of expelled students.

1931 – 1942

Students stage a series of protests and strikes against militarism and for academic freedom.

Free Speech Struggle (1931–1942)

CUNY has a rich, vibrant history of organizing and activism. It's in our blood and bones to fight and protect CUNY, academic freedom, and the institution which we love; we carry on the struggle of our ancestors proudly. One of our earliest struggles occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, where we fought for academic freedom and free speech at home and fought against militarism and social and economic injustice abroad.

In February 1931, the Social Problems Club, a group which criticized the ROTC and military training on campus, was banned, and City College President Frederick B. Robinson suspended 11 of its leaders. In October 1932, Robinson went on to dismiss instructor Oakley Johnson, the Social Problems Club's advisor. This only incensed students

further, and over one-thousand students came out to protest. In response to student mass action, Robinson called police to campus, where four students were arrested. An off-campus protest meeting on October 30 led Robinson to suspend nineteen student leaders.

On May 29, 1933, a "Jingo Day" was held on-campus to protest against the military. College administration then expelled twenty-one students and suspended the Social Problems Club (again), the Student Forum, and the Liberal Club. Students did not let this deter them, though. On April 13, 1934, the first (yes, *first*), National Student Strike Against War was held, and eight hundred City College students assembled peacefully. Police were called on campus to disperse protesters. Students accuse President Robinson of attacking them with his umbrella; the administration

1950s

The municipal system undergoes a period of massive expansion and is praised as the "Harvard of the Proletariat" for its academic excellence.



The opening of Queensborough Community College in 1958.

1961

Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller signs legislation to consolidate the municipal system as the "City University of New York."



Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller

accuses the students of "preventing the normal functioning of the school." Robinson's anti-radical campaign resulted in the expulsion of 43 students, the suspension of 38, and the calling in of hundreds of undergraduates before campus disciplinary boards. During Robinson's reign of student suppression, every student radical organization and publication was at one point or another banned from the CCNY campus. Students and faculty, standing in solidarity, did not back down, and in 1938, Robinson submitted his letter of resignation in response to the ongoing campaigns of student and faculty organizing.

What is to be learned from all of this? When CUNY students fight, we win. When administration, higher-ups, and those who wish to take away what makes CUNY great—our funding, our resources, and our fervor for education, research,

and scholarship—they can expect to be met with militant activism and solidarity from across students, staff, and faculty. The rich activist history of CUNY demonstrates that we are proud of our campus, and we will fight to preserve it.

Expansion and the Creation of CUNY (1945–1968)

This current system of four senior college campuses was no CUNY, though. Not yet, anyway. They were a loose federation of municipally-funded institutions which were held together by the direction of the Board of Higher Education (BHE). The system was lauded as the "Harvard of the Proletariat," "the poor man's Harvard," and "Harvard-on-the-Hudson" for its academic excellence, national prestige, and status as a school which educated everyone (the municipal

Editorial on the College Center - P. 3

THE GADFLY

Vol 1, No 4 United Federation of College Teachers - BMCC December, 1966

AGAIN: THE COMPENSATION QUESTION

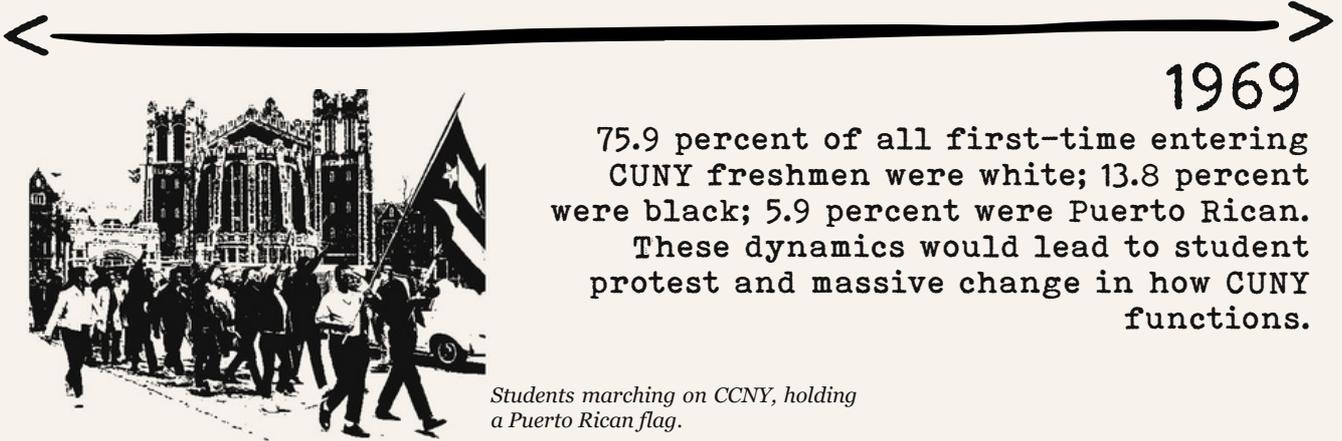
The Gadfly, BMCC's publication. This edition details the "woefully inadequate" campus facilities.

1960s

CUNY continues to expand, opening BMCC, Kingsborough CC, and CityTech.

1969

75.9 percent of all first-time entering CUNY freshmen were white; 13.8 percent were black; 5.9 percent were Puerto Rican. These dynamics would lead to student protest and massive change in how CUNY functions.



Students marching on CCNY, holding a Puerto Rican flag.

system, living up to its origin as the Free Academy, was still free to attend.)

CUNY was lauded as the "Harvard of the Proletariat."

Over the following post-war years, in order to accommodate the city's growing population, the municipal system continued to expand. In 1953, the School of Business became Baruch. Four community colleges were established in quick succession: New York City CC (1953), Staten Island CC (1955), Bronx CC (1957), and Queensborough CC (1958.) By 1960, "the poor man's Harvard" was becoming more and more exclusive, requiring an increasingly higher high school average to secure entry into both the four-year and community colleges in the city.

In 1958, Governor Nelson Rockefeller launched a panel on reorganizing the state of higher education in New York. The Heald Commission—led by Henry T. Heald—would eventually go on to propose that the municipal system be subsumed under the SUNY system; the Commission also proposed that it would begin charging tuition for the municipal colleges.

This proposal did not go over well. The BHE countered and recommended that the municipal system would be centralized and reorganized under the name City University of New York. Importantly, this new system—CUNY—would continue to not charge tuition. A large coalition of groups—alumni, organized labor, and civic and ethnic groups—would engage in a public struggle campaign to retain local control and free tuition. The coalition knew that the

Spring 1969

CUNY students shut down CCNY in support of the Five Demands:

1. A separate school of Black and Puerto Rican studies.
2. A separate orientation program for Black and Puerto Rican freshmen.
3. A voice for SEEK students in the setting of all guidelines for the SEEK Program.



4. The racial composition of all entering classes should reflect the Black and Puerto Rican population of New York City high schools.
5. That Black and Puerto Rican history and Spanish language be a requirement for all education majors.

strength of CUNY was in its ability to respond to the aspirations of the middle and working class youth of the city. To take away local control and free tuition would be antithetical to the very foundation of the system: “to educate the children of the whole people.”

So, in Spring 1961, CUNY was founded. New York State passed legislation to consolidate the municipal system under CUNY, as well as for the state to provide funding for the newly created entity. Tuition was still free.

With this new found funding, CUNY expanded. The 1962 report, “A Long-Range Plan for the City University of New York, 1961-1975” (which is 424 pages, by the way), laid out three major goals for the new CUNY: to build and expand more colleges; to up enrollment through a more flexible admissions policy; and to maintain free tuition for full-time 4-year

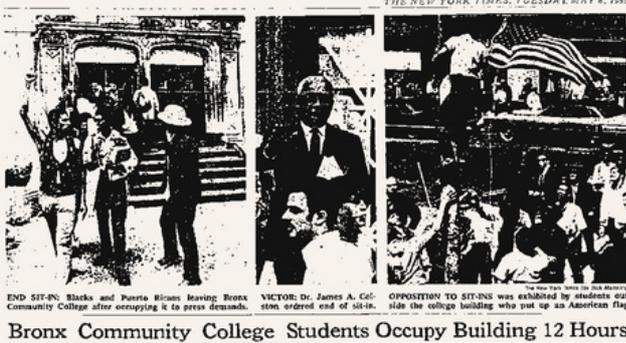
college students. In 1963, both the Borough of Manhattan CC and Kingsborough CC were founded. In 1964, CUNY acquired New York City CC (now known as City Tech) from the state. But enrollment was still not as high as CUNY and Chancellor Albert Bowker would have liked. In 1967, SUNY’s enrollment was 138,000; in 1964, CUNY’s was just 49,000 students by comparison. There was also an increased push from the growing population of Black and Latino New Yorkers to expand access to education. At that point in 1969, 75.9 percent of all first-time entering CUNY freshmen were white; 13.8 percent were black; 5.9 percent were Puerto Rican. CUNY was excellent at propelling low-income students into the middle and upper-middle classes—white students, that it. Thus, under pressure from the student movement and shifting

Spring 1969

While the protests at CCNY are the most well-known, students across CUNY campuses stood in solidarity with the Five Demands.



Students at Queens College holding a sit-in.



Spring 1969

A militantly organized movement of students shut down their universities and demanded that their administrations and indeed, the city and state, listen to them.

demographics of NYC, Bowker proposed a policy of open admissions: a guaranteed spot for every NYC high school graduate.

The Struggle for Open Admissions (1968–1970)

The goal of 100% Open Admissions, according to the Board of Higher Education, was to provide “each student, regardless of high school achievement, the opportunity for more advanced study so that each may progress to his fullest potential.” The open admissions policy was proposed in 1966, but was not projected to take effect until 1975. In the late 1960s, however, as militant student organizers grew fed up with the deficient funding of higher education and were inspired by the growing Black Power, anti-war, and grassroots activism movements happening across the

country, CUNY demanded more *now*.

In 1968, a black and Puerto Rican student group at CCNY made five demands out of President Buelle Gallagher: one, to have the racial composition of City College classrooms to reflect the composition of the city’s high school classrooms; two, to have a separate school of Black and Puerto Rican studies; three, to have a separate orientation for Black and Puerto Rican students; four, to have hiring and firing power for the SEEK program (SEEK—Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge—still around today, assists students from the city’s K-12 system who may not be academically prepared for college); five, to require all education majors to study Black and Puerto Rican history and study Spanish.

Gallagher didn’t listen. One hundred students took over CCNY’s administration building on February 13, 1969, but no

CUNY Chancellor Albert Bowker oversaw the implementation of Open Admissions.



Fall 1970

The Board of Higher Education gives into student demands and decide to implement Open Admissions in 1970.



Early 1970s

Enrollment at CUNY skyrocketed. CUNY was offering exciting new programs to the ever growing and diverse student body.

Writers and activists Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde met at CCNY in 1968, becoming close friends. They both taught at CUNY and confronted racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in their works.

response came. That only energized students more, and in Spring 1969, students across the CUNY system rose in action against austerity and for a more diverse CUNY which looked like the city they lived in.

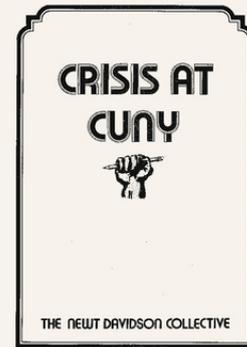
On April 21, one thousand students marched through CCNY's campus denouncing CUNY's racist admission policies; the next day, black and Puerto Rican students blocked the gates to the South Campus, causing Gallagher to shut down campus. But no worries—when one CUNY campus struggles, all others rise to stand in solidarity. At Queens, hundreds of students organized a sit-in for academic freedom and to protest the firing of radical professors. At Brooklyn College, students shut down their campus and demanded that all black and Puerto Rican applicants be admitted in 1970 (also at Brooklyn, 20 students were

arrested, with the charges eventually dropped.) At BMCC, there was a sit-in of hundreds of students to expand Black and Puerto Rican Studies programs. At Bronx Community College, students held a twelve-hour sit-in in solidarity with the movement.

"So you lose a day, a week, a semester. We lost generations, damn it, this is what we intend to stop."

Back at City, counter-demonstrators began to protest, who stated that they were losing class time and feared quotas would limit opportunities for them. One student said in response: "So you lose a day, a week, a semester. We lost generations, damn it, this is what we intend to stop."

In 1974, the Newt Davidson Collective—a group of organized CUNY faculty—published *Crisis at CUNY* to examine the complex bureaucracy of the CUNY system.



1974

Insufficient funds led to long registration lines, closed courses, and more. Adjuncts made up 1/3 of CUNY teachers.



June 1975

The fiscal crisis hit New York and the world at-large. The NY state legislature surrendered the city's financial independence to the state.



The NY State Capital Building

Militant student organizers, community groups, labor unions, Mayor John Lindsay, and Chancellor Bowker all demanded: go forward. Open the system up to everybody, *now*. Under pressure from all sides, the BHE gave in to the students' demands. *Every* NYC high school graduate would be guaranteed a place in CUNY. Public higher education, which aims to provide a quality and accessible education to everyone, was finally realizing its fullest potential—if it could be sufficiently funded.

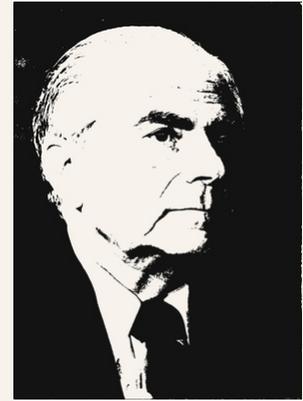
Fiscal Crisis and State Takeover (1970–1977)

The impact of Open Admissions was immediately apparent. By 1975, enrollment was more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before, with over 235,000 undergraduates—a 55

percent increase in total enrollment since 1969. In 1969, 78 percent of first-year CUNY students were white; by 1975, that percentage was 30. The system was also developing ethnic and Black studies programs across the system. Thousands of new, young faculty members were hired, launching exciting and lively programs such as courses on expanding accessibility for deaf students and “Ready to Learn, Ready to Work,” a program to provide education to homeless women. CUNY was experimenting with a radical, exciting prospect in the United States: providing a tuition-free public college education to all, by and for the city they lived in. CUNY was among the most envied, diverse, and open college systems in the nation—the very pride and joy of New York City.

Despite the triumphs of the new Open Admissions policy, CUNY faced an uphill

Mayor Abraham Beame oversaw the state takeover of CUNY and enacted massive layoffs.



June 1976

The state took over CUNY's four-year colleges' finances and imposed tuition on CUNY students for the first time.

1980

The imposition of tuition led to a sharp decrease in enrollment, particularly amongst students of color.

CUNY Cuts Bring Anger and Despair

By LEONARD BUDIR
Anthony Majic is a junior at Hunter College, one of 19 units that make up the giant City University of New York. There are 60 students in his chemistry class and this year, when a question comes to mind in class, he has learned to stifle the impulse to raise his hand. "Time is so precious you feel like you're wasting the other students' time," he said the other day. "You feel like you should wait and approach the professor later, but his schedule is so full it's hard to get to him."
At Queens College, the student personnel office, which last year had 12 full-time employees, now has a staff

Queensborough Community College before transferring to Queens College last year. On campus, he was active in the fight against the budget cuts. Now he is attending classes at Emerson College and Boston University.
"The City University is falling apart," he said last week.
But others intend to stay, or at least hope to. For them, the City University, with all its problems, is still an open door to opportunity.
Anna Finkler, 27, is studying to be a community mental health assistant at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and wants to go later to a senior college. Her tuition is covered by the state's Tuition Assistance Program, and she takes classes during

the day and in the evening. She also works part-time in a college office.
"I'm a warrior," she said, "and sometimes I think how can I do it, how can I pay all my bills. But I mean to take one semester at a time now. I'm an older student who appreciates how fantastic learning is. I wouldn't be here if I didn't really want to be in school."
"The present is overshadowed by a pervasive threat of doom," Dr. Paul Chock said. And Chancellor Kibbee, asserting that the university's financial emergency was not over, recently told the City Club of New York: "We are threatened with further deterioration."
Their concern is rooted in the announcement made last spring by the

Beame administration that it intends to cut off all financial support to the university's senior colleges at the end of 1976-77. The city, which now pays half that cost (the state pays the other half), wants the state to pick up the full amount.
But the state, which has financial problems of its own, responded by establishing a blue-ribbon commission to study the future of all higher education in the state, and particularly the City University.
The commission's report is not due until March and its release then is certain to stir a lengthy debate. In the meantime, the students and faculty of City University face an anxious and uncertain period.

A 1976 article from the New York Times on the detrimental effects cuts had on the CUNY system.

battle. Austerity measures (what's new?) threatened to prevent CUNY from reaching its fullest potential. Insufficient operating funds led to long registration lines, closed courses, insufficient classroom seats, and a scarcity of textbooks. The number of adjunct faculty jumped to make up one-third of all teachers at CUNY (today, that number is around 64%.)

In 1976, tuition was imposed on CUNY students for the first time in its 130-year history.

Then, CUNY—and the world—faced an economic crisis, with the worst downturn since the Great Depression between 1973 and 1974. In June of 1975, the New York state legislature surrendered the city's

financial independence to an Emergency Financial Control Board (EFCB), and the city cut CUNY's budget by tens of millions of dollars. In early 1976, Mayor Abraham Beame announced massive layoffs. And the final nail in the coffin came in June 1976, when there was a total state takeover of four-year college finances. Capital construction was halted. Almost 5,000 faculty and staff members were laid off. Tuition was imposed on CUNY students for the first time in its 130-year history.

Decades of Austerity (1977–today)

The imposition of tuition led to a sharp decrease in enrollment, with about 62,000 undergraduates dropping in the years following. Fifty percent fewer Black and Latino freshmen were among CUNY's 1980 entering class as compared to 1977.

CUNY students staged a rally at Federal Hall, near Wall Street, in 1989.



1989

Students launched a series of successful strikes and building occupations to put a stop to budget cuts and increased tuition.

1991

Despite student outrage and organizing, Governor Mario Cuomo continued to cut CUNY's budget and raise tuition.



Governor Mario Cuomo (1983–1994)

Despite promises of aid with tuition assistance, TAP, Pell grants, College Discovery, and SEEK all faced budget cuts, which affected the working-class CUNY student population disproportionately.

Still, CUNY students, staff, and faculty persevered and fought back. In 1989, when Governor Mario Cuomo and the CUNY Board of Trustees announced more budget cuts and yet another \$200 tuition increase, students mobilized across the CUNY system, launching a series of strikes and building occupations at 13 of CUNY's 20 campuses. In addition to their demands around austerity and tuition, they demanded 24 other things, including extending library hours, making athletic facilities available to evening students, and recruiting more faculty of color. Governor Cuomo, through the power militant student organizing, was forced to

veto the CUNY tuition increase.

Although, this success would not last long. In 1991, Governor Cuomo proposed a \$53 million cut in CUNY's operating budget, a \$500 tuition increase, and sizeable cuts to the TAP program. While thousands of students organized—staging building occupations, running strikes on their campuses, and rallying in Albany—they were not successful in getting Cuomo to back down. In 1992, Cuomo and the Board of Trustees declared a policy of financial exigency (a fancy word to declare budget cuts.) This led to the termination of employees across CUNY.

The rest of the 1990s was not kind to CUNY either. Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudy Giuliani sucked CUNY dry, installing conservative businessmen, political figures, and lawyers on the Board of Trustees and instituting financial attacks on CUNY. Pataki proposed a

Mayor Rudy Giuliani (1994–2001)



Late 1990s

Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudy Giuliani continue to cut CUNY's budget and raise student tuition.

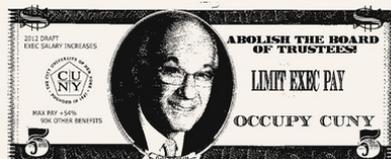


2000s

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein attempted to increase private fundraising, but the cuts to CUNY were too deep. By 2010, adjuncts represented more than half of the teaching workforce.



CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein (1999–2013)



A form of political art targeting Goldstein made during the OCCUPY CUNY movement.

massive \$116 million reduction in its operating budget, a \$500 tuition increase, and total elimination of the SEEK and College Discovery programs. As CUNY always does, CUNY fought back. Students organized rallies and hunger strikes, all culminating in a mass march and rally at City Hall of around 25,000 students. But Pataki did not relent, and CUNY's operating budget was reduced by \$102 million, with a tuition increase of \$750 (the math is not mathing.)

Mayor Rudy Giuliani (nicknamed Count Giuliani for his “scary” plans for higher ed), for his part, launched ideological attacks on the intellectual competence and educational achievements of CUNY's diverse student body. In 1999, Giuliani and his conservative appointees on the Board of Trustees ended remedial instruction at CUNY's senior colleges.

In the 2000s, Chancellor Matthew

Goldstein increased private fundraising efforts to support CUNY's operating and capital budgets. In the face of an increasing enrollment, CUNY's budget was marginally increased (still below fiscal crisis levels), and 2,000 more full-time faculty were hired. However, this was not enough to meet the growing student population, and so CUNY began to rely on low-paid, part-time adjunct instructors. By 2010, adjuncts represented more than half of the teaching workforce in CUNY.

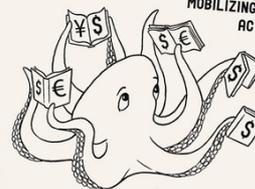
After the 2008 financial crisis, local and state governments imposed austerity measures that cut the budgets of public agencies and institutions—public higher education included. And so, in the face of growing economic inequality and austerity politics, the Occupy Wall Street movement took over. In New York City, many CUNY students, staff, and faculty

An #occupyCUNY poster made in 2011

#occupyCUNY

RADICAL TEACH-IN:
OCTOBER 21ST, 6PM-?
WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK

WHY PRIVATIZATION
IS PERSONAL +
MOBILIZING FOR
ACTION!



2008

The 2008 Financial Crisis led to militant student, staff, and faculty organizing as part of the Occupy Wall Street movement.



Governor Andrew Cuomo

2010s

Austerity still reigned. Governor Andrew Cuomo continued to cut CUNY's budget.

participated, fighting for the 99% of working-class students and people who were sick of being exploited and ripped off by the ruling class.

However, austerity still reigned. Between 2008 and 2016, State funding for CUNY had decreased by 17%, mostly during the tenure of Governor Andrew Cuomo. CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein continually relied on increasing student tuition and private funding. Austerity was seen most evident in the fact that from 2010 to 2016, CUNY staff and faculty were forced to work under an expired collective bargaining agreement. Neither Mayor Michael Bloomberg nor Governor Andrew Cuomo were willing to adequately fund CUNY. In 2016, PSC members voted by 92% to authorize a strike if no contract agreement could be settled. That vote finally forced a collective bargaining agreement with

moderate wage increases and stopped tuition increases for a year.

And now we reach today. Today, CUNY's struggles are much the same as they were fifty years ago, when our ancestors wrote Crisis at CUNY. We still are faced with austerity from the city and state; we still feel we have to prove why CUNY is a public institution that deserves and is in need of critical funding; most importantly, though, is that we still fight back. In early 2021, the New Deal for CUNY was introduced in the NY State Legislature, demanding free tuition for CUNY (as it was for 130 years), hiring more mental health and academic advisors, and increasing the capital budget. Thousands of students have been organizing behind this campaign for years now, and there is no sign of stopping, because CUNY will do as we always have: organize, educate, and agitate.

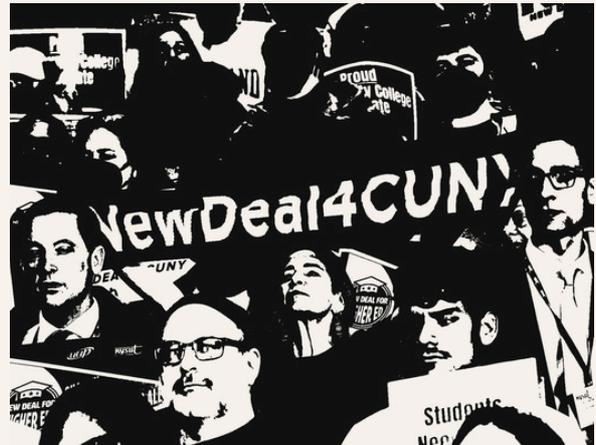
And now we are even stronger. We as the New York City Union of Students have banded together across the public/private divide to demand that NYU and Columbia—the largest private property owners in our city—pay their fair share back to the higher educational institution which makes our city run! We demand that our campuses support REPAIR to fund over \$300 million to CUNY; we demand that the use of these funds is TRANSPARENT and that students have say over how the money is spent through DIRECT DEMOCRACY; we demand that we have ACCESS to all of the wealth NYU and Columbia have, and we demand that LABOR on our campuses is treated fair and right.

We know as students that when we fight—when we are organized, when we stand in solidarity together against the face of austerity, when we band together to be militant and fervent in our work—we win!

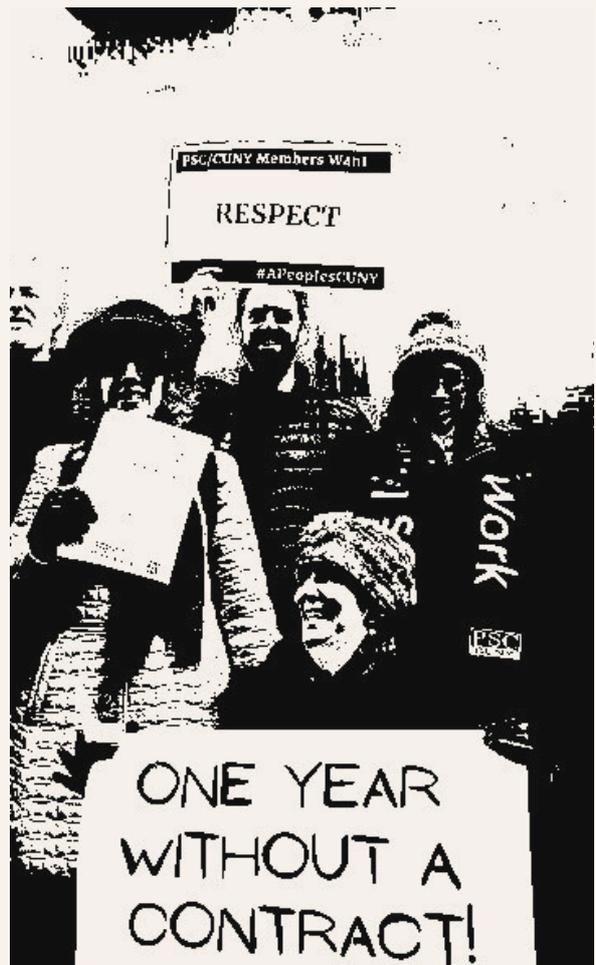


In Spring 2024, CUNY students organized and set up an encampment at CCNY to demand the divestment of CUNY into Israel, the boycott of Israeli made goods, solidarity with Palestinian liberation, demilitarize CUNY, and a fully-funded, free CUNY.

TODAY



In the past few years, students, staff, and faculty have been organizing for a New Deal 4 CUNY: a fully-funded CUNY system that is tuition-free.



The Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union of 30,000 CUNY staff and faculty, have been without a contract since February 2023 and have been tirelessly organizing for their rights.

4. How We Win

"Can you not see that the task is your task—yours to dream, yours to resolve, yours to execute?"

Upton Sinclair, City College Alumni

People Power

What is power? Power is the ability to make decisions and make change. Where does power come from? Well, that's a more complicated question. We'd first like to start this section with a quote from Vietnam anti-war activist Peter Camejo, in [his speech from 1970](#):

"We have to stop and think: what's stopping the United States from sending hundreds of thousands of troops into Cambodia right now, to take over the capital and secure all those little towns and cities and roads and everything else they claim they're losing?"

Camejo answers with an amazing and very simple conclusion: "The masses of people in this country have become a force that enters into the balance on a world scale."

Curious! While the ruling powers of our institutions—politicians, government officials, and yes, our university administration—have money on their side, we have the masses of people. And we can leverage our masses to demand that people in power not only listen to us, but actually take action and make the change we want to see in the world.

What does that really look like? We will once again [quote Camejo](#):

"You can take 200 or 300, or even a few thousand people and fight in the streets, throwing rocks at windows, and putting on a big show. You can play revolution, not make revolution. But when you're talking about 15 million workers who control basic industry in this country, you don't play games. Because they don't run around throwing things at windows. They do things like stop production, period."

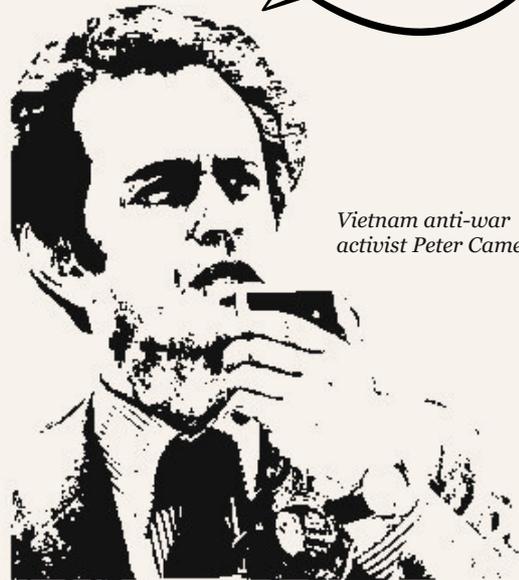
Camejo is talking about something really important here. We do not make change by simply being a few people knocking on our university president's door and bothering the university administration to listen to us. We do not make change by asking politicians politely to hear us out. We do not even make change by protesting a couple hundred people. That's all theater.

What is real, though, are the masses of students. The masses of people, when united and organized, are decisive. Decisions such as where money is spent abroad, the engagements our government deals in, how our universities run and function—they can and will be determined by what the masses of students think.

It is our task, then, to educate, agitate, and organize students. Our institutions prey on apathy. They hope that we do not

"You can take 200 or 300, or even a few thousand people and fight in the streets, throwing rocks at windows, and putting on a big show. You can play revolution, not make revolution. But when you're talking about 15 million workers who control basic industry in this country, you don't play games. Because they don't run around throwing things at windows. They do things like stop production, period."

The masses of people in this country have become a force that enters into the balance on a world scale.



Vietnam anti-war activist Peter Camejo

care and that we do not pay attention. But when we start showing up and start proving our mass power, our institutions will be forced to listen. In May 1970, students across the country staged a student strike. They refused to go to class and instead walked out and joined picket lines. And it was not just a couple hundred students. It was the masses. When 98 percent of the student body refuses to go to class, we are able to shut down the very functions of the university. Society is forced to stop and listen.

The forces in power will not stop and listen and create change by simply asking politely. Nor will we make change by mobilizing a couple of us to break some windows and go to some rallies. Sure, maybe the forces in power will sit down and listen and nod. And then do nothing. They will say, "We hear you, we see you, we are listening." And then take no action to meet our demands.



Students on strike in 1969 at UC Berkeley demanding an ethnic studies program. The strike, which ultimately succeeded, lasted five months.

We are talking here about *independent mass action*. Camejo explains independent mass action like this: “a general strategy of trying to build movements which reach out and bring masses into motion on issues where they are willing to struggle against policies of the ruling class.”

How to bring the masses into motion? Camejo also has an answer to that: “You get the issues around which people are moving against the government and create a unified movement around them, in order to maximize the numbers that will come into motion.”

We need to unite people in action around the issues on which they’re moving. That is why we have developed our FIVE RIGHTS FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATION: TRANSPARENCY, DIRECT DEMOCRACY, ACCESS, LABOR, and REPAIR. We have concrete demands. Now, we have to organize

people to win them. And once we have the masses, once we are able to leverage the most number of people around an issue to struggle against the ruling class—we can force the powers that be to listen and more importantly, change. We are able to not just play revolution, but make revolution.

Why Students?

Why are we organizing students? Why not the labor unions on our campus? Why not the working class of NYC?

First, we are organizing our labor unions. LABOR is one of our demands. LABOR needs full TRANSPARENCY and deserves DIRECT DEMOCRACY in their workplace. We also do not want REPAIR if it means any detriment to our staff and faculty’s working conditions. We will forever stand in solidarity with our professors and staff, because their

teaching conditions are our learning conditions.

Second, students have a unique position in society. We are at the critical point in our lives where we all gather at the same place, exchanging ideas, cultures, and struggles. We interact in our classrooms, cafeterias, dorms, and even just in the hallway each and every day. We are coming into our own and developing our own political identities as we cross paths. We know each other best, we know our own experiences the most, and we are increasingly coming to realize that the powers that be do not have our best interests at heart.

Our government and academic institutions rely on us being separated from each other. NYU, Columbia, and CUNY do not want us all to see each other and know one another, because they know that if we were to work together, that they would be in real trouble.

Students have the ability to shut down the very functions of the university. When we walkout, rally, picket, and strike, we are taking away the power from our administration. University administration likes to think that they make the university run. They like to imagine that the emails they send and the decisions they make enable the university to function. But they are wrong.

Students and workers make our universities run! Our staff and faculty work each and every day on the ground to enable students to learn; the students are the ones who pay tuition and attend class and thus enable universities to be universities. What the hell is a college without any students? Useless.

So, why do we organize students? Because students have the ability to shut the university down. And if our

universities do not listen to our demands, we will be forced to use our power and make them listen and take action.

5. You Ask; We Answer

We've heard your questions. We've got answers! Do you have additional questions? Feel free to DM us on Instagram or TikTok, or email us at campaigndirector@studentsforhigheredfunding.nyc

What does the legislative process entail?

The property tax exemptions are constitutionally enshrined and so will require passing legislation in two consecutive legislative sessions [[S7797/A8478](#)] to amend the constitution and winning the resulting state referendum. We then must pass legislation to repeal the exemption at the \$100M threshold and direct the resulting revenues to CUNY [[S7798/A8479](#)]. While this is a lengthy process, this issue is straightforward for New Yorkers who have seen these universities grow richer without paying their fair share.

What about churches?

It's true that the Catholic Church owns a lot of land; it actually has a \$6,000,000,000 real estate portfolio, and it definitely does not pay property taxes on all of that. And there's definitely a conversation to be had about why the Church has all that real estate. But this legislation—REPAIR—focuses exclusively on private universities because of the contrast between NYU and Columbia in comparison to CUNY. While all three institutions ostensibly have the same mission—education and research—two of these universities have become real estate moguls on top of that while the other has broken elevators, crumbling ceilings, and leaking roofs. The goal of the legislation is to focus on higher education inequities and to organize students to leverage their power over their universities.

Is this class warfare?

Well, we'd argue that Columbia and NYU are the ones waging class warfare against the working-class of New York City with how they are hoarding mass amounts of wealth and amassing gross real estate portfolios. We are simply trying to right the ship and get NYU and Columbia to pay their fair share back to our city.

This sounds like a money grab from two wonderful not-for-profit organizations, simply because they have grown large. It seems intellectually dishonest to strip successful universities of this benefit and not other smaller, less successful universities.

Well, we aren't trying to abolish private universities here. We're just trying to get them to pay their fair share back to the city and return them to their original academic mission, which is to educate and conduct research. NYU and Columbia

will still be able to run classes and do research just fine when REPAIR gets passed. These are taxes they should be paying in the first place, frankly. We aren't asking for new rules to be put into place because they are just so successful. We are asking NYU and Columbia to play by the rules that every other private landowners plays by. It is fair.

How can we guarantee that the tax money actually goes into education?

This is an important point! Whenever you talk to CUNY students about REPAIR, the discussion is usually something like: "Well, of course I support taxing NYU and Columbia and getting more money to CUNY, but I don't want that money to go towards university presidents' salaries or invested into shady places abroad." That is why one of our rights is DIRECT DEMOCRACY: to decide how our colleges and universities spend our tuition and tax dollars. We demand democratic control over the companies and contracts that our

MISSION STATEMENTS? LET'S RETURN TO THOSE, SHALL WE?

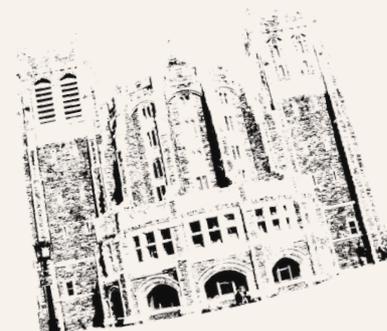
"to educate future generations, create knowledge that will take humanity forward, and invest in community, both locally and globally."



"provide a public first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background."



"to be a top quality international center of scholarship, teaching and research."



universities are affiliated with, and we have the right to invoke a general complaint to re-negotiate contracts and companies we affiliate with.

Students, staff, and faculty will be able to decide where and how this money—about \$300 million each year—is spent. Ideas floated around have been around fixing the crumbling infrastructure, paying our professors a living salary, getting more academic and mental health advisors, opening up new majors such as Asian Studies, and so much more.

What is stopping NYU and Columbia from just raising our tuition more?

We hate to be the ones to break it to you, but NYU and Columbia will raise your tuition regardless of REPAIR. Just this year, NYU announced a 3.6% tuition increase; Columbia announced a 4.39% increase. In 2020, tuition at NYU was about \$56,500; in 2024, tuition is \$62,796. In 2020, tuition at Columbia was \$58,920; in 2024, tuition is \$71,170.

So, your tuition is going to go up no matter what. Wouldn't you rather your tuition money, since you're paying all that money, actually go towards education? Also, why is it that instead of raising student tuition, NYU and Columbia decide to cut out the stupid stuff they spend money on? Such as \$10,000 chairs? Or maybe NYU and Columbia could decide to pay administration a little less. NYU President Andy Hamilton used to make \$3,500,000 every year. Columbia President Lee Bollinger earned nearly \$3,900,000. So, maybe university administration ought to do some soul searching before needlessly raising tuition on us.

Appendices

POWERMAPPING: MASTERMINDS &
MASTERPLANNERS

BUDGET BREAKDOWNS: HOW IS
YOUR TUITION BEING SPENT?

GOING FARTHER:
SOME SUGGESTED READING

Powermapping: Masterminds and Masterplanners

What is powermapping?

Powermapping is essentially any method of tracking where power lies relative to your targets in a campaign.

In our work, our target is yes, the NY State Legislature; after all, REPAIR is a piece of legislation, and we need the legislature to pass REPAIR. But our targets are also NYU and Columbia administration. We need to point out their greed, and we need to organize the public against them to pressure them in order for the legislature to feel like this piece of legislation and our rights are part of a mass movement. Our targets are also CUNY administration, as once REPAIR passes, we need to ensure that the money—over \$300 million each year—is spent in a transparent and democratic fashion.

We have conducted powermapping of our universities: CUNY, Columbia, and NYU. It is meant to guide our strategy and tactics in our campaign. It is imperative that we powermap so that we keep on track with our goals and so we can track our target and opposition.

So, take a look at the powermaps, and see who really is orchestrating your education. Keep an eye on them: they are planning their futures for you.

(Also, maybe question: why aren't we, *the students*, able to determine what *our* education looks like?)

CUNY CENTRAL

The City University of New York was founded in 1847 as the Free Academy. Once tuition-free, today we at CUNY pay tuition and yet receive subpar education in crumbling buildings with cancelled classes and overworked and underpaid professors. So, we think it's time to ask: who is really pulling the levers at CUNY Central?



Governor **G**



Mayor **M**

The Governor of NY appoints ten people to the Board of Trustees, and the Mayor of NYC appoints five. The Board is the University's policy-making body and appoints the Chancellor, who serves as the University's Chief Executive Officer.



Board of Trustees **B**

Serving at the pleasure of the Board, the Chancellor nominates university presidents and proposes CUNY's budget to the Board. The Board has the final approval of the budget, president and senior staff appointments, capital projects, and has the ability to amend CUNY's bylaws.



Chancellor **C**

Since the presidents are chosen by the Chancellor, the presidents' ultimate constituency are not their students, staff, or faculty, but the Chancellor.

The Presidents are held unaccountable to the students. The Presidents carry out the will of the Chancellor and thus, the Board, on their campuses.



President **P**



President **P**



President **P**



243,000 students and over 40,000 staff and faculty get no say in how the University runs.

NYU Inc.

NYU is one of the largest private property owners in NYC, yet receives \$142 million in property tax exemptions each year from NY State. We think it's time to ask: who is really controlling NYU Inc.?

exploits *appoints* *controls*

Board of Trustees



The Board of Trustees acts as the Board of Directors of NYU Inc.. The Board is made up of undemocratically selected real estate developers and investment bankers who seek profit from our tuition and labor. The Board controls the corporation's real estate transactions, investments, and budget.

The President & Upper Admin.



The President and Upper Administration act as middle management of the corporation. They serve at the pleasure of the Board.

61,890 students and over 19,000 staff & faculty

We are the laboring masses whose work makes the university run.



Yet under NYU Inc.'s business model, we are treated as disposable parts with no say in how the university works.

Columbia's Kingdom

Columbia University is the largest private landowner in NYC, yet receives \$179 million in property tax exemptions from NY State. Who really gets to control the real estate empire?



appoints + controls
rules over

Board of Trustees



The Board of Trustees are the kingmakers of the Kingdom of Columbia. The Board is made up of 21 undemocratically selected businessmen, real estate developers, and investors. They tyrannically rule over our school, dictating the budget, investments, and development of the university with no check on power.

The President & Upper Admin.



The President and Upper Administration are the Lords of the Kingdom. They are at the beck and call of the Board, carrying out the Board's will with an iron fist.

35,872 students and 20,012 staff & faculty

We are the laboring masses whose work actually makes the university run.



Yet under the Kingdom's despotic rule, we get no say in how the university functions.

NYU Budget Breakdown

How is your tuition really being spent?

“The annual budget for the University, excluding NYU Langone Health, totals \$4.132 billion and includes all academic, auxiliary, and administrative units at NYU New York, NYU Abu Dhabi, the New York-based activities of NYU Shanghai, and all global program sites.” (x)

Operating Budget: \$4,100,000,000 (x)

Fiscal Budget: \$648,000,000 (x)

Separating the “Operating Budget” from the “Fiscal Budget” intentionally obfuscates revenue sources and expenditures. Thus, we will combine the two.

NYU’s Total Budget in Fiscal 2024: \$4,748,000,000

HOW MUCH ARE YOU PAYING TO ATTEND NYU?

In 2024 - 2025, tuition alone costs \$62,796. (x)

In 2024 - 2025, if you room and board on campus, there is an additional \$24,652. (x)

In 2024, it’ll cost you approximately \$87,448 to attend NYU.

WHERE IS YOUR TUITION MONEY *REALLY* GOING?

Tuition, fees, and student housing and dining account for 67% of NYU’s operating revenue, or \$2,474,000,000. (x) Or, in other words, you are footing 58% of all of NYU’s costs, including the operating and capital budgets. *So, what is NYU doing with your money?*

\$48,448.80 goes to the vaguely defined “Schools” Category, which NYU describes as “faculty and administrative compensation and non-personnel expenses in direct support of teaching and research.” (x)

\$12,869.21 goes to “Facilities Management and Campus Safety.” (x)

\$8,327.14 goes to “Provostial and Administrative Operations.” (x)

\$5,025.09 goes to “Capital Upgrades,” or “capital upgrades, improvement to student housing and dining facilities, faculty housing units, and sustainability initiatives.” (x)

\$4,546.51 goes to “New Construction/Expansion of Academic Facilities.” (x)

\$2,271.04 goes to “Informational Technology Services.” (x)

\$2,271.04 goes to “Student Affairs.” (x)

\$1,514.03 goes to “Student Housing, Dining, Residential Education, and Other Auxiliary Operations.” (x)

\$1,076.80 goes to “Capital Replacement.” (x)

\$717.87 goes to “miscellaneous school and administrative-unit capital projects.” (x)

\$598.22 goes to “information technology and IT infrastructure.” (x)

All of this equals **\$87,665.71**. Only about 55% of your tuition goes to faculty compensation.

Columbia Budget Breakdown

How is your tuition really being spent?

Columbia's total operating revenue for the last fiscal year (2023) was \$6,124,933,000. (x)

For the sake of examining Columbia's educational scope, we will subtract out the revenue gained by patient care, which is \$1,659,969,000. (x)

***Columbia's Total Operating Revenue, not counting patient care, in 2024:
\$4,464,964,000***

HOW MUCH ARE YOU PAYING TO ATTEND COLUMBIA?

In 2024 - 2025, tuition and fees alone will cost \$71,170. (x)

In 2024 - 2025, if you room and board on campus, there is an additional \$17,580. (x)

Oh, and there's a bonus of \$675 in "New student fees." (x)

In 2024, it'll cost you about \$89,425 to attend Columbia.

WHERE IS YOUR TUITION MONEY REALLY GOING?

Total operating expenses for fiscal year 2023 were \$5,916,699,000." (x)

We are once again going to subtract out the expenses for patient care, which is \$1,440,772,000. (x)

Thus, Columbia University's operating expenses in 2023 were \$4,475,927,000.

You'll notice that *Columbia (including patient care revenue and expenses) operates at a surplus of \$208,234,000.* What does Columbia do with this surplus?

According to Columbia themselves, “[m]uch of the centrally held surplus provides funding for capital construction projects to maintain and improve our campuses. Our auxiliary operations (housing and dining) and residential real estate are just two examples of units with surpluses. They generate an operating surplus in order to fund significant capital projects for renovations and upkeep. The resources expended for these projects are not in our operating expenses, but rather are capitalized, reflected on our statement of cash flows and our balance sheet as we invest resources in projects to support “land buildings and equipment” and “institutional real estate.” (x)

So, Columbia invests a whole bunch of money (about \$300,000,000 of your tuition dollars) in real estate in NYC. Yeah.

Where does the rest of your tuition go?

Net tuition accounts for \$1,487,356,000 of Columbia’s operating revenue (x). Or, in other words, you are footing 33% of all of Columbia’s costs. *So, what is Columbia doing with your money?*

\$45,394.25 goes to “Instruction and educational administration.” (x)

\$17,522.65 goes to “Research.” (x)

\$6,979.51 goes to “Operation and Maintenance.” (x)

\$6,698.59 goes to “Institutional Support.” (x)

\$4,293.74 goes to “Auxiliary enterprises.” (x)

\$6,584.01 goes to “Depreciation.” (x)

\$1,332.96 goes to “Interest.” (x)

This totals to **\$88,805.71**. The remaining \$619.29 goes towards Columbia’s operating surplus.

Going Farther: Some Suggested Reading

Articles on Organizing:

- Peter Camejo - "Liberalism, ultraleftism or mass action"
- Jo Freeman - "The Tyranny of Structurelessness"

Books on Organizing:

- Deepak Bhargava and Stephanie Luce - *Practical Radicals: Seven Strategies to Change the World*
- Jane F. McAlevey - *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*

CUNY History:

- Conrad Dyer - *Protest and the Politics of Open Admissions: The Impact of the Black and Puerto Rican Students' Community (of City College)*
- CUNY Digital History Archive

REPAIR Articles:

- Matthew Haag and Meredith Kolodner - "Columbia and N.Y.U. Would Lose \$327 Million in Tax Breaks Under Proposal"
- The Brian Lehrer Show - "How Taxing Columbia and NYU Can Fund CUNY"
- Sara Wexler and Zohran Mamdani - "Socialist Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani Wants to End Columbia and NYU's Tax-Exempt Status"

Fiction Books:

- Ursula K. Le Guin - *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*

Social Theory:

- Erich Fromm - *Escape from Freedom*

Film:

- Howard Alk and Mike Gray - *American Revolution II, Part 3*
- Gillo Pontecorvo - *The Battle of Algiers*
- Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss - *The Five Demands*