

RELEASE: NYU Students Call Tuition Strike

3 messages

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NYU Students Call Tuition Strike

Student organizers say they've had enough.

Undergraduate students at New York University have called for a tuition strike. Organized largely by the university's chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) in collaboration with Sunrise Movement NYU and NYU's graduate student union (GSOC), **students will meet at Gould Plaza (W 4th St between Washington Sq E and Mercer St) Friday April 30th at 11:15 am to kick off the strike.**

Their open letter, to be released Friday, describes ever-rising costs at the University, particularly costs related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Furthermore, the student organizing group decries lackluster University response as detailed in viral TikTok videos of food delivered to students in quarantine and the administrative decision to increase tuition beyond pre-pandemic levels while offering a sliver of a fraction of pre-pandemic facilities and services.

Organizers note that 57% of yearly operating revenue for NYU comes from undergraduate student tuition alone — another 10% of revenue comes from student housing and dining. This is a far higher percentage compared to NYU's peer institutions. NYU has no plans of stopping the increase of its tuition costs, and will continue to service its enormous debt load for rapid university expansion at the direct expense of students. According to data published regarding the debt burden of NYU students themselves, the average student had nearly \$30,000 in student debt, with 39% of graduating students in any debt.

“The NYU student body, our professors and TA's, the workers that the administration employs on an exploitative contractual basis to skirt regulation, all deserve better,” NYU YDSA members wrote in an open letter about the strike, “In recognizing the failures of the administration to address the glaring inequities it perpetuates, and that its students face, the NYU community says “No more.”

The demands released by student organizers fall into five categories regarding: tuition justice, treatment of student workers including GSOC, University expansion, public safety, and endowment divestment.

“We’re going on tuition strike to take back control of our university and its policies.” Joe Whitcomb, NYU YDSA member said, “We have no power beyond the fact that the tuition we pay the school allows it to continue operating the way it does. Thus, in order to protect our students from the police, shield them from a predatory financial burden, and reign in our school’s abuses both at home and abroad, we need to withhold that tuition until our demands for a freer and more just university are met.”

The announcement comes on the heels of a substantial organizing effort at Columbia University. The Columbia-Barnard YDSA chapter’s effort resulted in more than 1,000 students at Columbia going on a tuition strike for more than four months. The effort was a mixed success, with organizers failing to secure a tuition decrease, but winning admirable goals such as Columbia divesting relevant parts of its \$11 billion from certain fossil fuel companies.

NYU is no stranger to organized action. GSOC announced an ongoing strike April 26, facing a stonewall in NYU’s bargaining. Also relevant is the strike called by undergraduate TAs for NYU Tandon engineering course EG1003 earlier this month. Though the engineering TAs’ strike ended without successful resolution, it is testament to a simmering dissatisfaction across the student body — both strikes were met with widespread student support.

In addition to allying with GSOC, the tuition strike includes a demand for the administration to recognize a nascent campaign run by the NYU chapter of the Sunrise Movement. The Divest NYU campaign calls for the divestment of NYU’s multi-billion dollar endowment from fossil fuel companies and private prison corporations.

“Sunrise NYU believes that as undergrad organizations, we must stand together to ensure that NYU meets our demands,” Sunrise Movement NYU member Zach Feldman wrote in support of the tuition strike, “The demands of our Divest NYU campaign and those of the YDSA tuition strike are intertwined as they both seek to achieve a just and sustainable future for the members of the NYU community and beyond.”

NYU students do face potential consequences from the University. If registered students fail to pay tuition by the beginning of classes, NYU can place a hold on their enrollment, barring them from attending classes.

In spite of the potential consequences, supporters and prospective signatories to the strike resolution have a steely resolve.

"Instead of offering financial relief to students, NYU has actually increased tuition!" GSOC co-chair and former organizer of last year’s COVID Coalition, Bhumika Chauhan wrote, “And, they refuse to pay a living wage to grad workers, the TAs with whom undergrads spend most of their classroom time. If this tuition is not going to be used to pay these workers a living wage, then where is the tuition revenue going? It is going to finance a bloated top administration and into real estate expansion in NYC and around the world. To me, it's fully understandable why the undergrads would call a tuition strike."

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