Undergrads we still need your support!

What are we Fighting?

1. Privatization
Today, universities are increasingly run like shady businesses. Lacking the charisma of used car salesmen, those who run them opt for alternative measures to procure their deals. Essentially, the universities are closer to hedge funds, without a Wall Street, and with less public sympathy. Janet Napolitano’s UC is no different. Its ruthless management style is structured to benefit the growing ranks of top-level UCOP personnel and mysterious campus management officials, some of whom will work for only a few years before receiving generous pensions. Bear in mind: the University sees no contradiction between funding these and denying us a COLA (cost of living adjustment). It is just one more chapter in the University’s fraught legacy that we have inherited and are left paying the tab for. One thing is simple: the corruption and duplicity of this administration falls neatly into a historical arc of eroding public education in California, at the expense of students.

Since the Higher Education Compact of 2004, agreed upon behind closed doors by state, UC, and CSU leadership – rife with bureaucratic swindlers of all stripes – the system has fundamentally shifted away from public funding for its core operations and instead towards a tuition model. The UC’s founding commitments to tuition-free education had already dissolved in the 1980s; and now, the dependence on students’ tuition has intensified even further. Your tuition payments became the single greatest source of UC operating funds in 2013, and this administration has fought tooth and nail to increase that at every turn. The result is massive indebtedness and damaged futures—an increasingly visible feature of the national landscape, where student debt currently totals $1.41 trillion, at an average of $35,359 per holder. This administration has repeatedly refused us a COLA with tired excuses about tied hands and shrinking budgets. But the usual BS and hand-wringing over scarce resources merely mask what this systemic shift has brought about: a privatized “public” university whose public character, increasingly obscured, emerges only in the collective resistance of those it fleeces.

2. The Bosses and the Cops
Before the start of her appointment as President of the UC in 2013, Janet Napolitano’s tenure as Secretary of Homeland Security was defined by a number of brutal, though perfectly legal, policies befitting that loathsome office. As UC President, made headlines in September 2017 by suing the Trump administration over its immigration policy changes around DACA. Of course, this was a welcome development of UC policy, but certainly a hypocritical gesture on Napolitano’s part. If we travel further back in time, a clearer picture of her record on immigration emerges. Under the Obama administration, Napolitano created a deportation system that far eclipsed anything that preceded it, and she did it in only two years. As US Attorney in Arizona in the 1990s, she also aided and abetted the abuses of migrants by notorious Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Napolitano had the chance to prosecute Arpaio over the abusive jail he ran, which he referred to positively as a “concentration camp,” she instead let him go. Arpaio would later support her run for governor, even appearing in a campaign TV spot in 2002. In a tight race, Arpaio’s endorsement was decisive. Later she would become the first governor in the country to pursue 287g agreements between ICE and local police, allowing for local cops to be deputized as immigration agents. She was supported in her reelection bid by Arpaio in 2006 and in 2008 she refused to support Arpaio’s Democratic challenger.

For this reason, when we demand “COPS OFF CAMPUS” we are not only referring to the removal of the campus police departments and the UC police; we are also implicating Napolitano and her cronies who employ a “law and order” approach to campus life. When administrators consider possible reforms or solutions to problems expressed by those who work and live within the University’s orbit, it is assumed that these changes should be decided above our heads (and behind our backs). Just what sort of reforms do they have in mind? Turning the University into a privately-run detention center? Instead of providing clear answers, they continuously put the squeeze on the most exploited sectors of the campus: janitors, bus drivers, clerical staff, food service workers, tutors, teaching assistants, adjunct faculty – all the while insisting that they have our best interests at heart.

What we are Building
In the face of our shared precarity, we have begun to build a movement that the university cannot de-legitimize, divide, and dismantle. We saw this in the action undertaken yesterday in the Cowell-Stevenson dining hall – the establishment of a day-long “People’s Free Lunch Program” (indeed, there is such a thing as a free lunch). Food was distributed freely and students and workers ate together, breaking through the isolation and alienation that otherwise defines “dining in public.” While the university continues to brand itself as the “original authority on questioning authority” (a slogan that could not possibly have been authored by anyone but a conformist), we continue to learn, through coming together, that demonstrating our power requires first and foremost the affirmation of our shared struggles. When we act in solidarity with other workers on campus, and with workers of the UC system more broadly, we can win.

NoCOLA, NoGrades!

Universal Cost of Living Adjustment

#COLA