

o

Student protesters: 'Stop the Board of Regents in their tracks'

Crowd of about 100 students protest tuition hikes, student debt



G Eastern Iowa Breaking News and...



rising
2, 2014.

The protest was organized by COGS (the Campaign to Organize Graduate Students) a graduate student collective bargaining organization. (Adam Wesley/The Gazette)

By **Vanessa Miller**, The Gazette

OCTOBER 22, 2014 | 4:49 PM

IOWA CITY — With the Board of Regents on Wednesday about to convene a two-day meeting on the University of Iowa campus, during which they plan to discuss the first tuition increase in two years, a crowd of about 100 students rallied on the Pentacrest in protest of student debt.

“We need to stop the Board of Regents in their tracks and say enough is enough,” said Jeannette Gabriel, president of the local Campaign to Organize Graduate Students.

“Pay us back,” she led a crowd chant. “Pay us back.”

The Board of Regents is proposing a 1.75 percent tuition increase for the 2015-16 school year after freezing tuition for undergraduate resident students at Iowa’s public universities for two straight years. If approved, the increase would bump up the price of tuition for undergraduate Iowans by \$116 at all three universities to \$6,794 at UI and \$6,764 at ISU and UNI, according to regent documents.

The regent proposal, which will be discussed during the board meeting Thursday, also includes increases for non-resident undergraduate students — 1.75 percent at UI and UNI and 1.2 percent at ISU. And the proposed increases are the same for resident and nonresidents at each school at the graduate and professional level.

But some UI students, teachers, and several political leaders argued during the Wednesday protest that tuition shouldn’t go up and lawmakers instead should restore its funding of higher education in Iowa.

“Stop tuition increases, stop fee increases and bring education back to an affordable level,” Gabriel said.

At the protest, students carried signs that read “education is a right,” “I am not a loan,” and “graduating black and gold should not mean in the red.” Some protesters wrote dollar amounts on sheets of paper indicating the size of debt they’ve incurred for their education — \$95,000, \$32,000, and \$25,000, to name a few.

Seven students sat cross-legged on the pavement, working on typewriters, in response to UI President Sally Mason’s recent comments referring to debt incurred beyond federally-defined need as “lifestyle debt.”

“They are here to show Sally Mason what life looks like when they don’t go into lifestyle debt,” Gabriel

Start your FREE subscription to The Gazette News and Sports newsletter! [✕ close](#)

[🚫 don't show again](#)

The students' specific demands of the Board of Regents are universal: commit to a tuition freeze for the next academic year, eliminate all administrative feeds, and request full funding of all regent universities in Iowa from the legislature.

Board of Regents officials have said they’ve kept tuition to Iowa’s public universities low compared to peer schools, and the two-year tuition freeze was the first in Iowa since 1975.

UI doctoral student Melissa Zimdars, 29, said a two-year freeze is not enough, and the proposed increase

is not “modest” to the students shouldering the burden of funding higher education.

“My individual loan level should not be as high as it is,” said Zimdars, who dressed up like President Mason for the protest. “But it’s the result of the Iowa and national trend of defunding higher education.”

Tessa Heeren, 23, is a first-year UI graduate student studying social work who came to the rally on Wednesday with about \$70,000 in debt to her name. She said that burden is hanging over her as she thinks about life after graduation, and she fears it will limit her job choices and earning power.

“It’s pretty stressful,” she said. “Every dollar I spend, I’m thinking about how much interest I’m going to owe.”

In reference to the notion of “lifestyle debt,” Heeren said it’s debatable. She said family members recount for her the days they lived in a closet-sized space and ate SpaghettiOs every night.

“Well I need to have Internet at home, and I need a computer, and I want to eat fresh food,” she said. “I’m sorry. But you do the best you can.”

You Might Also Like

More From the Gazette

[Man accused of sexually assaulting sleeping Iowa woman](#) (KCRG)

[Bullets found in bathroom of Dubuque elementary school](#) (KCRG)

[Three Guttenberg residents arrested for passing fake cash in Dyersville](#) (KCRG)

[Marion man walking his dog finds woman in road with broken ankle](#) (KCRG)

[Iowa senators seek to expand access to entertainment venues - TheGazette](#) (The Gazette)

[Marion "flim-flam" man will plead guilty to more federal charges - TheGazette](#) (The Gazette)

From Around the Web



Have you found an error or omission in our reporting? Is there other feedback and/or ideas you want to share with us? Tell us [here](#).

The Gazette

[About Us](#)
[Advertise with Us](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Order Back Issues](#)
[Customer Care](#)
[Newsroom Staff](#)
[Newspapers in Education](#)

Gazette Content

[Email Newsletters](#)
[RSS Feeds](#)
[Apps](#)
[Archives](#)
[Green Gazette](#)
[Puzzle answers](#)
[Policies](#)

Our Local Sites

[Iowa Prep Sports](#)
[Hoopla Now](#)
[Fusionfarm](#)
[KCRG Autos](#)
[We Create Here](#)

Our Online Products

[Corridor Careers](#)
[The Gazette Classifieds](#)
[Here's the Deal](#)
[Directory](#)
[KCRG A-list](#)
[Photo Store](#)

Iowa SourceMedia Group

[KCRG-TV9](#)
[The Gazette](#)
[Color Web Printers](#)

[Penny Saver](#)

Copyright © 2015