

Resolution on Governor Cuomo's Proposal for 'Tuition-Free' College

(This resolution was unanimously adopted by the DSC Plenary at its February 24th 2017 meeting.)

WHEREAS, the Doctoral Students' Council (hereafter, "DSC") represents and advocates for over 4,000 students at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) in their roles as students, teachers, workers, family members, New Yorkers, activists, and academics; and

WHEREAS, the DSC shares CUNY's historic mission of providing access to higher education to low-income communities and communities of color in New York City and across the nation; and

Plenary

WHEREAS, on January 3rd 2017, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a proposal to "provide free tuition to New Yorkers making up to \$125,000 per year at all SUNY and CUNY two- and four-year colleges" via the 'Excelsior Scholarship' (hereafter, 'scholarship')¹; and

Executive Committee

Steering Committee

WHEREAS, a press release posted on January 3rd on the State University of New York's (SUNY) website anticipated 940,000 middle-class families would benefit over an unspecified amount of time², and the announcement by Governor Cuomo enthusiastically anticipated 200,000 students could benefit over the upcoming 3-year period when the initial announcement was made in early January, yet, because SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher later testified that only about 80,000 students would be eligible, these projections should be viewed cautiously as no actual proposal and set of guidelines has yet materialized³; and

Constitution and Bylaws

Grants

Health & Wellness

WHEREAS, further details on the proposal have indicated that the scholarship will not cover part-time students, out-of-state students, undocumented students, and international students, that the proposal considers 15 credits as 'full-time' (according to some reports^{4, 5}), thereby further disadvantaging students with disabilities, students who provide care to family, and students who work, and that the scholarship will only supplement tuition costs not covered already by the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) or federal Pell grants⁶; and

Outreach

Student Services

WHEREAS, data from the Office of Institutional Research at CUNY shows that in 2015, about 30% (44,488) of undergraduate CUNY students were part-time⁷; and

USS Advisory Committee

WHEREAS, CUNY requires only 12 credits to be considered 'full-time'; and

Advocate Advisory Board

WHEREAS, the total cost of attending an institution of higher learning is more than just tuition fees - in the 2015-2016 academic year, CUNY estimated that students living at home would spend approximately \$9,592 in books, transportation, and living expenses, while students not living at home would spend approximately \$20,295 on such expenses⁸; and

OpenCUNY Board

Governance Task Force

WHEREAS, the 2016 Student Experience Survey indicated that 60% of all CUNY students live in households with a household income less than \$30,000⁹; and

EDLAB

WHEREAS, the 2016 Survey also indicated that 53% of CUNY students are working for pay, and of those students, though a slight majority (55%) said that they are working to pay for tuition, an overwhelming majority (79%) said that they are also working to pay for living expenses; and

Student Tech Fee

¹ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-presents-1st-proposal-2017-state-state-making-college-tuition-free-new-york-s>

² <https://www.suny.edu/suny-news/press-releases/01-2017/1-3-17-tuition-free/governor-cuomo-making-college-tuition-free-for-new-yorks-middle-class-families.html>

³ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2017/02/06/college-free-no-student-loan/2/#393d947a43d5>

⁴ "9 Things to Know about Gov. Cuomo's Free Tuition". Times Union. 25 Jan. 2017. Web. <<http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-local/article/9-things-to-know-about-Gov-Cuomo-s-free-tuition-10881803.php>>

⁵ "Cuomo's Free Tuition Plan Needs Changes, Lawmakers Say". The Buffalo News. 24 Jan. 2017. Web. <<http://buffalonews.com/2017/01/24/suny-head-unable-answer-key-questions-free-tuition-plan/>>

⁶ "Free Tuition Idea Revived." Inside Higher Ed. 04 Jan. 2017. Web. <<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/04/new-yorks-tuition-free-plan-sparks-debate>>

⁷ CUNY Office of Institutional Research, "Total Enrollment by Undergraduate and Graduate Level, Fall 2015".

⁸ CUNY, <http://www.cuny.edu/admissions/tuition-fees.html>

⁹ The Office of Institutional Research And Assessment, The City University of New York. "2016 Student Experience Survey."

WHEREAS, given the reasons why CUNY students end up working for pay, the amount of part-time students will likely not decrease, keeping these students from accessing the scholarship; and

WHEREAS, those CUNY students who do meet the eligibility criteria for the scholarship already have their tuition costs largely covered by TAP or other grants, but will still have to pay for rising NYC living expenses out of pocket; and

WHEREAS, TAP does not take into account the cost of living per county, nor other rising costs like textbook prices, transportation fees, daily meals, and supplies; and

WHEREAS, the State failed in March 2016 to pass the NY DREAM Act that would extend TAP to undocumented students; and

WHEREAS, it appears that the scholarship will merely simplify existing tuition assistance from TAP and Pell grants, diverting the State's assistance from low-income students to middle-income and upper-middle-income households⁶; and

WHEREAS, though the proposed scholarship resembles a throwback to CUNY's prior commitment to provide free tuition to all students during the early to mid 1970s yet¹⁰, as proposed, it will not benefit low-income students; and

WHEREAS, according to University Student Senate reports, Governor Cuomo has also proposed to raise tuition for CUNY and SUNY students by \$250 over the next 5 years, which contradicts his call for free tuition with this scholarship; and

WHEREAS, this raise in tuition will disproportionately affect part-time students, out-of-state students, undocumented students, and international students, who will also not be considered eligible for the scholarship; and

WHEREAS, the State continues its disinvestment in CUNY by failing to cover fixed costs as part of the 'maintenance of effort' provision, resulting in a \$51 million budget gap in funding for mandatory costs¹¹; therefore let it be

RESOLVED, that the DSC acknowledges that though this may seem like a step toward 'tuition-free' college, it will in fact, not benefit low-income students, part-time students, students with disabilities, and undocumented students, who make up a significant part of the population at the City University of New York; and let it be further

RESOLVED, that the DSC calls on Governor Cuomo to release further details about the scholarship and make transparent the criteria for accessing it, and who will benefit from it; and let it be further

RESOLVED, that the DSC calls on Governor Cuomo and the NYS legislature to expand the scholarship criteria to include all students regardless of the number of credits registered for, income, or citizenship status, and for the scholarship to cover other educational or living expenses, particularly when a student's tuition is covered through other forms state-funded financial assistance; and let it be

FINALLY RESOLVED, that the DSC calls on Governor Cuomo and the NYS legislature to lead the nation in higher education by re-investing in CUNY's infrastructure and workforce - especially for those among the lowest paid workers, such as adjuncts, graduate employees, and college assistants - so that students are guaranteed a free and high quality education.

¹⁰ "When Tuition at CUNY Was Free, Sort of." CUNY Newswire. 12 Oct. 2011. Web. <<http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2011/10/12/when-tuition-at-cuny-was-free-sort-of/>>

¹¹ "Governor Cuomo Vetoes Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Bill". University Student Senate. 12 Dec 2015. <<http://www.uscuny.org/single-post/2015/12/12/Governor-Cuomo-vetoes-Maintenance-of-Effort-MOE-Bill>>