

Challenging the Tuition Crisis

By A.J. Cisneros, UC Davis NLG

Law students have remained largely silent in the face of the law school tuition crisis, but students can organize for budget transparency, administration accountability, and a return to historical tuition levels. The current cost of legal education limits access to education for students, forces students to take on enormous debt levels, and makes it more difficult than ever for lawyers to address the “justice gap” in America. The high costs of legal education can worsen the already stressful and competitive atmosphere of law school, leading to anxiety, depression, and isolation among law students. “Understanding The Law School Tuition Crisis” showed how law school tuition has skyrocketed in recent years and explained the roles of the American Bar Association, *US News and World Report* rankings, and law school faculty and administrators in the “arms race for prestige.” This section expands the conversation by exploring how students can organize to address the law school tuition crisis and by reflecting on the tuition organizing that took place at School of Law and the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years.

In the 2012-13 year, law students at UC Davis were faced with a 9% tuition increase. UC Davis Law was already the most expensive public law school in the nation. The administration had already roughly doubled tuition between 2005 and 2010. Students organized to challenge the tuition crisis and in the process created the first law student “Budget Policy Committee” in the nation, obtained a faculty hiring freeze, and won a reduction in the planned fee increase for the following year. We also missed a lot of opportunities, made basic organizing mistakes, and allowed ourselves to become distracted and discouraged at various times. But we did accomplish change. We slowed the crisis at our school. And the short-term effort created a handful of long-term tuition activists that, as alumni, can exert pressure on the administration for years to come.

This piece is not a definitive “how-to guide” to stopping the law school tuition crisis. In thinking about strategies and tactics, there are many helpful guides to direct action, grassroots organizing, and agitation for social change written by experienced activists and organizers. NLG is the legal arm of the movement, and the activists in the many movements we assist have far more to teach you about organizing than I do. This piece simply shares what happened at UC Davis and offers some insights on tuition organizing that you may find helpful.

In that spirit, there are a few takeaways from tuition organizing that are worth stating upfront. First, there is no substitute for basic grassroots organizing. If you want people to get involved, ask them personally. Facebook events, posted flyers, emails from student organizations, announcements in classes about meetings and events, etc., are all good promotional tools. But if you don’t ask your colleagues, one by one, to get involved and stay involved, your effort will underperform. The biggest mistake we made was prioritizing promotion and publicity over basic organizing.

Second, the tuition crisis is driven by the US News rankings. In order to meaningfully lower tuition, a school must make certain decisions. These decisions may include cutting faculty or instituting a faculty-hiring freeze, lowering admission standards to seat full classes amid falling applications,

reversing the practice of “buying” high LSAT and GPA applicants with merit scholarships, mandating that professors teach more and research less thereby risking the departure of high profile faculty, and otherwise cutting overall expenditure. These decisions will impact the ranking. All signs point to the fact that preserving a *US News* rankings mindset and returning tuition to historical levels are mutually exclusive propositions. This scares students. But if you are serious about organizing to lower tuition at your school, it’s best to get used to the idea that lowering tuition means a drop in the rankings.

Remember, though, that a drop in the rankings does not necessarily mean a drop in your school’s educational quality. In fact, the rankings incentivize the marginalization and exploitation of law students. The rankings focus on a school’s reputation as a research institution, rather than it’s quality as an instructional institution. The rankings “measure” the quality of a student body by valuing selectivity in admissions (LSAT, GPA, how many people a school turns away) at a whopping 25% of the total rank, while bar passage rate is only valued at 2% of the total rank. Total expenditures per student make up 11.25% of the total rank. The rankings do not measure average class size, quality of instruction, diversity of class offerings, an administration’s responsiveness to student concerns, the effectiveness of clinical or skill building programs, or any number of other indicators of quality. In short, the rankings do a very poor job of measuring the quality of your legal education.

Third, convincing students that law school tuition is a harmful crisis and that current tuition levels are fundamentally unfair does not guarantee that students will believe change is possible or that they will be willing to confront administration decision-making. After a year of sustained tuition organizing at UC Davis, we conducted a survey. Participation in the survey likely skewed towards those involved or interested in the tuition effort. Among respondents, 90% of students agreed nationwide tuition was too high. Around 75% agreed that law school tuition was a harmful crisis. But fewer students were comfortable challenging the *US News* rankings or second-guessing administrators’ decisions regarding faculty hiring, the prioritization of legal scholarship over instruction, or selectivity in student admissions. And, strikingly, only around 25% of respondents firmly believed that a nationwide student movement could meaningfully lower law school tuition. Remember, we need to do more than convince students that tuition is an unfair and harmful crisis. We need to convince them that change is possible.

Hopefully you can avoid some of the mistakes we made. Hopefully your successes are remarkable enough as to make ours irrelevant by comparison. Because that’s what the legal profession, and the society it serves, needs. We need students to say, “Enough is enough.” We need committed, inspired students like yourself to orchestrate a grassroots student movement that, through organizing, agitation, education, and direct action, reverses the tuition crisis, inspires a generation of law students, and radically alters the future of the legal profession. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

Challenging Tuition Hikes at King Hall (UC Davis)

In the summer before the 2012-13 school year, the administration of the UC Davis School of Law – known as “King Hall” after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – announced a 9% tuition increase. After suffering through skyrocketing tuition for years, students finally organized to oppose the increases. Students demanded the following: full budget transparency, a series of tuition town hall meetings, and the formation of a student budget policy committee to oversee and provide input on any future proposed fee or spending increases. After a flurry of student organizing, students made headway on all their demands. The Deans promised a 5% fee increase, rather than the planned 9% fee increase. The Deans also promised a faculty-hiring freeze for the 2014-15 school year. And UC Davis is, to my knowledge, the first campus to have a student budget committee and is possibly the first law school in the nation where student organizing has resulted in a promise of slowed tuition increases and a faculty-hiring freeze.

The results of the UC Davis model also illustrate its drawbacks and limitations. The creation of the Budget Policy Committee (BPC) has been a double-edged sword. We hoped that by creating a permanent committee, the student effort to resist the tuition crisis would have continuity and sustainability. After all, student organizing is disadvantaged by the fact that students leave every year, while the administration and faculty remain. And we did succeed in creating a sustainable institution that potentially may serve as an ongoing vehicle for tuition reform.

But in creating a regulatory body of sorts, we invited the problems that come with a regulatory approach – rather than a direct action approach - to social change. The existence of the committee diminished the sense of urgency in the student body. After all, why must they get involved? Isn't the BPC handling it? And the creation of the BPC gave the administration a catch-all answer to students voicing any concerns related to spending or budgeting: “Take it to the BPC.”

More worrisome, as soon as the spirit of activism and resistance stopped animating the BPC's participants, the BPC proved vulnerable to capture by the administration. The BPC was born of resistance and a willingness to confront the administration. But before long, students on the BPC became highly deferential to the administration. And at times the BPC was more interested in being apologists for the Deans than advocates for their fellow students.

But the future of the BPC is unwritten. And for the effort at your school you'll have to decide for yourself whether to prioritize ad hoc activism, the creation of institutional student influence, a mix of the two, or something else entirely.

How It Started: The Potential of Student Government to Confront the Law School Tuition Crisis

At UC Davis the effort to confront the administration began with our student government (LSA). Our NLG chapter played a critical role in supporting LSA, and we continued organizing on the tuition effort after LSA moved on, but we didn't have to start the effort ourselves. We learned that student government leadership brings multiple advantages. LSA's leadership gave the effort an initial sense of unity and legitimacy. Had the NLG chapter initiated the campaign alone, or even with a social justice coalition, it might have been viewed with more reservation by both the

administration and the student body. Another challenge to proceeding without student government support is that absent their “buy-in” in advance, it’s more likely they will feel pressure to play the “negotiator” role between the social justice students and the administration. These problems became clear during NLG-led organizing in the 2013-14 school year. The advantages of having student government lead the effort are substantial. Substantial enough, even, to warrant making getting involved in student government a worthwhile part of a strategy to confront the tuition crisis.

Below you’ll see how our student government led the way, and how our NLG chapter bolstered their efforts.

The Initial Email:

Our LSA President sent the following email on July 19, 2012, regarding new and unexpected (for students) fee hikes:

Dear Classes of 2013 and 2014,
As you know, our law school costs have gone up for this upcoming year. On the horizon is another increase. For those of you who do not know, yesterday, the UC Regents voted to raise our costs by another 10%. This is unacceptable. The time for direct action on this issue is long overdue. I am working with the LSA Board to implement a multi-pronged strategy to combat the assault on our current and future students. We need to rally around this issue together if we hope to make a lasting change. Therefore, we will need your support and participation. Stay tuned on how you can get involved. In the meantime, contact me or the External Vice-President with questions, comments, or concerns. I am speaking with Dean Johnson tomorrow, and I will be in touch with you again very soon.

Our NLG chapter quickly voted to support efforts made by LSA and informed our LSA President that he could count on us to assist with any organizing/mobilization around the issue. If you are working with your student government to initiate a tuition effort, encourage them to frame the issue in clear terms (“this is unacceptable”). And especially encourage them to solicit student participation and not simply rely on their ability to negotiate on the issue. It’s likely that your NLG chapter has some of the most experienced activists and organizers on your campus, and it helps for there to be no question that organizing and activism not only have a place in the effort but are central to it.

Takeaways: Student Government can give early unity and legitimacy to an effort. So much so that getting involved in student government may be a worthwhile initial step to tuition organizing. But if they lead the way, make sure they know they can count on the NLG chapter for substantive organizing support and encourage them to include an explicit call for student involvement.

LSA Reaches Out to the Student Orgs:

After resolving to move forward, LSA held a “Brown Bag Lunch” (a lunchtime meeting event where no food is served) on September 12, 2012. They invited the heads of all the student organizations (although anyone was welcome to attend) to “have an open discussion about how to deal with student fee and tuition increases.” LSA used the meeting to solicit input on an open letter they had resolved to send the Dean regarding unexpected fee hikes and budget transparency.

Our NLG chapter was active in the meeting. But we could have done more at what, in hindsight, was a critical moment in the effort. Several NLG board members attended and, to ensure we could participate meaningfully, we appointed an active 1L to be our “point person” on the issue. While we made sure our board was informed and engaged, we didn’t do enough to promote the meeting to our social justice colleagues. As such, some of the more active social justice students and organizations didn’t get the opportunity to give input and later some felt alienated from the effort.

Takeaways: Organize from the start and recruit as many influential students as early as possible, even if your student government is calling the meeting. Make sure every social justice student has been personally invited to any organizing meeting as they can, in turn, influence the effort to ensure it reflects social justice values. The students and organizations who aren’t involved in the early stages are more likely to question or oppose the effort on behalf of the administration later on.

The Open Letter:

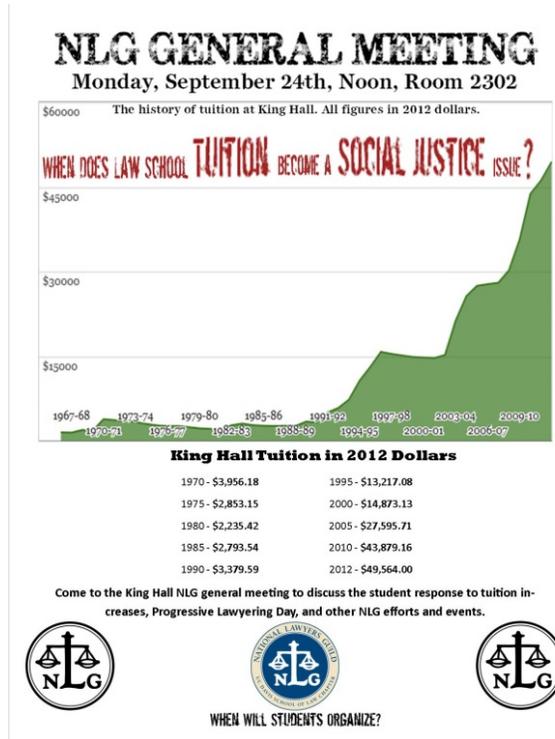
LSA sent the open letter to the Deans on September 13, 2012. The letter cited concern over rising student loan debt, called for an annual circulation of the King Hall budget presented in a simple format, and requested the formation of a permanent student committee to provide input on King Hall’s annual budget.

The open letter generated significant discussion on campus about the tuition increases and the lack of budget transparency. There were indications that the Deans were unhappy with the letter. There’s anecdotal evidence that the Deans reached out to social justice-oriented students and falsely advised them that the effort was aimed at cutting need-based aid. While the open letter created administration pushback, it also created “buzz” on the issue that would have been difficult to generate otherwise.

Takeaways: Open letters can create “buzz” that can be difficult to generate otherwise. But they may provoke some hostility from the administration and a degree of insecurity from students who weren’t connected to the organizing effort. Keep these tradeoffs in mind when considering this tactic.

Maintaining the Momentum

On September 14, 2012, our NLG board met to discuss the best way to support the effort moving forward. We voted to hold a tuition-themed general meeting in order to continue the momentum prior to the tuition town halls and to encourage other student groups to also hold tuition-themed meetings in order to reach as many students and social networks on campus as possible. In order to promote our meeting, and to continue discussion amongst our colleagues, we publicized the meeting with a chart tracking the history of tuition increases at UC Davis adjusted for inflation.



While the poster helped continue the “buzz” after the open letter, we ultimately didn’t do enough to encourage other student organizations to support the tuition effort by holding tuition-themed general meetings. Additional meetings would have been helpful as a challenge we continually encountered was that no one knew the answer to basic questions about why tuition was so high. And we found that students needed space to vent their frustrations.

Takeaways: A tuition-themed meeting by your NLG chapter may be a good idea. But consider working to ensure that there are plenty of spaces in which students can vent frustration and ask introductory questions.

A Threat To Momentum

On September 17, 2012, a group of social justice-oriented students held an informal meeting where suspicion and opposition towards the open letter was voiced. The organizers of the meeting were supportive of the administration and expressed the opinion that the letter made unreasonable demands and took an inappropriate and confrontational tone. Thankfully, several NLG members attended the meeting.

Two distinct viewpoints emerged. Students who had attended the LSA “brown bag” meeting felt the letter appropriately expressed student concerns. Students who had not attended the brown bag—and who were surprised by the open letter—were more sympathetic to the pro-administration point of view. Opposition to the effort by social justice students didn’t last, but it was instructive. Absent their participation in the planning stages, even our social justice colleagues’ default position was to support the administration and to distrust the student government effort. It’s unclear whether the Deans approached these students or whether the students called the meeting on their own, but without such clear NLG support this brief division could have become a more significant schism in the student body.

Takeaways: If the administration at your school enjoys a lot of student goodwill, remember that even social justice students will not automatically trust or support a student effort to address the tuition crisis, especially if they weren’t involved in the planning stages.

Leadup to the Townhalls: Support and Preparation

On September 24, 2012, the same day as the NLG tuition meeting, our Dean announced two townhall forums, promised to supply budget information, and endorsed the formation of a student budget committee as requested by the LSA open letter. In the interim between the open letter and the townhalls, the Deans met with LSA members. These students reported feeling “under fire” during these meetings. Remember, many students drawn to student government aren’t accustomed to opposing the status quo or speaking truth to power. As NLG students, we can make a big difference by offering emotional and political support to our colleagues who may be feeling vulnerable or insecure in the face of administration pushback during organizing efforts.

Townhall meetings on tuition provide a valuable opportunity for your NLG chapter to use its skills and perspective. Your members are likely some of the most experienced and passionate organizers on campus; meanwhile most law students have never organized or even participated in a movement for social change. Townhall meetings give your chapter an urgent reason to mobilize attendance, create educational materials, and spread a message of optimism and empowerment. At no point during the UC Davis effort was there more solidarity, focus, and optimism around tuition issues than in the lead-up to the first townhall.

While our chapter worked to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the townhall, we did some things well and we could have done other things better. Our plan included hosting two “tuition think tanks” to develop digestible tuition information to ensure our student body was informed and engaged with the issue in advance of the townhalls. Aside from heavily promoting attendance at the townhalls as an obligation for all Guild members, we sent emails to other student orgs asking them for firm commitments on how many members they planned to send. We also planned a Facebook “did you know” tuition information campaign in the days leading up to the townhall and we engaged in face-to-face recruitment in the halls the morning of the townhalls. We didn’t accomplish all our goals, notably the tuition think tanks suffered from lack of advanced planning, but our efforts made a difference.

Takeaways: Townhall meetings are a great recruitment opportunity! Use upcoming townhalls as a chance to talk with as many students as possible about the tuition issue. If you want to generate digestible information or recruitment materials prior to the townhalls, do as much in advance as you can to make sure time spent in any kind of workgroup is productive and doesn't only provide another space for venting frustration. And don't forget that experienced NLG activists can provide important emotional and political support to students who aren't as experienced challenging authority figures.

The Townhall Meetings

The first townhall took place on October 2, 2012, and approximately 200 students attended, making it one of the best-attended student events of the year. The Deans used the occasion to announce a proposal to raise our fees by 5%, rather than the planned 9%. While the Deans expressed sympathy for our concerns, they largely advanced an "it isn't our fault" narrative. Increasing fees were blamed primarily on cuts in state funding rather than on increased expenditures. Increased student services (clinics, academic success services, increased career services) were cited for the proposition that "students are demanding more from modern law schools." While *US News*-driven spending increases on faculty or merit based aid was not, to my memory, explicitly stated as a reason for perpetual fee increases. The Deans did not consent to having the townhalls recorded. Students didn't challenge the Deans on the issue of filming the townhalls

The second tuition townhall was held on October 9, 2014, and allowed more time for question and answer. Although NLG members asked some important questions, we likely could have done more to take advantage of this opportunity to hold the administration accountable. Even though we were happy with attendance at the townhall, in hindsight we should have done more to organize students to get informed on the issue and we should have developed and circulated more questions to be asked at the townhalls. While a focus on recruiting attendance for townhalls may be advisable, don't assume that your colleagues will be taking time from their studies to get informed on tuition and law school budgets. The easier you make it for them to become engaged in the issue, the better.

Takeaways: It's good to focus on recruiting attendance for Townhalls. But don't forget that most law students don't have a good working knowledge on why tuition is so high or why their massive tuition doesn't correlate to increased educational value. If you can, provide background materials and develop questions in advance.

The Formation of the Budget Policy Committee and Moving Forward

Our efforts got results: a proposal to scale back tuition increases, the circulation of budget info that students previously never had access to, the administration's promise to work with a student budget committee, the announcement of a faculty-hiring freeze, and the chance to question the Deans in two townhall forums.

Unfortunately, determined activism diminished in the wake of the two townhall forums. Student energy was diverted. Rather than continuing to challenge the administration, students focused on deciding the contours of our newly-won, permanent student budget committee with the expectation that it would direct future efforts. Find the UC Davis NLG proposal for the Budget Policy Committee in the [appendix](#).

Takeaways: At UC Davis, students formed a permanent student committee that has access to tuition and budget information and that is responsible for spreading tuition information to the student body. While this addresses the challenge of quick student turnover inherent in any student organizing effort, it can result in decreased urgency to address the problem. And once the students on the committee accept the administration’s point of view, they can serve as a stumbling block to further organizing. If you form such a committee at your school, make sure your chapter is committed to staying involved in the committee year after year. And don’t let the formation of a committee distract you from ongoing activism aimed at tuition reduction.

Continued Activism

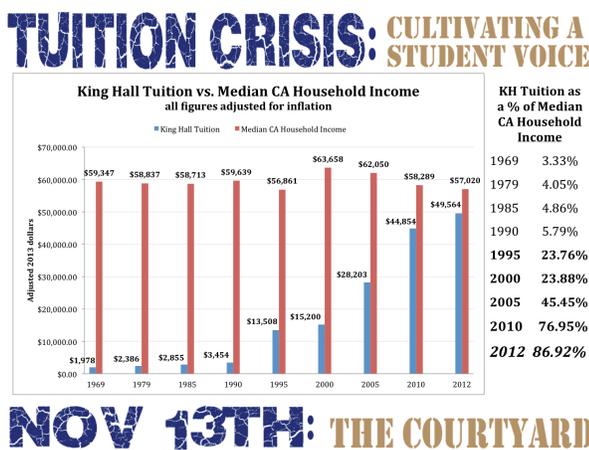
With the start of the 2013-2014 school year, students continued organizing around tuition at UC Davis. Our efforts included hosting an all-day tuition event in November, planning tuition crisis presentations at regional NLG events, weekly meetings, involvement in the Budget Policy Committee, continued outreach to the student body, continued research and writing on the tuition crisis, outreach to students at other law schools, faculty outreach, and other activities.

TUITION CRISIS:
CULTIVATING A STUDENT VOICE
NOV 13TH
THE COURTYARD

NOON RALLY
 Featuring recent alum discussing their experience with law school debt.

HOURLY THEMED DISCUSSIONS
FREE COFFEE AT 10 AM AND HOURLY EVENTS
 Check back for hourly events throughout the day, covering a variety of topics including the US News rankings, dealing with debt, Tuition Crisis 101, and more.

DRINKS AND DISCUSSIONS
5 PM - 7 PM
 A chance for King Hall students to share and discuss what you learned throughout the day.



However, for a variety of reasons the effort was less successful than the previous year’s effort. The all-day event was not as heavily attended as it needed to be. Neither the student government nor the Budget Policy Committee were as willing to confront the administration as they previously had been. In fact, at some key moments, those groups opposed continued calls for tuition reform. And the lack of an impending tuition increase decreased students’ sense of urgency overall.

Subsequent to the November event, our efforts slowed. Low attendance at many of our events, including the November event, made us question whether we were directing our efforts wisely. Myself and others allowed ourselves to become discouraged with our lack of progress and distracted by our other responsibilities. But, even though we weren't getting the results we wanted, we were still regularly engaging students, faculty, and the administration on the tuition issue. And we ensured that 1Ls, who were not present for the 2012-2013 organizing, were exposed to tuition activism early on.

In hindsight, efforts during the 2013-2014 school year were lacking in two main ways. We should have focused less on "event promotion" and more on grassroots organizing. And we should have included direct action and other forms of confrontational activism in our efforts.

We focused on promoting our big November event, while we should have focused on organizing attendance and participation in it. We contacted, and re-contacted, every student org and encouraged them to endorse and promote the event. We posted lots of flyers. We promoted heavily on Facebook. We asked the student president and the BPC to send out emails to the entire student body encouraging people to attend. What we failed to do was grassroots organizing. We didn't have a list of people who we personally solicited commitments to attend from. We didn't make any confirmation calls. Folks knew a big event was happening, and they were talking about tuition around campus, but not enough folks felt personally committed to attending and taking part. We promoted; we didn't really organize. And because of that mistake we didn't get the results we wanted.

Our efforts also lacked confrontational activism. We were attempting to build a coalition of law students in order to pressure the administration and we were worried that confrontational tactics would cost us too much support among students who were uncomfortable with activism. Looking back, the students who were uncomfortable with activism didn't help us anyway. And we missed many opportunities to meaningfully pressure the administration. Further, it's not unlikely that direct action would have energized the effort and improved recruitment.

Takeaways: Don't become complacent and substitute event promotion for organizing. Organizing is harder than promotion, but it's much more meaningful and will more reliably produce results. And beware foregoing direct action and other confrontational tactics in order to court a broader coalition of students. You may discover that your effort ends up enjoying broad "support," but lacks energy, urgency, and broad participation. But remember, your effort doesn't have to be perfect. Even our less successful 2013-2014 efforts kept students involved and placed some pressure on the administration.

Other Ways To Address the Tuition Crisis

There is no single way to address the tuition crisis. At UC Davis, open letters, student mobilization, townhall forums, and the formation of budget policy committees netted promising results. But our effort was lacking in direct action. And we allowed ourselves to believe that we were free to disengage once we delegated responsibility to a Budget Policy Committee. Here are some ideas for other ways to address the tuition crisis:

Protest, Demonstrate, Take Direct Action!

Demonstrations and direct action were absent from the UC Davis effort. But countless examples from history illustrate the power of demonstration, protest, and direct action. Some of your colleagues may be initially uncomfortable with the idea, but there's little doubt that walkouts, protests, and the like will force administrators and faculty to think more carefully about tuition issues. And direct action aimed at disrupting symposia, student recruitment, or alumni events will place pressure on the administration to concede to your demands for lower tuition. As is always the case with protest and direct action, be thoughtful in considering the risks. But remember that your power is yours to give away.

Work Regionally and Nationally!

As the tuition crisis is a nationwide problem, efforts at coordinating efforts nationally (or at least regionally) will likely make a bigger impact on more tuition decision makers than would efforts at individual schools. As an added benefit, a concerted effort aimed at coordinating actions across campuses will encourage student resistance to spread!

Get Information!

The tuition crisis is built on a series of lies. Lies about increased expenditures increasing education value. Lies about the need for ever-larger faculty to create more and more legal research. Lies about job opportunities after law school. Lies about tuition increases going to make up for decreasing state contributions. Challenge these lies. If you attend a public school, you may be able to use public records requests to gain information. Consider requesting information about the history of state funding to your law school, the growth of faculty since 1990 (dawn of the US News era), average class size since 1990, scholarly output since 1990, yearly total expenditures, etc.

Whether you attend private or public school, you can always exert pressure on administrators to release information with the threat of protests, disruption, and public relations campaigns. And remember that refusals to provide information are great organizing opportunities as even conservative students may become indignant when the administration outright refuses to release information.

Talk to your faculty!

While law school faculty have been some of the greatest beneficiaries of the tuition crisis, they can also be allies in this effort. Faculty routinely work together to place pressure on administrators for higher pay, more time for research, the preservation of academic freedom, and other issues which directly impact their employment. Subsequent to the 2012-2013 effort, we engaged in faculty

outreach on this issue. We were surprised to learn that many faculty are as uninformed on the roots of the tuition crisis as students are!

It would be beneficial if, when advocating for their interests, faculty had a deeper appreciation for the devastating impact of the tuition crisis on students. Don't underestimate the impact of one of their students speaking frankly about the impact of the tuition crisis on student lives. We need to change the attitude in the legal academy towards law school tuition. Sharing articles with them on the tuition crisis can be a good way to initiate conversation. Find good articles to share in "Understanding the Law School Tuition Crisis" in this manual! And the NLG Faculty Network can help you find sympathetic Guild scholars and professors who can assist your organizing efforts!

Alumni can help!

Because of the rapid escalation of law school tuition, most alumni don't realize just how high law school tuition is today. While schools routinely solicit alumni for their support, most alumni haven't heard about the tuition crisis from a student perspective. As alumni are an important constituency at any law school, recruiting alumni to pressure the administration to lower tuition can be an effective way to exert pressure. And after you've graduated, make sure to support students and pressure your school to lower tuition

Present at Conferences!

Legal and legal education conferences take place regularly and are a way to raise awareness about this issue. Organize a discussion at a conference or convention for any organization you are a part of and contact conference organizers for other organizations to see if you can discuss the law school tuition crisis from a student perspective. Propose panels on tuition hikes and student organizing at NLG regional and national conventions!

Lobby Legislators!

If you attend a public school, consider discussing the law school tuition crisis with your legislators. Many legislators went to law school, and most don't realize how out of control the tuition crisis is. Nor do they realize how much state and student money goes to fund *US News*-incentivized expenditures which have very little connection to instructing students. Administrators of public schools will likely encourage you to simply ask for more state money for law schools. But state money without pressures to reform are likely to be dedicated to more *US News*-incentivized expenditures, rather than to tuition discounts. When talking to legislators, remember that you aren't just advocating for your school, you are advocating for your fellow students and for an end to the tuition crisis!

Don't Give Up!

Law school can keep you busy. There is always another deadline around the corner. But don't give up. As long as you make sure that some tuition organizing, any tuition organizing, is taking place on a weekly basis at your school, you are exerting pressure. Remember the stakes. The future of the legal profession hangs in the balance. Do your best!

NLG Proposal for a UC Davis Student Budget Policy Committee

Mission

1. Primary Goal
 - a. To serve as the student voice regarding budgetary concerns in order to apply pressure to the Dean's Office and the greater UC system to bring down professional fees.
2. Student Body Outreach
 - a. Educate the student body through a lunch meeting on budget issues at least twice a semester
 - b. Solicit input from the student body through townhall style meetings at least twice a semester
 - c. Prepare a presentation for orientation week for 1L's that explains the budget process from a student perspective
 - i. Inform incoming 1L's of the purpose of the committee, how they can get involved, and why such a new committee matters here at Davis and within the broader context of the UC law school system
 - ii. Articulate the concern that tuition matters because high tuitions limit career choice upon graduation due to high levels of debt
3. Information Gathering and Analysis
 - a. Responsible for acquiring all documents related to the budget situation
 - b. Maintain a website that allows access to the documents by the student population
 - c. Create summaries of relevant documents for faster comprehension by students
4. Working with the Administration
 - a. Monthly meetings with the Deans to discuss student concerns and remain informed about the Deans' vision of the school
5. Community outreach
 - a. Network with other UC schools to build state-wide coalition regarding budget
 - b. Provide best practices to other schools
 - c. Determine as needed outreach to media in order to inform the broader community about tuition control efforts

Structure

1. Qualifications
 - a. Persons running should have a strong commitment to budget issues
 - b. Demonstrate a desire to participate in the committee for all three years to maximize the continuation of institutional knowledge

2. Five Voting members
 - a. Numbers
 1. One of these 3Ls is the Chair of the committee
 - b. Responsibility
 - i. Makes the final decision about what policies the committee should adopt
 - ii. Primarily responsible for the analysis and synthesis of the budget documents
3. Three Non-voting members
 - a. Numbers
 - i. 2 1Ls, 1 2L
 - b. Responsibility
 - i. Primarily responsible for organizing the student body
 - ii. Set up the meetings with student body and deans
 - iii. Analogous to outreach, publicity, and secretary positions

Selection

1. The five voting members will be elected positions
 - a. Each class votes for its class level representative
2. The three non-voting members will be selected by the elected officials through an application process.
3. Thus, the five voting members should be elected at the end of the school year (with the exception of the 1L rep) with the three non-voting members selected at the beginning of the subsequent school year.

The idea is that non-voting members will eventually become the voting members of the higher classes, thus carrying institutional knowledge from year to year.

The Law School Tuition Crisis

Tuition: Then and Now

Law School tuition has skyrocketed since the dawn of the US News era (1990). To put the current tuition crisis in perspective:

Law School Tuition - 2013

Average Public School tuition today....**\$23,214**
 Average Private School tuition today...**\$40,634**
 Average CA tuition today.....**\$45,583**
 Average UC tuition today.....**\$47,557**

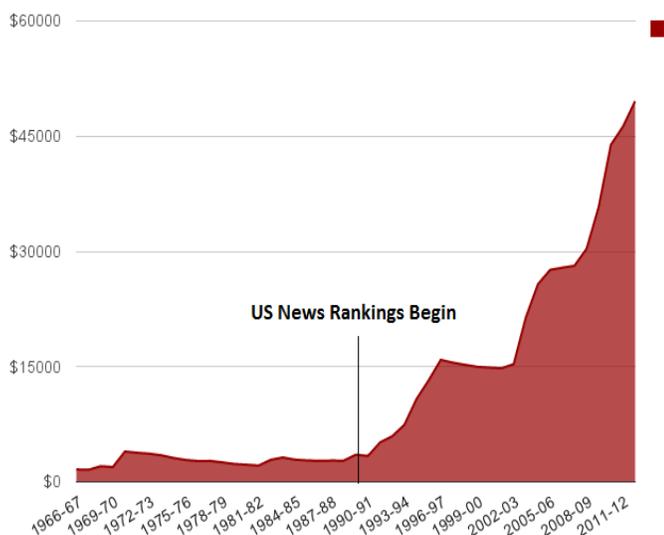
Law School Tuition in 1985 (Pre-US News)

All figures adjusted for inflation!!!

1985 Avg Public School Tuition**\$4,339**
 1985 Avg Private School Tuition.....**\$16,281**
 1985 UC Davis Law Tuition.....**\$2,793**

“Legal education today is very similar to that which I received in the mid-1970s, and I would guess that the legal education that I received in the mid-1970s is much like those in the mid-1930s.” – Irwin Chemerinsky, Dean of UC Irvine Law (\$47,308/yr tuition)

UC Davis Law Tuition: a case study



2000: 15.2 to 1; Rank #41; \$14,873 (adjusted)
2013: 11.1 to 1; Rank #38; \$49,564

Faculty Expenditures: Then and Now

While there may be other factors (accreditation standards, loan availability, state budget cuts, misleading “average salaries” creating demand, etc), more student money is funding legal research than ever before:

Estimated Total # of Law Review articles published in 1990: 4,255

Estimated Total # of Law Review articles published in 2010: 9,856

Historical Student-to-Faculty Ratio (schools with 500-699 students)

1980 - 26.4 to 1
 1990 - 24.4 to 1
 2000 - 16.9 to 1
2010 - 14.5 to 1

“From 1998 until 2008, the number of law faculty at 195 ABA-accredited law schools grew from 12,200 to 17,080 - a 40 percent increase....This increase in staffing accounts for 48 percent of the tuition increase from 1998 to 2008, the study shows.” – National Jurist Magazine, March 9, 2010

Are all Faculty expenditures “instructional”?

“[The focus on rankings] leads to: reducing teaching loads to free time for scholars to write (and thereby requiring larger faculties or more adjunct hiring); hiring faculty who have interests that may be provocative, press-worthy, or attractive to university press and law review editors (and paying them premium salaries or giving them reduced teaching loads); encouraging faculty to travel (and supporting it generously); and promoting faculty to appear on television, write editorials, participate in national law reform or other social movements (with appropriate support and staff assistance).” – Richard Matasar, Former Dean of New York Law School

Law Student Average Debt

These are the latest Law School Debt figures, but tuition has already increased significantly!

2011-12 Avg. Pub. School Debt.....**\$84,600**
2011-12 Avg. Private School Debt...**\$122,158**

Salary req'd to service \$84k debt..... **\$119,185**
Salary req'd to service \$122k debt... **\$172,098**

How do US News Rankings work?

Is this a student-based model of rankings?

The Prestige Ranking: 40%

Reputation survey to select Deans and Law Faculty on 1-5 scale.....25%
Reputation survey to State A.G's, BigLaw hiring partners, and Judges on 1-5 scale...15%

Selectivity in Admissions: 25%

Median LSAT.....12.5%
Median GPA.....10%
School Acceptance Rate.....2.5%

Student Outputs: 20%

Employment at Graduation.....4%
Employment 9 months post-grad.....14%
Bar Passage Rate.....2%

Faculty Resources: 15%

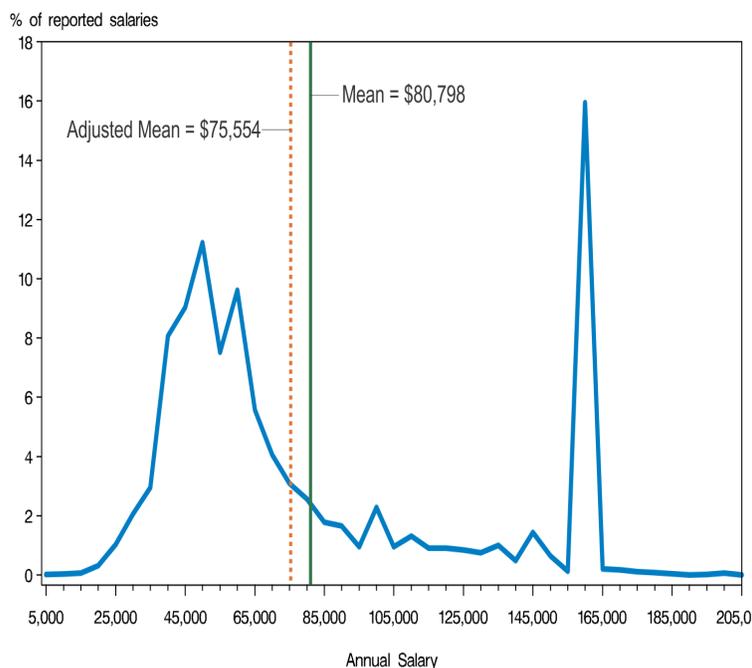
Expenditures-per-student.....11.25%
Student-to-Faculty ratio.....3%
Total library resources......75%

Law Student Starting Salary Data

On average we (conservatively) need to make between \$119k-\$172k to service our debt, but what are we actually making?

Median Salary for 2012 grad.....\$61,254
51% of grads make between.....\$40-65k
16% of grads (BigLaw).....\$160,000

Schools advertise high “average” salaries, but very few students make those salaries. Salaries aren't distributed along a bell curve, rather it's more like a two-humped camel!



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Ideas to Start Organizing!

Hold Townhall meetings to discuss the Tuition crisis/ US News rankings with your classmates

Use articles to discuss the Tuition Crisis with Professors to build urgency in the movement

Lobby legislators for action

Stage walkouts, protests, or other demonstrations

Leverage Student Government to campaign for a “Student Budget Committee” which can review Law School financials and have a voice in future budget and tuition decisions

Reach out to alumni for allies who can exert pressure on the administration

What ideas do you have?