

New York University withholds completed dental degree, student facing deportation

By Sam Dalton
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A recently graduated New York University (NYU) dental student in the school's College of Dentistry is having her degree withheld in a dispute over unpaid tuition. The student is an international student of Libyan nationality and has been an NYU student since 2012. She received other degrees from NYU before beginning the Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree that the university is now withholding.

Due to the outbreak of civil war in Libya and the pandemic, she has been unable to pay \$167,306 in outstanding tuition and fees. Acting more like a corporation rather than a center of learning, on this basis NYU is refusing to bestow an earned degree on the student. She is currently unable to receive funds or contact her family due to the civil war, which has left her hometown without telephone or internet.

The student's ability to pay NYU is further complicated by her immigration status. Due to her Libyan citizenship, she is unable to find private loans or apply for financial aid. Without the degree the student cannot even begin the work that would allow her to pay off the amount owed to the university. The student had secured a postgraduate dental residency, but without the conferral of the degree she is unable to begin work. This further jeopardizes her residency rights in the US and leaves her facing deportation to a war-torn country.

The response of the GSOC-UAW 2110, which she has been a member as a graduate student, is most criminal. The union's only action has been to sponsor a GoFundMe for the student. Its reply combines equal parts of inaction and complicity in the university's continued predation on its students' finances.

The union's cynical demand that its members, fellow graduate student workers who live on poverty level wages, find nearly \$170,000, despite the

well-documented financial hardship of graduate students in the midst of a pandemic, was justified by quoting the following extract from its constitution, that, "it shall be the duty of each member to render aid and assistance to brother or sister members in cases of illness, death or distress." This is disingenuous and empty phrase-mongering.

In reality, far from allowing members to meaningfully support each other, the union caters to the demands of the university, which expects to receive the full \$167,306. Furthermore, the union fails to even question the legitimacy of exorbitant fees, threats to immigrant students, or the refusal to bestow an earned degree on the basis of financial difficulties.

The union's inaction follows its efforts to contain student anger with a phony three-day sick-out at the end of the Spring semester. Local 2110's inaction is only the latest incident in decades of working class betrayals by the UAW, which has culminated in a multimillion dollar corruption scandal in recent months.

This incident comes in the context of widening attacks on students and educators by universities and the ruling class as a whole. This includes an increasing criminalization of poverty amongst students, in a process where elite universities have become the reserve of the multimillionaires and billionaires of the financial aristocracy.

In line with colleges internationally, NYU's fees continue to skyrocket after years of increases. For the four-year DDS program undertaken by the student in question, those who began the course in 2019 annually funnel \$95,968 to the university. This breaks down into \$82,008 for tuition, \$3,348 for "fees", \$6,180 for equipment costs, and \$4,432 for health insurance. Above these expenses, students must secure housing

and food, which in one of the world's most expensive cities often amounts to further tens of thousands of dollars per year.

Despite its \$4.2 billion endowment, the university evicted thousands of students from residence halls with just 36-hours' notice in March in the midst of the pandemic. This left many students, particularly the most financially vulnerable, facing homelessness or a return to overcrowded family homes.

Last week, the Columbia University college newspaper reported that graduate students who were unable to pay rent in college housing during the pandemic are being barred from registering for classes this semester. Missing registration is potentially ruinous for graduate students, who risk losing their health care coverage and, if they are not US citizens, their legal immigration status.

Across the US there is now over \$1.6 trillion in student debt. While fees across higher education have been rising exponentially in recent years, homelessness and food insecurity amongst students have also increased. As the incidents at NYU and Columbia have shown, the pandemic is only intensifying these issues across college campuses.

While repression is being carried out against all students, the Trump administration, with the complicity of the Democrats, is waging an ongoing assault on the rights of over one million international students in the country, many of whom endure poverty conditions for the opportunity to study in the US. As part of the growing bipartisan anti-China campaign, Chinese graduate students have been targeted.

Following an ICE ruling that left international students facing deportation, NYU was one of the universities to back a university-led lawsuit that disputed the ruling. The lawsuit failed to defend students' rights, instead focusing on the administrative aspects of the Trump administration's ruling. The criminal nature of the universities' limited defense of international students is exemplified by NYU, which prides itself on being "home to the highest number of international students in the United States," consciously placing a recent graduate at risk of deportation to a warzone.

In reality, NYU's loyalty is first to the very same forces in American society that have brought death, destruction and poverty to the Libyan people. The

university boasts deep ties to US imperialism, particularly to the military and state agencies. With this in mind, its treatment of this Libyan student is wholly in line with the university's orientation to the interests of the financial elite and US imperialism.

The case of this student, undoubtedly one of scores of similar such incidences across the country, underlines the futility of any defense of students' rights outside of an assault on the capitalist system. Acting increasingly like corporations, universities only care for the well-being of students as it correlates to the size of their wallets.

The interests of the ruling class run contrary not only to the right to high-quality education but also the lives of students and their families. Ultimately, it is Wall Street, which is demanding the return to the extraction of value from the working class, that is driving colleges and schools around the country to deadly reopenings.

Without the mobilization of the power of graduate student workers, in conjunction with the wider working class, across the country and internationally, thousands of students will be robbed of their degrees, livelihoods and their lives. The UAW's neglect of workers and student workers shows that in this struggle students and educators must form rank-and-file committees at universities and workplaces independently of these corrupt unions.

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