

the FEDERALIST

Congratulations, Student Protesters, You Just Got Used

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Heavily publicized student protests over alleged “systemic racism” at Yale, the University of Missouri, and Claremont-McKenna College have touched off a nationwide movement, with students at other schools eager to get into the action by issuing their own demands.

These have helpfully been collected together at a website called The Demands. The students’ list of all the things they want the world to provide them with drones on and on, but Walter Olson has already posted a preliminary summary, focusing on how the demands amount to a full-scale assault on freedom of speech.

But Olson made one comment in passing that caught my attention: “more jobs and a bigger and more entrenched establishment promoting diversity within the academy were among the most consistent demands.”

So I took a look for myself, and the more you read through the students’ demands, the more they look curiously like a full-employment program for the faculty who just happen to be egging on these naive youngsters.

A key theme in the demands is the creation of new posts in the university for jobs that consist of promoting a leftist agenda. Students at Brandeis demand, among other new positions, a “Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion.” Boston College protesters demand that the school “appoint a diversity officer at every college” and “increase recruitment and retention of students, faculty, staff, board of trustee members of color, international status, and female and/or gender nonconforming.”

Students at Guilford College, in addition to proposing show trials in which “every week a faculty member come forward and publicly admit their participation in racism inside the classroom”—Mao Zedong, please call your office—also demand “the creation of a sovereign Office of Diversity and Inclusion to enforce these demands and keep the administration accountable—

these tasks should not solely be carried out through the unpaid labor of students and faculty of color.”

That last point—getting paid by the university to engage in leftist political activism—is an important running theme in these demands. Brown University students demand “that the university support monetarily and otherwise departments and centers committed to social justice, as evidenced through anti-oppressive pedagogy.... Anti-oppression trainings should be led and organized by people of color with significant experience in anti-oppression activism or scholarship. Furthermore, those leading these efforts should be compensated and acknowledged for their labor.”

Yale Students frankly ask for “an increase of two million dollars to the current annual operational budget for each cultural center,” and money for “five full-time staff members in each of the cultural centers.”

At Brandeis, a demand for more minority faculty members is specifically targeted at the departments of anthropology, history, fine arts, sociology, and theater. One wonders how many employees of these departments are involved in the campus protest movement.

Or consider the very specific demands at Dartmouth.

Convert the African and African American Studies (AAAS), Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies (LALACS), and Native American Studies (NAS) programs into departments in order to provide curricular autonomy.

Give each department an increased budget and the authority for hiring more faculty (esp. tenure-track faculty).

Increase each departments’ budgets to fund student research. Incorporate into each department at least one queer studies class.

Increase the number of AAAS, LALACS, and NAS post-doctoral fellows.

Establish an Asian American Studies department with the above privileges.

Now isn’t that a wish list any academic department would slaver over?

Oh, but it’s not just the expansion of their own departments that they want. At Mizzou, the demands call for “funding, resources, and personnel for the social justice centers on campus for the purpose of hiring additional professionals, particularly those of color.” But they also demand “that the University of Missouri creates and enforces comprehensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum throughout all campus departments and units, mandatory for all students, faculty, staff and administration. This curriculum must be vetted, maintained, and overseen by a board comprised of students, staff, and faculty of color.”

So the various ethnic studies departments get to colonize every other department.

We can find the distilled essence of these demands in a single paragraph from the student demands at Brown University. It's long and unwieldy, but I wanted you to get a sense of the bludgeoning repetition of this idea.

We demand an increase in faculty of color hires and retention. The current plan to double faculty of color is insufficient due to the dearth of tenured faculty of color, as well as the countless faculty of color who have left Brown due to a lack of competitive pay.... We demand that the Corporation of Brown University fund tenure-track hiring lines for specialty positions in each department across disciplines, and the continued cluster hires of junior faculty of color as done in the Departments of American Studies and History. By "specialty positions" we are referring to the deliberate hiring of faculty who work on critical issues related to social justice such as topics on race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class as they pertain to specific disciplines. Furthermore, we would like the instantiation of hiring committees that would ensure Brown offers competitive salaries to top faculty of color working in the aforementioned areas. In accordance with this demand, we implore Brown's administration—with the inclusion of undergraduate and graduate students of color—to create an external board tasked with the responsibility of reviewing each department's progress in hiring, retaining, offering competitive salaries, and creating opportunities for advancement for faculty of color who work on social justice issues.

Boy, the phrase "competitive salaries" comes up an awful lot in there, did you notice? This reads less like a manifesto of student revolutionaries, and more like a particularly aggressive salary negotiation. But this is not about higher pay for all faculty members. Notice in the middle the emphasis on "specialty positions," we are defined as "faculty who work on critical issues related to social justice." So it's a special sinecure for those with the correct political agenda.

There is a lot going on in these demands, including an attempt to turn universities into organs of leftist indoctrination, with all opposing viewpoints rigorously purged. (The Dartmouth demands include a provision specifically targeting the school's conservative student newspaper, the Dartmouth Review, while Boston College protesters demands that their school "Reform Pedagogy & Curriculum to Reduce Eurocentric Focus and Address Racism and diversity in the classroom." So much for "academic freedom.")

But underneath the creepy totalitarianism, there is a more mundane and practical purpose. Once you're attuned to it, it's hard not to be struck by how much of this agenda consists of commanding universities to hire a specific group of people: the professional campus "diversity" activists. Universities are exhorted to hire them, promote them, increase their budgets, pay them more, and create new offices for them with new powers.

And who do you suppose is supporting and encouraging the campus protests? Who taught them the ideas they are using, and who is egging them on? The very same faculty and administrators for whom the protesters are demanding more money and power.

Everyone who has ever spent time around a university or with academics knows that beneath all the high-flown ivory tower stuff, there is a constant scramble for money and authority. Every department's job is to expand itself, to hire more faculty and administrators, to expand its budget, to get bigger offices in a nicer building. Now the "social justice" faction among the faculty has found a way to club everyone else into submission and win departmental office politics once and for all. Accuse the university of systemic racism, force its nominal leaders into groveling apologies, and then dictate terms to the rest of the system. Emboldened and seeing that no one wants to stand up to them, they're even attempting to take over every other department of the university by foisting mandatory courses in "social justice" on the math department.

So what looks from the outside like a student protest movement looks on the inside like an administrative coup by a small faction of the faculty, using naive and ill-informed students as their shock troops. No wonder marginal faculty members are climbing on the bandwagon and signing up to muscle out reporters and guide the young protesters. They hope to ride this to higher-paid, more secure, more powerful positions.

This also gives us an answer to the question of what will happen when the student protesters leave the coddled confines of the university and go out into a world where everyone will not walk on eggshells around them. The answer is that some of them never intend to leave. They hope to occupy some of those faculty and administrative offices and to be campus protesters forever—but with salaries and benefits provided by the very institutions they protest.

As for all of the other students, including the many who declare (sincerely or out of fear) that they are sympathetic to the goals of the protesters, you might notice that it doesn't benefit them at all. They are the ones whose education will be watered down with tedious mandatory indoctrination sessions and who will have to spend four years of their lives living in fear of making the wrong move and offending the wrong people.

They might want to consider the way in which they are being exploited for the institutional interests of a very few people, who feed them a lot of high-minded guff about "systemic racism" while angling for bigger offices and cushier salaries.

I'm not sure they'll pay much attention to that now. Being 19 years old, they are likely too absorbed in their own personal dramas, particularly those in which they can imagine themselves as the heroes. But later on, they might consider how much of their crucial educational years were diverted into a cause that mostly benefited the elders who were egging them on.

If they can figure that out, it just might count as a whole different kind of education. Just because you get to go to a fancy college doesn't mean you avoid the School of Hard Knocks.