

Challenging the Law School Tuition Crisis with Information Requests!

You can challenge the Law School Tuition Crisis at your school! Your activism can stop tuition increases and win tuition rollbacks! The first step is getting the right information!

Why Start with Information Requests?

The Law School Tuition Crisis isn't well understood by students and faculty. Detailed information about the tuition crisis at your school will help you make the case that change is possible.

Law Schools are currently relying on perpetual fee increases in order to finance ever-increasing expenditures aimed at increasing their "prestige" and improving their rank in the US News Rankings. The US News rankings don't prioritize students. Thus, a large part of those expenditures only impact educational quality tangentially.

Law schools tend to obscure this reality. For example, schools have consistently increased faculty. Schools tout this as a benefit to students. After all, additional faculty means lowered student-to-faculty ratios. But lower student-to-faculty ratios don't mean lower class sizes if professors are given smaller teaching loads and more research sabbaticals. Information requests can clarify whether increased faculties have resulted in more classes or smaller class sizes at your school.

Most students don't know why fees are increasing, what the money is spent on, or the fact that tuition can be cut without negatively impacting educational quality. A great first step to challenging the Law School Tuition Crisis at your school is to gain the information you need!

Public or Private Law School?

If you go to a public school: Most states have "Freedom of Information" laws. Those laws may entitle you to information about your school. Filing statutory information requests can be a great way to get the information you need. They will also give you experience with a tool that may be helpful in your career as an attorney! Find information about various state freedom of information laws here:

<http://www.nfoic.org/state-freedom-of-information-laws>

If you go to a private school: Although you can't rely on freedom of information laws, don't despair! You should absolutely request any and all information that you need. Publicizing your request may incentivize administration disclosure. And it's always important to follow up regularly. Don't forget that information requests can be a great organizing tool! Even politically moderate and conservative students may become indignant and willing to take action when a school is refusing to provide information in response to reasonable information requests.

And regardless of whether your school is public or private, look around your school's website—it may have more information on it than you think!



What Kind of Information Should You Request?

Students need to know that their ever-increasing tuition dollars are going to finance unprecedented amounts of legal research and more professors and deans than ever before. Your requests should be aimed at creating a historical record of the tuition crisis at your school. You want to know how much tuition has gone up, how much expenditures have gone up, and what those increased expenditures have funded. Some specific suggestions are below.

Consider making all requests cover the last 15 years, the period in which the bulk of tuition and expenditure increases have taken place.

You may want to request:

- Yearly total expenditures.
- Yearly cost of attendance.
- Total number of Professors employed each semester (including adjunct and teaching deans).
- Yearly salary information for every Professor and Dean.
- The amount of credit hours taught per semester by each Professor (to see if Professors are enjoying shrinking teaching loads).
- Total class offerings each semester.
- Total students enrolled in each class (in order to calculate average class size, which you can then compare with student-to-faculty ratio).
- Planning Documents such as “5 year Academic Plans” or planning documents containing a school’s approach to the US News Rankings (which may detail a school’s intent to enact drastic tuition hikes in order to increase faculty).
- Any ABA-mandated “self-study” reports.
- Annual total number of scholarly articles published by faculty (to illustrate that additional tuition dollars are financing increased output of articles rather than increased educational quality).
- What ideas do you have?

With that kind of information, you’ll be able to “connect the dots” by creating info sheets, charts, and other resources to show your classmates that drastic increases in tuition have gone to finance ever-expanding faculties which tend to teach less and research more. While legal research is valuable, it isn’t valuable enough to justify sentencing a generation of attorneys to a lifetime of exorbitant debt!

Conclusion

Knowing how much tuition has increased, how rapidly tuition has increased, and what those increases have funded, will give you the information you need to make the case for tuition cuts and a re-prioritization of student interests at your law school. If your school refuses to provide information, don’t give up, organize! Publicize their refusal and keep on asking for the information you need!

For more information or to share your results, contact NLG Research and Education Director Traci Yoder at traci@nlg.org.

