

Students March for “Occupy Education”

- [Multimedia](#)
- [News](#)

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333

By Henry Miller and Kareem Samuels.

On March 1, roughly 1,000 New York City college students took part in an “Occupy Education” protest against the rising cost and current state of American education — the most significant action taken by the Occupy movement in New York this year after a largely dormant winter.



Students rally on the steps of the Board of Education building in Manhattan. By Simone Egipciaco

Protesters gathered at the New York City Department of Education's Chambers Street headquarters at 2 p.m., before crossing the Brooklyn Bridge and walking two miles to hold a rally at the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument in Fort Greene Park.

"The state of education in this country is horrible right now," said Gabriella Pelsinger, a Columbia University student. "The fact that education is inaccessible to so many people sets off a snowball effect on a lot of other societal problems."

As they marched, passing drivers honked their horns in support of the protesters. Over a dozen NYPD scooters and squad cars guarded the perimeter of the march.

Demonstrators passed through MetroTech Commons in Downtown Brooklyn, where actor and activist [Reverend Billy](#) performed a "student debt exorcism." Dozens of students huddled together, wearing t-shirts with painted zeroes symbolizing the roughly \$1 trillion of nationwide student debt currently outstanding. The protesters then ripped the shirts off their backs and declared themselves free of financial burden.

Economic activist Christopher Cocuccio expressed concerns over Student Loan Asset-Backed Securities, or [SLABS](#), which enable trades of student loans — including those yet to be paid off — across Wall Street's trading floors.

"They are packaged up just like the mortgages were," Cocuccio said. "A good chunk of them are federally backed, so it's like [the banks] have already had a bailout."

While the winter weather put many outdoor Occupy Wall Street-related events on hold, those involved with the movement say they've spent that time prioritizing their causes. And as spring approaches, they expect that active support for widespread national issues like student debt relief will resume.

“The winter was a time to address the issues that unite us,” said Alejandro, a protester who chose not to give his last name. “At the beginning, there was a lot of support but little in common in views from one protester to the next.”

Protesters said that even if the cold weather doesn’t abate soon, they’ll continue organizing New York’s student activists toward social justice.

“I want to build a student movement where we can demand that we don’t have anymore tuition hikes,” Ralfo Ortiz, a junior at Queens College, said. “We want a working chance for a better future.”