

Dear Dean,

The educational product you currently offer is misleading, and it's having a toxic effect on our culture in the form of debt.

Your university's degrees feed on artists' aspirations and promise a return of professional advancements such as high-end sales, prestigious galleries and academic careers. Yet these opportunities rest in increasingly fewer hands, and the mechanisms of privilege are ignored. The 99% of us either balk at the financial risk of pursuing higher art education, or will spend our entire lives struggling to pay off our loans. We are forced to push our art practice aside to work long hours at unsatisfying jobs that enable us to keep pace with climbing interest payments. This system resembles indentured servitude where the few capitalize on the labor of the many. But models do exist where the value of culture is shared.

Occupy Museums has launched DebtFair, a series of experimental market-actions to address the debt crisis in the arts. DebtFair encourages solidarity rather than competition among artists. It asks participating artists to be transparent about their debt and economic reality, and asks collectors to help sustain culture rather than use it as a tool for speculation. We need models like DebtFair to heal the untenable situation caused by your institutions.

Why are we, as cultural producers, encouraged to contribute to a luxury market for the few at the expense of the many? How could our nation spend more money per year on prisons than on education? What kind of culture are we building for the future?

These are not abstract questions. Tomorrow, Congress will attempt a "fix" to prevent a doubling of student loan interest rates. While students are praying that their rates remain at 3.4%, big banks continue to borrow from our government at 0.75%. The toxic equation of a doubling of interest rates will allow them to steal \$37 billion annually from students. But even if the doubling is prevented, the status quo is a crisis for artists and for art education.

We are reaching out to you as a potential ally. You, as [TITLE] of [SCHOOL] are inseparable from this crisis and can be instrumental to its resolution. Ignoring this problem is no longer an option. We invite you to support realistic alternatives. We are calling on you to:

1. Begin a process of transparency in your art institution: educate your students about the realities of debt, and disclose the relationships between your board members and predatory lenders.
2. Encourage your president and board to freeze tuition rates.
3. Lend your support to DebtFair (www.debtfair.org) which aims to bail your students out of debt and attend the meetup and discussion at Abrons Art Center in New York in early August. You will be receiving an additional invitation about this event. Your presence will help to initiate a mutual aid movement to bail artists out of debt.

Enough is enough. We need a cultural bailout in the face of a student debt crisis.

Sincerely,

Occupy Museums