International students are unfairly denied financial aid awards at Tufts

by MARC CARRIE

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Today’s boycott of classes and rally at Ballou Hall address the students’ concern about possible cuts in financial aid. This concern is justified, and we fully support it. But we would like to take the opportunity to bring up an issue of which very few people are aware or sensitive to, and which is related to this matter.

Tufts’s policy of need-blind admission is not extended to international students. All international students in need of financial aid are strongly discouraged from applying, and will ultimately be denied acceptance. This means that those foreign students who do get accepted here either have the resources to attend or have families who are willing to sacrifice many years of their income to give their children an opportunity to study at a liberal arts university, an institution unique to America.

Currently, there are 175 international students here at Tufts. According to William Eastwood, director of financial aid, “only two or three international upperclassmen receive approximately between $3,000 and $4,000 in financial support.” But it should be emphasized that this only applies to upper-class students.

We know a Caribbean freshman who is being forced to transfer to a less expensive school. He has gotten into financial troubles due to a combination of the normal increases in tuition, and the bad luck of a hurricane back home, which has depleted his family’s source of income. This can happen to virtually any international student. Similar cases have occurred in the past, and can be documented properly.

Our main concern lies with the fact that with this current policy Tufts can only attract those affluent enough to afford a four-year education totalling (not including travel expenses) close to a $100,000. We realize that American students are faced with similar situations. However, as long as financial aid is available they have a secured place. It is our sense that international students are being used to generate income, without the ‘normal’ concern for diversity. If diversity means attracting people from many cultures and giving those people an opportunity to interact with each other, then the Tufts community should make an effort to lure those foreign students who are unable to support themselves financially at Tufts.

Tufts does make an effort to enhance the stay of international students. There is a very active and supportive International Center, which organizes an International orientation together with the International Club. However, beyond this, the Administration and the Tufts Community Union Senate do not seem very concerned about the international element of the student body. Previous efforts to get direct international student participation in the Senate have failed. This is in part due to the fact that many international students come from backgrounds where initiative is not appreciated or permitted. This is also the reason why, in the past, international students have not felt compelled to make this an issue.

We would like to stress that with the current situation, much more can be done to take advantage of the international students’ abilities. This is a very sophisticated group. Many of the international students have lived in different countries and speak more than one language. Much of that potential is untapped, though the annual Intercultural Week, held in the last week of February, gives an opportunity to raise intercultural awareness.

We realize that the fiscal situation at Tufts is such that expansion in financial aid is difficult. We also realize that many non-international students are concerned with their own well being and future here at Tufts as well. We believe, however, that the income generated through the international students’ fees would be sufficient to start up at least one international student scholarship. We would like to point to other institutions where prudent efforts have been made to get a more heterogeneous international student population. At Brandeis eight to 10 full scholarships are available to international students. Furthermore, 40 to 50 students receive some extent of financial aid.

Ideally, we will grow into a situation where foreign students are accepted according to their ability--regardless of their purse size. But in the meantime, we would be very pleased if students and administrators gave some attention to this issue and started a process to resolve it.

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