

American Student Energy ~Tuition Fees~

American Student Energy or Attitude Towards

Social Things which They Disagree with.

~Focusing on Tuition Fees~

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Introduction

Last year, 30,000 students gathered in Berkeley's Sprawl Plaza to protest the latest tuition fees increase. In the past 25 years tuition costs have risen 439%, whereas people's incomes rose just 127%. As a Japanese student it is amazing to me that Americans have such passion for social change and do not hesitate to voice their opinions. I wonder, are all American students like this? Is it really so common to participate in such demonstrations? And if it is true, how were these characters made in US? With this paper, I will try to answer these questions and find out more about American passion for voicing their opinions, especially dissenting voices.

University Tuition Fees in the U.S.

University tuition fees in the U.S. are extremely more expensive than those of other countries. Pamela N. Marcucci and D. Bruce Johnstone* (2007) show the average tuition fees for college freshman. While it is about \$4,500 in Japan, it is about \$12,400 in the U.S. Added to that, the report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education shows, although median family income increased by only 147% from 1982 to 2007, college costs increased 439%. Since 1990s' tuition has increased by 5~10% every year. (Inflation was not considered). (LEWIN, 2008, College May Become

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Unaffordable For Most in U.S., *The New York Times*, December 3). In 2007-2008, this net-cost* accounted for 55% of median income of lowest class family, which had increased by 16% from 1999-2000. (*Net-cost: tuition plus room and board minus school aid). In his article, Patric M. Callan, the president of the center said, "In the next 25-years, the school system will become unaffordable because of the high tuition fees".

As a result, there are a growing number of financially stressed students becoming hungry and even homeless. Hillard reported about two UCLA students; one student has been rotating his house at library, his friend's couches and Student Activity Center. Another student made a "Food Closet" which stocks donated foods or small goods for poor students. Michelle Asha, Cooper of the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington D.C. says, "Some are taking out pretty large amounts of student loans to finance their education as well as their living costs. Some are enrolling part-time, some are even dropping out." (Gillard, 2010, College Students hide hunger, homelessness, *National Public Radio*, July 27). In the US, 2 of 3 students took a school expenses loan, and the amount of loans is about \$9 hundred million. Also, the number of nonperforming school expense loans is 5 million and amount of that is \$4 hundred million (Tsutumi, 2010, *Hinkon Taikoku Amerika*, P48-P53).

Student Protests

U.S. students have made protests against expensive tuitions many times. In 2009, a huge student protest happened at U.C. Berkley. They protested against a 32% increase in tuition fees. When the regents voted to raise undergraduate fees to \$10,302 from \$7,788 this year, protesters put a five-foot mound of trash bags outside California Hall, Berkeley's administration building. Students occupied buildings at U.C. Santa Cruz and Berkeley. Hundreds of students protested outside, and some of them shouted "Fee hike! We strike!" According to Claire Holmes, a Berkeley spokeswoman, there were about 500 student participants in the protests across campus, and they became defiant and explosive in mood as the hours went by. At the U. C. Davis campus, 52 people were arrested because they refused to leave the main administration building. And next day, 75 to 100 students occupied Dutton Hall. Also, at UCLA, students occupied Campbell Hall. (Wollan and Lewin, 2009, Student Protest Tuition Increases, *The New York Times*, Nonember 20)

Recently, other student protests also happened across California at universities in March 2010. Thousands of participants including students, parents and faculty members protested against cuts in state financing for education. It was called "Strike and day of action to defend public education". Protesters said they would continue to

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claim with more demonstrations. But there were some students who are skeptical about that they can sway state leaders by their activities. Maura Geiszler, 22, a senior studying music at San Francisco State said, “We’ve had tons of protests here, and it doesn’t do much. All they’ve (university) got to do is turn off the news.” (Mckinly, 2010, California Students Protest Education Cuts, *The New York Times*, March 4).

Survey

I collected answers to discover student motivation/interest in protesting fee hikes from 10 UC Berkeley students and 10 Stanford University students. Most students think their tuition fees are Expensive or Too Expensive. (Q2). Some students pay some amount of the money, but most students pay little by themselves. The tuition fees are met by parent supports, scholarships or school expense loans. (Q3).

Here are differences we can observe between Berkeley students and Stanford students. First, while almost all Stanford students do not have an experience to join student protests, half of the Berkeley students answered that they have joined 1-3 times to protest for tuition increases. (Q4). (See Graph 1). Even though, secondly, the percentage increase in tuition for Stanford students to protest is less than that for Berkeley students. (Q5). Third, many Stanford students answered the main reason to

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join protests is just “to know about student fees more deeply”. On the other hand, many Berkeley students chose “because they want to protest, even if their friends are not there” as the main reason. (Q6). (See Graph 2). From (Q5) and (Q6), we can say that Stanford students would also join a protest, but the reason is fairly different from Berkeley and it is a much less aggressive one.

The explanation for these differences are clear; while a lot of student protests have been made at Berkeley, it never happened at Stanford. The parents of Stanford students are basically rich. Students whose families’ income is low hardly enter this university given the expensive tuition fees. Stanford University also has large scholarships. According to Tsutsumi (2010), in 2006, Stanford University earned the highest amount of donations in the history of US Universities; \$9 hundred million. The students may have more chance to get more scholarships. On the other hands, public schools, such as Berkeley, accept students who have low income as long as they are smart. There are relatively more poor students at Berkeley. They are more sensitive to tuition increases. Also, Berkeley has historical tradition to make student protests. As a result, they have more opportunities or incentive to join protests, and they are more passionate towards this topic. It is shown in Q6.

Regardless of their major, almost all American students think expressing their

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opinion is Extremely important or Very important. (Q7). It can be said that such culture is one of the reasons to explain why many student protests have happened in the US. They are used to having a voice and it will cause big movements such as demonstrations.

However, suprisingly, most of them do not think they can change the school or tuition fees drastically by their protests. As we can see in Geiszler's interview, they know the difficulty of swaying the decision by their school or state. The students who have joined protests realistically estimate the effects and expect some change happen. (Q8).

Conclusion

There are a lot of student protests in US, especially in California. Certainly, it is not necessarily common to participate in such demonstrations. It depends on the environment the students live in. (financial condition, university, etc...). Also, even participants do not think they could expect drastic improvements by their protests. However, all American students think it is really important to voice their opinion. This thought has created a tradition that American students try to struggle with public decisions or policies they do not agree with.

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Appendix

Survey Sheet

Please circle or write your answer to these questions.

Q1. a. Your Sex Male / Female

b. Your Age _____

c. Are you college student? Yes / No

d. Are you overseas student? Yes / No

e. Your major _____

Q2. What do you think about your tuition fee? (Including College Costs)

1	2	3	4	5
Don't care	Cheap	Acceptable	Expensive	Too Expensive

Q3. How much do you pay yourself? (Beside your parents)

1	2	3	4	5
0~10%	10~20%	30~40%	50~60%	70%~100%

Q4. How many times have you ever joined students protest for tuition fees?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1~3 times	4~6 times	6~9times	10 times~

Q5. If tuition fees increased by more some percent, at how many percent you would start to protest?

1	2	3	4	5
0~5%	5~10%	10%~20%	20~30%	30% or greater

Q6. Which is the main reason to join these protests?

1. To watch other student's protests
2. To know about tuition fees more deeply
3. Because your friends join it.
4. Because you want to protest, even if your friends are not there.
5. Because you want to lead the protest.
6. Other _____

Q7. Do you think expressing your opinion to society is important?

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly important	Important	very important	Extremely important

Q8. How much do you think you can change school or tuition fees by student protests?

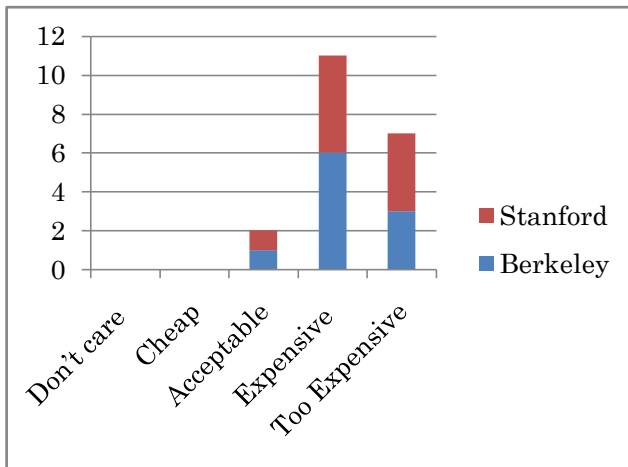
1	2	3	4	5
Nothing	a little bit	some	a lot	Drastically

Q9. Any other comments

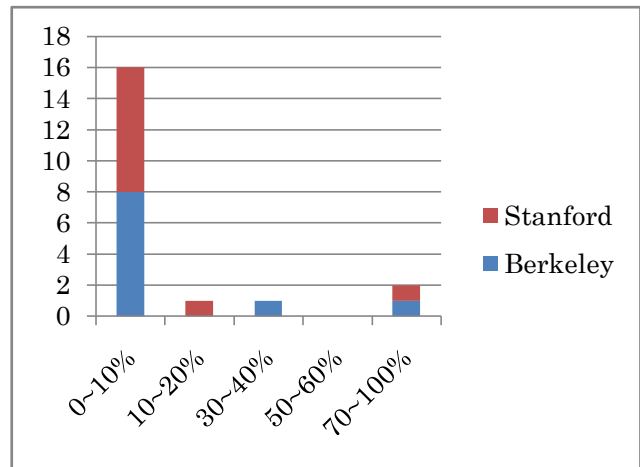
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Graphs from Survey Results

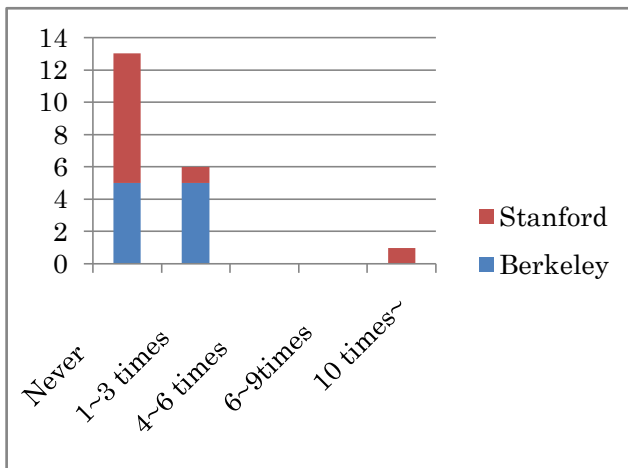
Q2. What do you think about your tuition fee?



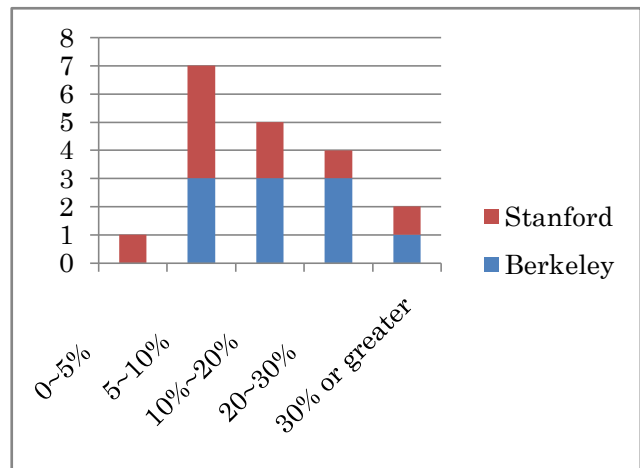
Q3. How much do you pay yourself?



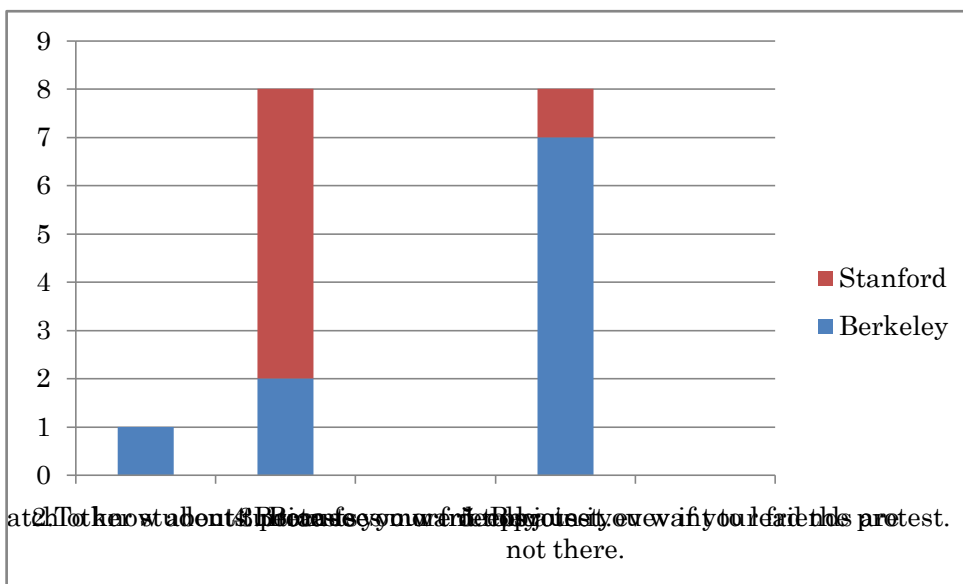
Q4. How many times have you ever joined student protest for tuition fees? (Graph1)



Q5. If tuition fees increased by more some percent, at how many percent you would start to protest?

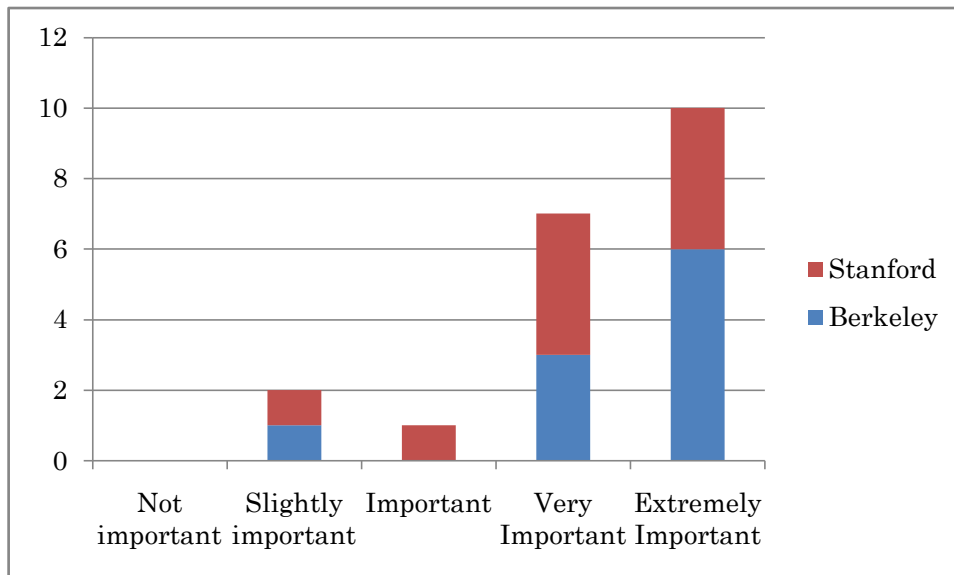


Q6. Which is the main reason to join these protests? (Graph2)

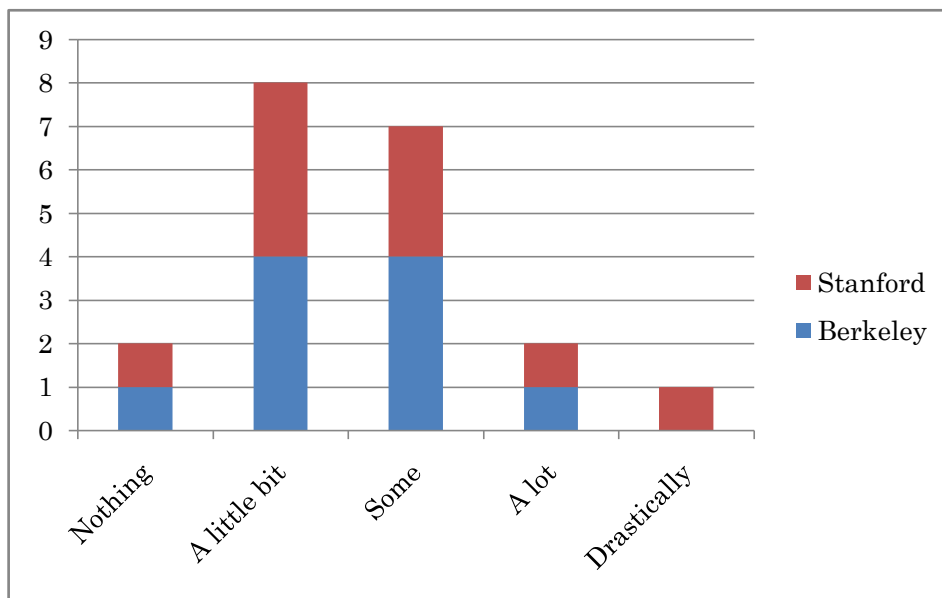


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Q7. Do you think expressing your opinion to society is important?



Q8. How much do you think you can change school or tuition fees by student protests?



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