



The Week of Student Sit-Ins

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A sit-in at the DC office of Xavier Becerra. (Photo: CIYJA)

Last spring, *The Nation* launched its biweekly student movement dispatch. As part of the *StudentNation* blog, each dispatch hosts first-person updates on youth organizing—from established student unions, to emerging national networks, to ad hoc campaigns that don't yet have a name. For recent dispatches, check out [January 27](#), [February 10](#), [February 26](#), [March 7](#), [March 21](#) and [April 8](#). For an archive of earlier editions, see the [New Year's dispatch](#).

Contact studentmovement@thenation.com with any questions, tips or proposals. Edited by James Cersonsky (@cersonsky).

1. As Congress Sits, LA Youth Storm the Capitol

This month, affiliates of the [California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance](#), including the [Orange County Dream Team](#) and the [National Queer Trans Latino@ Alliance](#), rallied in DC as members sat down, and were arrested, at the congressional offices of Loretta Sanchez and Xavier Becerra. We entered with letters outlining demands that both leaders, as member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, make use of their political power to ask president Obama to stop all deportations by expanding deferred action for all. As a member of the NQTLA, I also advocated for [members of the LGBTQ community](#) who are in the process of

deportation—for some, a death sentence in their countries of origin. Locally, we will continue organizing through [#not1more](#) and [#migrantlivesmatter](#), while demanding Sanchez’s public support.

—*Luis Ramirez*

2. As Obama Talks Civil Rights, Students Rail on Hypocrisy

On April 10, as President Obama gave the keynote speech at the University of Texas–Austin’s annual Civil Rights Summit, the [University Leadership Initiative](#), a [United We Dream](#) affiliate, organized more than 100 students and community members to gather in solidarity with the immigrant community. The group called out Obama, whose administration has overseen record deportations, for his hypocrisy in speaking on civil rights. Three leaders separated from the rally and moved toward the LBJ Library with the intention of delivering this message to the president. As guards told us that we were not allowed to continue, [we peacefully sat at their feet](#), the crowd began sharing stories about family separation and we were arrested. Along with another ULI representative, the three of us had [spent the previous night chained to the Martin Luther King Jr. statue](#) on campus to stand with King’s dream.

—*Emily Freeman, Alejandra Gomez and Patrick Fierro*

3. EMU v. the Emergency State

In the summer of 2011, Eastern Michigan University president Sue Martin, at the behest of the university’s unelected regents, [secretly signed into existence](#) the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan, the receiver and privatizing agent of Detroit’s “lowest-performing” public schools. The EAA has fired school employees [en masse](#), subjected them to at-will contracts and stripped [working-class communities of color](#) of their democratic powers. On April 14, as part of a now five-month escalation plan, the [Coalition of People Against the EAA](#), composed of students, faculty and residents, launched a [sit-in in at the president’s office](#), demanding that Martin remove her signature from the agreement. Thus far, the sit-in has been the site of a noise jam, teach-ins and a concert by DC punk artist [Spoonboy](#). Our organizing will not cease until the [inter-local agreement](#) that created the EAA is dissolved.

—*Coalition of People Against the EAA and Students For an Ethical and Participatory Education*

4. USC v. the Retail Empire

For eight months, [students from the University of Southern California](#) have been calling on the university to terminate its contract with JanSport, whose parent company, VF Corporation, is responsible for the [deaths of twenty-nine Bangladeshi garment workers](#) and displays a [continuous disregard](#) for worker safety. [Sixteen other universities](#) have already cut ties with VF Corporation but USC’s administration has firmly refused to change course. On April 15, [eighteen students occupied President Max Nikias’s office](#) in protest of this decision, while a group of 100 students rallied outside. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue with students, administrators [called protesters’ parents, threatening expulsion and revocation of scholarships](#). After four hours, we marched out of the building, vowing to continue our fight.

—*Student Coalition Against Labor Exploitation, USAS Local 13*

5. Wash U v. Peabody Coal

Students at Washington University in St. Louis are entering the third week of a sit-in at our admissions office to pressure Chancellor Wrighton to sever ties with Peabody Coal. [Peabody CEO Greg Boyce](#) sits on the Wash U board of trustees, and in 2009, Peabody donated \$5 million to launch the school's "Consortium for Clean Coal Utilization." We believe that the school's close relationship with Peabody legitimizes its practices—which include [contributing to climate change](#), [exploiting workers](#) and [relocating indigenous Navajo and Hopi people at Black Mesa, Arizona](#). The occupation, which began on April 8, comes on the heels of the [student-led Fossil Fuel Divestment Convergence](#) at San Francisco State University, which brought together 200 student leaders from over 100 campuses nationwide.

—*Leslie Salisbury and Brendan Ziebarth*

6. #StandWithMonica

Since a [wrongful arrest in May 2013](#), students at Arizona State University have been rallying to support the [Sex Workers Outreach Project of Phoenix](#) in demanding justice for [Monica Jones](#), a student at the ASU School of Social Work and trans rights activist who was profiled by the police during a prostitution diversion program called [Project Rose](#). Run by the School of Social Work in collaboration with the Phoenix Police Department, Project Rose creates a [coercive environment](#) by forcing those arrested to choose between a lengthy diversion program or a potential criminal record. ASU students have worked with SWOP Phoenix to gather [hundreds of petition signatures](#) demanding that the charges against Jones be dropped and Project Rose end its association with ASU. As Jones's case moves forward, we will continue supporting the call to action put forth by SWOP Phoenix to stop profiling trans women of color and decriminalize sex work.

—*ASU Students With SWOP Phoenix*

7. #JusticeForCecily

On April 11, the trial of graduate student Cecily McMillan began in New York City criminal court. McMillan is facing seven years [for felony assault](#) of a police officer. Her supporters say that it was she who was [sexually assaulted](#) and brutally beaten into a seizure. The Justice for Cecily Team, activists from diverse backgrounds, ideologies and groups, including [Occupy Wall Street](#) and student organizers, is running court support—from [social media](#) and press outreach to fundraising and community events. The team has curated a [website](#), [Celly](#) and [ongoing event page](#) for supporters to stay [up-to-date](#) as McMillan's trial goes into its third week. Our overarching aim is to pack the courts with press and supporters to draw attention to this case and the underlying issues of [police brutality](#), [sexual assault](#) and [civil rights infringement](#) that are [common practices](#) in the NYPD.

—*Justice for Cecily Team*

8. On Day of Silence, GSA Leader Stays Locked Up

Gay-Straight Alliance and immigrant youth activists have united behind [GSA Network](#) alum Yordy Cancino and all undocumented youth seeking asylum. Yordy, who worked to transform school culture in Los Angeles as GSA president at Animo Jackie Robinson High School, has been held in an ICE detention facility in San Diego since mid-March and faced a judge and potential deportation on GLSEN's [Day of Silence](#). More than 1,000 GSA leaders and alumni answered the call to action, contacting ICE and [signing the #GSAs4Justice](#) petition to free Yordy and all youth in detention. After several excuses from ICE, Yordy is still being detained.

—*Mario Vasquez*

9. With TRUST Act in Hand, Orange County Youth Blitz ICE

On April 7, Kareli Barrera was arrested by the Los Angeles sheriff's department. After seeing a judge, she was set to be released, but the department held her to allow ICE to pick her up. While Barrera's charges are not listed as crimes for which detention is authorized, on April 14, the department transferred her to ICE—a violation of California's TRUST Act. Since then, Resistencia, Autonomia, Igualdad, lideraZgo, or RAIZ, the Orange County chapter of the Immigrant Youth Coalition, has bombarded ICE with calls and e-mails to demand it halt Barrera's deportation. While the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit eventually granted Barrera an emergency stay of removal, she is still in detention in Orange County. This fight builds on RAIZ's Keep Our Families Together campaign to end the police-ICE collaboration in Orange County and efforts resisting the high rates of undocumented referral to ICE by the Orange County Probation Department.

—RAIZ

10. Napolitano's Judgment Day

On April 9, 2014, a coalition of University of California–Berkeley law students, alumni and undergraduate students came together to protest Janet Napolitano's human rights violations, her appointment as UC president and her appearance as a judge in the law school's esteemed McBaine Moot Court Competition. Law students demanded her removal from the competition, which those responsible for the event rejected, insisting she contributed to "intellectual diversity." In response, a small group of law students of color organized a rally before the start of the competition, disseminated information and dropped a banner reading, "Berkeley Law Students say NO 2 Napolitano." Additionally, a group of five law students sat through the competition and disrupted Napolitano's concluding comments by revealing a banner and chanting, "No to Napolitano!"

—Monika Y. Langarica

11. Illinois's Coming Out

Throughout April, undocumented youth and allies held Coming Out of the Shadows actions across Illinois. At Chicago's Federal Plaza, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Illinois Institute of Technology, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Waubensee Community College in Aurora and Bensenville, the message was clear: deportations need to end, and our universities need to create financial and academic resources for undocumented students. Universities were asked to improve opportunities for undocumented students by opening up and recruiting funding for in-house scholarships, training university counselors on best practices, assisting with post-graduation job placement and taking public stances on immigration legislation and discrimination.

—Rigo Padilla

12. I, Too, Am CU

In March 2014, students across the University of Colorado–Boulder, inspired by the spread of the #TooAmHarvard campaign to other campuses, organized an I, Too, Am CU photoshoot and Tumblr. With Audre Lorde's quote, "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives," as a unifying theme, the campaign accrued more than thirty student statements and videos, as well as widespread staff support via #WeWorkatCU. I, Too, Am CU welcomes participation from anyone at CU who has experienced marginalization and institutional oppression on campus—from testimonies on in-class and peer-to-peer

discrimination, to talking back to Steven Hayward, after the conservative scholar made a series of inflammatory comments about CU students. Rather than representing a singular, or racialized, struggle, our campaign will continue to push for solidarity among marginalized groups.

—*Tamara Williams Van Horn*

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13. Restart OU

On April 17, a coalition of student activists won a majority of seats, and effective control, of the student government at Ohio University. Campaigning as “RESTART,” with the avowed intention of radically overhauling and democratizing student government, we began as an alliance of activists from a variety of student organizations connected to the Ohio University Student Union, which has been organizing around issues ranging from the school’s tuition hikes, to the university’s plan to build a \$90 million cogeneration gas plant, to the culture of rape around campus. We draw inspiration from the student movement continentally—including Montreal, where the transformation of student unionism led to a one-year strike. Moving forward, we intend to mobilize the student body around the need for a more affordable tuition model, build student associations in every department and ultimately replace the representative model of student government with a participatory one.

—*Ohio University Student Union*

14. Who Rules Northeastern?

For the past year, students at Northeastern University have been campaigning alongside adjunct faculty in their fight for a union. On April 16, the Empower Adjuncts Community Coalition, a group of students, workers and community allies organized by the United Students Against Sweatshops visited the deans of five colleges on campus. These visits were in response to e-mails with anti-union rhetoric sent by the deans to adjunct faculty. While students played noisemakers and ate pizza in the offices, the deans were told that pizza was only for those who did not attempt to interfere with the democratic process of unionization—a tongue-in-cheek warning that they will be held accountable for attempting to intimidate adjuncts as their voting period begins. After the delegations, Northeastern agreed to stop sending out anti-union e-mails.

—*Empower Adjuncts Community Coalition*

15. How to Stop Street Harassment?