

Rally at City College of San Francisco Turns Violent; Students Released From Jail

[KQED News Staff](#) | March 14, 2014



Police and students were involved in a dispute at CCSF following a rally about accreditation issues. (Alex Emslie/KQED)

Update Friday

Two City College of San Francisco students arrested yesterday at a chaotic protest against the state-imposed administration were released from jail this morning.

Labor studies major Otto Pippenger, 20, is charged with misdemeanor resisting arrest and battery on a peace officer, according to the San Francisco Sheriff's Department. Members of the [American Federation of Teachers Local 2121](#) and fellow students raised about \$1,600 to post his bail, said Pippenger's mother, Heidi Alletzhauser.

English major Dimitrious Philliou, 21, was cited and released early this morning for resisting arrest and "returning to school property," according to the sheriff's department.



A moment from the clash between students and police at City College March 13, 2014. (Alex Emslie/KQED)

About 200 students and teachers with the [Save CCSF Coalition](#) rallied yesterday afternoon at the school's main campus demanding the resignation of Special Trustee Robert Agrella, the reinstatement of City College's elected board of trustees, and an end to a new [payment policy](#) requiring class fees to be paid upfront, at the beginning of the semester. Agrella was made a special trustee with broad administrative powers after an [accreditation agency ruled](#) it would pull the school's accreditation. This would render the school ineligible to receive state funding and close the school.

"I think anytime there's any economic downturn, private forces try to sell our most important institutions for scrap," Pippenger said after returning home from jail this morning. "I'm committed to try to keep it open in the way that it has been. I'm a dedicated participant in the fight to save City College."

The two-[year battle](#) between City College and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges has drawn charges of conflict of interest in the private regulatory body, a state audit of the commission and three lawsuits, including one brought by the city of San Francisco. An [injunction granted in that case](#) put the school's closure on hold indefinitely.

But students and teachers with the Save CCSF Coalition say much of the damage is already done. The school [shed more than 5,000 students](#) since last year. Chairs of diversity-related departments, like African American or LGBT studies, say their departments are under siege as programs are being cut. In addition, [students who pay nonresident tuition, including noncitizen students, are angry about thousands of dollars in fees now being charged at the beginning of the semester.](#)

"Unfortunately, I was not able to register this semester," [Itzel Calvo said at yesterday's rally.](#) "I [pay out-of-state tuition because I'm undocumented,](#) and so for me that's about \$3,000 for only two classes." Calvo also said the school's payment plan requiring 20 percent down is also "completely unaffordable."

City College Chancellor Arthur Tyler said the college has an obligation to be stricter about collecting fees.

“We’ve instituted a payment plan to try to help students as much as we possibly can, but we’ve also got a fiscal crisis and I have a fiduciary responsibility to the state and to the taxpayers to ensure that we are collecting fees in a timely way.”

Protesters gathered yesterday afternoon and listened to students and teachers decry the policy and other changes imposed by Agrella, who replaced the elected board of trustees last summer by order of state Community Colleges Chancellor Brice Harris. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors Neighborhood Safety and Services Committee is considering a resolution today that would urge Harris to restore the elected Board of Trustees.

“From my perspective the board should have been restored months ago,” Supervisor David Campos said. “I came here as an undocumented student, to the U.S., and I think education is not a privilege, it’s a right. Part of that right is that you’re allowed to have a reasonable way of paying for something as basic as education, and the fact that they’re not giving these students that opportunity is actually shameful.”

Violence erupted yesterday after the crowd tried to get into City College’s main administration building at the Ocean campus in southern San Francisco. The protesters said they wanted to take their demands directly to Agrella and the school’s administration.



Police from the San Francisco and City College campus police departments block the majority of protesters from entering Conlan Hall after a rally calling for the resignation of special trustee Robert Agrella. (Alex Emslie/KQED)

Campus and San Francisco police blocked the entrance, but some students already inside the building opened two sets of doors in the front, and more than a dozen students pushed past campus Police Chief Andre Barnes and other officers. A melee ensued, and Peppinger was thrown to the ground face-down, with officers pulling his wrists behind his back to handcuff him. An SFPD officer punched Peppinger in the back of his head, bouncing his face off the concrete.

He disputes that he assaulted any officers or resisted arrest.

Pippenger's first appearance in San Francisco Superior Court is scheduled for Wednesday, his mother said.

Pippenger, who said he's an intern with the AFT 2121, the local teacher's union, said he attended the rally for five points of extra credit for a labor studies class. His instructor was one of the people who delivered his bail.

The second arrested student, Dimitrious Philliou, also said he was treated roughly by police.

"They threw me to the ground, choked me, twisted my arm, and maced me," he said while in custody from the back of an ambulance. "They pepper-sprayed me in the eyes for several seconds. The pain is still excruciating."

It's unclear whether Philliou was talking about San Francisco or campus police, which were both on the scene.

Philliou said he wants Agrella to have a face-to-face meeting with students.

City College student and Save CCSF organizer Eric Blanc stayed at a sit-in with about 12 students in the administration building overnight. He said many students cried and were very upset about the violent clash.

"I think it's shocking that this administration would incite police on peaceful protesters," he said. "The reason there was violence yesterday was there was a decision to bring in massive amounts of police and lock a public building. It shows that they're scared, the fact that they had to use excessive force against students, that our two demands are widely shared and this administration is increasingly isolated."

Chancellor Tyler said campus police had a responsibility to lock down the building to ensure the safety of students and staff inside.

"I'm never happy to see someone get hurt," he said. "There is always a challenge when people are exercising their rights. The idea of civil discourse starts with being civil."

Tyler said the inside of the building, Conlan Hall, is not one of the three designated free-speech zones on campus. He didn't think coming down from his office to address the protesters would have diffused the situation.

"I did have my staff down there talking to the crowd. That didn't seem to help," Tyler said. "I did have business that I had to conduct and continued to do so."

– Alex Emslie

Update: 5 p.m.

The Save CCSF Coalition has issued a statement saying that the students who entered the administrative building at the Ocean campus intend to continue their sit-in until Agrella steps down and the payment policy is reversed.

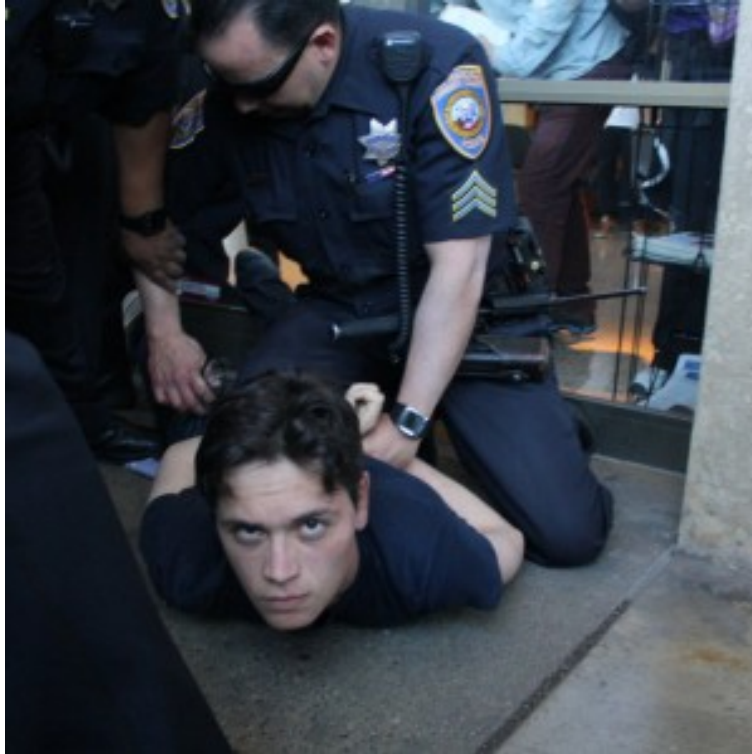
The statement reads: “The students are demanding that the Special Trustee With Extraordinary Powers (STWEP), Robert Agrella, step down. Ever since the democratically elected Board of Trustees were stripped of their powers students, faculty and staff have endured a series of destructive decisions and policies. One such policy the students are demanding be reversed is the aggressive payment policy that has forced many students out of school.”

Itzel Calvo, an undocumented student, is also quoted in the release explaining how the payment policy was hurtful to low-income and undocumented students. “I was not able to enroll in classes this semester unless I paid thousands of dollars in tuition up front, even before the classes started. I can’t afford that.”

Agrella and other school officials are expected at the Chinatown campus right now for a previously scheduled meeting on the controversial policies.

Update: 3:15 p.m.

Dimitrious Philliou, the student who was pepper-sprayed and arrested, spoke with KQED reporter Alex Emslie as he was in the back of an ambulance. According to Philliou, he was trying to enter the building “that is public for students” when he was stopped by officers during the scrum. After asking why he was being detained, he said that police pushed him to the ground and pepper-sprayed him in the eyes.



City College student Otto Pippenger is detained by SFPD officers outside an administration building. (Alex Emslie/KQED)

“It was extremely painful. The pain is still excruciating and they still aren’t giving me a reason for my arrest,” said Philliou, although he was told that he was being held for trespassing and resisting arrest. The officer in the ambulance confirmed that he was under arrest, but couldn’t confirm the charges.

The chief of campus police said it’s too early to know for sure, but it appears two students have been detained.

The students remaining in sit-ins both inside and outside the building have made two demands: the immediate resignation of special trustee Robert Agrella and ending the student payment plan, which requires that out-of-state students pay all tuition upfront at the beginning of the semester. This has been difficult for low-income students and undocumented students, who typically don’t have California residency and are considered out of state.

Haley Garabato, a San Francisco resident and student at CCSF, is one of about 18 students now inside the lobby of the building.

“I pushed my way through,” she said. She also reported seeing students being hit by batons and that officers, at one point, arrived on the scene in full riot gear.

The students, who have been inside the building for nearly an hour and a half now, are making posters with slogans on them and snacking on whatever food they have in their bags, said

Garabato. There are no serious injuries among the group inside and they intend to stay there “all night if we have to,” she said, until their demands are met.

Original story:

A rally at City College of San Francisco turned violent this afternoon when protesters attempted to enter the school’s administration building, Conlan Hall, to present a petition to special trustee Robert Agrella calling for his resignation.

According to KQED reporter Alex Emslie, who was on campus covering the rally organized by the [Save CCSF Coalition](#), the event became chaotic around 1:30 p.m. when students and teachers tried to enter Conlan Hall. Campus police blocked the entrances to the building, said Emslie, forcing the 250 or so marchers to circle the building looking for an open door. Protesters eventually pushed aside San Francisco Community College Police Chief Andre Barnes and forced their way inside.

At that point, said Emslie, “it was a melee.”

Campus police were promptly joined by officers from the San Francisco Police Department, who attempted to physically stop the protesters from entering the building. According to Emslie, batons were used to push back the crowd, and there was at least one detention of a student. Emslie said that while that student was being held on the ground in the process of being detained, he was hit by an officer, slamming his head into the concrete.

AFT Local 2121 President and CCSF English teacher Alisa Messer also reported a student being pepper-sprayed and receiving medical attention. “This has never happened at City College,” said Messer of the physical altercation with police.

There has been no official word on the number of detainees or any charges that may be brought.

Currently, a relative standoff has been reached, with about a dozen students inside the lobby of the administration building conducting a sit-in and the remainder of the protesters holding a sit-in outside the building. There are approximately 20 officers outside, monitoring the crowd, and about that many inside, said Emslie, but the administration has said it is going to release the SFPD officers and continue to oversee the scene with just CCSF officers.

San Francisco Supervisor David Campos, who was scheduled to hold a symposium this evening on the CCSF accreditation issues, arrived after the incident and helped to negotiate with both Barnes and school officials. Campos has introduced a resolution calling for the restoration of the City College Board of Trustees and is holding a hearing on the issue at City Hall on Friday.

The negotiated standoff will allow the students, both inside and outside, to continue their peaceful sit-ins, but no one else will be allowed to enter the building.

The group was protesting the scope of powers of [Agrella](#), who was appointed after [CCSF lost its accreditation last summer](#). Last July, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors

stripped the elected City College Board of Trustees of its powers after the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges announced that the school would have its accreditation revoked because of financial and governance issues. The board of governors replaced the trustees with Agrella, who has unilateral power over decisions on the school's rules and regulations. Many of the changes Agrella has made, particularly salary increases for administration and a student payment plan, have come under criticism by staff and students.

A separate rally had previously been planned for 4:15 p.m. today at City College's Chinatown campus, followed by a 5 p.m. forum on the school's master plan for the next five years. It is unclear how those events will continue in light of the afternoon's demonstration. This story will be updated with more information as it arrives.

<http://blogs.kqed.org/newsfix/2014/03/13/ccsf-protest-violent>