

**From:** [Ashley, Garrett P.](#)  
**To:** [White, Timothy](#); [Nakai, Karen](#); [Jones, Andrew](#); [Relyea, Steven](#); [Blanchard, Loren](#); [Nazario, Evelyn](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: WSJ story on tuition refunds  
**Date:** Friday, April 10, 2020 8:37:21 AM

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Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Uhlenkamp, Michael" <muhlenkamp@calstate.edu>  
**Date:** April 10, 2020 at 8:33:10 AM PDT  
**To:** "Ashley, Garrett P." <gashley@calstate.edu>  
**Subject:** WSJ story on tuition refunds

## College Students Demand Coronavirus Refunds

Online classes fail to give them the in-person experience promised, students say

Students filed lawsuits this week against Drexel University and the University of Miami in an effort to recover spring tuition, room and board and fees after their campuses closed and their classes moved online.

The suits, which aim to be class actions, allege the schools are failing to give them the educational experience they paid for, one with in-person instruction.

Total cost to attend either the University of Miami or Drexel exceeds \$70,000 a year.

Both schools said they hadn't reviewed the lawsuits and declined to comment.

Schools around the country have been moving classes online to adhere to social-distancing regimens to try to stop the spread of the new coronavirus. Some schools prorated rebates for room and board, but very few—if any—

have [reimbursed students for tuition](#).

That policy has prompted widespread discontent. Students at about 200 schools have started petitions demanding the return of money.

Attorneys who represent universities say schools refusing to reimburse tuition is rooted in firm legal ground: By continuing to hold classes for credit remotely, they are fulfilling the terms of their contract.

“The students are going to have an uphill battle unless a school has actually shut down and they’re not getting credit,” said James Keller, co-chair of the higher-education practice at Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP in Philadelphia, where Drexel is. “The basic contractual agreement is, I pay tuition, and if I satisfy academic requirements, you give me credit. That’s still happening.”

Students have a broader interpretation about what their tuition money buys them. There are nearly 200 petitions signed by tens of thousands of students on the website Change.org. Most ask for some or all of the money back, citing the high cost of college and the inferior education they now think they are getting.

The petition about St. John’s University in New York City is typical. “With the recent record increase in unemployment, it is unreasonable for a non-profit organization to cash in on education they are no longer adequately providing,” the petition says. It asks for reimbursements for tuition and room and board.

“Some of the classes are a joke,” said Paul Deutschmann, a student at St. John’s, referring to online instruction. “You’re pretty much teaching yourself from a textbook.”

St. John’s University didn’t return a call seeking comment.

Roy Willey, a lawyer at the Anastopoulos Law Firm in South Carolina, the firm that filed the cases against the University of Miami and Drexel, said the schools weren’t providing students with the experience they were promised.

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In addition to academics, tuition and fees cover face-to-face interaction with professors, mentors and peers; access to facilities such as computer labs and libraries; and extracurricular activities and networking opportunities, the suits allege.

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The suits pull quotes from the website of each school, which promote their residential experiences. From the suit against the University of Miami: “Living on campus opens a world of interaction with other students, faculty and staff members in many social, development and academic activities.”

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“The on-campus learning experience is very different than it is online; these student’s didn’t sign up to online colleges,” said Mr. Willey, who filed the cases.

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Last month, University of Miami President Julio Frenk announced the move to online classes in a video addressing students. He said the school held 1,300 training sessions over spring break for faculty to transfer classes online.

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“All this effort has paid off. This morning classes resume virtually, and I am happy to share that the transition, largely, has been a success,” Mr. Frenk said.

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Universities have incurred additional costs since the pandemic began, including the expense of moving classes online. They are absorbing revenue declines as they cancel summer programs and athletics. Schools are also girding for declining enrollment and revenue when school starts this fall.

FOURTH VIEW

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