

Brats protesting at the UC gates need to buck up

When the make-love-not-war generation finally got around to having kids, they were so proud of their accomplishment that they fawned over the little darlings and protectively adorned their minivans with yellow caution signs that warned of precious cargo: "Baby on Board."

Now, after many years of being told they were special and entitled to endless conveniences and a life without turmoil, the children are grown up. And the University of California system, which has recently endured student protests and arrests over a fee hike, has to contend with the byproduct: Brats at the Gates.

The protests erupted after UC regents voted to increase tuition by 32 percent to help close a \$535 million budget gap. University officials say the fee increase will raise \$505 million and prevent more cuts into student services.

Hundreds of students have turned out at campuses throughout the state. Fourteen students were arrested at UCLA, where the regents were meeting. Forty-one were arrested at UC Berkeley. More than 50 students were arrested at UC Davis, near Sacramento. And about 70 occupied a university building at UC Santa Cruz for three days, before finally evacuating when threatened with arrest. Officials say some of those students may still be arrested and charged with damaging university property.

The first phase of the fee increase, which takes effect in January, will raise tuition for the system's more than 170,000 undergraduates to \$8,373. The second phase kicks in during fall 2010, raising tuition to \$10,302. Graduate students will also be required to pay more. But university officials claim that students whose families make less than \$70,000 a year will have their tuition covered. UC officials also insist that a third of the income from the undergraduate fee hikes and half of the extra graduate fees would go toward funding more financial aid for needy students.

Still, there's no denying that a 32 percent fee increase is quite a shock, and that students have a right to be upset. After all, this

year, tuition and fees at four-year public universities around the country increased an average of 6.5 percent from the previous school year, according to the College Board.

Moreover, those of us who complain that the Twitter generation is apathetic should be encouraged that students finally awoke and took to the streets — for any cause at all.

And so the protesters might actually have come out of this looking good — if they had never opened their mouths. But they did, and some of what came out was ludicrous. The rest was downright offensive, especially when students broke out in choruses of "We Shall Overcome."

UC Irvine freshman Suzanne Kordi told the regents in public comment: "This isn't Wall Street, and the UC students are not here to bail you out. We're here to get an education. If these fee increases are approved, I will not be able to afford my education." UCLA law student Kenia Acevedo added: "Fees are going to be so high that people are not going to be able to attend this institution. It is a devastation to what is supposed to be a public institution." And Victor Sanchez, president of the UC Student Association, chimed in with this gem: "These proposals are egregious, to say the very least. The dreams of so many are being shattered as we speak."

That's what bothers me. These kids obviously can't take a punch. How are they supposed to compete one day — not just in the United States but also around the globe? Life is full of disappointments, challenges and setbacks. They had better get used to it. And yet there is all this talk about how students will have to drop out of school now that fees went up.

Have these young people never heard of a job? I don't suppose they have since the human-resource managers I know tell me that when they look at resumes for twentysomethings, they usually find very little work experience — summer jobs, after-school jobs, etc. Twenty years ago, when I was in college, I worked 20 hours a week in addition to going to class. Twenty years before that, my father obtained his bachelor's degree through night school while working a 40-hour week. Those stories aren't unusual. Plenty of other Americans have their own versions.

If attending college is a priority, then you do what you have to do. And if your dreams shatter so easily, then maybe they weren't that durable to begin with. So the loss was negligible.