

Robert F. Miranda, President of the student government at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, conducted a hunger strike this past fall to protest tuition increases. He vowed to consume only juice and water for 30 days or until the State met demands to stop raising tuition and to investigate why tuition raises exceeded the inflation rate. Tuition at his campus increased by 6.9% this year according to a spokesperson for the university system. It has increased by 65 per-cent since 1986-87. Mr. Miranda also says he hopes his protest will prevent the State from cutting the university system budget by 10% for the 1995-97 biennium, which he says would force another increase.

Is Mr. Miranda's hunger strike an ethically justifiable tactic of protest? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: Mr. Miranda's hunger strike was not ethically justifiable. A less extreme form of protest would have been ethically appropriate, but not a thirty day fast that could have posed significant health risk for Mr. Miranda. Even if the Wisconsin State legislature had been insufficiently attentive to the hardships borne by students as a result of tuition increases, Mr. Miranda's protest, symbolically expressing that hardship, was inappropriately disproportionate. The danger to which he exposed himself not only affected Mr. Miranda, but also everyone concerned about him which includes (probably) his parents, close friends, and many students, faculty, and staff at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

Case from the 1995 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.