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Four Tufts students, three union members arrested during protest

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HANDOUT

Tufts students and activists protested on Thursday.

By Travis Andersen

GLOBE STAFF MAY 01, 2015

Four Tufts University students and three activists affiliated with a janitors union that contracts with the college were arrested during a protest on Thursday, the union and a Somerville official said.

Eugenio H. Villasante, an official with the Service Employees International Union, which represents janitors at Tufts, said four students and three union members were arrested on College Avenue in Somerville after they blocked vehicular traffic during the demonstration.

Representatives for Tufts and Middlesex District Attorney Marian T. Ryan's office had no immediate comment on the incident.

"We have no details on reported arrested students or

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confirmation that anyone was booked,” Tufts spokeswoman Kim Thurler wrote in an e-mail.

Somerville police could not be reached for comment, but a spokeswoman for Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone confirmed that a “select number” of protesters were arrested without incident.

According to Villasante, the activists were protesting “a plan to reduce janitorial services” at Tufts, which he said would result in some custodians losing their jobs after being employed by the university for decades.

“It’s going to affect their lives, and it’s going to affect the quality of service at Tufts,” Villasante said in a phone interview.

He said the three union activists who were arrested do not work as janitors at the university. He could not say if the four Tufts students taken into custody were undergraduates or graduate students.

“This is not the way to treat communities,” Villasante said.

Working conditions at Tufts have grabbed headlines in recent months.

In February, full-time professors voted to unionize, after the SEIU had successfully organized part-time faculty at several Boston-area colleges.

“We’re hoping to have job security, better pay, and more of a voice, and the union, because of collective bargaining, gives us a strong voice,” Claire Schub, a French literature lecturer at Tufts, said at the time of the union vote, which passed overwhelmingly. “It also makes us more a part of the academic community, so the students benefit ultimately.”

Globe correspondent Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report. Travis Andersen can be reached at travis.andersen@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@TAGlobe](https://twitter.com/TAGlobe).

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