FIVE DEMANDS
The Student Protest and Takeover of 1969

In 1969 three different trends converged and led to a protest at City College known as the "Five Demands Protest."

THE FIRST TREND
A History Of Student Protests At The City College

Throughout the College's history, students have occasionally protested on this campus. Some of the noteworthy protests prior to 1969 were:

- In the early years of the last century, journalism was the chief weapon of students in their struggles for campus reform. After The Campus was founded in 1907 it became the focus of attacks by the administration. Copies were often confiscated and editors suspended.

- The 1930s were the heyday of demonstrations of all kinds: social protests, anti-war and anti-fascist protests. President Robinson, described as the most autocratic and insensitive president in the College's history, clashed frequently with demonstrators, and in 1935 students called for his resignation. In 1936 Morris U. Schappes-a member of the City College English Department for eight years, and 12 others were fired for their pro-union, anti-fascist, and anti-racist activities, although there was no evidence that their activism interfered with their effectiveness as teachers. Six hundred students sat down in protest outside President Robinson's office.

- In 1949, 4,000 students left their classrooms for five days to protest the actions of two faculty members. The first was William C. Davis, an economics instructor in charge of the campus dormitory for veterans.

- He had segregated the Black students from the White students in the dormitory. The second was Prof. William E. Knickerbocker, chair of Romance Languages, who was accused of withholding honors and advancement from Jewish students and professors. The students' sit-ins and picketing resulted in clashes with the police and the arrest of 17 students.

- In 1967 seven students were arrested and 467 suspended from classes when they attempted to block the construction of temporary huts on South Campus.

- In November 1968, the largest mass arrest of students in the school's history was prompted by a week-long occupation of the Finley Center's ballroom that was held to protest the draft and to provide sanctuary for an AWOL soldier.

THE SECOND TREND
Recognition That The Mission Of The City College Needed To Be Expanded

During the 1960s university administrators recognized that the mission of CUNY needed to be expanded. A 1962 CUNY plan suggested that the senior CUNY colleges begin accepting the top 30% of high school graduates rather than the top 20%. A Middle States Evaluation Team in 1966 questioned the College's lack of sufficient attention to the needs of the future student body. These concerns resulted in the initiation of the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) program at City College in 1966.

THE THIRD TREND
The Late 1960s, A Time Of National Tumult

During the 1960s the United States was in turmoil. More than a half million U.S. servicemen (mostly draftees) were involved in a seemingly endless war in Vietnam.

1968 was a particularly tumultuous year— In April of that year the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and in June, U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York, the winner of the Democratic primaries for the 1968 presidential election, was also assassinated. Riots erupted in several American cities.