



Internal and Academic Affairs Committee

11/7/24 School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Proposal:

Opposing the RUSA Allocations Referendum Act of 2024 regarding the increase in the student fee for Rutgers students.

Authored By:

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Sponsored By:

Internal and Academic Affairs Committee

Background

Student fees at Rutgers University serve as a critical funding source for both academic schools (SEBS, Business, Engineering, Mason Gross, etc.) as well as the University's 400+ student organizations. Historically, Rutgers University Student Assembly (RUSA) has managed these funds under the "80/20 provision." This provision designates 80% of the student fee to school-specific governing associations, while the remaining 20% is allocated to the RUSA Allocations Board, which then distributes these funds to various student clubs and organizations affiliated with RUSA.

In recent years, RUSA has faced financial constraints that have required difficult decisions about how best to allocate resources amidst rising operational costs. According to RUSA Bill 15S22-11: Allocations Referenda Act of 2022, RUSA aimed to address these constraints by proposing an annual 2% increase in the student fee, bypassing the need for a student referendum. As stated in the bill, "...they may unintentionally act against their own interest and not raise the fee, thus stifling funding for their clubs and organizations." The intent was to ensure adequate funding without risking a vote that might unintentionally reduce resources essential to student life on campus. The Rutgers University Student Assembly (RUSA) introduced the Allocations Referenda Act of 2024 (ARA 2024) to address reduced funding for student organizations following COVID-19-related budget cuts, which have lowered club funding by 40%. Scheduled for voting between November 8th to the 29th of 2024, this act proposes two referendum questions.

1. A one-time \$15 increase in the RUSA portion of the semesterly School Fee, which has minimally risen since 2007-2008, to support the expanding needs of campus organizations.
2. Amending RUSA's Constitution to allow a biannual increase of up to 2% in the RUSA portion of the fee without a referendum, accommodating inflation and rising costs. Any increase beyond this limit would still require student approval across campus.

Student Concern:

It has come to the immediate attention of the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences Governing Council that under the proposed fee increase, SEBS Governing Council would not receive its typical 80% cut of the additional \$15. This means that while SEBS students would still pay the increased fee as part of their term bill, 80% of that amount would not go to supporting SEBS organizations, events, or professional development. This violates the 80/20 provision and the entire increase would be allocated to RUSA's general funds. The second question, which allows RUSA to adjust the fee by up to 2% biannually without a referendum, could lead to future increases in student costs without adequate input or assurance that these funds will directly support school-specific needs.

SEBS Governing Council recommendation and Impact

Recommendation:

The School of Environmental and Biological Sciences Governing Council opposes the proposed \$15 increase in the student fee as outlined in the Allocations Referenda Act of 2024. This increase would violate the previously established 80/20 provision as stipulated in RUSA Bill 15S22-11:

Allocations Referenda Act of 2022. SGC believes that this increase would place an unnecessary and unfair financial burden on students within our school without providing proportional benefits to the governing council, which would in turn impact school-specific programs, clubs, and organizations. Therefore, SGC recommends that RUSA maintains the current student fee structure and adheres to the 80/20 model or seeks alternative funding options that do not impose additional costs on students without delivering stated proportional benefits.

Impact:

By opposing the \$15 increase in student fees, SGC aims to protect SEBS students from an added financial obligation that does not directly meet their needs. Rejecting this referendum would relieve financial pressure on students who are already managing tuition and other costs. It would also prevent automatic biannual adjustments of up to 2% without student input, thereby preserving student influence over fee changes. SGC believes any future changes to student fees should uphold transparency and fairness, providing a clear, tangible benefit for the students who contribute.

Preliminary Dates:

11/6/2024:

- Referendum Introduced to the Committee

11/6/2024:

- SGC Official vote to **oppose** the RUSA Referendum
- Cast:
 - Voted: 31 in favor, 0 against, 0 Abstain
 - Result: SGC is opposed to the RUSA Referendum