

**Rutgers University Senate
Student Affairs Committee
Response to Charge S-1311
on Process of Changing Rutgers Cultural and Traditional Icons
November 2014**

Process of Changing Rutgers Cultural and Traditional Icons: Examine the process by which changes are made to cultural and traditional icons of Rutgers University and, where necessary, define such a process which is transparent and available to key stakeholders. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by October 2014.

Background

In the fall of 2013, the words of the Rutgers University Alma Mater were changed by the Glee Club Director, Dr. Patrick Gardner. This occurred after the shared governance body of Rutgers University, the University Senate, had ruled on the issue of potential change to the alma mater brought forth by the Student Caucus. In a Response to Charge S-1005 in October of 2011, the Student Affairs Committee reported to the Senate the following summary and recommendations:

We view the Alma Mater as reflecting the traditions and history of Rutgers, and utilizing one person's experience as representative of that. It does not claim to make any social statement.

We recommend the following:

- 1. The most current version of the Rutgers Alma Mater should stand (see Appendix A for 1989/1990 and Current Version).*
- 2. We encourage groups or campuses who are so inclined to add other stanzas as they see fit, and as they may find representative of their own experiences, as has been done in the past. (Appendix A).*

This report was voted upon and accepted by the University Senate and sent to the President. There was no formal response by the President at that time, Dr. McCormick. After the aforementioned lyric change by Dr. Gardner, President Barchi issued the formal response to the Senate in regards to Charge S-1005 in February 2014. In this response, he states:

I do not have authority over the Alma Mater and its lyrics. As the Alma Mater was originally commissioned by the Rutgers Glee Club in 1873, I have been told that decisions about modifications to it have historically been made by that organization.

This was not the case according to the Senate Report on the Charge. A member of the Committee that created the Glee Club, Howard Fuller, wrote the song "On the Banks of the Old Raritan" about his college experience prior to the first Glee Club concert. In 1914, Rutgers President, William H. S. Demarest, asked Fuller to keep the first and last verses but rewrite the middle verses to reflect themes to which the

alumni body could relate. It marked the transformation from a rowdy college song to an alma mater, set a precedent that the song can be changed if the lyrics were deemed unsuitable and that any revisions should be extremely well thought out and planned.

The next significant attempt to change the alma mater came in 1988, when President Edward Bloustein wrote the chair of the University Senate stressing the need for gender-neutral lyrics, and the need to represent the students from the various campuses, including Newark and Camden. This led to the creation of a university-wide committee to oversee additions to the Alma Mater. The SAC report charged this committee with overseeing a contest for a new set of lyrics. The result was the 1989 version. These University-as-a-whole lyrics are still being sung at commencements, as reported to the Senate. Thereafter, the original first and last verses are listed in the program with the changes of “my boys” to “my friends.” Additionally, students of Rutgers University specifically the women) had begun singing the words “or a woman” after the second line of the first verse.

So as you can see, the alma mater in Rutgers history has never been changed by the Glee Club Director without direction nor has it been considered the property of the Glee Club. As a result, the Student Affairs Committee of the University Senate was charged with examining and defining a process by which the alma mater and other Rutgers cultural and traditional icons which belong to all of the Rutgers community may be changed respectfully and thoughtfully.

Perhaps the most difficult part of this charge is that of defining cultural and traditional icons. The definition may lie in who is determined to have “spiritual” ownership of the item. Who does the item serve or belong to? If the answer is the greater Rutgers community, then it would seem to fit this category. Certainly the Alma Mater is one such item that belongs to the Rutgers community.

The 2013 version of the Rutgers University Alma Mater has met with mixed reviews. At its unveiling at a Rutgers football game in 2013, many in attendance were vocal in their disapproval. It is still not sung by many at Rutgers sporting events and has caused additional division in the Rutgers community.

To find out more about these processes at other institutions, we reached out to several leaders in the Big Ten conference. Many do not have a defined process except for that to do with institutional branding. Those responding included Michigan State, Northwestern and Wisconsin

Conclusion and Recommendations:

We feel the best process for changing that which belongs to the Rutgers community as a whole is best accomplished by the body which most completely represents the constituents of the Rutgers community, the shared governance body that is the

Rutgers University Senate. As indicated above, it has also been the body that has governed the process since 1988. Since charges for the Senate can originate from any one of its constituent groups, the Student, Alumni, Faculty, or Staff caucuses, the various standing committees as well as the Senate Executive Committee and the Rutgers University President, we feel this is the correct process for such change. Depending on the icon considered for change, the Senate Executive Committee can charge the evaluation of such change to an appropriate committee or create a special work group composed of key stakeholders.

We recommend the following:

1. The process by which cultural and traditional icons of Rutgers University are to be modified must be the purview of the Rutgers University Senate. The impetus for such a charge may come from any one of the caucuses or committees of the Senate or from the President, as has been the history here at Rutgers.
2. A study should be undertaken regarding the 2013 revision of the Alma Mater to evaluate satisfaction with the lyrics within the Rutgers community and if any further action needs to be taken This should be performed by the Student Affairs Committee of the Rutgers University Senate.

Respectfully submitted by the Student Affairs Committee, Rutgers University Senate,

Appendices

[Response to Charge S-1005, Alma Mater](#)
[President Barchi's Response](#) to Report on S-1005

2014-15 Student Affairs Committee:

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