

Budget and Finance Committee Report, Rutgers University Senate

Senate Charge S-2320, Timing and Process for Recommending Tuition, Fees, Housing Charges, and Dining Charges

April 2024

“Review the process and timing whereby recommendations are developed and made for annual changes in tuition, required fees, and room and board, including mechanisms for input from students, parents, and other stakeholders (including tenants with rents affected by Rutgers housing rates) and including the role of shared governance in this process. Make recommendations for any changes in this process to increase transparency and confidence in the process.”

Given our inability to directly survey Rutgers students, an online questionnaire was distributed to students by committee members (who represent all Rutgers campuses) to seek stakeholder input. This happened between November and December of 2023. The questionnaire received 57 responses, which are available in the Appendix. In addition, a Zoom meeting was scheduled and those comments are also in the Appendix.

Summary:

Parents and students uniformly object to increases in tuition, fees, room, and board without sufficient advance notice. Respondents particularly object to increases in their costs in the face of quality shortcomings and desire involvement and representation in the budgetary process.

Committee Recommendations:

- **Parents/families should not bear the risk to their finances of Rutgers' and the State of New Jersey's fiscal schedule.** Rutgers should take a proactive position by committing to a fixed tuition/fee/housing number at the point of extending admission offers for newly incoming students of whatever year/level. A similar process should be created for returning students. If the state allocates less than the university anticipates, Rutgers could use reserves to cover the difference and work with the state to recover the funds. Such action provides strategic optics ("state underfunds student tuition") that could facilitate more ideal collaboration between the state and the university regarding tuition costs going forward.
- **Establish an Advisory Committee.** Involving parents more directly will enhance communication and transparency regarding financial challenges and budget planning at the university. Explaining how tuition and fees are used—for instance, for faculty salaries, campus maintenance, and academic resources—can help justify expenditures and mitigate frustration over fee hikes. This will also enhance trust and understanding among students and their families.
- **Create Flexible Payment Options and Incremental Increases:** Offering flexible payment options, such as installment plans, can alleviate financial strain on students and families.
- **Improve Service Quality:** Increases in fees must be accompanied by communication

regarding tangible improvements in the quality of education and campus services. Addressing current issues, such as the lack of quality utilities is crucial for enhancing support and trust with our student body and their families.

Findings:

Parents and students cannot manage sudden unanticipated increases in charges. Questionnaire respondents recommend that an announcement of expected increases occur as early as possible, and in any event before decisions for student acceptance of Rutgers attendance are due. Typical survey responses include:

“As an out-of-state student, it was hard to compare the tuition at Rutgers with the offers I had from other schools. Out-of-state tuition is very expensive and it would be better to know the cost before committing so students can make better financial decisions.”

“A drastic increase in tuition will lead to students of lower socioeconomic status not being able to attend Rutgers University, making us less diverse.”

- Respondents propose flexible payment options to lessen immediate financial strains and avoid financial shocks, for example, allowing the total cost to be divided into manageable monthly installments. A typical response is:

“I think it’s honestly the most ridiculous thing that they increased the tuition. 1. Most Parents and/or students are already struggling to make ends meet and then they also have to worry about rent or dorms and food on top of that. I literally do not have much money in my bank account and I’ve been struggling with eating because of paying for books or tuition or groceries and other amenities”.

- Respondents identify issues such as lack of quality utilities such as AC and power and propose an action project plan to address these issues. For example:

“My dorm building has had four power outages and one water outage since I moved in, and I had to pay extra in tuition for it. If they’re going to happily hike prices like that they can at least renovate our dorms while they do it.”

“I am running very low on meal swipes and will be out of them by the first week of December if I eat one meal a day and nothing else unless I buy food (despite having the same meal plan I had last semester) while paying higher for it.”

“I am from a low-income family and barely have enough spending money on myself to cover basic expenses like food, let alone a 6% tuition hike. If this increases again next semester, this would be a very serious issue for me, my family, and any other low-income potential students that administration claims to want admitted and graduating so much.”

- Respondents communicate economic hardships and ask for transparent explanations of cost increases. Example responses include:

“It is expensive and there are a lot of busy fees that we do not need to pay for.”

“Too expensive for no reason. Some fees have nothing to do with anything.”

“Tuition costs are not proportional to the quality of education and facilities being received by students. There is a lack of transparency regarding where student tuition is distributed and students often have no say in how their money is used because of this.”

- Respondents communicate the importance of quality instruction, for example:

“How will students, who are paying customers of the university, be assured that our tuition money is going towards paying for the hiring of and RETENTION of quality instructors who are experts in their field as well as regular maintenance

and renovation of academic spaces where classes are held? Are there any initiatives in place to accomplish this?"

"Raising tuition will not help anyone; it will only add to the dragon's hoard beneath the administration of Rutgers. It is unreasonable to raise tuition costs; they should be lowered if profits are as high as Holloway claims. Shouldn't a school's first priority be to its students?"

- Parents ask to be involved in decision-making, for example by public meetings to discuss budgetary challenges and discuss the budgetary process. Proposals include:
 - Forming a parents' group to participate in the process;
 - Polls to obtain parents' perspectives, including options to choose from;
 - Reducing increases and spreading increments over time;
 - Offering improved services that justify cost increases.

- Respondents particularly object to quality shortcomings in the face of cost increases. For example:

"As a school that receives a lot of money, Rutgers school buildings and equipment is lacking. In my labs, especially physics, my equipment is always faulty. We often can't perform the procedure properly. There should be more funding that goes into the classroom equipment."

- Respondents propose more extracurricular activities, personalized tutoring, leveraging technology to reduce costs, and other innovations that provide students with additional benefits. For example:

"The cost of additional learning resources (ie, Elsevier in SON) in addition to regular tuition. Students are under the impression the tuition has increased due to faculty negotiations".

Most critical tuition and other cost issues for Rutgers students?	Questions or statements for the meeting record	Constituency:
As an out-of-state student it was hard to compare the tuition at Rutgers with the offers I had from other schools. Out-of-state tuition is very expensive and it would be better to know the cost before committing so students can make better financial decisions.	N/A	Undergraduate student
The mandatory meal plan which doubles the cost of dorming.	N/A	Undergraduate student

<p>Room and board Tuition - for professors and TAs Food</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>The fact that a lot of the things that fees are covering are deteriorating while prices are being hiked. My dorm building has had four power outages and one water outage since I moved in, and I had to pay extra in tuition for it. If they're going to happily hike prices like that they can at least renovate our dorms while they do it. I am running very low on meal swipes and will be out of them by the first week of December if I eat one meal a day and nothing else unless I buy food (despite having the same meal plan I had last semester) while paying higher for it. I am from a low-income family and barely have enough spending money on myself to cover basic expenses like food, let alone a 6% tuition hike. If this increases again next semester, this would be a very serious issue for me, my family and any other low-income potential students that administration claims to want admitted and graduating so much.</p>	<p>I won't be able to attend the hearing, but I would appreciate it if someone in the student senate could read it during the hearing my place, because the things I brought up are very important for a considerable amount of students here.</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>A drastic increase in tuition will lead to students of lower socioeconomic status not being able to attend Rutgers University, making us less diverse.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>It's terrible. flat out</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Credit hour cost, books, top hat registration</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>It is expensive and there are a lot of busy fees that we do not need to pay for.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>How expensive dining hall food is, textbook fees, other fees to join classes, no air conditioning in dorms, poor quality of dorms for the price, no parking on campus and numerous parking tickets.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>

<p>The excessive fees on top of tuition, dining and housing can really add up. For example, what is the student fee?? What's the point?</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>I think it's honestly the most ridiculous thing that they increased the tuition. 1. Most Parents and/or students are already struggling to make ends meet and then they also have to worry about rent or dorms and food on top of that. I literally don't have much money in my bank account and I've been struggling w eating because of paying for books or tuition or groceries and other amenities. 3. Lets not forget parking... faculty parking lots aren't even booked. There are so many free spaces in every lot and we have to pay hundreds of dollars every semester to be in a parking lot for an hour and a half to two hours top. And then if you don't have a parking permit you get fined a ridiculous amount of money. There are about 50,000 students at Rutgers and that can't be part of our tuition?? Like i know this school is sitting on billions of dollars and they cant let students who are the ages of 18-25 maybe to park. Yes there are busses but if you've ever been on them yourself you can't even make an argument. 4. Why am i paying tuition for teachers who don't know how to teach. Get better teachers for calc and orgo. A C in their class is literally getting a 30% on their exams. Do you know how terrible that is? 5. There's already inflation why are trying to make us struggle even more to make ends meet. Think about that.</p>	<p>If they have billions of dollars, why are we increasing everything still and why not get better things for it, instead of making us struggle more?</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>

I do not believe Rutgers should increase tuition as wages have stagnated and this will increase the cost of living for all students and families within New Jersey and who attend Rutgers. There must be some point of stopping otherwise tuition costs will be unable to allow students to study in University in the future.		Undergraduate student
ITS TOO EXPENSIVE		Undergraduate student
cost is unbelievable.		Undergraduate student
Tuition and room and board.		Undergraduate student
Tuition costs are not proportional to the quality of education and facilities being received by students. There is a lack of transparency regarding where student tuition is distributed and students often have no say in how their money is used because of this.	This past year the bus system has been worse, on campus food prices have increased, and parking for commuters has become considerably worse due to lot closures. Why did the increase in tuition not get reflected in the quality of on campus facilities?	Undergraduate student
CLASS AND HOUSING ITS SO EXPENSIVE MY FAMILY HAS 3 KIDS IN COLLEGE AT ONCE AND WE ALL THOUGHT STAYING IN STATE WOULD BE CHEAPER BUT ITS STILL SO EXPENSIVE		Undergraduate student
The cost of living in New Jersey is relatively high compared to other states. Expenses like housing, food, transportation, and books can add a considerable amount to a student's budget. There are often additional costs associated with university life that are not always anticipated, such as fees for student organizations, lab materials, or technology resources.		Undergraduate student
Too expensive for no reason. Some fees have nothing to do with anything.	Too many fees that aren't realistic and just makes tuition more expensive that it needs to be.	Undergraduate student
	They should consider lowering out of state tuition and making the process of residency a bit easier, also.	Undergraduate student

<p>As a school that receives a lot of money, Rutgers school buildings and equipment is lacking. In my labs, especially physics, my equipment is always faulty. We often can't perform the procedure properly. There should be more funding that goes into the classroom equipment. It is also frustrating how much the price has increased for meal swipes at the dining hall when the quality of the food has shown no improvement. As a commuter I sometimes need to eat at the dining hall for healthier food options. Unfortunately, the price is almost \$20 which is absolutely ridiculous. Students and parents are struggling a lot financially, these price increases don't make any sense if the quality of our school year isn't improving.</p>	<p>What improvements have been made to Rutgers University since the tuition increase? Do the majority of students benefit from those improvements? Where is the money going? We have barely recovered from Covid, how do you think people will be able to afford this? Do you actually care about your students?</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>The tuition is extremely high. It becomes very difficult to have to divide the tuition costs between loans and other family members paying for the remaining costs. The tuition cost should definitely be lowered. Also, I believe the student fee should also be reduced. The student fee and the tuition fees are the highest costs on the term bill.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Being able to pay the tuition was already difficult enough but now it's more expensive. I'm a commuter because I couldn't afford the price for dorm housing and all those additional costs so this increase in tuition is frustrating. I want to know what caused the tuition hike and what the extra money I am forced to pay is actually going towards with proof that my tuition money is being used for those things. Rutgers is built on and for the students so all students deserve to know what our money is being used for.</p>	<p>I know this is a very difficult question to ask but: Was the tuition hike done as retaliation against students for supporting the strike in Spring 2023?</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Out-of-state tuition is way too high</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>

Tuition increases		Undergraduate student
Too many random fees that don't seem to go to anything that directly benefits me		Undergraduate student
It's shit		Undergraduate student
For Rutgers Students, the student body is diverse with everyone having different financial statuses and with an increase of tuition for those who come from low-income families, this could lead for paying more in term bills and having to take out loans with slightly larger amounts of money that affects how they're able to properly able to manage school, work, and financial life with work sustaining the financial aspect of it		Undergraduate student
Housing is exorbitant. The new financial aid system is a catastrophe.	How does a PUBLIC institution have the gall to cost this much?	Parent of student
The average in-state tuition across the United States is \$9,350 yet the average here at Rutgers it is \$15,800. Every semester my parents are astounded by tuition bill which I am forced to take loans out to pay. Many students are unable to work during the semesters and/or do not qualify for sufficient/any financial aid. Therefore, thousands of students are forced to take out loans simply because housing and course tuition is not a feasible expense. The meal swipe values are also incredible inflated. Depending on the meal plan you are paying around \$18-20 for each swipe yet a retail swipe is only good for \$10. How does that make any sense? Surely transaction fees and food service expenses are not high enough to warrant a near doubling in value.	How come Rutgers does not bat an eye at raising our head football coach's six figure salary, but cannot allocate funds to decrease tuition and housing costs?	Undergraduate student

<p>To raise tuition after decision timeframe is deplorable, just like the college budgets are often finite so are the budgets of parents and students so to raise costs after the commitment is misleading and constitutes false advertisement for incoming students. Our family is not receiving one dime of financial aid so outpacing inflation puts families in a precarious position of not being able to absorb additional costs, especially with multiple students in college at once. There are not enough classes available and registration is the worst I've ever seen. Transportation is unreliable via bus service and dorms are outdated. Where does all of the money go- into football and trying to compete with other Big 10 rivals? Look at the RU Screw threads on Reddit and see what students and parents really think they are getting for their tuition money.</p>	<p>How can the college raise tuition after the period in which intent to attend is needed? This seems to be false advertisement of the cost of goods and services since decisions are made based on the published tuition and fees. Our family is receiving zero financial aid so a 6% increase is not small. Rutgers deceived the public in the true cost of tuition, we actually may have made a different decision since other offers were received that included aid but Rutgers was less tuition based on the published cost of attendance.</p>	<p>Parent of student</p>
<p>The cost of additional learning resources (ie Elsevier in SON) in addition to regular tuition. Students are under the impression the tuition has increased due to faculty negotiations.</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>I think overall gross tuition is a problem</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Housing and Winter/Summer Tuition</p>	<p>Why are there such visible funding issues (transportation, staffing, etc.) at Rutgers when there is an increase in cost?</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Housing and food</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Dorm room conditions</p>	<p>How can the school improve the bus conditions?</p>	<p>Parent of student</p>

<p>Many students choose to stay in state to save money, and the increasing tuition can make it extremely difficult for students and their families to afford school. Rutgers does also not give a lot of scholarship money for many students, and it can be difficult to get scholarships from outside sources. The increasing costs also make it difficult for many students to afford off campus housing, groceries, etc. Personally, I have had to take out a lot of very big loans (with an unreal interest rate) to be able to afford school.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>The dorms need to be updated, the bus system needs to be reliable</p>		<p>Parent of student</p>
<p>Housing, food, tuition</p>	<p>President Holloway claims Rutgers is experiencing record high profits, yet none of that profit is being used to help either the student body or the professors. Livingston Quads still have asbestos in the ceilings, and earlier this semester students without AC were simply advised to stay out of their dorms. Raising tuition will not help anyone; it will only add to the dragon's hoard beneath the administration of Rutgers. It is unreasonable to raise tuition costs; they should be lowered if profits are as high as Holloway claims. Shouldn't a school's first priority be to its students?</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Tuition is a major issue, as is housing cost. Housing is an enormous fee that I would not be able to afford without tuition remission, and it is necessary for me to live on campus because commuting every day would be costly in terms of gas money and in terms of time that I could spend doing homework or attending to the clubs I am a leader of. Making both housing and tuition more affordable is necessary to having students such as myself have access to an education that is necessary to finding a job in today's labor market.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>

<p>I believe that the justification for the "slight increase" in tuition costs at Rutgers to be undermining the true intentions of the university (i.e., higher education = business, not focused on quality education, if one wants to call what Rutgers offers "quality"). Look no further than the recent Writers/SAG-AFTA strikes for prime examples of this mentality. In addition, there is the fact that these increases will affect the surrounding communities (i.e., New Brunswick, Highland Park). From my understanding, these increase only affect undergraduate students, but who is to say that it will not affect graduate students? For all we know, Rutgers could be working on a plan to increase tuition and other costs for graduate students, perhaps with an even greater increase. At that point, the student recruitment issue will not be resolved, and instead will be exacerbated. Finally, more and more people are realizing that college degrees are worthless, so it is best that Rutgers give up and stop trying to "keep themselves afloat." They will only suffer in the end.</p>		<p>Graduate student</p>
<p>Dining Charges</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>We spend a lot of money on sports and facilities compared to education.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>Housing, healthcare, and technological resources.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>College as a whole is quite expensive, and many students turn to Rutgers for its relative affordability. To raise the tuition so much without any real reason would be spitting in the face of all those students who are simply trying to earn an education without paying an arm and a leg.</p>	<p>Rutgers is a state university that is funded by tax dollars, there should absolutely be no reason to increase tuition this much. A friend of mine from Buffalo University visited yesterday, and his first impression of this University was that it did the bare minimum for its students for an unreasonably high price. That doesn't sound like a university that should be raising the cost of tuition by 6%.</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>

Meal plan fees have become more expensive, and so has the food, making it worth less. Tuition is also extremely expensive considering dysfunctional resources and an inconsistent quality of education.		Undergraduate student
		Undergraduate student
tuition		Undergraduate student
The cost of tuition, for one.		Undergraduate student
Overpaid and bloated administration		Undergraduate student
Too high		Undergraduate student
Everything, most importantly educational		Undergraduate student
I believe tuition should be affordable and should be spent towards programs that benefit the students. For example the football teams has an unreasonably high budget given their record as well as the fact that many students are not interested in football.		Undergraduate student
the fact that tuition is rising despite the quality of our education not rising alongside of it. as a paying customer of the university, i am upset that rutgers is consistently suffering from a shortage of qualified instructors and academic spaces.	how will students, who are paying customers of the university, be assured that our tuition money is going towards paying for the hiring of and RETENTION of quality instructors who are experts in their field as well as regular maintenance and renovation of academic spaces where classes are held? are there any initiatives in place to accomplish this?	Undergraduate student
Why am I forced to spend \$3000 on meal swipes that I can't use all of unless I go out of my way? It's insane, and I'll have a quarter of them left over at the end of the semester that just disappear.	Meal plans at Rutgers are far too expensive, and they absolutely should not be mandatory in any capacity. The fact that I live on campus does not necessarily equate to relying on the dining halls for food.	Undergraduate student
An in state tuition for an undergrad is way too high and doesnt line up with cost of living increases or inflation.		Parent of student

We are trying to target first generation, low income, and diverse students. High costs are pricing them out of the opportunity to attend Rutgers.	My statement above (critical issue) is relevant here.	Faculty
Lack of transparency in budget and spending		faculty
Value for money		Undergraduate student
Tuition has regularly surpassed the rate of inflation. Other fees have ground similarly.		RU Faculty
Financial aid processing transparency	Office of Financial Aid computation in assessing tuition charges affect students before and after the completion of a semester raises questions in student confidence in financial aid programs	Graduate student
I feel tuition is too expensive especially for people who don't have scholarships.	Yes	Undergraduate student
Tuition is high and as a full-time student who pays all expenses on her own, it is difficult to want to continue school between loans and out of pocket expenses,		Undergraduate student
As a student with disabilities who resides off-campus, I predominantly engage in online coursework. However, the substantial fees associated with the use of labs and other services, which I do not access, pose a financial burden. Currently, I lack financial aid and am not employed.	My inquiry pertains to the aforementioned concern. Is there any provision for disabled students who may not fully utilize all of the institution's facilities?	Undergraduate student
I'm paying more money and my favorite professors are being fired.	You are hurting students when you fire adjunct professors.	Undergraduate student
It's too high. It makes it difficult for students to afford basic necessities.		Graduate student
Housing is too expensive, and secret fees hidden in tuition		Undergraduate student

<p>Big increase that surpasses other public colleges and inflation rate together and notification is after students confirmed classes. This is like after you sign a contract to buy a house and then the seller tells you by the way they secretly changed the house price on the contract. Illegal! Not ethically!</p>	<p>I'd like the school board to explain the huge jump in tuition. How is that justified? With inflation that affect cost of living including rents for parents and students while parents income not catching up with it, how on earth Rutgers assume parents could still afford such huge jump in tuition without problems.</p>	<p>Parent of student</p>
<p>If its up by that much, rooming is probably the biggest concern. And getting enough food from the meal plan. I can attest that those are important because we simply do not have the money for a fifth year on campus and must commute with my father (who works at Rutgers) instead because we do not have a third car for me to use. I can only imagine that this is more difficult for other commuters.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>It's unreasonable to expect family and students to pay so much more for tuition during this economic recession and inflation crisis.</p>	<p>As a low income student who fully depends on financial aid to attend Rutgers it is completely mind blowing to me that they would increase tuition at a time like this, students and families should not be put under additional financial stress especially when Rutgers faculty and staff continue to be underpaid. Where is all that money even going.</p>	<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>It is not fair that we pay so much money is living and dining costs when the facilities are not up to par. The dorms have a constant roach problem and despite being a smoke free campus, the halls often smell of weed. Little seems to be done about this. Additionally, as a College Ave resident I should not have to travel to another campus to have healthy dining options on the weekend.</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>
<p>I feel though departments like the africana and other culture departments are underfunded. as well as cultural centers. d</p>		<p>Undergraduate student</p>

Meal plans, parking passes, tuition prices	I personally had to take out an extra loan prior to the semester since the tuition hike was both later and more than I had expected	Undergraduate student
The tuition hike after decisions came as a surprise. If the buses and rooms are improved because of this and future increases are limited that will be helpful.	High tuition hike after decisions came as a surprise. If the buses and rooms are improved because of this and future increases are limited that will be helpful.	Undergraduate student
The bus system must be improved. With the reliable and frequent bus system, Rutgers is a world-class institution. With the current unreliable, overcrowded system, it is not.		Parent of student
Tuition housing and mandatory meal plan are too expensive	Why are students paying so much for uninhabitable living conditions and horrible food. Bring dorms up to date and let more chains like chick fil a on campus so they can have better options like other big schools. Virginia tech has tons of chain restaurants and on the meal plan	Parent of student
Busing needs to be improved	How is Rutgers planning on improving it busing situation?	Parent of student
Meal plans are expensive and there seems to be less options with every passing semester.	I don't understand why when you open a new option for meals why do you cut back other options. That is not helpful. On Cook you opened a cafe in the student center but now the only grab and go lunch option in the dining hall is a smoothie and the cafe does not open until 3PM. There has been no change to the cost but it seems that options continue to be reduced. Even the variety of options within the dining hall have been reduced. Why?	Undergraduate student
Room and board is high and my daughter has issue with no heat in the room.		Parent of student