

## **Rutgers Senate MADC Taskforce Report**

*Submitted by Anna Haley on behalf of Co-Chairs Paul Boxer, Heather Pierce (and Anna)*

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### **Overview of Charge and Focus of Work**

The MADC Taskforce was established in April 2025 following the Senate’s adoption of the first-in-the-country [MADC resolution](#). It met several times through spring and twice in summer as a full group, with additional efforts continuing by the Co-Chairs through that period. Since the Senate updated the MADC [Taskforce charge](#) in November 2025, the Taskforce has continued work along three interrelated tracks: engagement with Rutgers leadership; collaboration with shared governance leaders across New Jersey; and strategizing about internal communication and educational efforts within Rutgers. Over the past several months, the majority of our work has concentrated on the first two areas.

### **Engagement with Rutgers Leadership**

A central component of the Taskforce’s charge is to engage Rutgers leadership – including the University President, senior administrators, and potentially Board of Governors – in exploring principles and practices consistent with mutual academic defense aligned with Rutgers’ core values and strategic interests.

Over the course of the fall and into this semester, the Taskforce Co-Chairs have held multiple meetings with President Tate, General Counsel Bill Castner, former Chief of Staff Brian Ballentine, and Francine Newsome Pfeiffer, Senior Vice President for Government Relations. These conversations have focused on developing a constructive working relationship, establishing norms for communication and engagement, and discussing approaches consistent with mutual academic defense in the face of federal and other external pressures.

Additional conversations with the GC have addressed institutional responses to academic freedom concerns and broader federal policy developments. While these meetings have necessarily involved a smaller group – reflecting the President’s stated preference for strategic discussions in small groups – they have allowed for candid dialogue about risks, constraints, and opportunities facing the University. Taskforce Co-Chairs view this channel of communication as an important institutional asset and intend to continue cultivating it in ways that support shared governance, collective institutional defense, and administrative effectiveness.

### **Building the New Jersey MADC Coalition (NJ-MADC)**

The second major focus of the Taskforce’s work has been collaboration with shared governance leaders at other New Jersey colleges and universities to build a statewide coalition strengthening collective defense of academic freedom and representative governance. The Rutgers Senate [formally approved a resolution joining this body](#) on October 17, 2025.

Throughout Fall 2025, Taskforce Co-Chairs participated in organizing meetings with counterpart representatives from university and college senates across the state. These conversations culminated in a “constitutional convention” meeting on February 16 (this week) attended by leadership (chair/president through executive committee level) from seven member senates: Rutgers, Stockton University, Rowan University, The College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, William Paterson University, and Stevens Institute of Technology. At that meeting,

participants agreed on initial procedural structures, including representation and voting arrangements, and identified several early issues requiring further clarification. These include the role of representatives – specifically, what decisions may appropriately be made by the NJ-MADC body and which require return to individual senates for consultation or formal vote – as well as the development of foundational documents such as a charter, bylaws, and mission and values statements.

The Taskforce Co-Chairs view the NJ-MADC as a promising mechanism for coordinated dialogue, information sharing, and, where appropriate, collective advocacy in defense of higher education across the state. Work will continue in the coming months to solidify procedures, recruit additional member senates, and ensure that the coalition develops in a way that respects the autonomy and governance structures of each participating institution. An immediate next step for Rutgers' MADC Taskforce is to select 2 representatives to this new body.

### **Internal Communication and Educational Efforts**

The third element of the Taskforce's charge involves deepening understanding within the Rutgers community of mutual academic defense principles and the University's role in advancing them.

There is a standing proposal to develop an MADC informational website as a centralized resource for Rutgers constituents. Early planning generated interest and constructive ideas, and two Senators are eager to move forward. However, the absence of a critical mass of Senators available to undertake the sustained work of building, curating, and maintaining such a site has led to a pause in this work. The Taskforce remains open to pursuing this initiative in the future should sufficient, sustainable volunteer capacity emerge.

### **Reflections on Structure, Participation, and Next Steps**

The Co-Chairs want to reflect candidly on participation dynamics and outline priorities for the next phase of the Taskforce. There is shared recognition that communicating clearly with Rutgers faculty, staff, and students about mutual academic defense remains important. At the same time, internal-facing efforts require sustained collective engagement, which has been difficult to achieve to date.

Some Taskforce members have expressed frustration about limited opportunities for broader engagement, particularly around internal initiatives such as a potential MADC website. Taskforce Co-Chairs take these concerns seriously. At the same time, the current configuration of work reflects several structural realities: the President's preference for meeting with a small group for strategic discussions; the limited number of representatives per institution involved in NJ-MADC organizing; and the absence of a critical mass of Senators available to plan, implement, and maintain internal outreach initiatives over time.

In the coming months, the Taskforce will continue engagement with the President's team, support the further development of NJ-MADC as a functioning statewide coalition (and continue outreach to additional NJ senates). Taskforce Co-Chairs invite additional Senators who are interested in this work to step forward to help identify and carry out feasible, high-impact efforts focused on internal communication and education at Rutgers.