

RUSA

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
STUDENT ASSEMBLY

Rutgers University Student Assembly

Fall 2019 Report

Table of Contents

Letter from the Student Body President	2
Allocations	4
Academic Affairs	5
Health and Wellness	7
Student Affairs	9
University Affairs	11
Legislative Affairs	13
Sexual Violence Education	14
Outreach	15
Big Ten Collaborations	17
Presidential and Vice Presidential Initiatives	18



Office of President Jhanvi Virani

613 George St

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

president.rusa@gmail.com

Dear Rutgers Community,

It's been an absolute honor serving as your student body president this past semester. I fell in love with student government during my sophomore year at Rutgers, and at the time I never imagined I could give back to the Rutgers community in this big a capacity. It's been both inspiring and humbling.

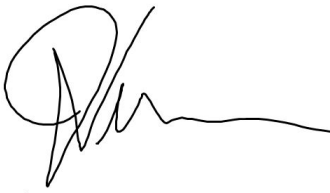
This semester I was proud to lead an assembly of passionate, eclectic, and thoughtful student leaders who pushed the boundaries of what it means to give a voice to students at Rutgers. We expanded both our efforts to take to the streets and hear the thoughts of students on campus as well as our efforts to share those thoughts to administrators effectively and impactfully. We launched and funded several projects of our own. We've even enacted internal protocol changes to optimize RUSA's project output, giving us the room to pump out more events, more advocacy efforts, and more programs.

It's a new age of student power at Rutgers, both in RUSA and out. We've got strong activists, organizations, journalists, and advocates. I'm honored to play a role in this long and continuing tapestry of students fighting to make this university live up to the title of "RevolUtionary".

On behalf of every member of our RUSA family, I'm humbled to share this progress report of everything we've worked on and accomplished over the Fall 2019 semester. I

hope you find it informative and engaging. If you would like any more information on any of these initiatives, or are looking to get involved in them, don't hesitate to reach out to me at the email address below.

Yours in Scarlet Pride,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jhanvi Virani', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jhanvi Virani

President

Rutgers University Student Assembly

Email: president.rusa@gmail.com

Instagram: @rutgers_sbp

Allocations

Part of a student organization on campus? Or maybe you had a blast attending a club-organized special event like HackRU or Caribbean Day? Yup, those are funded by us. Our Allocations team (led by Brian Brown) works hard to handle funding requests for over 400 student orgs on campus, allocating more than \$1 million per academic year. Here's what they've been working on this semester...

Outreach and Transparency

Our goal will always be to distribute funding to organizations as equitably and impartially as we can. For us to do that well, we need to go out and explain our funding process to student organizations, especially their treasurers. For the first time ever, our Allocations team presented to Directors of Cultural Centers, as well as attended executive training sessions to answer questions about the funding process for student groups that are directly advised by the Asian American Cultural Center, the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, the Center for Social Justice Education and LGBTQ Communities, and the Center for Latino Arts and Culture. They also held mandatory Treasurer Training sessions for RUSA-funded organization treasurers to learn the ins and outs of our funding process.

Making a Better Allocations System

This semester we shook some things up with how we fund groups on campus. For the first time in years, we're allowing provisional student organizations to get RUSA funding. We also enacted the Rutgers Allocations Process Transparency Act (RAPTA), a bill passed by RUSA in 2017. As a part of RAPTA, Allocations will be releasing more information on their funding process to student organizations so they have a better understanding of how to make the most of their funding requests.

Academic Affairs

The Academic Affairs Committee (led by Maya Ravichandran) focuses on student needs in undergraduate classrooms across schools, majors, and disciplines. This year, we've been putting a heavier emphasis on cutting the overall cost of getting an education at Rutgers. Whether that be advocating for cheaper textbooks, getting rid of iClickers and access codes, or providing resources for students to get them spending fewer semesters paying for tuition, AA's got you covered. Here's what's been cooking this semester...

Placement Exams

If you're someone who took AP or similar pre-college exams for college credit, you're probably someone who appreciates the value of being able to skip introductory courses here at Rutgers. For many of us, it could be the difference between graduating in nine semesters and graduating in eight. It could help you graduate early. It could help you switch majors. But not all Scarlet Knights had the opportunity to take these exams before they came to college, so Academic Affairs is working on researching the feasibility of bringing placement exams to allow students, if they pass, to opt out of more introductory courses on campus. AA representatives have been looking into similar placement exams available at Rutgers and other schools to see how we could go about expanding it to popular classes on campus. Our team's also been in talks with academic deans in schools like Rutgers Business School and School of Engineering to discuss integrating this initiative into their schools.

iClickers

Hate when you need to buy yet *another* iClicker for a class? Same. Which is why Academic Affairs is looking into why, when we have so many free alternatives for in-class polling, we're still using iClickers. We're researching accessible alternatives

which can be easily integrated into professor's existing learning management pipelines, like Canvas quizzes. RUSA can do a lot in terms of advocacy, but to create university-wide change across all departments, we're gearing up to submit a charge in the University Senate to investigate instituting a sweeping switch from iClickers to a free alternative.

Career Services

Many of our undergraduate students look for a job to transition into right after they graduate, and Rutgers Career Services does an incredible job in connecting students and alumni to a wide variety of professional opportunities. Academic Affairs is excited to work with Career Services to expand accessibility to professional guidance for its students and connect Career Services with feedback from students who have used existing resources offered by them.

Health and Wellness

You can't get a degree without taking care of your physical and mental health. The Health and Wellness Committee (led by Bilal Ahmed) is dedicated to advocating for the health of students at Rutgers as well as expanding the institutions that keep students healthy. Here's what Health and Wellness has been working on this Fall...

MidKnight Snacks

An initiative launched in 2016, MidKnight Snacks provides free food for students on College Avenue at night to mitigate the potential risks associated with unsafe drinking habits. This semester, we collaborated with the Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council to host MidKnight Snacks in the last weekend of October. Our volunteers served hot dogs, mac and cheese, pita and hummus, and more to hundreds of students across two nights.

Health Product Accessibility

With the closing of the student center convenience stores last year and this semester's closing of the on campus pharmacies, many students are struggling to access basic health products (over the counter medications, menstrual hygiene products, etc.). Our HW team has been researching creative ways we can increase accessibility on campus, specifically advocating for vending machines in the student centers or selling them at on-campus cafes like Kilmer's Market. This is a project that we'll be continuing next semester!

State of Mental Health at Rutgers

As a combined effort with all the student governing associations in the Big Ten, RUSA is conducting research to get a better pulse of the state of mental health among

the undergraduate student body here at Rutgers. Specifically aimed at finding subsets of the student population that are at higher risk of facing high stress and anxiety, our report will hopefully provide some insight to mental health service on campus on how to reach their students effectively.

Student Affairs

The Student Affairs Committee (led by Hira Hussain) is the arm of RUSA that amplifies the voice of student on issues outside the classroom and formal university facilities like dining and recreation. It's championing for diversity and inclusion, safe residence halls, and accessible resources on campus. It's hosting town halls to give students the opportunity to share ideas on a larger stage. It's keeping a pulse on the concerns of the student body and making sure they reach the RUSA floor. Here's how Student Affairs has been working towards those goals this past semester...

Diversity and Inclusion

Our RUSA administration is the most diverse student government has ever been at Rutgers. And with the recent creation of the Chancellor's cabinet division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement (DICE), there are incredible things going on to promote a diverse and inclusive educational experience here at Rutgers. This September, Student Affairs organized the first ever RUSA Diversity Town Hall. With a panel consisting of Vice Chancellor of DICE Dr. Branch, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Dr. Mena, and every Cultural Center Director, RUSA had the unique opportunity to participate in a conversation about the state of diversity and inclusion on campus, as well as learn about ongoing initiatives happening at the university.

Rutgers Police Town Hall

Student Affairs brought in leaders from RUPD, including Chief Kenneth Cop, to a RUSA Town Hall to discuss ongoing initiatives to improve safety and justice for all Rutgers students. We were excited to provide students the opportunity to engage with RUPD administrators and ask them important questions pertaining to the Rutgers community.

IT Student Advisory Board

A project revamped from 2017, the IT Student Advisory Board is a new SA-led working group that meets on a monthly basis with the Office of Information Technology to share student concerns on all things technology at Rutgers. Whether it's RU Wireless issues, ideas for improving the Rutgers App, or advocating for more printers at the libraries, ITSAB has you covered.

Student Memoriam

In collaboration with the University Affairs Committee and the Office of the RUSA President, Student Affairs has been working on advocacy efforts to build a memoriam on campus to honor the lives of students who pass away while studying at Rutgers University- New Brunswick. This is a project that they will continue working on into the Spring 2020 semester.

RUPD Hiring Representation

In collaboration with the University Affairs Committee, Student Affairs negotiated a deal with the Rutgers University Police Department to increase student involvement in the police officer hiring process. Starting Spring 2020, the Community Oriented Review Board (CORB), a hiring panel for officer candidates, will have one student representative chosen by the United Black Council, one chosen by the Latino Student Council, and one chosen by RUSA.

University Affairs

University Affairs (led by Andrew Petryna) deals with advocating on all things university run, from dining halls to recreation centers to buses. This is what University Affairs has been working on this semester...

E-Scooters

An effort started this summer, bringing e-scooters to campus was one of our first advocacy projects. Electric scooters would decrease the crowd on buses, make it easier for students to get from place to place within any campus, and provide a greener alternative to our gas-powered buses. After meeting with the Department of Transportation Services as well as several e-scooter providers, we're happy to say DOTS is working to bring e-scooters to campus this Spring!

Reducing Plastics on Campus

Have a meal plan? Head to any dining hall take out line and grab your free reusable takeout bag! Though they just began rolling out this semester, this was an initiative started in Spring 2019 in collaboration with NJPIRG to reduce the use of plastic bags at dining halls.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity among students in higher education is a growing national problem, and, unfortunately, Rutgers is no exception. This semester, the UA team collaborated with Dining Services to allow students to donate their guest meal swipes to the Rutgers Food Pantry as a part of RUSA's Meal Swipes for Charity initiative. With over 2,200 swipes collected, the Off-Campus Living and Community Partnerships will

be working with the Dean of Students to distribute those meal swipes to eligible students across campus!

Legislative Affairs

Legislative Affairs (led by Subhadha Kartik) is the RUSA division committed to fostering an engaged and well-informed student body on all things governmental. They also advocate for Rutgers interests to legislative bodies on a local, state, and federal level. This is what Legislative Affairs has been working on...

Voter Accessibility

If you can vote, you should vote. It's just that simple. Almost every polling location for on-campus residents is a walkable distance from campus, except for those who live in a few select locations on Cook and Douglass, who are designated to vote at Parsons Elementary School in North Brunswick. In collaboration with the Eagleton Institute of Politics, RUSA allocated \$5,000 to pay for shuttles that students could access for free to get to Parsons on Voting Day this past November.

Legislator Speaker Series

In an effort to increase exposure to legislative initiatives going on in the state, Legislative Affairs has begun drafting a list of potential legislators to invite as speakers to Rutgers University- New Brunswick. This is an initiative the team is excited to continue into the Spring 2020 semester.

Sexual Violence Education

Our newest committee, the Sexual Violence Education Committee (led by Priti Kantesaria) the RUSA team that works on advocating for, sharing, and expanding resources available at Rutgers for survivors of sexual and dating assault. Here's what they've been working on this Fall...

Video Series

In collaboration with VPVA, Sexual Violence Education has been working on a video series to raise awareness of sexual assault culture on campus, as well as inform students on what to do if someone they know comes to them for support. The series is on track to launch in Spring 2020.

Phone Banking Session

Sexual Violence Education held a phone banking session this past November to contact state legislators and advocate for the passing of bills A318/S1282 and A1984, both of which increase accountability and reporting of sexual violence cases in higher education institutions while maintaining the well-being and privacy of survivors.

SVE Tabling Sessions

In November, Sexual Violence Education hosted tabling events across Busch, Livingston, and College Ave to share resources available to students who experience sexual and/or dating violence. The team handed out fun give-aways like purple hair ties, candy, metal straws, and QR code stickers that lead to an SVE-created document of all sexual and dating harassment related resources available to students on campus.

Outreach

We can't advocate for students if we don't know the wants of all students, even the ones that don't come to our meetings or email us. And with a school with over 35,000 undergraduate students, that's a difficult task. But we're up for it. Outreach projects are primarily run by our Public Relations Committee (led by Monsef Oukil) , Student Affairs Committee (led by Hira Hussain), and/or our Special Events and Projects Director (Jill Cuzzalino). Here are some initiatives we launched this semester...

RUSA Tailgate and Barbeque

Hate going to Busch to tailgate? Same. On the day of the Rutgers v. University of Maryland football game, RUSA turned College Ave into the new tailgate spot, with free burgers and fries, beverages, and ice cream all morning outside the Student Center! We had over 200 visitors over three hours, and we loved talking to students about what they want improved at their school.

RUSA Complaint Boxes

SA's got a tough job-- hearing the perspectives of students who might not interact with RUSA on a regular basis. A new project the team's implemented this year is creating RUSA Complaint Boxes and placing them at the front desks of all the student centers. Have a question for us? Or have something you'd like to bring to our attention to address? Drop it in one of our boxes and we'll take a look! If you'd like us to reach out for a follow up, leave us your contact info; otherwise feel free to stay anonymous.

Coffee Chats w/ RUSA

An initiative started 2018, Coffee Chats w/ RUSA is a week-long initiative led by SA. Each day, we set up a table at a different student center to talk to the student body. We've got coffee, we've got snacks, and we've got RUSA reps eager to hear about what you want addressed by your student government! We held Coffee Chats this December and interacted with over 1,000 students throughout the week, and we've got some great leads on initiatives from your feedback that we're excited to get started!

Big Ten Collaborations

Rutgers brings a unique voice to the Big Ten. We're the most ethnically diverse student body in the Big Ten. We have the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipients in the Big Ten. And we're the oldest institution in the Big Ten. Every few months, delegates from all the student governments in the Big Ten meet to network, collaborate, and mobilize on common issues. Our Big Ten Liaison (Marc Younker) facilitates conversations with our student government reps and Big Ten counterparts year round to keep these conversations going.

Summer 2019 Conference

The Association of Big Ten Students met at the University of Iowa this past July, and 4 RUSA members joined Marc and I as delegates representing Rutgers University-New Brunswick. Our delegates passed resolutions and participated in conversations covering a variety of topics including mental health, sexual assault, voter engagement, and diversity and inclusion.

Winter Conference 2020

In late January 2020, 6 RUSA delegates will be representing Rutgers at the Association of Big Ten Students at the University of Indiana- Bloomington. We will be co-sponsoring legislation advocating for a voting member on all Big Ten Board of Governors (something Rutgers University doesn't have), increase minority caucuses within the Association, and expand legislative protection for survivors of sexual assault.

Presidential and Vice Presidential Initiatives

Though the core of RUSA is our committee work, our vice president, Aneesh Deshpande, and I have been working on a few initiatives on our own. We're excited to present these ongoing projects...

RUSA Internship

For the first time in RUSA history, we accepted an inaugural class of seven interns. Each standing committee, excluding Internal Affairs and Allocations, has one intern, who must be either a first year or new transfer student. Each intern was accepted and placed after completing an application and excelling in an in-person interview with Vice President Deshpande, every intern project is a year-long assignment that usually involves researching and presenting suggestions for creating a long-impact initiative at the university.

Financial Aid

We all know the student debt crisis is a problem that hits home. Many Rutgers students incur debt to finance their education, and too many of us know someone who had to defer or put off finishing their degree because they couldn't access loans with reasonable repayment and interest models. Enter Income Share Agreement, a model of financing a college education that guarantees students don't spend their lives drowning in student debt. Rather than borrowing money and paying it back with interest, ISA allows students to pay back a percent of their salary every month for a finite period of time. After that, they're debt free, no matter what they paid back. Over the semester, I've been researching ISA and talking to administrators to learn the feasibility of bringing ISA to Rutgers Financial Aid. This past December, RUSA passed a bill authorizing me to advocate for this initiative on behalf of the assembly, and for the first

time in this administration's history, the bill was sponsored by every committee in RUSA! I'm excited to continue this advocacy effort into the Spring 2020 semester and to, hopefully, get the ball rolling on a project that can make a Rutgers education more accessible than ever.

Decanal Review of SAS Dean Peter March

Every few years, professional school deans go through a regular review. This semester I've been invited to represent the undergraduate student body in a committee tasked by Chancellor Molloy to review the performance of Dean March, Dean of the School of Arts and Science. In the next semester, the committee will be inviting SAS students, faculty, and staff to provide their feedback for the review, and I have been working specifically on planning how the committee will go about college undergraduate student input in the Spring 2020 semester.

Internship/Fellowship Grants

Unpaid internships shouldn't be a thing. Unpaid research opportunities shouldn't be a thing. But they are, and too many students at this school need to turn down valuable professional experiences because they simply can't afford unpaid opportunities. That's why we're advocating for a scholarship program that awards students stipends to finance their unpaid or low-paid internship, research, and fellowship positions over summer and winter breaks. We're excited to say we've garnered interest from a variety of administrators at the university, and we're looking forward to continuing this advocacy through the rest of our terms.