



Student Fee Process

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UNIT	Student Government Association	CONSTITUENCY	Student
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DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

For over a decade, student fee process reform has been of interest to leaders across campus. In 2010, a letter was addressed to then-incoming President Loh expressing concern with the process and recommendations for improvement. In 2012, a University Senate policy was passed in relation to the process by which student fees are considered, yet this process has not been consistently followed.

In the fall of 2020, student leaders sent a memo to President Pines, Provost Rankin, Vice President for Student Affairs Perillo, and other leaders hoping to move the ball on these decades-old procedural issues. After an initial conversation, no additional progress was made.

The goal of this proposal is to increase transparency and establish in policy what many stakeholders have already agreed upon. The current practices and policies in place do not align with our university's values, specifically those of unity, accountability, empowerment and growth. While our student fee process is more rigorous than those at some of our peer institutions, we believe there is significant room for improvement.

These processes related to establishing and modifying student fees are important as students are the only ones who pay these fees and are the key stakeholders in relation to them. The changes to current policy that we propose would not address any financial aspect of existing student fees, but rather improve the processes through which student fees are considered, as was done by the Senate in 2012.

The specific recommendations are made in Appendix A of this proposal. Although some are changes that can be addressed administratively, several will require policy. We hope that any committees charged with considering this proposal will carefully consider whether the proposed changes align with the university's values and create more transparency in the student fee process.

As a staple of shared governance, addressing the procedural concerns students have with their student fees is an important first step in creating a more equitable, transparent, and inclusive process and building on the policies that were previously passed in 2012.

DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE

We would like the existing policy to be revised in line with the following provisions:

1- Establish an expectation for a consistent schedule for advisory groups. This would include a minimum number of meetings scheduled to allow for the time necessary for each student appointee to gather feedback on proposed budgets and changes. This can be a general timeline that preserves reasonable flexibility for departments (e.g. the first meeting must be held in the first month of the academic year). Departments can increase, but not decrease, the minimum frequency of meeting times as they see fit.

2- Students should have the majority of seats on committees that directly consider, review, or approve any changes to, or creation of, student fees. Faculty/staff should not have a majority of seats on committees that discuss any fees that only students pay. Currently, there are 7 student seats and 8 faculty/staff seats on the Committee for the Review of Student Fees (CRSF).

3- Require each unit to establish a point person for the fee review process. This individual would be responsible for understanding fee policy and history, collecting and sharing data, developing a comprehensive budget for the use of any student funds, and responding to student emails and questions. Names and contact information for these point people should be provided by units to the CRSF.

4- Require unit advisory bodies to share vote tallies and general notes on discussions, perhaps in the form of a pros/cons list, to CRSF.

5- Require CRSF to provide a report of findings to the President's Cabinet and justifications for its recommendations, rather than just vote totals, so that student voices are not lost and a more robust record is maintained.

6- Require explanations when decisions are overturned. Last year, for example, the Campus Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) and CRSF provided one recommendation, but the decision was overturned at the President's cabinet level with no explanation.

7- Share minutes/vote totals from CRSF and Cabinet conversations. Committee members should also be told what they can and cannot share throughout the process.

### **SUGGESTION FOR HOW YOUR PROPOSAL WOULD BE PUT INTO PRACTICE**

Suggestions for implementing the above provisions are listed below:

1,3,5,7- Although some groups might have more rigorous processes, three mandatory meetings should be required for each advisory group with at least a two-week break between meetings to provide student appointees the ability to discuss with their constituencies and come to a conclusion that is well thought out. The budget office would be the central hub for all communications regarding fees. They should enforce meeting requirements for all unit committees. Additionally, they should have an accurate and precise understanding of fee history and policy. Any findings should be reported to the budget office and be publicly available. Lastly, minutes and votes should be shared with the budget office for public reference.

2- A rebalancing of seats is required. This could be done by adding a second RHA seat and eliminating a staff or faculty seat.

4- A list of pros/cons, including a vote and conversational notes, should be provided by every unit advisory body to shed light on its process. These could be provided within 10 business days.

6- A report should be provided establishing the reasoning behind an overturned decision within 10 business days so the campus can see how that conclusion was reached.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Appendix 1: SGA, RHA, and GSG Memo Regarding Student Fee Process

### Memo Regarding the Student Fees Process

The cost of college is consistently a top concern for students. In the student view, the fee review process should be an opportunity to critically judge the amount that units ask for from students and determine alternative funding methods when available. However, flaws with the process prevent the university from truly incorporating and acting on student concerns, and students continue to shoulder the financial weight of many departments without adequate input.

#### Student Effect

It is challenging to convince students to spend hours on advisory committees when they feel that they have no power and that their decisions will be overturned. Almost every year, SGA, GSG, and/or RHA pass a resolution regarding some part of the fee process. Arguably, we should not have to do this, instead, the Committee for the Review of Student Fees (CRSF) should be the place for these changes. Students continue to feel as though student fees will just keep increasing, as they are viewed as the simplest method to receive additional funding for units. In addition, once a fee increase or enhancement is created, CRSF currently does not provide the means to review the increase to decide whether it has met its determined purpose. Despite our efforts, students remain uninformed on the fees that they are paying and the process the approval of fees must go through. It is important that changes are made so that students have a voice in the cost of their higher education.

Overall suggestions for change:

1. **Make every unit advisory group consistent in student representation.** (Clarice is mostly students, DOTS is a mix with faculty, etc.)
2. **Establish an expectation for a consistent schedule for advisory groups.** This would include a minimum number of meetings set on dates that allow for the time needed for each student appointee to share and solicit feedback on proposed budgets and changes. This can be a general timeline, flexible for departments, such as the first meeting must be held in the first month of school. Departments can increase meeting times as they see fit, but should not decrease.
3. **Faculty/staff should not have a majority of seats on committees that discuss the fees that only students pay.** Though students are the only ones paying the fees that CRSF reviews, except for parking, there are 7 student seats and 8 faculty/staff seats. ***Every single undergraduate student voted down the undergraduate Athletics proposal, but the fee passed because faculty voted to approve. We have concerns with this.***
4. **Require each unit to establish a point person for the fee review process** that is responsible for understanding all fee policy and history, collecting and sharing data, developing a comprehensive budget of where student funds go, and responding to student emails and questions. Share the list of these point people with the members of CRSF.

5. **Require unit advisories to provide a vote and conversational notes**, perhaps in the form of a pros/cons list, to CRSF.
6. **Require CRSF to provide a report of findings to the President's Cabinet**, and not just vote totals so that student voices are not lost.
7. **Ensure an appointed student representative is present during the CRSF recommendation presentation to the President.**
8. **Require explanations when decisions are overturned.** Last year, for example, CTAC and CRSF provided one recommendation, and the decision was overturned at the next level with no explanation sent back.
9. **Review [Senate Document 11-12-12](#) with each advisory group**; none of the recommendations for the fee process provided in this document are consistently followed. Specifically, **require all enhancements from prior years and updates on those projects to be regularly provided** in fee requests in order to be evaluated for their effectiveness. A five-year lookback is required in Senate Document 11-12-12.
10. **Provide a process for recommending the reduction or elimination of any existing fee.** The committees can only consider proposals for changes to existing fees or the creation of new fees, and cannot recommend the reduction or elimination of any existing fee unless the unit itself makes such a proposal. This has been advocated for by students for over a decade as indicated in the letter from 2010 attached at the end.
11. **Share minutes/vote totals from CRSF and Cabinet conversations.** Students should also be told what they can and cannot share throughout the process.
12. **Require units to develop a list of options for alternative funding**, including fundraising, other marketing efforts, sales, etc. Students should have the opportunity to deny requests for funds that could be raised in other ways.
13. **Consider a process where a total fee cap amount is set** and advisories must provide proposals for certain amounts of the total fee. The climate created when fees are viewed and debated separately is problematic. It causes misunderstandings across units who, understandably, do not understand the reasons each unit receives their respective fee and how much it is/what it is used for. It would be a very different environment if the group had to come together as a whole to decide where to allocate a finite amount.
14. **Establish a criteria list** based on State and USM policies that would be used consistently to determine which units are and are not eligible to receive student fee money. This would apply to a review of units that currently receive fee money and would be used to vet any future potential units asking to receive fee money.

## **Reversion**

Over the past year, RHA, SGA, and GSG have become aware of and have worked to acquire information about a \$22.98 million fund sweep that the university took from many departments on campus. These departments are required by the state to hold 2% of their total funds in a "plant fund," which is basically a savings fund for any necessary projects that may come up in the future. Many departments request funds from students in their annual fee processes to put money directly into their plant funds. During the 2019 legislative session of the

Maryland General Assembly (MGA), the University System of Maryland (USM) received a \$10 million budget reduction, which led to a reduction of \$3.9 million for UMD.

On July 1, 2019, a memorandum was sent to all Deans and Budget Officers from the University Provost and Vice President of Administration and Finance informing them that the central campus would absorb the cut so that services would not be impacted. In this memorandum, all Deans and Budget Officers were also informed that “5% of all campus fund balances will be moved to a ‘campus initiatives’ account managed by the university’s chief financial officer to support one-time strategic initiatives.”

In a second memorandum sent on October 15, 2019, the Provost informed Deans and Budget Officers that the reversion sweep would fund various different projects, including but not limited to Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), a new engagement system called TerpEngage, replacement of the main power plant, hazardous waste removal, stormwater management improvement, and greater College Park initiatives, including Cole Field House and the Discovery District.

The University lost \$3.9 million as a result of the budget reduction. However, the total reversion sweep collected \$22.98 million in total. To share a few numbers, Dining Services lost \$463,000; Resident Life lost \$1,824,950; the Department of Transportation Services (DOTS) lost \$115,168; Stamp Student Union lost \$567,377; the University Recreation & Wellness Department (RecWell) lost \$450,269; and the Student Government Association (SGA) lost \$61,322.

### Specific Unit Background & Suggestions

Fee	Background	Concerns & Areas for Improvement
Athletics	<p>Unfortunately, the Department of Athletics has historically been difficult to communicate with as students. Over the past four years (at least), students have had to be proactive and persistent in receiving communication meetings, and answers. The groups are confusing, as the fee advisory is separate from a different, more general advisory known as the Athletic Council. Athletics did not hold an official advisory meeting, a vote was not taken, and SGA, GSG, and RHA were not informed that this would serve as Athletics’ unit fee meeting.</p> <p>This was submitted in an email to 2018-2019 Student Body President Jonathan Allen by Eric</p>	<p>-Students continuously are left in the dark as to what our fees actually pay for and when we ask for information, only some has been given. Athletics should ensure prior to any student meetings that they have this data.</p> <p>-Athletics has not been held to the standards that other departments follow in distributing a comprehensive budget, having multiple fee meetings, taking an official vote, or providing information when asked and in a timely manner.</p>

	<p>Reinke in relation to the Athletics Fee: “We can commit to a reduction when we become fully vested in the conference beginning in the 2020-2021 academic year. We would propose a 2 percent reduction that year, followed by a 3 percent reduction for the 2021-2022 academic year, and then a 4 percent reduction for the 2022-2023 year. This would reduce student fee support for the Athletic budget by an estimated amount of 1.05 million dollars over three years. We would then renew conversations in Fall 2023 to evaluate the years ahead.”</p> <p>Following this, no communication was responded to from the Athletics department in relation to this commitment. Several requests to meet were also ignored.</p>	
<p>Clarice Performing Arts  (Division: College of Arts and Humanities)</p>	<p>This unit was missing a couple years ago and we later learned this was due to turnover in the unit. Since establishing the Maryland Students for the Arts Group in 2018, we have seen a lot of improvement. The main contact really cares about student collaboration and listens. The unit formatted the new group to be holistic and not solely fees and is <b>almost entirely composed of students</b> which is a great model, especially for voting.</p>	<p>-The format of the committee is different from others, which can be confusing. However, we appreciate the new training Colleen Auburger has started to create more consistency across the units.</p>
<p>Department of Transportation (Shuttle/ Parking)  (Division: Administration and Finance; pre-2019-20 it was Student Affairs)</p>	<p>While CTAC does follow the requirements of having multiple meetings to discuss fees and take a formal vote, students have consistently found that this time is full of short conversations where student advice is not heeded and follow-up is not had. Our conversations are also not explained when DOTS presents to CRSF. We try to propose solutions, but are often not taken seriously and are not provided data on why our recommendations are not a good solution. CTAC</p>	<p>-CTAC does try to send recommendations to the next level, but past recommendations, like changing parking tiers, are denied with no explanation sent back to CTAC. To allow change, CTAC must be given full information as to why recommendations are denied. -Students need to be given a voice that is not continuously shut down by faculty. In most contexts, we have different concerns. -Comprehensive data needs to be provided to us, so that we</p>

	<p>voted to recommend a \$14 fee increase rather than a \$15 fee increase this year. This information was not provided to CRSF until the SGA President asked. Last year, the proposal was voted down at the unit and CRSF level with three ideas for alternative funding. These suggestions all seemed to be ignored, the advice not heeded (overturned at the first level where students and faculty were not present) and no proactive follow-up given; returning members of CTAC were persistent until it was addressed.</p>	<p>understand why some recommendations are not feasible.</p>
<p>Health Center (Division: Student Affairs)</p>	<p>The Student Advisory process was not very interactive. We did not have in-person/virtual voting or debate.</p>	<p>-When Departments aren't suggesting a fee increase, they often will not respond to questions or concerns, thinking that their proposal will not have an impact. This is not true. There must be the same transparency, conversations, and documents provided.</p>
<p>University Libraries (Division: Provost/Academics)</p>	<p>Despite multiple outreach/meeting requests to the Dean of the Libraries, there was no response and thus no ability to meet with her, or her department, before CRSF voting. In the 2020-2021 academic year, we were able to talk with the Dean of Libraries about the fee, however concern about why this is not under tuition still remains.</p>	<p>-Libraries should provide much more information as to where student fee funds are spent. -Libraries should appoint someone responsible for understanding the entire history and requirements of the fee process, as well as responding to student leaders.</p>
<p>Nyumburu (Division: ODI)</p>	<p>Nyumburu has been difficult to get in contact with or get information from. They seem to have a lack of information about their own finances, and their budget puts all costs under "Operations," leaving students with no idea where money actually goes. Nyumburu has many enhancements that are not followed up on.</p>	<p>-Nyumburu should be provided extra training as to how the fee process works and what information is expected to be shared with students. -We also recommend Nyumburu creating a document with the full history of enhancement requests and data on their success, so it can be shared with students.</p>

<p>Recreation and Wellness</p> <p>(Division: Student Affairs)</p>	<p>Across the many units, RecWell is at the top for transparency, communication and creative thinking. We all have appreciated the hard work of this group, their integrity and proactive approach to educating our student orgs each year. They are a role model for the process. This does not mean we necessarily agree with proposed fee increases or use, but they provide space for us to share opinions. RecWell is very transparent and provides extensive data; they even project years into the future and show up how different things may impact the fee and have created different models for us based on different scenarios. They have a great philosophy of not wanting to raise the fee, knowing that students are impacted when they choose to raise it.</p>	<p>N/A; Keep up the same process.</p>
<p>Stamp Student Union</p> <p>(Division: Student Affairs)</p>	<p>Stamp has consistently been very helpful in terms of answering questions and they do the best in terms of being transparent about where their money goes. Being the stewards of the GSG and SGA fee, they are really helpful for us. Stamp understands how much students are impacted when raising the fee and they try to put all their fee money into direct student services. They acknowledge that although money is money, it matters to students about what their fee money is “directly” paying for.</p>	<p>N/A; keep up the same process.</p>
<p>Student Technology (DIT)</p>	<p>DIT does not provide a lot of transparency about where student money is spent. When students</p>	<p>-There is a bigger conversation regarding DIT about what student fees should go towards. Some of their project requests should be</p>



	ask questions, they are given broad answers, not specific amounts or projects. DIT doesn't provide what students directly pay for in this fee. In the 2020-2021 academic year, there was no meeting to discuss the fee.	paid for under tuition and other projects should be paid for by the fee. -The fund for projects should be promoted more.
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### Additional Fee Concerns

International Student Fee (Division: Provost)	This fee was recently established and does not currently have any obligation to participate in the CRSF process because it was formed under academics. There are many persistent and continued concerns about what this fee is actually used for, the lack of transparency, the lack of a student advisory committee and the continued belief that services are lacking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-ISSS needs help but also guidance. It is not a given that the fees go to ISSS as they have to go through a proposal and approval process for allocations.</li> <li>-International students are rightfully skeptical that no advisory exists</li> <li>-There are concerns regarding transparency and that the fee is being allocated solely to fund international student specific services</li> <li>-International students perceive this fee as philosophically wrong and discriminatory (i.e. other students require special services as subsets of the population but are not charged a fee)</li> </ul>
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### Appendix 2: 2010 Open Letter on Fee Review

September 19, 2010

Dear Incoming President Wallace Loh and Members of the Board of Regents,

As the leaders of the student body at the University of Maryland, College Park, we are writing to express our deep dissatisfaction with the fee review process at this University. It is a process that lacks the transparency essential to any legitimate shared governance body, one that significantly reduces accountability for how student fees are spent and denies the President the important input he needs to make sound recommendations to the Board of Regents. In short, it is a process that is profoundly broken.

That process relies on the Committee for the Review of Student Fees (CRSF), which meets each fall to consider the mandatory fees students will be charged for the following fiscal year. This committee is made up of seven faculty/staff and six students (we both serve as student members of the committee), and is chaired by the Vice President for Administrative Affairs. Deliberations of the committee are closed to the University community, and its functioning is limited in ways that give rise to significant concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Below, we will elaborate on these concerns, and give specific suggestions for improving the process and allowing students meaningful participation in deciding how their money is spent.

## Transparency

The system seems designed to prevent committee members from consulting with their constituents, as it denies them the opportunity to study the proposals in depth or clarify ambiguities or contradictions in supporting documentation. This fall, committee members were not given the list of fee proposals until Monday, September 13th; the CRSF meeting took place on Thursday the 16th. If the committee's work is to be truly deliberative and transparent, **all members of the campus community should have a minimum of two weeks to study the proposals and gather feedback on the importance of the services that fees are intended to support.**

While the committee is technically permitted to close the portion of the meetings where debate and voting takes place, such an approach does more harm than good. Not only does it ensure that information on the committee and its work only trickles out through the perceptions and recollections of individual committee members, it creates and magnifies concerns about transparency and accountability, and allows unfounded rumors and misapprehensions to cloud the process. While minutes of the meetings are kept, they are only provided to committee members months after the fact, and to call them "skeletal" would be overstating their substance by half. They contain little more than a record of vote tallies, and do not provide the important information that could contextualize those votes and help the rest of the campus understand the merits of the proposals. In addition, as members of the committee change from one year to the next - particularly in the case of student members - the lack of adequate records obscures the intentions of previous committee members, so there are conflicting ideas about how fees were intended to be used, and ultimately leaves the characterization to the chair. **Given these shortcomings, detailed minutes of both the fee presentations and the committee's deliberations should be made available to the entire campus within 48 hours of the end of the meeting.**

## Accountability

The CRSF's purpose, purview, and standing rules are not contained in any of the documents provided to the committee, nor are they covered in the training session given to incoming members. The chair of CRSF rightly points out that the recommendations the committee makes are advisory only, and that the final decision on fees lies with the President and, ultimately, the Board of Regents. Yet she also claims that the committee can only consider proposals for changes to existing fees or the creation of new fees, and cannot recommend the reduction or elimination of any existing fee unless the unit itself makes such a proposal. These are restrictions that are not codified in writing (at least not any writing made available following repeated requests by committee members), but are either part of parameters the chair alone is privy to or are left to her discretion.

In effect, the restrictions the chair has imposed on the committee mean that once a fee is created, it is permanent, and can only be reduced or eliminated by a recommendation from the unit receiving the money. This effectively denies CRSF any oversight of fee expenditures, and hands those responsibilities to the units themselves.

How is this accountability? If CRSF is not even allowed to verify that a fee is going towards the specific services for which it was intended (and, even if it the committee could verify how it was used, it could not recommend a change if the fee were being misspent or circumstances had changed), how can it possibly provide the President with sound recommendations about future fee levels? **The CRSF should have a clear**

**statement of its purview and authority, one that is available both to committee members and the campus community. Further, that statement should establish the authority to set clear guidelines requiring that units provide detailed documentation of the services the fees will support, and, even more importantly, the committee should be able to help ensure that students' money is being properly spent by recommending reductions or eliminations of fees, rather than simply weighing increases.**

## **Leadership**

Not only does the chair claim CRSF cannot itself recommend the reduction of a fee, she has also refused to enforce specific conditions set by the committee when fees are approved. The Library Fee, for example, was passed last fall based on an understanding that the Dean of the Libraries would create a student advisory committee to guide the expenditure of the funds, and provide a budget detailing what the fee moneys would go towards. That advisory committee has yet to meet, and no budget was provided to CRSF. As such, we had assumed that the committee would have the opportunity to ensure a budget was submitted before we considered the additional \$10,000 the Libraries were requesting. After all, every other unit requesting a fee specifies what services it will support; why should the libraries be any different? The chair, however, refused to honor the request her own committee made a year earlier, and indicated that CRSF could not be compelled to provide that information before the committee voted on their proposal. That unit was not held accountable and, despite overwhelming student dissent, was granted a \$10,000 increase in budget from enrollment. Over student protests, the non-student majority of the committee voted to approve the increase, despite the fact that during her presentation, the Dean of Libraries suggested the funds might not be used for the specific purposes the fee was created for; despite the fact that the libraries failed to produce the budget CRSF called for as a condition for approval last year; despite the fact that they have yet to convene an advisory group to oversee uses of the fee; and despite the fact that the Dean could not explain how the additional \$10,000 would be spent (in contrast, student groups were required to account precisely for every penny of adjustments). **The committee needs leadership that is impartial, committed to a fair and open process, and willing to respect and enforce the rights of committee members; as such, CRSF should be allowed to elect its own chair, in accordance with best practices for shared governance.**

In a series of editorials last fall, the *The Diamondback* succinctly stated the problems with the current system, and sent out a clear call for specific changes. They noted that "the way the committee came to these decisions is patently undemocratic: behind closed doors, in an opaque and secretive meeting" ("Staff editorial: Open the door," 10/14/2009). Despite student outrage last year over an unprecedented jump in fees, and despite the widespread calls for increased transparency and accountability, the process for considering student fees continues to limp along, denying students any role in holding units responsible for how they spend our money, and preventing the President from receiving comprehensive advice on the most effective use of student fees.

As currently configured and chaired, CRSF is a broken process, a committee that provides the illusion of shared governance but so restricts students' participation and so conceals its operations that we cannot continue to support it. Neither should the University administration or the Board of Regents.

We call on incoming President Wallace Loh to make reform of the fee review process one of his top priorities, and ask the Board of Regents to view this University's fee proposal in light of the concerns we have raised.

Sincerely,

Anna Bedford  
Graduate Student Government President

Steven Glickman  
Student Government Association President

CC: Acting President Nariman Farvardin, *The Diamondback*