**Why We Need the Student Empowerment Fund**

We, as students, negotiate with the University administration every day, and time and time again we have learned a simple lesson: money talks. It’s time for students to invest in a fund which will give us the agency to complete our own large-scale projects centered on improving student life. The creation of the Student Empowerment Fund will provide the student body with the tools it needs to begin the important work of taking our ideas and policies and turning them into meaningful and impactful actions.

We know that the Student Empowerment Fund can facilitate change on campus because a similar effort has worked before. Between 2001 and 2010, half of the semesterly student activities fee was paid into an endowment that eventually grew to roughly $2 million. In 2010, the Georgetown University Student Association sought input from the student body on a plan to change this fee structure and allocate the endowment account to projects that would benefit all students in the immediate future. This process of Student Activity Fee Endowment (SAFE) Reform would demonstrate student commitment to the resources needed to transform student life on campus and pave the way for the creation of the Healey Family Student Center, and specifically Riverside Terrace.

Following a campus-wide referendum in which the student body overwhelmingly supported the recommendations put forth by a GUSA-appointed Endowment Commission and GUSA, more than $2 million was granted to the Healey Family Student Center, specifically to fund the addition of Riverside Terrace, an outdoor area previously not included in plans for the center. Through the Endowment Commission process, other commitments were made to the Healey Family Student Center, including increasing the project scope to include space on the ground and first floors, central involvement by students in the development of the building design and features, and the creation of a student advisory committee to oversee planning for the center. The result center opened in the fall of 2014 and incorporated sustainable elements, maximized square footage, and featured beautiful design, inside and out.[[1]](#footnote-0)

Student voices are loudest when they work in tandem with the University Administration to concretely impact student lives. The HFSC was one of the first campus improvement projects in which the University worked side-by-side with students and it created one of the most impactful and dynamic student centers at Georgetown. The student body showed its commitment to campus improvement and had measurable impact through our financial buy-in to the project. In the future, if we seek to replicate the example of the Healey Family Student Center, we should be willing to make a similar financial investment. The University and we, the students, both win when students are given agency in campus planning. The Student Empowerment Fund will grant us such agency.

The fund would begin at the start of Fiscal Year 2021, by taking $50,000 from the roughly $1,090,000 annual student activities fee budget. With continuously mandated contributions, the fund is estimated to grow to roughly $1,300,000 by Fiscal Year 2036. We decided that, in order to allow the fund to reach an impactful size, we would need to write our bylaws such that money cannot be withdrawn from the fund until 15 years have passed. After 15 years, the Finance and Appropriations Committee will work with members of the student body to evaluate a variety of proposals relevant to the student body These proposals will then be submitted to the general student body through a referendum, to give Georgetown students the final say on how the money will be spent. Then, armed with these well-thought out proposals and the support of the student body, the Finance and Appropriations Committee and student activists can begin working with the university to make these projects a reality.

Why 15 years? First, once the fund grows to larger than a million dollars it will have reached a size that commands significant attention from the university and guarantees students a seat at the table. Second, 2036 is an important year for Georgetown. The university enacts change on a twenty-year planning cycle, during which they cement plans for new buildings and programs. This fund will become available at a crucial time for student negotiations with the administration. We want to have the most impact and voice during that planning period.

Yes, this 5% cut in annual Student Activities Fee spending will lead to some budget cuts in the short term. However, we have solidarity with our future Hoyas. It is imperative that we give them leverage in their negotiations with the University in the future, even if that means minor cutbacks today. The only way we can make a big impact on our campus is if we start saving now.

The Student Empowerment Fund is the best possible way that the student body can invest in our campus’ future. We are asking for your support to transform our system to become active and equal partners of the university. If you want to help us make this happen show your support by signing on to our petition here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdDFXnAVj_YxhlOxOgrTUOZnAcF-cQXNmE6R_-ezW9-y2IbDQ/viewform?usp=sf_link>

1. https://studentcenters.georgetown.edu/ourspaces/hfsc/history/# [↑](#footnote-ref-0)