**Introduction**

Since Vice President for Student Affairs Todd Olson raised the subject in a meeting with the leadership of the Student Association, the Finance and Appropriations Committee has been carefully considering what we believe the Student Activities Fee (SAF) should look like in Fall 2020. On June 10th, 2020, we brought the issue to the floor of our committee and members of the Committee were afforded the chance to present their opinions on the matter, and after reopening options were released by *The Hoya* on June 16th, 2020, we revisited and evaluated the points that were raised in that debate. After careful consideration of their perspectives, and after consulting the Advisory Boards and their leaderships, we have reached a conclusion as to what we, as the leadership of the Committee, believe the Fee should look like if options 2, 3, 4 for reopening are implemented.

Please note, this Memo will not provide recommendations as to the nature of student life and the state of the Student Activities Fee in a fully virtual reopening (which was expressed in option 1), as we assume the University will maintain the general spending freeze it has enforced since campus closed in March.

1. **Even in a Rotational Model, All Students Should Pay the Student Activities Fee**

As was revealed by *The Hoya* on June 16th, 2020, administrators are considering a model whereby 3,350 students would return to campus in the Fall (2,900 in dorms, 450 in nearby hotels) and the rest would continue with virtual learning; those populations would then switch places for the Spring semester.

Vice President Olson has raised the question of the fairness of making students not on campus pay the fee, and while we recognize these concerns, it is our firm belief that the most just approach is to require the fee of all students. We have three principal reasons for reaching this conclusion:

* The Student Activities Fee is a fundamentally redistributive financial resource; though all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, benefit from the Fee, the benefits are more relatively experienced by those students who now have access to a more equal social playing field through the availability of free or low-cost programs. Through campus-wide special events through the Lecture Fund, Program Board, and organizations affiliated with the Student Activities Commission and Performing Arts Advisory Council, dues assistance programs to support students interested in participating in Club Sports, and financially self-supporting Access to Benefits (ATB) student organizations that have no need to charge membership dues, our present system already significantly reduces the access-to-entry barriers to student life that would otherwise exist on our campus (and could do even more to reduce them if more money was available each year). This also stands in remarkable contrast to some of our peer institutions, which charge large sums for ticketed events and provide little to no assistance. Even with new restrictions and social distancing guidelines, free University programming and well-equipped student organizations will still benefit socioeconomically-disadvantaged Hoyas the most. Moreover, if socioeconomically-disadvantaged students are prioritized for a return to campus, we cannot disproportionately impose upon them the financial burden of supporting student life.
* All students, even those who will not be on campus, benefit in the long-term from paying the Student Activities Fee in a socially-distanced landscape. After all, if student organizations do not have equitable access to financial resources to develop programming, they will be unable to reach new students, retain passionate leaderships, and maintain even semblances of community, which hurts students who are not allowed to return to campus just as much as those on campus. Whenever Georgetown returns to normalcy, student organizations will likely be the first line of response in providing students with the communities they so yearn for right now. We need to ensure that those “Homes on the Hilltop” are well-maintained and well-stocked for that day.
* Distanced students will still likely be able to participate in virtual and socially-distant programming. For example, it is unlikely that in the Fall, talks and panels will occur in any environment that isn’t at least accessible via Zoom or livestream. This also holds true for traditional student organization social activities, like movie and game nights, which will likely still have to follow the University and D.C.’s strict restrictions on gatherings and assemblies and perhaps employ various online modes of communication and festivity. Additionally, organizations, regardless of the pandemic, will continue to need to cover the cost of their subscriptions, websites, and resources. If distanced students will benefit from this programming and access to these resources, they should at least buy into the system that continues to support it.

This, of course, comes with certain caveats. When making these recommendations, we do operate assuming that the University will run regular shuttle service to satellite hotels (which we also assume will be decently close to campus), new high-flex technology and events will be utilized and will some additional expense to groups, some effort will be made to provide programming to students at hotels, and on-campus programming options will be made available throughout the day so as many students can access it as possible. Additionally, this is not to say that all students, irrespective of their being remote or in-person, should be paying $171.00 this coming academic year to support student life. In fact, we have approached this question with a firm belief that the Student Activities Fee should be reduced for the Fall 2020 semester.

1. **Regardless of the Model Chosen, the Student Activities Fee Should be Reduced**

The reality is simple: student life will not function to the same extent we budgeted for in the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Summit. This will be true of any model the University chooses, whether students are virtual, rotational, or living mostly in hotels and off-campus housing options. Some activities, such as large cultural dinners, guest speaker presentations, travel trips, and performances from our arts groups, will not be able to occur in their traditional senses. And overall, students will be ill-served if they are forced to pay a fee that was intended to cover a much wider strata of programming than what they are getting.

Additionally, to endorse the overfunding of student life right now would be entirely contrary to our stated mission in the FY2021 Budget Summit. As a Committee that intended this budget to reward financial responsibility and encourage more effective spending, we would undermine that by providing organizations with money they will be obligated to get rid of by the end of the Fiscal Year on programming and encourage wasteful, inefficient spending in the process. It would be better to provisionally practice more austere spending and then re-evaluate the state of the fee for the Spring 2021 Semester once more information is available.

Finally, we do recognize that now, more than ever, the financial constraints many Hoyas and their families are facing. With unemployment at 13.5%, and this figure magnified for women and people of color in the workforce, any added fees and costs would be unfair to Georgetown students who are struggling, especially if those fees are not providing Georgetown students with benefits proportional to their contribution into the system.

Though we do believe that the Student Activity Fee, in the long-run, is due for an adjustment in terms of its principal amount and rate of growth as Chair Bazail-Eimil outlined in an [op-ed](https://thehoya.com/reform-student-activities-fee/) in *The Hoya*, we cannot in good faith and conscience ignore the present reality. We recommend that student organizations, with guidance from Advisory Boards, FinApp, and the Center for Student Engagement (CSE), revisit their budgets for the Fall 2020 semester and consider how we can adapt and adjust events to meet these guidelines upon their final announcement. From there, we can reduce the fee in an aggregate sense to account for those changes in programming.

1. **Administration Must Duly Consider The Needs of Black Student Organizations and other Cultural and Identity-Based Organizations Throughout This Process**

We cannot deny the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on the well-being of Georgetown students who identify with marginalized and underrepresented communities. Many students were unable to remain on campus, despite having dangerous home environments awaiting them, and the Coronavirus has hurt Black communities and communities of color viciously. This harm was then only magnified for Black students with the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks and the protests that have gripped our nation.

Though programming will need to be cut or adjusted to comply with social distancing guidelines, we must ensure that this process is equitable and continues to afford Black students and other students of color with adequate resources to rebuild their spaces on campus and organize programming to meet this moment and process it. We cannot allow for this process to serve as a vehicle for further marginalization and we cannot ignore their needs; their needs must be taken seriously and considered when we begin making adjustments to student life given new guidelines. Their voices must be heard in the process; we strongly recommend Advisory Boards continue their reforms and self-reflection and recommend they do their due diligence in involving them. We also strongly urge that leaders in Administration act in good faith towards, if not honoring more of, the demands of the Black Survivors Coalition and Georgetown United Against Police Aggression (GUAPA) to ensure Black student groups, when they host events in the Fall, are not met with aggression and hostility from GUPD and that we can preserve safe and brave Black spaces on our campus.

1. **We Must Explore Devoting Part of the SAF and Tuition Contribution Towards Programming Partnerships with Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) and Other Mental Health Resources**

After we opened this memo up to feedback from the Advisory Boards and Part A and B Applicants, Brianna Rodgers, Chair of the Center of Social Justice Advisory Board for Student Organizations (CSJ-ABSO), brought this idea to our attention. Upon hearing it, we immediately recognized the value that this could have on student life during this uncertain time and we have decided to add it to this memo for greater consideration.

As we all know too well, the extended periods of isolation brought on from stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders, compounded by the separation from our friends, extended family, and traditional networks of support, have had deep impacts on widespread student, faculty, and staff mental health. CAPS, along with the Center for Student Engagement, has led programming virtually throughout this time to help combat that, and we applaud the University’s decision to make CAPS services free in Fall 2020. However, as we work to rebuild our community, CAPS has the ability to play a key role in helping struggling students and we would not want to strain its already insufficient financial resources through partnerships and programming.

We recommend an exploration of this idea going forward, that as CAPS continues to expand its programming for students, we may be able to financially contribute during these difficult times; this could come from the SAF itself or from the money additionally given to Advisory Boards through the Tuition Contribution. We will bring this to the attention of the Committee and the Mental Health Policy Coalition and we hope to discuss with the CSE in the coming weeks.

**Conclusion**

At the end of the day, students and administrators alike value what student organizations contribute to our community and amidst these strange and uncertain times, we all want the best possible outcome for student life. We look forward to further dialogue with you all and we hope that these recommendations can serve you well as the Center for Student Engagement and University administrators continue to explore this question.