

**Rutgers University Senate  
Student Affairs Committee  
Response to Charge S-1005 on the Alma Mater  
October 2011**

*Charge S-1005: Explore and make suggestions for possible revisions to the current Rutgers University Alma Mater, "On the Banks of the Old Raritan" Consider the Student Caucus rationale suggesting the need for this charge.*

The Student Affairs Committee began the response to this charge by examining the rationale submitted by the Senate's Student Caucus when it submitted the proposal for this charge. As stated in that proposal, "The current Rutgers alma mater, 'On the Banks of the Old Raritan', written in 1873, is not currently inclusive of all Rutgers students. In addition to being exclusively New Brunswick-centric, additional issues have been raised by the university community that the line, 'And resolved that I should be a man' is also not inclusive or gender-neutral. Revised wording has already been adopted on the Camden Campus, according to some Camden students. The new wording makes the song's lyrics more inclusive, and the Student Caucus of the University Senate would like the issue of the alma mater reviewed by a Senate committee, with a focus on making the song inclusive of all Rutgers students and alumni." We had the good fortune of consulting with a Rutgers student, Dan Comito, SAS 2011, who was coincidentally writing his thesis on Rutgers' Alma Mater. We examined the history of the Alma Mater itself from its penning to its current version and common variations, and present such in this report using text from Mr. Comito's thesis with his permission. Pertinent elements for our consideration are given here.

In 1873, several students decided to band together and create a committee that would solve this issue and make Rutgers better known musically and thus created the Glee Club. One of the founding members of the committee, Edwin E. Colburn '76, wanted a song for their first performance that would capture the Rutgers student experience and instill pride in Rutgers' rich traditions. On the day of the concert, Colburn approached another member of the committee, Howard N. Fuller '74, to write such a song. With two hours until the concert, Fuller decided to write of his own college experience and use the tune from a popular English/Scottish drinking song, "On the Banks of the Old Dundee". The original lyrics are attached as part of the Appendix.

The intent of the lyrics is not a reference to the gender of the man, but rather of the abstract concept of manhood. The essence of the line is synonymous with the concept of taking a boy and making him a man. The point is about the growth, maturity, and wisdom that an education at Rutgers would provide; it is not a ploy for male dominance. Although the term is obviously gender-specific, the intended usage is indicative of the connotation of the responsibility of maturation to adulthood.

The first revision was in 1914. Rutgers President, William H. S. Demarest, asked Fuller to keep the first and last verses but rewrite the middle verses to reflect themes to which the alumni body could relate. Both versions had received the attention of the Targum. This particular revision is extremely important for several reasons. First, it marks the transformation from a rowdy college song to a more austere version of an alma mater. Second, it set a precedent that the song can be changed if the lyrics were deemed unsuitable. Lastly, however, and most importantly, this revision sets the precedent that any revisions should be extremely well thought out and planned.

The New Jersey College for Women (NJC) was founded in 1918 and later took the name Douglass College in honor of Mabel Smith Douglass and her efforts in ensuring the existence of an education for women in New Jersey. NJC evolved quite separately from Rutgers, developing its own traditions, curriculum, and even its own alma mater.

In 1924, Rutgers became a university with the addition of a graduate school. After this reorganization, all of the male colleges continued to share facilities with one another, but NJC did not.

On October 11, 1988, President Edward Bloustein wrote the chair of the University Senate stressing the need for gender-neutral lyrics, and the need to represent the students from the various campuses, including Newark and Camden. This led to the creation of a universitywide committee to oversee additions to the Alma Mater. The result is the 1989 version in Appendix A. These lyrics never caught on, only being performed for two years' commencements, in 1990 and 1991. Thereafter, the original first and last verses are listed in the program with the changes of "my boys" to "my friends." Additionally, students of Rutgers University (specifically the women) had begun singing the words "or a woman" after the second line of the first verse.

Several other universities, including Penn State, Dartmouth and Harvard, have made gender-neutral changes to their alma mater without changing the meter or rhyme. Of particular note is the song of Victoria University, a subsidiary of the University of Toronto: "On the Old Ontario Strand". This song is almost identical to Rutgers' Alma Mater. They changed the words "my father" to "my parents" and "Resolved that I should be a man" to "Finest college in the land." The situation is different from that at Rutgers as this university is a subsidiary. Students still sing the University of Toronto alma mater as their main college song. "On the Old Ontario Strand" is only sung once a year, at orientation. And the word "parents" still raises issues of single-parent families, etc.

This brings us to recent history. Discussions begun by the Douglass Governing Council (DCG) in 2009, and put before President McCormick and the Senate's Student Caucus in 2010, led to creation of University Senate Charge S-1005, which was issued formally to the Senate's Student Affairs Committee, as shown at the

beginning of this report. There have been several articles on this matter in the Targum since November 2010. The first made the students aware of the SAC charge. A December 2010 follow-up written by a sophomore student suggested that changing the Alma Mater sets the wrong precedent. The student, Mr. Reep, notes that the song was written by one who dearly loved the college and reflects history and tradition, and that it is acceptable that it not reflect the present condition. He contends that our National Anthem should therefore be changed as we are no longer at war with Great Britain. The Student Affairs Committee decided in Spring of 2011 to survey the present student body. The survey and its results are attached as Appendix B. It is consistent with a Targum poll in April 2010, in that 70% of the students responding do not want the song changed. Over 55% of the 5066 respondents were female. An editorial in the Targum in 2011 also echoes the sentiment not to change the Alma Mater.

As for the Douglass Governing Council, Dan Comito spoke to several of its members, and attended its April meeting. No current member had a copy of the original petition or the resolution they wrote. However, the internal vice president of the DGC has said they simply want the song to be inclusive of women. As far as the DGC was concerned, it was in the hands of the Senate. They also stated that words like "parent" in the Victoria version would not be acceptable since not all students are supported by their parents. The DGC went on to say that they would not support not changing the song, even if the vast majority of the Rutgers community did not support change. They indicated they would pursue it further. Nicole Fisher, a class of 2012 member of the council, explained this point of view by stating that "The problem cannot be solved by deciding who is offended by it and voting on how many people agree, the issue is assessing why it is a problem *period*. The university should take the time and decide what exactly caused the outrage by women who are underrepresented. The minuscule representation is evident in the fact that this is still an issue and has not been properly addressed." The DGC contends that this wording also violates the anti-discrimination policy of the school and is a matter of right and wrong.

As a result of the Student Affairs Committee's fact-finding and response to the survey it has put before the student body, the Committee does not feel change to the Rutgers Alma Mater is warranted nor is there a mandate to do such. This song is not a statement of morals, ethics or policies. It is not advocating a return to single-gender institutions. It is not pejorative toward lifestyle differences, alternative families or either gender. It is the artistic result of passionate writings of a student for a school that holds a respected place in our history. Past attempts at modification to an even more inclusive version, such as the 1989/1990 version, have not caught on simply because the vast majority do not want it changed. Although recent events have thrown the condition of tolerance among students into doubt, changing two words is not the best course of action. The editorial published in the Targum in April 2011 titled "Respect history of alma mater" raised concerns that the changing of the alma mater was left to a survey and a series of clicks. As we have shown above, we also did our homework (assisted by Dan Comito).

In closing, the following are some excerpts from the Rutgers student writer, Joe Hernandez, April 2011 "The Soap Box":

"But, in my eyes, the alma mater is only sexist and old-fashioned if we mistakenly take it to represent the University's current stance on social issues. Rather, "On the Banks of the Old Raritan" embodies our history, our roots and our dynamic tradition, which has remained mostly the same but continues to change... If it is meant to represent the most up-to-date version of the University's collective social philosophy, then students have rightly protested. No alma mater written in the 21st century would begin with those two lines. But if the song's practical function is in its traditional value to our University's history, then there is no reason to change it. It expresses things as they were, not necessarily as they should have been... I am not against change, just this change. You get the idea."

### **Summary/Recommendations**

We view the Alma Mater as reflecting the traditions and history of Rutgers, and utilizing one person's experience as representative of that. It does not claim to make any social statement.

We recommend the following:

1. The most current version of the Rutgers Alma Mater should stand (see Appendix A for 1989/1990 and Current Version).
2. We encourage groups or campuses who are so inclined to add other stanzas as they see fit, and as they may find representative of their own experiences, as has been done in the past (Appendix A).

#### **Student Affairs Committee**

**Barraco, Robert, Alumni Association, Co-Chair**

**Rabinowitz, Samuel, SB-Camden (F), Co-Chair - Executive Committee Liaison**

**Sanghvi, Sheel, Engineering (S), Co-Chair**

Blimling, Gregory, VP for Student Affairs (*Non-senator*) - *Administrative Liaison*

Bodnar, Raymond, Alumni Association

Cashin, Joseph, SAS-NB (S)

Coppola, Renee, SAS-NB (S)

Dietrich, Marisa, Student Charter Trustee (S)

Fontana, Joseph, SAS-NB (S)

Guo, Li, UC-N (F)

Honey, Christine, SAS-NB (S)

James, Sybil, Ombudsperson for Students (*Non-Senator*)

Kerr, Erin, CCAS (S)

Klein, Spencer, SAS-NB (S)

Lalani, Aamir, SAS-NB (S)

Lindgren, Teri, At-Large Newark (F)

Markowitz, Norman, SAS-NB (F)

Messer, Stanley, GSAPP Dean (A)

Milliman, Stacey, SAS-NB (S)  
Minucci, Thomas, MGSA (S)  
Paterno, Matthew, UC-C (S)  
Stillwagon, Michael, NB Staff  
Violette, Nancy, Other Units-NB (F)  
Wolf, Ian, SAS-NB (S)  
Yabut, Katherine, SAS-NB (S)  
Yeagle, Philip, FAS-N Dean (A)

## **Appendix A: Variations of the Rutgers Alma Mater**

### Original lyrics

My father sent me to old Rutgers Resolved that I should be a man,  
And so I settled down  
In that noisy college town, On the Banks of the old Raritan

Chorus:

On the banks of the Old Raritan my boys Where old Rutgers evermore shall stand  
For has she not stood  
Since the time of the flood On the Banks of the Old Raritan

As Fresh, they used me rather roughly, But I the fearful gauntlet ran  
And they shook me so about  
That they turned me inside out On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus

I passed through all these tortures nobly, And then, as Soph, my turn began  
And I hazed the freshman so  
That they longed for heaven, I know, On the Banks of the Old Raritan

Chorus

And then I rested at my pleasure,  
And steered quite clear of Prex's ban,  
And the stars their good-bye kissing  
Found me not from Euchre missing, On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus

And soon I made my social entrée  
When I laid full many a wicked plan,  
And by my cunning art  
Slew many a maiden's heart, On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus

Then sing aloud to Alma Mater  
And keep the Scarlet in the Van  
For with her motto high  
Rutgers name shall never die  
On the banks of the Old Raritan  
Chorus

## 1914 Version

My Dearest President

I have written three new verses for an old college song and the first transcript of the whole song in its revised form appears below, which I place in your hands with much misgiving yet with the devout hope that it may prove a true and satisfactory symbol for the fullest experience of those staunch and sturdy and fervent feelings of love and loyalty which every reverent son of Rutgers must need have in his heart for his "precious Alma Mater"

My father sent me to old Rutgers,  
And resolv'd that I should be a man;;  
And so I settled down,  
In that noisy college town  
On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus:

On the banks of the old Raritan, my boys,  
Where old Rutgers evermore shall stand,  
For has she not stood  
Since the time of the flood,  
On the banks of the old Raritan

Her ardent spirit stirred and cheered me  
From the day my college years began;  
Gracious Alma Mater mine;  
Learning's fair and honored shrine  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Chorus

I love her flaming, far-flung banner,  
I love her triumphs proud to scan,  
And I glory in the fame  
That's immortalized her name,  
On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus

My heart clings closer than the ivy,  
As life runs out its fleeting span,  
To the stately, ancient walls  
Of her hallowed, classic halls  
On the banks of the old Raritan

Chorus

Then sing aloud to Alma Mater,  
And keep the Scarlet in the van;  
For with her motto high,  
Rutgers' name shall never die,  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Chorus

Faithfully Yours Howard N Fuller

1989 Version

Rutgers New Brunswick:

Verse: My father sent me to old Rutgers, And resolved that I should be a man;  
And so I settled down,  
In that noisy college town  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Chorus: On the banks of the old Raritan, my friends, Where old Rutgers evermore  
shall stand;  
For has she not stood,  
Since the time of the flood,  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Verse: Let's toast to Rutgers ever stronger  
Since the time when Old Queen's first began;;  
Here's to glory days of old  
And a future bright and bold  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Rutgers Camden:

Verse: Sweet leaves of grass grow fresh in Camden,  
An so we proudly gather there;  
Our hearts and minds unite  
To share the poet's light,  
On the banks of the old Delaware

Chorus: On the banks of the old Delaware, my friends,  
Sound the clarion trumpets, let them blare;  
Clash the cymbals ruff the snare,  
Rutgers' glory fill the air  
On the banks of the old Delaware.



Verse: The sun of justice shines in Camden;  
Its enlightened truth we all can share;  
Our hearts and minds unite  
At that honored urban site,  
On the banks of the old Delaware.

Rutgers Newark:

Verse: John Dana's dream for this old Newark  
Of an educated human will,  
Lives on in sturdy walls  
Of Rutgers' urban halls  
On the slopes of the Academic Hill.

Chorus: On the slopes of the Academic Hill, my friends  
Where Rutgers stands and ever will,  
Standing proud and standing tall  
Here for one and here for all,  
On the slopes of the Academic Hill.

Rutgers-The State University as a whole:

Verse:  
From New Jersey's northern lakes and mountains  
To our southern pines and gleaming shore,  
Learning's fair and hallowed place  
Joins us, every creed and race,  
And we praise the name of Rutgers evermore.

Victoria University/College "On the Old Ontario Strand" revised

Oh, my parents sent me to Victoria  
The finest college in the land,  
And so I settled down  
In that quiet college town,  
On the old Ontario Strand

Chorus:

On the old Ontario Strand, my friends  
Where Victoria evermore shall stand  
For has she not stood  
Since the time of the flood  
On the old Ontario Strand

Current version

I.

*My father sent me to old Rutgers,  
And resolv'd that I should be a man (or a woman);*  
And so I settled down,  
in that noisy college town,  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Chorus

On the banks of the old Raritan, my friends  
where old Rutgers ever more shall stand,

For has she not stood since the time of the flood,  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

V.

Then sing aloud to Alma Mater,  
And keep the scarlet in the van';  
For with her motto high,  
Rutgers' name shall never die,  
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Chorus