Improving the College Experience at Rutgers: RUPA

A study about the accountability, structure and funding of RUPA and what can be done to improve it.

Tag words: RUPA, finances, Snooki, awareness, Rutgers University, events

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Video Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9Kro-oxzfl

Summary

Rutgers University Programming Association (RUPA) has come under criticism of late due to the amount of money it has spent on talent and the way that these events are run. Many are upset that Rutgersfest will no longer go on because of their mismanagement, and many more are upset with the amount of money that Nicole “Snookie” Polizzi received for her appearance last spring. These recent strings of controversy have students calling for more transparency within the organization, and a stronger sense involvement from the students. With a change to the RUPA structure and a stronger involvement in the general student body, RUPA would enhance the Rutgers student experience. This would create a greater sense of accountability with the students themselves because they would then have a more direct say and impact on where their own student fees go. (KR)

History and Structure of RUPA

(KR) RUPA is a very large organization with many sub committees. It appears to be a very bureaucratic organization that has 1 President, 7 Vice Presidents, and 34 committee members that oversee all the operations within the organization. With so many committee’s and positions of power it really seems like things might get a bit confusing.

RUPA’s mission statement: “Rutgers University Programming Association (RUPA) is the university-wide student programming council that serves Rutgers University by providing a variety of cultural, educational, recreational, and social programs that appeal to diverse student needs and interests. RUPA enriches every student's Rutgers experience by offering leadership opportunities, building community, and creating a dynamic
environment that incorporates student input, cultivates creativity, and facilitates personal growth.”

That’s only the beginning of the RUPA overview which can be found here: http://getinvolved.rutgers.edu/documents/programs/RUPA_Overview2011-12.doc

The overview itself outlines RUPA into Human Resources, Financial Affairs & Assessment, Public Relations, Arts and Culture, Comedy and Movies, Concert and Coffeehouses and finally Traditions and Community. Within each of sections there is a detailed description of the duties and responsibilities of each one. This overview is very resume like.

RUPA appears to be a volunteer organization. People mostly volunteer their time to either help out as a president, vice president, committee member or general member. It does not however seem to be a democratic organization. From the information I have as of now, you cannot be voted in as a president or committee member. You need to apply and be chosen. Through an interview with Jared Levine VP of RUPA financials we found out that you are chosen by a group of professional staff in Resident Life and Programming if you apply for one of these positions.

**Issues**

(KR) Lately RUPA has been in the news due to the mishandling of Rutgersfest and Snookie. It brought many to ask questions as to where the funding comes from and how does RUPA decide to spend it.

RUPA responded: “Before selecting a performer, RUPA members brainstorm ideas, analyze trends in campus programming and gauge student input while maintaining an annual programming budget.”

They also stated that over 2,000 students requested that Snookie come perform on campus. In fact, tickets sold out so quickly that a second show was added, which also sold out. Rutgers New Brunswick has over 30,000 students and because of 2,000 students they decided it was enough to spend $32,000 on Snookie with student funds. While some may argue that Snookie is a great entertainer and performer in her own right (a point that is no doubt debatable), there is no way any organization with the mission to serve the general student body can justify that, no matter who they would have brought in. It’s simple cost benefit analysis. RUPA needs to spend that money more effectively to serve the entire student population.

Some more interesting spending habits we’ve found through RUPA have to do with them paying their members directly or indirectly. For example the president and the 7 vice presidents underneath him or her all get a $2,000 stipend for the summer and either free on-campus housing or another $800 stipend for off-campus housing. On top of this during the school year each president and vice president gets $100 RU Express monthly. Committee chair members also get paid $50 monthly in RU Express. When totaling this
RUPA spends roughly $36,000 just to pay its members. This was only using information available on their site. It was kind of shocking when looking at this organization because quite honestly I thought it was pretty much a volunteer only organization.

Financial Numbers from application packets:
President:  
http://getinvolved.rutgers.edu/documents/programs/PresidentApplicationPacket2011-12.doc

Vice President:  
http://getinvolved.rutgers.edu/documents/programs/VicePresidentApplicationPacket2011-12.doc

Chair Member:  
http://getinvolved.rutgers.edu/documents/programs/ChairApplicationPacket2011-12.doc

At first I was ready to persecute them for paying their members, but after talking to Jared Levine it seems justified. This Organization is like a full time job for many of the members, so compensation should definitely be allowed for all the dedication they and time they put in. We were also appalled by the Snooki situation and the money that was spent there, but after the interview we found out that RUPA does not use direct student funds. They receive money through Student Center generated revenue. So for example whenever rooms are rented out that money is given to RUPA, and whenever something like Wendy’s is bought within those student centers a portion of that money goes to the organization. A stark contrast to what many of us had assumed.

Finally our last issue was that of student input. Again many of us assumed there was no way to let RUPA know what we wanted to. After talking to them we found out they do periodic surveys on what talent should be brought to Rutgers on Facebook. A lot of the things we found out during the interview initially was a complete contradiction of what we assumed to know. And because of this we decided to spread the awareness of actually understanding what does and how you can participate i.e. voting on Facebook

Programs and Structure

(RUT) RUPA does not only bring musicians, speakers, and comedians to campus. It has a hand in many more events that take place at Rutgers University. The RUPA website currently lists a number of events and programs it is involved with running at getinvolved.rutgers.edu. These include:

- Involvement Fairs – Event held at the beginning of both the fall and spring semesters during which students are able to learn more about the 300+ student organizations, 60+ fraternities and sororities, and numerous educational departments on campus.
- New Student Orientation – A two day program during which newly admitted Rutgers University students are provided with information about the university, college culture, and how to navigate and utilize the bus system between all five campuses. Students are able to ask questions to current Rutgers students and faculty, and participate in a number of teambuilding activities to form new friendships with other newbies.

- Multicultural Programs – The Student Life Multicultural Student Involvement consists of the various cultural centers on campus (Paul Robeson Cultural Center, Asian American Cultural Center, Center for Latino Arts and Culture), multicultural and LGBT student organizations, cultural umbrella student organizations (Asian Student Council, Latino Student Council, United Black Council), and other academic departments and centers. In addition to coordinating multicultural celebrations, they develop leadership initiatives for students and student organizations of color.

- Community Service – The Student Volunteer Council allows for students to participate in volunteer community service throughout the school year.

- Dance Marathon – New Jersey’s largest student-run philanthropic event, raising over $1.3 million over the last ten years for the Embrace Kids Foundation, a non-profit organization that supports children with cancer and blood disorders. Over 400 dancers stay on their feet for 32 hours, and over 500 people volunteer during this event. There are prizes, games, sports, and various other forms of entertainment.

- Alternative Breaks – Students learn about a particular community issue within the United States for 5 weeks, and then take a trip either during winter or spring break to participate in volunteer community service acts. This displays social responsibility and allows students to become better leaders.

- Commuter Life – Rutgers University has a large number (HOW MANY?) of off-campus/commuter students, and has a Commuter Life program to assist the thousands of these students present. Student needs are addressed, commuting students are integrated into on-campus activities, and various events are sponsored. The Off-Campus Students Association is also affiliated with RUPA.

- Class Councils – Rutgers University Class Councils are present to keep students of the same class feeling a strong sense of affiliation and pride with the University and their respective classmates.

- Rutgers at the State Theatre – The State Theatre, located on George Street in between the College Avenue and Cook/Douglass Campuses conducts numerous performances, varying from music, to theater, to comedy. RUPA as well as RU Student Life have a program in place that allows students to purchase discounted tickets to these events.

RUPA events
(JL) RUPA has created a fan based page via the social network, Facebook, to affiliate and spread awareness of their organization publicly to Rutgers students. Currently, there are 1726 members on Facebook who have chosen to affiliate themselves with this page. Listed below are a few set of events hosted by RUPA in the months of October and November with brief details on the event.

October:

1. **RUPA Halloween Movie: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2**
   “Tap into your inner wizard with RUPA while we watch what happens in the finale of The Harry Potter sequel, "Deathly Hallows Part 2".
   UPDATE: RUPA will be hosting a HARRY POTTER COSTUME CONTEST the day of the showing! Come out in your best dress robes for a chance to win a magical prize!”
   This event has taken place on October 21 at 8:00 pm. Approximately 200 students have reserved via online Facebook that they will be attending.

2. **RUPA Concert: KARMIN**
   “Experience the sensation that has captured the attention of millions when KARMIN comes to Rutgers! KARMIN's unique sound puts a fun flair on mainstream music and has received millions of rave reviews from fans, famous musical artists, and members of the media. Their cover of Chris Brown's 'Look At Me Now' has received over 40 million hits on YouTube!” Student tickets were sold at a price of 8 dollars and student guest tickets at a price of 12 dollars. This event has taken place on October 18 at 8:00 pm.
   Approximately 165 students have reserved that they will be attending via Facebook.

3. **RUPA Tradition: 4th Annual Homecoming Charity Bed Races**
   “Come watch your friends as they speed down College Avenue in support of New Brunswick Public Schools! Prizes awarded to winner of race, as well as for best decorations and most donations. Team members must be representatives of a student organization. Maximum per team-5 members and 2 alternates. Beds will be provided to all teams. Maximum per team-5 members and 2 alternates. We ask all team members to donate any hats or gloves, so your kind donations can go to the New Brunswick Public School District. A prize of $750 will be awarded to the first place team!”
   Approximately 110 students have reserved that they will be attending this event which has taken place on October 13, at 9:00 pm.

November:

1. **RUPA Tradition: Scarlet Harvest**
   “Join us for the "Scarvest" an annual RUPA tradition where you can race in a giant corn
and hay bale maze, carve Halloween pumpkins, and enjoy a live concert.” Approximately 145 individuals are planning to attend on November 4th, at 1:00 pm.

2. **RUPA Concert: LMFAO & The Cataracs**

   “RUPA is party rockin’ with LMFAO at the State Theatre in downtown New Brunswick on Thursday, November 10th! "Party Rock Anthem" reached #1 in the U.S. for six straight week - come see why. The Cataracs open this amazing show!” Doors open at 7:00pm, show starts: 8:00pm, ticket prices ranged from 25-55$. Approximately 240 students have reserved to attend this event on November 10th, at 8:00 pm.

3. **RUPA Lecture: To Write Love on Her Arms**

   “Founder of TWLOHA Jamie Tworkowski brings his message of hope and help to those dealing with depression, addiction, and thoughts of suicide.” Approximately 105 students have reserved to attend this event on November 15th, at 8:00 pm.

**Service Project: Reshaping the noise of RUPA**

(JL)

Our mission will be mainly focused on getting the attention and awareness out and abroad to those who are affiliated amongst Rutgers University such as the undergraduates, faculty, athletes, and prospective students. Our goal is to broaden the horizons of RUPA’s organization and spread their concept by use of the following:

Daily Targum: The daily Targum prints every day, for students, to read and catch up on relevant news within the Rutgers network and the outside world. The goal is to notify the Rutgers community, staff and students, that RUPA does exist and what obligations the organization holds. However, not just an ad that publicly announces RUPA or a specific event organized by RUPA however the idea is to provide information such as who is the current president and where to locate their offices. As well, information that share links to online articles or surveys just to catch the reader’s attention.

Email listserv: Cook Community sends out weekly notifications to students via email regarding specific events, deadlines, and general information about the campus. The idea is to include a specific awareness that RUPA also holds events and what RUPA stands for and that it represents the student body of Rutgers.

Online surveys, Facebook: A source of communicating and getting the acknowledgement out into society is to network the given proposal. Facebook has several means of communicating with the Rutgers population such as creating specific events, uploading information on a wall, creating a survey and uploading the link so that many of the students can reply to the questions. A handwritten, 10-12 question survey asking if the
student knows about RUPA and what events they would like to see RUPA invest more of their time and money into. A second type of survey is to publicly ask random students on campus the same questions but have their instant responses recorded.

Recognition: The idea is to enhance the awareness of RUPA’s organization and the role they play in at Rutgers. We want the Rutgers students to participate in voting and choosing what they would like to see planned out for upcoming events and programs.

Events planned, voice heard by students: The moral of this proposal is to allow more of the Rutgers population to have their voices heard by the RUPA’s organization and to create a more instrumental awareness.

We’ve produced a survey to submit online via Facebook and post around campus at different locations to receive feedback regarding our issue at hand. The survey was successful in its use for feedback and the format is given below.

**Title: RU Aware of RUPA**
(Please take a moment of your time to complete a few set of questions based on RUPA's campus activity.)

**Question One:** What do you think RUPA stands for? [This question should be completed in text form.]

**Question Two:** Do you know what RUPA does? [Answer is completed in a yes or no format.]

**Question Three:** How would you rate your awareness of RUPA’s organization? [This question is answered on a scale of 1-10, worst to best respectively.]

**Question Four:** RUPA is allocating its funds to organize events through…
   a- Student funds
   b- University funds
   c- Revenue through various student centers
   d- Donations
   e- I have no idea
   [This question is answered through a multiple choice format.]

**Question Five:** What events would you like to see RUPA create with their funds? [This question is completed in text form.]

**Question Six:** How would you want to incorporate your ideas/votes about RUPA's events?
Dear Mary Diduch,

As an attending fifth year Rutgers student, it is imperative to see change occur within the universities internal structure on how they manage social events and how awareness of these events become public. This letter is in regards to introducing my group’s presentation idea and hopefully coming to terms with you, the editor in chief, to see if a section within the Daily Targum could announce what my class group’s objectives are, how we plan to attack it, and why we are doing it. My group and I started this class project initially thinking that RUPA did not attempt to interact with any of the students, who attend Rutgers, in light of the Snookie situation. Then, dwelling more in depth of the situation we recognized how that organization’s awareness within the Rutgers student population was nonexistent. As a group, we find it necessary that the interaction between students and RUPA become existent through an effective and elaborate plan. As proposed, awareness can be brought out through introducing RUPA and their events in a different manner within the Rutgers Targum. As well, if students cannot attend meetings held by RUPA then we suggested building a voting system through the Rutgers email listserv to send to every student on their opinion to know who they would like to see attend Rutgers University as an event. We understood that fliers would make great use of creating awareness of the organization but then what? We wanted to make sure the students had their full attention and interest when reading something about RUPA and commit to reaching out to the RUPA’s student body group with their opinions. There has been, over the past year or two, confusion regarding how RUPA is allocating their resources to produce every event and whether or not it was coming out of student’s funds. We hope to be successful in our presentation’s mission and find a means to an end. Thank you for your support and concern.

Sincerely,
Joseph Lehaf

Hi Joseph,

Thank you for your letter. Is this something you would like the Targum to publish?
We’ve all been familiar with the Snookie debacle that took place last year. But are we still really familiar with how RUPA operates. RUPA came under fire for bringing Snookie in on a Budget of $32,000. But although the question was asked where that money came from was it really answered? We spoke with RUPA very briefly and are actually scheduled to sit down to interview the financial head. For the 10 minutes that we talked it was from my understanding the RUPA does not take student funds, contrary to statements made in the paper and sentiment from general public. He stated that RUPA has a lot of misconceptions, student funds being used was one of them. I found it so weird that a misconception that big would not have tried to be fixed by RUPA, especially when the New Jersey State Legislature has been trying in recent months to allow students to opt out of contributing to student funds. They would essentially be fighting for a law that wouldn’t change anything. According to the financial head, they explained that RUPA uses funds generated from student centers and other forms of revenue. For example this would be the spaces that are rented out, and food that is bought within the student centers. At the time I thought well I guess I shouldn’t be so mad then. The more I thought about it however, the more I began to go back to my original position. The key word that RUPA most uses when explaining funds, its mission and its purpose is students. Regardless whether they get these funds direct from tuition or it is from revenue generated from the university. These funds represent us, and if we use them irresponsibly then the image created by that is put on us. The meeting coming up should really answer a lot of questions. Is RUPA just a misunderstood organization that was caught in the firestorm after Snookie? Or did they actually just mismanage the situation themselves and create the controversy in the first place. Time will tell.
The Rutgers University Programming Association has been embroiled in controversy over the last year following their invitation of Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi to speak to students. The issue was not so much her invitation as it was the cost it took to bring her to campus, which was a cool $32,000. To make matters worse, the marquee end of the year event, Rutgersfest was marred by the shooting of three individuals during after-parties on/around campus. While none of the people involved were University students, RUPA was raked through the coals for organizing an event that led to such turmoil, and there were many calls for RUPA to be disbanded altogether.

RUPA uses student funds for its programming, and as the programming association for a public university, taxpayer money as well. These incidents were unfortunate examples of RUPA events gone wrong, but the organization definitely has its merits. Running approximately 180 events a year, RUPA sponsors many other beneficial functions. In addition to providing entertainers and speakers to the student body, RUPA runs multicultural programs in conjunction with Rutgers University’s cultural centers. RUPA also holds involvement fairs for students at the beginning of each semester to expose them to the plethora of clubs and departments on campus. Getting rid of RUPA would be throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The organization needs stricter guidelines and better overall input from the student body, but its merits undoubtedly outweigh its deficiencies.

(JL)

Chart 1: Survey Answer
Based on Chart 1, 65% of the total surveyed students answered correctly to the first survey question. Only 50% of the total surveyed students knew what RUPA does. Approximately 69% of the surveyed students who answered the first survey question correctly knew what RUPA does.

Chart 2: Survey Answer

![Bar Chart of Awareness of RUPA]

Based on Chart 2, 35% of the total surveyed students responded their awareness of RUPA as poor or not aware, between the scale measurements of 1 to 4. Another 35% responded between the 5 to 7 scale as somewhat aware. 30% of the total responded as completed aware of RUPA between the scale of 8 to 10.

Chart 3: Survey Answer

![Bar Chart of Allocation of RUPA Funds]

Based on Chart 3, the allocation of RUPA funds is distributed as follows: 25% for university funds, 25% for revenue through various student centers, and 20% for student funds. The remaining allocation is not specified.
Based on Chart 3, 20% of the total surveyed students voted that their thought on RUPA’s method of allocating funds is through student funds. 30% thought funds were through university funds and another 30% thought funds were through revenue from other student centers. 5% of students thought funds are coming through donations. 15% of students have no idea how RUPA is allocating their funds.

Chart 4: Survey Answer

Based on chart 4, 75% of the total surveyed students chose the idea that they would like to have their ideas or votes about RUPA’s events through an online survey. No student surveyed wanted Rutgers to choose the event. 10% of surveyed students would like to see the committee to choose the events and 15% of students are undecided on how this procedure goes.

Based on the question, asked in the survey about what events students would like to see get created by RUPA, 70% of the surveyed students responded back stating that they would like to see the event Rutgersfest come back into the program. 15% responded that they have no idea and another 15% responded with different thoughts ranging from dance parties to carnivals.