

Executive Summary: Cornell Student Assembly 2024–2026 Student Activity Fee

Recommendation

The Cornell Student Assembly recommends the Undergraduate Student Activity Fee (SAF) be set at \$424.00 for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 Academic Years. A table breaking down the individual allocations of the fee to organizations is provided in Appendix A.¹

Update to the Procedures of the Allocation Process

- New to the 2024-2026 SAF Allocation Process, a revamped quantitative section was added to the Byline Funding Application.
- This section required the reporting of previous expenses from the past two AYs and the completion of budget templates to plan expenses for the next two AYs.
- This updated section allowed for further analysis of the actual financial needs of an applicant and helped to limit the project rollover balances when determining allocations.
 - More information about the process is included in Appendix B.²

Recent Issues Affecting Byline Organizations

- **Rebuilding After COVID-19 Restrictions** – Restrictions implemented during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 AYs negatively impacted organizations total membership and executive board succession. When restrictions loosened, this led to two notable trends observed in the past 2AYs outlined below.
 - **Organizations focus on recruiting** – Organizations have shifted many internal resources to the recruitment of new general body members.
 - **Increased programming events** – Organizations have significantly increased the total amount of programming events to near parity of pre-pandemic levels.
- **Inflationary Environment** – Despite pandemic restrictions limiting the methods for Organizations to spend money leading to larger rollover balances, and the SAF not being refunded to students during the pandemic, Organizations have faced financial issues in the inflationary environment between Fall 2021 and Fall 2023. This occurred concurrently with the expansion of programming events during that time.
- **Dispersion of Organizational Stability** – The synergy between organizations dealing with the negative effects of restrictions and an inflationary environment resulted in a distinct divide between struggling and high-functioning organizations.
 - **Operational struggles** – Restrictions resulted in leadership succession issues.
 - **Financial struggles** – Inexperienced Organization leadership attempting to expand programming while also battling inflation led to poor financial decisions and the liquidation of many rollover balances.
- More information about these issues can be found in Appendix C.³

Historical Rise in Tuition with the Recommended SAF Increase

- Historical tuition & fees are tracked by the Cornell IRP database. From the 2006-2007 AY until the end of the 2025-2026 AY, the CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of the following categories was calculated.
 - Nonresident Contract (less SAF): 4.196%
 - Resident Contract (less SAF): 5.090%
 - Student Activity Fee (using 2024-2026 Recommendation): 4.582%
- More information about this calculation can be found in Appendix D.⁴

¹ Appendix A: Student Activity Fee Allocation Proposal

² Appendix B: Update to the Procedures of the Allocation Process

³ Appendix C: Recent Issues Affecting Byline Organizations

⁴ Appendix D: Comparing the Historical Rise in Tuition with the Recommended Student Activity Fee Increase

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The Progressive Principles of the Student Activity Fee

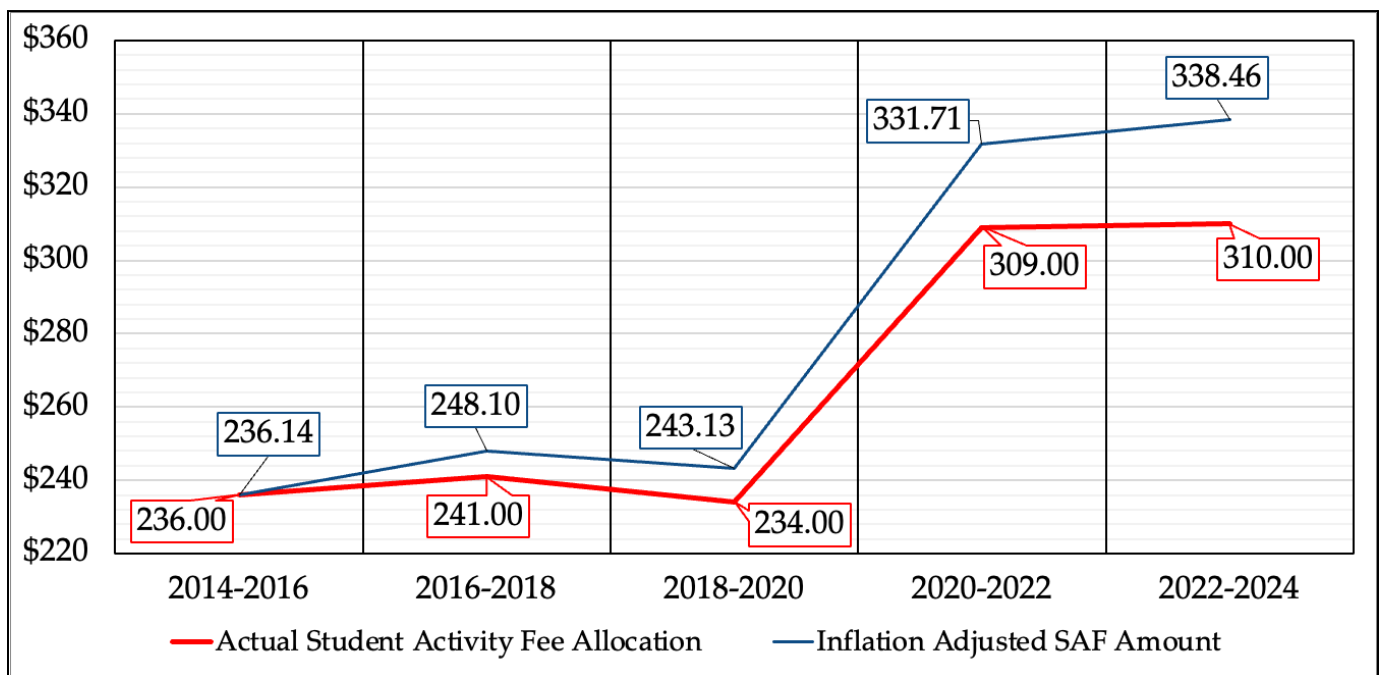
- For any student who receives a form of financial aid, the SAF is not paid by the student and is instead financed by the student’s College.
- If we consider this fee as a “tax”, it fundamentally acts as a way to shift the negative financial burden from low-income students to their Colleges, while still allowing all students to benefit from the fee.

Increase in College Payment to Offset Student Activity Fee Increase

- When analyzing the percentage of students who have received some form of aid over the past four years in tandem with the projected enrollment increases for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 AY, the incremental contribution increase from colleges is projected to be \$978,799.30
- More information about this calculation can be found in Appendix E.⁵

Comparing Historic Inflation with Student Activity Fee Increases

- From Fall 2013 until Fall 2021, the SAF has always lagged what it should have been using inflation rates.
 - Used Consumer Price Index data from the Fall semester (October) before the SAF was set and compared it to the SAF amount set for the following two AYs.
- The chart below outlines this discrepancy.



Independent Study into our Student Activity Fee Price Index

- Since the Consumer Price Index includes categories that the SAF is not traditionally spent on, using the same principles as CPI, we constructed a SAF Price Index for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 AYs.
 - Composite SAF Inflation Rate
 - 2021-2022 AY: 13.1457%
 - 2022-2023 AY: 7.6922%
- More information about this calculation can be found in Appendix F.⁶

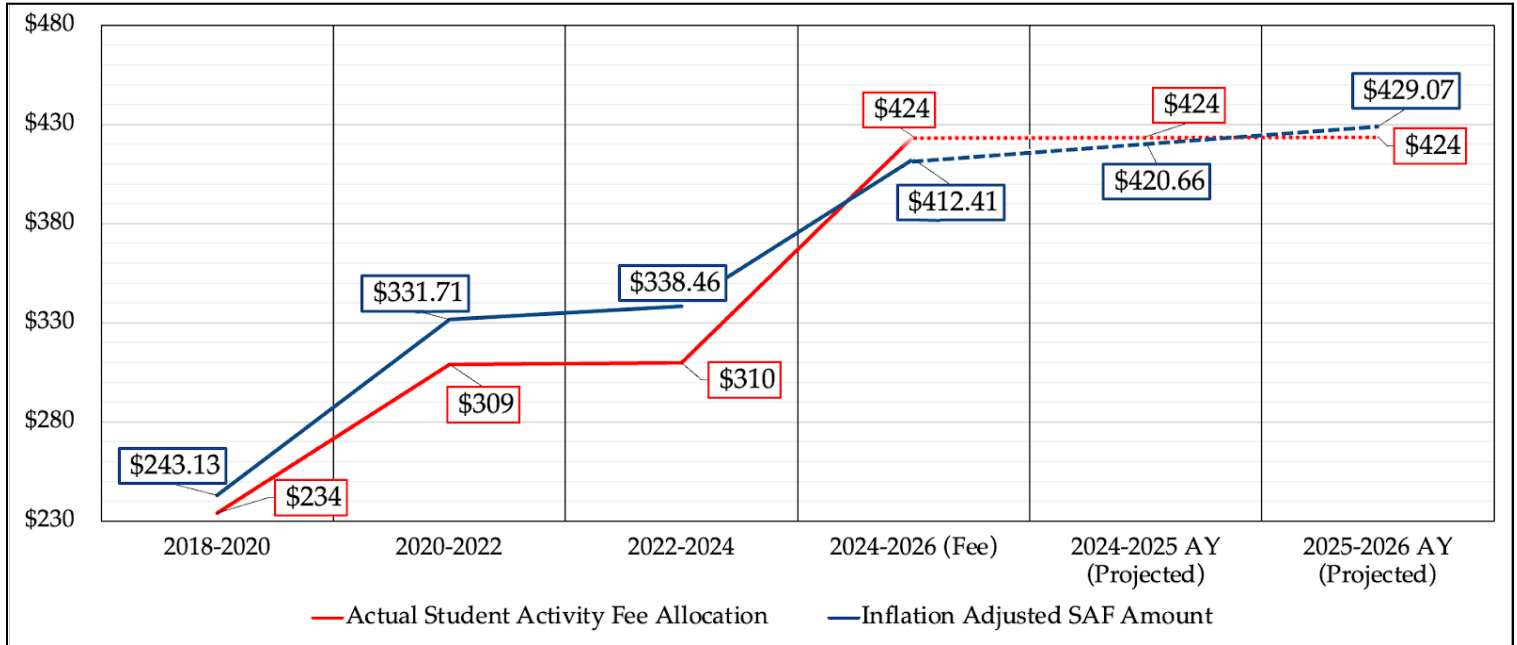
⁵ Appendix E: Increase in College Payment to Offset Student Activity Fee Increase

⁶ Appendix F: Independent Study into our Student Activity Fee Price Index

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The 36.77% Student Activity Fee Increase to \$424 is Justified

- Assuming that the prior Student Assembly should have set the SAF for 2022-2024 AY at \$338.46, using the Composite SAF Inflation Rates for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 and a 2% YoY inflation rate for 2024-2025 and 2025-2026, our recommendation of \$424 corresponds to the funding levels Organizations need to compensate for historically high inflation
- The chart below outlines this and more information about this calculation can be found in Appendix G.⁷



⁷ Appendix G: The 36.77% Student Activity Fee Increase to \$424 is Justified

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Appendix A: Student Activity Fee Allocation Proposal

2024-2026 Byline Funding Cycle	2022-2024	2024-2026		
Organization	Allocation	Request	Allocation	% Change
Alternative Breaks	–	–	\$0.50	–
Athletics and Physical Education	\$7.13	\$8.00	\$7.70	7.99%
Collegiate Readership Program	\$4.30	\$2.92	\$2.92	-32.09%
Community Partnership Funding Board	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	0.00%
Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service	\$1.60	\$1.60	\$0.50	-68.75%
Emergency Medical Services at Cornell University	\$4.70	\$5.15	\$5.15	9.57%
Minds Matter at Cornell	\$1.63	\$1.63	\$0.50	-69.33%
Tatkon Center for New Students	\$11.00	\$14.20	\$13.86	26.00%
Outdoor Odyssey	\$2.00	\$4.00	\$2.90	45.00%
Student Assembly	\$1.50	\$4.25	\$2.75	83.33%
Student Club Insurance	\$5.50	\$5.50	\$5.50	0.00%
Students Helping Students Awards	\$5.00	\$4.60	\$4.60	-8.00%
Cornell Sports Council	\$22.00	\$30.00	\$29.00	31.82%
Interfaith Council at Cornell	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$6.50	-7.14%
Student Activities Funding Commission	\$113.28	\$132.00	\$148.53	31.12%
Student Programming Council	–	\$3.00	\$3.00	–
Convocation Committee	\$18.00	\$22.00	\$18.00	0.00%
Cornell Concert Commission	\$13.50	\$27.42	\$22.00	62.96%
Cornell University Class Councils & Senior Days	\$7.40	\$16.45	\$16.00	116.22%
Cornell University Program Board	\$13.56	\$17.74	\$15.39	13.50%
Multicultural Community Fueled Activities Board	–	\$15.00	\$14.75	–
Slope Day Programming Board	\$21.00	\$50.00	\$50.00	138.10%
Willard Straight Hall Student Union Board	\$3.30	\$6.60	\$6.60	100.00%
ALANA Intercultural Board	\$20.00	\$14.00	\$14.00	-30.00%
CUTonight Commission	\$8.00	\$20.00	\$12.00	50.00%
Gender Justice Advocacy Center	\$3.45	\$3.45	\$3.45	0.00%
Haven: The LGBTQ Student Union	\$4.40	\$5.40	\$5.40	22.73%
Environmental Collaborative	\$0.75	–	–	-100.00%
International Students Union	\$7.00	\$10.00	\$8.50	21.43%
Multicultural Greek Fraternity Council	\$1.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	100.00%
Total Student Activity Fee	\$310.00	\$435.91	\$424.00	36.77%

Appendix B: Update to the Procedures of the Allocation Process

Per the Student Assembly Charter, Undergraduate Organizations applying for “Byline” funding submitted applications by 9/8/23 which included two parts, (1) a qualitative section to provide background information about the applicant and information about their campus impact, and (2) a new quantitative section to report previous expenses from the past two AYs and budget templates to plan expenses for the next two AYs. Compared to previous allocation cycles, this quantitative section allowed for further analysis of the actual financial needs of an applicant when determining its allocation.

Each of the 23 applicants (30 if Programming Council umbrella organizations are included) met with the Appropriations Committee on eight Sunday mornings across the Fall 2023 semester. After each applicant hearing, a corresponding report was created and presented to the Student Assembly at the next meeting where the specific allocation amount was voted on to be approved. The 30 individual reports are compiled in the following 82-page report.

Once all applicant allocations were individually approved by the Student Assembly, the total 2024-2026 SAF was presented to the Student Assembly for a final vote. The final 2024-2026 SAF was unanimously approved by a vote of 27–0–2.

Appendix C: Recent Issues Affecting Byline Organizations

Rebuilding After COVID-19 Restrictions – After sending students home in March 2020, for the in-person operations to continue, various necessary restrictions were implemented for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 AYs. However, as the current leadership of Undergraduate Organizations graduated and struggled to recruit new members, the Programming restrictions negatively impacted the longevity of these organizations. As restrictions subsided, the remaining Organizations were in a weak state because of young, inexperienced executive boards who lacked previous programming experience. As a result of this effect, two recent trends have been observed over the previous 2 AYs;

- Organizations focus on recruiting – Since the executive board leadership of organizations that took over during restrictions is approaching graduation, there has been a heavy focus on recruiting general members and developing them to become executive board members in the upcoming year.
- Increased programming events – As organizations' executive board leadership gained experience over the past 2 AYs, there has been an increase in the number of events hosted by organizations. Compared to the number of events during the restriction period, this expansion in programming has nearly doubled and mirrors the number of events from the pre-pandemic period.

Inflationary Environment – With restrictions limiting the programming types that could occur during the pandemic, when the total fee was recorrected to \$240 in 2020-2021 and \$309 in 2021-2022, the aggregate rollover balances of all organizations substantially increased. While the Student Assembly had good intentions at the time, in Fall 2021 when the fee was only increased by \$1 to \$310 for the 2022-2024 AYs, this occurred before the rampant inflation and increase in programming activities after restrictions were lifted. This was especially experienced in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 AYs, as organizations began to expand the amount of programming offered, they now had to do so while battling record-setting inflation. Using available Consumer Price Index data, from November 2021 to November 2022 and November 2022 to November 2023, the annual overall United States inflation rate was 7.1% and 3.1% respectively.

Dispersion of Organizational Stability – The synergy between organizations dealing with the negative effects of restrictions and inflationary issues over the past 3-4 years has resulted in a distinct divide between struggling and high-functioning organizations. This pattern is reflected within this year's Byline applicant pool, with about 50% having a solid foundation, 30% struggling in some capacity, and 20% teetering on the edge of insolvency.

- Operational struggles – As mentioned before, the pandemic restrictions negatively impacted organizations because it led to leadership succession issues and shrinking general body membership. To address this, organizations have either placed a greater emphasis on recruitment efforts or restructured their operations to match the capacity of current membership.
- Financial struggles – Around 45-50% of Byline organizations have faced some degree of financial hardships over the past 2 AYs. In some cases, this originated from organizations attempting to reach pre-pandemic programming levels, but with concurrent rapid inflation levels, these organizations quickly liquidated their rollover balances from the pandemic. In other cases, organizations with inexperienced leadership made frivolous financial decisions, such as approving too much money to be allocated to other organizations, leading to near insolvency in the middle of the 2022-2023 AY.

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Appendix D: Comparing the Historical Rise in Tuition with the Recommended Student Activity Fee Increase

Using the Cornell Institutional Research & Planning database, the sum of tuition and mandatory fees is tracked for Resident Contract and Nonresident Contract colleges. Since the SAF is included in this number, it is subtracted to calculate raw tuition fees.

Period	Academic Year	Contract, Nonresident		Contract, Resident		Student Activity Fee
		Tuition and Fees (Less SAF)	YoY Growth Rate	Tuition and Fees (Less SAF)	YoY Growth Rate	
0	2006-2007	\$31,700		\$18,060		\$181
1	2007-2008	\$33,500	5.68%	\$19,110	5.81%	\$181
2	2008-2009	\$35,200	5.07%	\$20,160	5.49%	\$204
3	2009-2010	\$37,750	7.24%	\$21,610	7.19%	\$204
4	2010-2011	\$39,450	4.50%	\$23,310	7.87%	\$216
5	2011-2012	\$41,325	4.75%	\$25,185	8.04%	\$216
6	2012-2013	\$43,184	4.50%	\$27,272	8.29%	\$229
7	2013-2014	\$45,129	4.50%	\$28,989	6.30%	\$229
8	2014-2015	\$47,050	4.26%	\$30,910	6.63%	\$236
9	2015-2016	\$48,880	3.89%	\$32,740	5.92%	\$236
10	2016-2017	\$50,712	3.75%	\$33,968	3.75%	\$241
11	2017-2018	\$52,612	3.75%	\$35,242	3.75%	\$241
12	2018-2019	\$54,954	4.45%	\$36,936	4.81%	\$234
13	2019-2020	\$56,988	3.70%	\$38,318	3.74%	\$234
14	2020-2021	\$59,042	3.60%	\$39,700	3.61%	\$240
15	2021-2022	\$60,706	2.82%	\$40,802	2.78%	\$309
16	2022-2023	\$62,890	3.60%	\$42,392	3.90%	\$310
17	2023-2024	\$64,894	3.19%	\$43,578	2.80%	\$310
18	2024-2025	\$67,033	3.30%*	\$44,975*	3.21%	\$424**
19	2025-2026	\$69,219	3.26%*	\$46,389*	3.14%	\$424**
CAGR		4.20%		5.09%		4.58%

* Note: Since tuition for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 AY has not yet been approved by the Board of Trustees, those numbers were projected by using a weighted average for future tuition growth rates [Weighted Average Growth Rates (n-1 = 45%, n-2 = 30%, n-3 = 15%, n-4 = 10%), where n = period of unknown tuition rate]

** The Student Activity used to calculate the CAGR was the recommended amount of \$424

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Appendix E: Increase in College Payment to Offset Student Activity Fee Increase

The total incremental increase in the sum of money colleges will need to pay to cover the Student Activity Fee is calculated to be \$978,799. (\$3,320,344 – \$2,341,545 = \$978,799)

Academic Year	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Not Aided (% Undergrads)	52.00%	52.00%	51.00%	52.00%	51.70%*	51.72%*
Other Need Based, no Pell (% Undergrads)	31.00%	31.00%	31.00%	30.00%	30.55%*	30.50%*
Pell Grant Recipient (% Undergrads)	16.00%	17.00%	18.00%	17.00%	17.20%*	17.24%*
Total Percentage of Undergrads Receiving Aid	47.00%	48.00%	49.00%	47.00%	47.75%	47.74%
Total Undergraduate Enrollment	14743	15505	15735	16071	16400**	16600**
Total Number of Undergraduates Receiving Aid	6929	7442	7710	7553	7831	7924
Student Activity Fee	\$240	\$309	\$310	\$310	\$424**	\$424**
Total Dollars Colleges Pay to Cover SAF	\$1,663,010	\$2,299,702	\$2,390,147	\$2,341,545	\$3,320,344	\$3,359,956

* Note: Since the percentage of students receiving aid is unknown for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 AYs, those numbers were projected by using a weighted average of past aided student percentages [Weighted Average (n-1 = 45%, n-2 = 30%, n-3 = 15%, n-4 = 10%), where n = period of unknown aided rate]

** Projection of Undergraduate Enrollment in the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 AYs

*** The Student Activity used to calculate the CAGR was the recommended amount of \$424

Appendix F: Independent Study into our Student Activity Fee Price Index

Since the Consumer Price Index includes categories that the SAF is not traditionally spent on, using the same principles as CPI, each Byline Organization Expenditure in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 AYs was marked as an expenses category already tracked by CPI.

After identifying these categories, granular CPI data for those categories was located by referencing the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Non-seasonally adjusted rates for Northeast Size City – Class B/C)

Since booking Musical Artists/ Notable Speakers comprises a large portion of our basket and is not tracked by CPI, this rate was determined differently.

- Compiled a list of musical artists from the 2024 Slope Day survey who could be booked before November 2017.
- Using the *Internet Wayback Machine* and referencing three primary booking websites, the “sub-basket of artists” could be calculated for each year since 2017. (Note: When artists could not be booked during COVID, the price was extrapolated from their latest and next actual prices.
- The percentage change in the “sub-basket of artists” is the inflation rate for Musical Artist/ Big Speaker prices.

After determining the inflation rates, the annual subcategory weight within the “SAF Basket of Goods” was calculated by summing all expenses in a subcategory across all Byline Organizations. This process was repeated for each subcategory in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 AY.

All subcategories for a given year were used to find their respective percentage weight of the “SAF Basket of Goods”.

With basket weights and inflation rates for each category, the composite SAF Inflation Rate for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 AYs was calculated.

- 2021-2022 AY: 13.1457%
- 2022-2023 AY: 7.6922%

Table 1: 2021-2022 Academic Year

Sub-Category	Dollars Spent	"Weight"	Adjusted Inflation Rate	Composite Value
Miscellaneous Goods	\$1,216,165.62	23.343%	8.1425%	1.900714%
Travel/ Airfare/ Hotel	\$70,929.76	1.361%	6.8915%	0.093822%
Services (gear rental, non-musical performers, or paid to Cornell)	\$1,189,131.60	22.824%	7.2595%	1.656915%
Food	\$977,059.13	18.754%	9.4277%	1.768043%
Gasoline/ Fleet Services	\$8,721.67	0.167%	9.0297%	0.015116%
Staging/ Security	\$220,799.20	4.238%	5.2386%	0.222011%
Musical Artist/ Big Speakers	\$1,136,196.41	21.808%	32.7800%	7.148691%
Medical Equipment	\$66,196.30	1.271%	9.3842%	0.119233%
Apperal	\$223,565.13	4.291%	4.0560%	0.174046%
Insurance/Trainings	\$86,212.61	1.655%	1.8962%	0.031378%
New Vehicle	\$15,000.00	0.288%	5.4674%	0.015741%
Total 2021-2022 AY Expenses	\$5,209,977.42	100.00%		13.1457%

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Table 2: 2022-2023 Academic Year

Sub-Category	Dollars Spent	"Weight"	Adjusted Inflation Rate	Composite Value
Miscellaneous Goods	\$1,285,397.34	23.715%	-0.03425%	-0.008123%
Travel/ Airfare/ Hotel	\$132,932.83	2.453%	4.58449%	0.112439%
Services (gear rental, non-musical performers, or paid to Cornell)	\$1,200,491.38	22.149%	5.12944%	1.136118%
Food	\$842,574.67	15.545%	3.69337%	0.574150%
Gasoline/ Fleet Services	\$67,050.51	1.237%	1.38365%	0.017117%
Staging/ Security	\$271,813.05	5.015%	-0.13197%	-0.006618%
Musical Artist/ Big Speakers	\$1,171,352.34	21.611%	26.34000%	5.692430%
Medical Equipment	\$35,866.59	0.662%	0.83952%	0.005555%
Apparel	\$250,741.73	4.626%	1.70770%	0.079001%
Insurance/Trainings	\$103,155.70	1.903%	3.02989%	0.057665%
New Vehicle	\$58,703.34	1.083%	2.99826%	0.032473%
Total 2022-2023 AY Expenses	\$5,420,079.50	100.000%		7.6922%

Appendix G: The 36.77% Student Activity Fee Increase to \$424 is Justified

In Fall 2021 when a prior Student Assembly set the fee at \$310 for the 2022-2024 AYs, this widened the gap between the actual SAF and what it should have been due to the inflation.

Assuming that the 2022-2024 AY fee should have been set at \$338.46, if the Composite SAF Inflation Rates are applied for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the fee should be \$412.41 to have the same purchasing power in mid-November 2023.

Since the SAF is set in the Fall semester for the upcoming 2 AYs, the amount is designed to allow for continued operations throughout those years.

Assuming the target of the Federal Reserve is 2% YoY inflation, by the end of the 2025-2026 AY, the SAF should be \$429.07 to have the same purchasing power.

In other words, “we’re right on the money” to catch up with inflation and hedge against it throughout the next 2 AYs.