



Financial Accountability Initiative

Emerson College Student Government Association

Spring 2018 - Version 1.0



Introduction

To the Emerson College Administration:

Every year since 2014 the New York Times releases their “College Accessibility Index.” The index is compiled by the Upshot, a section of the *Times* that provides “analysis about politics, policy and everyday life.” The College Accessibility Index ranks colleges with a five-year graduation rate of 75% or higher based on the affordability for students from middle and lower income backgrounds. Colleges are scored on a one-point scale where the average score is one. Colleges that perform better than average receive a higher score.

In 2015 Emerson was [ranked](#) at 174 out of 179 with a score of 0.50. In 2017 Emerson was [ranked](#) 170 out of 171 with a score of 0.35, ranking only better than the University of Puget Sound. Both years Emerson placed beneath NYU, a college which Emerson regularly advertises as a costlier alternative to an Emerson education.

A [May 2017 article](#) in Boston Magazine pointed out that “Emerson College was ranked the least economically diverse college, private or public, of the Greater Boston schools included in the Times’ list, and third-least of the 171 colleges nationwide.” The index has since been updated placing Emerson second to last on the list.

Anyone who works with higher education finance knows how complex of a balancing act the administration and allocation of resources can be. However, the *Times*’ lists make it clear that Emerson still has strides to make with regards to accessibility. The issues presented by this ranking can be organized into three categories.

Diversity and Accessibility:

Emerson has placed an emphasis on the future, focusing on expansion and improvement. This focus has led to a decreased acceptance rate from 49% in 2015 to roughly 35% in 2018. However, while acceptance rates decreased, the proportion of white students either increased or stayed consistent. [In 2010](#) 60.3% of the undergraduate population was white (not accounting for 11.7% not reported). The incoming [Fall 2017](#) class is 67% white. This lack of progress over the last 7 years perpetuates structural inequality, both economic and otherwise.

This homogeneity counteracts our mission “to advance scholarship and creative work that brings innovation, depth, and diversity to these disciplines.” Emerson has taken upon itself the task of promoting “innovation, depth, and diversity,” but data shows it consistently fails to achieve the mission of diversity.

Communication:

Many students find themselves confused and frustrated upon receiving news about changes made on the institutional level. Whether it is re-branding, the re-design of the Little



Building, or a tuition increase, students feel left out of the conversation. At its root, this comes down to an issue of communication. Students who are not directly involved in conversations at the institutional level feel disconnected and unheard when important financial decisions are made. When students are not provided with the necessary information, they are not afforded the opportunity to participate in important conversations or have their voices heard—either as individuals or as a collective group. Issues of accessibility also arise when historically marginalized and oppressed communities, in particular, are not given the opportunity to provide input.

Academic Support:

In recent years, Emerson has created a number of new programs including a first of its kind Comedic Arts major, a Business of Creative Enterprises program, an expanded Los Angeles program, and the introduction of more study abroad opportunities. These programs have provided incredible new opportunities for students. However, many students have still found a lack of resources and financial support to be an issue. Students find themselves struggling to pay for textbooks, hard-drives, printing costs and other academically necessary costs while simultaneously battling with financial aid for the support they need to continue attending the college.

The Student Success Office created the Student Assistance Fund to support many of these additional costs. However this fund is not regularly advertised to students and cannot provide support for student abroad and external programs.

As Lee Pelton said in an email to students on April 11th, 2018, “at Emerson, it’s up to us to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.” Outlined throughout this document is a series of proposals designed to address these issues. Each section includes a brief description of the problem and potential strategies to create a solution. We look forward to exploring ways to work in tandem with the administration to address these problems, and provide more open communication with the student body.

Sincerely,

Ian Mandt

SGA Executive Treasurer



Endorsements

This initiative has been reviewed and endorsed by the following student organizations, faculty organizations, offices and groups:



Protesting Oppression With
Education Reform



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“It should go without saying that it’s not enough for elite institutions to accept students from racially, ethnically, and economically diverse backgrounds if those students are then told in a thousand ways—tiny and large, oblique and direct—that they are there only at the whim of the powers that be, that they haven’t paid for the privilege to err or falter, that, at root, they don’t belong.”

- *Youth From Every Quarter* by Kirstin Valdez Quade



Diversity and Accessibility

The high cost of an Emerson education, as described in the Accessibility Index, inhibits students from lower-income backgrounds from pursuing an Emerson degree program. Nationally, many students who do attend college face food insecurity. To fill this gap, many institutions have created [Food Pantries](#), including the Student Success Office at Emerson. The Food Pantry in Fall 2017 semester saw 155 unique visits while the Spring 2018 semester saw 123 unique visits at the time of writing. While the creation of a Food Pantry is worth applauding, the fact that the need exists is an issue in and of itself.

Additionally, the institutionally disadvantaged populations most likely to be affected by high costs tend to be minority populations, contributing to Emerson's [67% white](#) undergraduate population. A more diverse and inclusive environment has consistently [shown](#) to be an effective tool in creating a well-rounded and rigorous experience for all students.

Outlined below are examples of how the College can provide resources and implement programs to support a more diverse student body.

Early Recruitment and Support

“From Broadway to Hollywood, the staggering lack of diversity in the representation of faces, voices, and stories, particularly at the highest and most visible levels, is a systemic problem that has persisted across generations—at Emerson, it’s up to us to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.” - [Lee Pelton](#)

Research has shown that [recruitment efforts](#) for students from diverse backgrounds often come too late in the student’s educational career. Many gifted and talented students find themselves falling behind early in their educational career because they are not sufficiently challenged or made aware of the opportunities college can provide.

Features of a successful intervention program consistently rely on early sustained implementation with an emphasis on interpersonal interaction. These programs should facilitate the familiarization with the idea of higher education and provides. [Research](#) has shown that this strategy has shown to be successful across the country.

The SGA encourages the introduction of local early education programs. Potential initiatives could range from increased support for [Generation Citizen](#) and [Bird Street](#), to a partnership with [826 Boston](#) and similar community education programs. These organizations and numerous others work simultaneously on a national and local level. Additionally, the University of Technology, Sydney hosts the [Make it Reel](#) program where current students train young students on film production over 30 days. SGA also encourages the exploration of programs similar to [BC Splash](#) and Make it Reel where



students from nearby middle and high schools such as the [Boston Arts Academy](#) are invited to Emerson to take classes taught by undergraduate students.

SGA also encourages the expansion of the College's road-show recruitment program to include recruitment in community centers, churches, and other nontraditional settings as [research](#) has shown these strategies to be successful in recruiting diverse populations. Additionally, these programs should provide resources to parents of potential students as a family wide approach has consistently demonstrated success.

Academic Social Justice

“Emerson cannot continue to define itself as having a foundation of diversity and inclusion, civic engagement, and innovation if tangible examples of it cannot be found running through the entire framework.” - [SGA Academic Initiative 2014-2015](#)

Emerson is an institution that trains students how to communicate, an effort seen from the beginning of a student's curriculum through programs like CC100 and the First-Year Writing Program. These skills are integral to the Emerson educational experience and should be honed as students continue in their time at Emerson.

It is the belief of POWER, with the support of Emerson SGA, that these programs can and should be adapted to train students to tackle issues of cultural competency through advocacy. Lucie Pereira, co-chair of POWER, wrote in a [Berkeley Beacon article](#) that “Emerson can make a statement now by presenting a plan of action to radically change or replace CC100 and finally begin to prioritize marginalized voices beyond public speaking.”

As is stated in the header quote of this section, “Emerson cannot continue to define itself as having a foundation of diversity and inclusion, civic engagement, and innovation if tangible examples of it cannot be found running through the entire framework.”

Additionally, many students create and pitch their own television programs, others write and produce their own theatrical productions. There is value in free creative production. However, the College could support social justice programs and the creation of media that sends an inclusive message.

For example, at Griffith University in Australia's Bachelor of Education Applied Theatre students produce an interactive drama production about going to university in order to familiarize young students with the idea of higher education. Similarly, the University of Technology, Sydney hosts the [UTS: Shopfront](#) program which places students “at the heart of the community sector to gain real-world experience and make a meaningful difference to local not-for-profit organizations”.

The College could provide a sort of ‘grant funding’ for student productions that tackle issues around diversity, social justice, and advocacy. In doing so, the College tasks



students with developing a deeper understanding of these issues and finding creative ways to spread a positive message.

Similarly, the College could offer summer employment for students interested in teaching in a “Make it Reel” style program where students from underprivileged communities in Boston are invited to campus for a series of video or television production workshops. An alternative to the introduction of a new program could include financial aid for low income students to participate in the [Pre-College](#) summer programs.

Focus on Need-Based Aid

“We are proud that, due to our commitment to need-based financial aid, F&M is a dynamic campus where students of myriad cultures and diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds can exchange ideas, learn from one another, and grow together.” - [Franklin & Marshall College](#)

Many Ivy League and leading liberal arts institutions around the nation are making the transition to dedicating all financial aid resources to need-based aid. The goal of making this change is to meet the full demonstrated need of all accepted students.

Franklin & Marshall College is a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania that in recent years made the change to [exclusively need-based](#) aid. With tuition of \$54,580 per year, the College is able to fully support all students over the course of their four years at the College. Since implementing this program, Franklin & Marshall enrolls a student population where “24 percent of domestic students in the Class of 2021 are eligible for federal Pell grants, 20 percent are the first in their families to go to college, 26 percent are domestic students of color, and 14 percent come from countries outside the United States.”

Additionally, following this change, post-graduation student debt has sunk 20% since 2012.

Emerson has a smaller endowment and larger student population than Franklin & Marshall and as a result would likely not be able to achieve 100% support, even if they were to dissolve all merit aid programs. However, the potential impact of exclusively need-based aid should be explored.

College Access Programs

“It was nice to think I could get into one of those colleges, but it didn’t hit me that it was a possibility,” she explains, adding that when she told her parents about the 5 out-of-state schools she had ranked, they didn’t think of it as something that could actually happen.” - [Lizbeth Flores](#), QuestBridge scholar at Columbia University

One of the reasons colleges across the country face challenges recruiting students from marginalized backgrounds is that those students don’t apply. The reasons for not



applying can range from high application fees to high tuition, or the belief that their background and identity make them less likely to be accepted.

Some colleges have addressed these issues by working with organizations such as QuestBridge. QuestBridge “connects the nation’s most exceptional, low-income youth with leading colleges and opportunities” in an attempt to catch students who ordinarily slip through the cracks.

Additionally, programs like [Upward Bound](#) “serves high school students from low-income families; and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree”. The goal of these programs is to provide the academic and financial resources necessary for low-income and first-generation college students to succeed.

It is the belief of Emerson SGA that the College should explore a partnership with a similar organization to QuestBridge, or consider creating an Emerson Upward Bound project.

Additionally, the Student Success Office oversees the [emersonWRITES](#) and [emersonTHEATRE](#) programs which function as a pipeline for Boston-area students. It is the belief of Emerson SGA that implementation of similar programs for all majors could begin to serve this need while recruitment partnerships and projects are explored.

Finally, Emerson provides support for students matriculating from local community colleges having already completed Associates degrees. This support is provided through the [Next Step Emerson Scholarship](#). It is the belief of Emerson SGA that these programs should be advertised more readily at the partner colleges. Additionally, the list of eligible colleges should be expanded to other community colleges within the New England area.

More Student Involvement

“All major and minor departmental changes should include student ideas and concerns before being put into action--after all, departmental changes are going to be directly impacting students first.” - [SGA Academic Initiative 2016-2017](#)

BPPAC:

The Budgetary Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee serves “to advise the President and Vice President for Administration and Finance on institutional budget planning and priorities” according to the [“BPPAC Roles and Meeting Objectives 2017-2018”](#) document shared with members.

The Board’s tasks include to “review, discuss and provide feedback on annual funding priorities put forward by the President’s Council” and to “provide written report to the President’s Council outlining rationale on recommendations for ranking of budget priorities along with other related comments or feedback”.



This year, the BPPAC process did not meet these objectives. Each BPPAC meeting functioned as a forum within which representatives from parts of the College asked questions of President Lee Pelton and Vice President for Administration and Finance, Maureen Murphy, about the College's general operating budget. Discussion and feedback on priorities were hindered by both a lack of time and detail.

The current process by which the BPPAC operates does not provide representatives with enough time or information to adequately complete the duties they have been tasked with.

It is the belief of SGA that the BPPAC members should be provided adequate detail about each departmental request prior to the meeting in order to review it and form discussion points, similar to the way the SGA provides sitting members links to supporting documents for their review prior to an Appeal Request. Additionally, more student representatives should be added to the BPPAC, including a Student Diversity Fellow.

President's Council:

It is the opinion of SGA that two student representatives, one from SGA and the other a Diversity Fellow, should be invited to President's Council meetings and have an opportunity to speak on behalf of students on important issues.

All SGA Joint Sessions, as well as Board of Trustee meetings, have the opportunity to enter closed executive session for discussion of sensitive issues. This practice could be implemented for President's Council meetings when sensitive issues arise and student representatives should not be present in the interest of protecting confidentiality.

It is also the opinion of SGA that these student representatives should hold a vote on the finalized budget and financial matters.

Board of Trustees:

Every year, the Emerson SGA appoints a student representative to the Board of Trustees. The student representative participates in semesterly board meetings and is given the chance to address the board.

It is the opinion of Emerson SGA that a student representative should be present at, and have an honorary vote on the finalized budget and tuition decisions. At this year's Spring meeting, the Board of Trustees approved the FY19-20 budget without a student representative invited or present. In order to foster student involvement and communication, students should be involved at the highest level of conversation.

It is also the opinion of Emerson SGA that the Board of Trustees should meet with one of the Diversity Fellows. This student should have the opportunity to address the board and hold an honorary vote on the finalized budget and tuition decisions.



Finally, it is of the opinion of SGA that student representatives should be actively invited to and included in all Board of Trustees proceedings that fall outside of executive session.

Student Comments:

In the planning process before the start of each fiscal year, academic and non-academic departments are given the opportunity to submit requests for additional funding. These requests can be for anything from security upgrades at the Kasteel Well campus to the multi-million dollar HD TV studio upgrade made over the summer of 2015.

These enhancement requests are vital in the College's effort to keep up with industry standards and to provide students with the tools necessary to transition into a professional career.

It is the opinion of the Emerson SGA that students should also have the opportunity to submit suggestions in an open comment period prior to final approval. Conversations about student needs have led to significant changes on campus, such as the re-development of 172 Tremont as a student social and organizational hub. Continuing to foster and solicit input from the student body will allow students to feel a more direct connection with the College administration.

Loan and Finance Element of the Graduation Exit Process

"Managing money can be a full-time job for anybody who wasn't born into an abundance of it. This will always be true, no matter how the social and political winds might shift." - [Sarah Landrum](#)

Across the nation, students graduate lacking a full understanding of how to properly manage their loans and debt. Emerson has the opportunity to provide students with the tools necessary to succeed after college through financial literacy education. The loans and debt that end up being an inevitable part of the Emerson education to the vast majority of students stay with graduates longer than many other parts of their Emerson experience.

Emerson offers the Money Matters program, however, most students are unaware that it is offered; and those who are generally haven't participated. The Emerson SGA requests that the federally mandated exit process for graduating students feature a mandatory financial literacy program either online or in person. Students should be fully aware of the load they are taking on when accepting loans and should be made aware how to proceed after graduation.

Programs such as these have been implemented in institutions across the country, including [GV Complete](#) at Grand View University in Iowa. Students enrolled in the program are paired with a completion coach that helps them to understand all elements of their college expenses over their four-year program. After implementing GV Complete,



graduation rates have increased while average student debt has decreased. It is the belief of Emerson SGA that a similar program should be explored at Emerson.

Evidence-Based Budget

“Evidence isn’t important just for accountability; it’s essential for innovation.” - [David Bronstein](#)

In 2012 the US Office Management and Budget under the Obama administration released a [memo](#) stating that when forming their annual budget “the Budget is more likely to fund requests that demonstrate a commitment to developing and using evidence.” The goal of this implementation was to restore public trust in government, a goal which should be a top priority for the College.

David Bornstein said in a 2012 New York Times [Op-Ed](#) that “without timely and reliable feedback, how can we hope to improve government?” The successful implementation of this process would ensure that all allocations support programs that have been shown to be successful.

The strategy to implement a similar system at Emerson comes in two parts:

1. Operating Budget: The success of all operational budget programs within a budget of over \$10,000 (excluding salary, required maintenance, and capital) should be evaluated following a multi-year cycle. The SGA does this through the Annual Budget Request and Organization Recognition and Review Board processes. While many departments may have their own methods for evaluating the success of their programs, these methods should be consistent across the College.
This evaluation does not always have to include expensive data collection but can rely in part on data already collected such as academic performance and in the long run, post-graduation success. These evaluations should be conducted by a body independent of the department being evaluated.
2. New Enhancement Requests and Short Term Funding: Programs which are new, one-time cost or cannot be evaluated through localized research should be submitted with references to successful implementation at comparable institutions wherever possible. Additionally, such programs should include detailed plans for long-term implementation. For example, the Creativity Kit program implemented two years ago was tested over the course of a year and then implemented as a mandatory fee for all undergraduate journalism students because the cost was deemed unsustainable for the department to bear. This (often prohibitive) cost was thus passed onto journalism students, many of whom were not aware of the requirement when submitting their Enrollment Deposits. The goal of implementing an evidence-based approach is to prevent issues like the Creativity Kit from arising.



In addition to statistical evaluation, requests should be submitted with a completed questionnaire similar to the "[Program Assessment Rating Tool](#)" implemented by the George W. Bush administration.

Allocation decisions for both the operating budget and one-time requests should be based on what allocations have the strongest evidence to ensure success. That may require small-scale pilot programs or coordination with other institutions that have made similar requests. The extra work will provide students with the assurance that their tuition is spent productively and for the collective benefit of the College.

Retention and Matriculation Programs

"Despite appearing diverse on the surface, many predominantly White institutions (PWIs) encounter impediments in retaining and graduating students of color." - [Kevin S. McClain, April Perry](#)

In addition to providing resources that support the admission of low-income and diverse student populations, the College must evaluate and form strategies to support the matriculation and retention of these students. Other schools have implemented [programs](#) to address these issues.

There is little success in admitting diverse students if those students do not matriculate or leave prior to graduation.

According to the [2013 Digest of Education Statistics](#) only 39% of students across the country complete their bachelor's program within four years. According to the same study only 59.2% complete their program within six years. Emerson College exceeds these standards consistently, but has the opportunity to do far better. Emerson College to set an example for schools around the country.

Enrollment Data and Institutional Research tracks retention rates by population. Evaluating this data and using it as a gauge of the success of programs will give a more complete picture of the factors that affect a student's decision to come or return to Emerson.

For instance, data has shown that growth and support for Flawless Brown, an artist collective for women of color, led to a marked increase in retention rates for students who identify as women of color.

It is the opinion of Emerson SGA that programs for low-income and diverse student populations that are likely to support matriculation and retention rates should be supported financially as has been done with Flawless Brown. Additionally, data about retention by population should be accessible online.

Finally, it is the opinion of Emerson SGA that while support for student run programs such as Flawless Brown is important, it should not be the sole strategy for addressing



these issues. Emerson SGA would like to echo the sentiments raised by student protestors at the #ThisIsEmerson protest in Fall 2017 that this work should not fall on student's shoulders in the way it historically has.

Financial Mission

"Through a shared commitment to students and families, we strive to eliminate financial barriers of postsecondary education. We make a conscious effort to reach out to those with exceptional financial and educational needs." - [Gavilan College](#)

It is the opinion of SGA that the College should create and publish a Financial Mission similar to the College's academic mission. This mission should outline the populations and priorities the budget is intended to support and should include specific goals. The Financial Mission outlines the philosophy that drives financial decisions within the College and serves as a philosophical guide to the allocation process.

The College currently provides a "[Five Strategies](#)" plan which includes a Financial Strength section. This Financial Strength section provides an excellent starting point for a more complete Financial Mission.

A good way to expand the Financial Mission would be to delineate the three main focus presented by Vice President for Administration and Finance, Maureen Murphy, at the Student Forum on Finance. At the forum, Maureen presented the balancing act between supporting people, physical resources, and financial stewardship. Goals should focus on supporting students, staff, and faculty as much as possible without sacrificing academic standards.

While the Five Strengths page is an excellent starting point, the Financial Mission should be more complete and should be accessible as its own page. An example of a well done Financial Mission can be found from [Gavilan College](#). This page provides a one paragraph mission and a list of ten clear objectives. Additionally, this page provides the principles upon which the Financial Aid office operates as well as a brief history of Financial Aid history of the College.

The goal of creating a Financial Mission is to make clear how each priority funded by the College serves the College's Financial Mission. Additionally, the Financial Mission will serve as a guide to BPPAC, the President's Council and the Board of Trustees in budget decisions.

Annual budgets, once approved, should be communicated to students with a description of how this allocation serves the Financial Mission of the College and what evidence ensures the success of each allocation. This could come as a part of President Pelton's State of the College Letter, or through the introduction of a State of the Budget Letter from the Vice President for Administration and Finance.



Communication

Ask any student from any major, class, or community on campus and the issue of communication between students and College administration will come up. Many topics which cause frustration among the student body arise from poor communication. A notable example would be the release of the College's new brand identity. Most students were exposed to Emerson's new visual identity through a grainy cell phone photo from a student journalist, rather than directly from the College. The impact of this lingers on campus even today.

Outlined below are examples of how the College can improve communication with new and incoming students on issues of finance.

Regular and Well Publicized Student Forums

During the Spring 2018 semester, Vice President for Administration and Finance Maureen Murphy, President Lee Pelton, Vice President and Dean of Campus Life Jim Hoppe, and SGA hosted the first ever Student Forum on Finance. Historically, Maureen Murphy has provided a similar presentation to members of Joint Session each year. However, the forum is designed as a larger scale question and answer session for all students, not only elected officials.

This forum was hosted at 12:30 pm on the Thursday prior to spring break, a time when many students had class, work or had already left for vacation. Despite the timing, 23 students attended the forum in person and 800+ viewed the [live stream](#) on Facebook. Roughly one-quarter of the undergraduate student population participated in some way. A similar series of forums on the use of 172 Tremont saw a total of around 20 attendees across multiple forums.

The success of the Spring 2018 Student Forum on Finance is a testament to a widespread desire for communication and involvement in the budgetary process. SGA believes that a similar forum should be held once per semester. A representative from SGA should be involved in the planning process, as was the case for the Spring 2018 forum, with the intention of regularly evaluating and improving the forum.

Additionally, it is the belief of SGA that this forum should occur at a time when more students are able to attend in-person, such as an evening or Friday slot. Physical attendance provides the opportunity to ask questions and receive direct feedback in a way that digital participation does not. Additionally, this forum should be organized with SGA and POWER representatives. The coalition built through co-sponsorship of forums like this further sends the signal that the administration is working directly with students to address issues of communication.



Public Tuition History

The recent tuition increase for the 2018-2019 academic year led to a significant amount of [discussion](#), [social media activity](#), and [anger](#) within the student body. Many students are unaware of the potential for a tuition increase when they apply for and commit to Emerson College.

In order to follow through on the claim that “the College is committed to offering you an excellent education at an affordable price” made on the [Tuition & Financial Aid](#) page, the Emerson SGA calls upon the College to list a tuition history on its [Undergraduate Student Tuition and Fees](#) page. This tuition history should go back at least 5 years and include information about the potential for a future tuition increase.

The purpose of sharing this history is to make clear to current, prospective, and incoming students that tuition rates may change in their time at the College. This is especially important for students who may be the first in their family to attend college. Prospective students whose families have not attended college have fewer resources available to them to prepare for their college education, and may not be aware that tuition will likely increase during their time at the College.

Application Fee Waivers

When portions of the student population experience food insecurity as illustrated in the Diversity and Accessibility section, all costs, including application fees must be examined.

[The Common App provides built-in fee waiver opportunities](#), however, these opportunities are not communicated on the Emerson website. Emerson SGA believes that guidance on application fee waivers should be referenced both on our [application website](#) and within the common application itself.

Clarity On Financial Aid and Scholarships

Financial Aid:

Emerson College maintains a total financial aid budget of \$40.6 million, \$32.3 million of which is need-based. While conversations are had about making a transition to primarily need-based aid, the College should redesign its Financial Aid website.

A good example of a successful Financial Aid page is [Franklin & Marshall's](#) because it provides a step by step guide describing how financial aid is awarded at the College. Additionally, the page outlines all factors that are considered in award decisions and provides resources for students who have questions.



It is the belief of Emerson SGA that the College should provide detailed information about what factors are and are not considered in award decisions. Having as much information as possible is essential for students applying to the College.

Scholarships:

The College has a fairly expansive page on scholarships available for [new and transfer students](#) and [provides opportunities](#) for current students to apply for private and merit-based scholarships.

The main issue is that this information is not readily communicated to students. It is the belief of Emerson SGA that Financial Aid should actively reach out to students based on available information including class standing, major, demographics and hometown to provide them with lists of what scholarships they may be eligible for and how to apply for them. Implementing this program should require few additional resources provided the message is standardized. The only variable from student to student being the list of applicable scholarships.

Additionally, it is the belief of Emerson SGA that information about scholarship resources should be included within the admissions portal when students are accepted to the College. Students should have as much information as possible prior to submitting a deposit.

Clarity on Investments

“Emerson College is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and reaching climate neutrality by 2030, promoting local and global environmental education and awareness, and institutionalizing sustainability into the fabric of the College community.” - [Emerson Sustainability Page](#)

Recently, the #DivestEmerson campaign has gained traction on campus. The [concerns raised](#) by Divest Emerson are important and worth addressing. In order to allow for proper conversation between students and the administration, it is the belief of Emerson SGA that the College should communicate to students information about where and how our money is invested. This is the only way to ensure a productive and meaningful dialogue, as well as promote transparency and communication between the College and students.



Academic Support

Throughout areas of the student body, it is often perceived that the financial decisions made by the College miss the mark where the need is highest. Decisions made about where financial resources are allocated feel misguided to many students. While a portion of that feeling may come from a lack of information (see Communication above), a portion of it is due to a lack of support for important academic programs.

Outlined below are examples of how the College can improve allocation practices with new and incoming students on issues of finance.

Co-Curricular Support

“Students throughout the College participate in a wide range of on-campus media organizations, including two radio stations, a television station, a number of magazines and literary journals, and an online news service.” - [Student Media and Productions](#)

There are a number of student-run organizations that offer members the opportunity to receive non-tuition credit for their complete participation in the organization. As a part of this process, students are required to meet certain requirements such as attending workshops or completing projects.

Co-Curricular organizations are required to provide a syllabus that outlines the requirements of participation and course goals to students upon joining the organization. This rarely happens. Co-Curricular programs should be regularly evaluated for the educational benefit they provide to participating students.

Additionally, at least \$200,000 of the student activities fee funds co-curricular organizations. These organizations receive no academic support aside from the granting of a stipend for their advisors.

If the College is to advertise the robust nature and strength of its Co-Curricular activities as a selling point to prospective students, it is the belief of the SGA that Co-Curricular organizations should receive support from the academic department they fall under because these organizations are classified as courses.

Adequate Support for All Offered Programs

As a part of the evaluation process, departments should evaluate the extent to which their academic programs are financially supported. While Emerson has introduced the Comedic Arts and Business of Creative Enterprises programs, students within the program may not consistently feel as though their program is supported to the necessary extent.



Class Related Costs

*“Since 2006, the cost of a college textbook has increased by 73 percent — or more than four times the rate of inflation — according to *Covering the Cost*, a new report from the non-profit Student PIRGs (Public Interest Research Groups).” - [NBC News](#)*

Many students face challenges with unanticipated academic costs. These costs include, but are not limited to, purchasing film for film production courses, software for screenwriting courses, print costs for workshops, and textbooks.

It is the belief of the Emerson SGA that the necessary expenses of each course should be calculated and included in both the course catalog and within the course offering on eCommon. These costs should include textbooks, hardware (hard-drives, SD cards, etc...), printing costs, and class-related travel. Additionally, professors should be made aware of and encouraged to work with the Iwasaki Library staff to ensure required texts are made available in the course reserves.

When students are able to anticipate related expenses for the courses they register for, they will have the opportunity to save money, search for more affordable resources or apply for support from the Student Assistance Fund. Additionally, this provides students with the opportunity to avoid registering for a course they will not be able to afford, rather than dropping it during the semester.

If the high cost of a course leads to issues filling the course, that signals to faculty and program staff that the course and/or its required materials should be re-evaluated.

Los Angeles Program Funding Re-Evaluation

Emerson Los Angeles is one of the most highly advertised programs offered by Emerson College, through campus tours, on the website, and throughout a students time at the College.

However, the ELA program is classified as a ‘non-mandatory’ program, meaning that students do not receive financial aid for the mandatory housing or other necessary expenses, such as transportation. Students are able to petition for more financial aid, however, this hinges on students’ being aware that this is even a possibility.

It is the belief of Emerson SGA that Emerson Los Angeles should no longer be classified as a ‘non-mandatory’ program and that students’ aid packages should be re-evaluated as students move back into Emerson-owned and operated facilities. Additionally, necessary costs like transportation should be considered in determining aid packages.



Closing

To the Emerson College Administration:

We would like to acknowledge that many of the changes—in both approach and action—made to the College’s budget in the last few years have been incredibly important, and do not go unappreciated. Progress towards equitable and fair pay for staff and faculty as well as substantial increases in financial aid all begin to address the issues outlined in this document.

The addition of the Topper scholarships, as well as the creation of an Associate Director position in the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, are both examples of the important work being done to address the issues of diversity on campus raised by POWER.

The purchase of the 172 Tremont space, the construction of 2 Boylston Place, and the reconstruction of the Little Building all provide students, staff, and faculty with improved resources, space, and tools to make the Emerson experience a more positive one. The creation of the first of its kind Comedic Arts major, the expansion into New Media studies, and the exploration of additional study abroad programs keeps Emerson on the cutting edge of the communications field.

These improvements serve the mission of the College “to advance scholarship and creative work that brings innovation, [and] depth” but fall short of promoting diversity and making the College an accessible institution. Kirstin Valdez Quade, in her essay *Youth From Every Quarter*, argues that “it’s a worthy, essential claim to seek “youth from every quarter.” Institutions and individuals have a responsibility to work against centuries of structural inequality.”

Emerson has the responsibility to act upon the principles it claims to uphold by actively and consistently striving for diversity of economic, social, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Continuing on our current path will further alienate the few students of diverse backgrounds who currently attend and leave many recent alumni feeling that requests from the College for institutional support after graduation is at best tone-deaf and at worst disrespectful. Our current status on the accessibility index should overshadow any other ranking we may hold.

There is little reason to be proud of any high ranking program offered by the College when that program is walled off from those who do not have the means to pay its hefty price.

The Emerson SGA offers our support and input on this work moving forward. We thank you for taking the time to review this document and hope that this will lead to necessary change. We look forward to a continued productive relationship.

Sincerely,



Ian Mandt
SGA Executive Treasurer