



NOVEMBER 12, 2024

2024-25 STATEMENT ON A UNIVERSITY-WIDE METROCARD PROGRAM

We, the members of the General Studies Student Council (GSSC), are writing to the President of Columbia University, the Office of University Life at Columbia, and Columbia Transportation to demonstrate the urgent need to establish a university-wide MetroCard Assistance Program, providing subsidized MetroCards to students in need.

As it stands, the only MetroCard programs currently offered at Columbia University are run at the discretion of certain Student Councils, paid for by students' activities fees. As the following reasons support, a university-wide and administration-run program is a vital reform:

1. **Funding is currently not coming from an appropriate source.** Every dollar spent by the Student Councils on MetroCard programs is a dollar taken away from campus programming. Given that the Student Councils are funded by students' activities fees, this money ought to be dedicated to these services, rather than funding basic needs. It is crucial for the University to utilize its current use funds to address these fundamental needs.
2. **The current process is based on student discretion.** In past years, the selection process for who would receive a MetroCard was left entirely up to the Councils. This year, GSSC has outsourced this function to the school's administration to prevent students from having to disclose personal information to their peers. Having a university-wide and administration-run MetroCard Assistance Program would eliminate this problem completely.
3. **Consequential impact on student life.** The absence of transportation assistance has a detrimental impact on student life by disincentivizing commuting students from taking additional classes or taking part in campus events.
4. **Full need is not being met.** For as long as the Student Councils fund this program, the debate over the purpose of activities fees will continue, causing the total amount allocated for the program to be lower than the need would require. Having this program funded by an adequate University source will allow funding allocations to be based solely on need. The GSSC-run program had several hundred requests last year alone, and was unable to fulfill a significant portion of them.
5. **Student Councils cannot guarantee an annual subsidy.** There is no guaranteed consistency year-by-year in the Student Council-run MetroCard programs. Hundreds of students rely on these programs to get to and from campus each day, so they must have the assurance that the program will not end unexpectedly.



Given the wider context of the ongoing University housing shortage for many GS and graduate students, the University has a responsibility to address the immediate issue of assisting students who are facing financial hardship in getting to and from school. The schools most affected by this issue are already unable to meet full financial need, so we believe this initiative must be funded from a University source, rather than by any particular school. We have been working in collaboration with other student leaders across the University who share our concerns to further our efforts in advocating for the commuter student population. We believe a comprehensive, university-wide, and administration-run MetroCard Assistance Program is a necessity in addressing this accessibility gap between local and commuter students.

We, the undersigned, are grateful to the University Administration for their willingness to engage with this issue, and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Respectfully,

The General Studies Student Council, 2024-2025

Addendum (Updated December 19, 2024):

The following entities have taken a vote in their General Body meetings in support of this statement and are subsequently co-signers moving forward:

School of International and Public Affairs Student Association (SIPASA), 2024-25

Engineering Graduate Student Council (EGSC), 2024-25

Arts and Sciences Graduate Council (ASGC), 2024-25

Columbia Climate Graduate Council (CCGC), 2024-25

Society of Professional Journalists, Columbia Chapter, 2024-25

Columbia Engineering Student Council (ESC), 2024-25

School of Professional Studies Student Government (SPSSG), 2024-25

Columbia Business School Student Government, 2024-25

Teachers College Student Senate, 2024-25