

Students gain safeguards against ID theft

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By Carla Cantor

As of Feb. 13, students will no longer use their Social Security numbers as their Rutgers ID. A new, randomly generated number termed "RUID," or Rutgers University Identification number, will replace the Social Security number as the primary identifier in student records.

The new identification cards will be distributed at no cost to all registered students in New Brunswick, Newark and Camden. The cards can be picked up beginning Feb. 20 at a campus RUconnection Card office.

"Students have expressed longstanding concerns about the easy availability and nonessential use of their Social Security numbers," said Brian Rose, associate vice president of student affairs.

The conversion is being made to respond to students' privacy concerns, reduce the risk of identity theft and make it easier to comply with a new state law that prohibits universities from displaying Social Security numbers in transcripts, class rosters, ID cards and materials sent through the mail, Rose said. The law took effect Jan. 26.

"The new ID cards are part of a comprehensive program to protect the privacy of our students that goes beyond the state mandate prohibiting the display of SSNs on documents and listings," Rose said.

While efforts have been made to safeguard the Social Security identification numbers of faculty and staff, the university intends to replace them with RUIDs in the near future, said Sandra L. Russell, associate vice president of university human resources. "It is a major undertaking," said Russell, who will coordinate efforts with the Office of Information and Technology (OIT) to develop a unique employee ID, similar to what has been done for students.

OIT has been working on the conversion of student identification numbers since last April. Associate Director Ellen Law, who spearheaded the project for OIT, said the switch required changes in virtually all student information, including databases, files, reports, applications, labels and feeds to all university departments. Social Security numbers, however, will not be completely eradicated from student records since they are needed for services such as financial aid, work-study payroll and verifying immunization records.

The estimated cost of the project is nearly \$1 million, which includes \$900,000 for systems analysis and modifications, Law said. More information on the conversion, including faculty/staff FAQs, is available at studentaffairs.rutgers.edu/conversion.html.

Each year, more than 10 million Americans are victims of some form of identity theft, according to the Federal Trade Commission, which maintains a database of identity theft cases used by law enforcement agencies for investigations. Universities are particularly vulnerable because of their large computer databases of personal records, and financially inexperienced college students are at high risk.

Health insurance companies are taking steps to protect consumers from security breaches. Last

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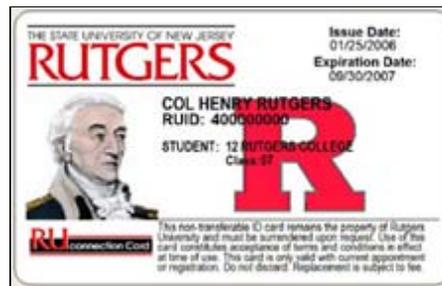
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On Feb. 13, all students will be assigned a new "RUID" with randomly generated digits and "00" for fourth and fifth digits. Using their NetID and password, students will be able to access their RUID number through the MyRutgers web portal, my.rutgers.edu/profile, and begin using the number immediately. The new cards will be distributed at no cost and can be picked up beginning Feb. 20 at a campus RUconnection card office. Students without NetID's should contact their campus registrar.



fall, the administrators of the traditional health plan, Horizon BCBSNJ (the administrator of NJ Plus), and the prescription drug plan began replacing current Social Security-based identification numbers with member contract numbers that are randomly assigned. Replacement medical ID cards are being released in phases; the first mailings began last month. Planning is under way at all the HMOs that are part of the state health benefits plan.

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