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'Phase III' of campus center never completed

Faculty, students look for trustee support for renovations

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The Mayer Campus Center is a shadow of what it was meant to be, according to architectural plans that detail an expansion of a three story building which would add and additional 15,000 feet.

When the main building of the Mayer Campus Center opened in 1985, it marked the completion of the first of what was to be four phases of development. The second phase — the building that houses the Bookstore and Jumbo Express — was completed a few years later. It has been over a decade since there has been any construction at the campus center, and many students assume it to be a complete project.

Recently, however, students and faculty have taken a new interest in developing the relatively unknown "third phase" into a more concrete plan.

There is very little information about Phase III in the original proposal for the campus center, though there are architectural renderings of the building extension to be built on the lawn of the Women's Center. The building would include a faculty dining hall, multi-purpose function room, expanded recreational space and dining commons, an art gallery, rehearsal space and student organization offices.

Many student groups feel that the current situation is not adequate to meet demand. Director of Student Activities Jodie Nealley would like to see "the campus center double in size so it can become the true center of campus." But despite her excitement at the possibility of an expansion, Nealley has recognized that changes — if they are to come — will not be swift. "If this project could be completed in the next five years, it would be a miracle," she said.

There is a need for more meeting rooms and office space on campus, with many campus groups finding meeting and performance space in short supply. The Large Conference Room in the lower level of the campus center is the only meeting room that can accommodate up to 50 people, and student organization offices are scattered throughout the campus.

Presently, there are offices in the campus center, Hayes House, and Curtis Hall, and there is a need for more offices as new organizations continue to grow. Last year alone, 15 organizations were recognized by the Tufts Community Union Judiciary, to bring to total to nearly 170 different student groups.

Centralizing these offices would help facilitate communication between clubs on campus and create more unity between the groups, according to Nealley.

Though many see a need for this construction, the funding does not presently exist. These improvements would be dependent upon donations by alumni and trustees of the University.

A Union Advisory Board has been created to research what students want included in

Phase III and to compare the student centers of other schools to the one at Tufts to brainstorm possibilities. The committee consists of four students representing each class year, and four faculty or staff members.

Nealley and TCU Senate Trustee Representative Raji Iyer co-chair the committee. During one of the Trustees' three annual meetings in February, Iyer will present the ideas for Phase III to the Administration and Finance Committee. "The trustees respond to new ideas," Iyer said. "This issue has been previously swept under the rug, but new student interest will peak the trustees' attention."

This resurface of interest is coming from a report created in July 2001 by then-Senator Michele Shelton (LA '02). The Campus Center Phase III proposal _ composed with the help of Assistant Director of Programming Ed Cabellon _ outlines the Phase III recommendations that were proposed in 1985, the needs of Phase III today, and points out who will benefit from this plan.

"The research that is being done this year will lay the groundwork for future efforts," Iyer said. "As the standards of the student body are rising, there is an increasing need for better services. The interest in these services is always there, right now it's a matter of identifying those who will work to make it happen."

Such research includes comparing the Mayer Campus Center to other student unions across the country. Colleges that recently finished renovating student centers were featured in a bulletin published by the Association of College Unions. St. Norbert College _ a private Catholic college in Wisconsin with a student body of 2,000 _ added 22,000 square feet to the 52,000 square foot campus center. The \$5.9 million renovation was funded by private donations. In comparing the size of the community of St. Norbert to Tufts, and considering Mayer covers 28,000 square feet, the Tufts campus center falls behind in these areas.

Transfer students, who have seen how other campus centers can work, are excited about the possibilities for the same type of building here. "There were tons of tables set up everyday, a bar and café for grad students, conference rooms, a craft center, restaurants," University of Massachusetts transfer student Laura Janowitch recalled of her former school. "There was a lot going on, it was definitely the social center of campus."

A particular area sparking faculty interest is the faculty and staff dining facilities in Mugar Hall which are in need of improvements. TCU Senator Alison Clarke, who has been looking into the issue, believes that if they were to be relocated to the campus center, it would promote faculty and student interactions outside of class. As well, its placement near the academic quad would increase convenience for faculty.

A multipurpose function room is perhaps the most obvious need and the first priority in developing Phase III. This space, which would ideally fit 800 people, could be used to host a variety of events, including performances, lectures, and alumni functions. Currently, Dewick dining hall is the only space available on campus for such events.

Nealley highlighted additional services that would benefit students, including e-mail stations, a mailroom and study lounges, which would allow for the game room to be expanded. e-mail stations would be useful for students, allowing them to "check-and-run," instead of seeking out a computer in Eaton Hall or Tisch Library.

The ability for centralized US mail that would allow students to keep one mailing address throughout their four years at Tufts and receive mail at school during the summer was particularly appealing to Clarke. By eliminating the transport of mail to each dorm,

she said the efficiency of mail services would be greatly improved.

The inclusion of the Alumni Center has also been considered for the third phase of the campus center.