

# Duke University

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Larry Moneta, Vice President for Student Affairs  
Kemal Dawkins, Vice President for Campus Services

FROM: Elliott Wolf, President, Duke Student Government

DATE: January 8, 2007

RE: Event setups in Von Canon A, B and C in the Bryan Center

It is our understanding that as of July 1, the Office of Student Activities and Facilities will assume responsibility for all event setups in Von Canon A, B and C in the Bryan Center. Duke University Event Management currently handles those setups and is compensated for their services by OSAF. We have been told that this change is planned in order to reduce the costs to students of reserving the Von Canons, improve services for student groups and increase the availability of the Von Canons for student use. Although these goals are admirable, we have significant concerns about the effects of this change and ask that it be reconsidered.

As the governors of and advocates for student groups, we are not convinced that this change will bring about the desired effects and, indeed, believe that it will negatively impact student groups. Despite the cost associated with working with Event Management, we have found their staff to be extremely professional and dependable. They are experienced, both as Duke employees with significant institutional knowledge and as event managers, and are relied upon by the entire University community to handle event setups. When DSG plans various small-scale events associated with our operation of Krzyzewskiville, we go directly to Event Management and have been extremely satisfied.

On the other hand, OSAF's primary role is to advise student groups; it should not try and replicate the services provided by Event Management. While we have full confidence in OSAF Director Chris Roby, we have serious concerns about the ability of OSAF to perform at the level that Event Management has. OSAF staff members generally have backgrounds in higher education administration or student affairs personnel and are not trained as event planners/managers. They are not totally incapable of handling the setups in question, but Event Management staff members are clearly preferable; we use Event Management instead of OSAF whenever possible.

In addition, we believe this change to be fiscally and organizationally unwise. Currently, OSAF pays approximately \$120,000-\$150,000 per year in funds from the administrative portion of the Student Activity Fee to Event Management for event setups in the Von Canons. In order to shoulder the burden of handling these setups, OSAF plans on hiring three more staff members, two of which have

already been hired. Considering a salary of approximately \$30,000-\$40,000, fringe benefits, and other costs associated with hiring and retaining an employee, it is quite likely that the cost of these new employees will exceed the amount currently paid to event management.

Since Event Management will not lay off employees (and we don't believe that they should be expected to) in response to their decreased workload, this change will result in the same number of on-campus event setups being handled by more people, a clear waste of resources. Coupled with our concerns about the level of service OSAF will be able to provide, the ultimate effect will be a reduction in the quality of service with an increase in the price to students and the University. This seems a clear and unfortunate byproduct of the "silo" structure of the University and Student Affairs' unwillingness to work with Auxiliary Services.

This change is also being used as the justification for a \$25 increase in the administrative portion of the Student Activity Fee, something that we fervently object to. The Student Activity Fee has been nearly doubled in the last three years by Student Affairs and this increase will mark the first time that the administrative portion of the fee exceeds the portion of the fee directly allotted by students for student groups and on-campus programming. We would like to increase funds available to student groups, which would involve a student referendum to increase the student activity fee, but doing so is difficult since that the administrative portion of the fee has already increased it so much. And even with this change, it is not clear why the increased fee is needed due to the fact that OSAF will have the \$120,000-\$150,000 available for salaries that it currently pays to Event Management.

Lastly, if it is the case that the use of the Von Canons will necessitate either three new staff positions in OSAF or the payment of \$120,000-\$150,000 per year to Event Management, we would like there to be some cost incentive for students to find alternative space. Trinity College and the Pratt School of Engineering provide space free for student use, and therefore Student Activity Fee funds should not be used to support the use of the Von Canons unless those rooms are absolutely necessary. The number of groups who regularly use the Von Canons is limited; that amount of money is of far greater utility to the student body if used for on-campus programming or other activities beyond simple event setups.

**CC:**

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