

The Need for a Student Center

An Executive Summary

“I am a student ambassador.¹ Of all the places I stop at on my tour of campus, CFSU² is the hardest to talk about because it’s hard to talk up what little benefit it offers the students. Sometimes I outright skip it out of embarrassment.”

“I didn’t even realize CFSU was the student union on my tour.”

“I honestly don’t know what happens at CFSU...I don’t actually know the purpose of the building...”

“As Loyola is a top-tier school, I compare it to other top-tier universities student unions I have been to. It does not compare to the students unions of other top tier schools like Fordham, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, SMU, or even our third-tier neighbor to the south of Lakeshore Campus, DePaul.”

“I don’t even know where the Loyola student union is.”

Purpose

To articulate (a) the need for a genuine communal space where students can gather, socialize, meet, and organize; (b) to lessen the burden on our University’s facilities, which all face increasing demands; and (c) to bring together the scattered resources of student life.

Principles

- 1) The University needs to develop its campus resources and address concerns of student engagement;
- 2) To do so the University needs to construct a centralized space for general interaction and socialization;
- 3) Doing so will increase student satisfaction and retention.

Environment

With the Strategic Plan of 2004-2009 nearing completion, and the Strategic Plan of 2009-2014 nearing its proposal deadline, a centralized student center is still not part of the University’s master plan.

Values

The University needs a building that will bring together the scattered and disparate resources of student life. This much needed facility should include such amenities as:

- Campus Dining
- Union Recreation
- Organization Space
- Event Venues

Method

Data was gathered by surveying a random sample of students, with 1041 respondents, and by surveying the presidents of student organizations, with 68 respondents. Through this method, students expressed a clear need for a student center.

Vision

A new, centralized student center is placed on Loyola University Chicago’s 2009-2014 Strategic Plan. This will strengthen the University’s promise of *cura personalis*—the education of the whole person.

1. A student ambassador represents the school to prospective students, providing tours and information.

2. Centennial Forum Student Union; Loyola’s student union space.

The Need for a Student Center

In his message on strategic planning, Loyola University Chicago's President, Rev. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J., writes that the University needs to focus on campus resource development and student engagement. This underscores that current campus resources fail to meet increasing student needs, and that current students struggle to engage with, and be engaged by, the campus.

Loyola University Chicago currently offers over 180 academic programs, with 72 undergraduate majors. *US News and World Report* ranks the school in the first tier among the nation's top universities, and ranks LUC at 49 for best value in the country. These prestigious attributes developed largely due to prudent investments. On the Lake Shore Campus, the Quinlan Life Science Building provides exceptional laboratories; the Sullivan Center provides a one stop shop for excellent student services; the Klarchek Information Commons provides a state-of-the-art place for study. However, the campus lacks a center for student life, necessary for developing the whole person. This leaves the Loyola student unsupported in a vital way. Nancy K. Schlossberg, professor of psychology at Harvard University, writes that an engaging student life positively affects collegiate satisfaction, academic achievement, and retention (*New Directions for Student Services*; Volume 1989 Issue 48).

Beyond that, Rev. Garanzini, S.J., also wrote to incoming freshmen in the summer of 2008:

Each of you has gained admission to a university that prides itself on belonging to the Jesuit education system, which has over 450 years of tradition. Each of you takes your place at an

institution that was established in 1870 and is in the nation's third largest city, which was founded by Jesuit missionary Fr. Pierre Marquette. Each of you has chosen a community whose faculty and staff are dedicated to the ideal of cura personalis, the care of the whole person.¹

Just as Madonna Della Strada is the center of our campuses' spiritual development, the University requires a center for our social development as well. In this way, we can achieve *cura personalis* and further develop the whole person.

Student centers at sister Jesuit schools like Xavier and Saint Louis achieve this by including amenities such as food courts, cyber cafes, book stores, student office spaces, lounge areas, television and audio-visual equipped rooms, large conference rooms, grand ball rooms, and activity resource hubs.

While not speculating on what could be placed in a student center at Loyola, such a building must address at least four key components to improve campus engagement. They are (a) campus dining, (b) union recreation, (c) organization space, and (d) campus event venues. It does not suffice to address these factors separately. To do so would be inadequate. Just as student services require the Sullivan Center to be the hub for collegiate resources, student life requires one location to house the four components listed above.

In its report on student life, the Loyola University Sociology Department noted a missing space on Loyola's Lake Shore Campus. They cited Stephan Hunter from the *Washington Post*: "All Communities— and therefor all members of communities— need a 'third place.' The place where you work and the place where you live are the first two spaces, while the third place is the unique place where you simply "be." It is an engaging space where one interacts with other individuals. Such a space is essential for developing one's social

1. Emphasis added

identity.” This third space is missing from Loyola’s Lake Shore Campus, and therefore students struggle to find an area necessary for social development.

CAMPUS DINING

The University does not provide enough quality dining space at the Lake Shore Campus. Dining space is integral to student life, as a great deal of socialization occurs over a meal. Yet the dining halls fail to appease student needs. They operate past capacity and do not offer a wide variety of healthy options.

A Student Need

“Other schools have food courts and dining areas where people can come together and enjoy, talk, and read.”

- Over 90% (939 responses) agree that the student union should be a place that offers various kinds of foods and drinks.
- Nearly 65% (634 responses) state that they would like to see a new food court in a student union.
- Additionally, 62% (615 responses) say that they would like to see a cafe or coffee house separate from a food court.

Student Satisfaction

“I don’t like CFSU that much. Other schools have a food court area. I think Loyola should most definitely have this as well.”

- Over 40% (407 responses) of students disagree with the statement, “I have rarely had to leave campus to eat or shop for food.”
- Over 36% (357 responses) state that the Lake Shore Campus’s food venues fail to satisfy their needs.

Operational Capacity

• Douglas Stenfedt, Director of Simpson Dining Operations provided the following statistics: on a typical Wednesday, Simpson Dining Hall use far exceeds its capacity.

- For breakfast the cafeteria operated at 112% of its capacity.
- For lunch, it operated at 267% of its capacity.
- For dinner, the hall was stressed at 261% of its designed use.

In other words, there are nearly three students per seat available. Stenfedt also states that, as the dining halls struggle to meet increasing demands, staff are only allowed one hour in between meal periods to prepare for the next meal.

Healthy Choices and Alternatives

“Food should be healthier; that really effects how all students live. We need more variety too, such as dietary considerations for certain faith traditions.”

- About 44% (430 responses) of students disagree that they eat healthy meals in our campus dining facilities.

Interpreting Data

“I have visited Xavier University’s student union and it looks much more updated and modern. It is more inclusive, with more food options.”

Dining at Loyola hinders student engagement on the lake shore campus. Students look towards competing schools’ food courts with envy. Students are often forced to leave campus in search of a quality dining experience, and resent that fact.

A dedicated student center would fill the student wants by offering more dining space with more culinary options in a comfortable and inviting atmosphere designed for socialization.

UNION RECREATION

The Lake Shore Campus is devoid of any true student union structure. Students want a centralized student center on campus, but the current union inadequately meets student needs.

A Student Need

“There is nothing in our student union. You are more likely to go to CFSU for a judicial hearing than for entertainment purposes. Other schools have fun things for their students to do!”

- 86% (895 respondents) agree that a student union should be a community meeting center for students, faculty, and staff.
- 89% (927 respondents) agree that a student union should be a center for non-classroom campus activities.
- 91% (939 respondents) agree that the student union should be a place that offers a variety of entertainment for students.
- 86% (887 respondents) agree that a student union should be a place that encourages informal interaction among students, faculty, and staff.

The Current Union

“It’s so uncomfortable and the atmosphere? It’s just not welcoming. You have to go downstairs to get there, in the basement! ...I’d much rather hang out in my dorm.”

- 42% (419 respondents) feel indifferent towards or disagree that our union space exposes them to various cultures.
- 45% (444 respondents) feel indifferent towards or disagree that our student union space makes them feel part of the campus community.
- 47% (466 respondents) do not agree that our unions have had a positive affect on their collegiate experience.

- 42% (418 respondents) feel indifferent towards or disagree that due to our union space, they have been able to connect with other students, staff, and faculty.
- 46% (472 respondents) feel ambivalent towards or disagree that because of our union space, they have enjoyed a variety of extra-curricular activities.

Of those surveyed, 43% were commuter students. These students feel disconnected. *“I think the Union needs better commuter lounge space. As a commuter, I am lucky that I have another place to hang out in. However, if I didn’t have the Mosque to hang out in, I think my experience as a Loyola commuter student wouldn’t be very good.”*

A Student Center is...

“In other universities a student center is seen as a meeting ground for students to come together and interact with one another and share ideas and enjoy each other’s company. Loyola’s student union seems more like an afterthought.”

- 56% (552 respondents) would like to see a new multipurpose entertainment room in our student union.
- 55% (541 respondents) would like to see a new game room with TV lounge in our student union.
- 65% (639 respondents) would like to see lounges and informal gathering spaces for casual meetings in our student union.

Interpreting Data

“As a transfer student, the previous union that I was involved in had areas where people would hang out and relax or study at all times of the day, as well as be a place that students and faculty could utilize for study and non academic needs. Having events put on such as comedians and local artists and hosting smaller events like how to stay healthy at college.”

After reviewing the data of our current union space and comparing it to data on what students would like to see in a union space, our facilities fail to satisfy. A centralized student center would meet students' needs by offering adequate union recreation amenities. It would create a community feeling, remedying the disconnect that many students feel.

ORGANIZATION SPACE¹

Student organizations are the life blood of the student community. An active foundation of clubs and groups ensures healthy student engagement on campus and enhances retention. However the University's facilities do not place a needed emphasis on student organizations and activities. As such, student life suffers.

A Student Need

"We were in a different meeting space every week. Sometimes it was hard to even get space."

- 65% (44 respondents) of student organizations meet once a week or more.
- 89% (66 respondents) of student organizations meet on campus.

Location, Location, Location

"It's hard to find big enough space for just a group meeting. We should have space where we don't need to go through campus reservations."

- 80% (52 respondents) report that they have been required to meet in classrooms.
- 70% (43 respondents) report that they have been required to meet in common space, such as cafeterias.
- 33% (22 respondents) of student organizations state that the Lake Shore Campus meeting spaces fail to fulfill their needs.

Priorities

"Campus reservations has moved us from our reserved spaces to accommodate more important events, as we were told. It would really help if reservations that we make are final and not tentative."

- 60% (39 respondents) state that they have been told that no space is available when seeking meeting space.
- 33% (21 respondents) of student organizations state that it is difficult to find meeting space on campus.

Interpreting the Data

"We currently hold our meetings in Hussey Lounge and it does not meet our needs. We tried using the computer and projector but it did not work well and we don't have boards to write on."

As one organization laments, *"We always get placed in a classroom."* The organization meeting spaces offered by current university facilities are undeniably inadequate. More troubling is Capitol Planning's announcement to move more classes to night slots. This will minimize even available classroom space. The University needs to construct a new student center equipped with ample organization meeting space to create a stimulating atmosphere for student engagement.

EVENT VENUES

For the University to move to the next level of excellence, it desperately needs a sufficient amount of quality event venues to allow for more, and better, events for students. The University is not currently equipped with such facilities, which only hinders student involvement and interaction, and ultimately increases apathy in the University community.

1. Data used in this section is gained from the survey on student organization presidents, with 68 organizations responding.

A Student Need

"The larger the event, the harder it is to find space because large spaces are very limited on campus, especially auditoriums. The ones that we do have are always booked because students, staff, and faculty are usually vying for the same space and preference tends to go to faculty and staff."

Interpreting the Data

"When planning large banquet events, there are very few "nice" options, except Kasbeer hall which is downtown, so not as convenient."

A student union would house several rooms and halls large enough for events to be open to the entire student body, as they should be. Also, its centrality to campus would ensure greater turnout for each event, enhancing the collegiate experience of all.

A PRUDENT INVESTMENT

The Experts

Dick Blackburn, executive director of the Association of College Unions International, writes in an address, "The ingredients of what we offer toward the educational process in college— the professors, the library, the museum... These remain only the scenery behind education until a real human contact occurs." Such interaction occurs in the third place, that which is offered by a student center. The Association went on to write that the student center building and all that occurs therein is a great facilitator – a matchless opportunity for students to come together and make good things happen, and for good things to happen to them. Loyola University Chicago lacks this student center building.

The Facts

As reported by Loyola's Office of Student Activities and Greek Affairs, a holistic student center would save the University money. In the first semester of the 2008-2009 academic year alone, the University

has been forced to expend over \$100,000 to either retrofit existing on campus venues, or to transport students to venues off campus, so that they may meet their needs. For example, the Italian Club had to spend \$26,000 to hold their Valentine's Ball. This was due to Loyola's lack of a ball room.

As reported in *US News World Report*, Loyola University Chicago has a retention rate around 85%. Data confirms that student centers help increase retention. Loyola Marymount, for example, began constructing a new center to address that specific concern. Upon constructing their centers, Washington and Lee University, Averette University, and Creighton University all saw an increase in their student retention. After completing its student center, the University of Virginia's College at Wise saw an increase in applications, an increase in the average SAT scores, an increase in out of state student applications, and entered into the top ten ranking for public liberal arts universities. A new student center would benefit Loyola University Chicago.

By including amenities such as the four explored above in a single building, a student center will enhance student satisfaction with campus life, improve students' academic performance, increase retention, and will strengthen the University's promise of *cura personalis* – the education of the whole person.

A new centralized student center is an integral addition to the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan.