

REPORT: COMMITTEE ON PHYSICAL FACILITIES, SPACE, AND GENERAL SERVICES

TOPIC: McPHAIL RESOLUTION

The Chair (Thomas Eyssell) and two committee members (Professor Susan Cahan and Mary Ann Coker) of the Physical Facilities, Space, and General Services Committee (hereafter PFGSC) acted as a subcommittee to address the resolution brought to the floor of the UM-St. Louis Faculty Senate by Professor Tom McPhail at the September meeting of that body.

The McPhail resolution requests that the PFGSC (a) investigate the charge that “non-educational considerations are receiving priority over faculty and student events, classes, and productions,” and (b) to “look into . . . the relocation of Theater, Dance and Media Studies faculty into the PAC.”

In order to address item (a), the subcommittee met or spoke with several faculty members and administrators in the departments and units involved, and received comments from several students . Of the ten faculty and administrators contacted, eight agreed to speak with the subcommittee, one didn't return phone calls, and one asked that s/he not be involved. As a result of several of the abovementioned conversations, a third issue was considered: the amount of academic usage of the Touhill Center.

The question of priority of usage was raised directly with the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication (CoFAC), who oversees academic scheduling of the Center. The subcommittee received unambiguous assurance that academic events receive top priority in the scheduling process. Nonetheless, faculty comments about the scheduling process might best be regarded as “mixed.” Some faculty members feel that they are asked to schedule too far in advance, while others describe themselves as “perfectly happy” with the situation. The subcommittee's conclusion is that, while scheduling problems have occurred in the recent past, they have been due in large part to transitional issues, and actions have been taken to mitigate future problems.

The subcommittee recommends that concerned faculty members meet directly with the CoFAC Dean to address scheduling concerns.

With respect to the balance of academic/nonacademic usage of the facility, the subcommittee turned to a report provided by Vice Chancellor Kohn on the Center's operations. (The same report was given by him at a recent Budget and Planning Committee meeting). This report indicates that, during the most recent period, approximately two-thirds of the events in the Center were academic in nature. This figure is slightly higher than the frequently-mentioned “60-40” academic/nonacademic balance of usage envisioned during the planning of the facility.

Is this “enough” academic usage? The determination of an optimal ratio of academic/nonacademic usage of the Center is neither within the scope of the resolution, nor does it fall within the charge of the PFGSC. It should be noted, however, that continuing pressures on the Center to “break even” financially significantly impact the academic/nonacademic usage question.

The PFGSC suggests that the PAC academic usage policy be reevaluated to determine if it requires updating to reflect current practices and needs.

As to the relocation of faculty offices, the subcommittee takes no position. The procedure for requesting space is described in the procedures found on the Facilities Planning webpage (<http://www.umsl.edu/%7Easd/facplan/>). Space requests are initiated within academic units by those needing space, and signed off on by Department Chairs, Deans, and, ultimately, by the Provost. At that point, they are forwarded to the Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, who brings a recommendation to the PFGSC. It is only then that the Committee takes a position on the request, and renders its advice to the Chancellor. Thus, neither the PFGSC nor the subcommittee is in a position to initiate or recommend the move of faculty offices.

Respectfully submitted to the UM-St. Louis Faculty Senate and Assembly 11/14/06.