

# **An Initiative For Student Life:**

## **The Examination of Student Center Needs**

### **Illinois Wesleyan University Student Senate**

#### **\*\* An Introduction \*\***

At the start of 1999, Illinois Wesleyan University is home to over eighty-eight student groups, who, in cooperation with the Student Senate, have spent \$275,000 to ensure that activity on campus is in constant motion. Yet a perception of stasis persists, characterized by a common student cry that "there is nothing going on." This attitude, common among our past and current student bodies, has contributed to student dissatisfaction in campus social life, contributed to a separation between Greek, independent, and off campus students, as well as harmed past relationships between students and administration. We are hence left asking: where has the community atmosphere of the small school gone?

It is our goal in this report to outline not only the reasons for this tangible breakdown in student satisfaction, but to offer a solution that may become radically successful. We propose that the school begin a renovation process of existing facilities into a Student Center that holds the social and extra-curricular needs of students *of utmost concern* in its design. We, the students, understand that any new structure will derive its success from the spirit of those who are in it, and that new facilities do not breed automatic success. The following proposals are part of a corrective process already beginning to emerge through the Division of Student Affairs. However, we feel a Student Center shall be the greatest, and most significantly effective, solution within this process.

We have a variety of sources citing similar concerns, including the Preliminary Report of the Greek Affairs Task Force, the revamped Division of Student Affairs, and the recent report on student programming by marketing classes 370 and 331. It is our belief that all of these voices point to a common solution:

*That of great importance to the current and future students of Illinois Wesleyan University is the need for a centralized student space whose primary focus shall be the needs of the student body, as it relates to social and extra-curricular programming. We recommend that Illinois Wesleyan solve these problems through creation of a new Student Center.*

#### ***1. More than Words: Distinguishing between Campus and Student Centers***

The first distinction that needs to be made between our current "student center" and our cause for concern requires an understanding of the term "student center." A

student center is a building where the lives of enrolled students are of the utmost concern. Such a facility is organized around the schedules, agreements, and programming needs of the students investing in an Illinois Wesleyan education, as well as four years of their post-adolescent lives. One may argue that the Memorial Center is doing just that, but upon further review it is clear this is not the case.

The Memorial Center is currently home to a branch of one of the largest corporation in the world: Marriott Inc. While their service is of high quality and professional in nature, contractual stipulations allow them strong control over the activities that occur in the Memorial Center. Despite usually good intentions, this control affects every aspect of student interaction within the building: from food options, to building hours, to room availability. Can it be argued that Marriott's presence is tailored to student needs?

The Memorial Center is currently the only space on campus with adequate, non-classroom, meeting space. This fact means that not only students are competing for this space, but administration, faculty, staff, and alumni must fight for that space as well. These "campus" meeting rooms are booked months in advance, and the majority of meetings held within them restrict their attendance. Would not such a presence make it hard for students to take ownership of such a center?

The Memorial Center is also home to the faculty lounge, office of Multi-Cultural Affairs, and the main Information Desk of the University. While such a presence in and of themselves play positive roles in student interaction, these are aspects of the larger community of Illinois Wesleyan as a whole. Those who use the facilities on a daily basis have a great deal to say with what goes on in the space, how it is used, and how it is furnished. Such a presence make it impossible for the students to do with the space what they see appropriate, out of respect for the Center's other "owners."

The Memorial Center is also the headquarters for many All-University events and programs. This past weekend, the Center was the headquarters for five-hundred high school band members. This occurred not in the summer, not during an academic break, but during a weekend in the first month of the Spring semester. The Center plays host to alumni and friends annually during Homecoming, not to mention Board of Trustee meetings, Faculty Open Houses, or other special events catering towards non-students. Does this seem like a common use of a student center, or does it seem more like the result of Illinois Wesleyan an the institution?

If you have answered no to the previous questions, then perhaps you are beginning to see the Memorial Center through the eyes of the students. Perhaps you can begin to see the short-comings of this space as a facility devoted to the needs of the enrolled students at Illinois Wesleyan. In fact, it is really not a Student Center at all. It is a Campus Center, an entity that is useful and good in the needs that it fulfills for the campus as a whole, but altogether inadequate in the role its name has assumed.

In the next several pages, we the students of Illinois Wesleyan University Student Senate shall present the argument that current insufficiencies in campus programming, inadequate facilities, and student dissatisfaction are intimately linked to the lack of a Student Center. We shall not only present current campus problems but suggest solutions and practical suggestions as to how the University may act

with the students needs in mind. Over one year of research and student input have led to the following conclusions, and the students of IWU are ready for a change.

## ***II. The Impetus for a Student Report***

Over the past four years, Student Senate has functioned as a switchboard for student concerns. Year after year, students have criticized that there is no where to go to simply relax outside of their dorm rooms. Consensus tells us that all-campus meeting spaces are too formal, primarily conducive to studying, or are just undesirable options, based on thier location or facilities. The Memorial Student Center offers facilities for student entertainment that are functionally unsound for their given programming aims, in structural disrepair (the Greenhouse and Phoenix), and are (in general) only available for student use a fraction of the time.

Senate is not the only arena which has heard student unrest, and "quality of space" issues are not the only problem pervading the student's social lives. As noted in the Preliminary Report of the Greek Affairs Task Force, "the belief that campus life is boring, mundane, unattractive, or unappealing is widespread among students and results in an overburdening of Greek letter houses to provide social opportunities." Social lives of students have been historically directed off-campus or into the basements of our school's fraternities, and the results are disappointing. The report of Marketing 331 agrees, stating "in respect to current student programming, overall students are dissatisfied." Specific survey results cite 49% dissatisfaction from the Freshman class, 55% from Sophomores, 51% of Juniors, and 48% of seniors in the current social programming. These results tell us that too many people are not enjoying a very significant part of the college experience, which is social interaction.

Student Senate has also fielded concerns suggesting that life at Illinois Wesleyan is too often not "student-friendly." The Marketing report cites the availability of space during a sample week of November 15th, 1998, the week of their report: of the 76 scheduled events and meetings, only 15 were student run activities, or less than 20%. Problems arise on a monthly basis relating to space, and many Senate programs are negatively affected by lack of availability and miscommunications over room reservation systems within Memorial Center. For example, the Fall Carnival was forced to cancel its top band because of last minute problems relating to reservation of the Main Lounge. Many other significant concerns stem from a lack in support staff, a cumbersome system for facilitating visiting speakers, technological shortcomings and inconsistencies, and slow response times to various student concerns.

For we students, it is not surprising to hear fellow students express frustration. It is understandable why students do not feel they have a true place of their own on campus-- a place where the focus is on students needs; we felt that a call for change was appropriate.

## ***III. Specific Concerns Relating to Student Life and Memorial Center***

It is important to understand the student lifestyle in terms of three separate categories. The first is **Academic Lifestyle**, thriving on many levels at this university; its status is of tertiary concern in this report. The next two can be defined

as **Extra-Curricular Lifestyle** (activity within special interest groups or the philanthropic nature of Greek houses) and **Social Lifestyle** (what students do when they are not working or volunteering). It is understood that the three are interrelated, but the distinctions are important. Outlined below are specific concerns relating to the latter two categories.

*1. Over-Reliance on Greeks for Social Life--* The majority of the students on campus look to the fraternity system to host most after-hours events, both on the weekend and during the week. The new alcohol policy urges other groups to register for their own events, but there is really no space on campus that will work. At the start of the 1999 school year, students again are relying on the fraternities to get their after hours activity fix. Most parties tend to start around 10 p.m. and most wind down around 2 a.m. Another issue of concern is where these students go afterwards? Its either *Steak and Shake* or straight to bed, and this lack of options is frustrating to the average student.

*2. Lack of Alternative Space for Parties--* The reason few groups have sponsored parties this year is probably for lack of space. The Main Lounge is too open for a dance party, the Dugout is too much a hallway, and the Greenhouse is too compact. Other venues are restricted to academic use or simply improper for social use.

*3. No Off-Time Space/Lounge Space--* Students find there is little to entice them to hang out in the Memorial Student Center. The Dugout is very sterile, and is best utilized as a study and meeting space for group projects. Atmosphere wise, the Dugout is harmed by the overabundance of large tables, space , hard chairs, and banality of decor. Talks have been underway to improve the Greenhouse lounge in the Center's lower level, but because of its limited occupancy, even a refurbished space will not meet the needs of a campus community. There are few good options urging off-campus students to stay on campus for the two to three hours between their classes.

*4. No Alternative Food Option Outside of Marriott--* When students are hungry and have no means of getting off campus, they have only one option: Marriott. Students as a whole enjoy the quality of food Marriott provides, but a student's palate gets tired of the monotony. For a long time, students have yearned for other on-campus options, as they had seen at most other small colleges they visited. Not only is such a benefit denied them, but due to contractual limitations, no outside-vendor's products are even allowed in the Student Center. This means that students cannot order pizzas for their work group, they cannot buy soda from a machine, nor can students let outside catering companies cater their events, even if Marriott will cost their group more money.

*5. Lack of Meeting Space/Meeting Space Cohesion--* There are six private rooms available for campus use in the center, and other public spaces. However, the four best spaces are often reserved and students are given no priority in reservation systems. As a result, student groups meet all over the campus: in the English house, Science building, Music Building, Holmes Hall, or in the dorms. Due to differences in building hours, lock down policies, and general facility differences, this system has become too cumbersome. Also, it is impossible for the student body to appreciate the work of a Student group if they never see them meeting or miss the signs telling where the next meeting will be held.

6. *Lack of Group Office/Production Space*-- Excluding the Student Senate, the vast majority of student groups are without office, file, or desk space. Some religious groups have limited space in the basement of the Evelyn Chapel. All media organizations have independent spaces, but they are all bursting at the seams, and are spread out across the campus. The University reaps the benefits of organizations like the Argus or Titan TV, and we feel they deserve even greater institutional support than they have been given. Most groups meet in classrooms, dorms, or the Dugout- a fact which is both disheartening and unfair to the many hard working students trying to make a difference.

7. *Poor Theatrical Space for Independent Student Productions*-- One of the unique and popular aspects of Student Life at IWU involves the programming of the Phoenix Theater and Greenhouse spaces. Non-existent in many campus centers, these types of facilities have been used for theatrical or musical performances put on *by students*, both within and without the School of Performing Arts. These productions are invariably well attended, however seating in the Phoenix is limited to thirty students per performance. To meet demands for seating, fire codes are often broken causing obvious safety concerns. Ventilation, lighting, sound, and accessibility are all sub-standard, and it is hard to say whether renovation of that space will satisfy any concerns as they relate to seating. However, the student support for such co-curricular programming has such a long history, it continues to flourish.

8. *Communication Problems/Publicity*-- One of the challenges of being an IWU student is the difficulty in finding out what is going on and where. Communicating announcements from a small group to the entire community is done primarily through posters randomly hung up across campus. Adding to the communication problem is the cross-campus use of various meeting locations. An even more specific problem has been communicating these types of announcements to the students who live off-campus. Unlike students in Residence Halls or Greek houses, off-campus students miss the bulk of campus mailings. If they do receive them, they will arrive after events have taken place or after-the-fact. This problem has less to do with physical space issues than campus culture.

9. *Unbalanced Scheduling of Co-Curricular Programming*-- The Memorial Center is currently home to not only student events, but it also becomes headquarters for events targeted for alumni, University guests, and members of the Bloomington/Normal community. The building often hosts events not open to students at all, such as Board of Trustee meetings, receptions, or administrative meetings and lectures. Many events are clearly not meant to cater to student needs, such as certain aspects of Homecoming; other events attract more community members than students, such as the Blue Moon Coffee House, making it less desirable for students to regularly attend. *Such a contrast in priorities defies the building's title as 'student center.'*

A problem less related to space concerns is the school's co-curricular calendar of events. All too often, events seem to be scheduled in bunches, and students do not feel they have viable options during down periods. Far too many of our students feel the need to go home or to other schools on the weekends because "there is nothing to do on campus."

10. *No Twenty-Four Hour Space*-- Finally, there is no space on campus that is available to students twenty-four hours a day. The simple freedom to know there is a

community space where you can go at any time is invaluable. It is an issue that arises on the Senate floor every year, and every year students are told by the institution it is an impractical wish or that students would not really use it. Similar arguments have been raised concerning Dugout hours, to which we also disagree.

#### ***IV. Historical IWU Responses***

It is obvious that the school is aware of the problems in social life and student programming on campus. A notable example of positive change is the reordering of the Dean of Students office into the Division of Student Affairs. We feel adding an Associate Dean of Student Affairs/Co-Curricular Activities is a terrific start. However, it is an understaffed department left with nearly ninety student groups to help facilitate, and we hope these additions to the Division will not be the last.

The school has worked in other ways to meet the needs of students which are worth mentioning. The Office of Business and Finance has pledged to improve student's social space outlets by renovating the Greenhouse space. However, the plans were begun in April of 1998 and the space, as of yet, remains unchanged. The alcohol policy was meant to tailor to the needs of all student groups when it came to registering parties, in the hopes that non-Greek social groups would participate; however, the lack of viable space has seriously impeded those efforts. The school has been willing to find spaces for new groups like Titan TV, but the lack of centralized space has forced such groups to divide themselves across campus, making due with the tiny spaces allotted them in different buildings. There is obvious miscommunication within the student population as to where these groups are located. Similarly, students are often forced to use less-than-ideal space within the Memorial center and adapt their plans to the facility's limitations. As one graduate of the class of '73 stated, "I think the Memorial Center was fine when we were in school, but I feel that if I were a student today it would no longer meet a student's needs." The school has sought many ways to answer the needs of the students, but the answers have proven to be short term and in most cases, incomplete.

#### ***V. A Comparison: IWU and the Top Five***

Having absorbed all that we could from our own institution, we felt it was important to expose ourselves to the responses of other small liberal arts schools. We understood that, in order to have a proper perspective on the role of a truly functional student center, we would have to visit colleges with such buildings in place. We also felt it was important to choose colleges that had an overwhelmingly satisfied student body. We chose five schools, based on their top five status in U.S. News and World Report in terms of retention and graduation rate: Williams College, Swarthmore College, Bryn Mawr College, Haverford College, and Amherst College. Thanks in part to the President's, office, the Dean of Students, and Student Senate, four committee members visited these five institutions over the Winter Recess, 1998. Our findings were immensely helpful; we returned with an equal understanding as to what seemed to work well, and what did not work at all. Understanding the details of these institutions' relationships to their student centers allowed us to come to our own conclusions about our own "ideal center." The following pages represent summaries of what was seen at each of the schools.

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## Williams College

The newly renovated Goodrich Hall was opened for the Fall Semester in 1998 after approximately four years of planning and construction. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$2.4 million. It is the only student operated building on campus. Students are responsible for maintaining, managing, and coordinating the use of the space. As a structure initially designed with broad open spaces, Goodrich offers the large assembly spaces that other student venues seemed unable to provide. All of the building's rooms are varied in form and function and each room in the center is multi-purpose. Goodrich provides high-quality amenities for student life, such as large and small gathering spaces for student organized events, lounge space with a coffee/beverage bar for informal socializing and relaxation, and a resource room equipped with office machines and supplies to support student organizations. An enclosed pathway to the Athletic Complex through the gymnasium gives students easy access to both the athletic and coffee bar facilities. For security purposes, there is an electronic lock system on the main doors to Goodrich that require students to swipe their ID cards for entry after certain hours. Also, the office spaces on the upper level are locked with an electromagnetic key system.

The Great Hall itself was designed to function both as a locale for the coffee bar and as a large space for concerts, socials, dances, and movies. Because the building was originally a church, the large, formerly stained glass windows allow in plenty of natural light during daylight hours, which reduces the need for large amounts of artificial lighting in the Great Hall. The coffee bar boasts a key location in the Great Hall of the Goodrich Student Center. In an article for the Williams College newspaper, one student wrote, "Goodrich is a pleasant place for studying alone or chatting with a small group of friends, and both activities commonly involve coffee." Another said, "It's the social place we've been missing." The coffee bar "rivals most trendy coffee bars" with its selection of hot beverages and bakery goods that are prepared fresh daily. The students also, through the support of the College, have secured an account with a major local cold beverage distributor. The Student Center managers handle the account and all communications with the distributor.

The small copper tables on the ground floor encourage intimate clustering. They are also easily stacked alongside the walls with the wooden chairs when the space is required for a larger group of students. Behind what once was an altar is now the wall housing the state-of-the-art theater screen, lighting, and sound system. Features of this system include a 14-channel mixer board, a 9'x12' front projection screen, an elevated stage, and a disco ball.

Behind the projection screen is a smaller space known to students as the Living Room. The Living Room may be used as an alternate student study space when the Great Room is used for large student events. It also doubles as a "Greenhouse" room for stage performances in the Great Hall. It is furnished with ski-lodge type couches and overstuffed chairs with a few coffee tables and an upright piano along one wall. There is a small space in one corner along the windows, which is being planned to sport a television in the future. The room is sizable enough to support student organization meetings, but is mostly used as a quieter hang-out/study space.

The second floor is partly enclosed; however, the majority of the space is utilized as a mezzanine above the Great Hall. Functionally, the mezzanine is a tremendous asset to the facility. The mezzanine has six comfortable banquettes that include voice/data connections for laptop computers. In addition to the banquettes there are several couches and armchairs on which students can relax. Two e-mail terminals are also present on this level. To the rear of the mezzanine is the Student Activities Resource Center. This space is utilized to bring students together to work in a single office which, according to students, strengthens the student body into a more cohesive unit. There are five high-powered computer stations, a fax machine, copier, and several telephones on the three main desks. The desks are large enough to support four students working simultaneously at each. File cabinets are used as supports for the desks and for storage space for groups, and each organization has its own locker to keep administrative materials. There is a separate, smaller office for the student government and a fireside mini lounge along one side of the room.

Overall, students' responses to the new Goodrich Hall have been overwhelmingly positive, according to the two dozen students we interviewed. The primary concern of the managers of the center is the lack of storage space for the coffee bar and archived files. When speaking with the former student-manager of the center, he cautioned that "there is never such a thing as too much storage space." He also noted that the facility was still in a "honeymoon period" and that some of the kinks associated with students taking full responsibility for the student center were a burden. He did mention that things appeared to be going well. Currently there is a website describing the center that provides forms for reserving spaces for larger gatherings as well as a guide to the process used to bring the Student Center from conception to reality.

## **Swarthmore College**

At Swarthmore, the Committee met with the Director of Student Activities and was given a tour of the Tarble Social Center. Swarthmore is in the process of proposing a plan for the construction of a new Student Center. The current accommodations were never meant to be used as a student center. However, due to a fire in the mid-1980's, the community was forced to adapt to the space. Currently, the center is housed in an old church near the main quadrangle of the campus. The doors leading outside have been adapted to provide for the needs of physically challenged students. The lower level of the building houses the campus bookstore, which is easily accessible by stairs or via the elevator. Included in the bookstore are not only textbooks and Swarthmore products, but also independent titles.

The main level of the Social Center is comprised of lounges at the fore and a snack bar and booth-equipped eating area to the rear. Both spaces are ample and were well utilized at the time of the visit. Lining the hallway to the snack bar are publicity areas for student organizations and public promotions. The opposite hallway was carpeted and generally clear of such promotions, revealing window seats and similar sitting areas with full size tables, benches, and chairs. Behind the snack bar, and accessible from the opposite hallway, is the student-run coffee house/club. It is furnished with a bar, an eclectic array of tables and chairs, and a track lighting system. This multi-functional area could be used for smaller performances, as a nightclub, or as a coffeehouse.

The Great Space, used for all major (registered) social functions, is located on the second level. This space spreads from the front of the building to above the rear of the snack bar. It is rich and warm with its carved beams and intricate woodwork along the rafters. The space itself easily surpasses 1800 square feet with at least 25 feet from the center of the floor to the rafter peaks. The area is also equipped with a high quality sound system for concerts, dances, parties, and movie screenings, "all of which are well attended," according to students. There is one primary entrance and exit from the space, which is along a side staircase. For the purposes of risk management, this is an excellent concept because it allows the hosts of events to monitor guests and reduces the possibility of people not affiliated with campus community from entering the venue unnoticed. Accommodations have been made for those with physical challenges, but those routes are not encouraged for general use during events.

Unseen and behind the projection screen area are the Office of the Director of Student Activities and other offices for leading student organizations. The offices are not easily accessible and are rather small. The Director of Student Activities stated, "Many students don't know we're back here." However, like many offices, if it is important enough to the students, they make a point of knowing where to find these areas. Overall, the Social Center appeared to be functional and a positive model for other endeavors.

## **Bryn Mawr College**

The Centennial Campus Center at Bryn Mawr College is a renovated facility. Upon entering the building, a single stairwell leads to the main level where there is one large central space effectively arranged with groups of couches, chairs and coffee tables. There are several windows surrounding the space which stretch nearly from floor to ceiling, allowing a vast amount of natural light in to the room and minimizing the need for artificial light sources. The furniture is inviting and comfortable such as one would find in a family room of a residence. The couches are over-stuffed and upholstered in light complementary colors to accentuate the brightness of the space. There are also some overstuffed chairs to compliment the casual seating structure of the room. All of the furniture is movable and appeared to have been arranged and rearranged to suit the needs of the students utilizing the space at the time. At one end of the space is a large screen television connected to a cable service. One unique addition to the center is a baby grand piano, next to the television, for student use.

The main floor of the center also boasts a snack bar with both grill and deli selections, bottled and fountain beverages, assorted snacks, fresh fruit and vegetables. Within the snack bar is a portable coffee bar for cappuccino, espresso, and a wide variety of other coffee and tea selections. There are also vending machines and an automatic teller machine within a close proximity to the eating area. The eating area is furnished with café-like tables and chairs and also bears an ample amount of natural light from large windows. Also located on the main level are campus mailboxes, a postage scale for student use, and several aesthetically pleasing and functional recycling receptacles.

The staircase to the second floor of the Campus Center is oversized. It leads up to a loft overlooking the larger space below. It is also casually furnished with a couch, loveseat, coffee tables and stuffed chairs. This area is just around the corner from the main meeting rooms in the facility. These meeting rooms are akin to more posh conference rooms with wire-glass windows and scenic views to the quadrangle and other areas of campus.

The lower level of the Centennial Campus Center is home to the campus bookstore. It may be accessed either by the stairs at the main entrance off the quadrangle or via an elevator within the center. The landing between levels boasts a bulletin board for pertinent information for students regarding campus activities and activities at neighboring colleges. The Self-Government Association (SGA) also has a space on the board for meetings and other announcements.

While the Centennial Campus Center is a good example of an effective layout for a student center, some of the areas seemed under utilized for their purpose. The large space on the main floor appears as though it might feasibly be used as a venue for social events. However, the manner in which the acoustics are carried lends one to believe that the sound would disrupt others from other meetings or activities in other parts of the center. Also, for the time when the facility was viewed, there did not seem to be as many students using the center as would be expected. The main hall between the two entrances appeared to be just that: a hallway students would pass through to retrieve their mail and then continue onto their next destination.

## **Haverford College**

The Campus Center at Haverford is a new facility, but not as functionally desirable as the students or staff at the center wanted. After meeting with the Director of the Campus Center, the committee came away with several ideas of what not to do. First, a fair amount of emphasis was placed on the importance of the title of the facility. "A Student Center is not the same as a Campus Center," she stated. According to the Director, the term "Student Center" identifies the facility as a space designated and dedicated to serve students. A "Campus Center," however, serves the entire college community. Apparently in the planning phases of the Campus Center, students became acquainted with the notion that the facility would be erected solely to serve as a Student Center. However, the faculty, administration and architects involved in the planning and construction phases went forth with plans for a building to serve the entire campus community. She then stressed the importance of cooperation between the administration of an institution and its students when planning any project where large amounts of time, money and investment are necessary.

The Director of the Campus Center was very helpful in determining how to approach the planning of a new facility. She first emphasized the importance of having all classes represented on the planning and building committee. "It is especially important for freshmen to serve in the planning stages" because they will be the students who will most likely benefit from the endeavor and have the most time invested in the success of the center. She also cautioned against focusing too much

on architectural wonderment in lieu of functionality of a center, something that she believes the Campus Center fell victim to in the construction process.

While the Haverford Campus Center is architecturally lauded, it is viewed as a functional disaster by students and faculty. It's narrow hallways, tile floors, and sectioned off spaces did not create a welcoming atmosphere for the community. The building itself is rather long and thinly rectangular with a central cement stairway leading to each of the four levels. The rooms are divided in a way that makes them difficult to view from outside. People generally like the ability to see who is inside or what is going on in a room before they decide to make a commitment to enter it. The layout of the facility doesn't allow for this. In order to determine the state or company in a space, one must fully commit to entering.

The amenities available to students in the Campus Center are comparable to those in other institution's centers. The bookstore is located on the lower level and is one of the only spaces one may explore through windows without actually entering. There is also a snack bar, fully equipped game room, and meeting rooms. The mailboxes and publicity areas for student organizations are centrally located on the lower level in a long, narrow hallway. Students mentioned that this area was probably the primary reason most students go through the Campus Center. Few expressed their satisfaction with the amenities and use of space. The College is in the process of constructing another lounge area for students, but as it stands, the only lounging areas appeared to be in the hallways of the facility.

On a more positive note, the center does allow for some student organizations to have office space on the fourth level. However, the route to arrive at the offices is fairly dark, narrow, enclosed, and seemingly uninviting. These areas appear as though they should be in an office complex and not a Campus Center. A unique aspect to the Haverford community lies in the location of the Admissions Office. It is located on the second level of the Campus Center. The philosophy surrounding this locale is "bring prospective students to where student life is active and visible." This may be both helpful and harmful.

Overall, students are not satisfied with the Campus Center. The Haverford Administration hopes that with the transitional period that comes with all new endeavors, the community will warm up to it. However, the primary complaints range from "not enough hang-out space" to "all it functions as is a passageway to the rest of the campus from the parking lot."

## **Amherst College**

The Amherst College Campus Center was constructed from the ground up, not renovated from a previously used facility. It is located just down a hill off the quadrangle near the fine arts centers of the campus. According to Amherst, "It's probably the most used facility on campus..." It contains the campus Post Office, a movie theater, performance and dance space, two snack bars, the campus store, and

a game room. Student organization offices, media rooms and the Student Government are also located in this center, and are for the most part, easily accessible on the first floor of the building. The entrance to the center is somewhat dark, but opens up on the interior to a central atrium surrounded by rooms on the periphery. Adjacent to most of the amenities mentioned is well-furnished sitting areas.

The spaces in the Campus Center appear divided rather purposefully based on how they were expected to be used. Several of the rooms in the Campus Center are carpeted and fairly open with large windows. Just off to the side of one of the snack bars is a patio that opens to a smaller open space outside. Students are able to view this area through floor to ceiling windows. The large area boasting the performance and dance space is arranged with a stage and moveable furniture. This appears to allow the room to transfer easily from a lecture-type area to more of social outlet for parties, dances, etc.

While the administration sings the praises of the Campus Center, several students interviewed expressed their unhappiness with the facility. Some said that they never used the building. Others pointed out the fact that if the center wasn't so divided by hallways it would be more successful and more inviting for students to spend time in there and hang out. One student referred to the lounges as mini-libraries, very quiet and purposeful for academics, making the center feel uncomfortable and in one student's opinion, "cold." Another student stated that, aside from the campus center being the central Post Office, it was rarely used and little more than a "hallway" for students to pass through from one end of the campus to another. "No one hangs out here," was a common assertion.

Amherst provided a facility that exhibited both architectural and aesthetic beauty at first glance. However, looking carefully at the layout of the center, one soon realizes that it is more closed with its narrow stairways and hallways. "Perhaps it would be more successful if it were more open and not so divided," one student commented.

## ***VI. Conclusions about the Role of Student Centers***

It is clear in the minds of the members of the Strategic Planning Committee of Student Senate that there are tremendous benefits intrinsic to a functioning and well supported student center. We believe that facilities devoted to the extra-curricular and social needs of the students foster community building, more successful activities, improved communication between diverse social groups, better cooperation between student-interest groups, a wider array of social options, and overall satisfaction within the student body. By providing quality facilities to meet the social needs of the student population, the university can make a *statement*, telling the students that what they do on campus, both with for each other and for the community as a whole, is a vital aspect to the culture and reputation of Illinois Wesleyan University. A student center will not solve all problems, for indeed even the best schools, with the best facilities in the nation, still have some student dissatisfaction. However, by providing the students with quality options, we believe our students will make this venture a successful one, well worth the financial commitment.

## ***VII. The Implementation of a New Student Center***

### ***~What shall it include~***

Now that the question of "why" has been presented, the matter of "how" is the next concern. The following pieces of information stem from a year of research and questioning of students from across the country, and it is our opinion that Illinois Wesleyan should follow goals similar to what is outlined below if a Student Center Project is to begin. We feel there are ten key attributes of a successful planning phase, and that by following these basic tenants, the school may move forward on the project as speedily as is fiscally possible. While timing does play an important role in these proceedings, the quality of the center shall take first priority and must at no time be sacrificed due to timelines or economic caution. Above all, the students must be involved every step of the way, and it must be the University's mission to keep the students involved in the process as possible. The key edicts are as follows:

#### ***A. A Clear Purpose***

We saw such a wide variety of functions that a student center can provide for, there is no way to successfully combine ALL of them, so we need to prioritize from the beginning exactly what role the center will serve. The main focus should be clearly communicated to the students to prepare them, and the campus community, for the final product. This Committee feels our campus is in need of a *student* center as opposed to a *campus* center as explained at the top of this report. Faculty-student and staff-students interaction on our campus is alive and well within academic buildings and the existing Memorial Center; and there is a strong call for students to have place for primarily social purposes amongst themselves.

#### ***B. Use Governed by the Students***

Any Student Center must be inviting to students, and its source of vitality will be the atmosphere it exudes to the student body. Administrative offices, prevalent policies directed by Marriott, and equal accessibility to all members of the IWU/Bloomington community have all been characteristics of the current Memorial Student Center. None of the successful centers we have seen combine these characteristics. Successful student centers **feel** like they belong to the students. Such a philosophy would be foreign to Illinois Wesleyan, but it has proven to be effective with other, more successful universities. Such an openness in policy would limit the number of Administratively-planned events into the building, events whose focus is more on recruitment or PR than on the lives of enrolled students.

Giving students the impression that their privacy is valued will benefit all campus relationships, and foster more popular and creative programming than ever before. It is hard to be creative when your perception is that you are being watched. This philosophy should not lead to complete isolation however, and it would be understood that University support in terms of staff and upkeep are important in maintaining the highest quality experience within the Center as possible.

#### ***C. Creative Use of Existing Space***

IWU students are very aware of the cost of recent and upcoming additions to our campus, and will be especially sensitive to this following planning for the new athletic field and library. At the same time, our students are calling for a campus "hang out" that is comfortable, casual, and conducive to relaxation and socializing during the less structured times in a student's schedule. Taking all of this into account, and based on our observances from other schools, IWU should attempt to utilize existing space on campus before considering plans to build a new structure. We feel the size and open nature of the Memorial Gym, as well as its location on the busy north side of campus, make it the logical choice.

#### ***D. Designed with Student Input***

Student involvement in the decision making process is crucial for the building's success. Different levels of involvement throughout the process would be appropriate, such as forum discussions open to all students, a survey of representatives from various sectors of campus, or appointed members of a student-chaired committee. Student leaders could form a work group with members of the Administration, Board of Trustees, and the Faculty to see the design process through. It is important to make sure to include younger students that will be on-campus for the duration of the process. Maximum communication with students will result in a greater sense of ownership and satisfaction with the center.

#### ***E. Will Function as "Information Center"***

Besides providing a location for activities and socializing, the Student Center should be a place where students find out about opportunities as well. A centralized announcement board, mailboxes for students, and email stations with the campus web page on display would make publicity on campus much more efficient. A combined drop off spot for mail, or posters to be approved for campus posting would help centralize paper circulation. Also, common knowledge that the Student Center was the primary location for publicity on campus would not only reduce the need for publicity everywhere on campus, but attract students to the center as well. Such a concept has been demonstrated at Swarthmore and Bryn Mawr; it can work at IWU as well.

#### ***F. Media Headquarters***

In keeping with the idea of "information center," no Student Center would be alive without the media. The Argus and Titan TV play vital roles in connecting the students of IWU; having headquarters within a Student Center would help connect the students to the media. Should office space open up, such groups should receive first consideration for space. Currently, the Argus and Titan TV are operating in spaces too small for their needs and would benefit from extra space. WESN, though using a newly remodeled office and recording booth, is also limited in space; being hidden in the basement of Kemp, it is hard for the average student to find. The radio stations decaying antennae will also need replacement, and such a project would easily fit into the plans of a Student Center. The Wesleyana has adequate space, but should it be moved to the Memorial Gym, it would remain in an area of high student interest and would be closer to its photo processing lab on Park Street.

#### ***G. A Resource for Student Interest Groups***

Student Interest Group communication and productivity will improve if located under one roof; schools such as Williams have proven that placing them in the *same room* could be even better. *We believe that a communal space for special interest groups would greatly enhance their potential for accomplishment.* This can include both a work space for group leaders, (with computers, copying machines, desk space, phone lines and answering service, files, and locker space), and a scheduled meeting space for group meetings. A central calendar would help scheduling of programs as well. We could consider the practicality of relocating campus media, student government, and involving certain staff positions that deal closely with students and programming (such as Alcohol Educator or Co-Curricular Programming) with this central space. Office areas for students could be located on an upper level of the building as opposed to a socially-based space on the main floor.

#### ***H. Versatility and Atmosphere are Everything***

The atmosphere of any socially-based space within the Student Center should be one that is unique to any other building on campus. The most effective common spaces are those that allow students to unobtrusively observe who is in the area and what is going on, yet private enough so that those inside do not feel watched, or that they are part of the moving traffic. Student-designed decorating, large comfortable furniture, and a coffee/snack bar would add the unique, non-institutional feel to the building that students want.

We have observed that rich materials such as wood, contrasted with brightly colored wallpaper or paint, create an atmosphere that is elegant, inviting, and comfortable. Easily removable furniture, a large space, and storage areas are a must for maximizing the potential for activities in the Center. The same area can then be used for studying/meeting during the day and a party/event location at night. The call for an accepted "party spot" is definitely needed to supplement recent changes in the alcohol policy.

#### ***I. A Center Without a Book Store***

After reviewing the Centers in the top five liberal arts schools, we found no concrete evidence of a better solution: a Center without a bookstore, or a Center with a bookstore. There are the obvious benefits for students who wish to pick up school materials, and making such goods available in the spaces where students are makes sense. However, we must understand the historical relationship between the students of IWU and their perception of the IWU bookstore. To say that the relationship is strained would be a grave understatement.

The truth of the matter is that many students feel the bookstore is overpriced, out to make money off of students, and is generally not run in the students' best interests. Even the store managers would attest that IWU students often attribute the store's business practices to those of a private business, causing mistrust and undue criticism. We question whether introducing such an atmosphere into the students' space is a well-thought idea (see previous examples with Marriott food service). It is also important to note that the bookstore does not sell a wide variety of wares students would want in a Student Center bookstore: food, non-required books, popular music, room decorations, etc. This is evidence that the bookstore has a severely limited selection, and that the operation does need an expanded facility. However, placing it in a Student Center would take up valuable student space and

expose the Center to a commercial element that, on this University, is not a welcome one.

Let us clarify that we present the bookstores exclusion as an *option*, and there are positive aspects to including a student center bookstore. However, this is a legitimate and volatile concern for most students, and this aspect of the center should not be taken lightly by the powers-that-be who may plan the center.

Possible other locations for the University bookstore include a renovated Sheean Library, where its function may be better suited. Visiting students associating with the Admissions department would be exposed to attractive IWU apparel, and its location off the quadrangle would be equally convenient for students. It is our feeling that the atmosphere associated with the bookstore would be complimented by a close proximity to other Administrative offices, linking its existence more to the University than as the Manager's private business.

### ***J. Alternate Food and Beverage Options***

We feel that an appropriate addition to the space will be one that offers students a simple array of alternative food and beverage options. A popular theme would be that of a coffee bar, offering cappuccinos, hot chocolate, coffee, and cold beverage options. Smaller food stuffs like sandwiches, cookies, and muffins would also be highly used. The greatest asset of such a space would be its ability to remain open till later hours of the night. Simplicity and openness to ideas are important, so similar student-to-food service relationships do not arise. Students should be free to bring in outside sources of food like pizza or carry-out without hassle. Finally, consideration to be given the space as it relate to the alcohol policy, perhaps allowing sponsored parties into the common space on a limited basis.

\* \* \* \* \*

These suggestions are meant to tie into the unique fabric of the Illinois Wesleyan culture, and we feel such changes will positively influence that culture into something better. Similar suggestions have been shown to exist in successful Student Centers in the nation's best small, liberal-arts colleges, and it would follow that IWU can continue in their successes. We also believe IWU can go a step further.

## ***VI. What Can Be Accomplished***

As students who have seen what the best schools have to offer, it is our collective opinion that IWU has the unique opportunity to create a **superior facility**, both in functionality and student satisfaction. The value of such a project for the school in terms of **student satisfaction** is immeasurable. Its attractive appeal will touch all aspects of the University's national reputation, enhancing **admissions** and **retention** rate, and possibly enhancing the input of **Alumni-giving**. By providing a social center whose social focus is less on alcohol or the social chemistry of private living units, the Center will provide a healthy and vital campus dynamic- bettering the facilities seen by prospective students at rival institutions. According to numerous student surveys, a Student Center will give the students the **most**

**attractive** on-campus **alternative** in terms of relaxation space and social interaction. Such an addition to social life will surely have a positive effect on University retention and graduation rates, giving our students a unique reason why it is **better to attend IWU-** in the heart of the Prairie State- than the other selective schools where students have also been admitted. In terms of alumni giving, research has shown that students active within vibrant social groups, such as Greek organizations, will give back **greater amounts of money** to Illinois Wesleyan University. By adopting Student Center goals meant to foster student empowerment, satisfaction, and community involvement, perhaps more students will feel inclined to give back their University five or ten years down the line. Such improvements are not only feasible, but well supported.

Students have come to Illinois Wesleyan for a common purpose: the personal touch and attention only a small liberal arts institution can offer. We cannot envision a better response to this universal desire than a socially oriented, student-driven Student Center.

## ***VIII. Conclusions and Implementation***

An integral segment in the planning of a fully-utilized Student Center will be the gathering and use of input from the Illinois Wesleyan community, especially the student body, regarding what else shall be included in such a Center. From day one, a process where students, faculty, and support staff are able to work together alongside administration, will be key. This will guarantee the creation of a union where the interests of the entire campus community can be heard. A process similar to the planning of New House Residence Hall has proven to be highly popular and well received by the student body; students gained a true sense of ownership by seeing their ideas for the building come to fruition.

*We recommend the creation of a committee consisting of one administrator who would serve as co-chair, two faculty representatives, three support staff members, from the offices of dean of students, co-circular programming and physical plant, and four members of the student body, one of which also designated as co-chair.* Student interaction with the architects, contractors, and other pertinent persons involved in the planning and implementation of the project will translate into a student union best fit to the desires and needs of the student body.

In conjunction with the goals of this group, we suggest that the suggested committee act as representatives of the whole, but whose information be taken directly from a number of student focus groups. As for the reevaluation stages of the 1995 Bebarlo Master Plan for the university, we believe it beneficial to the IWU community past, present, and future to have this group help plan the new shape and form of the campus. The presentation of a proposal for a student space to the Board of Trustees. It is felt that this space would garner greater support from the Board if it is shown to be endorsed by the entire university community. The portion of the planning process where student interaction would be most important is throughout the design stages. Interaction by the aforementioned committee and outside student sources would work best to help reach our goal of making a facility that students use in their desired capacities. Within the designing stages, the programming and

schematic levels of creation are seen to be areas where student input could be utilized most effectively. And finally, in the approval of a plan and course of action concerning a student space. This not being an exhaustive list it is hoped that similar cooperative actions, as outlined above, will continue in all other aspects of planning for student space.