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BACKGROUND

The Yale College Council (YCC) is working with Garth Ross, Executive Director of Schwarzman Center, and Laura Paul, Deputy Director of the Center, to ensure that undergraduate student input is considered in the development of the Schwarzman Center. The goal of the YCC is to make sure that undergraduate students feel that they are able to actively voice their thoughts about what they envision the Schwarzman Center to be.

There have been instances in the past where student input was not taken into account, resulting in both the administration and the YCC receiving backlash. For example, in regards to the renovation of Bass library, students were informed of these plans after renovation designs had been decided. Student and faculty input had been largely neglected throughout the entire process, thus students spoke out widely about not being heard. This should not happen with the development of the Schwarzman Center, as it is a student center, meant to best serve the needs of the students who occupy it.

To ensure students’ voices are taken into account, YCC proposed in its initial meetings with Schwarzman Center leadership the establishment of focus groups. Focus groups will be able to help Garth Ross and Laura Paul better understand student opinions and hopes for the Schwarzman Center. Topics of discussion may include dining, study spaces, meeting spaces, and values of the center (non-exhaustive).

We recommend that focus groups be assembled from specific student demographics on campus such as student athletes, students from New Haven, FGLI students, Dwight Hall, faith-based organizations, etc.
PURPOSE

The YCC seeks to ensure that the Schwarzman Center team finds ways to include undergraduate input throughout their decision-making process both in the development of the center as well as after the center is completed. This can take many different forms, including information sessions and focus groups. The goal of this YCC policy project is to help the Schwarzman Center devise avenues to collect input from undergraduate students.
RESEARCH FINDINGS
In our conversations with students, as well as in our findings from an analysis of our survey data, we identified the following key themes:

Student Wellness

After the success of the Good Life Center (GLC) in Silliman College, Yale undergraduate students have greatly benefited from access to more student wellness spaces on campus. One way to improve access to student wellness resources on campus is to improve access to the GLC. Currently, while undergraduate students are able to access the GLC, its location makes it seem as if it were a Silliman initiative as opposed to a university-wide initiative. As seen below in Figure 1 (data from the YCC 2019 Fall Survey) roughly two-thirds of undergraduate students (67.58%) would use the GLC the same or more if it were moved to the Schwarzman Center.
Use of Spaces in Schwarzman Center

In the Fall Survey, the YCC collected data about what types of spaces students would want to have in the Center. According to Figure 2, the most popular option was to have “open and collaborative study spaces (like Bass Cafe or the Center for Teaching and
Learning in Sterling Library)" with 1400 votes\(^1\) (25.99%). The second most popular option was to open “lounge areas like residential college common rooms” with 1329 votes (24.68%). Other options included “open and quiet study spaces” and “separate meeting rooms,” which garnered 23.95% and 23.69% of the vote, respectively.

Figure 2: Types of Spaces Studies Would Benefit From

Q46 - The Good Life Center (GLC) is a university initiative to improve wellness at Yale that is currently housed in Silliman. How would your use of the Good Life Center change if it were moved from Silliman to the new Schwarzman Center?

\(^1\) Note that students were allowed to choose multiple options. Percentages in this category reflect percentage of all votes cast for all provided options, not percentage of students.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues that have been identified in this report, we propose the following recommendations:

Suggestions for the short term

1. **Create collaborative, open spaces for students**
   a. Undergraduate students seem to have a need for more open, collaborative spaces to meet, work, and socialize on campus. Places like Bass Cafe (on Cross Campus) serve as central meeting locations where students can meet with their peers, teaching assistants, or friends to work on homework, collaborate for extracurriculars, or spend time with friends. At the same time, it seems that there are not enough of these spaces on campus, and there is a need for more spaces where students can meet and talk. Undergraduate students seem less interested in more separate meeting rooms or quiet study spaces (like those found in Bass Library itself). A reason could be that there are enough quiet spaces on campus. We recommend that the Schwarzman Center Team consider having more collaborative spaces within the Center.

2. **Consider moving the Good Life Center to the Schwarzman Center**
   a. Undergraduates have benefited greatly from resources like the GLC in Silliman College due to Yale’s push for more wellness spaces on campus. As mental health becomes an increasingly pertinent issue on college campuses, improving access to wellness is essential in ensuring strong mental health among students. Currently a large majority of students would use resources like the GLC either the same amount or more if it were moved to the Schwarzman Center. Given that wellness is a pillar for the development of the Schwarzman Center, we recommend finding ways to ensure that there are dedicated spaces for wellness within the Center. This can take form in multiple ways, including but not limited to moving the GLC to the Center.

3. **Assemble focus groups from the student body**
   a. In conversations with Garth Ross, Laura Paul, and undergraduate students, the YCC found that focus groups are essential for undergraduates to feel like they have a role in the development of the Schwarzman Center. While
the Schwarzman Center will benefit people across the Yale and New Haven community, it is important to ensure that students, especially undergraduate students, feel like they are being heard.

b. Undergraduates are most passionate about participating in focus groups relating to programming and diversity in the center. This can include topics relating to events, galleries, performances, and other opportunities that may happen in the Center.

In the Fall Survey, students showed that they’d want to speak on “programming (the kinds of events and activities held at Schwarzman such as but not limited to dance performances, gallery presentations, etc.)” (30.22% of votes) and “increasing cultural diversity in the space (example: decor, food services, events/activities)” (25.67% of the vote). Other options included wellness at Yale and community engagement.

Suggestions for the long term

Consider hosting recurring focus groups in the future

a. Undergraduate students sincerely value their voices being heard in the events and activities happening on campus. Given that the Schwarzman Center will monumentally change and influence the ways that Yale undergraduates interact with their peers, graduate students, and faculty, it is essential that undergraduate voices are heard, even after the Center opens.

b. We recommend that the Schwarzman Center team consider holding recurring focus groups in perpetuity, specifically for undergraduate students. This can be annually or bi-annually, so that administrators for the Schwarzman Center can get direct input about what student perception of the Center is. This will also allow for the Schwarzman Center administration to constantly ensure that the goals and vision for the Schwarzman Center are aligned with those of students, including undergraduates.

c. We also recommend that the Schwarzman Center Team consider holding recurring focus groups with communities on campus including the Yale Cultural Centers, First-Generation Low-Income (FGLI) students, varsity student athletes, and performing and visual arts students.
FINAL THOUGHTS

We hope that the act of gathering the above information into one document proves useful for students and administrators alike. In conclusion, we hope that data from the YCC Fall Survey can factor into the Schwarzman Center leadership team's thought process about utilization of the space inside the Schwarzman Center.

The 3 main conclusions we found were:

1. Focus on open, collaborative study spaces (as opposed to quiet, closed-off spaces)
2. Consider ways to make student wellness accessible within the Center
3. Find ways for the Schwarzman Center to focus groups

After our conversations with Garth Ross and Laura Paul, the YCC is excited to see how the Schwarzman Center leadership team will continue to call for undergraduate student input as the Schwarzman Center grows and develops.

Should any questions about this report arise, or should any students or administrators be interested in hearing more, please contact the YCC representatives assigned to the YCC Schwarzman Center Policy Project at aiden.lee@yale.edu and karen.li@yale.edu.