Student Center shuffle

Employment office to take spot on first floor

By

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Starbucks is moving to afterHOURS and the Student Employment Office is going where Freshens, operated by Chartwells Dining Services, used to be.

That's the gist of recently approved changes to Curry Student Center spaces.

The changes were approved by the Student Center Governing Board (SCGB), a committee made of students and administration that oversee changes to the Curry Student Center. But the process for deciding the changes is drawing criticism from inside the Student Government Association (SGA), where at least one vice president said he is drafting legislation to overrule the decision.

The changes to afterHOURS come as a result of low food sales of its current breakfast and appetizer offerings, SCGB members said.

"While afterHOURS programs and events have been a big success in the past year, the dining option in that venue has not been well utilized and food sales have been very low," Dean of Campus Life Marina Iannalfo said in an e-mail. "Our hope is that the Starbucks signature brand will actually improve the food venue itself and the overall utilization of that space."

Iannalfo declined to be interviewed by phone.

In a student survey conducted last fall, the food at afterHOURS was rated second-to-last, behind only Dosa Hut.

The current selection of food will be nixed in favor of pastries and several other offerings that are standard for Starbucks.

"We're investing a lot of money into the new Starbucks area to improve the area," said O'Handley, who will become SGA president at the end of the Summer I semester. "We're going to purchase new furniture to help with overall aesthetic appeal to make sure it has a good image, and is capable of providing the environment we were initially trying to have."

The renovations will cost about $25,000, he said.

The Student Employment Office is being relocated from its current site in Speare Commons, which was renovated last year. The office assists students with finding part-time jobs on campus.

Iannalfo said the office's call for new space came from a desire to expand, and the need to fill the space that Freshens will leave vacant.

"At the time that the Student Employment Office needed to expand [last summer], there was not a space available for them in the Curry Student Center," she said in an e-mail.

After conducting a student survey with six different options for what to put in that space, O'Handley said the choice was narrowed down to either a DVD Store that could provide movie rentals, or the Student Employment Office. Those two options came in first and second on the survey. O'Handley said a random sample of 500 surveys was used to determine the outcome.
"We had time constraints because we didn't want to open the school year with vacant space," O'Handley said. "SCGB will be discussing concept of bringing DVD store into the student center in the future."

But not all students feel the process was fully transparent. SGA Vice President for Student Affairs John Guilfoil said he is drafting an internal resolution to overrule the decision to put the Student Employment Office in the student center.

Guilfoil accused the administration of controlling the student center changes.

"The solution this university has when it has problems is to tear everything apart and redo it from step one," Guilfoil said.

He said there was no reason for the Student Employment Office to be put in the student center because the office primarily conducts its business with students via the myNEU Web portal.

"Instead of giving NUTV a studio ... or instead of a food service, you're putting in an office that most students aren't going to go into," he said.

Guilfoil also accused the survey of employing "loaded" questions.

"One question was, 'Would you use the Employment Office if it were located in the Curry Student Center?' That's a loaded question," he said. "If you imply the answer that people are going to use it if we give it to you, they're going to say yes."

When asked during Senate last week to provide details of the relocation, O'Handley said he did not have all the details.

Guilfoil also criticized the addition of Starbucks to afterHOURS, which, he said, students and administration could have tried harder to promote.

"Starbucks is a corporation. AfterHOURS is the Northeastern students' café. That's why we created it, that's why SGA funded it," he said. "I have to ask the question: How long is it before Starbucks is picking the entertainment at afterHOURS, and not the students?"

O'Handley defended both moves, arguing that students had full input on the decision, between the 13 students who sit on SCGB and the surveys that were conducted.

"The students were definitely not left out of this process," he said.

"That's what you get with any change. There's going to be people that are upset and there's going to be people that are happy," he said.

O'Handley said afterHOURS will maintain full control of student programming.

"That's one of the things that we made certain of as we were going through the process with the Starbucks operation," he said. "And, now, afterHOURS is going to be open a lot longer during the day."