

Advocate

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Whither Health Services? Administration reconsiders health services funding in face of dwindling resources

JAMES HOFF

With CUNY budgets still uncertain and state revenue shortfalls projected between six and eight billion dollars for the next fiscal year, the Graduate Center administration is looking at ways to reduce its current expenses. One of the items on its list of considerations is its annual contribution to the Health Services Center.

The Health Services Center, which offers free and low-cost health care at the GC and is widely used by many students on campus, has traditionally been funded by a combination of revenue from various sources, including student activity fees and

annual contributions directly from the Graduate Center administration.

The Doctoral Students Council (DSC), funded entirely by student activity fees, normally contributes on average approximately 50% of the total Health Services budget or about \$62,500 annually. Due to a significant and unexplained bookkeeping error, the DSC was able to pay only \$37,000 this year, or a little less than 30%.

The administration, which usually contributes the other half of the Health Services budget, agreed to cover the remaining amount, paying a total of \$88,000 instead of the usual \$62,500.

Faced with these increasing costs and

uncertain budgets for the next fiscal year, the administration is now looking for ways to reduce or perhaps eliminate its annual contribution.

Matthew Schoengood, Vice President for Student Affairs, is adamant that "there have not been any decisions made yet" about the Health Services Center, but added that "We are examining our options in the face of dwindling resources, and looking at how other CUNY colleges address this issue."

According to Schoengood, the Graduate Center's Health Services Center is unique among CUNY campuses. Our administration currently contributes one of the high-

est percentages of funding to its Health Services Center compared to the other campuses in the university. Baruch, for instance, funds its health center almost entirely with student activity fees, while the administration at campuses like Lehman and Brooklyn pay only a small portion of the total health-services budget. Many other campuses contribute less than 10 or 20% of the total health-services budgets, while the remaining amount is covered by student activity fees, some of which are often earmarked specifically for health services, meaning they cannot be spent elsewhere.

Schoengood also added that student
see *Health Services*, page 3



NO MORE WHORING FOR HUMMERS FOR NOW: Workers dismantled the scaffolding on the night of December 6.

Prison Tales
from the RNC

Arafat's Legacy

Views from
CUNY Conservatives

Bush's Reelection
Seen from Mexico

Remembering Ol' Dirty

Dispute Brews Over Dining Commons Firing Administration and Restaurant Associates Defend Dismissal as some Students Urge Boycott

ANTONIA LEVY & DAN SKINNER

Food services provider Restaurant Associates (RA) officially characterizes itself as a "New York based restaurant group with more than 130 restaurants and high-profile accounts." One of those accounts is a contract over 20 years old with our very own Graduate Center (GC), which covers the Dining Commons and 365 Express Café.

Recently, concern has been raised over the firing of one of RA's longtime GC employees, Lazeena Gaffoor, known to many students as Liz. Some students, who see her dismissal as emblematic of the firm's questionable labor practices, have gone so far as to call for a boycott of the Dining Commons and 365 Express until Ms. Gaffoor is reinstated. RA and the GC administration, on the other hand, claim that the firing was justified and reasonable.

Perspectives on the Dismissal

On September 15, 2004, Ms. Gaffoor finished her lunch

break and was subsequently fired by local RA manager Charles Hunter. After being asked to collect her belongings, CUNY security personnel were called at the request of RA management to escort her off the premises. She was given notice not to enter the GC for 30 days.

Ms. Gaffoor, a mother of three who is currently going through a divorce, was employed by RA at the GC for about 14 years, most of that time as a register operator. According to Ms. Gaffoor, she had been late a few times, mainly because she had to wait at home until a babysitter arrived to care for her children. Ms. Gaffoor says that she would normally compensate by staying late, an arrangement she had made with her previous manager to accommodate her responsibilities as a mother.

About one year ago, Mr. Hunter arrived at the GC as the new manager, and Ms. Gaffoor reports that her work situation changed abruptly. In June 2004, when she took two of her allotted three weeks of vacation, she was called back to work four days early, a request Ms. Gaffoor

accommodated. In September, however, according to Ms. Gaffoor, Mr. Hunter again called her back early from her vacation, but this time she refused. Ms. Gaffoor says she told Mr. Hunter: "I am not going to work during my vacation anymore."

According to Ms. Gaffoor, her tardiness was met "with one verbal warning," although RA claims that Ms. Gaffoor was warned on several occasions. After returning from her vacation in September, management informed her that she was being demoted, and she was subsequently reassigned from her former position in RA office to the registers in the Dining Commons. According to Ms. Gaffoor, another employee had already been moved into her former position in the office while she was on vacation. The demotion was accompanied by a 30-day probation period, during which she was not allowed to be late or to take days off. Shortly after this warning, Ms. Gaffoor says that she encountered scheduling problems with her

see *Firing*, page 4

Don't Compromise With Imperial Christianity

It's good to appear to be pious, faithful, humane, honest, and religious, and it's good to be all those things; but as long as one keeps in mind that when the need arises you can and will change into the opposite. — Machiavelli

We've all heard more than we ever needed to know about "moral values" and their role in the re-election of George W. Bush. The mainstream media has eaten up the Republican Party line that the "moral values" in question—anti-choice on abortion and a fierce opposition to gay marriage, in particular—are an essential characteristic of "real Americans." *The New York Times*, for instance, opined that

Rural voters [...] stunned Democrats by placing moral values over their own economic interests and even Iraq and terrorism. That suggests the party faces years in the political desert if it doesn't address the basics of rural culture.

ADVOCATE

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The essentialist foundations of this type of thinking contribute to its inevitable failure to ask the most basic questions about what these values are and why Americans hold them. While you wouldn't know it from the last election, Christian thought has not always carried the pro-war, right-wing flag it carries today. Many early Christians, for instance, refused to serve in the Roman army even under the threat of death. This refusal was not just about political opposition to Rome—it stemmed from a deep religious respect for the human body as the masterwork of the divine hand, which inspired Tertullian to state in the second century that "Under no circumstances should a true Christian draw the sword."

When Constantine adopted the Christian faith as the official religion of the state, however, the church abandoned its anti-war position. This shift is worth considering. Christianity acting against or outside the power of the state appears to have been a "humanist" doctrine: humans are created in the image of God and must therefore be treated with respect wherever they are found. In league with state power, however, the benefits of violating the human body become too tempting, and the message becomes distorted. Christian beliefs become instruments necessary to bring unfortunate infidels into the fold (of "freedom") by military force. Our sympathies, it follows, are reserved for those with US citizenship.

The majority of American Christianity passed through the Constantinian gate some time ago (the Cold War era, for instance, saw a major increase in the conflation of Church and State) and we may now look upon mainstream religion in the US as a distinctly imperialist form of thought. The basic reason for saying this is the sense of American exceptionalism which has become so fused with the conservative Christian movement, and according to which God is smiling down on the US, "blessing" us and approving of everything we do. If we consume much of the world's resources while constituting just a small fraction of its population, God loves that. Interpreting it as a new rendition of "the white man's burden," with the American economy serving as the locomotive of progress. If we use violence to tilt the balance of global power in our favor, God loves that too, after all, ours is a war of "good" against "evil." And if we want to portray ourselves as kindly dedicated to "freedom" as we do this, all the better to God.

Admittedly, most Christians don't consciously think like this—they really do care about morality and want to see themselves as moral people. Meanwhile, the media and the government play on their desires, petting their egos and telling them that their country is doing the right thing. This was the true core of Bush's "values" appeal—telling Americans that they are

Letters

What's the Matter with Kaminski?

To the Editor,

I had the displeasure of reading an article in *The New York Times* ("A Blue City (Disconsolate, Even) Bewildered by a Red America," Nov. 4,) right before reading Mr. Kaminski's article from *The Advocate* ("Let's Talk About America"). Double whammy.

The Times and *Advocate* articles shared a common theme: how can we bring our enlightened East Coast vision to the yokels in the 'heartland,' er, the Midwest? The *Times* article had gems like...

His friend, Ms. Cohn, a native of Wisconsin who deals in art, contended that New Yorkers were not as fooled by Mr. Bush's statements as other Americans might be. 'New Yorkers are savvy,' she said. 'We have street smarts. Whereas people in the Midwest are more influenced by what their friends say' and 'If the heartland feels so alienated from us, then it behooves us to wrap our arms around the heartland,' she said. 'We need to bring our way of life, which is honoring diversity and having compassion for people with different lifestyles, on a trip around the country.'

The Advocate article echoed this silly theme, though at least Kaminski emphasized to his hippie readership that we need to be patient with these naive, Midwestern yokels. After all, these poor bastards mean well:

While the activists in these Midwestern communities may have lofty goals for reform, they are not necessarily in accordance with the radical ideals held by the core founders and position holders of many metropolitan activist groups.

Thank God for that. Wait, can I say? (Don't worry: I mean "God" in the ceremonial sense.) At any rate, I learned from Kaminski's article that you East Coast types "must be patient and willing to work with groups that are more moderate in nature, without enforcing ideological orthodoxy." So be patient with me, guys. I'm trying. I'm learning.

To be fair, Mr. Kaminski's message isn't quite like the traveling road show suggested by the *Times* article. Fortunately, I live in Minnesota, part of Mr. K's sweeping "Midwest," and consider myself only a temporary visitor/student in New York, where "subconscious Marxist sentiments" have made this city the great place that it is, or isn't. Depends on where you go, though I'd advise you to avoid all hospitals and public schools, at least when you are showing visiting Minnesotans your version of East Coast utopia.

I would advise Mr. Kaminski (from Indiana, obviously a different Midwest than mine), and the rest of the 51st state of New York City, to consider again the conception of the "Midwest." Or don't. Whatever. We in Minnesota aren't going to lose any sleep over it. We in the land of Wellstone are doing just fine. So you can keep your own brand of activism. Ours is doing just fine. You bet.

At the very least, Mr. Kaminski, quit with the "blanket terms." You are in graduate school now, and need to set a "total agenda of transformation" in your use of facts and language.

Yours in science,

Nate Metzger
Department of Philosophy

Are our readers hippies? Some of us used to be crustie punks... -Eds

essentially good people who believe in marriage and children and "hard work," and that their country's role in the world is a beneficent Christian one. Just how well have they honed this message? Consider that opponents of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s attempted, but never succeeded, in masking their racism as a "value." The homophobic Right is doing this today with unprecedented success.

The state and media charlatany behind these "values" makes it hard to point a condemnatory finger at Christians and hold it there without mercy. American Christians are trying to hew a positive self-image for themselves out of the corporate, pro-state message that they are offered. Jesus casting the money lenders from the temple? Pool! Blessing the peacemakers? Pshaw! And, yet, point we must.

Any religion that values the lives of one nationality over those of another has become a nationalist faith. When that country begins to exercise its hegemonic power against others in the name of "preemptive strikes," religion will surely become one of its chief ideological organs, throwing a curtain of righteousness over piles of dead civilians overseas, while conjuring comforting images of families and domesticity to assuage feelings of guilt at home. Such religions are distortions of their own tradition and a disgrace to their prophets and purported tenets. The American Left must not make concessions to imperial Christianity. It's fine to have an open debate with this group, and to listen when they make sense, but we must see the corrupt, non-religious root of their ideology and point it out every time we see it.