

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER Advocate



The Newspaper for the CUNY GC Community

October 2005

<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/advocate>

Wellness Center Survives Fee Crisis DSC funding of Student Health services assured; referendum passes 654 to 457

The Graduate Center student body has voted to increase the Student Activity fee from \$29.60 to \$41.60 in order to maintain funding to the Student Health Services portion of the Wellness Center. The \$12 increase will go into effect as part of the Spring 2006 tuition and fees. Without this increase, Student Health Services at the Wellness Center would have ceased operations on December 31.

From September 27 through October 3, the aroma of fresh popcorn wafted through the Graduate Center lobby and up the elevator shafts to entice students to learn about the referendum and participate in the vote.

The concern about and interest in the issue was evidenced by the voter turnout. Sharon Lerner, Director of

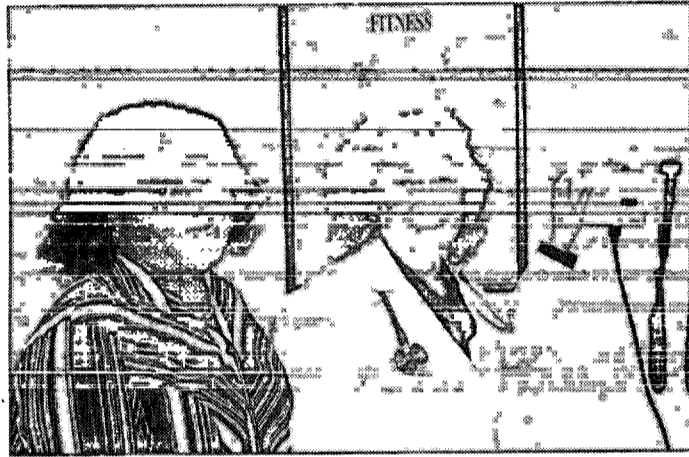


PHOTO: SPENCER SUNSHINE
The Wellness Center staff includes administrative coordinator Annabella Bernard and nurse practitioner Mary P. Clancy, RN.

Student Affairs, says this is the largest turnout by far of any election or referendum that she has seen in the more

than 15 years that she has been involved with the Office of Student Affairs. 26% of the student body voted; more than one thousand votes were tallied.

The DSC receives all of its funds through the Student Activity Fee, and pays 60% of the costs of Student Health Services; the fee had not been increased since 1998. The increase will be earmarked solely for funding of Student Health Services, freeing up

additional DSC funds to be utilized for other student-related activities. This arrangement allows the DSC to maintain other services such as childcare, travel and research grants, and community events.

Members of the DSC Steering Committee and other concerned students pulled "popcorn duty," tabling and answering questions during the referendum. Many students did not know about the Wellness Center at all: two of the most common questions were "What is the Wellness Center?" and "Who is it for?"

The Wellness Center Student Health Services is open to all GC students, whether or not they have insurance.

The Wellness Center is located on the see DSC NEWS, page 11

CORPORATE RUBBISH

Evaluating Restaurant Associates' environmental claims about Styrofoam cups

LEA JOHNSON

In the May 2005 issue of THE ADVOCATE, Charles Hunter replied to Abigail Schoneboom's letter regarding Restaurant Associates' decision to shift from the use of paper to styrofoam cups in the Graduate Center's 365 Café. He claimed that Restaurant Associates made a "deliberate and thoughtful decision to go with foam, rather than paper cups." The information he presented as the basis for this "thoughtful" deliberation was based entirely on the website of the Dart Container Company, the world's largest manufacturer of foam cups. Even the citations he listed can be found on the Dart website under "The Basics: Environmental Q&A."

It seems more likely that Mr. Hunter's decision-making was influenced by the fact that twelve-ounce foam cups average three to four cents a cup, while paper ones average six to eleven cents – a question of profit margin, not environmental impact.

What would a "deliberate and thoughtful" examination of the paper versus foam cup question look like? A brief investigation of sources other than the Dart website gives us an idea.

PRODUCT LIFE CYCLES

Hunter – and the Dart company website – rely heavily on a 1991 *Science* policy article by University of Victoria professor Martin B. Hocking to ground the claim that styrofoam cups are more environmentally sound than paper cups. Hocking's comparison of foam and paper cups followed each one through the major stages of its manufacture, from raw materials (petroleum, trees, chemicals, etc.) to finished product.

But in a subsequent issue of *Science*, both Hocking's methods and the data on which they relied were questioned by other scientists, including the author of one of the papers whose data Hocking used for his calculations. While Hocking's main point is valid – that evaluating the relative environmental impacts of products is complex – his calculations hardly warrant a wholehearted embrace of single-use foam cups.

Product life cycle analysis is a way of accounting for the resources, energy and impacts involved in making a product; however, the relative importance of those impacts is subject to debate. How do you weigh kidney damage versus cancer, or biodiversity

loss versus casualties in wars to safeguard oil supply? Even Hocking, in a 1999 paper, discusses the need for complex values frameworks in comparative evaluation of products. One suspects that Dart's publicists forgot to read that one.

WHAT'S IN MY CUP: POLYSTYRENE FOAM

Styrofoam, introduced by Dow Chemical in 1937, was the first flexible, moldable plastic foam (today, Dow only wants "Styrofoam" to refer to a blue foam used as building insulation). It is also called polystyrene foam.

Polystyrene's main ingredient, benzene, is a petrochemical that comes from crude oil or coal. The environmental and human costs of the oil and coal industries are numerous and well-documented.

Benzene, a known carcinogen linked to leukemia, is then converted to styrene. New York is among the top 10 states listed by the EPA for toxic emissions of styrene to land and water. Chronic high-level exposure to styrene is associated with liver and nerve tissue damage. According to the EPA, food packaged in polystyrene containers has been found to contain small amounts of styrene. Styrene is chemically

linked to form polystyrene, which is then expanded (or "blown") with gas to produce a foam that is approximately 95% air. This high air content is what gives the foam its insulation properties. In the 1970s, expanded polystyrene foam was blown with chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that were found to result in destruction of the ozone layer. Following public outcry, most polystyrene is now blown with gases not called CFCs (like pentane and HCFCs, which got their "H" after the bad publicity) that may be "less" destructive

see STYROFOAM CUPS, page 3

