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ASI Seeks Student Opinion at Cookout

By Anders Howmann

Hundreds of hungry students lined up in the Quad Tuesday to enjoy a free lunch at the Associated Students Inc. Cookout, an event held four times a semester to promote different groups of student government.

The goal of the event was to spread awareness of future plans to renovate the Titan Student Union. Focus groups will be organized this week by the Titan Student Centers Governing Board in order to determine if renovations are in the student interest, if they are feasible and what improvements students want.

"We are looking for student input from anyone and any campus community," said Christian Urcia, chair of the TSC Board and senior communications major.

Urcia spoke before students as they waited in a line that stretched across the heart of the campus. He emphasized that ASI is looking for opinionated students to attend the focus group meetings. He also mentioned that the TSU has seen many major improvements since 1992. The campus population has grown significantly since then, he said.

Urcia also emphasized that renovations are not yet planned and depending on student input at the focus groups, they may not happen at all. These focus groups will be conducted by a group of private contractors: Brailsford and Dunlavey, Pheiffer Partners, and Henrikson Owen & Associates.

"We are not saying that we are going to do it, we want to see from students if they want to see that," Urcia said on the renovations.

The renovations, if they were to occur, would be funded by students' campus union fees, which are \$134 per student per semester, according to ASI's 2011-12 budget.

"These are their student fees and we want to make sure we are using their dollars correctly," Urcia said.

TSC members in attendance were happy with the turnout of the event.

"I think it's been a success," said Ginny Cheung, 21, a double major in theatre arts and political science. "There's been such a gap between the Titan Student Center Governing Board and ASI, so I think this is a good collaborative event."

ASI Executive Staff members could be seen at the end of the long line, flipping hot dogs and talking with students as they served them.

"Students were excited. I got to talk to some students in line to try to get them involved," said Matthew Badal, junior biochemistry major and ASI vice president of finance.

While it's likely that many students were lured into the event by the food, some said they wanted to get involved in the focus groups and ASI because of the event.

"I came for the food to begin with and then I also want to learn more about ASI," said Gregorio Avila, 22, a business major. He said he wanted to get involved in the focus groups as well.

While the main focus of this particular Cookout was to promote the TSU renovation focus groups, the event also increases the visibility of ASI among the student body. ASI Vice President Jay Jefferson said the student government has some big plans for the coming semester.

"One of our top priorities is making sure that our university and Academic Senate committees are filled," said Jefferson. "The student government is really here to be the mediator for the students. We are here to fight for students and present the students' perspective and so if students are not represented then that's a problem."

Jefferson also said advocacy on issues related to students, such as rising Pell Grant requirements, will be another priority for ASI over the course of the semester.