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ASG Discusses BSC Survey Results

By Courtney Day

Cost continues to be the determining factor whether Miami University students support the proposed Bicentennial Student Center (BSC).

Results from the recent BSC financial assessment survey, funded by Associated Student Government (ASG) and conducted by Brailsford & Dunlavey, were a topic of discussion at Tuesday's ASG meeting.

Of the 1,816 students who responded to the e-mail survey, 57 percent said they would be likely to support a \$174 per semester increase in student fees to fund the new student center. This would be a 20 percent increase of the current general fees, which stand around \$861.

At a lower fee increase of \$125 per semester, 66 percent of respondents would support the project. An increase of \$100 each semester would garner approval from 75 percent of respondents.

The fee amount needed to support the BSC would depend on the amount of donations received for the project. Kim Martin, Brailsford & Dunlavey project manager and a Miami University alumna, said the \$174 fee estimation is based on the cost of the project being fully funded through student fees without any help from donations.

David Creamer, vice president of finance and business services, said in October that Miami hopes to raise up to \$57 million in donations.

"We are now somewhere between \$1 and 2 million," said Barbara Jones, vice president for student affairs.

Jones said of the 4,000 donors who have supported the project, many have never donated to Miami before.

Jones said donations should increase when images are generated to show donors.

"We expect to have some preliminary images by the end of March," Jones said.

Martin said in her experience with these types of "quality of life" project surveys, most institutions have a higher level of support than Miami's 57 percent.

"I've seen anywhere from 40 percent to 80 percent," Martin said. "I'd say the average is higher than 57 percent."

The survey was sent via e-mail to 8,200 students, more than half the student body, with a response rate of 22 percent, Martin said.

"Twenty-two percent is an excellent capture rate," Martin said.

Martin attributes the relatively high response to the electronic format of the survey and to the high interest level of students.

Julie Skolnicki, regional vice president of Brailsford & Dunlavey, said the statistics of the results are strong.

"Adding more students would barely affect the confidence level," Skolnicki said.

The survey has a 95 percent confidence level with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.3 percent, Martin said.

The survey results indicate that more students think they would use a new student center more frequently and for a longer duration than they use the Shriver Center.

About 76 percent of respondents said "yes" when asked whether they would support a reallocation of the current Recreational Sports Center fee after that fee is retired to support the BSC.

Support for the BSC is highest among first-year students. The results of the survey show that approximately 62 percent of first-year students would support the facility while 54 percent of seniors said they would support it.

Due to the on-campus housing requirement for second-years, Martin said first- and second-year students are most likely to use the facility.

Martin said student comments indicated that some students are unaware that fees will not be charged for the facility until doors are opened.

"Students definitely need to be more educated on fees," Martin said.

Only 37 percent of respondents said they were at least somewhat familiar with the student fees they already pay.

"We did find that students who were paying for school themselves or using loans were slightly less supportive," Skolnicki said, but she said the difference was only between 2 and 4 percent.

Some students feel the BSC should not be a priority for Miami, particularly in difficult economic times. Only about one-third of students surveyed feel the BSC should be a high or very high priority for the university. About 24 percent of students surveyed think it should be a low or very low priority.

Jonathan McNabb, student body president, is eager to educate students about the BSC plans and the results of the survey, which cost approximately \$15,000 for ASG.

"This survey is going to be so important to the dynamic of the way the student center is talked about until it opens," McNabb said.