

The Pit – A venue at the SU

Union Notes and Believes

On what the SU ought to do: 'giving you added value to your time here through our many extra-curricular activities.' On how each individual student should feel being part of Goldsmiths SU: 'We believe that every student is extra special and every student deserves the very best educational and extracurricular experience whilst here.'

Union Belives I must first deal with the claim 'many extracurricular activities.' Unfortunately my first term as member of the Drama Society committee was dominated by desperate attempts to book already oversubscribed performance spaces. This meant no performances in first term. Which meant students were unable to act; direct, stage manage, even watch anything that we as a society wanted to present in first term. This meant members were uninvolved in any extracurricular activities and the student body at large unable to see what we were up to. As by far the largest society in the Student's Union, with over 150 members, and counting, this left a large portion of my society wondering why they departed with their £3 to an optimistically delusional bearded man at Fresher's Fayre back in September. We are unfortunately, but, understandably, under the dominion of bookings within the Drama Department. They have the most suitable spaces available for performance in college, unsurprisingly. And this is of course how it should be. I am not suggesting that extracurricular activities should take precedence over Student's degree programmes. In fact I believe it is unfair and unnecessary to put the Drama Department under anymore strain attempting to fit in extracurricular work amongst their more important scheduling of degree programme performances, rehearsals, workshops, assessments, etc. Although the Drama Society is billed as a Departmental Society this strain of room bookings and the priority of student degree programmes over Student's extracurricular activities sets up a necessary divide and hierarchical system which leans more favourably towards departmental scheduling. This results in no extracurricular activity. When I first expressed my concern with room bookings to the activities and societies manager I was told that Drama students receive priority over others to book rehearsal rooms, and performances spaces in the Drama Department. I am not a Drama Student. The Drama Society committee and many of its members are made up of students from other disciplines and demonstrative of the difficulty the society can have in building a relationship with the department and in turn scheduling. The other major factor effecting the society with using facilities under the Drama Departments jurisdiction is the cost. Currently one show in production is having to pay £80 a performance for technician to be present at each performance. This is to ensure the safety of their equipment. I can understand this but given the small amount of budget we can provide a group of eager students this would eat up any money that could be used for props, rights for a published play, etc. meaning again no performances OR all of the societies money put into one production, limiting the number of members able to be involved. I stress again I do not think the Drama Department should provide a space for us to perform. But the spaces on offer within the SU are unsuitable. There would be a way to make the stretch more performance friendly, which I will come to shortly. However in the meantime it is not user friendly. It is a bar. The lack of performance spaces available meant that one student, Harry Fox Davies, felt that he could not put on his play that we, the drama society were very enthusiastic about and willing to fund. His play was called Positive Feedback. It was a piece that collated and edited source material from real political speeches, seminars and committees, that were dealing with climate change. He intended to have post show interviews with leading academics on the subject and read from his own articles written on the subject:

he has recently secured a job as a columnist writing on climate change. Wouldn't this have been a great thing to happen in our college, sparking debate and involving people in a current issue? For me it seems such a horrible waste that somebody so passionate will leave his university saying that he wasn't able to experiment and share with his other students because of facilities. I would now go on to talk about the disaster that is room bookings if it didn't exhaust me to my socks. Why do I need to email someone, for them to email someone, for them to email that someone back, for that someone to then email me back. It is also not fit for purpose in my case. The sheer number of students I have who want to be doing something means that at anyone I would need one production needing 3 rooms a week, another the same and a separate room for a general society workshop. There must be a more simple way. But perhaps that is for another motion. All of this means my members don't feel 'extra special' in fact they feel like there is nothing happening. And this is not because I don't want things to be happening, it's just I can't seem to find the place for things to happen or the support for it to happen. For instance I haven't received one email from the societies and activities manager asking me how things are going, how he can help – and let us look at the societies currently open. The Shakespeare society has zero members, and yet has an unused £1500 budget. Why hasn't somebody been found to fill this role? So what do we do? In my view the SU needs a new space. A small venue that is performance friendly, but that could be used by anyone and everyone in the Union. Let's call it The Pit. Or some other variant on a pun on Gold. Anyone can book it. The comedy society does a biweekly gig there. The musical society has a showcase every month. The psychology society runs lectures there. The cheese and wine society host a gala cheese evening. Use your imagination. The Pit has it's own website. Which means a unified place where stuff is always happening in college. This simplifies marketing for society events: what's on at the pit? Get's put in the SU newsletter, posted on the Goldsmiths Facebook Page. Each society knows they will be able to get what they want put on seen by the larger student community so they can get involved. Who runs it? Much like Wired Radio a manager would be chosen by the students in a vote. With other students in charge of tech, another the website (the new fantastic Wired Radio is demonstrative of the talent and ingenuity of students, it would not be expensive). This would also give students keen to work in the arts, and at this university that is many, a chance to give it go. How is it paid for? Well if given the go ahead I imagine the Goldsmiths Annual fund would support a project of this kind. An injection of £1000 would pay for the minimal lighting and PA system the room would need, along with paint etc. For general upkeep and further development a levy could be taken from ticket sales of 10%-15% OR some of that £8000 surplus that the SU announced could be syphoned into a project like this. Why? Isn't this just something for the drama society? As stated no. It is a room free from departmental bookings and room bookings in general. Run by students for students, for anything they want, when they want. Also we put tickets on sale for a play funded by the society and 150 tickets sold out within 3 days. There are students who want to see theatre by other students at college. More things other than club sandwich would be nice in college. But a note on performance. With uni's such as Durham, Warwick, Bristol, York, Oxbridge etc. who offer excellent facilities for extracurricular performance this university should be supporting it. On your own website you advertise your societies by stating: 'the drama society for example often go to the Edinburgh Fringe festival' in order for things like this to continue the societies need more support from the SU with facilities which will build a vibrant performance community. I have felt let down by the extracurricular opportunities available at my time in college. I took over the Drama Society believing it was just lazy previous society presidents. However I have learnt it is passionate people who are let down by a system that seems to be against them. When I leave I'll say I'd have liked to have done more at uni but that there wasn't the chance. Don't let that happen to your future students.

Union Resolves

I propose a meeting with myself, any other society presidents interested in this motion, the society and activities manager, the chief executive, the SU president and the warden (if available) to discuss when this venue would be sourced, funded and opened. With the desire to have one open by the academic year 2013/2014.

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