

WILLIAMS RECORD BOARD

Pay the price and build it right

The Stetson-Sawyer project has long been presumed as a certainty to most members of the Williams community, merely the next step in a transformation that will fundamentally alter the campus for generations of students to come. Recent developments, however – namely the reluctance of some trustees to shoulder the steadily rising price tag of the gargantuan project – have stalled the project in a holding pattern and raised questions about its eventual completion.

While we understand the need for careful deliberation in such an expensive and time consuming project as Stetson-Sawyer, we are also concerned by the increased emphasis on cost-cutting in the design. Following an increase in the cost estimates for the new student center, President Schapiro declared, “We are going to build a first-rate student center and will spend whatever we need to do this.”

Setting and sticking to a reasonable budget is clearly the fiscally responsibly course of action, but where has this same resolve gone? Stetson-Sawyer is an academic building, sitting at the core of the College’s mission. It is disheartening to see that the College is willing to spend millions of dollars on projects like the student center and the

’62 Center for Theatre and Dance, only to have trustees balk at the idea of using the College’s considerable financial resources to properly see Stetson-Sawyer through to completion.

Cutting costs by making changes to the design of the complex has dangerous consequences to its ultimate functionality. Historically, the same inefficient design that the current architectural plans strive to correct were themselves made necessary by the fact that Stetson’s last renovation left the back of the office a confusing maze of tunnel-like hallways, constructed incrementally as the College waited for more funds to roll in rather than forming one schematic plan.

Some of the pressing demand for a new library as a study space comes from student dissatisfaction with another recent renovation: Schow library, with its echoing acoustics and sterile study spaces. While some elements of Schow’s layout, particularly group study spaces, are attractive, the lack of intimate spaces prompts some students to choose Sawyer over Schow day-in and day-out. While the spaces appeal to different types of study habits, the fact that both Sawyer and Schow are overused spaces underscores the necessity to create more study

spaces for students.

A scenario in which the new academic buildings are erected and present-day Sawyer stays in its current location is a disastrous one, no matter how unlikely or far-fetched. The committee says that such a situation would require an absolute worst-case scenario; we believe that there is no scenario in which this solution would be appropriate. Sawyer would lose its value as a study space – one of the most attractive things about the building is that while it may feel cavernous inside, the windows that line the outer walls provide natural light and mountainous views. The new academic buildings would basically be ruined by their extreme proximity to the library. Imagine looking up from your book only to see your professor through two panes of glass, only feet away.

A renovation of Stetson and the creation of a new library are clearly needed. Williams’ first priority is academics, a priority that should be reflected in how the school spends its endowment. Yet in order to make such an expense lasting, it is essential that the project be not a maze of cost-cutting measures but buildings designed for the long-haul.

No working for me