Student Senate on the Robert W. Van Houten Library

Renovations and Rearrangement of the current Structure and Facilities

New Jersey Institute of Technology

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Luis Gonzales and Elizabeth Benoy, Co-Chairs of the Student Senate Ad-hoc Committee on the Library Renovations, drafted this assessment and proposal.
In 2002, The Middle States Commission on Higher Education cited NJIT for failing to have adequate space and books within their library facility. Yet in the past number of years, NJIT has seen a sharp increase in its undergraduate enrollment. Since 2002, NJIT has seen its total enrollment increase from 8,862 students to 9,558 students. In addition, the NJIT library has decreased its facility usage by relinquishing part of its second floor for the housing of NJIT’s Center for Pre-College programs. This, in fact, created a climate for added congestion in the library.

With the return of The Middle States Commission on Higher Education this April, it is imperative to consider a plan for increasing the size of the library in the most cost effective way. The NJIT Student Senate is suggesting a change in venue for NJIT’s Center for Pre-College Programs, in order to return much needed space to the NJIT library. From a student perspective, the library is the lifeline to academics, providing multiple services for the student body. Data collected by the NJIT Faculty Library Committee already show a high usage of multiple study rooms, to the point of capacity. Use of the second floor would allow for the integration of new study rooms and tables, thereby, allowing more students to use the facilities that are paid for by their tuition. While other uses for the second floor can be decided upon, it is of the utmost importance that this space be returned to the Van Houten Library, and above all else to the students.

For those students who are looking to use their library facilities currently, there needs to be an improvement in maintenance. Students have observed problems with the ground outlets in the library, which do
not supply any power. Students have also reported malfunctions with many of the desk lights throughout every floor in the library, along with inadequate lighting in some of the bathrooms. Poorly regulated temperature controls are also a cause for concern, with the library temperature switching from too cold or too hot on numerous occasions. When compounding such problems the common student would find their library unsuitable for studying.

In speaking with representatives from the library there is an admitted level of uncleanliness concerning various facets around the building. The carpet, for instance, is in need of cleaning according to the librarians. It is unknown if computers are cleaned on a regular basis, yet visual evidence would suggest that these desktops remain unkempt. This also applies to many of the chairs located on the second floor of the library, which contain a wide host of stains. Such maintenance problems are unacceptable for a top university. The Student Senate affirms that such issues can be resolved mainly through the Physical Plant department, which is charged with maintaining facilities here at NJIT. In its current state the library is in need of much support.

In the last year the library has seen a drop of 3,304 books borrowed by students. However, the steep drop-off is an actual continuation in trends, which shows less and less books being borrowed by students. Although the NJIT Faculty Library Committee is unsure as to the cause of this phenomenon, they have mostly agreed with a student outlook of their books being somewhat outdated for usage. It is the belief of this Student Senate that a great deal of books currently utilized by the library do not
match many new concepts discussed in present day classes. If the library were to increase the amount of recently purchased books it possessed from there could in fact be an increase in book circulation.

As a University with a promotional motto of being on the edge of technology, it is important to not forget about the day-to-day basics that students need. There is an understanding that the desire to pump money in to research and other measures is attractive to a university looking to raise its prestige. However, students cannot be expected to be neglected while they are in actuality the true source this university’s prestige. Asking an alumni for donations all goes back to their time at NJIT, which may have been spent working in subpar facilities. It is with conviction that the Student Senate does hereby support these suggested remedies to the Robert W. Van Houten library for the betterment of the students and the university as a whole.