

Academic Futures

“White Paper”

Return ATLAS to the Students; They paid for it.

The Roser ATLAS Building was inaugurated in 2006. After many years in the planning, and the participation of various academic and non-academic University dependencies -the College of Arts & Sciences, the Department of Theatre & Dance, the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, the Film Studies Program, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, the University Libraries, and the College of Engineering- the official “ATLAS Center Program Plan” was approved and greenlit by University authorities in May of 1998. Several years later, students across campus approved a self-imposed special building fee in order to break ground on these facilities. From its inception and the student-funded initiative, the ATLAS Center - housed in the Roser ATLAS Building after a naming gift from Jim and Becky Roser- was meant to serve students and the University community at large. The lofty goals of the initial “Program Plan” included the following language:

- ATLAS involves all the colleges and schools at CU Boulder - Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Engineering, Music, Journalism and Mass Communication, and Law, as well as Continuing Education, the Graduate School, and the University Libraries;
- Provides new curricula that meet crucial Colorado and national workforce needs by combining technology, arts, and media;
- Is a campus-wide effort to help all students and faculty use technology to improve the quality of, access to, and productivity of teaching and learning;
- Involves new outreach activities to Colorado K-12 education and citizens; and applies the research and creative talents of CU faculty and students to examining the societal impacts

of technology.

Among other things, the original “ATLAS Center Program Plan” established the expectation that the Roser ATLAS Building would also provide a permanent, stable home to the Film Studies Program –originally, the only academic unit housed in the building-, the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program, and the Graduate Teacher Program, both essential and important academic-support units that serve all colleges and departments across the campus.

At some point in its history starting around 2010, the College of Engineering took hold and control of most of the space in the Roser ATLAS Building, and significant changes that affected students negatively came into place. An open student lounge in the second floor became a working lab with walls and doors and “permissions” required to use it; the welcoming “coffee shop” vibe of the building lobby was substituted with work-stations not conducive to socializing or relaxation between classes; all of the previously designated “Group Design” rooms –intended to be used by students for projects, etc.- were reassigned to non-CU occupants; the only two classrooms in the first floor were cordoned off for “Lab” uses; a large room that served as office for ATLAS PhD students was also reassigned to non-CU tenants; and five sound and video editing suites that OIT made available to students for all sorts of projects were shut down.

In short, inch by inch, the last two ATLAS administrations have effectively taken the building away from its original intentions and made access for students, academic programs (such as Film Studies) and academic support programs (such as FTET and GTP) increasingly difficult. The most alarming situation is the “renting” out of space to the National Center for Women in Information Technology (NCWiT). As admirable as NCWiT’s mission might be

(judging by its name, as I actually have no idea what NCWiT does), it is not a CU dependency, it does not serve students, and many of the spaces it now “pays rent” to occupy has effectively been taken away from CU students, who paid for, and still pay for the building with their fees. It is inexplicable –and to most of us, inexcusable- that an outside non-profit with, at best, tenuous ties to CU, gets to occupy prime real estate in the middle of campus, and particularly space that, in some cases, has been *effectively*, taken away from CU students, academic units, and academic support units.

“Academic Futures,” how about taking a close, responsible look at the allocation of space in the Roser ATLS building and earnestly considering these questions: What is the NCWiT? What is its relationship to CU Boulder? How many students does it serve? (I would venture a guess at that number.) Is renting out space in the middle of campus with a marginally associated non-profit the best use of this space? What do students think about it? Should we poll students –who pay for these facilities more than anyone- about the best uses of the many rooms in the Roser ATLS Building now occupied by “staff and researchers” from NCWiT? How many of the “ATLS Center Program Plan” goals copied above are still in practice? I say, return ATLS to students now.

Respectfully submitted,

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