Faculty-Only Lounge Raises Questions

Underused lounge does not allow for staff use or faculty-staff interaction

By Janice Gallagher

President Al Bloom has said that Kohlberg is a “spiritual uplift” for the College community. However, there is some disagreement about the kind of community to which Kohlberg is contributing. Specifically, some feel that the faculty-only lounge, located next to the Cappuccino Bar, unnecessarily excludes staff, especially the administrative assistants, and further undesirable divisions between different groups on campus.

As of now, there is no specific space allocated for staff to eat besides Tarble and the Cappuccino Bar. The administrative assistants on campus work closely and consistently with faculty, but are not permitted in the lounge. Rose Maio, administrative assistant in the Sociology/Anthropology Department, stated, “I was disappointed when the decision [to have the lounge be only for faculty] was made, because originally there was some hope. We really have no place to go away from our office, to eat lunch, or even interact with our co-workers.”

Most faculty and staff interviewed said that the lounge is usually empty, and that the space is not being utilized by the faculty. “Whenever I go to the lounge it is empty, so I don’t go anymore,” said Jerry Frost, professor of religion and director of the Friends Historical Library. Lisa Hajjar, visiting assistant professor of sociology, didn’t know there was a faculty lounge.

But Rob Hollister, professor of economics, believes the lounge represents an important step towards fostering faculty dialogue. The lounge is intended as “a space where faculty members will interact in a relaxed and informal way to foster the liberal arts tradition of serious interaction across disciplines. To do that, you have to have a space where this can occur in a relaxed and nonstructured fashion.”

The existence of a faculty-only lounge obviously has different significance for the faculty and staff, and although it may at first seem like a trivial issue, it raises questions about how Swarthmore defines itself as a community. Aurora Camacho de Schmidt, assistant professor of Spanish, said that faculty and staff relations “can be greatly improved if members of each group can see each other as working for the same goals, being professionals together in the same institution...and these tensions may very well go away if people have a chance to know each other better.”

An administrative assistant who asked to remain anonymous said she thinks the faculty-only lounge will impede this process. She was “upset about the faculty-only lounge,” and wrote a letter to Associate Vice President for Facilities Management Larry Schall prior to the opening of the lounge expressing this, but was told that the decision was already made. “It makes you feel like you’re worth nothing.”

Schall reiterated that the cappuccino bar and Tarble are all-campus lounge spaces intended for faculty, student and staff. He said that he did not remember the exact letter that expressed concern about the lounge, but that he would have relayed it to Provost Jennie Keith or President Al Bloom. Keith did not comment; Bloom was out of town. Lee Robinson, acting director of personnel, also did not comment.

(Continued on page 2)
Kohlberg Lounge Excludes

(Continued from page 1)

Mary Anne Stewart, administrative assistant in the Economics Department, says she currently goes to the annex room to eat her lunch, or goes into the seminar room across the hall and closes the door, and says “it would be nice if we had our own little room where we could have lunch...but it's not that big a deal.”

A woman who works with Environmental Services echoes this sentiment, and says “it would be nice” if there was either a joint lounge or a staff lounge, and says she now eats in Tarble or off campus. “It's a little weird” that the lounge is for faculty only. She says she did not realize that it was for faculty only, and has sat there to drink coffee on her breaks in the past. She noted that it was usually empty, an observation confirmed by many faculty.

However, Hollister said that if the Kohlberg lounge became open to staff it would become “overwhelmed by staff just because of the sheer numbers of staff and the proximity of space.” Sighting the need for meaningful dialogue between faculty, he said “my guess is...that they [staff] would be inhibited in such discussions, and many of the faculty would be too arrogant to involve themselves in such discussions.” He noted that discussions would deteriorate to conversations about what’s broken in Kohlberg. “For some of the staff they might [participate in the dialogue], but for a lot of them they're really here performing other functions [rather] than involved in a discourse about the substance of liberal arts education,” although he acknowledged that people have a problem with the lounge because it is exclusionary.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology Lisa Hajjar, sees this as faulty logic. “The faculty lounge is an arbitrary distinction made because people have different responsibilities...We’re all adults and should be able to relate in the same space.” She found the division that the lounges perpetuate detrimental to the Swarthmore community.

A fourth administrative assistant, who also asked not to be named, sighted the existence of the lounge as “a very visible illustration of what is symptomatic in the unequal staff-faculty relations on this campus.”

Tara Schubert, Miriam Shakow, Kate Atkins, and J. Carew Kraft, who are part of a group of students on campus interested in faculty, staff and student relations, contributed to this report.