

DC Students Speak/ Georgetown Chapter is present today as an organization in support of the Georgetown University Campus Plan.

Our organization, which has chapters at all major DC universities, was founded in the fall of 2009. We seek to not only connect students with one another, but also with their local government, and encourage civic participation. To achieve these goals we hold voter registration drives and forums with city-wide candidates, work with university administration across the city through the campus-plan process, and have an active city-wide blog.

DC Students Speak believes that the Campus Plan, as drafted, is important to the Georgetown University campus community because of the various proposed projects that would enhance campus life. To name just a few, these include the roof over Kehoe, which would allow better use of it by intramural groups as well as members of Yates Field House; new student activity space in New South and a more pedestrian friendly campus.

In addition, there are several components of the proposed Campus Plan that will allow the University to improve the overall facilities that are available to both students and the broader Georgetown community. Several of these building plans include an expansion of the Lauinger Library, a new athletic training facility, additional religious and spiritual space, and a modern Science Building. The construction of these buildings will not only improve standards for Georgetown University, but also provide state-of-the art facilities available to community members and students alike

And, while we support the latest change proposed by the University to add an additional 250 undergraduate beds, we also strongly believe that upperclass students – juniors and seniors – have a right to live off campus. Many juniors and seniors view living off campus as a “rite of passage”.. Currently the action proposed by ANC2E, CAG and the Burleith Association would, in effect, create a restriction for Georgetown University students to live off-campus. DC Students Speaks urges the Zoning Commission to recognize the discriminatory aspect of such a proposal..

The limitation outlined to prevent students from living off-campus would discriminate against individuals based on their status of “matriculation”. According to the D.C. Human Rights Act, ‘matriculation’ cannot be a condition for one to be discriminated against. If ‘students’ were replaced with any other ethnic or religious group, the proposal would be considered blatantly discriminatory. House owners may choose not to rent their living spaces entirely, but selectively denying students would be a violation of D.C. Human Rights Act, which was enacted to secure an end in the District of Columbia to discrimination for any reason.

Preventing students from living off-campus could also result in detrimental effects to the wider community. While students spend a majority of their time on campus and in class, students also play a variety of beneficial roles in the community. Students serve as tutors, babysitters, and volunteers for the greater community. While it is, of course, possible for students to perform such tasks while living on-campus, living in the community helps to better facilitate their involvement with their neighbors in these types of activities.

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The opportunity to live off-campus as a student in college is also an important part of the full college experience. The process of renting or owning an apartment and the responsibilities that come with it serves as a transition for students from college life to experiences living independently in a community. Living off-campus affords students the opportunity to learn the responsibilities of being a good neighbor and becoming part of a community. While it's true that some students accept these responsibilities more readily and more seriously than others, Georgetown's Off Campus Student Life Program assists in educating students to these responsibilities and obligations.

Although complaints about student conduct have dominated the discussion between the University and the community, the fact is there is a very small number of students who create problems in the community. We believe, as the community does, that such problems are not tolerable and should not be tolerated. The University's Off Campus Program works to address these types of situations and indeed, the Metropolitan Police, who the community calls quite often, also responds to such situations as it would in any other situation not involving a student.

Additionally, I, as well as many of my peers, truly consider this neighborhood and this city our home. In March I registered to vote in DC, along with 150 other Georgetown students. For me, the registration change made sense as I consider myself a resident of this city, and therefore have an interest in the well-being of Georgetown and DC as a whole. I also look forward to continuing my residency here, both in the surrounding neighborhood during my final year at Georgetown and after graduation.

With this in mind, our organization has also been involved in efforts to engage Georgetown students in the issues most important to DC. Leading up to the recent City Council At-Large election we organized a Forum for candidates on youth issues. 25 students were present to hear the candidates answer their questions so that they could make an informed decision at the polls. These students, like many others, have demonstrated their commitment to our community.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views and respectfully urge you to consider the rights of students to live off campus. It is our hope that the Commission will take all of this into consideration when voting on Georgetown University's Campus Plan. Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our views.