

OPINION

Foxes on campus? What is this, an ecosystem?
Pg. 2

CAMPUS

Take Back The Night week comes to campus.
Pg. 3

A&E

Indie Royale is an indie gamer's dream.
Pg. 5

TUESDAY

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Opinion 2

Campus 2-4

A&E 5

The Slipstick 6

Sports 7

Student forum explores evaluations, endowments

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Students, faculty and staff all convened at the Hermann Hall ballroom for their lunch hour on October 31 for this semester's student forum with President Anderson and Provost Cramb. While all enjoyed a catered lunch, students asked questions on a variety of topics, ranging from finance and athletics to the grading methods in some of the studio courses in the College of Architecture. At multiple points during the forum, Anderson and Cramb enlisted the help of staff and faculty members in the audience to field questions in more detail.

After brief opening remarks by the president and provost, the first question of the day, a written submission, was offered. The author of the question specifically wished to know what the money from the university's fund-raising campaign is going to be used for. President Anderson began his answer with a description of the current state of the university's endowment. The goal of the fund-raising campaign is to significantly increase this fund over the next five years, though it should be noted that the endowment does not represent immediately usable assets for the university: roughly 5% of the value of the endowment is usable by the university in any given year, usually corresponding to the interest generated by the fund.

The president took this opportunity to explain some of the difficulties with large donations, as well. Many of the alumni donations are in the form of estate gifts, which are handed over to the university upon the donor's death. As Anderson jokingly put it, "Donors

tell us 'I'll give you the money, but I'll have to die first'... and we don't hurry up that process."

The following question built off the first, with a student asking about priorities for facilities upgrades, and asking how much the donor defines what happens with the donation money. President Anderson gave the example of one alumnus (who received a business degree in the 1960s) that recently gave the university \$10 million, with half in the form of an estate gift and the other \$5 million to endow two chairs.

One of these was in the business department and the other was for a philosophy professor (a favorite topic of the donor's). The president pointed out the difficulty of balancing the university's needs with the desires of large donors, though he stressed that the university would not accept money for purposes which conflict with IIT's vision and mission, as he did not "want to go down a dark road."

The following question specifically addressed the university's work in making graduates more competitive in the job market, for which Provost Cramb stepped in. He detailed some of the work that is being done by the CMC, and praised this semester's career fair (the largest in recent memory).

The provost then spoke of the concerted effort the administration and faculty are making to work with alumni groups around the nation and help graduates find work.

Another topic that came up was the Greek community advisor moving from a position under Student Life to Housing and Residential Services, to which Provost Cramb answered that the structure of the departments had changed, with Housing and Student Life now being under the umbrella of the Dean of

Students. The dean, Katie Stetz, affirmed that this did not mean anything additional be written into the relationship between the advisor and the Greek community.

Other issues raised included the university's improving efforts to increase the retention rate for both under- and upperclassmen, its plans to increase the undergraduate student body size (to around 3000 students, with all the accompanying facilities—especially housing), the idea of introducing physical education courses to the curriculum, and the way the university's strategic plan is changing (including student input that has heavily impacted the existing plan). In answer to this last question, the provost emphasized the work of IPRO 2.0 and current efforts to increase the variety of master's degrees offered by the university, and having different schools working together to improve the quality of education for all students.

One issue that received a good deal of attention was teaching evaluations. A student was greatly concerned about the idea that professors did not receive, in her view, adequate instruction in how to interact with students who had different learning styles. This expanded into a broader discussion, with multiple audience questions, of the extent to which university departments evaluate their own professors' teaching abilities, through sit-in evaluations, ongoing feedback and training with professors, and other efforts. The president and provost spoke of the need for a teaching center on campus, so that faculty members could learn to be better teachers, and that an alumni gift may make this a reality in the short term.

Dean Russell Betts, of the College of Science and Letters (CSL), was asked to speak,

as the college has been engaging in an in-depth discussion over the very matters brought up by students. He started off by pointing out that "being a university professor is the only profession in the world where you're not taught to do what you're supposed to do: teach." CSL has spent considerable effort in this past semester to ask the interlocking questions of how professors are teaching, how they know how they're teaching, and how they know students are getting what they need out of this teaching. Dean Betts admitted that the college had not done enough in the past to evaluate teaching. However, he said that plans were being developed that will incorporate teacher feedback, classroom visits, and peer evaluations, among other things.

One of the more light-hearted moments of the event was a question about the ban on certain indoor sports at Keating. Enzley Mitchell, the university's athletics director, explained that the suspension of these sports was only in effect until the department could develop an effective method of protecting Keating's windows from breaking due to impacts. However, some rivalry between organizations representing different sports led to accusations being made by a student during the course of the discussion.

At the end of the event, responses from students and the administration were both positive. Though a wide variety of questions were fielded by the president, provost, and a number of faculty and staff members, this forum focused more around the issues of teaching quality and the nature of alumni donations. By next semester, these issues, especially teaching evaluations, may be ready for another round of more detailed questioning.



Photos by Ed Chiem