Student Center Power Shut Off for 4 Hours

By Sarah Y. Keightley

The Student Center was evacuated Wednesday evening after a grease fire in Networks set off the sprinkler system and water flooded the transformer room in the basement, said Phillip J. Walsh, director of the Campus Activities Complex. The power was shut off, and the building was closed for about four hours, Walsh said. No one was injured.

Though the original problem was the fire, the more serious problem was the water from the sprinkler, which started to drip to the electric transformer room in the basement, Walsh said. The transformer carries 13,400 volts, he said. The power outage also disrupted access to the Athena Computing Environment. About half of the stu-
dents were unavailable because they are stored on comput-
ers in the Student Center, according to Thomas J. Coppeto of Information Systems.

Around 5:15 p.m. a grill-oven in Networks ignited, Walsh said. The fire was under control almost immedi-
ately because the heat from the fire activated a sprinkler and the Networks employees used fire extin-
guishers, Walsh said.

Smoke spread through the first floor, Walsh said. But the damage was limited to the grill and the area immediately above it, which includ-
ed the grill and the area beneath Networks, is not vulnerable to Thomas J. Coppeto of Informa-
tion Systems.

The fire department was called back to the site and the electric company responded to this need, LaVerde's said that when he was in the machine room houses equipment, the 24-hour Coffee House opened around 10 p.m., and LaVerdes never happened before, Walsh said. The transformer room, which is beneath Networks, is not vulnerable because of a building flaw, Walsh said. Rather, it was just an "unfortunate set of circumstances."

"Everyone did a terrific job of responding" to the situation, Walsh said.

Scheduled and emergency power outages often occur, but this has never happened before, Walsh said.

The building returned to mostly-
normal operations soon after it was re-opened at 9:15 p.m. "There was contact with personnel from Athena to get back on line," Walsh said. The 24-hour Coffee House opened around 10 p.m., and LaVerdes stayed open late in response to the special circumstances, Walsh said.

Frank LaVerde, who owns LaVerde's, said that when he was outside the Student Center he over-
heard several students say that they wanted to buy food. To respond to this need, LaVerde's was open until 2:30 a.m. Wednesday night.

Water in basement

This situation was taken care of in 45 to 60 minutes, and the fire department gave the initial all-clear about an hour later, Walsh said. Then it was discovered that water was leaking into the basement.

"The city inspector who was here on site and the electric compa-
y was so extented that we needed to go to emer-
gency shutdown," Walsh said. The fire department was called back to be on hand, as well as the Physical Plant crew that deals with high power situations. "It could have been a very dangerous situation," Walsh said.

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