

Dear Lynne Miller, Rich Fann and Allie Chomick,

My name is Mekhala Rao, and I am the President of **Mastana Fusion Dance Club**. I am writing to you all on the behalf of **Pitt Pantheraas, First Class Bhangra, and Pitt Nrityamala**.

All leaders of these organizations have read the memo thoroughly and have a few concerns regarding the content of the message. Before I get into any details, I want to offer some background and insight into what exactly these dance teams at Pitt do. All of our dance teams function on the same level as collegiate sports. We practice the same amount if not more than club sports teams (up to 30 hours a week sometimes). We are not simply members of a student run “club”, we consider our roles as jobs. These positions require extensive work and commitment outside of our regularly scheduled practice hours to conceptualize and create choreography. As student athletes, we compete at several national collegiate competitions throughout the school year, giving the university a great reputation. The University of Pittsburgh would not be the same community without our organizations bringing cultural awareness and appreciation to this campus.

Having said this, we understand the concerns that have been brought up. We are students first. We also study in Posvar and we also have class in Posvar. Our music at times is loud and we understand the distraction this could cause to someone trying to study. We respect the building for being more than just an academic building, but also a cultural and global hub. We have had conversations with the chancellor where he has said we are able to practice in Posvar because he is aware that there are no viable spaces. The purpose of this letter is not to discredit these concerns but to find a reasonable solution in which all parties can be satisfied. We want to see change and a solution to combat this problem, not just a policy that puts all the dance teams at a severe disadvantage.

We have split our response into 2 parts, with part 1 consisting of reasons we cannot use current dance spaces, and part 2 consisting of why we believe we are being treated unfairly in this entire process.

Part 1

As a student organization at Pitt, we have very few rights regarding EMS reservations. Posvar floors are concrete/stone, cold, and covered in debris. Let it be known that this is not our practice space of preference. Pitt simply lacks the space to house our organizations in a safe and comfortable place. As a result, many of our dancers suffer from persistent bruising and injuries. We would love—actually prefer—to practice in mirror rooms and studios equipped for dancers but we simply do not have access to any of them. Other groups and university events get priority over us and prevent us from being able to use the spaces. These spaces are also restrictive in space and functionality. For example, our dance requires extensive and intricate formations and levels, which cannot be properly executed in the narrow/compact confines of

most of the spaces at Pitt. I am listing the spaces on campus and why they have not worked for us below:

1. Alumni Hall

1. We do not have access to book the ballroom on the first floor. This is a wide open space that we could utilize and we would not disturb anyone, but none of our teams are able to book this. We would LOVE to be able to book this room for two teams at a time. We practice from the hours of 9-11 weekdays and 11-1 on weekends so we would not disturb anyone.
2. We do not have access to book the 7th floor stage. This stage is too small for some of our teams with 32+ people but we have tried to utilize this space and have been told to leave on multiple occasions. Most times, the 7th floor was completely vacant, so we were not disturbing anyone but were still asked to leave.

2. Bellefield Hall

1. Booking the 4th floor mirror room in Bellefield requires calling Bellefield Hall and requesting to reserve it in addition to EMS reservations. It is difficult to do both. Inside, this room is incredibly dusty and has splinters on the floor. Many of our dancers have not been able to breathe freely and they have gotten foot injuries since we practice barefoot. The room is also too small for us to do formations with our entire team, which is a crucial aspect of our performance.
2. Bellefield basketball court
 1. We are unable to reserve this but we have tried to use this space and we have been kicked out. Again, this was during a time when no one was utilizing the gym and no one was being disturbed.

3. Petersen Events Center

1. Multipurpose Room

1. This room is built in such a way that it is neither wide enough for us to stretch out nor is it deep enough for us to spread ourselves out. With all the bikes and the mats lining the sides of the room we are unable to utilize the space.

2. Dance studio

1. This room is too wide with no depth. We cannot execute our formations which as mentioned before, are crucial to our performance.
2. It can only be booked from 9-11 when our typical practice schedule requires us to practice from 9pm-12am.

4. Trees Hall

1. Dance studio

1. NONE of us have access to book this room. It is actually built perfectly for our purposes. It has mirrors, nice floors and is big enough. But as a dance team on campus, we are not deemed official enough and we do not have the right to book this space. We would love to use it but we cannot even

though it is a dance studio. Two teams could practice here at the same time with no problem but we are not able to use it.

2. Multipurpose room
 1. On EMS, we have the option of booking this room. It has mirrors and nice mats and we booked it. Once we showed up, the room was triple booked. It was not only our organization but two others sharing an already small space. We talked to the guard and they said that our name shows up on the reservation but there's nothing we can do and we should just share it. When three organizations on campus have to accomplish their own respective tasks with music and talking it is nearly impossible to focus and impossible for any of our organizations to achieve our goals.
5. William Pitt Union
 1. Dance studio on the 5th floor
 1. This is way too small for any of our teams to practice in. We cannot do formations which are imperative to our performance.
 2. When we tried to use this space during open hours--and we were sharing it with other people, not trying to use it ourselves--apparently the room got booked during those open hours, and we were told they had the room because they were a "real organization."
 2. Lower lounge
 1. There have been cross reservations of this lounge multiple times. Other groups have booked it thinking that they have access when none of the teams have access. Teams have had to film audition videos to send to competitions while having a choir performances right outside on the patio, with the choir group coming in and out of the room throughout. Not only is this distracting, it is disrespectful to the dance teams. It was also frustrating for the choral group.
6. O'Hara Student Center
 1. We could have the dance room booked for weeks and the reservation would be cancelled last minute for another event. This throws us off our practice schedule entirely and is very inconvenient.
 2. Dining Room
 1. The spaces we are able to reserve are not taken care of at all. On multiple occasions there has been broken glass on the floor. Our dancers have stepped on these pieces and have started to bleed while dancing.

This is just a brief overview of the multitude of challenges that the practice spaces at Pitt pose to us. This is also assuming we even have access to book these spaces. If we want to create a real change, let's have a conversation about increasing access to the rooms that we do see fit and avoiding the habit of overbooking.

Part 2

As I mentioned before, we are the lowest priority when it comes to booking rooms. Most of the time, these spaces are filled before we can even look at them. In the spring semester, Greek life gets priority to book these rooms for Greek Sing. We love Greek Sing and all the effort put into the event and we even attend it every year. This is nothing against this great event, but Greek organizations practice for two months and are treated with more respect and credibility than our teams. We practice year-round to go to prestigious competitions and represent this university on a national stage.

Another problem that is particularly disturbing is the fact that Greek organizations also use Posvar to practice for their performances; however, they have never been complained to (this knowledge comes from our brothers and sisters in Greek organizations). They have never had a student come up to them and tell them to leave although they have an equal number of dancers and play their music at similar levels. We have had practice interrupted multiple times by people and it's frustrating to hear from our friends in Greek organizations that they have not been approached.

Finally, we want to address the fact that Pitt dance teams have been practicing throughout Posvar for the better part of a decade now. Posvar, before the recent renovations, was not a building with many or any study spaces. The introduction of these study spaces without the addition of proper facilities for the arts make our community feel forgotten and unwanted. The first and second floor of Posvar is not deemed a "quiet" study space. Students who study there throughout the day, even when the dance teams do not practice, can expect a certain level of noise because Posvar is a public building. If students want a completely quiet environment they have the option to study in Hillman Library, WPU, or countless other spaces throughout our campus. Dance teams do not have that same option. We typically only practice from 9-11pm on weekdays or from 9am-1pm on weekends so we can avoid the majority of the crowd, and we try to practice far away from the primary second floor study space when possible to minimize the disturbance we pose to people studying. We even make sure to not let our music exceed 80 decibels as this is a public safety regulation for open spaces.

At the end of the day, the issue here seems to be the level of our music, but as leaders of these student organizations, we feel that we have a right to speak with you directly regarding this matter. We want to create real change and solutions for this issue. We are all able to come into the office on Tuesday (11/19) at 3:30 PM to further elaborate and discuss this issue. We await your response.

Sincerely,
Mekhala Rao | Pitt Mastana
Vatsal Patel | Pitt Pantheraas
Suprotik Debnath | First Class Bhangra
Nithya Kasibhatla | Pitt Nrityamala

All Pitt dancers.