

Controversial Speakers and Events:

Strategies for Risk Management

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&

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Example: Ann Coulter

- Student event scheduled for Thursday, September 6, 2007
- Limited work was done on the event during the summer – the challenges were: timing and minimal follow-up
- SL&L administration needed to intervene if the event was to be successful

Advice From Loyola Chicago

- LCU advised against bringing Coulter to Xavier
- Worse experience in LCU's history with a controversial speaker
- Coulter heckled and was rude to audience members who challenged her comments
- Security lost control
- Arrests were made and Coulter left the stage 20 minutes into the event and did not return

A Planning Committee Was Formed

- The “group” consisted of students and administrative staff with the underlying focus being on educational outcomes for student learning

- The following individuals comprised the “group”

Dean of Students
Chief of Campus Police
President of the Sponsoring Organization
Executive Director for Student Involvement

Associate Provost for Student Life & Leadership
Associate Vice President for Media Relations
Student Government President
Director of the Cintas Center

Other support personnel were included in meetings, as requested or needed.

To Cancel or Proceed?

- While it was considered to be controversial, and not planned, Xavier made the decision to hold the event
- Strategies to manage the event were explored (the idea for a counter event emerged)
- Controversial events are supported by the University mission and University Protocol for Campus Public Speakers and Events

University Protocol for Campus Public Speakers and Events

- First paragraph...
- Universities exist “for the transmission of knowledge, the pursuit of truth, the development of students, and the general well-being of society.” In the pursuit of knowledge and truth, universities—as befits their name [*universus*=whole]—examine the whole of reality from a wide range of different perspectives. Free inquiry and open discussion are therefore indispensable to the attainment of the central goals of universities. Xavier University, as a *university*, is committed unreservedly to open and free inquiry and discussion.
- Academic Freedom

Equality Ohio

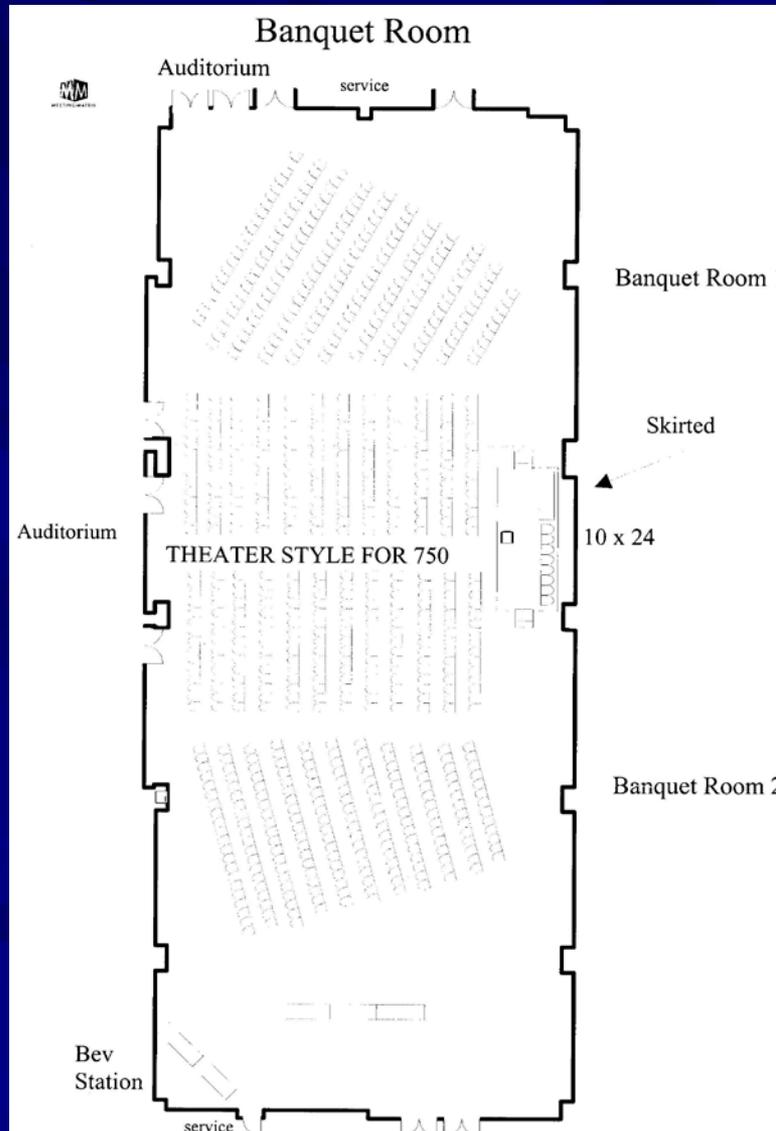
- Xavier student clubs/organizations were initially considered to host a counter-event
- Equality Ohio then approached Xavier about coordinating a counter event
- Website solicitation of \$5 (the cost to attend the Coulter event)
- Equality Ohio worked with student groups to plan the counter-event

Event Location

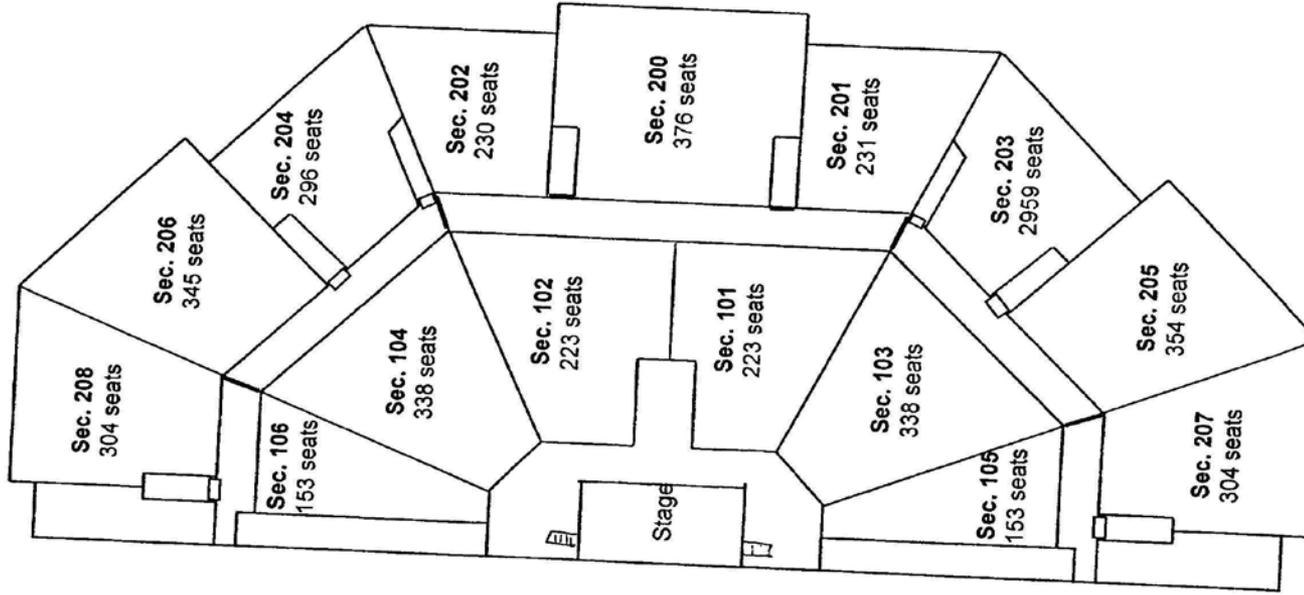
- Originally scheduled for the Banquet Room
- Campus Police, Cintas Center, and the Planning Committee did not approve that location
- Coulter personnel and College Republicans insisted the event be held in the Banquet Room due to be more intimate
- Planning Committee finally insisted that it would be held in the Arena for safety reasons
- Ann Coulter event moved from a banquet room to the arena and rationale



Banquet Room Diagram



Arena Diagram



Plans and Implementation

- **The Coulter event was held in the Cintas Center Arena**
- **The “Thank You Ann” event was held on the campus green-space (outdoors)**
- **Security was present at both events (more at the Coulter event than at the “Thank You Ann” event)**
- **Both events were free to students**
- **The public paid only \$5/person to attend the Coulter event (a higher charge may have drawn a larger audience)**

Safety and Security Considerations

- Officers and contract security were posted at strategic locations
- Security for the “Thank You Ann” event
- Role of the Emergency Response Team (ERT)

Challenges

- Student relationships (among sponsoring groups and SGA)
- Administrative involvement
- Newswire (Xavier's student newspaper)
- Taking sides
- Outside forces (Young America's Foundation and Equality Ohio)
- Responding to Public Outcry

Public Relations

- Consistent statement about the Ann Coulter event being held on-campus to individuals who oppose the event being held in a Xavier facility
- Complaints referred primarily to two individuals (Associate VP for Media Relations and the Dean of Students)
- Responses to possible questions regarding the Ann Coulter event

Consistent Statement

Thank you for your comments regarding the scheduled appearance of Ann Coulter on our campus. This appearance, sponsored by a University student organization, is not an endorsement by the University or the sponsoring group.

Speakers and events on campus contribute to the critical inquiry, open discussion, and diverse expression of ideas that are essential to Xavier's educational mission. Xavier's commitments to academic freedom as well as its mission as a Catholic, Jesuit university often results in a wide expression of ideas and opinions on campus.

Please know that your concern about the appearance of Ann Coulter is being noted and your comments are appreciated.

QUESTIONS/RESPONSES

Is Xavier paying for her appearance?

Like all student groups, the College Republicans get minimal funding from the University and it is up to the students to use it as they wish. Members of the College Republicans have raised most of Coulter's fee on their own, through fundraisers sponsored by the organization.

Whose idea was it to bring her here and who approved it?

The students in College Republicans made the decisions and followed the guidelines of the University speaker policy, working with their faculty advisor and vice president to get approval. The University's guidelines for speaker protocol state that the potential for controversy is never in itself an acceptable reason to deny a speaker or event.

Will the University present the "other side" to balance Coulter?

While there are no plans to bring someone to campus to directly speak in opposition to Coulter, the University sponsors a variety of speakers on a variety of topics throughout the year, many of whom hold opinions vastly different from Ann Coulter. You may remember that a few years ago, the Student Government Association brought in controversial film maker, Michael Moore.

Will there be demonstrations against Coulter?

Like all college campuses, the students on our campus carry many different opinions. There is no doubt that some of them will organize a thoughtful demonstration to make their opinion known.

Feedback and Reactions

- Some newspaper articles viewed both events as successful
- Others viewed the Coulter event as a “flop”
- There were no controversial incidents or outbursts
- Show video clip

Statistics

- 1,273 people attended the Coulter talk
- Approximately 250 people attended the “Thank You Ann” event
- Coulter’s speaker fee was \$20K
- The “Thank You Ann” event raised \$23K in donations
- All money raised by Equality Ohio was given back to Xavier student organizations that were offended by Coulter’s message (Xavier Alliance, African Student Association, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Black Student Association, Voices of Solidarity, Xavier Women’s Center)
- The Dean of Students alone invested approximately 70 person-hours (meetings, phone calls, e-mail messages, conversations)

Q & A