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G.R. #92  
A Resolution to Urge the Watt Family Innovation Center to Be More Welcoming to Graduate Students

Whereas, the Watt Family Innovation Center (Watt Center hereafter) website states under “Our Mission”:

The Watt Family Innovation Center is Clemson’s most technology-enhanced academic building, featuring state-of-the-art information technology and special facilities. Established in 2016 with the support of more than $25 million in corporate donations, the Watt Center’s mission is to create an environment where collaboration among students, faculty, and leaders from industry and government agencies generates ideas and solves complex problems. The Watt Center is available for students and faculty in all disciplines as a flexible space for collaboration, innovation and project development. [Emphasis added]

Whereas, some Watt Center policies and environment are perceived to be in conflict with their stated mission and the mission of Clemson University; and

Whereas, the majority of the 4th floor of the Watt Center is dedicated to a common area that appears to be meant for group collaboration and individual study (see Figure 1);

![Figure 1. Watt Center 4th floor common area.](image-url)
Whereas, to the best of Graduate Student Senate’s knowledge, the 4th floor is locked down and only accessible to Watt Center employees and two research groups who have research space located on the 4th floor.

Whereas, despite advertising the rooftop terrace, it is not accessible by non-Watt faculty, staff, or students outside of a Watt Center Tour (see Figure 2);

![Figure 2. Example of Terrace advertisement.](image)

Whereas, the rooftop terrace has an abundance of patio seating ideal for lunch, study, and collaboration (see Figure 3);

![Figure 3. Watt Center Terrace.](image)
Whereas, according to sources with access to the 4th floor, the common area and terrace are nearly always empty and drastically underutilized;

Whereas, the rooftop terrace has the highest cost of any reservable space on campus for Clemson users - $1,500 for a weekday and $3,500 per day on weekends (for reference, the next highest non-Watt rate is the Old Main (Tillman) auditorium, which is between $150 and $500 depending on the department or Clemson organization);

Whereas, hosting conferences is a valuable professional development opportunity for graduate student networking and reflects positively on Clemson University serving our R1 research goals, but is currently not affordable to graduate student organizations seeking to host a weekend event, with a cost of over $3,000 to use the atrium and auditorium for a single day,

Whereas, graduate students and some university employees with desks in the Watt Center cannot bring any guests into the space after hours despite having after-hours access – limiting collaboration and creating a hostile environment;

Whereas, Watt Center informational screens contain slides that state “Security cameras in use at all times” with a picture of a security camera (see Figure 4);

Whereas, the Watt Center operations room near the north elevator on the 1st floor often displays live feeds of classrooms in the building – presumably the staff have the capability to listen in on room microphones as well;

Whereas, it is unclear if and how often rooms are actively monitored, or if private conversations can happen within the building;

Whereas, these and other messaging signals an Orwellian or authoritarian environment, creating a perception that students cannot be trusted to be in the space;
Whereas, the Watt Center policy of no food in the majority of the building is not explicitly stated and the rationale has not been adequately communicated to people using the space, leading to confrontation between Watt Center personnel and various student groups;

Whereas, these and other policy confrontations have created an unwelcoming environment such that several student leaders and other Clemson employees choose to meet elsewhere;

Therefore, be it resolved by the Clemson University Graduate Student Senate assembled,

That the following list of action items be presented to the director of the Watt Center as recommendations to improve graduate student experiences within the building; and that the list is approved by the Senate.

1. Grant access to the 4th floor and rooftop terrace to all graduate students and faculty during building hours (unless reserved for an event), to encourage collaboration and project development, which align with the Watt Center stated mission;
2. Reduce the cost of reserving space in the Watt Center for student groups, particularly the rooftop terrace;
3. Allow the graduate students and employees with desks in the Watt Center to bring in guests at any time – graduate students often work late nights (e.g. to 3 a.m.) and weekends. There is little reason to limit access from research partners, particularly with the current security system;
4. Review and alter Watt Center messaging and policies to be more collaborative and supportive rather than authoritarian;
5. Provide explicit signs across the Watt Center stating the rationale for limiting food;

Cody Woods, President of the Senate

Date