

Golden Ticket

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Given New York's preeminence as an arts and culture hub, a centralized campus box office offering student discounts to city events and performances has been long overdue. The Arts Initiative at Columbia (CUArts) deserves substantial credit for bringing such a necessary service to the Columbia community. CUArts' new box office in the center of campus will be far more conveniently located than its current residence on 125th Street in Prentis Hall. The new box office should epitomize CUArts' stated mission of encouraging the arts on campus and making city art and culture more accessible to students. Nonetheless, the development of the box office was not without controversy, and CUArts must bear student concerns in mind as it builds on its recent successes.

Among the CUArts box office's many improvements over its predecessor are a greater level of consolidation and longer business hours. In addition to providing discount tickets to events in the city, the box office will sell tickets for campus events—everything from academic speakers to student performances—and will essentially serve as an all-purpose ticket center. Moreover, all tickets will now be on sale whenever the box office is open—a fact particularly beneficial to performing student groups, who were previously responsible for selling their own event tickets on their own time. By offering ticketing services to the campus community at large, complete with an easy-to-use event-registration form on the CUArts Web site, the new box office will help cement CUArts as a visible presence.

However, in light of Columbia's tendency to mire even the most innovative changes in bureaucratic red tape, CUArts must continue to work closely with students—particularly student groups who rely on the box office to sell tickets—to ensure that the new box office serves their needs and works as easily and efficiently as currently advertised. While CUArts is extending a helpful and well-intentioned service to student groups by offering to sell tickets for them, CUArts must remain open to compromises if and when challenges arise during the box office's launch.

CUArts has come a long way since its inception in 2004, when University President Lee Bollinger established the Arts Initiative with arts veteran Gregory Mosher at its helm. Following the launch of its Web site in fall 2005, CUArts has increased its visibility on campus with Vaclav Havel's high-profile residency in fall 2006, free access to many of the city's museums, and accessible funding from the Sainsbury fund for students' artistic endeavors, to name only a few of its programs. This recent addition to CUArts' string of accomplishments will undoubtedly benefit a large portion of the community and will hopefully improve the accessibility of theater and the arts both on and off campus. As CUArts moves into Lerner, one hopes that it will be wary of bureaucratization while

staying true to its original mission: to be the campus portal to the arts on campus and beyond.

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