

## UW Ethnic Cultural Center to get a facelift; firm comprised of UW alumni appointed as architects for project

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This is the current front of the Ethnic Cultural Center at the University of Washington. Many hope to renovate this building. (Photo by Jason Cruz)

**By Jason Cruz**

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Community. This is the theme Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) supporters envision in renovating the University of Washington building which serves as a sanctuary for student groups of color.

In May, the UW Services and Activities Fee Committee, a student governing body, will decide if they should make a recommendation to the UW Board of Regents for approving funding for bonds to build a new ECC facility.

The bonds will be paid through student activity fees.

If approved by the Board of Regents this summer, the student activity fees would increase by an estimated \$70, although the monetary increase has yet to be finalized.

The funding for the ECC renovation project is bundled with two other capital projects at the UW: the Husky Union Building (the HUB) and Hall Health, the campus health center. The proposed budget for the ECC is \$15.5 million dollars. In comparison, the HUB expansion budget is projected to cost \$130-\$140 million, and the Hall Health project is estimated at \$9.6 million.

Upon funding approval, the ECC will be torn down in June 2010 and estimated to reopen in August 2011. The expansion plan calls for the single story, 10,000 square foot structure to become a 25,000 square foot, multi-floor facility.

The University of Washington awarded the design of the new ECC to Seattle-based architecture firm Rolluda Architects. The firm has personal ties to the ECC as the team is comprised of former UW students that have used the ECC.

For Alex Rolluda, owner of Rolluda Architects, winning the right to design the ECC is more than just another job. "This is a dream project," said Rolluda, a Filipino American and former member of the Filipino Student Association while attending the UW during the 1980s. "To do a facility like this is really a dream to highlight a career. It's a project to showcase," Rolluda said.

"Amazing," said Sam McPhetres in regards to the opportunity to work on such a project so personal to him early in his career. McPhetres hails from the small island of Saipan. He participated in the Micronesian Islands student group during the late 1990s and received a graduate degree in Architecture in 2007.

Rolluda's project manager, Sam Cameron, talked about the significance of the project. "The fact that the [ECC] will be designed by a minority-owned firm is a milestone," said Cameron, as his firm beat out several others for the project. "Being a user of the facility, we feel better equipped to design the ECC." Cameron, who is Black, was an ECC patron during the 1970s. "[The ECC design] will be a departure from what the University is used to seeing," Cameron said.

In 1996, Rolluda Architects had four employees. It has since grown to 18.

"The students were impressed with Rolluda as they understood the meaning of the ECC," said Dr. Sheila Edwards Lange, vice president and vice provost of the Office of Minority Affairs. "[Rolluda Architects] did an outstanding job of positioning themselves as the architects for this project," Lange added. "They listened to what students had to say." Rolluda Architects participated in multiple meetings with current students and administrators to assess their needs. The overwhelming feeling conveyed by many was that the new ECC facility design should continue to encompass a feeling of community for students.

Victor Flores, director of the ECC, believes that there may be a "vertical challenge" in keeping the cohesion between the students. This refers to the multiple levels in the new ECC. Flores expressed concern that the multiple floors may pose a challenge to the open communal essence of the current single story structure. In addition, Flores stressed the need for more meeting and performance space. "Meeting rooms are the key. Another one of the needs is a performing arts room where there is a mirror, sound system, and an enclosed space for groups to perform," Flores said.

Among the hurdles for the ECC, Lange expressed concern of what to do with the student programs during construction. "This building serves as their hub. If we move programs, it may be hard to maintain," Lange said. Currently, there are no set plans as to where the student groups will go during the construction. The mission to expand the ECC began in 2006 when students made it known to UW administrators and student government that expansion was necessary. Since 1972, the ECC has served as a home away from home for many students of color.

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