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Parties at the Nasher are required to be catered by Sage & Swift, which students considered expensive.

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A number of student groups have come to DSG with complaints that a Nasher party can cost as much as \$14,000.

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## Nasher price tag deters parties

### Student groups turn to DSG to make popular venue more feasible

**Adam Eaglin**

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Earlier this fall, the Nasher Museum of Art threw the "Nasher Noir," a large-scale soiree designed for undergraduates. But although officials expected a high turnout, they did not predict how popular the event would become.

"I guaranteed 1,000 people with my caterer, and 1,557 people showed up," said Michelle Brassard, Nasher special events coordinator. "Everyone loved that party."

After September's gala, interest in the Nasher as a venue for larger student parties skyrocketed, Brassard said.

But as soon as most student groups hear the price tag, the partying stops.

"The Nasher is a unique space, both in the arts component and in the open space component because there are very few spaces on campus capable of throwing a large-scale party," said junior Elliott Wolf, Duke Student Government president. "So naturally we want student groups to use that space and right now they can't [because of price]."

Nasher only recently celebrated its first birthday, and its unique desirability as both high-class museum and spacious student venue is a bit unexpected, Brassard said.

Although she acknowledged the high cost of large-scale events, Brassard noted that the museum is more than a party venue and works to provide cheaper-or even free-opportunities for students to make use of the space.

"We are really doing everything possible to make the Nasher available to everybody," Brassard said.

### Throwing a "Nasher Noir"

If a student group comes to the Nasher asking to host an event comparable to the Nasher's September party, Brassard said she explains to them that the price for that event was approximately \$14,000.

"I have student groups coming in here and saying, 'We have \$1,000 total,'" she said. "Well, \$1,000 doesn't even cover the museum, let alone the catering."

Although Brassard said it is possible to plan a cheaper party, there are still requisite costs involved, including facility fees, security, extra parking and entertainment.

In addition, catering, which must go through the Nasher's caterer Sage & Swift, and labor costs, such as those required for bartending, often include the largest chunk of event fees, she said.

"Some of these student parties, especially the larger ones, are very labor-intensive for the museum," Brassard said.

Despite the cost, renting out the Nasher is not a money-making scheme for the museum, said Anne-Marie Angelo, co-chair of the Nasher Student Advisory Board and second-year graduate student in history.

In fact, student groups are guaranteed the lowest price for rental fees, Brassard said.

Angelo said many student groups have made use of the space to hold events from sorority anniversary parties to law school fundraisers, but that larger parties are often out of the question for students.

"No matter [whether it is] \$10,000 or \$14,000, it's still going to make it cost-prohibitive for certain groups," she said.

With the Nasher Noir's success, many students have clamored for similar events.

"Student groups have come to [DSG] and complained specifically about this issue," Wolf said.

Junior Hasnain Zaidi, president of the Junior Class Council, said his organization was in talks with the museum and NSAB to host an event, but cost and logistics ultimately prevented the group from using the space.

"We found that it was too expensive for us," Aulden Burcher, treasurer of the Junior Class Council, wrote in an e-mail.

### Sage & Swift

Although the price of catering varies for events, the high cost of Nasher parties is associated with the food quality guaranteed by Sage & Swift, Brassard said, adding that reviews have been overwhelmingly

positive.

Any group that wants to host an event with food is required to use Sage & Swift, which agreed to be the Nasher's exclusive dining option. "It was important for us to find a good, established caterer that was willing to take the risk," Brassard said.

Amy Tornquist, executive chef and owner of Sage & Swift, said working with students was a new, exciting niche for her company.

"It's been a learning experience," she said. "As a company, we love students. The cafe wouldn't actually really exist without the patronage of students."

Brassard said the high price of Sage & Swift can be attributed primarily to the quality of food and service the organization delivers. She added that this quality is important for throwing the wide variety of events that the Nasher hosts.

Wolf, however, said the quality of food was not appropriate for many student events.

"For some of the student groups, they don't necessarily need the incredibly high level of gourmet cooking that Sage & Swift is usually called upon to provide," he said.

Brassard said the number of caterers available through the museum will expand to about three in July, in order to provide more options. Although a definitive plan has not been drafted, Sage & Swift will likely continue to host the museum cafe, she said.

#### The abundance of non-Noir events

Nasher officials and student leaders emphasized that parties are not the primary focus of events at the facility, but concentrate instead on smaller, more arts-oriented programming.

"We try to emphasize the art in our events," Angelo said, adding that if a student meets with NSAB, the board will work to create alternative options that do not require a several-thousand-dollar budget.

Angelo also noted that the board is working on new initiatives to bring in student groups, including co-sponsorships with NSAB and free events on Thursdays.

"We're always really happy for people to use the museum," she said.

Brassard said that despite the obvious impossibility of regularly throwing Noir-sized events, the Nasher always welcomes students.

"[Raymond Nasher] built this museum for the students, and he really sees this as a place where students will come and not only be educated, but have a social outlet as well," she said. "We are very mindful of that."

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