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Lightless at Seattle U: Frustrations Amidst String of Power Outages

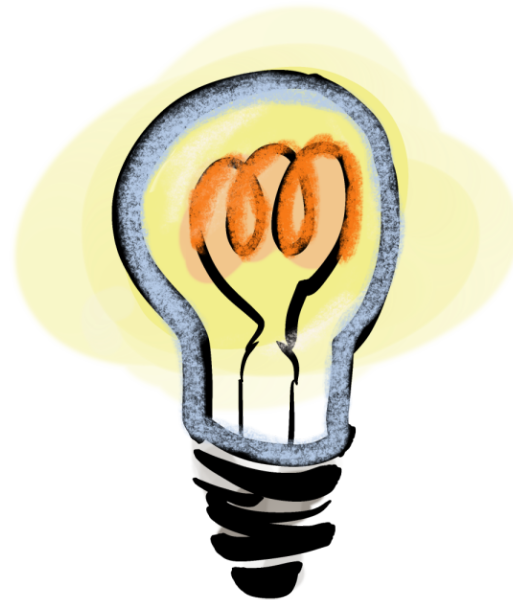
Camryn Mata, Staff Reporter

Though Bellarmine residents were startled when the building's power suddenly went out on Halloween weekend, outages across campus and the city continued to exacerbate the situation.

Wi-Fi, hot water and heating were all affected, forcing residents to travel to other buildings to utilize these resources. The Lemieux Library, Cherry Street Market, Sullivan Hall and the Pigott Auditorium also experienced outages, as each building's emergency power supply provided light for common areas and hallways. According to Housing Services Associate Director Tim Albert, the power outage was the result of a power surge in the neighborhood.

"In this particular case, the power surge came through and caused damage to the breaker in the building," Albert said. "It couldn't be repaired on site and there wasn't an immediate replacement breaker in the area."

A temporary generator was installed Oct. 31 while the school waited for the manufacturer to send a replacement breaker. Facilities caused a second outage Nov. 3 to check on the generator's coolant, giving residents only a two hour notice.



Luca Del Carlo

Clodagh Walsh, a second-year psychology major present during the outage, reported high tensions as residents waited for a permanent installation. Walsh had an ethics midterm due during the power outage, making their already stressful assignment worse. They struggled to work on it in the Lemieux Library, turning it in dangerously close to the deadline.

“It was frustrating not having access to power,” Walsh said. “I think more than anything it added to my academic stress [and] it was a disruption of my regular routine.”

As students began finals season preparation, many were looking for a break. For a group of first-years, this was supposed to come in the form of the New Student Retreat, a yearly weekend excursion organized by Campus Ministry for first-year and transfer students. Scheduled for Nov. 4-6, the retreat served as an opportunity for students to intermingle and socialize while enjoying the beauty of Camp Sealth, a waterfront on Vashon Island, Wash..

Roughly 50 students prepared to leave for Camp Sealth around 4 p.m., Nov. 4, but their bus missed the ferry, causing a schedule delay. When the group finally arrived, they learned the camp experienced a power outage, leaving the entire area without heat or light. Rather than returning to campus, the group stayed the night at Camp Sealth in hopes that power would return. When it was determined the electrical issues could not be resolved, retreat leaders took the students back to campus early Nov. 5.

Imaan Khaki, a first-year biology major and retreat participant, expressed disappointment and anger about the cancellation of the retreat and the uncomfortable conditions they experienced.

“I was looking forward to meeting new people and having a break from school over the weekend, especially after just finishing exams,” Khaki wrote in an email to the Spectator. “Overall, I think campus could have handled the retreat better. However, I also understand that losing power was not in anyone’s control.”

Dissatisfied Bellarmine first-years returned to the dorm only to endure another outage Sunday night Nov. 6, but power was restored after a couple of hours. The replacement breaker was finally installed Nov. 9.

Campus leaders made efforts to ensure that students’ grievances were heard. Housing and Residence Life (HRL) Director Hilary Lichterman worked to provide accommodations to students.

“Our team members meet with students everyday about general questions, ideas, concerns and frustrations,” Lichterman said. “[And] that is something in Housing and Residence Life we try to embody.”

When the power outage occurred, HRL listed campus resources Bellarmine residents could use while they waited for power, along with providing temporary Wi-Fi hotspots and refrigeration for medications. The night power was restored, campus partners threw a pizza party for Bellarmine residents. However, some residents feel that it was not enough compensation for what they had to endure for the last two weeks.

“I wasn’t too happy with the whole pizza thing,” Walsh said. “It was nice, but it didn’t do much. I think it was kinda a cheap way of reimbursing us [and] I wish the school could have compensated Bellarmine residents a little bit better.”

Although HRL is currently working on more ways to compensate Bellarmine residents, some residents report feeling displeased with the university’s handling of the power outage. It is unknown how students’ trust in the school has been affected, but as of now, residents are content with the restoration of power in Bellarmine. spe

