N.Y.U., Fearful of Publicity, Cancels Class on Ground Zero

By EDWARD WYATT

A New York University course that was to have focused on the intersection of politics, finance, design and culture in the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan has been canceled because of concerns about the potential political fallout from the course.

The course, called Ground Zero Lab, was canceled after the dean of the university's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, David F. Finney, sent an e-mail message seeking a guarantee from organizers of the course that it would not generate any news media attention.

The organizers said they could not meet that requirement, in part because the school had already issued a news release about the course.

Dr. Finney's office referred questions concerning the course to the director of the university's office of public affairs, John Beckman. Mr. Beckman said Dr. Finney's letter was "an inartful expression" of his concern that the course, which he had previously approved, would not be academically rigorous and that it could serve as a political platform for someone seeking to influence the debate over the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Beckman also said the dean was concerned that the course, coming near the anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center, would be hurtful to the families of victims of the attack and to other New Yorkers. Finally, he said, the dean was concerned that the 10 students enrolled were not enough to justify the course.

Other university officials said as many as 18 students had committed themselves to enrolling in the course.

"Of all the times to cancel a symposium and a course about rebuilding and planning for New York," said Frederic Schwartz, an architect who was to have participated in a seminar last Tuesday that was to have begun the the ground zero course. "Schools all over the country are teaching courses about Sept. 11 and related issues."

The course was organized by three units of the Continuing and Professional Studies school — the humanities program, the Center for Advanced Digital Applications and the Real Estate Institute — and by Creative Cities, a nonprofit organization of architects and planners.

The course organizers, Linda Lees, the director of the school's Humanities Program and an organizer of Creative Cities, and William Cippola, associate dean of the continuing studies school, received the e-mail message from Dr. Finney on Sept. 8 asking for a guarantee that the course would not receive any media attention. If the course did go forward and generated publicity, "we're not going to get along very well," Dr. Finney said, according to university officials who have seen the e-mail exchange.
The following day, Dr. Lees sent an e-mail message and letter about the cancellation to people who had been contacted about the course.

Several days later, Dr. Finney "decided he was wrong," Mr. Beckman said. "He came to regret what he said. He apologized and said he wanted them to go forward with the course."

But the course's organizers said they thought it was too late to reinstate the course.