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## The CCRB Is Out of Shape

By Roger Sauerhaft

When LSA junior Jeff Kendall first stepped foot in the Central Campus Recreational Building (CCRB), his first impression was that the facilities appeared dated, reminding him of the shabby community center in his hometown of Midland, Mich.

"They really should reconsider how they put it together," Kendall said. "I think we have a lot of work to do in terms of our recreational facilities, especially at the CCRB. It's just so dated for such a large school with such great resources."

Common gripes with the recreational facilities on campus are what led to the creation of the Recreational Sports Task Force, which issued a 91-page report in March recommending major changes to campus recreational facilities. Data was compiled from a survey conducted by the task force starting in fall 2007.

The task force most strongly advocated changes to the CCRB, the North Campus Recreational Building (NCRB) and the Intramural Sports Building (IMSB).

The recommendations made in the report, commissioned by Provost Teresa Sullivan and Vice President of Student Affairs E. Royster Harper, undoubtedly added to the administration's lengthy list of needs amid financial strife. But many say this call to action is well overdue, especially given the progress made by institutions that compete with Michigan for students.

As a measure of comparison, the task force surveyed the fitness facilities of 11 other universities — seven other Big Ten schools, Stanford, Maryland, Texas and Virginia. To put it lightly, the University of Michigan didn't measure up.

From the list of 11, only Purdue and Penn State had a lower ratio of square footage per student. Iowa, which plans to open its new \$69 million facility later this year, will have well more than double Michigan's space (17.13 ft. to 6.97 ft.) per student.

The new Ross School of Business boasts a shiny new fitness center which is only available to business students who pay a membership fee. The average University student has to deal with long wait times, an unpleasant atmosphere and antiquated exercise equipment. But demand for better facilities is high and the task force report affirms that the University could whip its fitness centers into shape if it implemented a few changes.

## STUFFY, OLD, INADEQUATE

Of the facilities open to all full-time students, the CCRB and NCRB, both built in 1976, represent the cutting edge. According to the report, neither has ever undergone major renovations since being built. All other schools on the list except Penn State have built new facilities since 1983.

The University hasn't always lagged behind the recreational vanguard. When the IMSB was built in 1928, it was the first intramural building in America. Now, it also doubles as an historic campus landmark — one that students appreciate more from the outside than when they're fighting for workout space inside.

"I love the old building and its architecture," said Meghan Milford, a 2007 alum. "It would be sad to see that go, but at the same time, it wasn't built for this kind of activity. It's just really outdated."

The aesthetic relic is a credit to campus architecture but is quite at odds with the concept of providing quality fitness facilities to help students relieve stress. Milford also said ventilation is an issue. And if you're willing to tolerate the stuffiness for a turn on the elliptical, you'll only be able to for 30 minutes at a time.

"It just seems like they're trying to pack more machines in the same amount of area every year," Milford said. "It just keeps getting tighter and tighter. They are putting machines in racquetball courts, and it's just like, 'Come on, expand already.'"

Despite its historical place on campus, the IMSB was criticized just as harshly as the other two facilities on campus by a focus group of 2,293 students surveyed by consulting firm Brailsford and Dunlavey in 2003.

Out of the 70 percent of respondents who had visited the IMSB, 38 percent answered that the facilities failed to meet their expectations. Of the 90 percent who had been to the CCRB, more than 50 percent were disappointed. For the NCRB, 48 percent had visited and 27 percent were let down.

The results of the survey led to some modifications within the IMSB and CCRB, such as transforming unused locker room space and racquetball courts into an additional fitness area, but the task force report showed there is much more to be done.

It should also be noted that since 2003, residency on North Campus has greatly escalated, causing student demand for the NCRB to be higher than it was six years ago.

One student employee quoted in the task force report said that "many freshman are constantly shocked" at how inadequate the gyms are for a school with such a strong reputation.

Staff and faculty shared the opinion of the students.

In a July 2008 survey taken by the task force, more than half of the 2,498 staff and faculty members who responded said it was "very important" to improve the facilities.

"Our facilities are undersized and they are tired," said Recreational Sports director William Canning. "They are not up to Michigan brand standards. They are also not up to the current level of technology and equipment innovation."

## ELLIPTICAL INEQUITY

Canning said that the philosophy in creating modern fitness centers demands more natural lighting and larger windows in order to make the space seem more open. He added that the state-of-the-art technology for cardiovascular machines includes individual multimedia stations with each piece of equipment so that users can entertain themselves without worrying about dropping iPods or balancing textbooks.

If you'd like to see a modern weight room and gymnasium for students on campus, venture to the basement of the new Ross School of Business. The center features brand new equipment and nine large flat-screen TVs lining the wall in front of the elliptical machines. Of course, you can only go here if you're in the business school and pay the \$100 membership fee. Kinesiology students must be scratching their heads in frustration.

At the three facilities open to all students, the atmosphere of the weight rooms is the same. No televisions, music playing or windows — just musty air filled with the smell of sweat and the sound of weights dropping on the rubber floors, punctuated with a few grunts. At many times during the day, people wait in line to use 25- and 30-pound dumbbells while heavier weights remain untouched.

Cardiovascular rooms at campus's main buildings differ a bit more. At times in the IMSB, a pleasant breeze and the sound of birds permeates from outside. But the main room at the CCRB resembles a sweaty, windowless dungeon, and many of the cardiovascular machines are in a former racquetball court. The NCRB is perhaps the most pitiful — space is so limited that elliptical machines stand in the front hallway.

For some of the common use equipment, it's only a matter of time until upgrades will be unavoidable. Canning said that some treadmills in the IMSB are approaching 120,000 miles of usage. He estimated that the lifetime of the average treadmill is roughly a third of that and credited an outstanding maintenance crew for getting the most from the machines.

Although the maintenance workers should be commended for lengthening the lifespan of equipment, the statistics from the report scream for the revamping of fitness centers across campus. With elliptical machines on their last legs, campus gyms exemplify the "high school gymnasium and weight room" atmosphere that the task force alluded to in its report.

The task before the administration, should they choose to go forward with the recommendations, is immense. But the University of Michigan is a massive institution with excellent resources, and many smaller schools with fewer resources have been able to provide top-notch facilities for their students.

Listed in the report as schools with admirable, contemporary facilities were nearby Oakland University, Miami University in Ohio and Saginaw Valley State University, a Division III school.

"In terms of lifting and total workout space, it was actually larger at Miami, a school less than half the size of Michigan," said Kendall, who spent his freshman year at Miami.

While the endowment is not where funding would come from for new facilities at the University of Michigan, it is worth noting that its endowment of \$6.5 billion is approximately 20 times that of Miami — which illustrates a huge disparity in overall financial resources between the schools.

## IS IT FEASIBLE?

Allocating more funds toward recreational facilities as outlined in the report recommendations would mean either cuts to departments or a tuition hike, Provost Sullivan told The Michigan Daily

in an article published Mar. 31. Because of that, Sullivan wasn't sure to what extent the administration would adopt new projects for improving facilities.

On the other hand, the task force seemed to already have found the answer.

"A majority of students said they would easily pay a \$100 fee for new recreation facilities at U of M," the task force wrote in its Recreation Feasibility Study after consulting their focus group.

Within the same study, one student was also quoted saying, "This is Michigan, and we don't do things halfway!"

We have the Big House; we should also have the Big REC!"

Still, with the national economy in shambles, there is the question of whether taking on more projects at this time really the responsible thing to do.

While many schools have cut new projects and spending, Canning proposed that conditions are actually quite favorable for the University to take on such a project.

"There are lots of people — architects, planners, suppliers, trade skill workers — who are looking for work right now," Canning said. "That becomes a very advantageous time to have a project go out for a competitive bid."

Even if prices for such a project don't come at much of a discount, there is also the positive externality of creating jobs through the project.

The University applied this New Deal strategy with the \$108 million purchase of the Pfizer facility in January, where it aims to create more than 2,000 jobs over the course of a decade.

Sullivan also told the Daily that the proposals to fund recreational facilities do fit well with recent University initiatives. She described one as promoting "active lifestyles for students and faculty," apparently referencing the MHealthy campaign begun in 2005 by President Mary Sue Coleman.

The link between new fitness facilities and more active lifestyles doesn't need too much explaining. Sullivan also saw new facilities helping admission, another aim of MHealthy.

Improving recreational sports and fitness facilities is something students and faculty both want. The studies presented also show that students are willing to pay for it, and it's something that lines up perfectly with the priorities of the University's administration while aiding the economy. In short, the time is now.

"The statement that keeps ringing in my hear is, 'Why can't our facilities be better?'" Canning said. "Because we have the leaders and best. And that's an expectation."