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## **University Examines Students' Recreational Facility Needs**

University Park, Pa. -- Despite major renovations to key recreational facilities made in the last few years, students on Penn State's University Park campus still say that Penn State does not fully meet their needs when it comes to recreation and fitness, according to a study undertaken by the firm Brailsford and Dunlavey.

Nearly 40 percent of Penn State University Park students surveyed say the University is unable to meet their fitness needs because on-campus facilities are too crowded. In addition, more than 80 percent of students surveyed said they are very likely or somewhat likely to increase their participation in recreational activities if improvements are made to address the crowding issue.

Although many students indicated that they use off-campus recreational facilities, students surveyed as part of this study showed a strong preference for using on-campus facilities. This trend is not unique to Penn State students. Studies done around the country in recent years indicate many students make enrollment decisions based on the amount and kind of recreational facilities a university offers.

The consultants report that almost 100 percent of the students interviewed were in favor of substantial expansion of recreational facilities, and they are willing to pay a dedicated fitness fee to fund the projects.

The Brailsford and Dunlavey study looked at changes in expectations in recreational facilities by today's students, as compared to earlier generations. "Penn State's facilities were built at a time when there was a nationwide focus on physical education classes and athletics. Programs were directed in shared-use facilities with a utilitarian function and a limited, male-dominated audience," said Paul Brailsford, project executive, co-founder and CEO of Brailsford and Dunlavey. "Contrast that with today's recreation and social focus, in programs that are market-driven. Programs today increasingly are housed in special-purpose buildings and have maximized appeal to a more gender-balanced audience."

The study also examined the kinds of facilities and programming offered by other large institutions around the United States and at the issue of helping young people develop lifelong wellness goals.

"We are by no means trying to 'keep up with the Joneses,' but rather are looking to do something uniquely Penn State that addresses the needs of our students. To accomplish this, we do need to be aware of what other institutions are doing for their students," said Stan Latta, director of union and student activities at Penn State. "More and more students arrive on college campuses with an expectation of on-site facilities that address their fitness needs, and what this study has

confirmed for us is that Penn State is behind the Big Ten in terms of what we are able to offer our students in recreational services."

Penn State offers roughly seven square feet of recreational space per student on its University Park campus, which is slightly below the average in the Big Ten. The University's goal is to over time increase that space to roughly 11 square feet per person, and at the same time make the facilities more user-friendly and accessible.

The study includes several recommendations to Penn State for achieving these goals, including expanding and renovating White Building, and linking it to the HUB-Robeson Center, as well as expanding and renovating the IM Building. Renovations and improvements also are proposed for outdoor fields and facilities used by intramural and club sports.

Several initiatives are currently under way to begin to meet some of the recommendations offered by B&D:

-- The West Campus Athletic Fields will be upgraded this year and three synthetic turf fields will be constructed and ready for use by club sports teams and intramurals this fall. The conversion of these grass fields to synthetic turf will provide greater opportunities for competitive play and casual recreation during the times when regular grass fields are not playable due to the weather.

-- With the relocation of the practice area for women's soccer, additional intramural fields can be developed on East Campus. These additional playing fields will increase the opportunities for intramural football and softball.

-- A committee has been appointed to study the feasibility of connecting the HUB-Robeson Center with the White Building to physically connect these two student centers and possibly create additional activity and meeting spaces for students.

Latta stressed that the recommendations are a starting point, not a master plan for action. "Our challenge is to take the information we now have and put it in the context of where we are at Penn State, and what realistically can be done," he said.

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