

# LEWISTON TRIBUNE

## Rec Meccas

**With Campus Facilities Already Overflowing, College Students on the Palouse Are Clamoring for—and Willing to Help Pay for—More Recreational Opportunities**

**Administrators, Recognizing the Value of State-of-the-Art Facilities in Recruitment, Are Only Too Happy to Oblige Them**

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By Rebecca Huntington

Pat McAdams has to stand in line for 45 minutes so he can break a sweat for an hour.

It's a Monday night at Washington State University's student-owned Olympic gym, where students have to wait for someone to leave before they can pick up a barbell.

Despite the wait, McAdams voted against a proposed \$100 per semester fee increase to build a new recreation center on the Pullman campus.

"I didn't think I could afford an extra \$100."

But 64 percent of the 3,088 students who participated in the referendum exercised their votes in favor of a new multi-million dollar center.

Freshman Tawny Johnson, 19, wasn't around for last year's vote. But for her, the hundred bucks is worth it -- she's lost 50 pounds working out almost every day. Looking good, she says, is a social necessity on a college campus.

"I didn't want to be dateless for the next four years of my life."

College administrators appear to agree flexing a little muscle is attractive. For them, though, it's the school's image they're trying to strengthen.

The University of Idaho, WSU and Boise State University each are planning new student recreation centers. Lewis-Clark State College is working on a health and wellness center to serve athletes, students and perhaps the community.

"College administrators are learning what recreation professionals have known for years about the value of recreation/wellness centers," writes Jeffrey D. Turner, a consultant who worked with both WSU and UI.

"These state-of-the-art facilities are paying large dividends in satisfying the modern-day version of education's three R's -- recruiting (of new students), retention (of current students) and renewal (of alumni support)."

Turner's advice appeared in Athletic Business magazine.

During discussion of BSU's recreation center request in March, Idaho Board of Education member Carole McWilliam of Pocatello dubbed it a "marketing issue for adolescents."

Already working on architectural designs, WSU is ahead of BSU and UI. If all goes smoothly, WSU could open the new center in August 2000.

The UI will likely ask the Board of Education for approval to sell bonds to pay for architectural plans sometime next fall, says Hal Godwin, vice president for student affairs.

Just because McAdams didn't vote for the fee increase for the WSU recreation center doesn't mean he isn't interested. The sophomore is now on the planning committee to ensure students get the most exercise equipment for their money.

The WSU fee doesn't kick in until the doors open. So McAdams may not have to help pay for the center. But he won't get to use the shiny new digs either.

WSU junior Andre Smith, 22, and sophomore Will Wehmeyer, 19, both voted for the new center, although they might not get to use it either. Their votes will save future students from standing in line, they say, waiting their turn to get buff.

Why do they put up with the wait?

"Looking good for the girls," Wehmeyer says.

"And then maybe some health reasons," Smith adds.

It's undecided how the UI will phase in its \$82 per semester recreation center fee. But like WSU, UI officials promised students they wouldn't be asked to pay for a building until they could use it.

However, the UI is charging students \$12 a semester, up from \$3 in 1996, to pay for planning the center.

"We have said to the students we will not assess the total cost until the doors are open," Godwin says.

That's a departure from the usual university sales pitch, in which administrators argue students who came before paid for buildings being used by current students, who in turn are expected to do the same for future generations.

"I think it's about time," says Randy Burtz, a WSU graduate student in recreation management. Burtz has worked at the Olympic gym since 1991. The lines started getting long five years ago, he says.

"It's just impossible to move around."

The Olympic gym is next door to a state-of-the-art gym for varsity athletes only.

"They deserve it," Burtz says. "It doesn't bother me."

Johnson is less sympathetic.

"I think that's a little bit unfair that the athletes get so much attention."

The hook upon which student recreation centers are sold is open recreation time. Drop-in student use traditionally has taken a back seat to athletes' needs and physical education classes.

Athletes and classes may have access to the new centers, but student-dominated committees will monitor that use to ensure student recreation remains the top priority.

Some student centers sell passes to community residents to defray operating costs. At WSU, students will decide who gets to use it, says Tim McCarty, WSU Compton Union Building manager and co-chairman of the planning committee.

WSU and UI are benefiting from the student recreation center craze underway in other states.

McAdams toured centers at other campuses, where students said if they had it to do over, they'd build bigger weight rooms.

So WSU students are pushing for the biggest weight room around. Preliminary designs give it about 17,000 square feet -- what's needed to meet peak demand, according to a consultant's study.

WSU's designs are on display in CUB 110. Pictures of other centers show students rock climbing on massive walls at the heart of a spacious lobby or students lounging beside a large stone fireplace.

WSU's preliminary designs are equally impressive. The lobby has a central information desk surrounded by a juice bar and places to lounge, watch television or play cards.

To the right, there's a two-story weight room with a partially open ceiling so both levels are visible. Cardiovascular machines will be positioned in front of windows for the best view.

Across the lobby is an aquatic center with multiple pools. There will be room for seven basketball courts, glassed-in racquetball courts and multi-purpose rooms for aerobics, martial arts and yoga.

Universities are becoming recreation center pioneers. UI Recreation Director Cal Lathen visited the first such center at Bowling Green State University in Ohio in the mid '80s.

On a later tour, Lathen flew to Cincinnati and drove to seven fairly new, well-designed college centers. The buildings often have spacious lobbies, sophisticated architecture and warm, inviting atmospheres, he says.

"They're like a cathedral, a lot of them."

Some cities offer a similar experience, he says, noting Idaho communities are coveting Nampa's recreation center.

WSU's \$35 million center will be between 140,000 and 160,000 square feet.

The UI's proposal for a 90,000- square-foot center could cost up to \$17 million. Consultants determined the UI fee increase wouldn't be enough for a swimming pool.

BSU is planning a \$12 million center with a \$65 per semester fee hike.

Both UI and WSU followed a consultant's advice and chose to hold student referendums.

A carefully planned referendum, Turner writes, "will reduce the possibility of a negative outcome and subsequently, give university officials the confidence to move ahead."

Turner calls passing a referendum "likely to be the single biggest hurdle schools must overcome." That's because dwindling state support continues to put the funding "onus" on students.

Turner works for the Washington D.C.-based project management firm Brailsford & Dunlavey. When Turner's company took on the UI project it had a perfect 9-0 record in passing student referendums, which included WSU.

The student informational brochures used in both the WSU and UI campaigns had similar components, with both using the slogan "exercise your vote."

Not only was UI another win for the consultants, it proved to have the best turnout of the 10. Out of 9,728 UI students, 3,440 or just over 35 percent voted. Of those, 2,288 or 66.5 percent said yes.

The UI paid \$46,599 to Brailsford & Dunlavey and another \$23,282 to promote and carry out the advisory vote. Other UI costs related to the recreation center, including additional studies, bring the total spent so far to \$117,119.

WSU paid about \$50,000 to Brailsford & Dunlavey and another \$15,000 to hold the election, which included brochures, McCarty says.

WSU had a smaller turnout, with 19.5 percent of its students voting. Of those, 64 percent said yes.

Student elections typically draw between 17 and 20 percent of the student body, says WSU's Associated Students President Neil Walker. Although he voted against the new center because of the added cost to students, he expected it to pass.

"But you always wonder, Wow, people are going to institutionalize a hundred dollar (fee increase).' That's amazing."