

LEWISTON TRIBUNE

UI Students Don't Break a Sweat in OKing Rec Center

Whopping 66 Percent Vote in Favor of \$16 Million Facility

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By Rebecca Huntington

MOSCOW -- University of Idaho students want recreation, and they're willing to dig into their own pockets to pay for it.

In a voting turnout that "blew the national average out of the water," UI students overwhelming said yes to raising their fees \$70 a semester.

"I am amazed by the turnout," said Katie Cox, program assistant for institutional advancement. About 35 percent, or 3,440 students including undergraduate, graduate and law school students, voted in the three-day election.

Washington D.C.-based consulting firm Brailsford & Dunlavey, which aids campuses nationwide in recreation center and other campus construction referendums, told Cox she'd be lucky to get a 20 percent turnout.

Of UI students who voted, 66 percent said yes while 34 percent were opposed.

Now the UI administration will present the recreation center proposal to the Idaho Board of Education for final approval. The goal is to have the 90,000-square-foot, \$16 million center built by 2001, Cox said.

Opponents of the referendum criticized the process, saying efforts to drum up student votes were biased in favor of building the center.

Critics noted that students already pay \$12 a semester in planning money for the project. Some of that money paid for consultants, a logo, student surveys and brochures explaining the recreation center plan.

But Cox defends the student committee that put together the referendum.

"There has to be enthusiasm for a project if you're going to work on it for three years."

The student committee decided it couldn't run the referendum like a regular school election and expect a good turnout, she said. The average turnout for regular student elections is between 9 and 13 percent.

The 22-member student committee has been meeting at the Student Union Building at 7:30 a.m. every Thursday during the school year, Cox said.

She has worked on other new capital projects at the UI, like the recently approved University Commons. Students are paying an additional \$45 a semester to finance the commons.

Students won't begin paying for the recreation center until it's open and they can use it.

"The university is really developing a vision," Cox said. "This is one giant step toward that vision. All the students on the committee really are visionaries. They see what the campus could do."

Considering the successful turnout, students might think about revamping their regular elections to mirror the referendum, said Vice President for Student Affairs Hal W. Godwin.

"It is the clearest endorsement from students regarding a major project I've been involved in."

The students who worked on it "fostered a discussion which really was a campus-wide discussion," he said, "and they should be commended for that."