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Survey Shows Desire for Better Rec. Facility

By Michael Brus
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University students, faculty and staff would be willing to walk across campus to a new recreation facility and pay a fee, focus groups show.

Brailsford & Dunlavey -- a consulting group hired to determine whether the University should build a new recreation complex -- gave its preliminary report last Wednesday to a University steering committee.

The firm met with two dozen focus groups to solicit the opinion of students, faculty and staff on University recreation.

In its report to the steering committee, the firm said the focus groups showed that having both Gimbel and Hutchinson confuses students "about where certain activities are located."

In addition, "many students, especially women, feel that the free weight room in the basement of Hutchinson is intimidating."

The focus groups also determined that, because students valued security over location, they would be willing to walk across campus to a new recreation center.

But faculty and staff said location was more important because their workout time was often fixed.

Brailsford & Dunlavey reported that all the groups would be willing to pay a fee, though faculty and staff were less willing than students. Most students "felt that \$150 per semester would not be unreasonable."

The firm plans to solicit more scientific data in a University-wide e-mail survey. It will release these poll results in April.

At that stage, the group will recommend types of repair or construction to the University, but it will not offer anything as specific as an architectural blueprint.

"You know you have a Chevrolet, but you don't know whether it's stripped or loaded," he said.

Many people on the steering committee stressed the preliminary nature of the firm's findings.

Brailsford said the information collected thus far is only qualitative.

"What we typically use focus groups for is to identify issues," he said.

The upcoming survey should quantify those "issues." Brailsford touted the survey's margin of error as "much lower" than that of national polling groups.

He said his firm typically polls to 3.5 percent margin of error or less with 95 percent confidence.

Statistics Professor Kathryn Szabat said such accuracy would require that approximately 1,200 surveys be sent out.

Szabat also noted that using only e-mail for a survey assumes that everyone in Brailsford & Dunlavey's "target population" has equal access to computers.

E-mail surveys are common in some contexts, since they are an "easy way of contacting people and getting responses," she said.

Both Brailsford and Femovich said supplementing the e-mail survey with University mail or other media might be a possibility.

The University hired the consulting firm -- based in Washington, D.C. -- for around \$100,000, Senior Associate Director of Athletics Carolyn Schlie Femovich said.

Brailsford & Dunlavey has consulted on many professional stadium projects, including feasibility studies for a proposed hockey arena in Norfolk, Virginia and a proposed entertainment complex in Anaheim, California.

The firm has also consulted for over 50 universities -- both in the factfinding and the construction stages.

Recently, the firm consulted for the Reily Student Recreation Center at Tulane University, where Diorka -- a former Tulane official -- oversaw the planning.

The Reily Center's annual maintenance costs are borne partly by students, who pay a mandatory annual fee of \$2,400.