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U. Seeks Input on Rec. Facilities

By Michael Brus
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The Recreation Department wants to know what you think.

Brailsford & Dunlavey, a consulting firm hired by the Recreation Department, met with students last night as part of a series of focus groups designed to help administrators as they upgrade campus recreation facilities.

The firm's project manager, Brad Noyes, began the session by asking general questions about the students' reasons for coming to the University.

"We're going to tie this back to recreation soon," he assured them.

College senior Chris Balakrishnan said he came to Penn because "it's large, which increases your chances of meeting people you like."

Noyes told Balakrishnan that centralized recreational facilities often serve as meeting places and that 80 percent of student bodies generally make use of them.

A few minutes later Noyes offered another unsolicited comment:

"You have thousands of students now using private health facilities, and the majority feel frustrated" that these services are not available on campus.

A student wondered out loud, "How much does it cost?"

"I think \$400 a month [at University Nautilus]. And it's packed," Noyes told them. In fact, an annual membership at University Nautilus costs less than \$400.

Noyes switched the topic to prospective locations for the new complex.

"Should [recreation improvements] be in one location, so you get more for your money, or should it be scattered in four or six locations across campus?" he asked.

Engineering freshman Vince Marshall said a centralized location would work best. But Matt Wasowski, a 1996 College graduate, said a "scattered" plan might relieve overcrowding.

Noyes assured Wasowski that surveys showed a centralized location would not cause overcrowding.

"I don't mean to sway you one way or the other. You tell us what you want and we'll provide it," said Noyes.

Noyes' final topic was finances.

"What's happening at other universities is students are saying, 'We're going to pay for it ourselves'," through taxes on tuition bills, he said.

Wasowski and others agreed.

"If you throw a [small] fee in with \$25,000, nobody would know about it," Wasowski said.

Noyes assured the group that "a fee would not be implemented until the doors [of a recreation complex] open."

After the session, Noyes said privately that the group had been less enthusiastic about building a new recreation complex than most groups.

Brailsford has conducted about a dozen focus groups so far. It has met with Medical and Law students, graduate and undergraduate students who live both on and off campus, faculty, staff and local alumni, among others groups.

Noyes said the focus group members are chosen at random through a mass e-mail generated by the Recreation Department.

But of the five attendees at last night's "undergraduate" focus group, one had graduated and two had been dragged along by friends. Two participants also worked for the Recreation Department.

Brailsford will unveil its proposals for the University's recreation facilities today at a meeting with a University committee. The committee includes representatives from academics, athletics, Physical Plant and the Admissions Office.

Brailsford's contract with the University expires at the end of the proposal process. Such an arrangement helps assure objectivity in surveying, Noyes said.

But both Diorka and Noyes consider Brailsford a possible contractor for the recreation upgrades.

"There are all sorts of services we could provide" at the construction stage, Noyes said.