

MUSTANG NEWS

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Firm Introduces Plan to Expand University Union

By Benjy Egel

Cal Poly has already made plans to expand campus housing to accommodate growing freshman classes, but the Julian A. McPhee University Union (UU) could be the next campus facility to expand, with a proposal to nearly double its square footage.

Program management firm Brailsford and Dunlavey has proposed expanding the UU from about 110,000 gross square feet to 190,000-200,000 within the next 10 years.

Expanding the already busy UU will be necessary as Cal Poly continues to admit larger freshman classes, University Union Advisory Board (UUAB) Chair and industrial technology senior Katie Brennan said.

“If we are to grow as a campus by 5,000 students, we definitely need more space,” Brennan said. “It’s almost doubling the square footage of the current facility.”

Associated Students, Inc. (ASI) hired consultant Matt Bohannon, a senior project manager at Brailsford and Dunlavey, to come up with a new master plan for the UU. Bohannon graduated from Cal Poly with a bachelor’s degree in architecture in 2004 and was the UUAB chair during the 2002-03 academic year.

Bohannon presented four layout plans to the ASI Board of Directors, recommending a model based off the University of California, San Diego Price Center. The new plan would include a number of new buildings around the current UU, including a retail center at the face of Mott Athletics Center and a large structure near the Recreation Center.

“It provides a different and unique experience that will serve as a destination not only for Union services and student life services,” Bohannon said. “We think it has a great opportunity to connect student housing and the Recreation Center to the Union in a greater way.”

The new buildings would face the current UU Plaza, allowing more space for concerts while trapping sound within the plaza.

In an ASI survey sent out in early April, 72 percent of respondents said improving UU facilities was more important than indoor or outdoor sports and recreation centers.

Cal Poly President Jeffrey Armstrong and ASI President Jason Colombini have toyed with the idea of bringing a pub to campus, which Brennan said could be part of the UU redesign. Brennan also mentioned adding more name-brand restaurants such as Jamba Juice and Subway, though no plans have been set.

After ASI further surveys students about what specific stores or features they would want to see, Bohannon will give Cal Poly a price estimate on the project. No timetable has been set for its completion.

Respondents to ASI's survey, which included 23 percent of the student body, said they were most interested in a pub, a movie theater, more food options and more shaded areas in the UU. Many students also said they use the UU as a place to study.

"The library can be too loud and too social, so they come to the Union to get work done. So we definitely need to keep up that lounge/study space area," Brennan said. "And if they take Starbucks away, I'll personally be pretty sad."

While Brennan and Bohannon were optimistic about the project's prospects, next year's UUAB chair, Brady Hiob, was more reserved. Hiob said he wanted to hear Bohannon's price estimate and determine where the funding will come from.

Much of the Recreation Center funding came from quarterly student fees, which Bohannon said could be a solution for paying for the new UU. Hiob said he didn't want students to have to pay extra fees, but recognized they might not have a choice if the new UU is to be built.

"It might be (too) expensive," Hiob said when asked how feasible the new UU was. "We don't want any of those expenses to come down to students, necessarily, (but) it might have to come to that."