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Student Demand for Enhanced Recreational Facilities

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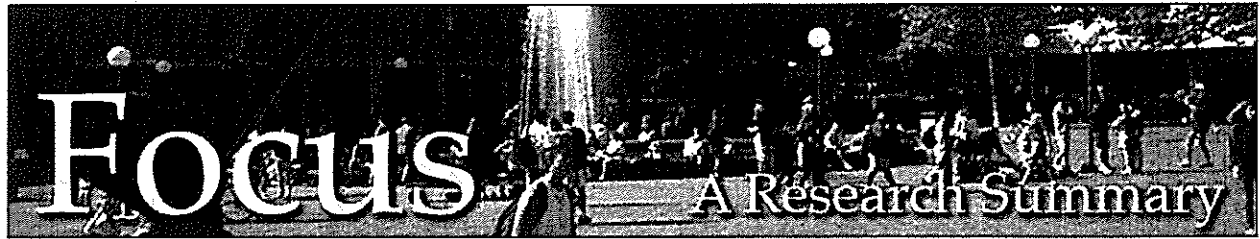
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Student Demand for Enhanced Recreational Facilities

Prepared by Carl Simpson, Linda Clark, and Gary McKinney

Western's recreational facilities, especially indoor facilities, fall notably short of those of the other regional universities and of that which is typical of well-funded private universities. On the other hand, Western students have selected to attend Western, we know them to be very active in

intramurals, and they express extremely high satisfaction with Western and with Western/Bellingham as a place to live. That is, we have reason to expect both that students may be satisfied and that they may be dissatisfied with the current recreational facilities at Western. The purpose of this survey is to bring evidence to bear on those possibilities.

METHODS: *During the spring, 1996, the Office of Survey Research conducted a follow-up survey of the 601 students interviewed in the fall, 1994, when they first entered Western. Just over half of the sample had entered as freshmen, the rest as transfers. Interviews were completed with 449, or 74.7% of the 601. Of these, 62 (13.8%) were not enrolled at Western during Spring, 1996. Eight had already graduated. Twenty were taking off from one to three quarters. Thirteen were planning to take off one year or more and then return. Twenty-one did not plan to return. Two of these decided against a college degree; the others transferred or were planning to transfer.*

Along with other questions, the 387 currently enrolled students interviewed were asked about their use of recreational facilities at Western, and their desires for additional facilities. The recreation questions were included because Western needed the information soon, and this survey was about to begin. In a number of ways, this survey was a less-than-ideal vehicle for these questions. The sample was not large and, as a follow-up of students who entered in the fall, 1994, it was not representative of all Western students. However, while not representative, the survey does offer a reasonable sample of sophomores and seniors. Most who entered as freshmen in the fall, 1994, were late sophomores when interviewed in the spring, 1996. Most who entered as transfers were late seniors in the spring, 1996. In short, findings were meaningful enough to use and perhaps point to the advisability of collecting more data, but could not be generalized accurately to the entire Western student body.

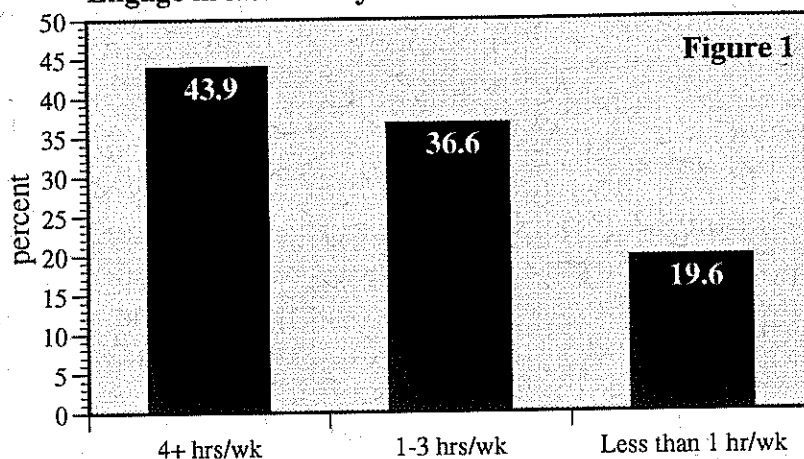
FINDINGS

LEVELS OF "ACTIVE PHYSICAL RECREATION"

The first question analyzed here sets the stage by asking whether, "on average," students "engage in active physical recreation" less than one hour per week, 1-3 hours, or 4+ hours per week. As Figure 1 shows, about one-fifth (19.6%) of students engage in so little recreation that the issue of what facilities Western should have is presumably moot for them. However, 43.9% engage in recreation four or more hours per week. Active physical recreation is a part of most students' lives.

Spring '96 Follow-Up of Fall '94 Entrants

On Average, How Many Hours Per Week Do Students Engage in Active Physical Recreation? (n=383)



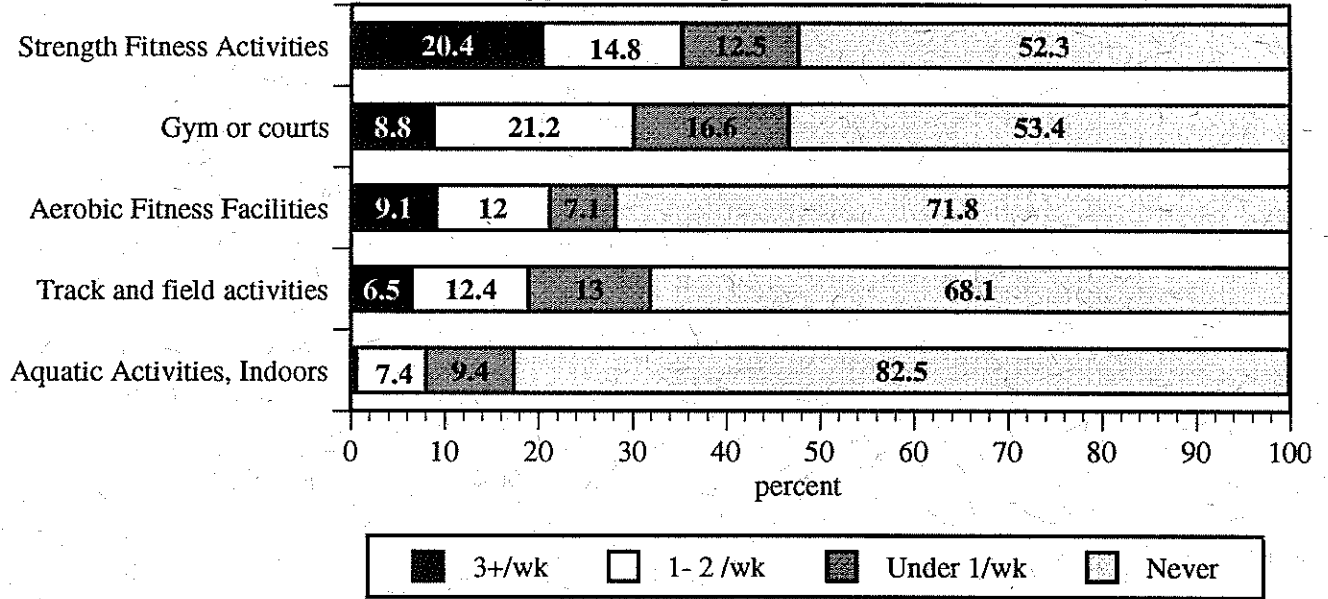
USE OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Current use of recreational facilities is lower than it would be if facilities were excellent. Even so, the place to begin is with current use patterns. Unfortunately, a wording error in the survey makes our findings ambiguous. Students were asked how often they used each of five types of facilities (Figure 2), then to evaluate Western's facilities if they had used them (Figure 3). However, the first part of the question failed to specify that the facilities used were *Western's* facilities. While some students probably drew on part two of the question to imply that part one referred to Western's facilities, others probably reported their total exercise levels, whether or not the facilities used were Western's. We know that all but four of the respondents do use Western's facilities because they answered the second part of the question. However, the frequency with which they report using facilities may include both on- and off-campus facilities for some students.

Figure 2 reports hours per week of use for each of five broad types of facilities. Strength fitness activities are most common, with 28.4% using facilities at least weekly. Even here, however, 61.5% "never" use the facilities, a figure that increases to 85.9% for indoor aquatic facilities. Altogether, 53.1% of the students in our sample say they use at least one of the types of facilities listed in Figure 2 at least on occasion, with 43.4% using at least one facility once a week or more often. Three or more types of facilities are used by 19.4% of the students in our sample, although fewer than half of these (7.7%) do so at least once a week.

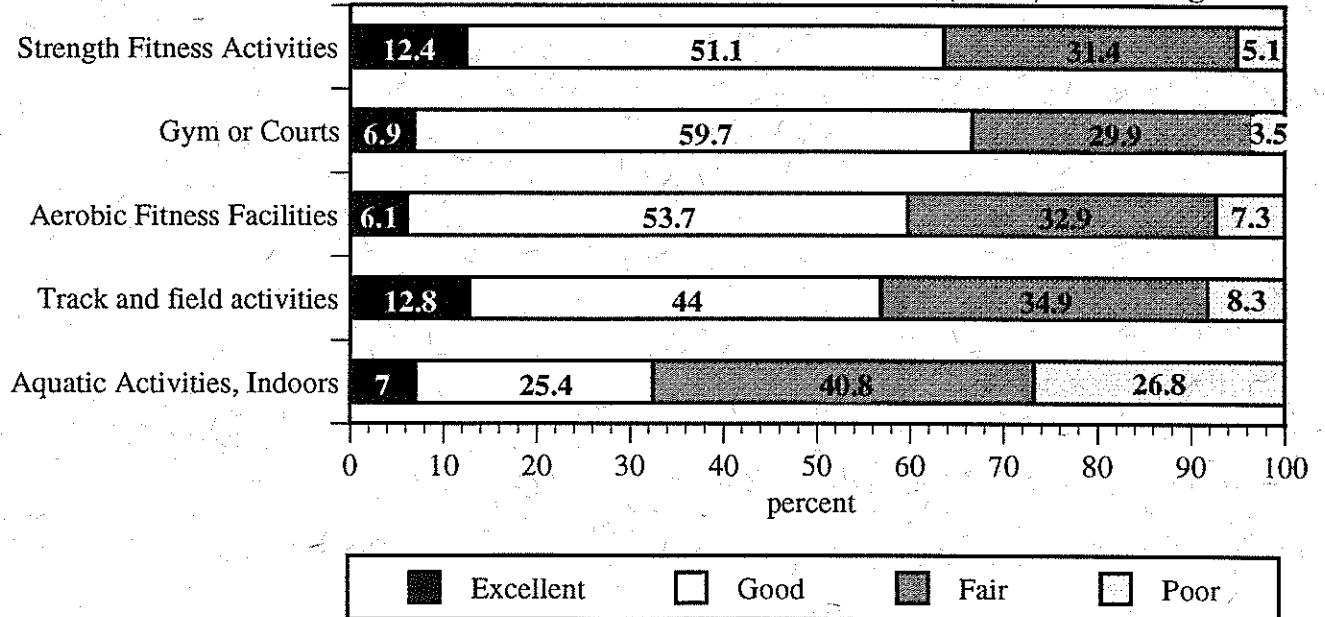
Spring '96 Follow-Up of Fall '94 Entrants

During the '95-'96 School Year, How Often On Average Did Students Engage in Each Type of Activity or Use Each Type of Facility Listed Below? (n=309) **Figure 2**



Spring '96 Follow-Up of Fall '94 Entrants

Students' Evaluation of Western's Facilities: For Facilities Students Have Used (above), How Well Do Current Facilities Meet Their Needs? (n=137) **Figure 3**



EVALUATION OF WESTERN'S RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

As indicated in Figure 3, all students who had used each type of facility at Western were asked to evaluate "...how well Western's current facilities meet your needs." Satisfaction ratings may help explain why so few students use Western's pool. More than one quarter (26.8%) of users rate it "poor," and another 40.8% rate it only "fair." Other types of facilities garner around 60.0% "good" or "excellent" ratings, although no more than one-in-eight rate them "excellent." Even these evaluations are not highly positive; in surveys such as this, a rating of "fair" is relatively negative.

USE OF OFF-CAMPUS RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

We also measured the proportion of students who pay additional money to use private off-campus recreational facilities such as health clubs, thinking that this would provide one "hard" indicator of the degree to which campus facilities fall short. There is considerable use of such facilities, but these individuals are not less satisfied than others with Western's facilities. Instead, they appear to be especially active individuals who tend to use both on- and off-campus facilities.

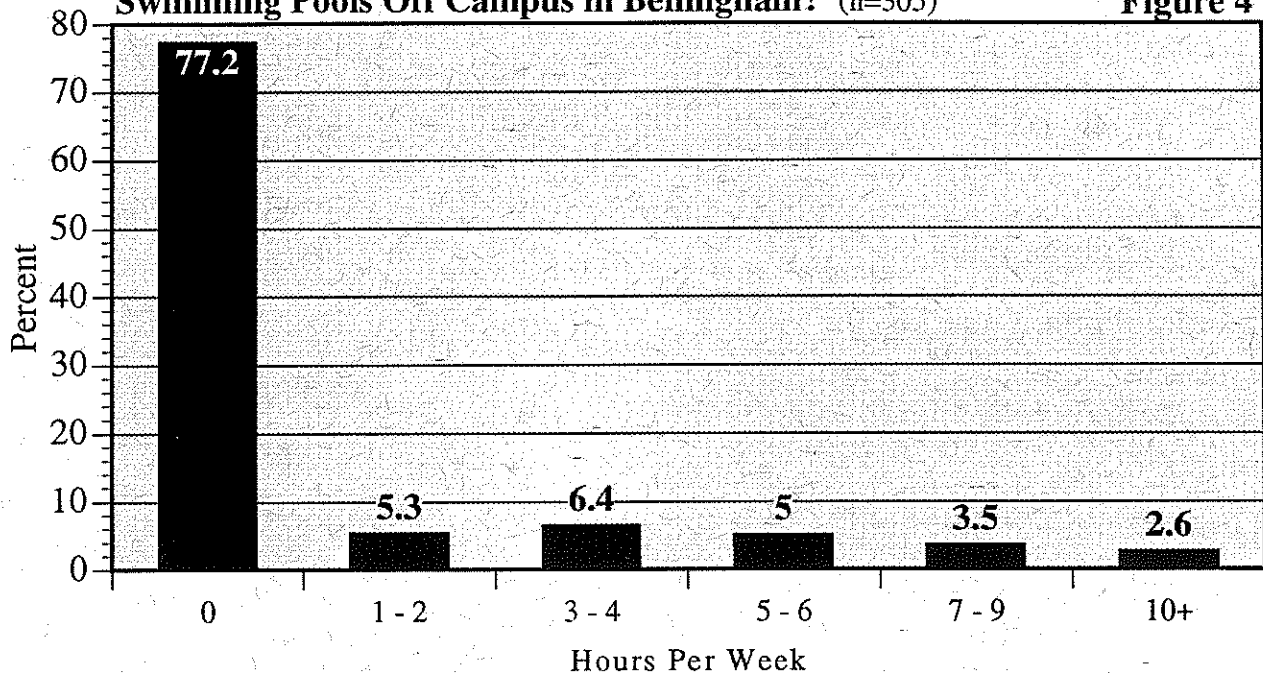
While the majority of Western students do not, of course, use private off-campus recreational facilities, it is remarkable that more than one in five (22.8%) spend at least one hour per week in such facilities (see Figure 4). Indeed, 11.1% say they spend at least five hours per week using off-campus facilities.

We initially assumed that a considerable portion of students who use off-campus facilities would do so because the on-campus facilities do not meet their needs. However, analysis of students' satisfaction with Western facilities and of the likelihood that they would spend more time using the on-campus facilities if they were improved (see below) show that to be only partially correct. We identify no differences between those who use off-campus facilities and others. Many of the students who use off-campus facilities are dissatisfied with Western's facilities and would make greater use of them if they were improved, but no more so than other students.

The best interpretation seems to be that some students who find Western's facilities fall short of their needs are paying for off-campus facilities, while others are dissatisfied but do without the recreation they would prefer. Others are satisfied with Western's facilities. In addition, a few of the students who use off-campus facilities specifically suggested that Western have enlarged *free* gymnastics and weight room facilities, suggesting that on-campus fees are one part of their decision to use off-campus facilities.

How Many Hours Per Week Do Students Use Indoor Recreational Facilities Such As Health Clubs or Swimming Pools Off Campus in Bellingham? (n=305)

Figure 4



PERCEIVED NEED FOR NEW OR IMPROVED FACILITIES

Students were asked two types of questions concerning their desire for additional or improved facilities. First, they were asked to identify any "other types of recreational facilities" they felt Western should invest in and that they would use. One hundred fifty of the 387 currently enrolled students in our sample offered suggestions of facilities they would use at least once a week (see Table 1 on page 6).

As would be expected in this locale, indoor facilities were by far the most often requested. In particular, 62.0% of those who said they would make use of any new facilities requested a climbing wall. Other requests cover a wide range of activities, with only a dance studio, gymnastics room and archery range mentioned by more than 5% of those making requests. It is particularly interesting that only 3.3% mentioned an improved swimming pool or hot tub, given students' negative evaluation of Western's present pool. Apparently, the low usage of the present pool stems less from dissatisfaction than from lack of interest, if this sample is representative of the rest of the student body at this time.

Table 1: Recreation Facilities Students Would Use at Least Once a Week if They Were Available at Western (n=150)*

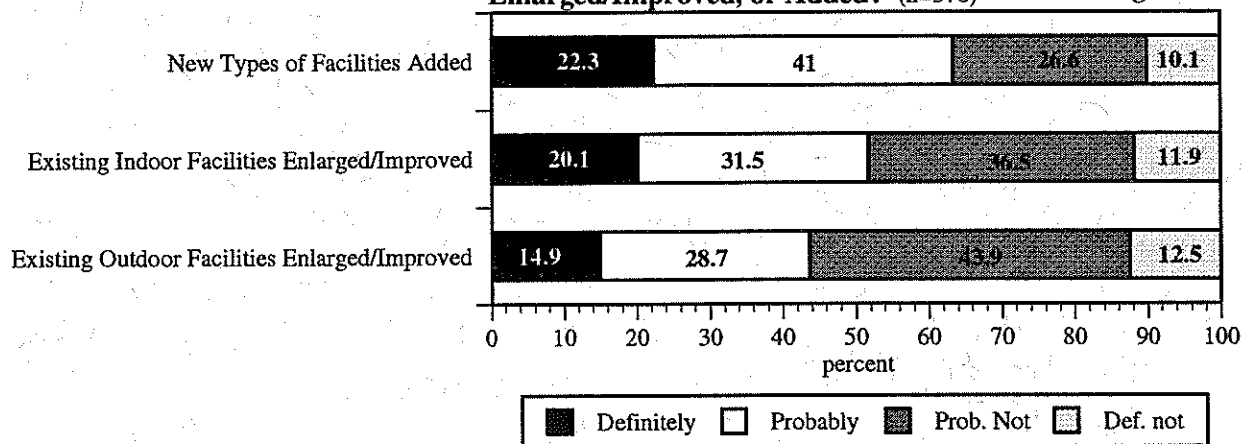
Indoor Facilities	90.3
Wall Climbing	62.0
Dance Studio	14.0
Gymnastics (gear, mat room) - free	8.0
Olympic Pool/Swimming	2.0
Weight Room - free	2.0
Hockey	1.3
Hot Tub	1.3
Bowling	0.7
Ping Pong	0.7
Track (indoor)	0.7
Yoga	0.7
Outdoor Facilities/Fields	20.0
Archery	9.3
Rifle Range	2.0
Skateboard/Rollerblade Park	2.0
Golf	1.3
Baseball	1.3
Hockey	1.3
Batting Cage	0.7
Cross Country Course	0.7
Rugby Field	0.7
Stable	0.7
Fitness	10.2
Aerobics	3.3
Treadmill	2.7
Climbing Machine	0.7
Nordic Track	0.7
Punching Bag	0.7
Rowing Machine	0.7
Single Sex Weight Rooms	0.7
Stationary Bike	0.7
Courts	4.6
Basketball	1.3
Racquetball	1.3
Tennis (lighted)	1.3
Rebound Board for Tennis	0.7
Other	2.1
Art Facilities (e.g., glass blowing)	0.7
Extended Time	0.7
Velodrome	0.7

*Percentages add to more than 100% because students were invited to provide multiple responses.

The second approach taken by the survey to measure perceived need for improved recreational facilities was a direct question asking whether students would spend more recreation time on campus if existing indoor facilities were enlarged/improved, existing outdoor facilities were enlarged/improved, and if new types of facilities were added. The final option follows the earlier question about which types of facilities students would like to see added, so we may assume students had in mind their favorite facility, along with other possibilities, when they answered the question. Findings are displayed in Figure 5.

Spring '96 Follow-Up of Fall '94 Entrants

Would Students Spend More Recreation Time On Campus If Facilities Were Enlarged/Improved, or Added? (n=376) Figure 5



While hypothetical questions such as this are prone to inflation (most of us plan to do more than we actually do), responses to this question nonetheless indicate a large market for additional recreational facilities at Western. Nearly two-thirds say they “definitely” (22.3%) or “probably” (41.0%) would spend more recreational time if new facilities were added. Adjusting for inflated intentions and for the fact that some of these individuals have in mind facilities which Western is unlikely to build, it is still likely that one-third or more of this sample would expand their recreation if Western expanded their options. Students’ enthusiasm for enlarging or improving existing facilities runs only slightly behind that for adding new facilities. Perhaps one-fourth of the students in our sample would in fact increase their on-campus recreation if facilities were improved.

There is considerable overlap among the three measures of hypothetical increased recreation levels shown in Figure 5. About one-fourth (25.8%) of students say they “definitely” or “probably” would spend more time if *any* of the three options were put in place. Another 22.0% respond positively to two of the three. Nearly all those responding positively to only one option (11.4%) responded to the option for adding new types of facilities; based on Table 1, many of these have in mind a climbing wall.

In short, while hypothetical use questions are subject to considerable error, and while this sample is not representative of all students, the evidence suggests that somewhere between one-fourth and one-third of students are now spending less on-campus recreational time than they would if Western’s facilities were improved and enlarged.

RECREATION PATTERNS BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

As Western considers improvements and expansions to its recreational facilities, one question of importance is whether different groups of students would be best served by different improvements. In particular, we would expect some differences in use patterns by gender.

We do in fact find some gender differences, although probably fewer than would have existed some years ago. Although about the same proportion of men and women exercise less than one hour per week (18.7% and 19.8%, respectively), considerably more men exercise four or more hours a week (53.7% vs. 39.3%). The most marked difference by gender is that women make more frequent use of aerobic fitness facilities and are more motivated to exercise for "aerobic fitness; general health; weight control" than are men. Nearly one-third (30.8%) of women but only 6.5% of men use aerobic facilities at least occasionally, with 10.4% and 1.5% using them at least three times per week. Similarly, 75.7% of women and 47.5% of men say that aerobic fitness is a major reason why they exercise.

We find no difference in the extent to which men and women use swimming facilities, and little or no difference in the extent to which they engage in track and field activities or use strength fitness facilities. The one type of facility which men use more often than women is "gym or courts." Nearly half of men (48.8%) use these facilities at least on occasion, compared to 31.0% for women, and 9.8% vs. 5.6% use them at least three hours per week.

One particularly interesting pattern emerges from the findings discussed above. Men tend more often to be motivated to exercise for enjoyment and social time. All those who exercise mostly for social purposes, and men in particular, tend to make use of gyms, courts, and track and field facilities. They would also be particularly interested in Western expanding its outdoor facilities. Women's exercise, on the other hand, tends to be more highly focused around aerobics and general health, and women make greatest use of facilities aimed to that end.

Finally, there is no difference at all in the extent to which men and women report that they would increase their on-campus recreation time if new facilities were built or if current facilities were improved. Nor do men or women currently spend more time using off-campus facilities, comparatively.

Making comparisons regarding characteristics other than gender, we find even fewer differences. We find no differences between higher and lower GPA students in recreation levels, evaluations of Western's facilities, desires for improvements, or reasons for exercising. We also identify few differences between minority and non-minority students. The only exceptions are slight tendencies for minority students to use gyms and courts less often, more often they would increase recreation on campus if facilities were improved or added, and to more often say they engage in recreation as part of their major, minor, or job.

Age differences are in the expected direction, but are not great. Older students currently engage in recreation of all types somewhat less often than do younger students, especially in the

areas of gyms/courts and track and field. Older individuals are less likely to say they would increase their use of facilities if they were improved, and they are less likely to say that they exercise to meet people or for "strengthening; specific skill development."

Finally, we asked students when they entered Western in Fall of 1994 to indicate whether they place greater importance on each of two pairs of opposed goals: "obtaining a degree vs. learning a great deal", and "having a good social life vs. studying hard and learning". We find several modest but consistent relationships between these orientations and recreation patterns. Students who emphasize a good social life equally or greater than studying and learning spend more time in recreation and are particularly more likely to use strength and track and field facilities. They are also markedly more likely to say that they would spend greater time in recreation if facilities were improved. Patterns are similar but much weaker for students who emphasize getting a "obtaining a degree vs. learning a great deal".

The most important point to make here, however, is that differences by student characteristics are very small except for some noted above for gender. In particular, evaluations of Western's facilities do not differ by any characteristic we measured and most students are about equally likely to increase their recreation if facilities were improved, enlarged, or added.

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Dr. Joseph E. Trimble, Director

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