

Proposed fitness centre too ambitious, expensive, and missing the point

**Nathan Swyers
Managing Editor**

The cost of living is increasing. Tuition fees are rising. North America is facing a possible recession. This is not the time to be spending up to \$18 million of the students' money...

Posters around the college declare, "You asked, we listened," but the numbers tell a very different story.

There aren't a whole lot of walls on campus where you won't find a "Vote Yes" poster. Some doorways even have several identical signs plastered side-by-side, in case one wasn't enough. The MSA, SAC, and the college are doing a great job of telling you how to vote, but there doesn't seem to be much in the way of public opposition to the campaign.

The larger of the two promotional signs does include many of the details about the fitness centre: students will begin paying \$75 each semester starting in Sept. 2009 to build the Recreation, Health and Wellness Centre. This will include a fitness and weight room, indoor track, four intramural courts, two gyms, spinning room, change rooms, therapy and physiotherapy, and a rock climbing wall.

It's an enormous investment. It's meant to replace an aging gym, but it's too much. Students don't need half the features listed for the centre, and proposing a smaller, exclusive building would mean much lower costs and a sooner opening.

Right now, the facility is geared toward more than just students at Mohawk College, since the poster mentions discounted membership rates. It's also strange that while the initiative is supposed to be focused on Mohawk students in general, the only students featured on the poster are varsity athletes, decked out in medals. Who is this facility really for?

Many people at the college are quick to encourage students to vote in favour of it, but no one seems to be playing devil's advocate. Here are a few reasons for students to be sceptical of the proposal:

For one, it seems that very little effort has been put forth to seek alternative funding for the facility. In an article in late October, MSA Executive Director Richard Anderson said, "I know we are working with the college to look at some other options, but I can't say that we have physically solicited or actually have extra funding at this point."

MSA President Alan Griffiths says he has met with Colleges and Universities Minister John Malloy and local MPPs to discuss possible funding; unfortunately, government funding is not an option for ancillary buildings.

Every effort should be made to secure any funding possible for this project. Implementing a \$150 fee each year and

then looking at additional funding later seems like a completely backwards approach. Would the fee be decreased if a public figure decided to donate millions to the college, in exchange for his name on the building?

Second, the projected completion date is incredibly ambitious. According to the campaign, it would take only two years to open. In reality, if the facility did open at that time, it would likely be nowhere near completion and only offer a handful of the promised services, while the rest of the building remains under construction. All the while, students are paying the mandatory ancillary fee whether they can use the service or not.

By the time the facility is completed, most of the students who have paid the fee will have long graduated and moved on to other things. While free access is offered to those students later on, how many are going to come back to the college just to hit the gym? That's hundreds of dollars paid over the course of a diploma program for virtually no benefit to the student.

Despite what supporters imply, \$150 is not a modest fee. The cost of living is increasing. Tuition fees are rising. North America is facing a possible recession. This is not the time to be spending up to \$18 million of the students' money, but the campaign posters imply students have been asking for a new facility.

On Aug. 1, 2008 the college sent a survey out to Mohawk students. The message said that the latest Student Satisfaction KPI survey indicated students wanted a new fitness facility.

"Undertaking a project like this will require student support and involvement at many levels," it read.

The KPI results released in April 2008 show that Mohawk's student satisfaction rate is about 76 per cent. Nearly 70 per cent said they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the facilities at the college.

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The college surveyed students about which areas they would most like to see improved. Only 16 per cent said they thought Mohawk needed better recreational facilities, while 48 per cent checked "none of the above." 15 per cent said better lounge facilities are needed, 9 per cent called for better libraries, and 12 per cent checked off wireless access.

Is this an indication that students want \$18 million of their money to go toward building an overly ambitious fitness centre, when so many other college facilities are lacking as well?

What the results of that survey clearly show is that students believe better college facilities are needed across the board. The majority are satisfied with what the college has to offer, and those who aren't are split down the middle on whether or not something should even be improved at all.

The planned fitness centre is too big. It would be a better idea to build a smaller facility for Mohawk students exclusively, rather than an enormous community centre that might sell memberships to the Hamilton community, initially paid for by students. Other areas of the college barely meet the needs of the 10,000 students enrolled here. Perhaps a better library or open-access lab would be more beneficial to Mohawk than a rock-climbing wall.

The Satellite

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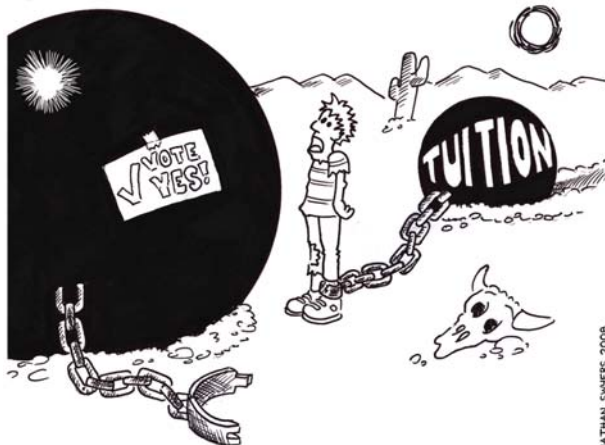
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