

THE
EVOLUTION OF
CAMPUS-BASED
FITNESS AND
RECREATION
FACILITIES



BY DAVID VINSON, PHD

The birth of the health club chains in the 1960s and 1970s sparked a gradual evolution in how the public imagined the culture of fitness. Prior to this shift, fitness centers were generally dingy, a space for men to box and lift weights. The rise of a new big-box concept for health and fitness emerged in the late 1970s in California, and this model gained momentum by appealing to the masses—not merely men but women, too, seeking to recruit patrons with

body types of all shapes and sizes. Coinciding with this evolution in the culture of fitness were advances in fitness technology and training as well as in the field of nutrition. The mega-chains remain ubiquitous today, and the culture of fitness has increasingly embraced a more personal and intimate experience for patrons by providing options for personal training, mind-body studies, and specialty exercise facilities that cater to wellness goals.

In higher education, the fitness and wellness-related wants and needs of students, faculty, and staff have evolved as recently as the past ten years. College campuses have responded by continuing to invest in facilities that reflect the ever-emerging desires of the campus community. Not only do these updates and renovations work as a powerful draw for prospective students and student-athletes, but they promote on a larger scale a healthier work-life balance. Campus communities are perhaps as healthy as they have ever been, thanks to the strategies by which institutions have normalized health and wellness as central, daily priorities. Ample research supports the correlation between increased productivity and contentment and that of mind-body wellness, and campus communities continue to benefit from the remarkable fitness-oriented facilities accessible to them.

Options for Everyone at NYU's Campus Recreation

In 2015, New York University (NYU) embarked on a massive expansion of the school's recreation and fitness facilities. The plan called for adding a staggering 1.9 million square feet of space, one which included construction of a 900,000 square-foot mixed-use facility providing strength training, cardio exercise, recreation classes, and locker rooms. In addition to fitness and recreation space, the facility also includes classrooms, student-life spaces, a large theater, four workshop theaters, other specialized spaces for the performing arts, and housing for about five hundred first-year students and one hundred faculty families. In this diversity of options for the campus community, NYU Campus Recreation represents precisely what campus communities want, both in the present day and going forward. In providing these amenities, NYU Campus Recreation offers opportunities and

experiences that enrich the daily experience at NYU.

The NYU community can choose from more than thirty-five group fitness classes that accommodate all levels and abilities. Classes are free to NYU students and members. Active Recovery is one such option, focusing on effective warm up and cool downs for workouts, foam rolling techniques, and stretching, as well as other forms of low intensity movement. This class is particularly beneficial in helping to improve flexibility, injury prevention, and knowledge for pain reduction of muscles. Other class options include ballet workouts, multiple dance workouts (ballroom, cardio, hip hop, contemporary, salsa, and Zumba), kickboxing, spinning, core-focused instruction, yoga, and meditation, in addition to water-based workouts. Members, for instance, can enjoy deep water running (managed by wearing a flotation belt) and swimming for aerobic fitness. Regarding



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the latter, students learn how to improve rhythm, coordination, and timing of their front crawl while developing sufficient strength to swim one-half mile by the end of the course.

For students who wish to learn or develop a specific skill, NYU offers several workshops throughout the academic year that are not only fun but also aid in participants' overall wellness. A self-defense class equips patrons with the basics and confidence to contend with potential moments of threat and conflict. Learning outcomes include discovering techniques, building confidence, and acquiring transformative communication and self-defense education. Another example is Mindful Movement: Dance + Wellness, a Campus Recreation pop-up series that fuses elements of Dance/Movement Therapy, evidence-based mindful practices, emotion-regulation techniques, and artistry to create a fun and inclusive environment. Students can even attend a workshop that teaches them how to ice skate. This multi-week workshop is led by Stacie Krinsky, the head coach of NYU Figure Skating. Krinsky supplies students with the basics of skating, body






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The University of Chicago's Award-Winning Ratner Center

Similar to the vibrant fitness culture at NYU, students, faculty, and staff at the University of Chicago have access to an impressive array of fitness facilities, programs, and services, all through the Department of Athletics and Recreation. On average, more than 4,500 students work out in the facilities each month. Among the fitness and wellness options provided, the University of Chicago community can enjoy nearly thirty fitness classes each quarter, and campus community members can even schedule virtual appointments with nationally certified personal trainers who will create comprehensive exercise programs unique to each client's needs.

The Gerald Ratner Athletics Center, designed by famed architect Cesar Pelli, is a 150,000 square-foot facility featuring the 50-meter x 25-yard Myers-McLoraine Swimming Pool and the Bernard DelGiorno Fitness Center. The Center also offers a

multipurpose dance studio, competition and auxiliary gymnasias, classroom and meeting room space, permanent and day lockers and locker rooms, as well as the University of Chicago Athletics Hall of Fame. The Ratner Center is likewise home to the university's basketball, volleyball, wrestling, swimming, and diving teams. The \$51 million facility has received awards from the American Council of Engineering Company, the American Institute of Steel Construction, and the Consulting Engineers Council of Illinois for excellence in engineering and design. Among the notable features of the two-story facility is a roof suspended by cables attached to five masts that peak one hundred feet from the ground.

The Bernard DelGiorno Fitness Center within the Ratner Center occupies two levels of the facility, plus the rotunda area. Open and full of life, the fitness center includes two weight circuits, free weights, rowing ergometers, elliptical trainers, recumbent and upright bicycles, step mills, and treadmills, many of which are equipped with cardio theatre options. Additional fitness center opportunities are available at Henry Crown

Field House; these options include cardio, resistance, functional, and weight training equipment. The Auxiliary Gym at the Ratner Center includes a multipurpose court that allows for indoor soccer as well as basketball, volleyball, wrestling, and badminton.

The most prominent feature of the Ratner Center is the Myers-McLoraine swimming pool, which includes up to twenty lanes in the 25-yard dimension and nine lanes in the 50-meter dimension; it also contains a moveable bulkhead that allows for simultaneous activities. Two one-meter diving boards are also available. The pool depth ranges from four feet in the shallow section to 13.5 feet in the diving well, allowing for a range of fitness and fun.

Combatting Stress and the "Freshman Fifteen"

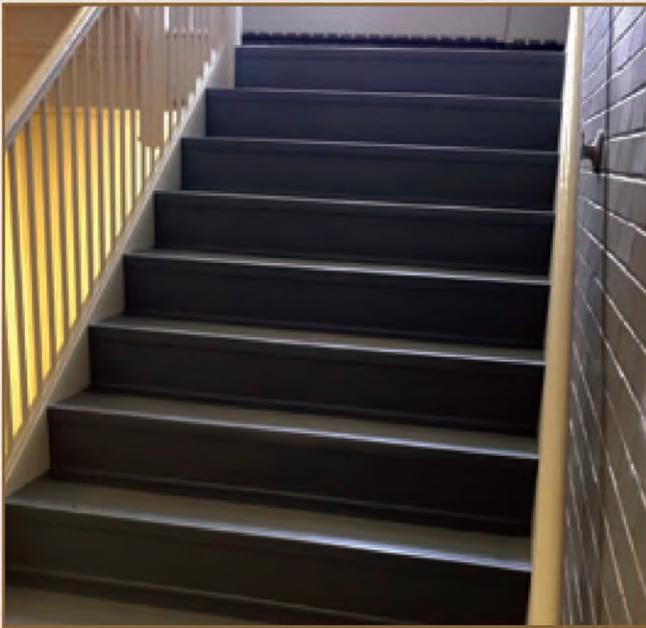
Not so long ago, campus fitness and recreation facilities were fairly limited. Sure, students could enjoy intramural sports and leisure-time activities, but campus recreation was hardly a major draw. In the 21st century, however, campus fitness and recreation is central to the mission and branding of many institutions, and schools lacking state-of-the-art facilities are at a keen disadvantage in terms of attracting students. Of course, even the most impressive fitness and recreation-oriented facilities are more than just bargaining chips for prospective students; they are instrumental in students' health and wellness. The notorious "freshman fifteen" remains a worry for many new students, but most pressing is the overall stress of college—whether from new campus living arrangements, academic struggles, or the financial aspects of paying tuition. This stress can take a serious toll on students' bodies and minds. Exercise, physical fitness, and fun—even a little each day—can make a crucial difference. Campuses with exciting and diverse amenities offer an escape from—and a cure for—the illness of stress.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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