

# Sport and recreation facility development in institutions of higher learning: A case study of the University of Western Ontario

## Contact details

Name author(s): W. James Weese (PhD, Professor and Dean) & Karen Danylchuk (Associate Professor)

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Western Ontario

City and country: London, Ontario, Canada

Email address for correspondence: [jweese1@uwo.ca](mailto:jweese1@uwo.ca)

## Preamble

Current and prospective students seek high quality sport and recreation facilities to enrich their post-secondary educational experience. It is often an important factor that prospective students evaluate in making an enrolment decision. University officials also recognise the role that high-quality sport and recreation facilities play in student recruitment, retention, enrichment and preparation. Naturally, wanting these facilities, and finding the funds to build them are entirely different issues, compounded by current financial realities.

The University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada was no exception. The institution proudly boasts its mission as offering the “best student experience among Canada’s research-intensive universities”. External reviews conducted by Canada’s “National Newspaper” flattered the university on most items, but also noted that the quantity and quality of campus sport and recreation facilities were insufficient and detracting from the institution’s ability to deliver on its mission. An opportunity existed to strategically rectify the problem.

## Aim of paper

Delegates in this session will understand how campus officials addressed this problem/opportunity, resulting in the construction of a \$35M Western Student Recreation Centre, which opened to rave reviews on January 5, 2009. Participants will learn how this project was strategically positioned around the mission of the university (Charan, 2008). They will also understand how support was generated with both student leaders and senior university leaders, which resulted in simultaneous commitments of \$23M and \$12M to make the project a reality. Finally, delegates will hear of the impact that this facility has had on our campus, including information on number of Canadian University delegations that have subsequently toured the facility and replicated our processes.

## Organisational/managerial context

Participants will hear about leadership practices related to creating the vision, building and broadening support for the vision from the student leaders (conditional on gaining 1/3 institutional support) and from senior campus authorities (conditional on gaining 2/3 student support), getting the question to a student referendum, increasing the likelihood for success, and finally, realising the dream. Conger (1989: 30) suggested that effective leaders “[...] get people to see ‘what is’, to see reality, to see that they are not contributing to the best of their abilities [...] then you have to get them to buy into your vision”.

Delegates will be shown images of the new Western Student Recreation Centre and hear of its success and impact since opening in January of 2009.

### **Organisational/managerial practice/issues**

Delegates will hear about the application of a number of leadership and strategy concepts implemented to make this vision become a reality. Bennis (1989) noted long ago that leaders, at every level, needed to think conceptually, entrepreneurially and strategically about their organisation. However, credibility needs to be established first at all levels (Kouzes & Posner, 1993) to build strong and effective relationships. Delegates at this session will understand these concepts and appreciate their application.

### **Implications for sport and sport management**

This session will appeal to both sport management academicians and practitioners. Sport management schools will appreciate the application of leadership and strategy concepts. Sport Management practitioners, based in either the public or private sector will understand the need for developing relationships with decision-makers and funding sources, coupling the proposal strategically to the mission of the organisation, and implementing best practices to build support for the project.

### **References**

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