

UNCA plans \$42 million fitness center

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If all goes smoothly, the North Carolina Center for Health & Wellness will open its doors by fall 2011.

"We will start to see walls going up by the end of this semester," said Keith Ray, director of the center and associate professor of health and wellness at UNC Asheville.

The state granted the university \$35 million to build the center. An additional \$7 million from private donors will equip the building. The popularity of the project attracted numerous bidders, but the price for construction is still undergoing negotiations.

"Because the economy is bad, the bids came in very low, which saves our university a lot of money and ensures that we're able to get everything that should be in that building in there," said Janet Cone, UNCA director of athletics and program coordinator of the project. "We're thrilled that we're going to get a lot more bang for our buck than we would've had 18 months ago."

The new center will provide an unprecedented and holistic approach to wellness.

"For the first time, our university will have a very large, multipurpose facility," Cone said. "It gives us an unbelievable opportunity for the university to have a space to do a lot of different things."

Three areas of focus for the center are childhood obesity, senior wellness and workplace wellness.

"We're going to be looked as a national leader in the area of health and wellness," she said. "It's not just good for our university, it's good for the community and for the state of North Carolina."

Alongside research labs, the building will house the entire health and wellness department, the fastest growing major at UNCA.

One of the main goals of the new center is to educate people on healthy habits to make it easier to lead a fit lifestyle.

"It's about creating a climate and structure that encourages and provides incentives for faculty and students across disciplines to be involved in the work of the center," Ray said. "We want the center to belong to the entire university."

The money from donors will allow students and faculty from all departments to participate in research conducted at the center.



Photo courtesy of UNC Asheville

Plans for North Carolina Health and Wellness Center, set to open in 2011.

"Ultimately, what the center is about is creating a national community campus partnership model," he said. "In other words, how does a public, undergraduate liberal arts university partner with the community to make a measurable difference in the quality of people's lives and health?"

Partnerships with existing programs in the community such as the Mountain Area Health Education Center and the Healthy Buncombe Coalition will also be a large part of the facility.

"We want to recognize, celebrate and support the work of different agencies around the community in the area of health and wellness," Ray said.

The importance of the center lies in inspiring people to think more health consciously.

"Our mission says that we are a leading catalyst for prevention of chronic health conditions through the promotion of healthy living among North Carolinians

of all ages," he said.

"We will also have a multipurpose area in this new building that will seat roughly 3,800 to 4,000 people," Ray said.

This area, the Kimmel Arena, will provide space for commencement ceremonies, conferences and basketball.

Due to Asheville's green reputation, the ecological impacts of the construction stand out.

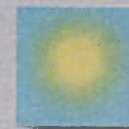
"We, from the very beginning, intended to make this as sustainable as possible given the amount of money we had and what our needs were," Ray said.

Although the progression of the center is not yet widely known, students are expressing their anticipation.

"Though I haven't heard that much about the new center, I'm excited about the prospect of a place that will be important not only to the university but to the community as well," said Sara Holland, senior art history student and captain of the women's soccer team at UNCA.

Weather

compiled by Morgan Weeks and Sarah Jessop



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