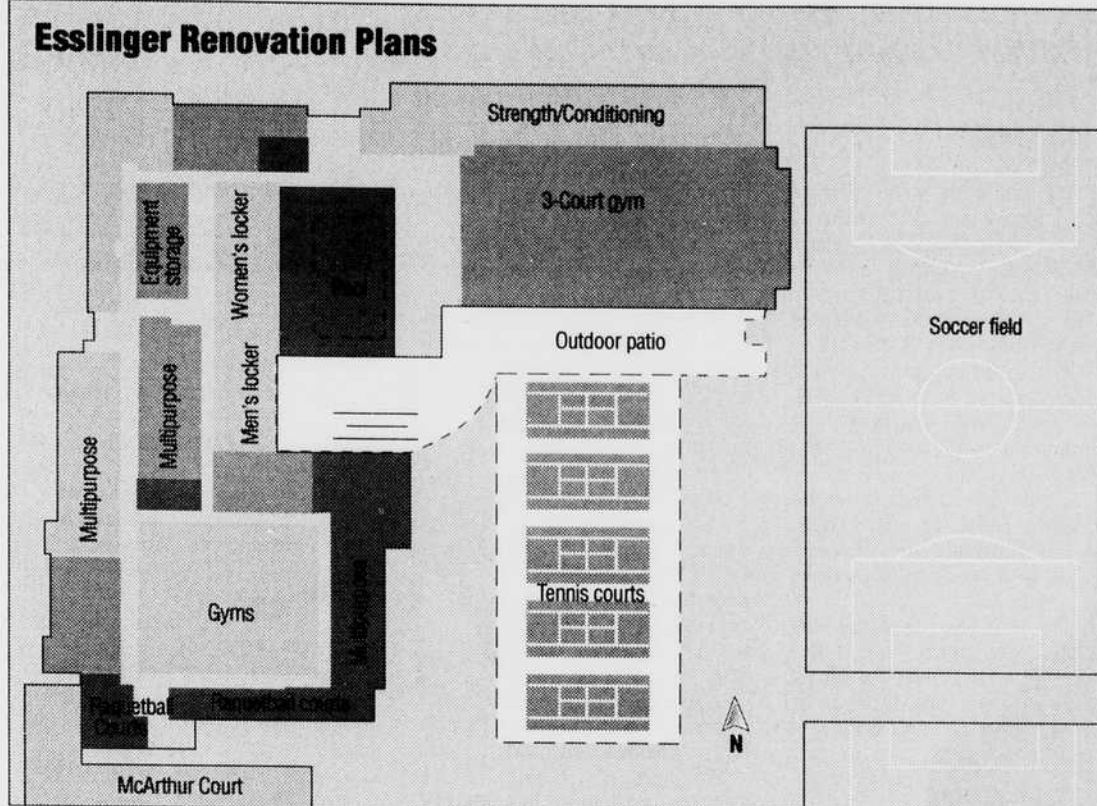


Mind & Body

Esslinger Renovation Plans



Matt Garton/Emerald

Esslinger renovation nearly half-finished

The exercise center will focus on providing a place for socializing

By Teri Meeuwse
Oregon Daily Emerald

When students return to the University in the fall, they will have more than just a place to burn calories and build bulk. They'll have a place to relax with friends in the juice bar, climb an indoor rock-climbing wall and run on a new suspended indoor running track.

The \$19 million construction project that now engulfs Esslinger Hall will be half-finished with one more phase to be completed by summer session 2000.

"It will be a pleasant place to linger," said Gregg Lobisser, project manager and associate dean of student life. "This will be a place for health and fitness, but there is no question in our design that we're acknowledging the social qualities."

Molly Kennedy, facilities coordinator, said there's a misconception that Esslinger Hall is just about people who work out.

"It's not just for athletes," she said. "It's for everyone who wants a place to hang out. It's just a matter of getting them here."

While improvements on Leighton Pool were finished earlier this term, students will be able to access the first phase's rewards in the fall, including a larger strength and conditioning

room, a new three-court gymnasium and remodeled, larger locker rooms.

But getting to that stage has taken some time.

While on schedule, the first phase of the hall's construction consisted of most of the major wall remodeling, using \$13 million of the project's budget. The sidewalk, the steps and a new entrance are just a couple of examples.

"It's more time-consuming to take things out of the ground than put finishing touches on," Lobisser said.

When the new entrance is completed, students will see a waterfall over basalt columns where a "bite" was taken out of a barrier. This \$120,000 part of the project accommodates the 1% for Art requirement. When a building is built or renovated, it is required by state law to include a piece of art.

Funds for the project came from three sources. The majority of the money comes from student recreational fees, Lobisser said. All students pay the fee even if they do not use the recreational facility. Students voted to increase the student incidental fees by \$7.75 per term in the fall of 1995 to help pay for the renovations.

About \$8.5 million comes from state building fees collected by the Oregon University System. The remainder of the resources

came from fund raising.

When the \$6 million second phase is finished in 2000, students will see even more of the project's rewards.

More gym space, remodeled racquetball courts, enclosed tennis courts and an improved synthetic soccer field will be open for enjoyment.

"It can be a place that turns into a place to relax in-between classes [and working out]," said Michelle Martin, a junior sociology major. "If they have a class at the rock climbing wall, then they can finish that up and hang out for a couple hours afterwards."

Junior business major Sean Tomashiro said the newness of the building will attract more students.

"It will just be the place to be," he said. "It will be like the Fish-bowl is now — a newer and lighter social environment."

All of the new facilities will benefit the University's recruitment and retention, Lobisser said. Students who are health-oriented and students who aren't will have a nice place to develop relationships and a sense of belonging.

"We're not trying to duplicate the mission of the EMU," Lobisser said. "Thousands of students will meet there and we created the open spaces to let that happen. It will be a place for health and fitness but will be a social melee as well."

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