



A row of treadmills in a gym with a yellow wall and modern lighting. The treadmills are arranged in a line, and the background features a yellow wall with a large abstract mural on the left and a window on the right. The lighting is warm and modern, with pendant lights hanging from the ceiling.

INNOVATION WITH GREEN ENERGY THROUGH CAMPUS REC CENTERS

by Ruben Mejia

Going green and becoming more conscious of environmental impacts continues to be embraced by people and organizations worldwide, and college campuses are no exception.

Both Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), the latest generations to matriculate to college or university, are demonstrating that they have the knowledge, will, and capacity to create lifestyles that promote positive, sustainable change for the environment. In turn, they want their chosen college or university to reflect these values back to them. Brand-savvy and keen on doing the research before making a big decision, millennials and Gen Z alike take pride in knowing which colleges and universities are “walking the walk” when it comes to sustainability on campus.

With Gen Z beginning their college careers, everything from program offerings to institutional goals are constantly changing. Colleges must do more than offer prospective students their academic program of choice; they must provide an outstanding student experience beyond academics from the get-go. However, now that sustainability and movements to go green are more popular than ever, colleges and universities are responding by adopting

sustainability initiatives that not only help our planet, but also capitalize on the opportunity to attract prospective students by highlighting the tools and support offered to live a green lifestyle aligning with their personal values.

According to the *U.S. News and World Report*, more than eight hundred colleges and universities across the United States have pledged the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment, which sets a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions on their campuses with the ultimate goal of becoming carbon neutral. These commitments align with the values of incoming students, as a 2019 *Princeton Review* poll reports 64% of applicants surveyed (approximately 12,000) would factor in school’s environmental and sustainability commitments and goals when deciding where to attend. Going beyond campus-wide recycling programs and solar panel installation, colleges and universities should continue to explore new and alternative green programs in an effort to achieve

carbon neutral status. One area to achieve these aims is through campus recreation centers, which offer an untapped opportunity for administrators to create an engaging, green fitness experience that can help foster a sense of community and inclusion through the student body.

Many colleges and universities offer grants or alternative funding for sustainability initiatives, oftentimes reducing—or eliminating—the financial burden that accompanies making these changes for the student recreation or athletic department. One alternative funding source can come from student government programs that work to support sustainable efforts across campuses. With rising energy costs—recent studies show 47% of recreation facilities account for annual building energy—installing self-powered cardio equipment can be a natural progression towards offering a more energy-efficient and sustainable experience for students across college and university campuses.

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Energy savings can help attract today's green-minded students to their campus fitness centers. Traditional treadmills use an average of one kilowatt hour, which equates to a refrigerator running for five hours. However, innovative solutions like the energy-generating ECO-POWR™ treadmills from SportsArt convert up to 74% of human energy into usable electricity. As a result, one treadmill can reduce the need to purchase that one kilowatt hour from the electric company, while generating up to an additional 200 watt-hours. That energy generation means a single student working out on a single energy-generating cardio machine can create a net positive 1.2 kilowatts of electricity per hour.

For many students, living and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a priority, both before their enrollment and after graduation. Up to 68% of students report campus recreation facilities influence their decision of which college to attend, which is why many campus recreation facilities are often highlighted and touted as destinations on college tours. Participating in recreation activities and programs expands interest in staying fit and healthy; they're often seen as a hub of social activity, where students can gather to connect with friends, reduce

stress, have fun, and relax. These facilities offer a safe and positive environment for students, and they can, in turn, help improve student wellness outcomes overall.

On-campus recreation centers are used by as many as 75% of students. By leveraging emerging technologies, colleges and universities can change how students create positive and sustainable outcomes for their overall health and wellness on campus. On-campus recreation centers are a component of holistic development for students. Eco-friendly athletic and recreation centers give colleges and universities the ability to demonstrate the direct impact of being environmentally conscious while instilling a great sense of pride on campus.

Attracting students to visit their campus's fitness center is just the first step. Gen Z students are the first generation of "digital natives" to attend college, meaning that the majority of them are tech-savvy and expect schools to offer technology to accompany their workouts. This expectation goes well beyond simply offering televisions on top of equipment. Instead, by including software ecosystems and mobile apps that work directly with the fitness equipment, campuses can ensure students are getting the most out of

their campus recreation center. In addition, including a gamification aspect offers additional opportunity for students to be even more engaged in their workouts. Through tracking workouts, for example, not only do students have the ability to see their workout metrics in real time, and they can also opt to see how their workouts stack up against their fellow students. These comparisons can foster friendly competition, motivation, camaraderie, and fun for students. When campuses combine these capabilities with workout equipment that can generate power back into the campus power grid, students may find themselves working out more frequently and know that their workouts makes a difference.

For institutions, installing energy-saving and energy-generating equipment can help reduce costs and offset carbon emissions over time. Combined with digital integrations, this new information can be brought to the forefront and put on display to highlight sustainability efforts and show students how their workouts can positively impact the planet. This situation can offer students the unique sense of ownership in helping give back, and of living the green lifestyle they strive for. By seeing the electric power they are generating firsthand, students can take

pride in seeing how their actions are helping the campus community and beyond. These insights can mean that a simple workout can transcend a student's time on campus. Going green and making changes to become eco-friendly is an ongoing process that both colleges and students can take pride in. New developments and innovation in energy-generating workout equipment and updated technology integrations will provide campus recreation and athletic directors even more opportunity to provide engagement to students in unique and meaningful ways. As sustainability continues to grow, the evolution of technology has made it possible for students, facility, and staff to engage with greener solutions for a better tomorrow in our shared world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ruben Mejia, Executive Vice President for SportsArt America, has more than twenty-four years of collective experience across the technology, e-commerce, and fitness industries. In his current role, Mejia focuses on product software and technology; he also manages external customer relationships, marketing, and sales.

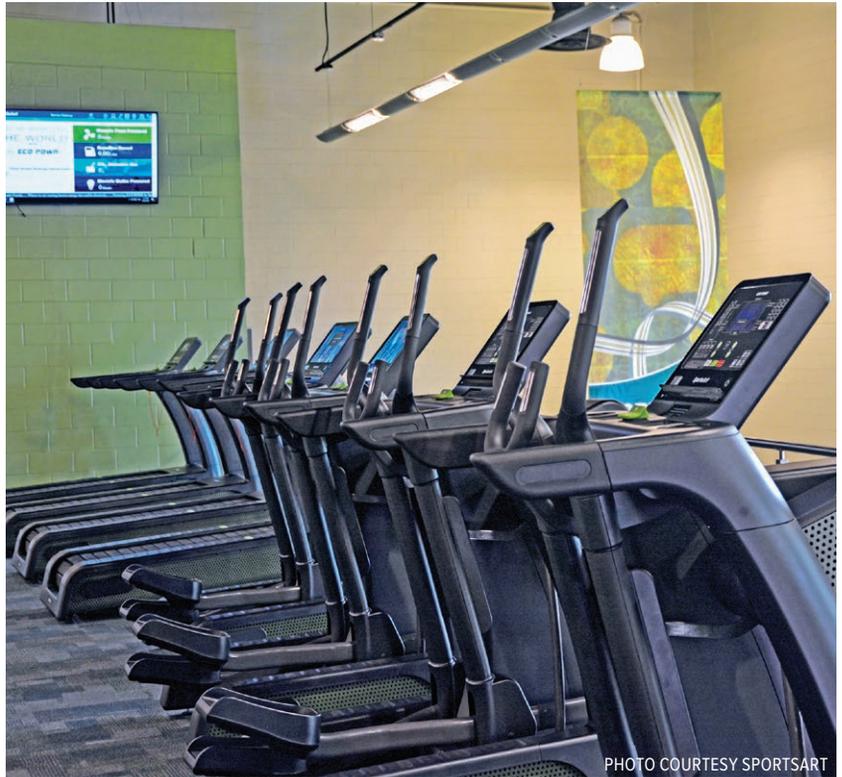


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