

# **Proposal for Change to the Marcellus Dodge Fitness Center**

**Columbia College Student Council  
February 2002**

To the Administration:

On Wednesday January 30<sup>th</sup>, the Columbia College Student Council sent the following e-mail to the Columbia College Student Body:

The Gym is always open when I want to use it, and I always find enough room to exercise. Agree? Disagree? This semester, the CCSC will be investigating the ways in which Dodge might be improved, and we need your help. If you've got an opinion about any aspect of the Gym, we want to know. Reply to this e-mail, and we'll use your responses to advocate for the changes you want to see.

In the past, we have sent out similar e-mails, asking for student input on Health and Related Services, Dining Services, and issues pertaining to Academic Affairs. To the e-mail above, however, we received the largest response yet—over 150 students sent us their suggestions regarding how to improve the Columbia gym experience.

Overwhelmingly, the responses we received described the gym as too crowded, and its hours as too limited. What follows is a report and a series of proposals based both on those student e-mail responses, many of which are reprinted in the appendix of this document, and on research undertaken by the CCSC.

Our primary proposal is to keep the Dodge Gym and Fitness Center open until 12 AM on weeknights; we strongly urge you to extend the hours of the gym to meet what we can prove is significant student demand.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michael “Novi” Novielli – President  
Albert Shin – Student Services Representative

Seth Caffrey – Vice President, Policy  
Tamar Simon – University Senator

## Proposal One: Extending the Hours of the Gym

### **Observation:**

Any one who has been to the Dodge Fitness Center knows just how crowded the facility can get: on the upper floor, treadmills and stationary bicycles are always in use, the lines for cardio machines are sometimes hours long, the track is nearly always packed with runners, and stretching mats are in short supply; on the middle floors, the free-weight rooms are always full, and the weight-lifting machines crowded; and on the lower floors, both University Gymnasium and Levien Gymnasium are nearly always occupied by one group or another. As a result of these conditions a great many undergraduates feel “crowded,” “rushed,” “frustrated,” and find the gym “far too busy for a comfortable workout.”

### **Proposal:**

Given that expansion of the Dodge Physical Fitness Center is an impossibility, we propose that the gym remain open until 12AM on weeknights.

### **Argument:**

Many undergraduates find that they are too busy juggling classes and schoolwork during the day to make their way over to the gym for a workout before dinnertime. As a result, the number of undergraduate recreational users at Dodge peaks around this time, and becomes especially amplified as late classes let out. A large number of these users find themselves at Dodge within the same window of time—from 7PM until the gym closes at 10PM—and experience the gym as “too crowded.” Were the hours of the gym extended and the crush of post-dinner, post-class users able to spread themselves over a greater length of time, the volume at any one point in time would decrease. Given that very few undergraduates go to bed before midnight, and that nearly all of the e-mails we received asked that the hours of the gym be extended, we believe sufficient demand exists to justify keeping the gym open after 10PM. Indeed, in an online survey posted on the CCSC website, 85 percent of the nearly 200 respondents said they would make use of the Dodge Fitness Center after 10 PM, were it open to them.

To anyone who works out, that there is a link between mental health and physical health is indisputable. Quite simply, when we are active and in shape, we feel better and think better. At a University committed to protecting the overall well-being of its students, any change that makes the gym more accessible to students—that gives more students the opportunity to improve their physical health and, consequently, their mental health—should be adopted.

It also has come to our attention that, in response to the conditions they find in Dodge, a number of Columbia undergraduates have decided to join neighborhood gyms instead. That this is a growing practice among former Dodge users is unfortunate, and speaks to the fact that a change in gym policy is warranted. Given the amount they pay

to attend Columbia, Columbia students should not find themselves leaving the Columbia gym feeling as if the service rendered them there was inadequate. Meeting student demand by extending the hours of the gym is a step towards shaping a truly student-centered facility.

In proposing that the hours of the gym be extended until midnight, we point also to the policies in effect at our peer institutions. At NYU—like Columbia, a private institution in New York City—the gym stays open until 11PM. At Dartmouth, the gym stays open until 11PM. At Cornell, the gym stays open until 11.30 PM. At the University of Pennsylvania and Georgetown, the gym stays open until midnight. And at the University of California schools, the gym stays open until 2AM.

**Conclusion:**

We are convinced that more than just a vocal minority of Columbia students are interested in seeing the hours of the gym extended. Our experience as student leaders on campus has led us to conclude that this particular issue is of the utmost importance to a very large segment of the undergraduate population. We offer this proposal on their behalf.

## Proposal Two: Machine Quality and Upkeep

**Observation:**

Over one-third of the e-mails received by the CCSC offered a critique of the machines available in the gym. Commonly, these e-mails included the following three complaints: there are too few machines in the gym; the machines in the gym are of sub-standard quality; and a number of the machines in the gym are broken.

**Proposal:**

The members of the CCSC are not qualified to assess the quality of the machines available in the gym, and we do appreciate the fact that space constraints limit significantly the number of machines that are available. Taking these considerations into account, the CCSC proposes that gym employees keep track of individual machine usage, make note of those machines that go unused, and attend promptly to those that are broken. We further propose that gym administrators consider updating or replacing those machines that receive the least traffic.

## Proposal Three: Ventilation

**Observation:**

A significant number of the e-mails received by the CCSC noted that the lack of ventilation in the gym, particularly in the enclosed weight rooms on the middle floors, is problematic. The stuffy conditions make it difficult to enjoy a full workout.

**Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that gym administrators look into improving the quality of ventilation in Dodge. Interim solutions may include adding upright fans in the workout rooms.

## Proposal Four: Machine Sign Up Protocol

### **Observation:**

Currently, students interested in using the stationary bicycles, stair masters, treadmills, and cardio machines sign up for 30 minute blocks on the second floor of Dodge. Because the sign up sheets are several floors away from the machines themselves, determining which patrons belong on which machines for which blocks of time becomes problematic, inconvenient, and time consuming.

### **Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that sign up sheets for machines be placed near the machines themselves—either on the side of each piece of equipment, or in the general area of the equipment.

## Proposal Five: Gym Rules

**Observation:**

A number of e-mails received by the CCSC referred to the frequency with which patrons in the Dodge Fitness Center ignore basic gym rules. Students especially made note of the failure of other patrons to wipe off machines and re-rack free weights at the conclusion of their workouts, and the unwillingness of some gym patrons to allow others to “work-in” with them.

**Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that the gym compile and post a list of basic rules of gym usage in the most heavily trafficked areas of Dodge, including the locker rooms and work-out rooms.

## Proposal Six: Publicity of Basketball Court Hours

### **Observation:**

Because Dodge has a limited number of basketball courts, and because varsity teams often practice on those courts, recreational athletes are left with few places to play pick-up games of basketball. While in the warmer months a large number of students turn to Riverside Park for open courts, during the colder months recreational basketball players are forced into Dodge. When these recreational players are lucky enough to find an open court, they are often asked to leave as varsity team practices get underway. For these students, the trek to Dodge for 10 or 15 minutes of court time is an inconvenience—had they known the schedule beforehand, they would have planned their gym time accordingly.

### **Proposal:**

Given that court space at Dodge is so limited, the CCSC proposes that the schedules for both Levien Gymnasium and University Gymnasium be made available on the gym website.

## Proposal Seven: Barnard Gym Hours

### **Observation:**

It has come to the attention of the CCSC that although Columbia students are permitted to use the basketball courts in Barnard Hall, very few undergraduates are aware of the availability of Barnard's facilities. Among those undergraduates who are aware of Barnard's availability, the following complaint is common: while Barnard policy requires that a "student representative" be present in order for Columbia undergraduates to make use of Barnard's facilities, often there is no representative on duty, and use of the Barnard courts is thus restricted.

### **Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that Dodge administrators publicize the availability of basketball courts at Barnard Hall, and that Barnard court hours be posted on the gym website. Furthermore, the CCSC proposes that Columbia gym administrators look into complaints received from Columbia undergraduates regarding the absence of "student representatives" in the Barnard gym.

## Proposal Eight: Extended Pool Hours

**Observation:**

Because of the number of varsity teams and physical education classes that make use of the pool every day, pool hours for recreational swimmers are significantly limited and somewhat sporadic.

**Proposal:**

Given that the pool facilities at Dodge are obviously limited, the CCSC proposes that the gym post the times of open pool hours on its website. Furthermore, the CCSC proposes that as the hours of Dodge are extended, pool hours be extended as well.

## Proposal Nine: Availability of Stretching Mats

**Observation:**

A significant number of the e-mails received by the CCSC noted that there are too few stretching mats in the gym. Given that students in line to use gym equipment often spend their wait stretching, the shortage of stretching mats is problematic.

**Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that the gym make available to its patrons more stretching mats. While the stretching area in the middle of the track on the top floor of the gym is already crowded, space is available for stretching in the lobby near the entrance to Levien Gymnasium, and courtside in University Gymnasium.

## Proposal Ten: Customer Service

**Observation:**

It has come to the attention of the CCSC that gym patrons often find the quality of customer service offered by gym employees to be substandard. In the appendix of this report the CCSC has compiled a number of the e-mails received over the last several weeks; specific complaints regarding the quality of customer service in the gym may be found there.

**Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that gym administrators emphasize to employees that gym users, though students, are also patrons, and deserve to be treated with courtesy and respect.

## Proposal Eleven: Shower Curtains in Women's Locker Room

**Observation:**

A number of the e-mails received by the CCSC noted the lack of shower curtains in the women's locker room.

**Proposal:**

The CCSC proposes that shower curtains be installed in the women's locker room.

## Appendix: Summary and E-Mails Received

The CCSC received 150 e-mails in response to the school-wide e-mail of January 30<sup>th</sup> soliciting student input regarding the gym. Those e-mails are compiled in the pages that follow. For your convenience, however, a tally of the primary issues raised follows below:

Issue	Number of E-Mails Received
Number of Machines Available in Gym	56
Crowding/Space Constraints	44
Machine Sign-Up Protocol	35
Availability of Basketball Courts	16
Number of Stretching Mats	11

In addition, on February 13<sup>th</sup> the CCSC placed on its website ([www.columbia.edu/cu/ccsc](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ccsc)) an online poll asking “If the gym had extended hours, would you go after 10PM?” By February 14<sup>th</sup>, 190 students had taken the poll; 85 percent answered that they would use the gym during extended hours. The poll, including updated results, is still available on the CCSC website.