

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 258
By: Pena
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) is located in Edinburg, Texas. The University serves an area of Texas facing many socio-economic challenges. Among these challenges is the limited awareness of the issues and factors affecting personal health and wellness. With those issues in mind the Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services began exploring the possibility of creating a new wellness-recreation center about two years ago. The Student Government Association voted to support the exploration of constructing such a center. In the fall of 2003, a Task Force of students, faculty, and staff was appointed to research the issue and develop a recommendation. The Wellness-Recreation Task Force surveyed more than 600 students and toured five newly constructed recreation centers. Task Force members learned how a quality wellness-recreation center could facilitate the development of a healthier lifestyle; in addition, Task Force members also saw first-hand how a new center could serve as a focal point for students and transform campus life. As a result, the Task Force voted unanimously to recommend the creation of a fee not to exceed \$75 per semester to fund the planning, construction, and maintenance of a wellness-recreation center at UTPA. This fee would allow the University to build a center approximately 100,000 square feet in size, at a cost of \$20-24 million. After meeting with many student organizations and holding two campus forums, the referendum was held March 29-April 1. With more than 1,600 students voting, an overwhelming majority of students (86.5%) voted in favor of creating the wellness-recreation center.

A new wellness-recreation center at UTPA can promote the development of a healthier, more active lifestyle that will benefit students for the rest of their lives. UTPA currently has some recreation and fitness facilities, but these facilities are limited both in terms of resources and availability. Because these facilities also are used to meet Athletics and Kinesiology Department needs, students who want to exercise or engage in other recreation activities are left with few hours to do so. In fact, UTPA's recreational facilities are open to students only 18 hours per week, which is fewer than UT Austin's facilities are open each day. In general, most universities UTPA's size have their fitness facilities open approximately 100 hours per week.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

SECTION 1 - Subchapter E, Chapter 54, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 54.5421, to allow the board of regents of the University of Texas System to charge a fee of no more than \$75 per semester or summer session for the purpose of creating and operating a sports recreation and wellness facility and program. The fee may not be imposed or increased unless approved by a majority of students voting in a general election called for that purpose.

SECTION 2 - Effective date.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This Act takes effect immediately if it receives two-thirds vote approval of all members elected to each house. Otherwise, this Act takes effect September 1, 2005.