

Athletics and Recreation Value for Money Report

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

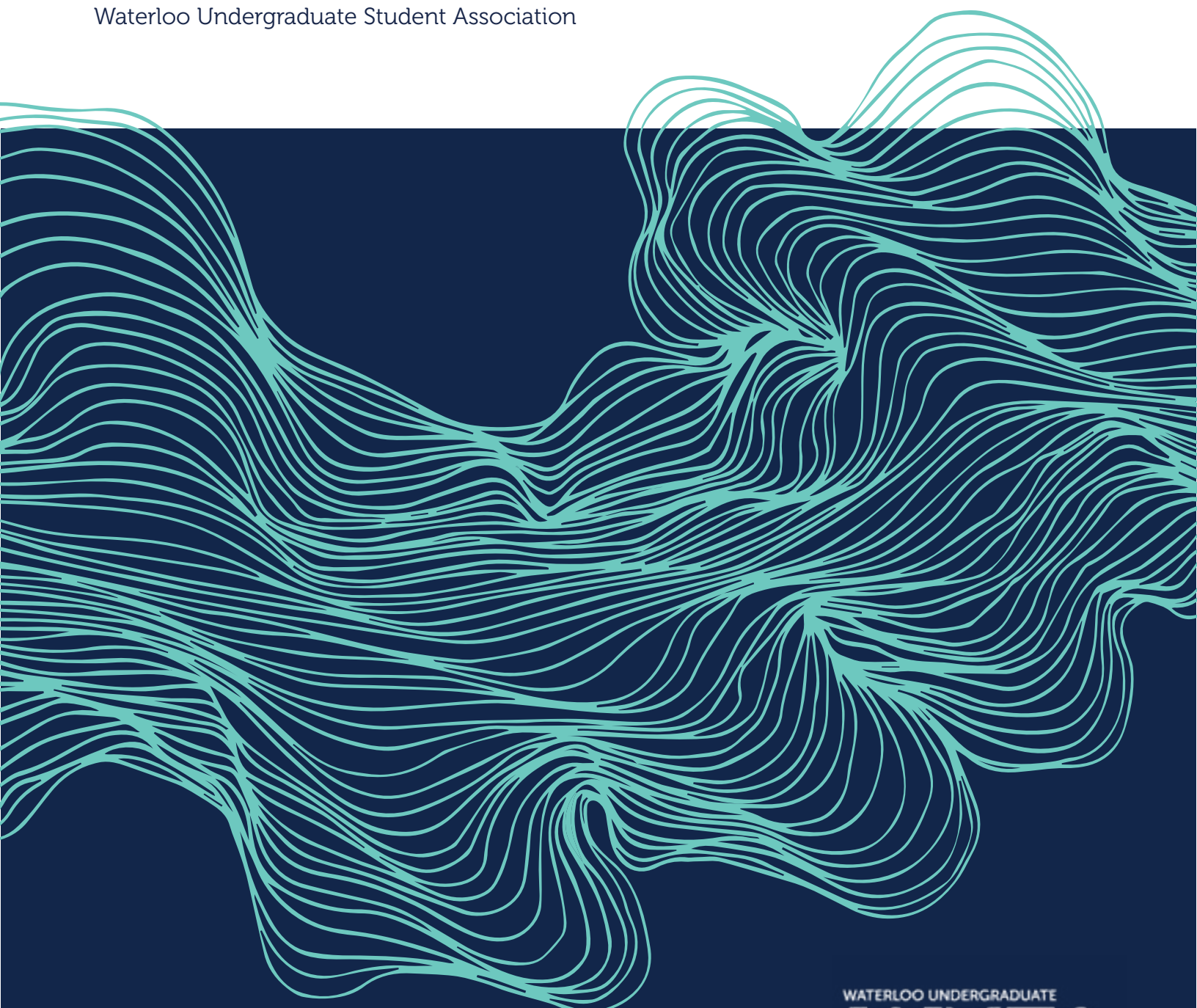


Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Background of report	3
Purpose and Scope	3
Methodology Overview	4
Data Limitations	4
Overview of Athletics and Recreation Fee	5
2024-2025 SSAC Fee Breakdown	5
Structure and Breakdown of the A&R Fee	6
Overall Funding Sources for Athletics and Recreation	7
Comparison with Peer Institutions	8
History of Athletics Fee at the University of Waterloo	9
Comparison With Local Providers	9
Summary of Local Provider Offerings	11
Optional Fees for Athletics and Recreation Programming	11
Additional Program Costs	12
Athletics and Recreation Generated Data	13
PAC and CIF Building Usage	13
Registered Recreation Programs	13
Making Space Programing (Equity-Focused Programming)	15
Varsity Participation	15
Varsity Game Student Attendance	17
Student Consultation and Analysis	18
Athletics and Recreation Space and Facility Analysis	18
Student Experience and Satisfaction	20
Overall Satisfaction by Program	20
Wait Time and Perceived Crowding	21
Facility Offerings and Equipment	22
Varsity Athletics Analysis	22
Perceived Value of the Athletics Fee	24
Recommendations	27
Appendices	32

Executive Summary

The Athletics and Recreation Value for Money Report was developed in response to a motion passed at the Winter 2023 Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) Annual General Meeting, mandating a comprehensive evaluation of the Athletics and Recreation (A&R) fee. This compulsory component of the Student Services and Advisory Committee (SSAC) fee funds a range of services that contribute to the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of undergraduate students. The report assesses the value that students receive for the services provided to them from Athletics and Recreation.

Drawing on institutional data (2021–2024), WUSA's Representative Survey Platform (RSP) results (2023–2025), and benchmarking against peer universities and private recreation providers, the findings indicate that the University of Waterloo delivers sound financial value relative to both cost and breadth of services. At \$141.39 per term per student (or \$35.35 per month), the A&R fee grants students access to a comprehensive suite of facilities that would otherwise cost between \$200 and \$400 per month through commercial providers for a smaller complement of offerings.

Student satisfaction across most recreation offerings is consistently high, with average ratings between 3.9 and 4.3 out of 5. Access to facilities and programs was a consistent strength of the service offerings. Intramural participation continues to grow year-over-year, with over 16,000 registrants in 2023–2024. Students overwhelmingly noted that there are opportunities to enhance facility and equipment maintenance that resulted in a negative experience. Additional concerns identified by students include wait times, wanting more open recreation hours, and access challenges for satellite campus students compared to main campus students.

In contrast, the report finds that varsity athletics, while offering high-impact experiences for student athletes, generates limited engagement among the wider student population. Through WUSA's administered RSP approximately 70% of students reported that they have never attended a varsity event, despite the program receiving nearly 50% of the total assessed budget via SSAC. This raises questions regarding proportional return on investment. Further work is required to determine if there is a need to rebalance the funding model of Athletics and Recreation or strengthen community engagement around varsity sport.

From a philosophical standpoint, the continuation of the A&R fee as a mandatory contribution is justified by the principles of collective investment and community benefit. The model ensures that all students, regardless of income, ability, or interest, can access essential wellness and recreation opportunities, while sustaining the infrastructure and programs that enhance campus life for the entire community.

Key recommendations emphasize the importance of data modernization, transparency, and inclusive access. These include implementing a more robust user tracking system at all facilities

to improve user analytics; publishing an annual Athletics and Recreation Impact Report; reviewing optional program fees to reduce participation barriers; expanding services to satellite campuses; and improving communication regarding how fees are allocated and utilized.

Overall, the Athletics and Recreation fee provides strong value for money and is essential to sustaining a healthy, engaged, and connected student community. Continued collaboration between WUSA and the Athletics and Recreation Department, supported by enhanced data systems and transparent reporting, will ensure that every student receives tangible and equitable benefits from this collective investment.

Introduction

Background of report

At the Winter 2023 Annual Members' Meeting, the membership of WUSA passed a motion directing WUSA to prepare and publicly release a report evaluating the value that the Athletics and Recreation (A&R) program provides to undergraduate students at the University of Waterloo.

This motion reflected growing student interest in understanding how the Athletics and Recreation fee, a compulsory portion of the Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC) fee, contributes to student experience, wellness, and campus engagement.

Mandate from the Membership

Be it resolved that *WUSA prepare and publicly release a report on the Athletics and Recreation fee and the value it provides to students.*

Be it further resolved that *the report should include representative data on student use of athletics space, the perceived value that students receive from the athletics fee, details on what areas that students feel the Athletics Department is not sufficiently serving students, the perceived value of varsity athletics funded through the athletics fee, an analysis of whether the athletics fee should remain compulsory, and any other data deemed relevant to the issue; and*

Be it further resolved that *the report contains recommendations on an advocacy stance for WUSA to take on the athletics fee and changes to the model by which athletics services are delivered, if any.*

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this report is to assess the value-for-money of the Athletics and Recreation fee in relation to the services provided to undergraduate students. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Explain the structure and allocation of the A&R fee within the broader SSAC framework.
- Assess student usage of Athletics and Recreation facilities and programming.
- Evaluate student satisfaction related to service quality, accessibility, and facility condition.
- Identify gaps and improvement opportunities in program delivery and data reporting.
- Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the student experience and is intended to guide WUSA's advocacy position on the future of the fee model.

Methodology Overview

The findings in this report draw from several primary sources:

- Institutional data and financial information provided by the Athletics and Recreation Department (2021–2024).
- Results from two Representative Survey Platform (RSP) studies (2023–2025) prepared by WUSA, focusing on health, wellness, and athletics experience.
- Benchmarking with peer Ontario universities and select private-sector recreation providers.
- Comparative analysis of student satisfaction and facility performance indicators.

Together, these data sources form the foundation of this report's evaluation of the Athletics and Recreation program and its value to undergraduate students at Waterloo.

Data Limitations

Within this report it is important to identify what data limitations were experienced that did have an impact on being able to fully evaluate all components of the department's operations:

- Facility usage data: CIF does require card swipes, however, it is not enforced via access controlled infrastructure which has resulted in skewed usage rates at this specific facility that do not capture the entire data set.
- Without accurate individual-level data, it is impossible to calculate how frequently students use facilities or whether heavy users skew totals.
- Program participation by demographic: A&R did not provide breakdowns by faculty, year, campus (Waterloo vs. Cambridge vs. Stratford), or student group (e.g., off-campus, co-op). This information is crucial to evaluate whether the programs and services meet the needs of the broad student population.
- Cost breakdown for operations: A&R shared high-level allocations but not detailed budgets, therefore limiting any in-depth analysis.
- Limited to no publicly available data in relation to other Ontario universities' Athletics and Recreation offerings to compare against. This limited the ability to conduct a comparison in relation to similar institutions.
- Limited financial data from other Ontario universities of how funding is allocated makes it challenging to assess resource allocation in relation to service levels.

Overview of Athletics and Recreation Fee

2024-2025 SSAC Fee Breakdown

The Athletics and Recreation (A&R) fee is a compulsory incidental fee collected as part of the University of Waterloo’s Student Services and Athletics Complex (SSAC) fee. The SSAC fee supports a range of campus services including Athletics & Recreation, Student Buildings, Co-operative Education & Career Action, Campus Wellness, the Student Success Office, and the Writing & Communication Centre.

Students enrolled in 1.5 or more academic units pay the full-time rate, while those registered in fewer than 1.5 units pay approximately 30% of the full-time fee. The A&R portion funds operating costs for facilities, varsity athletics, recreation programs, and related administrative functions.

The SSAC fee is reviewed and approved annually by the Student Services Advisory Committee, a joint committee of student and university representatives. The fee is assessed every academic term and is not optional. Approximately 55% of the Athletics and Recreation Department’s annual revenue is generated through the SSAC fee, with the remaining revenue coming from facility rentals, team fundraising, ticket sales, sponsorships, and advancement initiatives.

The SSAC fee for Athletics and Recreation is as follows:

Term	A&R fee (full time)	A&R Fee (part time)	Notes
Fall 2024 - Spring 2025	CAD \$130.23	CAD \$39.07	Part of the SSAC fee
Fall 2025 - Spring 2026	CAD \$141.39	CAD \$42.41	Increase of 8.6% year-over-year (Approved by Student Services Advisory Committee)

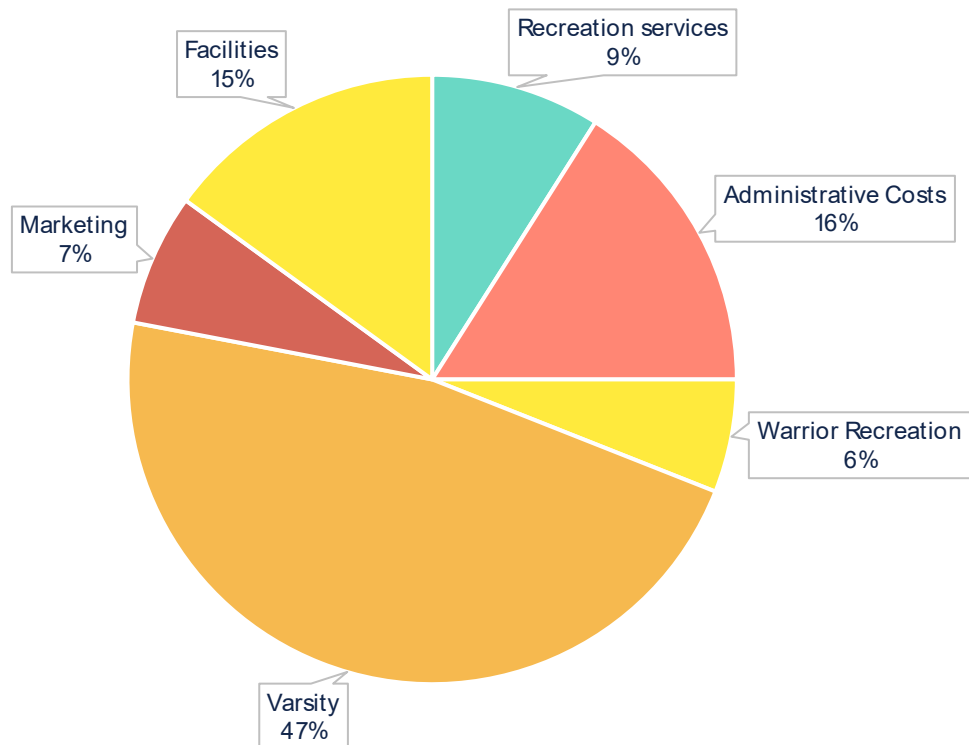
Monthly Equivalent Cost

Term	A&R fee full-time per month	A&R fee part-time per month
Fall 2024 - Spring 2025	CAD \$32.55	CAD \$9.77
Fall 2025 - Spring 2026	CAD \$35.35	CAD \$10.60

Structure and Breakdown of the A&R Fee

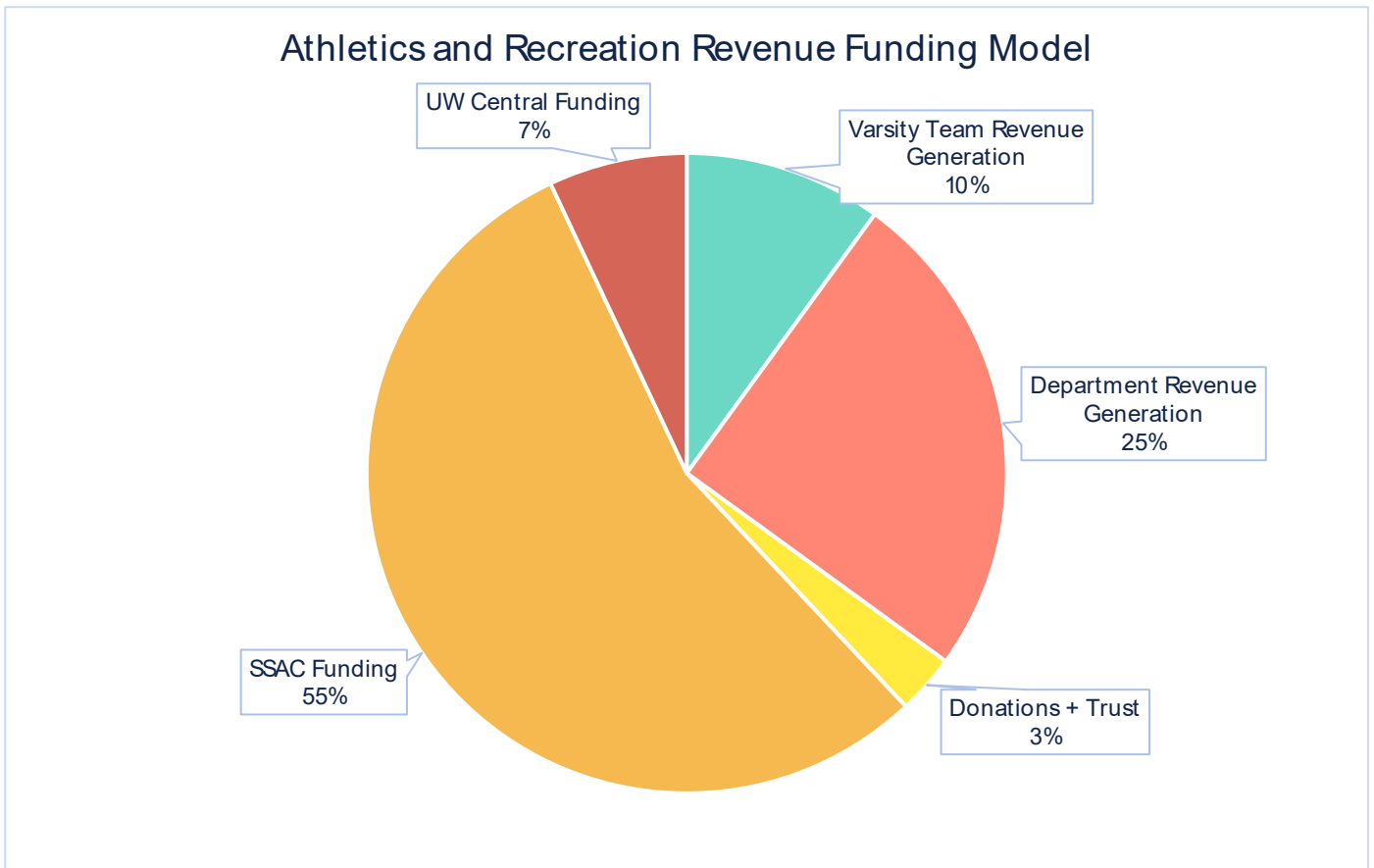
Division	Description
Varsity Operations	Competitive athletics and team management across 36 teams spanning 29 sports. Staffing (FT & PT), Student-Athlete support, travel and league fees for all interuniversity programs.
Warrior Recreation	Intramurals and recreational programming (i.e. fitness class memberships, climbing memberships, instructional classes).
Administrative Costs	Staffing (FT & Coops), insurance, communication costs and general supplies, IT (software/hardware), advancement etc.
Facilities	Staffing (FT & PT) operating the buildings (PAC, CIF & Arena) as well as maintenance, deferred maintenance and projects.
Marketing & Communications	All marketing and communications for the program operations include game day operations and ticketing revenues.
Recreation Services	Areas that require staffing to support drop-in activities - pool, rink, fitness that are part of our core service delivery.

2024-2025 Breakdown of Athletics and Recreation Fee by Program



Overall Funding Sources for Athletics and Recreation

Division	Description
SSAC Funding	Funding directly established via student fees through the Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC) fee.
Department Revenue Generation	Facility rentals (both internal and external), multi-sport camps, instructional programs, group fitness and climbing memberships.
Varsity Team Revenue Generation	Team fundraising and team specific camp revenue generation.
UW Central Funding	Funding provided by Waterloo's central budget as allocated via Provost.
Donations + Trust	Advancement efforts from past trust creations or donations directly to Athletics and Recreation.



Comparison with Peer Institutions

Institution (2024–25 unless noted)	Fee per term (CAD)
Brock University	62.67
Laurier – Waterloo	95.00
Carleton University	119.82
University of Windsor	126.53
University of Waterloo	130.23
University of Ottawa	137.29
McMaster University	147.98
U of T Scarborough (2023–24)	149.23
University of Guelph	157.59
Queens University	175.35
U of T Mississauga (2023–24)	211.68
Western University	230.89
Median \$142.64	Average: \$145.36



It is important to recognize that while the fee summary draws from publicly available fee schedules at other institutions, the per term fees at each institution do not cover identical programs or services. Therefore, the dollar amounts represent only a portion of the value provided to each campus. Given the limited data available from peer institutions, this comparison is included to illustrate fee differences across universities, not to reflect the complete value delivered through Athletics and Recreation fee offerings.

The University of Waterloo’s A&R fee of \$130.23 (2024-2025 academic year) per term sits slightly below the median and average among Ontario universities. While institutions such as Laurier (\$95.00) and Brock (\$62.67) charge lower fees, these universities often offer smaller-scale facilities or fewer varsity programs. Conversely, schools with higher fees, such as Western (\$230.89) and University of Toronto Mississauga (\$211.68) maintain large athletics complexes and fund expansive varsity and recreation infrastructures, often supported by larger student populations. On a cost specific basis, when adjusting for the range of services offered (e.g., access to PAC, CIF, fitness classes, pool access, and varsity programs), Waterloo’s fee of \$130.23 represents competitive value. While higher than smaller-scale programs at Laurier (\$95.00) and Brock (\$62.67), Waterloo charges substantially less than comparable sized institutions such as Western (\$230.89) and Queen’s (\$175.35).

History of Athletics Fee at the University of Waterloo

Academic Year	Fee per Term (Full-Time)	% Change
2020-2021	\$120.00	—
2021-2022	\$122.50	+2.1%
2022-2023	\$125.00	+2.0%
2023-2024	\$126.53	+1.2%
2024-2025	\$130.23	+2.9%
2025-2026	\$141.39	+8.6%

Comparison With Local Providers

To provide additional context to the value of the A&R fee, a cost comparison was conducted between the University of Waterloo’s athletics and recreation offerings and commercial fitness providers in the Kitchener-Waterloo region that students reporting accessing.

While Waterloo’s A&R fee grants access to multiple facilities, recreational programming, intramurals, and wellness initiatives, most private providers charge monthly membership fees that include only fitness or studio access. **Comparing the monthly A&R fee to monthly memberships provides insight into the relative affordability and breadth of service offered through the University’s model in direct comparison of off campus fee for access providers.**

Traditional Gym and Fitness Centre

Facility	Monthly Fee
GoodLife Fitness	3 Tiers ranging from: \$77.98 - \$119.15*
Fit4Less	2 Tiers ranging from: \$17.31 - \$30.31*
Crunch Fitness	3 Tiers ranging from: \$9.99 - \$34.99*
YMCA of Three Rivers	3 Tiers ranging from: \$65 - \$87.21
UW A&R Fee	\$35.35

Note: * indicates that there is an initial activation fee in addition to the monthly fee however it is not reflected in the chart above for simplicity.

Rock Climbing and Bootcamp Style

Facility	Monthly Fee
Grand River Rocks Single Gym	\$62.00
Grand River Rocks Dual Gym	\$79.00
F45	\$269.00
Orange Theory	\$199.00
UW A&R Fee	\$54.28

Note, students are required to purchase a rock climbing membership at UW to access the facility. This cost is included in the monthly rate of the UW A&R Fee for fair comparison.

Spin and Fitness Studio

Facility	Monthly Fee
The Branches	\$150.00
Big Bliss Hot Yoga & Fitness (DTK)	\$189.00
Midtown Yoga	\$95.00
The Bright Side	\$189.00
UW A&R Fee	\$54.28

Note, students are required to purchase a rock climbing membership at UW to access the facility. This cost is included in the monthly rate of the UW A&R Fee for fair comparison.

Summary of Local Provider Offerings

Compared to private-sector alternatives, the University of Waterloo’s A&R fee offers exceptional value relative to both cost and scope.

At approximately \$35.35 per month, students gain access to diverse facilities and programming that would otherwise require \$200–\$400 per month through off campus providers. While off campus memberships may offer more personalized services (e.g., small class sizes or dedicated coaching), the University’s integrated Athletics and Recreation model supports affordable, inclusive, and comprehensive recreation access for students.

Optional Fees for Athletics and Recreation Programming

While the A&R termly fee provides students with broad access to facilities and recreation spaces, some specialized programs and services have an additional fee. These optional costs are designed to support program-specific expenses such as specialized equipment, staffing, or facility maintenance.

Generally, these programs are partially subsidized by the termly A&R fee, ensuring students pay a reduced rate compared to market pricing.

Included Access with Termly Fee	Subsidized Programming/Services with Additional Fees
Access to Facilities for Drop-In/Open Recreation	Intramurals
Fitness Centres (PAC & CIF)	Instructional Lessons (e.g. Aquatics, First Aid, Dance, Skating)
Field House	Fitness Classes
Warrior Field	Rock Climbing
Disc Golf	Personal Trainers
Beach Volleyball Courts	Locker & Towel Service
Pool	Equipment Rentals (racquets, spike ball)
Rink	E-Sports
Gyms	
Squash Courts	
Studios	
Lendable Equipment (balls, gloves, nets, disc golf set, etc.)	
Facility Bookings (Studio, squash courts etc.)	

Additional Program Costs

Fee for the services are as follows:

- Rock Climbing Gym - \$67.00 per term (shoe rental extra)
- Fitness classes- \$67.00 per term
- Golf Simulator - \$20 per hour
- Esports Gaming Lounge - \$40 per term (as of 2025)
- Weight training classes – \$60-\$111 per term
- Intramurals- approximately \$45-\$70 per person per sport
 - Note this amount varies based on individual vs team sign-up and the number of players on a team.

Athletics and Recreation Generated Data

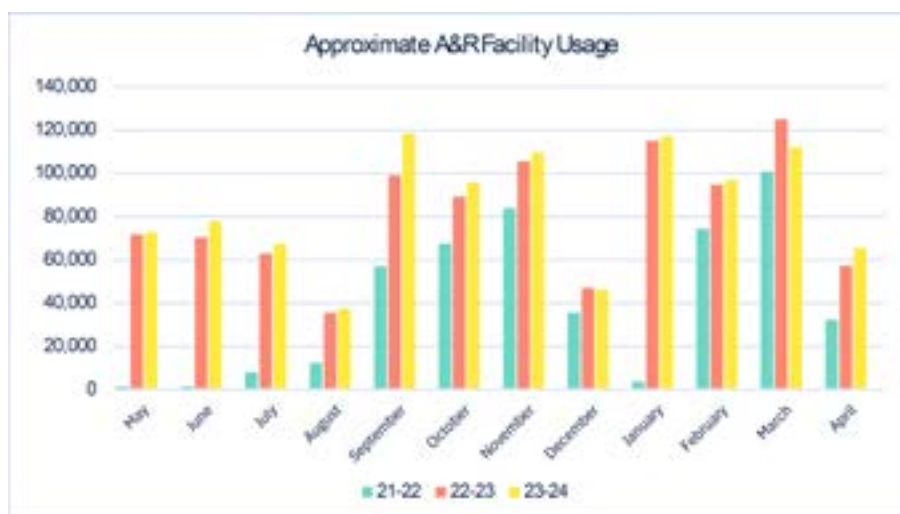
To evaluate the value derived from the Athletics and Recreation (A&R) fee, WUSA requested a comprehensive set of participation and facility usage data from the Athletics and Recreation Department. These datasets provide insight into student engagement, program participation, and utilization of campus athletic infrastructure.

However, as outlined later in this section, data collection and reporting limitations, particularly related to unique user tracking, create challenges in fully quantifying student use and proportional value.

PAC and CIF Building Usage

CIF requires card swipes to enter; however, unlike PAC's controlled turnstile entry point, CIF's facility design allows for incomplete data capture. This infrastructure limitation means that while some entries are recorded, the system cannot reliably measure total visits or calculate average visits per student due to a lack of controlled access infrastructure. PAC entry records show thousands of swipes per day during peak weeks, but even with this data, the total dataset remains incomplete when distinguishing unique users, making it impossible to determine true utilization rates or usage patterns. **A&R should continue working on more accurate tracking to ensure usage rates can be appropriately captured.**

The data below reflects the total number of visitors to A&R facilities, NOT unique users. This does not include varsity game attendance or external booking usage numbers. Note that May 21-Aug 21 was during COVID-19 remote learning.



Registered Recreation Programs

Athletics and Recreation provided user based data in relation to program participation which are shown in the charts below. This information is relevant for readers context and information. Further analysis is done later in the report

Program	Participation 2021-22	Participation 2022-23	Participation 2023-24
Intramurals	9,075 (two-thirds of a normal year)	14,983	16,628
Group fitness memberships	646	1,118	955 (+435 day passes)
Rock climbing memberships	943 (+950 day passes)	1,788 (+1,621 day passes)	1,635 (+1,549 day passes)
Instructional programs (dance, martial arts, skating, strength & conditioning)	2,370	3,568	3,999
Clubs participation	5,192	8,964	8,869
Golf simulator	n/a	215	450
Esports leagues	1,278	922	3,467

Note: Data regarding the total unique users in each program was not available from A&R.
Note: Esports participation numbers increased in 23-24 due to WUSA Welcome Week Partnership

Intramurals Team Registration by Sport

Sport	2023-2024					2022-2023					2021-2022				
	Spring	Fall	Winter	Total	% of overall	Spring	Fall	Winter	Total	% of overall	Spring	Fall	Winter	Total	% of overall
11 v 11 Soccer	35	15	19	69	3.62	16	33	9	58	3.17	0	30	0	30	2.12
6 v 6 Soccer	69	104	140	313	16.40	18	77	145	240	12.87	0	34	94	145	10.36
7 v 7 Soccer	0	36	0	36	2.21	20	20	0	40	4.70	13	20	0	33	2.71
Basketball	50	91	95	239	14.66	63	86	100	249	16.47	0	69	83	152	16.10
Beach Volleyball	43	15	0	58	3.56	23	12	0	35	2.31	26	12	0	38	4.03
Dodgeball	10	17	28	55	3.37	7	24	18	49	3.90	0	15	20	35	5.30
Flag Football	11	10	23	44	2.70	8	14	14	36	2.38	0	5	15	20	2.12
Ice Hockey	17	34	39	90	5.54	10	27	38	75	5.00	0	26	30	56	6.14
Innersube Water Polo	6	8	12	26	1.60	0	0	8	8	0.53	0	0	0	0	0.00
Ice Pitch	5	8	0	14	0.86	5	8	0	13	0.86	0	5	0	5	0.33
Spideball	16	46	26	88	6.04	25	60	46	141	9.33	12	50	38	100	10.50
Ultimate Indoor	6	28	48	82	5.03	7	21	29	57	5.00	0	27	20	47	6.52
Ultimate Outdoor	28	23	0	51	3.13	31	14	0	45	3.98	10	14	0	24	2.54
Volleyball	66	147	158	371	22.76	57	133	148	338	22.35	0	97	100	197	20.87
Squash	18	43	26	87	5.95	15	29	31	75	4.96	0	22	19	41	4.34
Total Teams:	371	622	637	1630		336	370	606	1512		61	435	448	944	

Making Space Programing (Equity-Focused Programming)

The Making Space Program provides equity-focused, identity-affirming recreation opportunities for students from equity-deserving groups. These programs are designed to reduce barriers to participation and create safer, more welcoming spaces for students who may face systemic obstacles or discomfort in mainstream recreation settings. Programming includes dedicated sessions for women (cis and trans), 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, trans and non-binary individuals, and racialized students across various facilities including the climbing wall, pool, fitness studios, and fitness centres.

To ensure anonymity and reduce participation barriers, A&R intentionally does not collect detailed attendance data for these sessions. While this approach supports participant comfort, it limits the ability to quantitatively measure reach and impact. The program is a good example that highlights a broader challenge: balancing data-driven evaluation with privacy and inclusion.

Future assessments may benefit from alternative evaluation approaches that maintain participant trust while still gauging program effectiveness. Potential methods could include:

- Anonymized, voluntary feedback mechanisms that allow participants to share experiences without identifying themselves
- Aggregate participation trends (e.g., "sessions are consistently attended" vs. specific numbers)
- Qualitative program evaluation through focus groups or anonymous surveys
- Indirect impact measures, such as overall facility satisfaction among equity-deserving groups or reduction in reported barriers to participation

The value of Making Space programming should not be measured solely by participation numbers, but by its role in creating an inclusive athletics and recreation environment where all students can access wellness opportunities in ways that feel safe and affirming. This programming represents an investment in equity that benefits the entire campus community by demonstrating that student wellbeing encompasses both physical access and psychological safety.

Varsity Participation

Waterloo has 36 varsity teams and more than 800 varsity athletes. Varsity sports vary in which time of year they compete/train and in season length. Athletes are expected to meet their academic obligations along with their athletic obligations.

Reported survey notes provided by Athletics and Recreation data set 2023-2024

- 57% of student-athletes attained academic averages over 80%
- 88% attained an average over 70%
- 82% felt they were being supported in their academic goals
- 84% felt their coach prioritizes academic & wellbeing above athletic performance
- 82% had positive student-athlete experiences

Breakdown of Varsity Athletes Per Sport

Team	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Badminton	21	25	25
Baseball	36	39	32
Basketball - M	18	18	16
Basketball - W	15	16	13
Cheerleading	71	56	0
Cross Country	42	40	39
Curling	9	10	10
Fencing	27	33	0
Field Hockey	18	18	21
Figure Skating	22	24	18
Football	105	100	109
Golf - M	10	8	9
Golf - W	6	8	6
Hockey - M	29	20	27
Hockey - W	27	24	25
Nordic Ski	17	22	14
Rowing	38	11	0
Rugby - M	60	47	42
Rugby - W	45	34	38
Soccer - M	36	31	39
Soccer - W	31	32	29
Squash	24	26	21
Swimming	46	50	49
Tennis	20	20	15
Track & Field	44	43	34
Volleyball - M	19	19	16
Volleyball - W	16	17	20
TOTAL	852	791	667

Varsity Game Student Attendance

In 2023–2024 there were 129 home varsity games/meets, as per the OUA published schedule. Athletics and Recreation has reported that 72 ticketed home events took place in 2023-2024 with a reported attendance of 10,008, averaging about 139 students per event. Note some events host more than one game, ex back to back Men's and Women's Volleyball games would only count as one event. Similar to building usage and program registration, A&R were unable to report on unique user attendance. Furthermore, the reported number of 10,008 includes Black and Gold Day which is an orientation related event that has approximately 1500-2,000 students attend. Athletics and Recreation reported that the non-ticketed games do experience varying levels of attendees, however, no specific headcounts were available.

Non-student attendance accounted for approximately 60% of all attendance at games. This is made up of parents, community members, friends, and alumni. It is worth noting that A&R did not provide a breakdown of attendance per game or by the varsity team. This limited the analysis to overall varsity program participation. More specific data should be used to understand attendance trends and how specific teams are engaging students.

Student Consultation and Analysis

In addition to the data from Athletics and Recreation, WUSA conducted two surveys through our Representative Survey Platform (RSP) to support the culmination of this report. The first RSP survey was conducted on Health and Wellness in spring of 2023 and contained several questions related to student wellness in relation to their athletic and recreational activities on and off campus. 546 participated in this survey for a response rate of 68% and the report was published in September 2023.

After much discussion with Athletics and Recreation, we received a broad set of data, some of which was outlined above and additional information included later in the report. Athletics and Recreation provided data related to facility usage, programming participation rates, hours of service delivery, varsity participation, financial data, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation they have conducted

The second RSP survey conducted by WUSA was directed specifically at Athletics and Recreation from student experience in nearly all aspects of the service offerings. This survey was conducted in late fall 2024 and the report was completed in the spring of 2025. 992 students participated in this survey, which provided valuable insight into the student experience.

Additional information was secured via the Council of Ontario University Research Reports.

The following sections of analysis are informed using RSP data to provide insight into student experience within Athletics and Recreation service offerings and the value students feel it delivers to their student experience.

Athletics and Recreation Space and Facility Analysis

Athletics and Recreation operates over 210,000 square feet, or +19,000 square meters, of recreation space on campus at UW. Athletics and Recreation offers a diverse range of programming within the facilities they manage from indoor field house, 5 gyms, a pool, multi-use studios, squash courts, climbing wall, fitness gyms, an arena, several multi-use outdoor fields, a turf field, disc golf course, and beach volleyball courts. Hours of operation for the indoor facilities are 6:30AM-12:30AM M-F and 9:00AM-12:30AM on weekends, some hours vary throughout individual terms.

According to the 2022-23 Council of Ontario Universities (COU) Triennial Inventory of Physical Facilities, Waterloo ranks 7th out of 25 Ontario institutions in total recreation and athletics space with 19,913 Net Assignable Square Meters (NASM). Only a handful of universities, U of T -St. George, Guelph, Carleton, Ottawa, Queen's, and Western, have more total recreation space. However, Waterloo on a per-student basis is reported to be average amongst other Ontario universities, as several smaller universities (e.g. Laurentian, Lakehead, York Glendon) enjoy higher net assignable square feet per full-time equivalent student (FTE). This can be due to a multitude

of factors including modest enrolments of smaller schools and/or outsized facilities for the student population a school is servicing. Waterloo's 0.6 Net Assignable Square Meters per FTE is below the Ontario university wide average of 0.63 Net Assignable Square Meters per student

When comparing Waterloo to other U15 research universities in Ontario, the institution performs at the average. However, Waterloo operates at only 64.5% of the athletics space that COU standards recommend, meaning the university has approximately two-thirds of the facilities it should have based on enrollment per COU standard. This under sizing is characteristic of large Ontario universities: among institutions with over 30,000 students, Waterloo ranks first in meeting the standard, ahead of Ottawa (62%), McMaster (62%), Western (55%), Toronto (St. George, 55%), Toronto Metropolitan (43%), and York (Keele, 30%).

Regional comparisons tell a different story. Among major southwestern Ontario universities (Guelph, McMaster, Western, Laurier, and Windsor), Waterloo falls below the regional average of 0.72 NASM per student. This is largely influenced by Guelph, which provides 1.2 NASM per FTE, double Waterloo's capacity, and is one of only six Ontario universities exceeding the provincial space standard. When students were surveyed on their access to athletics facilities, over 73% indicated that they accessed at least one aspect of athletics and recreation offering with the highest usage going to PAC (58%), CIF (33%), drop in/open rec (19%), intramurals (17%) and the climbing wall (12%).

Most students are somewhere between "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and "satisfied" with the availability of the PAC Fitness Centre (mean of 3.84) and the CIF Fitness Centre (mean of 3.79). This is in relation to access to facility based on hours of operation, class times, and game times. Students surveyed also noted their experience in wait times in relation to class registration and accessing gym equipment. PAC had a mean score of 3.31 and CIF had a mean score of 3.79. This was primarily due to wait times of being able to access equipment in a timely manner.

Overall, students expressed high satisfaction with athletic facilities and their respective cleanliness. All facilities scored above 80% in cleanliness and maintenance feedback. Nevertheless, open-ended comments reveal recurring issues: dirty showers, unpleasant smells, dirty equipment, malfunctioning machines and temperature/humidity problems due to HVAC issues that have been highlighted to occur during the spring academic term. Students particularly criticized the PAC bathrooms for inadequate cleaning, broken faucets and empty soap dispensers. While the high satisfaction scores indicate general contentment, these comments suggest that maintenance practices are inconsistent and that improved hygiene and equipment upkeep would further increase satisfaction.

It is important to note that Athletics and Recreation rely on Plant Operations for repair and maintenance work across its facilities. While this operational structure may not be apparent to most students, the interconnected nature of campus resources directly impacts facility conditions. This arrangement can create challenges in addressing maintenance issues promptly, as Athletics and Recreation has direct oversight but not direct control over maintenance staff scheduling or response times. The recurring nature of specific complaints, particularly regarding cleanliness and basic equipment functionality, suggests potential gaps in communication, service

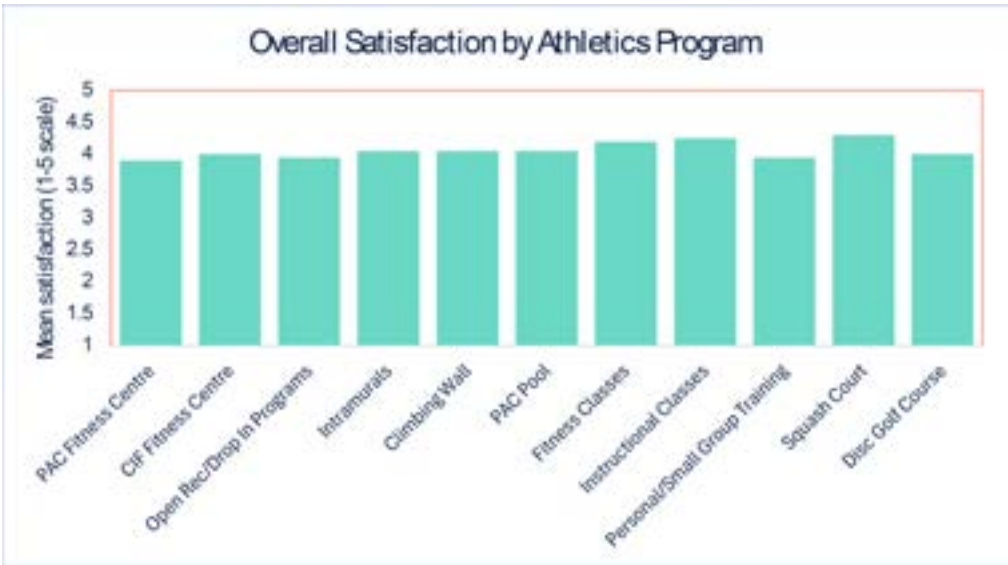
level agreements, or resource allocation between departments that warrant further examination by UW central to improve the facilities conditions for students. Without comprehensive facility-use data, it is difficult to assess whether the A&R fee is proportional to usage; however, current patterns demonstrate a clear trend that facility usage is increasing annually and that many of the fee for service programs/spaces are also generally experiencing an increase in participation.

The Athletics and Recreation Department provide facilities that meet the needs of the student population and are often leaving students satisfied with the built infrastructure they have access to on campus. Although cleanliness and maintenance issues are expected with high usership rates, it is suggested that the Athletics and Recreation teams continue to build on the strong foundation of facilities management and work with UW to improve upon some of the cleanliness and maintenance systems to deliver a more positive and consistent built environment for students.

Student Experience and Satisfaction

This section will provide insight into how students interacted and rated Athletics and Recreation’s offerings and their satisfaction with the various facets of the department’s offerings. To understand how students perceive the value of Athletics and Recreation programs WUSA utilized the Representative Survey Platform and Athletic and Recreation’s data sets to investigate further.

Overall Satisfaction by Program



Average satisfaction ratings for Athletics & Recreation programs. On WUSA’s RSP All programs scored between 3.9 and 4.34 on a five-point scale, indicating generally positive perceptions.

Wait Time and Perceived Crowding

The RSP survey sought insight related to student satisfaction in relation to wait times for equipment, programs, and facility access. 18% of students who visit PAC Fitness Centre can always access the equipment they need, compared with 45% of CIF users and 57% at off-campus commercial gyms. The PAC Fitness Centre also had the lowest satisfaction with wait times, with 24% of students dissatisfied and only 50% satisfied. CIF users were more satisfied with 11% dissatisfied, 71% satisfied. Students' comments reveal that long wait times deter them from attending the PAC. Busy weight rooms create a "gym intimidation" effect where shy or less experienced users feel uncomfortable asking to share equipment.

Furthermore, students highlighted frustrations with perceived limited open recreation hours and open availability at said open recreation times. Included in open commentary was requests for extended operating hours (including late evenings and weekends), more open recreation slots, additional swim lanes/times, and more flexible scheduling for women-only and 2SLGBTQIA+ sessions. Several respondents suggested making the PAC Fitness Centre 24/7 to accommodate co-op and evening classes.

Athletics and Recreation could consider exploring options to communicate to students when their facilities are busy and at what percentage of capacity. Recently, the department added hourly updated occupancy rates to communicate how busy facilities are. This is a valued addition, A&R should continue to build on the dashboard to display daily averages and trends by hour in an effort to support students in more effectively planning their schedules around avoiding peak periods.

Students from satellite campuses (Cambridge and Kitchener) also emphasized that the commute to the PAC makes using on-campus facilities difficult. Satellite campuses (Cambridge and Kitchener Campuses) have experienced some improvements in infrastructure; however further consultation should be conducted to ensure that there is adequate access for these campuses who do not have direct access to main campus offerings. WUSA should continue to engage in this consultative work and report the experiences to Athletics and Recreation Leadership when able.



PAC users report the lowest satisfaction with wait times, whereas intramural participants are largely satisfied.

Facility Offerings and Equipment

Students rated satisfaction with facility offerings and equipment similarly to cleanliness: average scores were around 3.9–4.1. Intramurals again scored highest (mean = 4.13), while the PAC and CIF Fitness Centres had lower means of 3.92 and 3.87 respectively. Respondents highlighted missing amenities (lack of tennis courts, climbing wall routes not refreshed) and insufficient or broken machines (e.g., out-of-order stair master). Locker availability and size were also noted as pain points; students reported difficulty finding lockers large enough to store their belongings during workouts. Athletics and Recreation has implemented mechanisms for feedback through online submissions via QR code however, addressing these equipment and amenity concerns could help raise the student satisfaction scores for PAC and CIF.

Varsity Athletics Analysis

Operating high-performance varsity sports inherently comes at a greater cost than general recreation programming. These teams require specialized coaching, equipment, travel, and competition infrastructure, which contribute to higher operating expenses despite similar facility use. At Waterloo, approximately 50% of the total Athletics and Recreation fee that students pay termly is allocated to directly supporting varsity programs. Additional expenses absorbed in other areas such as administrative costs, marking and communications, and wear and tear on facilities may bring this proportion to a larger percentage.

While this level of investment is substantial, it aligns with broader research that recognizes sport as a powerful driver of community pride, campus spirit, and student belonging. Varsity Athletics provides opportunities for athletes to represent the University of Waterloo on regional and national stages, fostering both personal excellence and institutional visibility. In 2023/24, 852 students participated as varsity athletes, contributing significantly to the university's identity as the "Warriors."

However, overall student engagement with varsity events remains modest at best. Across 72 ticketed home games and meets, total student attendance reached approximately 10,000 entries, averaging 139 attendees per event. When major events such as Orientation's Black and Gold Day event are excluded, the average attendance drops even lower, indicating limited sustained participation in regular season games from the broad student community. This suggests that while varsity sport strengthens pride among athletes and their supporters, its benefits are not being fully experienced by the broader student body.

When comparing participation levels, intramural programs saw approximately 16,500 student registrants, while varsity events attracted around 10,000 spectators. Despite this difference, 6% of the Athletics and Recreation fees are allocated to intramurals, whereas varsity athletics receive 50% of the total fee. This disparity raises important questions about the return on investment and whether current funding proportions align with student engagement and experience.

Survey findings further highlight this gap. Nearly 70% of students reported never attending a

varsity event, and among those who do not attend, the most common reasons were lack of time (50%), unawareness of game schedules (18%), not having friends to attend with (15%), limited entertainment value (9%), and perceptions of the university not having competitive teams (8%). Furthermore, according to the Student Experience Survey conducted by UW, 50% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they find it valuable to have the opportunity to attend varsity games at no additional cost. These insights suggest that logistical barriers and limited social appeal, rather than lack of interest in sport itself, drive low attendance.

Conversely, students who do attend varsity events describe them as fun, social, and community-building experiences. The top factors motivating attendance include watching a sport they enjoy (31%), socializing with friends (28%), and feeling part of the Waterloo community (18%). This pattern reinforces the potential of varsity athletics as a social catalyst. When events are lively, accessible, and engaging, they contribute meaningfully to campus culture and student well-being.

To strengthen engagement, students recommended improvements that align closely with these motivations. Suggestions include enhancing in-game entertainment, introducing giveaways and theme nights, increasing event promotion and visibility, and expanding food and beverage options. Building a more inclusive, high-energy environment around varsity games could encourage casual attendees and foster a stronger sense of shared campus identity and embrace the Waterloo Warriors identity.

In theory, Varsity Athletics has the potential to deliver clear value for athletes, creating a sense of community, providing entertainment, and sense of belonging. In practice, Waterloo has significantly struggled to attain these outcomes from the broad student community beyond the student athletes themselves. Significant work is needed to change the trajectory of student engagement within this area of operation.

A key consideration is whether the current level of financial and infrastructure investment in varsity athletics is proportionate to the outcomes achieved across the broader student community. With limited engagement from the general student population and a significant portion of the Athletics and Recreation fee allocated to varsity programming, it is important to assess whether this funding model effectively supports inclusive and community-wide benefits or if it should be innovated to serve other areas of the student experience.

Perceived Value of the Athletics Fee

The perceived value of the Athletics and Recreation (A&R) fee at the University of Waterloo is shaped by how students experience and access the services, facilities, and programs it funds. Drawing on participation data, satisfaction ratings, and financial comparisons from earlier sections, this analysis evaluates how effectively the current fee structure delivers value relative to cost, accessibility, and impact on student experience.

At \$130.23 (2024-2025) per term, Waterloo's A&R fee sits slightly above the provincial median yet provides one of the most comprehensive recreation and wellness offerings among Ontario universities.

When broken down to a monthly equivalent of \$32.55 (2024-2025), the fee grants access to two multi-purpose athletic complexes (PAC and CIF), intramurals, outdoor fields, open recreation, and a variety of wellness programs, all at a fraction of the cost of commercial memberships in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, which typically range from \$60 to over \$200 per month.

This comparison demonstrates that, on a purely financial basis, the A&R fee represents excellent dollar-for-dollar value. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that students receive a unique benefit from the service offerings.

The notion that each student should access all programs and service offerings that athletics and recreation offer in order for value to be present goes against the exact philosophy in which the service unit was built upon. Students recreate in various ways and seek various opportunities to engage in athletics. As such, varied usage per program is expected to occur.

When students were specifically asked if they saw value in the Athletics and Recreation Fee they pay each term it was noted that 48% of students responded yes, 34% responded unsure, and 18% responded no. Students were also asked how knowledgeable they were about the services and supports provided through this fee, of which most students (52%) indicated somewhat, followed by not knowledgeable at all (28%), knowledgeable (16%) and very knowledgeable (4%). The percentage of students who were not knowledgeable was higher for those who did not see value in the fee (44% not knowledgeable at all) and who were unsure about the value of the fee (40% not knowledgeable at all). This is important to note as it suggests that knowledge of what is included in the fee may impact on how valued Athletics and Recreation offerings are among students. This is reasonable given that if students are unaware of the full suite of offerings, they may not be able to accurately report on their value.

If the unsure responses were removed from the dataset due to being "indecisive", the reported perceived value would change to 72% in agreement that value is present and 28% communicating that value is not present.

Furthermore, students reported that they see significant value in having access to recreation activities on campus in general. 87% of students responded that they see value, 8% were unsure,

and 5% communicated they did not. This demonstrates that most students see clear value in recreational services and activities.

Moving beyond the perception of value of the fee, it is worth revisiting the data previously discussed around the access rates of facilities and programs to further understand value. The athletic centers continue to see increased access to the facilities with 2021-2022 seeing 447k check-ins, 2022-2023 918k, and 2023-2024 962k check ins. Nearly 1M visits annually demonstrates that facility usage is substantial and usership numbers indicate that there is value in the service offerings.

Increased participation in Intramural programming, instructional programming, and athletic club participation demonstrates that students are accessing these programs. When combined with satisfaction rates, they are generally perceived to be quite high with being above 4/5 ranking in nearly all areas.

Usage rates and satisfaction scores within fitness centres and recreation activities demonstrate that students see value in the services offered to them.

In turn, Varsity provides somewhat of a different perspective. **With nearly 70% of survey respondents reporting that they have never attended a varsity game combined with significant resource investments to operate varsity operations it is worth further assessment regarding the return on investment/the value students receive from varsity operations.** 850 student athletes receive exceptional experiences when participating in the programming and receive excellent value for money. However, the same cannot be said in the current state about the broader student community. With low participation rates (general student population) in varsity program, it begs the question, is the University of Waterloo experiencing a positive return on investment in its current form? With nearly 50% of the Athletics and Recreation fee allocated to varsity operations and relatively low student engagement in varsity events, the return on investment for the broader student body appears limited in present form. As reported above, contributing factors are the lack of time for students to engage due to academics. Broader institutional conversations about academic workload expectations are necessary to ensure students have meaningful opportunities to engage in campus life beyond the classroom.

When analyzing if the Athletics and Recreation fee should continue in its current compulsory form a philosophical approach has historically been applied. The use of compulsory student service fees is rooted in the principle of collective investment for the common good. They ensure that every student contributes to maintaining the shared infrastructure, resources, programs, and support that make university life equitable and accessible for ALL students. While not every student will use every service, students benefit from belonging to a community where wellness, recreation, advocacy, and engagement are universally available. Much like public systems that rely on shared funding, these fees safeguard access for those who need it most, prevent exclusion based on income, and uphold the continuity of essential programs that enrich the student experience. In essence, mandatory fees reflect the belief that a university is more than a collection of individuals, it is a community sustained by shared responsibility, mutual benefit, and a commitment to the wellbeing of all its members.

While certain areas of Athletics and Recreation have room for improvement, this initially does not warrant a philosophical change in how fees should be assessed. Overwhelmingly students experience value and positive outcomes from having access to recreational facilities and programs on campus and it has direct benefits to their wellbeing and academic performance. It is important that the institution maintains a commitment to continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making, regularly evaluating how compulsory fee investments align with program outcomes and student priorities to ensure resources are deployed as effectively as possible to positively impact the student experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by the findings presented throughout this report and are structured to align with enhancing the student experience and the value for the services they receive.

While Athletics and Recreation (A&R) provide strong value relative to cost, data indicates that the value of the fee can be improved through implementing modernized data systems, enhanced facility maintenance, public reporting, and improved student engagement within specific program offerings.

Recommendation	Description	Responsible Party	Proposed Completion Date
1. Data Modernization and Performance Measurement	Enhance the entry controls at CIF and other open-access facilities to capture more accurate data and prioritize student access. Further refine user data collected to reflect unique user engagement rates across various program offerings and facility access. It is noted that A&R leadership has expressed their desire to do so and some infrastructure limitations are currently a friction point.	Athletics and Recreation	Completed by end of Fall 26 term
2. Varsity Athletics Review + Strategic Plan	Athletics and Recreation should undergo a review of their varsity service offering. This review and plan should be aimed at improving the impact of service and student engagement/ participation of non-varsity athletes. This should include but not limited to:	Athletics and Recreation presenting to Student Services Advisory Committee for review	Expected Completion Date End of Spring 2027 Term

- A strategic review of the current program model and the attainment of broad community benefits to the student population
- An analysis of whether the current funding model is the most appropriate for the usage rates within the community. Alternate options should be explored. For example, an increased portion of pay-to-play model for athletes to participate in their respective high-performance sports.
- Establish a strategic action plan to systematically address the gaps in broad student engagement within varsity programming
- Included in this plan should be clear key performance indicators and evaluation strategies before the strategic plan is implemented.

3. Athletics and Recreation Varsity Fee

It is recommended that no increase in Athletics and Recreation funding is approved for the varsity segment until greater student engagement is brought inline with other program offerings.

Furthermore, when aiming to improve engagement

Athletics & Recreation + SSAC

Ongoing until Recommendation #2 is received and strategy is approved.

	of varsity programming and student value, it should not be at the expense of other program resource allocations.		
4. Satellite Campus Access Review	Athletics and Recreation should conduct further consultation to assess whether students at satellite campuses (Cambridge, Kitchener) have adequate access to athletics and recreation services in relation to annual fees. This report should be shared with WUSA and delivered to SSAC.	Athletics and Recreation	Spring 2026 Term
5. Publicly Reported Annual A&R Operations Report	Athletics and Recreation should publicly publish an enhanced operations report. It is recognized that much of this information is provided to the Student Services Advisory Committee already however it is unable to be accessed by the broad student population. An enhanced report should be created that is reported to SSAC and once approved, it should be accessible to the student community.	Athletics & Recreation + SSAC	Fall 2026 Term
6. Review Fee for Access Programs	Athletics and Recreation charge additional fee's for students to access some built facilities and programs like the Rock Climbing Wall, Fitness classes, etc. Athletics and Recreation should conduct an analysis for how these offerings could be enveloped into	Athletics & Recreation + SSAC	Fall 2026

	the current termly fee to increase access, engagement, add overall value and reduce financial barriers for students.		
7. Balancing data-driven evaluation with privacy and inclusion	Future assessments would benefit from more detailed participation metrics and/or voluntary feedback mechanisms to evaluate success while maintaining participant trust. Additional mechanisms should be explored to ensure adequate assessment of programming is done while ensuring student confidentiality, which is paramount in protecting the identity of equity deserving folx.	Athletics and Recreation	Winter 2026 Term
8. Live Traffic Monitoring	Enable real-time capacity monitoring to communicate peak/off-peak hours to students. Athletics are invited to work with WUSA to utilize current traffic monitoring systems.	Athletics and Recreation/WUSA	Fall 2026 Term
9. Hours of Operation	Delivering expanded hours could increase access and usership. As a start, further expanding service hours during exam periods to ensure that students continue to have a wide range of access. Furthermore, Explore the feasibility of moving service hours to a 24/7 based model. SLC is open 24/7, and data demonstrates that students frequently are on campus at all hours.	Athletics and Recreation	Spring 2026 Term

10. SSAC Reporting	WUSA to advocate to the university to make UW SSAC service units reporting and minutes publicly available to ensure students have access to know how their fees are being allocated in comparison to student utilization and outcome attainment of service units.	WUSA	Spring 2026 Term
11. Future Support Unit Review	WUSA should consider establishing a recurring timeline of review for all SSAC units to keep a pulse on the value for money these units are providing to the student experience.	WUSA Board of Directors	For Consideration
12. WUSA Advocacy Stance Development	WUSA should consider what advocacy stances should be developed by Advocacy Positions Committee (APC), if any, to further support future advocacy work related to the Athletics and Recreation fee, and/or other student service value for money on campus.	WUSA Board of Directors	Winter 2026 Term

Appendices

WUSA RSP 1- Physical Health and Wellness

1. [RSP-Physical-Health-and-Wellness-Survey-Report \(1\).pdf](#)

WUSA RSP 2 - Athletics and Recreation

2. [F24 RSP 2 Athletics and Varsity.pdf](#)

Athletics and Recreation provided Data Set

3. [Athletics Provided Data.pptx](#)

Student Experience Survey

4. <https://uwaterloo.ca/institutional-analysis-planning/studentexperiencesurvey>

Council of Ontario University: Space Report

5. [2022-23-Triennial-Inventory-of-Physical-Facilities-Feb-2025-FN.pdf](#)

Fee Guides from Peer Institutions	
University of Guelph	https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/studentfinance/fees/f24-w25-ug-gu-on-ft
Queen's University	https://www.queensu.ca/registrar/tuition-fees/ancillary
University of Windsor	https://www.uwindsor.ca/finance/sites/uwindsor.ca.finance/files/2024.25_ancillary_fee_schedule_from_bog_finalv2_-_2024_04_05.pdf
Wilfred Laurier University	https://students.wlu.ca/registration-and-finances/tuition-and-fees/fees-breakdown/incidental-fees.html
University of Toronto	https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CNAIF-Report-2023-24.pdf
Carleton University	https://central.carleton.ca/prod/pkg_online_fee_assess.p_main
University of Waterloo	https://uwaterloo.ca/finance/undergraduate-incidental-fees-fall-2024
University of Toronto	https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CNAIF-Report-2023-24.pdf
McMaster University	https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/fees/undergraduate/#tab-10
University of Western Ontario	https://registrar.uwo.ca/student_finances/fees_refunds/pdfsfeeschedule/Ancillary%20Fees%202024-2025_2.pdf
University of Ottawa	https://www.uottawa.ca/study/fees-financial-support/university-fees/ancillary-fees