Nininger Hall: The Case for Revitalization and Expansion

Bridgewater College’s mission is to educate the whole person, fostering the growth of its students in a challenging and supportive learning community. At Bridgewater, students develop inside and outside the classroom through engagement in the areas of academics, health, ethics and community.

Nininger Hall

Nininger Hall has been central to the academic and athletic life of Bridgewater College since its construction in 1958. Nininger is home to the College’s largest academic department, health and human sciences, which hosts five majors, including a highly respected athletic training program, and four minors, and prepares students for further education in physical and occupational therapy.

Nininger is also the heart of the College’s athletic programs. Now more than ever, as Bridgewater boasts 22 NCAA Division III sports and a robust intramural sports program, the state of the College’s athletic facilities is pivotal to student recruitment. Nearly one-third of Bridgewater’s student body is made up of student-athletes. They seek Division III programs like Bridgewater’s, where they can continue to excel both in the classroom and in the athletic arena. Since its last addition in 1988, the student body has grown by 79% and the number of intercollegiate teams has grown from 14 to 22. In addition, it is the location for baccalaureate services, many of our convocations and other non-athletic public events. The issues of capacity and wear and tear are obvious.

The Opportunity

The revitalization and expansion of Nininger Hall is a priority for Bridgewater College. While the appearance of a building does not reflect the caliber of the education within its walls, it does contribute to the perceived quality of the experience, especially to prospective students, their parents, prospective coaches and faculty, and the public.

This project is directly related to our mission to develop the whole person. The project's scope connects the academic, co-curricular and community aspects of Bridgewater College, and as such, would enhance and promote our core mission. Rarely does a facility project so significantly impact all phases of life at the College and touch so many aspects of a student’s development.

The Competition

Built in 1958, Nininger Hall is the oldest facility for student athletics in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC). Nininger has seen three additions since then. Nearly all of Bridgewater’s competitors, however, have made significant renovations to their facilities (built after Nininger) within the last 10 years, adding new floors, new lighting, additional seating and modern video scoreboards, while Nininger has remained largely the same. Two schools have constructed completely new facilities since 2000.

In order to continue to competitively recruit student-athletes, the College must improve its athletic facilities. The dated appearance and offerings of Nininger Hall, the home of the College’s athletic department and teams, cannot compete with the new and high-tech offerings of programs at competitive institutions and, more specifically, those
programs in the ODAC. In addition, as of fall 2012, Bridgewater is one of only two schools in the ODAC that does not have an artificial turf field for its teams. Only 11 percent of the student-athletes recruited annually choose Bridgewater. Many of the 89 percent of highly qualified and talented recruits who do not choose Bridgewater are lost to competing schools with more attractive and enhanced competition spaces, team rooms and training facilities.

The Benefits

With the proposed plans to renovate Nininger Hall, the Bridgewater College community has an opportunity to not only equip the school and its coaches with a strong recruiting tool but also to create a space in which to teach and train future educators, athletic trainers and others involved in health and human sciences-related studies. It also enables the College to continue to recruit faculty and coaches of the highest caliber to lead these programs and contribute to the future success of BC. In addition, goals of the project include:

- Enhancing academic facilities of our largest major, bringing all faculty together
- Attracting high-achieving students and faculty members
- Improving overall retention and graduation rates
- Enhancing brand recognition
- Improving an important recruiting tool for Admissions and Athletic departments
- Creating a center for school spirit for the entire BC community - students/alumni/friends

The College’s student-athletes are more ethnically and geographically diverse than the rest of its student body. Beyond the playing field, these student-athletes share with their classmates the valuable lessons they’ve learned – lessons of teamwork, shared responsibility, time management, triumph over adversity, leadership and much more. They are both more likely to stay at Bridgewater and to graduate on time than their peers, thus increasing both the College’s retention and four-year graduation rates.

The success of these athletes provides valuable positive publicity for the College and contributes to building name recognition throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.

The Plan

The plans for Nininger feature 15,000 to 16,000 square-feet of additional space as well as completely renovated existing structures and spaces. The total project cost is estimated at $9 million. Construction will commence only after a certain level of fundraising is achieved.

Features of the revitalized Nininger include:

- New event space
- Turf field with lights
- Fully renovated basketball venue
- Updated classrooms and laboratory for the Health and Human Sciences program
- Renovated faculty offices
- Renovated locker rooms, training/rehab center, strength/conditioning facility and team room
- Renovated offices for coaches in 22 sports
- New, multi-sport, flexible locker room
- New building façade and lobby
- New Hall of Fame celebration area
Clearly, this large-scale improvement to the campus has become a priority for the College. The dramatic increase in its use and the exhaustion of Nininger Hall over a lifetime of more than 50 years now make it a matter of urgency. It can only be accomplished, however, at a significant cost. Unless we have the generous financial support of our alumni and friends, the urgency of this situation will become increasingly more acute. We need your help!

Why give?

The need for a quality facility for academic, athletic and public activities is clear. No college can function without such a facility and Bridgewater’s mission to educate the whole person and its commitment to excellence will be jeopardized if we do not move soon. Your gift to the new Nininger will: (a) help support the expansion, addition and refurbishment of a building that will provide enhanced facilities to train future generations of teachers, athletic trainers, coaches and physicians; (b) foster growth in our student-athletes; and (c) enable a feeling of pride in our athletics facilities to match the pride we feel in the athletics program and the students who so well exemplify the character of our college and the excellence of our community. It will also enhance the spaces for many of our public gatherings, athletic and otherwise, in which the college makes a statement to its students, alumni, visitors and the community regarding its quality and success.

As an independent college, Bridgewater does not receive the state support for construction of facilities enjoyed by the public institutions against which we compete for students and faculty. Like many independent schools with relatively modest endowments, BC’s finances are highly tuition driven, leaving little from operations to fund capital needs. This is why your generous help is so critical to the success of this campaign.

The project will offer many recognition opportunities, both large and small, permitting a donor to personalize her or his gift or acknowledge a family member or a Bridgewater faculty member, coach or mentor. From the new addition, to the turf field, to individual offices or team locker rooms, the College would like to strengthen its ties with the BC community through naming opportunities in the facility.

This exciting dream can only be realized through your belief in the future of Bridgewater College and your generous gift in support of this campaign. Together, we can educate students in improved and state-of-the art classrooms and training facilities; accommodate the College’s athletes and our competitors in modern facilities; make possible the use of the Jopson Complex for multiple athletic teams as well as the intramural program without deterioration of the surface, even expanding its use with lights; hoist a championship banner in a newly renovated field house; and welcome prospective students, our current students, alumni, visitors and community to tradition-rich but also state-of-the-art Nininger Hall and Jopson Athletic Complex!