**Increasing Student Engagement with UBC Club Events**

**for**

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**Introduction**

* What are the most effective ways to increase student engagement? More specifically, what event planning and marketing strategies can clubs at UBC use to increase event turnout? This report aims to answer these questions based on literature about student engagement in post-secondary institutions, as well as data collected from surveys of UBC students who are involved with one or more club on campus.
* The University of British Columbia is an incredibly vast and diverse campus. With such a variety of programs, courses, jobs, clubs, and other groups, it seems as though there are opportunities for every student to be involved on campus and find their community. Yet, post-secondary students tend to struggle to find a sense of belonging on campus. This report aims to explore how clubs at UBC better utilize their communications strategies to connect with students and encourage involvement in events on campus.

**Background on AMS Clubs at UBC**

* The AMS is the student society of UBC’s Vancouver campus. Founded in 1915, the purpose of the AMS is to provide a voice and a variety of services to the student of UBC.
* This report is aimed at helping the Pre-Law Society and the Political Science Students’ Association, two events-based clubs that I work with, increase their student engagement and host more successful events.
* The Political Science Students’ Association (PSSA) mission is to connect Political Science undergraduate students with the department, faculty, and graduate opportunities. They do this by hosting approximately 10 events a year, including information sessions about career opportunities, grad school, political topics, as well as Moot Court and Moot Parliament. The PSSA also runs the Journal of Political Studies and a mentorship program. The PSSA states “We strive to provide all undergraduate students interested in political science with opportunities to learn more about the discipline by hosting entertaining, informative, and social events that connect them with other students with similar interests as well as professionals. Our ultimate goal is to cultivate a prosperous undergraduate environment for Political Science students.” (cite)
* Founded in 1991, the UBC Pre-Law Society’s mission is “to help its members: discover the opportunities within, and benefits of, the legal profession, pursue a legal career by familiarizing them with the process of entering law school, support their endeavors by providing them with relevant resources and knowledge, build relationships with legal professionals, law students, and fellow Pre-Law Society members, and achieve all of these goals in a supportive, inclusive, and open-minded environment.” (cite) The Pre-Law Society also hosts around 10 events per year, including LSAT information sessions, the law school admissions night, and the annual wine and cheese event that connects undergraduates with lawyers in Vancouver.

**Problem Definition**

* Despite student engagement being an important aspect of the university experience, many clubs on campus struggle to fill seats with students at their on-campus events throughout the school year. More specifically, 90% (36/40) of survey respondent club executives said that their club struggles with “maximizing event turnout”, and 73% (29/40) struggle with “estimating how many guests will attend an event”.
* Dunleavy (2008) defines student engagement as having three dimensions and examples of each:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Behavioural | Value of schooling outcomes, participation in extracurricular and non-academic school activities, attendance. |
| Academic-Cognitive | Time-on-task, homework completion, response to challenges in learning, effort directed toward learning, cognition and strategic learning. |
| Social-Psychological | Sense of belonging, relationships, perception of capacity of success/sense of competence, motivation, interest, need for choice and autonomy. |

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=3a57baa1-ce11-4007-a86d-5974ba93a632%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=508008186&db=eue>

(cite)

* Attending events, whether they are social, educational, or just a new experience, is arguably an important part of well-being for university students. Being involved on campus helps students find a sense of community, which can have positive outcomes on their learning.

**Report Objectives and Purpose**

* The purpose of this report is to focus on one of several elements of student engagement, on-campus events, in order to contribute to student engagement as a whole.

**Research Methods**

* The primary source of data for this report is a survey conducted online, in which 40 UBC students who have leadership positions in clubs on campus answered questions about their experiences with trying to engage students with on-campus events.
* Secondary sources for this report include a review of literature pertaining to student engagement in higher education generally as well as specifically regarding extracurricular involvement.

**Scope of Inquiry**

* This report is focused on finding some key ways to make students at UBC more engaged and involved in the on-campus community through AMS clubs. These findings may be applied more widely to student engagement in higher education more generally, but my primary source relies on UBC students only. Secondary research will focus on key figures, definitions, and theories regarding student engagement.

**Data Section**

**Survey: Areas of Focus and Objectives**

The key objective of the survey conducted was to gather an overview of the key ways that clubs on campus are currently engaging with students, particularly in the form of event planning and marketing. The survey asked club executives to not only outline what their current event planning tools are, but also in their opinion what factors contributed to the most successful events. The questions focused on marketing platforms,

**Event Marketing on Campus**

Currently, social media is the main way that clubs interact with students and market their events. This report focuses on the following platforms for student engagement:

* Facebook
* Instagram
* Email
* Posters
* Cross-posting on other clubs’ social media channels (i.e. having other clubs or organizations on campus share posts or events with their audience)
* Announcements about events, opportunities, etc. during lectures

**Figure 1: Platforms for Student Engagement at UBC**

Figure 1 illustrates the most commonly used platforms for marketing club events at UBC according to the. It is evident that the events tool on Facebook is a key platform for reaching students and advertising events.

**Survey Participants’ Background**

The survey was distributed and completed by 40 executive members of the following clubs at UBC:

* Political Science Students’ Association (PSSA)
* International Relations Students Association (IRSA)
* Pre-Law Society
* ECON Club
* Forestry Undergraduate Society (FUS)
* Electrical & Computer Engineering Student Society (ECESS)
* Engineering Undergraduate Society (EUS)
* Yoga Club
* Philosophy Students’ Association
* Pre-Dental Society
* Pre-Education Club

**Survey Findings**

**Marketing Platforms**

**Figure 2: Which event marketing tactics do you find to be the most effective?**

* Figure 2 illustrates a question which allowed executives to select the three marketing tactics that based on their experiences, they find the most effective for engaging students at UBC. As seen in Figure 2, Facebook, Instagram, and Other Clubs’ Social Media Channels are deemed to be the most effective. Other Clubs’ Social Media Channels refers to collaborations between clubs in which they reach greater audiences with similar interests by having their events or other social media content shared on similar clubs’ pages.
* Although platform is important, there are ways to make marketing more effective, particularly when targeting students. According to secondary sources, adding event photos to Facebook events is an excellent way to increase the likelihood that students will attend events. Creating a more “dynamic” event page is an important element of engaging students. This may also include using hashtags, or posting multiple times to engage with the student audience more regularly. <https://www.formstack.com/blog/2012/ways-increase-attendance-campus-events/> (cite)

**Event Timing**

* Majority (55%) of survey respondents said that Any Weekday (Monday-Thursday) was the best time to host an event to maximize turnout, while 28% selected Thursday and 18% selected Wednesday.
* 90% of club executives said that event turnout is impacted by the time of year (i.e. midterm or final season).
* Almost all of the clubs that were included in the sample host at least 6 events per year.
* Be able to identify the target audience for marketing events is a key element of increasing turnout. Planning online content, events, and programs around the needs of students is an excellent way to boost engagement. In the case of UBC students, on-campus involvement with clubs should not interfere with academic work, so scheduling events during less busy times of year such as the beginning of the semester or right after midterms will make students more likely to get involved. <https://www.qs.com/3-ways-increase-student-attendance-recruitment-events/> (cite)
* In an interview with an executive from the Pre-Education Club, they revealed that in the past the club had tried to host weekend events and had almost no students attend. For this reason, their club has a policy which states that all meetings and events will be held during the week.
* A majority of students at UBC commute from other areas of Vancouver or outside of Vancouver. Having events during the week in the early evening when students may be finished classes but already on campus may make it more convenient for them to attend events or club meetings.

**Event Location**

**Figure 3: Which factor is most important for choosing event location?**

* Although cost and appearance may be important factors in choosing the location of an event to get students to attend, the club executives who answered the survey prioritize relevance and convenience of the location.

**Other Event Factors**

* Informal interviews with executives from 5 different clubs revealed a variety of other opportunities for student engagement:
	+ hosting social media contests in which students can win free club membership, merchandise, or entry to an event by sharing social media posts with friends
	+ having guest speakers at events: this encourages students who wish to network, learn from experts, or add unique perspectives to their university experience
	+ providing free drinks or snacks at events can be a great way to encourage busy students to attend an event, particularly in the evenings

**Conclusions**

**Summary of Research Findings**

* The primary data from the survey of club executives illustrates that almost all club executives see student engagement as a challenge. Based on their survey answers, it is evident that clubs on campus have developed strategies to boost engagement and motivate students to attend events on campus.

**Recommendations**

1. Marketing Strategy:
	1. post multiple times across platforms,
	2. maximize the impact of facebook events: post photos,
	3. Inclusion: UBC policy <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/organizing-campus-events/event-planning-resources/tips-promotions-marketing>
2. Event Planning
	1. host event during the week, early evening
	2. host in a location relevant to theme (Pre-Law events at Allard)