

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program

Student Research Report

Analyzing Communication Strategies of UBC Recreation for Student Drivers

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Themes: Community, Wellbeing

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A Survey on UBC Student Drivers' Perception of the Communication Strategies from UBC Recreation

Background: Commuters make up 75% of the student population at the University of British Columbia. If the commuter student population is unaware of the various athletic activities on campus, then they will directly contribute to low participation rates in these programs. Additionally, receiving participation from commuter students who commute by car (student drivers) in athletic programs is important because these students are more likely to adopt an “in-and-out attitude” in which they perceive University as a location where they solely attend classes and are more likely to develop a sedentary behaviour. Student drivers can benefit from participating in UBC Recreation programs since they will receive the opportunity to develop a social network of like-minded peers and live a more active lifestyle.

Goal: The goal of this study is to receive insightful feedback from UBC student drivers about their commute, their awareness of UBC recreation activities, and their preferred communication methods. Thereafter, our goal is to assess the received feedback and generate useful suggestions for UBC Recreation to incorporate into their communication methods.

Project Design: Mixed-method approach was used to collect both quantifiable and open-ended responses from participants through the online Google-Form survey platform. Participants in this project were UBC students who commute to UBC campus by car and park in one of the UBC parkade on a regular basis. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and referrals via emails. Questionnaires in the survey forms inquired about participants' general demographic informations, perspectives on the UBC Recreation programs, and their preferred communication strategies from UBC Recreation.

Project Outcomes: Student drivers' knowledge and participation rate in UBC Recreation programs are low. Among the participants, first-year students have the highest involvement rate and is decreased in the upper-years. The lack of involvement of commuter students suggest an “in-and-out attitude”. Current communication strategies are not effective at communicating the UBC Recreation programs available to students who are not involved in extracurricular activities or competitive sports. Responses regarding the communication strategies were mostly negative or neutral, emphasizing on the the lack of organization and communication to promote UBC Recreation programs.

Suggestions for Partner: Increasing social media presence would help inform more students since more than half of the participants in this study indicated that social media is their preferred communication tool. Targeting upper-year students, non-Kinesiology students and transfer students should be a priority since this group of students have the least awareness and participation in UBC Recreation programs. It is also advised that UBC Recreation notifies all students that activities for all level is offered and not only for the “hardcore” participants.

Introduction

University student participation in university endorsed extracurricular activities has been a key focus in past literature reviews, but these reviews often disregard the perspectives of a variety of subpopulations, such as commuters (Melendez, 2015). According to Krasnick-Madden (2017), commuters make up the majority of the student population at the University of British Columbia; composing of 75% of the entire student population. On average, students take about 25 minutes to commute to campus, with the highest 20% of commuters traveling for 45 minutes or more (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2011). Observing these statistics, acknowledging the perspectives of commuters is important (Melendez, 2015). The purpose of this report is to assess the perspectives of commuter students at the University of British Columbia and their opinions towards their commute as well as the current UBC Recreation programs.

Literature Review

With the evolving demographic trends on campus, universities are finding it increasingly difficult to retain and receive participation from commuter students since commuter students are more likely to adopt an “in-and-out attitude” (Kirk & Lewis, 2013 p.56). Students who adopt this attitude perceive university as a setting where they only attend class, and avoid participation in extracurricular activities (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). According to Kirk & Lewis (2013), commuters adopt the “in-and-out-attitude” due to time constraints. Commuters are more likely to have a complex and busy life which makes it difficult to balance coursework, extracurricular activities, employment, and scheduling with the added time spent commuting between their home and their respective university. Additionally, it is even harder for commuters to participate in activities on campus when a considerable amount of the scheduled activities take place in the evening and are not held at a time that commuters are typically on campus (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). The main reason for individuals between the ages 20-24 to not participate in sport programs is due to not having enough time (40.3%) (Canadian Heritage, 2010). To make the situation worse, since commuters spend less time on campus they are simply unaware of the variety of campus events which is consequently contributing to the poor attendance of the commuter population (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011).

Since commuters typically live complex and busy lives, their frequent response is to remain uninvolved and disconnected from their peers (Melendez, 2015) and the activities that their campus offers (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). This attitude avoids sense of community and social involvement, which are stated to be the most important factors in a student’s well-being (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). Several studies have discovered a positive link between university athletic program participation and the healthy adjustment to stressful academic and social pressures of a university student. The positive social adjustment that accompanies participation in athletic programs can be attributed to the development of social networks that are created between the commuter and like-minded peers through the athletic events. Furthermore, individuals who commute by car are more likely to benefit from incorporating athletic programs into their lives since using a car to commute to a destination promotes a more sedentary behaviour compared to other methods of active transportation such as walking or biking (Frederick, Riggs, & Gilderbloom, 2017). It is important to note that there

is a limited amount of studies that have explored the effects of university athletic program participation and commuter student participation (Melendez, 2015).

Methods

Participants

For this project, the targeted population is students studying at UBC who commute to campus on a regular basis, in particular, student drivers. As previously stated, student drivers were chosen as our target population since compared to other modes of active transportation such as walking and biking, using a car to commute to a destination promotes a more sedentary behaviour (Frederick, Riggs, & Gilderbloom, 2017). The common sedentary behaviour of commuters can be reduced or eliminated by increasing their participation in physical activity programs. Based on the literature, the purpose of this project is to investigate the participation rates of student drivers in physical activity events and activities held by the UBC Recreation program. Furthermore, this project will assess if student drivers have adopted the “in-and-out attitude” due to having many time constraints (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). The project will evaluate the student drivers responses based on their proximity between the parkades and the Student Union Building/Nest since this is where the UBC Recreation activities are promoted and held (Refer to Appendix L). A possibility of differences may arise in student drivers’ participation in UBC Recreation programs depending on the proximity of their preferred parkade to Student Union Building. Given that the North parkade is a closer proximity to the Student Union Building/Nest where UBC recreation programs are held as compared to the other parkades, this proposed project anticipates a more positive response towards awareness and participation in UBC Recreation programs.

Data Collection

The mixed-method approach was used in this project to investigate how UBC student drivers hear about the UBC Recreation programs and their preferred communication strategies in receiving information about the UBC Recreation programs. The mixed-method approach states that surveys are a commonly used when obtaining quantifiable biographic data and qualitative, open-ended responses from participants is necessary (Drape et al., 2017). Furthermore, The survey forms are favourable for the participants as it is less time-consuming and easier for them to adopt into their busy schedules. The online Google-Form survey allows participants to fill up the questionnaires at any time, without a time constraint, and at any location without any geographical limitations. The Google-Form also allows for anonymity as participants can participate in this survey by completing the online survey forms without having to meet the researchers in person. Finally, the online Google-Form surveys provide the researchers the flexibility to structure and collect both quantifiable multiple-choice questions and qualitative open-ended questions which are essential in the mixed-method approach (Drape et al., 2017). For the current project, the online Google-Form surveys were disseminated on social media platforms such as Facebook as well as personally shared by e-mail to obtain responses from UBC students.

Participants Recruitment

The recruitment process of this project was conducted using the convenience sampling method as well as the snowball sampling method. The convenience sampling and snowball sampling approach are commonly utilized in studies to explore a sociological issue or to understand the perceptions of hidden or 'hard-to-reach' populations (Abrams, Dornig, & Curran, 2009; Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). As commuter students are commonly less aware to the activities on campus due to their 'in-and-out attitude' (Kirk & Lewis, 2013), the convenience sampling approach by advertising through online social media (e.g., Facebook) would attract the attention from UBC student drivers. The snowball sampling method was later incorporated into the recruitment process when previously recruited participants identified other potential participants who possessed the required characteristics to participate in the study. As such, this project was able to reach out to possibly more participants by recruiting them through using a combination of the two different sampling methods explained above.

Procedures

All eligible participants who identified themselves as UBC students, commute to UBC campus by car on a regular basis, and were interested in participating in this online survey contacted the group member of this project. Thereafter, the interested participants were provided a link to the Google-Form survey website. Prior to proceeding with the survey, participants were given information about the purpose, study procedures, and the dissemination of the potential outcome of this project. Participants were informed that their consent to participate in this research project was provided by answering the survey (refer to APPENDIX J). Once the participants had completed the survey, they could submit the survey form online at any time of their choosing.

In the online survey form, each participant was required to provide general background information about themselves including their age, faculty, academic year, commute hours, and their average duration on campus. To ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity, the online survey form did not require participants to disclose any identifiable personal information such as name nor student identification number. The recruitment process and the process of answering the online survey forms was voluntary and no incentives were given.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistical data from quantitative questions was analyzed using statistical graphics, in particular, pie charts. A pie chart is a circular figure divided into a proportion that corresponds to a percentage of the response (Tokunaga, 2016). The results of the chosen statistical graphics depended on the information that was collected from the participants. The data collected from the five parkades is analyzed and presented in full detail in the results section.

Pie charts were used to analyze and present the background information of participants such as their faculty and academic year. Responses of each category of closed-ended question were quantified in percentages to illustrate the proportions of the demographic of our sample. Moreover, pie charts were also utilized in the analysis of the

participants' preferred communication strategies. Given that the responses of each category were quantified in proportions and percentages, pie charts allowed the group members to quickly and visually identify the percentage breakdown of participants in each category of responses as well as the preferred communication strategy from UBC Recreation.

The open-ended responses were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The open-ended responses were coded into sub-themes and the sub-themes were then categorized into overarching themes. For cases where the open-ended responses did not fit in any of the common theme, the responses were analyzed on their own. The analysis of open-ended responses are discussed in further detail in the Results and Discussion sections.

Results

Participant Details

The results show that the majority of the participants are in the Kinesiology faculty (42.1%) while participants in the Arts faculty comprise of 36.8% (Refer to Appendix A). Participants in the Science, Engineering/Applied Sciences, Health Sciences, and Business each comprised of 5.3% respectively (Refer to Appendix A). The results show that the majority of the participants are in their third year of studies (63.2%); 15.8% are in fourth year, 10.5% are in second year, and 5.3% comprise of first and fifth year respectively (Refer to Appendix I)

Parking, time spent commuting and time spent on campus

The results show that the majority of the participants park at the West parkade (52.6%) while the remaining 47.4% park at either the Rose Garden parkade (10.5%), the Thunderbird parkade (21.1%), or the North parkade (15.8%) (Refer to Appendix B). The results show that the majority of the participants spend 30 minutes to 1 hour driving (57.9%) while the remaining 42.2 % commute for 0 to 10 minutes (5.3%), 10 to 30 minutes (21.1%), and 1 hour or more (15.8%) (Refer to Appendix C). The results show that majority of the participants spend between 4 to 6 hours on campus (52.6%), while the remaining 47.4% spend 7 or more hours on campus (31.6%), or between 1 to 3 hours (15.8%) (Refer to Appendix D).

Opinions on commuting

After assessing the results of the open-ended question, the results showed that 52.6% have negative feelings towards their commute on campus, with the most commonly stated themes being that their commute is too long, busy, tiring and inconvenient (Refer to Appendix E). 5.3% are indifferent about their commute to campus (Refer to Appendix E). 42.1% have positive feelings towards their commute to campus stating that it's more convenient than taking transit and it's fast (Refer to Appendix E).

UBC Recreation Programs Awareness and Participation

57.9% of the participants reported that they have heard about UBC Recreation Programs while 42.1% reported that they have not heard about UBC Recreation programs (Refer to Appendix E). From the participants who have stated that they have heard of UBC

Recreation Programs, they acknowledged that they have heard of the intramurals (Storm the Wall being the recurring answer), fitness classes in the Birdcoop, the sports league, and drop-in opportunities.

Interestingly, 31.6% have participated in UBC Recreation programs while 68.4% have not have not participated in UBC Recreation programs (Refer to Appendix G1). Of those who have participated, their engagement was in the Storm the Wall, MoveUBC and sports league. After analyzing the reason why participants have chosen not to participate in UBC Recreation, 41.7% stated that they have not heard of UBC Recreation entirely (Refer to Appendix G2). Others have expressed that they do not have the time (16.7%), they have “not looked into it” (16.7%), it’s inconvenient (8.3%) or that it’s not interesting (8.3%) (Refer to Appendix G2). Additionally, a participant felt that UBC Recreation is “hardcore”, “serious” and not a program someone can “casually” be involved in (Refer to Appendix G2).

Communication Strategies

The results of the survey show that 68.4% of students’ preferred communication strategy is Facebook or other social media platforms while 10.5% preferred E-mail (Refer to Appendix H). Posters/flyers, having a professor promote UBC Recreation in class, or flyers being distributed by UBC Recreation staff were other communication preferences which comprised of 5.3% each (Refer to Appendix H).

Thoughts of Current UBC Recreation Communication Strategies

After analyzing the open-ended question which asked the participants’ opinion on the current communication strategy that is being employed by UBC Recreation, 26.7% reported that they are not aware of the programs offered by UBC Recreation. 26.7% of participants had positive views of the current communication strategy observing that the programs offered are “omnipresent”, “always [being] promoted” and are “[r]eally good.” 13.3% had a neutral opinion stating that “it’s okay”. The remaining 33.3% of responses did not belong to these themes and is further elaborated.

A participant communicated that UBC in general does not provide a community for transfer students to find a place where they belong. More specifically, this participant commented that a lot of the programs and activities offered by UBC is geared towards first year students only. Other participants suggested for UBC Recreation to create more social media platforms to inform a wide range of audiences and to utilize other communication channel. Another participant indicated that the current communication strategy could be improved because only a small majority of people are familiar with UBC Recreation.

2 of the participants who gave a response in this question wrote “n/a”. For statistical purpose, these two response have been eliminated.

Discussion

Commuting students’ participation in UBC Recreation programs appeared to be low. Commuting students also had little knowledge about the programs available. With less than half of the participants not having any knowledge about UBC Recreation, participation rate and knowledge about the programs seemed to be related to the students’ faculty and commute time. Commute times plus time spent on campus daily can make it difficult for UBC students

participate in extracurricular activities with over half of the participants' commute time between 30 minutes to an hour and spending between 4-6 hours on campus daily and a neutral to negative opinion about about the daily commute.

The lack of commuter students' involvement in recreation programs support that UBC students appear to have an 'in-and-out attitude", especially on those who had longer commute times (Kirk & Lewis, 2013). This attitude was first observed during recruitment of participants, where most of the recruitment posters failed to attract students to participate in an interview. Therefore, the sampling method had to be modified to convenience sampling by recruiting students who use any parkade on-campus instead of only using specific parkades. In addition, the sampling method was further modified to the snowball sampling approach which is commonly utilized to reach participants of specific and hard to access populations. The data collection method had to be modified to fit the new type of sampling by changing it from semi-structured interviews to semi-structured online surveys that were shared through UBC Facebook groups; this allowed the participant to fill it out when it was convenient for them by providing them the freedom to access the survey at a time and location of their choosing.

Open-ended questions were used in the online survey to probe a more explicit answer, specifically about the participant's motives to participate or not participate in UBC Recreation sports; the responses varied from vague to detailed (Refer to Appendix K2). Regarding current communication strategies to promote these programs, the responses were mostly negative or neutral, emphasizing on the lack of organization and communication to promote UBC Recreation programs . One of the participants response was:

"I've always felt that UBC is terrible at making transfer students feel at home. Most of the effort is funneled into first years and it mostly stops there. Don't get me wrong, #IAMUBC too, but I credit that to the tight-knit, teamwork-centric vibe in engineering and the activities around it (E-Week, competitions, clubs, games night, pub crawl, etc) - not to anything outside of it."

The previous quote from a probe question shows the opinion of a transfer student regarding UBC Recreation; other responses were more vague and lacked depth. In the quote, the participant acknowledges that most of the communications strategies are aimed towards first-year students, leaving transfer students and upper-year students without avid communication about the programs offered by UBC Recreation.

Involvement in UBC Recreation programs was overall low (Refer to Appendix G1) but it was higher in first-year participants and decreased in upper-year students. Kinesiology students who participated in the survey were more involved in UBC Recreation compared to students from other faculties. This difference in involvement can be due to the nature of the undergraduate program which is more related to physical education and health promotion than other faculties. The responses for not participating in UBC Recreation was mostly due to time constraints or lack of knowledge about these programs. Some participants acknowledged their interest in participating but were not able due to time constraints and long commute times (Refer to Appendix G2). Overall, the data collected about known UBC Recreation programs was good but there were some programs listed that are not currently a program of UBC Recreation (e.g., E-week). Thus, current communication strategies are not effective at communicating the UBC Recreation programs that are available to UBC students who are not

involved in extracurricular activities or competitive sports. One participant's response to UBC Recreation's current communication strategies:

"It should be more wide reaching in terms of audience and communication channels"

This response encompasses most of the responses from this survey, acknowledging that communication between UBC Recreation and students is not good and should be improved.

Because the initial interview posters failed to work, it was decided to include a question in the survey about the best method of communication for commuting students to identify their preferred methods to increase their awareness and participation in UBC Recreation programs. According to the survey results, social media platforms were considered as the best communication strategy to learn about UBC Recreation programs (Refer to Appendix H).

There were several challenges and limitations of the study. The method of recruiting participants initially was through posters posted at two different parkades--North and West parkades but due to the lack of responses for several days, the method of recruiting participants was changed to online survey. The sampling method of online survey was chosen for convenience and for purposive sampling. The online survey was posted on social media, in particular, UBC Facebook pages.

Since the sampling method of the project was changed, there was a lack of recruitment of a variety of commuting students when posters were posted in the parkades. This may suggest the "in-and-out attitude" by Kirk & Lewis (2013), explaining that commuters do not take the time and explore and carefully observe campus and only attend classes. Despite this challenge, responses were still able to be collected from busy commuter students through the online survey that was posted on social media. However, there was also a limitation of the sample size and the accuracy of the responses since there was a small sample size and most participants were from the faculty of Kinesiology therefore, the responses might not be reliable. Participants were most commonly from the faculty of Kinesiology due to our incorporation of the snowball sampling method. The snowball sampling method was a limitation since the Kinesiology students that were already interviewed informed their peers about the survey, whom were also most commonly students from the faculty of Kinesiology. This limited our variety in the responses.

In terms of responses collected, there was a limitation of not being able to collect in-depth responses as well as not having flexibility in the interviewing process with the participants. In the first method proposed, interviewing in person allows a semi-structured interview with in-depth responses. However, since there were no responses on the posters posted at the parkades, an online survey was chosen to be the main method to gather data. Due to the limited flexibility of the online surveys, the responses that were gathered were structured and vague, disallowing a detailed response from the participants.

Recommendations for the Client

To help UBC Recreation improve the awareness and participation among students who commute, this section details the recommendations proposed by this project.

Increase Social Media Presence

Social media has become an emerging part of university students' life (Belanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014). A wide variety of students deem social media platforms as a convenient and trustworthy source where they can gather information (Singla & Arora, 2015). From the survey the current project conducted, 68.4% of the participants have indicated that their preferred method of communication strategy is through social media platform (Refer to Appendix H). Thus, it is recommended that UBC Recreation utilize social media platforms majority of the students use such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.

Increasing social media presence is an effective communication method as it creates a virtual community with online users (Belanger et al., 2014). Students are able to view others within their social network who are already involved in activities thus re-establishing credibility within the program (Belanger et al., 2014). This virtual community is more influential than the traditional method of communication (ie. flyers, posters) due to the formed relationship that already exists through social media platforms (Belanger et al., 2014). Prospective participants are also able to connect with previous participants and are more likely to engage in the common activities.

Increase program and activity awareness

Although 57.9% of the participants have heard of UBC Recreation Program, only 31.6% have participated (Refer to Appendix F & G1). Common barrier listed by the participants in the survey for their lack of participation is not being aware of the programs available to begin with (Refer to Appendix G2). Increase of participation can be enhanced if awareness is improved so that students can choose which programs to take part in. UBC Recreation awareness and participation also shows to be weak among transfer students, upper-year students and non-Kinesiology students particularly. A participant expressed their perspective by stating that activities are mainly targeted for first year students thus more focus on informing transfer students should be made if UBC Recreation desires to increase their participation rates. UBC Recreation could increase awareness by promoting in buildings where non-Kinesiology students and upper-year students often take classes. For example, investigating where required non-Kinesiology courses and upper-year courses are taken in and promoting in that facility could improve awareness and increase participation.

Let students know that multiple tiers are available

A participant in the survey expressed interest in taking part in UBC Recreation program. However, this participant thought that UBC Recreation activities are for those who are "hardcore" and "serious". It is recommended that UBC Recreation place a greater emphasis that students of all abilities and levels are welcome to participate and that there is an activity or program for what they are looking for.

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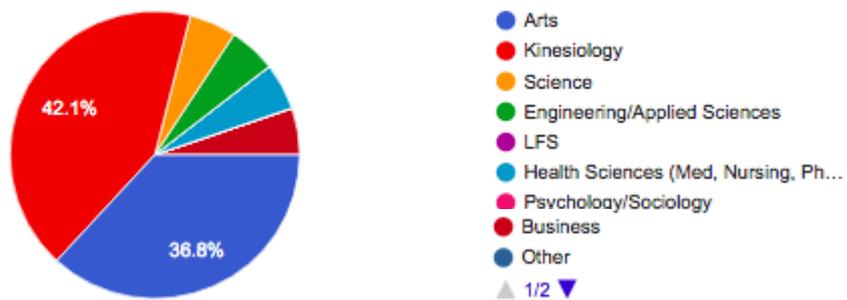
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Appendices

Appendix A: Participants' Faculty

Which faculty are you in?

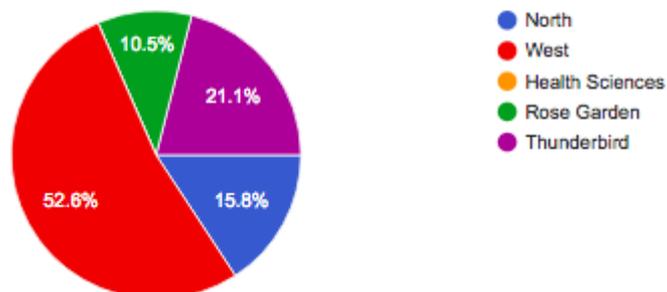
19 responses



Appendix B: Parkade Use

Which parkade do you use?

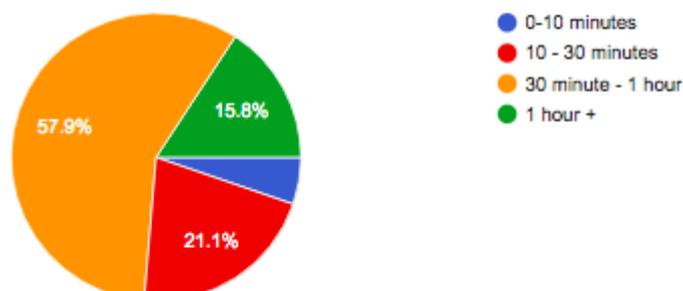
19 responses



Appendix C: Commute Time

How long is your commute to campus?

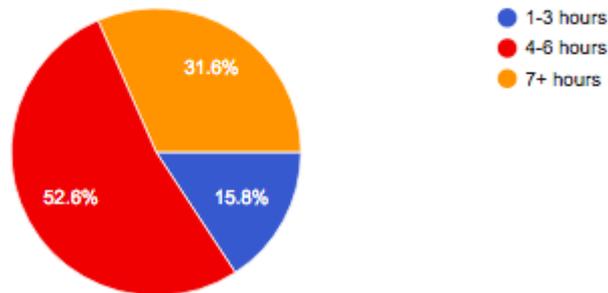
19 responses



Appendix D: Time spent on campus

How long do you usually stay on campus in a day?

19 responses



Appendix E: Opinions on commuting

Overall, how do you feel about your commute to campus?

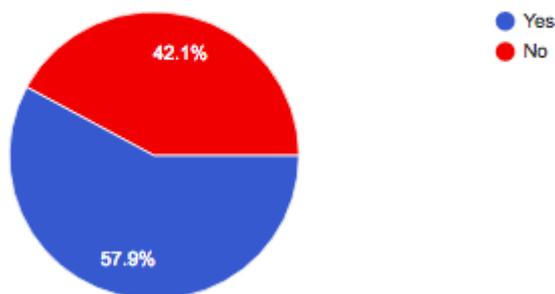
19 responses



Appendix F: UBC Recreation Knowledge

Have you heard of UBC Recreational Programs?

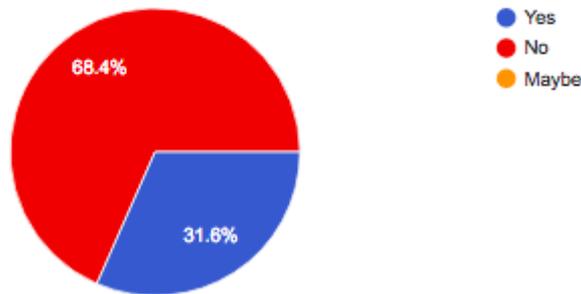
19 responses



Appendix G1: UBC Recreation Participation

Have you participated in any UBC Recreation programs?

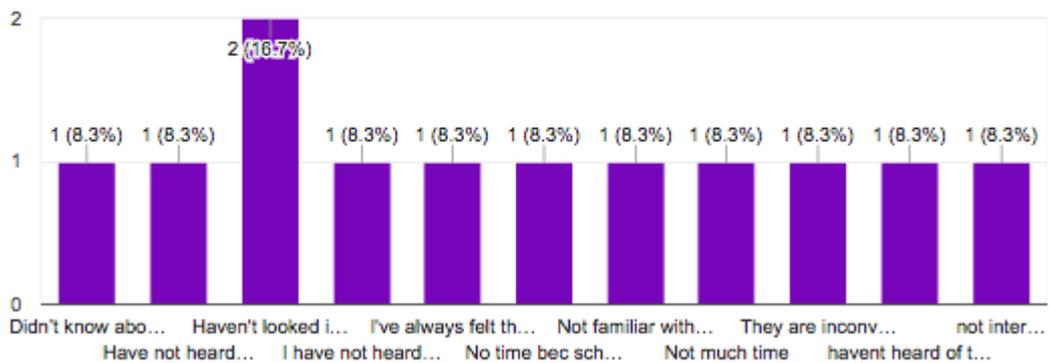
19 responses



Appendix G2: Reasons why students are not participating

If not, why not?

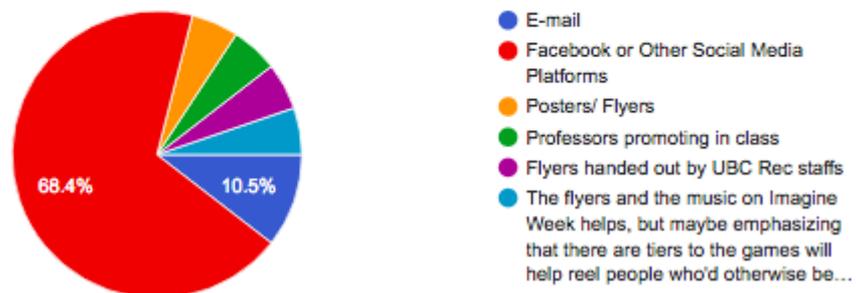
12 responses



Appendix H: Communication Strategies for UBC Recreation Programs

Which of the communication strategies would be best for you to know more about UBC Recreation programs?

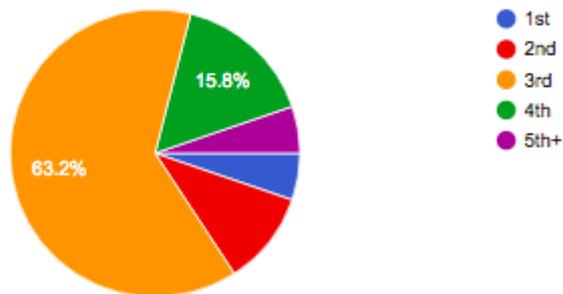
19 responses



Appendix I: Year of Study

What year are you in?

19 responses



Appendix J: Survey Description & Consent

UBC Recreation Involvement & Commuters

The purpose of the KIN 464 class project:

To gather knowledge and expertise from community members on topics related to physical activity, recreation, health promotion and/or active transportation.

Study Procedures:

With your permission, we are asking you to participate in an online interview. With the information gathered, the students will critically examine how different individuals understand or engage in health promoting activities or initiatives.

Project outcomes:

The information gathered will be part of a written report for the class project. The written report will be shared with the community partners involved with the project.

****BY ANSWERING THIS SURVEY YOU GIVE CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.****

Appendix K1: Survey Semi-structured Questions

Overall, how do you feel about your commute to campus? *

Your answer _____

Have you heard of UBC Recreational Programs? *

- Yes
 No

If yes, which UBC Recreational Programs have you heard of?

Your answer _____

Have you participated in any UBC Recreation programs? *

- Yes
 No
 Maybe

If yes, which UBC Recreation programs have you participated in?

Your answer _____

If not, why not?

Your answer _____

Appendix K2: Semi-structured Survey Probe Question

What do you think of the current communication strategies used by UBC Recreation to promote their programs?

Your answer _____

Which of the communication strategies would be best for you to know more about UBC Recreation programs? *

- E-mail
 Facebook or Other Social Media Platforms
 Posters/ Flyers
 Professors promoting in class
 Flyers handed out by UBC Rec staffs
 Other: _____

Appendix L: Map of distances from the various parkades to the Student Recreation Building

