

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program

Student Research Report

**Arts and Culture District: On-Campus Resident Gaps and Opportunity Analysis**

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**PLAN 522**

**Themes: Community, Wellbeing**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Arts & Culture (A&C) District is supported in part by the adjacent population of students, staff and residents who live within the neighbouring area. This report aims to identify the gaps and opportunities for increasing the attendance and participation of this demographic at events within the A&C District. These were identified through data gathered at pop-up engagements conducted in the NEST and Orchard Commons. These engagements consisted of three interactive boards, where participants would respond to a series of questions with sticky notes, and informal interviews, where a broader understanding would be gained of the participants 'sticky note' responses.

By the time the pop-up engagements had concluded, over 50 individuals had been engaged with, and approximately 200 unique responses had been received. After performing a thematic analysis of those responses, several key findings were determined. These findings were grouped together under the themes: (1) Advertising, Marketing and Coverage, (2) Theme and Appeal of Events, (3) Affordability and Financial Constraints, (4) Psychosocial and Behavioral Factors, (5) Venue and Timing, and (6) Other Commitments.

From these findings, several short term and long term recommendations emerged. In the short term, it is recommended that content advertising and outreach strategies have a focus on social media and online presence opposed to traditional print media. In addition, awareness about event incentives should be increased and attendance data for events within the A&C District should be coordinated and collected. As for the long term, it is recommended that an A&C identity be developed throughout campus and that events be increasingly student-led as well as impromptu or drop. Events should also be considered that contain social interaction and meeting new people as part of the event.

## **Introduction/Context**

The Arts & Culture (A&C) District of the University of British Columbia (UBC) is supported in part by the adjacent population of students, staff and residents who live within the neighbouring area. This report aims to identify the gaps and opportunities for increasing the attendance and participation of this demographic at events within the A&C District.

Increased participation in cultural activities can result in a wide range of benefits such as new perspectives being gained leading to enhanced creativity, innovation and improved wellbeing. The further development of a cultural area centered around artistic events can also lead to collaborations and a sense of community by acting as a bridge between otherwise independent individuals. Additionally, arts and cultural events offer opportunities for conserving traditional cultures of diverse communities, which in turn can facilitate community building. Thus, understanding the gaps and opportunities for increasing the participation of on-campus demographics can in turn help connect and develop a wider community through use of the District.

## **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

A community-based participatory qualitative research methodology was used to gain a more detailed understanding of the relationship between the A&C District and the on-campus resident demographic. We began to develop our understanding by initially using media and document analysis to review the existing event offerings and marketing strategies of the A&C District. Subsequently, we conducted a thematic analysis on data gathered from pin-up boards and informal interviews at multiple pop-up events to understand how the study participants are or are not being engaged into the A&C community.

Through this research, the main questions we sought to answer were:

1. What would engage the audience to spend more time before or after events?
2. What is keeping them from doing so now?

3. What would compel the potential audiences to attend cultural events?
4. What's stopping them from doing so now?

The scope of this project was decided to be residents that define themselves as living on campus, which includes students, faculty, staff, and non-UBC affiliated residents. The area defined as on-campus includes Westbrook Village, as this is considered to be part of UBC, but excludes the University Endowment Lands which are operated as a separate entity from the University.

The sites initially considered for our pop-up engagements were an on-campus residence building (Ponderosa Commons), Westbrook Village (Save-On Foods) and the NEST. It was believed that together these sites would provide a wide cross-section of our target demographic. For instance, an on-campus residence building would target students that live in a specific area on-campus, the NEST would provide access to a wider range of on-campus residents, and Westbrook Village would target relatively more non-student residents that live on-campus. To widen our range of demographics, these engagements would also be conducted at different times of day.

The engagement event at the NEST was conducted during lunch time when foot traffic was at its peak period. We located ourselves between other display tables which allowed us to collectively boost each other's foot traffic with the intent to increase participation. The second engagement session was originally scheduled to be located outside of Ponderosa at dinner time, but at setup time it was determined that due to inclement weather there was an insufficient amount of pedestrian activity. To maximize engagement interactions, we relocated to Orchard Commons, a multi-use residential/academic building that has a dining hall. We set up during dinner hours to capture a high-level of foot traffic; however, this location did not generate the same degree of interaction as the NEST. Our engagement for Westbrook village outside of the Save-On Foods unfortunately had to be cancelled due adverse weather conditions.

There were significant differences in the ambiance, layout and participant demographics between the two engagements we conducted. The NEST was a relatively open space which allowed for participants to congregate and observe the engagement from a distance prior to deciding if they wanted to approach. The Orchard Commons dining hall was nearly opposite as we were set-up in a corridor within which most individuals walked by us, or tried to avoid us, on their way to the adjacent dining hall. There was a high-level of foot traffic, but not the same degree of interaction as there was at the NEST.

The popup engagement and surveying consisted of three interactive board, where participants would place sticky notes as they responded. Each board had a question that the respondents were to answer. See **Appendix**.

Board 1 - Pin the Map: Where do you access arts and culture on campus?

Board 2 - What would compel you to attend more events on campus?

Board 3 - What reasons prevent you from attending events on campus?

After participants had responded with sticky notes, we then held informal conversations with them to gain a broader understanding of their responses. When holding these conversations, it was important to let the participant guide the conversation. During this whole process, and while deciding the questions for our boards, we tried to be as open ended as we could, as we did not want to be prescriptive in the questions we were laying out, or the conversations we were engaged in. We felt that this was the most important key for gaining new insights that we ourselves could not detect on our own.

## **Findings**

By the time we had concluded our pop-up engagements, we had engaged with over 50 individuals, and received approximately 200 unique responses. Through the subsequent thematic analysis of those responses that we completed, several key findings could be determined. We grouped them together under the following six themes: (1) Advertising, Marketing and Coverage, (2) Theme and Appeal of Events, (3) Affordability and Financial

Constraints, (4) Psychosocial and Behavioral Factors, (5) Venue and Timing, and (6) Other Commitments.

## 1. Advertising, Marketing and Coverage

This was the most prominent factor for which feedback was received.

### Unawareness about Arts and Culture District

There were instances where the participants were unaware of the existence or presence of the A&C District on campus. For instance, during one of the pop-up engagement events, a participant said, "I didn't know there was an arts district". Similarly, participants who were aware of A&C events on campus, were often unable to locate the District on a campus map. The prevalence of ignorance about the existence, scope and events



of the A&C District points towards a gap in information sharing. Participants suggested that 'increased visibility' of the A&C District and its events would compel them to participate more.

### Gaps in Information Sharing and Media Coverage

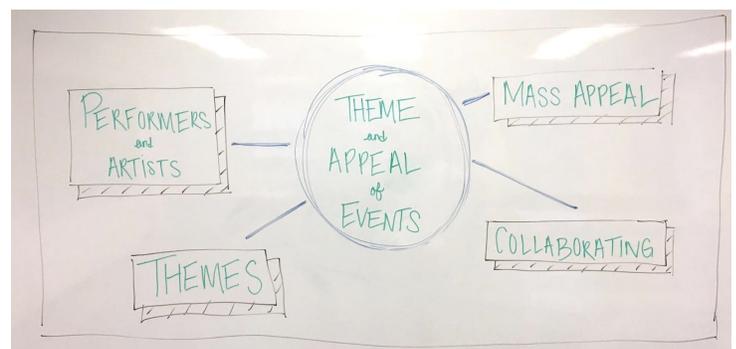
Most of the participants did not know where or how to receive information about upcoming events. This finding highlights a gap and opportunity for additional advertising and marketing of A&C events. Several participants mentioned that they tend to attend events that they see posted on social media (especially Facebook). Respondents seldom referred to the promotions of A&C events on the official website of UBC. However, it was found that promotion of events by word of mouth also garnered interest of on-campus residents. For instance, some study participants mentioned that 'in-person promotion of events helps attract students' and 'word of mouth is super powerful'. Participants suggested that information about the events should be

posted well in advance to facilitate their time management and planning to attend the events. In contrast, there was also concerns stemming from advertising overload meaning that participants felt inundated with too much information leading to confusion, desensitization to advertising resulting in loss of interest in attending events. Some participants, who were students living in on-campus residences, mentioned that they were '*overwhelmed with the amount of advertisements*' and consequently over time they '*became desensitized to things*'. Based on the feedback from our engagements, it appears that social media advertising is more effective than both printed materials and online website promotion. Advertisements done through social media may receive more attention and coverage as participants indicated social media was their preferred method. In-person promotion of events can help attract students, and word of mouth is a free and powerful resource. In addition, in-person pop-up events and "word of mouth" can also help combat students' feelings of being "desensitized" and "overlooked" by advertisements they are exposed to online and in print. This reinforces the power of pop-up events. However, in-person pop-up advertising can be relatively resource intensive.

## 2. Theme and Appeal of Events

### Theme of events

The participants of this study felt that they would be more compelled to attend the A&C events if the themes of the events were more diverse, such as those based on social issues (eg. climate change and sustainability), moral values, diverse cultures, fine arts, sports, pub-dance events, and events that celebrate difference.



### Format of events

There was also interest in different formats of these events like talks, chats, presentations, lecture series, pop-up performances, visual events and art galleries. Although initially these may be viewed as tangential arts and cultural since they are not traditional performance and presentation formats, they are commonly attended by campus residents and could be leveraged for a new perspective on A&C. For example, a speaker series formatted as TED talks was suggested by a participant and these could be focused on A&C content.

### **Mass appeal of events**

In general, it appeared that the A&C events currently offered did not enjoy popularity among the student population living on campus. Some students indicated that they did not feel as if they were the target audience for the A&C District. For instance, some respondents stated that they were *'not interested in many events'*. One participant highlighted that there are *'lots of other things going on and I found out about a jam session on Facebook, which is off-campus'*. This reflects the competition that the A&C District events face to get more attention from on-campus residents. It was observed by one participant that events at The Pit are popular, and that if there were more events like that in the A&C District, there would be more on-campus participants. There was also some concern that the event formats should be customized and designed in a way that makes them more accessible to participants with special requirements and disabilities. A participant in one of the pop-up engagements mentioned that she had a hearing problem and people like her would be interested in more visual events.

Lastly, students involved in arts and cultural studies may be more aware than the average student, both about the A&C District and its various events. For example, one participant was an undergraduate student in Arts for Media Studies, and knew where the A&C District was as they actively host the Arts Undergraduate Society Open Mic Night at Somerset. At the same time, it was found that popular events like Talks with Michio Kakes and Winter Classic enjoyed prominent mass appeal and were sold out. Many participants also expressed desire for smaller galleries or pop-up arts events.

### **Performers & Artists**

The results showed that the on-campus residents were interested in attending performances by *famous people* or *celebrities*. In contrast, there was also interest in *local artists*. Some participants also suggested that more financial and logistic support should be provided for grassroots *student-led* events (like music clubs). For example, one of the study participants was a student who performed *jam sessions* outside the NEST and wondered what could be done to promote student led clubs or organization. Some participants called for collaboration with on-campus residences and coordination with their student representatives. If the A&C District hosted more student-led events, such as open mic or comedy nights, student participation may increase. It was suggested that these events could be coordinated with student representatives of on-campus housing.

### 3. Affordability & Financial Constraints

#### Cost of admission

Most of the participants felt that the major deterrent in attending A&C events was the 'cost of tickets', which were perceived as 'expensive' which partly reflects the financial priorities of the student demographic. Many on-campus residents expressed interest in attending *free* events or having the



option of '*reduced price for groups*'. At the same time, one participant also suggested that '*small money investments help getting people to commit to attending*'.

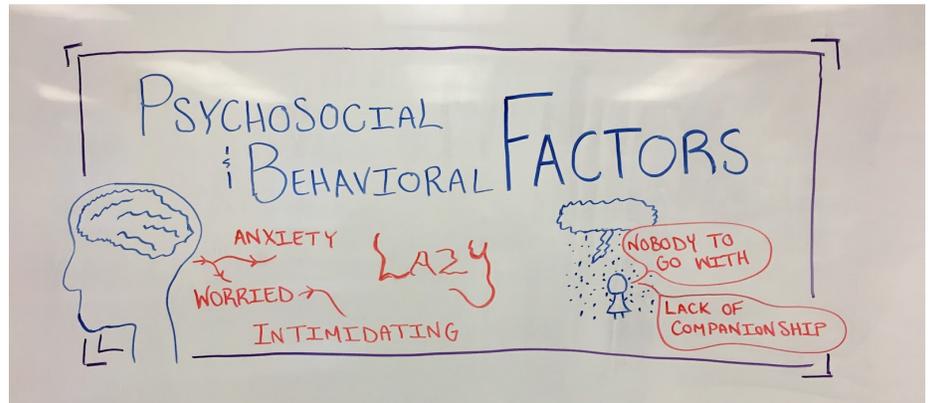
#### Food

It was found that many participants wanted to attend events with an option of free food and alcoholic beverages. Free food appeared to add to their savings and thus had the ability to increase draw. Even if the food was not free, an interest was found in the integration of food options with venue of the A&C events. One participant suggested that '*lunch time events need to have food*'.

## 4. Psychosocial and Behavioral factors

### Psychosocial issues

The results revealed that some of the participants did not attend the A&C events due to *social anxiety*. They perceived events as '*intimidating*' and suggested that such events



'need ice breakers'. A few on-campus residents were '*worried that others won't attend events*' so they in turn refrained from participating in the events. Laziness, or alternatively phrased as lack of motivation, was also found to be a reason that kept the participants from attending the events.

### Companionship

Lack of company was a major factor stated by many participants that prevented them from attending events. Participants reported that they had '*no one to go with*' and that they were '*more willing to attend with friends*'. On-campus residents who had a network of friendly connections were more likely to attend the A&C events. For instance, a participant who was a Residence Advisor said that she '*knows people and has connections to events go too*'. Similarly, a business undergraduate student stated that he has '*gone to Belkin, MOA, and a capella in one of the music buildings because a friend of a friend was promoting it*'.

## 5. Venue and timings



Figure 1: Where Participants Seek Arts and Culture on UBC Campus



## Timing of Events

Many participants also expressed concern over the timing of events, specifically the length of time and the commitment required. They said that attending an event for two to three hours may be too much of a commitment, but would attend more spontaneous or drop-in events, where people can come and go and stay for however long they please. Some participants also stated that the current timing of events is inconvenient, with weekday evenings being the best. Often some events conflict with class times.

## Frequency of Events

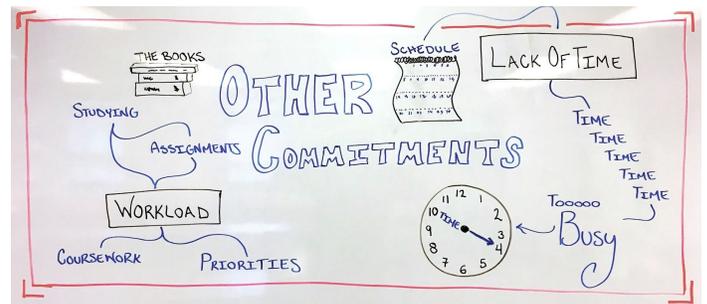
Some concern was also expressed over the frequency of events. A few participants indicated that tickets were often sold out or difficult to purchase, and wished for a greater frequency of what was offered. This concern was often expressed in relation to the timing of events. If students could not attend due to timing conflicts, then they were much more likely to attend if the frequency had increased.

## 6. Other commitments

### Study Workload

Participants also noted that they would like to attend more A&C events, but there are several reasons preventing them from doing so. One example provided was a heavy academic workload. Many students said that they had too much homework and assignments, as well as other academic priorities which kept them from participating.

However, the comment of a lack of time, did come from participants outside of school as well, and was much broader than from coursework. Many participants discussed that they don't have time to attend a whole event. One participant wished that there were more impromptu events, or events that provided the flexibility to attend for a small amount of time.



### Limitations

Based on the parameters of the study and engagement process undertaken, there were several limitations including, but not limited to; schedule, budget, resources, demographics, unforeseen conditions, and format which will be discussed in the following sections.

### Schedule, Budget and Resources

Firstly, this study was completed within a compressed schedule due to its connectivity with the graduate coursework of PLAN 522: Qualitative Methods. Due to the 8-week schedule, which included scoping, forming groups, techniques learning, and reporting for the project, there was less than 2 weeks to complete the actual engagement activities. Furthermore, both budget and resources limited the feasibility of utilizing various other qualitative engagement methodologies permissible within the schedule. With more resources and time, a much wider

demographic and geography may have been engaged with, across several qualitative methods.

## **Geography and Segregation of Demographics**

Many of the demographics within UBC are segregated, and because of our limited timeframe and resources, we were limited in which demographics we could engage with. UBC is a large campus with unique groups clustered in shared spaces but with limited intermingling. This created challenges in accessing a diverse and representative group through two engagements. As we only established a pop-up engagement at the NEST and Orchard Commons, we only conducted a pop-up engagement in two buildings, one in central campus and one in south campus. An example of the difference in responses was evident between the NEST and the Orchard Commons engagements with a great number of students at the dining hall noting their struggles with time and social isolation as hindrance to their participation in activities, which did not tend to be the case with the students we interacted with at the NEST.

## **Inclement Weather**

We had planned to do a third pop-up engagement at Westbrook village to better engage the non-student on-campus population, however due to inclement weather this had to be cancelled. In addition, we were forced to do indoor events only and had to adapt the engagements we did do as a result. For instance, our second engagement was originally planned for Ponderosa, which would have been favourable to do outside where foot traffic is highest, however due to inclement weather, this traffic was very low, and we had to shift this pop-up engagement to Orchard Commons.

## **Sample Bias and Limited Data**

While we did engage 50 on-campus residents, and received 200 unique engagements, it should be noted that this is still a very small subset of the overall population that lives on-campus. Therefore, while the comments we received are notable, due to a low sample size,

making assumptions that the majority of the on-campus population holds these same concerns may not be, statistically speaking, accurate.

## **Pop-up Format**

There are also several limitations with the format we chose. Due to the pop-up nature, we could only obtain what information from holding brief conversations. In addition, we cannot fully understand or recommunicate the feelings that were expressed to us. The pop-up format was brief with most engagements lasting less than a minute. The resulting feedback was “off the cuff” as opposed to detailed or thoroughly contemplated.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term**

#### **Develop Content Advertising and Outreach Strategies**

Develop content advertising and outreach strategies with a focus on social media and online presence opposed to traditional print media. Outreach strategy should include awareness about event incentives (e.g., affordable/free and food).

#### **Increase Awareness About Event Incentives**

Free events are only an affordable option if you are aware that it is happening. Incentives can come in many forms, but certainly admission price and food were repeatedly heard in our engagements.

#### **Coordinate Attendance Data Collection**

It is important to coordinate attendance data collection to develop more understanding of attendance and attendee demographics, which can be used to better inform future policy decisions.

### **Long Term**

## **Develop an Arts and Culture identity throughout campus**

The development of an A&C identity both within the district area but also across campus in less formal spaces such as the NEST or student residences. This could be accomplished by developing an A&C identity throughout campus through place-making, wayfinding and decentralization.

## **Explore Opportunities for Student-Led Events**

Throughout our engagement, we also heard of the importance of ensuring that there are opportunities for the A&C District to not just be for students, but also by students. Grassroots events could be developed through coordination with established student clubs and initiatives. There may also be opportunities to consider the integration of '*art activism*'.

## **Offer Events for Which Attendance is Impromptu**

Future consideration for drop-in and informal events to accommodate students' busy schedules could lead to increased student participation.

## **Build Community Through Social Interactions**

Events should also be considered that can have social interaction and meeting new people as part of the event. Activities to be encouraged should focus on building community through social interactions. This could include events such as trivia, open mic, icebreakers, and informal questions and interactions with performers.

# Appendix

Figure 2: *Board 1* used for the Pop-up Engagements

**Where do you access arts and culture on campus?**



We want to hear from you! Place a sticker on the map.



**Arts and Culture District  
Public Feedback**

Figure 3: *Board 2/3* used for the Pop-up Engagements

<p><b>What would compel you to attend more events on campus?</b></p>	<p><b>What prevents you from attending more events on campus?</b></p>
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**Arts and Culture District Public Feedback**