

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program

Student Research Report

**Barriers to Recreation for the Indigenous Population at UBC Point-Grey Campus**

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**University of British Columbia**

**KIN 464**

**Themes: Community, Health, Wellbeing**

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Running head: Recreation for the Indigenous Population

Barriers to Recreation for the Indigenous Population at UBC Point-Grey Campus

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The University of British Columbia

Kinesiology 464 001: Health Promotion and Physical Activity

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## Executive Summary

### **An Investigation of UBC Recreations' Engagement with the Indigenous Population at the UBC Point-Grey Campus**

This community-based conversation aimed to explore the barriers that Indigenous peoples face when approaching recreational activities, while listening to ideas that would make recreation more welcoming and accessible. The goal was to listen to how current recreation conditions could be altered to enable greater participation rates in the Indigenous population. Previous research indicates that recreation is important in the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing within the Indigenous culture, while also promoting connection among individuals (McHugh, Deal, Blye, Dimler, Halpenny, Sivak, & Holt, 2019). Despite these findings, Indigenous communities have had historically low rates of participation in recreation, prompting the Canadian federal government to create the *Aboriginal Sport Policy*. This policy acknowledged the difference and suggested ways to overcome these barriers in order to increase equity (Canadian Heritage, 2005). While being aware that UBC Recreation has also identified the Indigenous population as a less engaged group, discussions at the Longhouse were held to discover why the population was not participating as much as other groups on campus. The researchers were welcomed in the Longhouse for a one-week period in order to engage with the target population and completed the week with a lunch in the Great Hall (Sty-Wet-Tan) in order to discuss UBC Recreation with members of the Indigenous community.

Discussions were had within the Longhouse, and themes were later summarized with the purpose of identifying issues and barriers that Indigenous peoples had expressed. During this community-based research there were many obstacles, including both a lack of trust and relationship between UBC Recreation and members of the Longhouse, poor engagement with the community, and the absence of initial Participatory Action Research (PAR). Despite these issues, by the day of the luncheon there was more engagement between the researchers and the community, which fostered constructive conversations. There was no structured interview questions. Instead, the topic of UBC Recreation was introduced and the participants led the conversation around their past experiences, desires, or issues with UBC Recreation. Common themes of conversation were centered around Indigenous participants not feeling welcomed in recreational spaces on campus and having a lack of activities that spark enough interest to participate in. Some individuals were unaware of UBC Recreation, due to a lack of active engagement by UBC Recreation in the Longhouse. In contrast, there were positive findings such as the longstanding success of the Longhouse Basketball team, which many people enjoyed participating in.

Through the experience of being in the Longhouse and conducting this research, we would recommend that future research should be conducted using PAR. In the context of UBC Recreation, it is recommended that there is a presence during the beginning of the school year, stronger relationships between the Longhouse and UBC Recreation should be established, and more inclusive activities should be planned.

## **Introduction**

UBC Athletics & Recreation has a vision, “to engage a healthy, active and connected community where each person is at their personal best and proud of their UBC experience” (UBC Athletics and Recreation, 2020). Recreational participation may be defined as the activities that an individual partakes in during their leisure time (Aizelwood, Bevelander, & Pendakur, 2005). Recreation on campus has many benefits, ranging from positive social interactions to the establishment of healthy lifestyle behaviours in early adulthood (Hoffman, 2016). This study acknowledges that in Indigenous culture there is no distinguishable difference between sport, recreation or physical activity (PA). They are all seen as activities that are interrelated to both personal and community well-being; therefore, the term recreation will be all encompassing (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

## **Literature Review**

The importance of regular participation in light intensity recreational PA is clear (Penedo & Dahn, 2005). Both mental and physical well-being are improved through consistent PA (Penedo & Dahn, 2005). Further, studies have indicated that PA improves mood and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression (Penedo & Dahn, 2005). In particular, engaging in team or group activities enhances the positive mental outcomes of recreation (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Pain, 2013).

Within various Indigenous communities there has been recognition of the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual benefits to participation in recreational activity (McHugh et al., 2019). McHugh and colleagues (2019) suggest that the Indigenous population

view recreation as the most prominent way for people within the community to connect. Despite these findings, there is concern that participation in recreation is lower among ethnocultural minorities (Aizelwood, Bevelander, & Pendakur, 2005). To address this issue of low participation rates of Indigenous Peoples in recreation, the federal government created the *Aboriginal Sport Policy*. The policy was designed to acknowledge the barriers that Indigenous Peoples of Canada face, along with the implementation of an action plan to increase equity and access to recreation (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

Historically, Indigenous people in Canada have undergone a significant transition whereby traditional diets and PA have been replaced by a pattern of consumption and physical inactivity (Rand, Gray, & Nysten, 2018). This loss of traditional lifestyles has been associated with a decrease in PA and an increase in health problems which were once rare in traditional Indigenous communities. Thus, the prevalence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, alcohol and drug abuse have greatly escalated (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013). The lack of PA displayed by this specific population has created an abundance of health consequences which may be due to a multitude of barriers.

One of the most significant barriers for this population to participate in recreation is racism and racial discrimination. Racism often causes feelings of fear, distrust and anxiety and serves as a major barrier to full participation in sport and recreation (Canadian Heritage, 2005). According to a study by Mason & Koehli (2012), some participants admitted that without discrimination, they would have more positive associations with sports in general. Participants agreed that negative experiences, resulting from racism, are one of the many reasons why sport, exercise and activity are fully eliminated from daily routines (Mason & Koehli, 2012, p. 103).

Similarly, it has been found that programs and activities that are insensitive to cultures and traditions ultimately discourage participation (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

Another limitation to participation is related to low socioeconomic status (SES). This includes factors such as limited transportation, difficulty accessing sports equipment, and low income (Mason & Koehli, 2012). The poor conditions of facilities were also consistently recognized as barriers to participation in recreation as they are often severely underfunded and therefore unsafe (Mason & Koehli, 2012). Unfortunately, another obstacle associated with low SES is drug and alcohol use by family members. This contributes to less available money for recreation, as well as the potential adoption of substance use habits by the children in these families (Mason & Koehli, 2012).

Furthermore, education is an identified factor that impacts Indigenous participation in PA. It has been found that the most dramatic decline in adolescent PA occurs in the transition from high school to university; an important time of reforming habits (Sukys et al., 2019). Schools with a higher number of courses related to health education are associated with better health promotion and more participation in activities that improve health by students. However, Indigenous people have lower completion rates at all levels of education compared to the non-Indigenous population, which contributes to decreased opportunities for participation in sport (Richmond & Cook, 2016).

There are multiple ways in which we can eliminate or reduce these barriers to enable Indigenous people to participate more in sport and recreation. In resistance to racism and racial discrimination, strict policies could be established for gender, race and cultural discrimination in both gym and recreation centers on campus, followed by a zero tolerance for anyone who fails to comply.

It would also be beneficial to build a knowledge base regarding PA interventions in the Indigenous communities on campus (Rand et al., 2018). A knowledge base would provide an overall awareness to both the risks and benefits of PA, as well as self-awareness of activity levels - the biggest factor in fostering behaviour change (Van Sluijs, Griffin, & Van Poppel, 2007). Ultimately, a knowledge base will help to direct future health promotion strategies in the community. This could be achieved through workshops which focus on the importance of PA, the physical and mental benefits of exercise and how to become more involved in recreation on campus.

What may have the largest influence on increasing Indigenous students to increase participation in sport and recreation is having sport programs that are culturally aligned and appropriate (Pressick, Gray, Cole, & Burkett, 2016). This may include allowing the opportunity for inclusion of physical, mental, cultural and spiritual aspects in the sports and recreational activities (Aboriginal Sport for Life, 2016). Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living recommends being more active by participating in activities that are familiar and enjoyable; meaning traditional recreational activities need to be created and introduced (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013). Consulting with Indigenous groups and involving the community in program planning helps facilitate the acceptance of the programs by the community (Pressick et al., 2016). It has been found that group and community based activities are more successful in Indigenous communities compared to individual exercise programs (Pressick et al., 2016). Our aim is to explore how we could change the current recreation conditions to enable greater participation rates in the Indigenous population.

## **Methods and Rationale**

Increased cultural diversity on university campuses has generated new challenges within recreation systems as they must create and implement programs with improved cultural awareness and sensitivity (Gladwell & Stone, 2005). Additionally, research has shown that not only is cultural sensitivity in the recreational setting inadequate, there is also a lack of cultural diversity training in graduate-level park and recreation programming (Gladwell & Stone, 2005). From this research there is evidence that fewer new graduates are sufficiently prepared to increase the diversity of activities on campus. It has been found that Indigenous communities are often underrepresented in recreational activities (Norman, Petherick, Garcia, Giesbrecht, & Duhamel, 2008). In order to be successful, recreation educators need to account for the diverse and specific needs of the communities in which they hope to implement programs (Norman, et al., 2008). Therefore, the target demographic identified for this study was Indigenous students at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Baskin (2005) stated that Indigenous peoples are often subject to Eurocentric research which draws incorrect conclusions. Resultantly, the method used to gather information from the Indigenous community was an open-house format at the UBC Longhouse. An open-house style of conducting research reflects the Indigenous style of a 'storytelling circle' for information sharing. Storytelling is a method used to teach about beliefs, values, customs, rituals, history, practices, relationships and ways of life (Datta, 2018). The storytelling method allows for direct involvement between the community and the participants which would hopefully help negate any feelings of frustration or angst that may arise during an interview (Cajax, 2015). Storytelling is a method of knowledge translation that is often used to promote Indigenous self-determination. Cajax (2015) suggests that storied methodologies may provide more useful insights to



understand individuals' health experiences, especially in community based work (Cajax, 2015). Allowing the participants to lead the conversations provided the opportunity to share any experience or opinion without the guidance of prompts and acknowledged that they were more than mere subjects. Moreover, historically, the Longhouse represented a site of family, community and connection acting as a residence for 20 to 30 people (Gadacz, 2020). Although Longhouses are no longer used as a place of residence, they remain important for both history and culture (Gadacz, 2020). Subsequently, in present day, they have continued their role as major sites for political gatherings and ceremonies (Gadacz, 2020). The incorporation of the Longhouse into our data collection was crucial, as it acknowledged past traditions and hopefully enhanced feelings of safety and security.

To increase the likelihood of Longhouse attendance, the open-house time coincided with a complimentary luncheon for Indigenous students and faculty. The luncheon was advertised through the UBC Longhouse Facebook page (Refer to Appendix B). Research took place the week of February 24th. Researchers utilized both Tuesday and Wednesday to introduce themselves, as well as their study, to both students and faculty within the Longhouse before holding the lunch on Friday.

Our qualitative approach allowed the focus to be on sensitivity and meaning of responses, rather than on quantifiable information and phenomenon. Through flexible conversations, we gathered information that contributed to future methods of providing more effective recreational activities for the Indigenous community. Conversations were initiated with participants and notes (including key ideas, statements and thoughts) were taken immediately following interactions. This decreased the possibility of misinterpretation and aided in recall of specific details. Although we did not ask direct questions, most of the conversation stemmed

from whether or not the participant had an understanding of UBC Recreation. Conversations were either focused on explaining the basis of UBC Recreation or understanding the participants past experiences. After the conclusion of the open house, we collaborated to synthesize main concepts and themes which emerged from our interactions.

## **Results**

After completing the open house, it was concluded that several factors impacted Indigenous student participation in athletics and recreation on UBC campus.

### **Unawareness**

In general, the majority of participants had some knowledge and understanding of what UBC Recreation was, but were unaware of the variety of activities and events that were offered. A few participants felt more likely to participate in first year when they are living on campus or were more inclined to participate during free week classes.

### **Intramural Sports**

The sampling population had many similar experiences regarding intramural sports, which is comprised of a variety of sporting leagues and teams, hosted by UBC Recreation. This population found it difficult to participate in intramural sports as it was challenging to organize a team. This was because more responsibility was placed on the individual to take initiative and to be the team leader. Additionally, commitment to a team was a large factor, partially due to the inconvenient scheduled times. As a result, there is typically only one 'Longhouse' intramural team formed due to the insufficient interest from Indigenous students, which also may not be everyone's sport of interest. Conversely, it was found that individual classes, such as yoga and pilates, had more interest and value to Indigenous students compared to the team sports. This

may be a result of the range of times offered by the individual classes thus making it easier to drop in opposed to the strict schedule of intramurals. If there is enough interest and commitment shown by Indigenous students, the Longhouse will cover the cost of an intramural team, making participation easier for some students. Nonetheless, there is only enough funding for one sport each semester which could be problematic if there are conflicting interests in intramural team selection. Overall, it was found that the team that is financially supported is more successful due to the promotion within their community.

### **Fitness Centers**

Another trend involved both fitness centers on campus: the ARC and the BirdCoop. Neither fitness center was consistently used by the participants due to lack of gym space and intimidation. The BirdCoop specifically, was seen as overcrowded and predominantly male-based which seemed to elicit feelings of angst and discomfort, ultimately creating an uninviting environment. In comparison, the ARC had some more interest due to the improved arrangement of space and additional machines, yet still found to be intimidating. However, when female participants were informed about the 'Women's Only Fitness Times' at the ARC, the participants showed immediate engagement. Many participants stated that these parameters facilitated a more comfortable and inclusive environment, which ultimately increased their interest.

### **Transferability**

In qualitative research, transferability refers to the ability to generalize findings of a particular study to other contexts or participants (Kowalski, McHugh, Sabiston, & Furguson, 2018). Due to our small sample size and non-random sampling, the transferability of these findings to all Indigenous students on UBC campus would be low. However, often in qualitative

studies the purpose is not to generalize the findings to all contexts, but rather to form “understandings that may be relevant from one context to the next depending on similarity between the contexts” (Kowalski et al., 2018, p. 179). Therefore, while transferability of our findings is not possible, the understandings of the barriers to recreation that were formed in this study can be used to better understand the barriers of all UBC Indigenous students as a whole.

## **Discussion**

### **Findings**

UBC Recreation identified Indigenous peoples as a population that was not engaging as much compared to other groups on campus. Our findings connect to this problem as there was an apparent lack of engagement in the community with UBC Recreation for a variety of reasons.

#### ***Unrecognizable Branding***

A large majority of the sample population did not recognize the branding of UBC Recreation and were unsure of what UBC Recreation was. The lack of engagement from the Indigenous community in UBC Recreation may be due to the lack of knowledge and recognition in the community. It was noted by some individuals in the Longhouse, that UBC Recreation was not in attendance at the bothing day at the beginning of the year, which resultantly lowered the knowledge and engagement in the community. Connecting to this, people were unaware of changes UBC Recreation had made to become more inviting. Women’s only fitness times were unknown, intramural sports were not well advertised and there was confusion about what realms UBC Recreation encompasses.

### ***Unwelcome and Intimidated***

Participants expressed feelings of intimidation in gym settings, which is supported in recent research (Coulter, 2020). Participants may be motivated to go to the gym to achieve individual fitness goals but be discouraged by a negative social environment. Feelings of intimidation can come from the presence of gym "regulars" and individuals making a social comparison (Coulter, 2020). Motivated individuals may be deterred from using these resources on campus because of the social environment. Women tend to feel higher intimidation due to the predominant male presence in gyms. In a study conducted at the University of Waterloo, it was found that using the women's only section significantly reduced intimidation (Fisher, 2014). The study determined that while there is still social comparison between women, those who use the women's only section felt that others also utilizing the section were at more equal fitness levels and felt less judgement without men and more fit women around.

### ***Lack of Culturally Appropriate Activities***

Offering programs that are geared towards the Indigenous community or collaborating with the Longhouse would be beneficial for engagement. While recognizing that UBC is on unceded Musqueam territory, it is possible to ask for permission from the community to host other events that are not traditional to the land. By asking the people in the Longhouse what they would like to participate in, UBC Recreation could improve their relationship with the community, which would therefore increase engagement and satisfaction.

### ***Absence of Belonging***

It was expressed that the lack of Indigenous peoples using the facilities and participating in UBC Recreation was a deterrent due to the perceived absence of belonging. Additionally, some individuals expressed a longing for community and involvement within UBC Recreation,

but were discouraged due to the underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, leading to heightened feelings of unacceptance.

Lastly, there is recognition that due to the political climate at the current moment, recreation is not the first priority of the people in the Indigenous community.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

### ***Community Based Research***

Through our interactions at the UBC Longhouse, we experienced difficulties with community based research. To be successful, such research relies on previously established and ongoing relationships. It was unrealistic for our team members to enter a community, which had no previous established relationship, and expect immediate participation from that community. Community based research often works with the group of interest in determining what research questions will be explored and how research will be conducted. As previously stated, we were interested in identifying past recreation experiences within the Indigenous community. However, a key consideration when conducting community based research is discovering the desires of the target demographic as opposed to the interests of the researcher. This finding connects to the literature on Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is a process of empowering participants by respecting and giving importance to participants' thoughts, experience and spirituality (Datta et al., 2014). PAR methodology is helpful in providing researchers with insight into participants' needs, values and customs (Datta et al., 2014). Building trustful relationships and honouring the Indigenous voice are significant steps in selecting a research site. PAR allows the researcher to work with the community to generate knowledge about, and solutions to, problems that the community is facing and that they value enough to change (Datta et al., 2014). If this type of research approach was better implemented

into our studies foundation and research methods, we may have chosen a topic that pertained more to the target populations interests, and therefore had more successful outcomes. In the future, it would be beneficial to establish a relationship with the community prior to the study being conducted. This could take months to build, however the benefits to the community and our research would be extensive. After a relationship is built, trust and comfort would be created between the research team and the community. This would make it easier to establish what the community is interested in and wants to find out about themselves. In our case, this was not possible due to our guidelines, therefore next time it may be beneficial to choose a different demographic that will accept research to be done within their community that may not satisfy their interests.

### ***Underdeveloped Relationships***

Inevitably, there were multiple subsequent challenges due to the initial incorrect implementation of the community based approach. Prior relationships were not fully developed prior to the luncheon which impeded on the quality of conversations had. These were challenges that we encountered; however, we were able to adjust to make the most of our research. One of the first challenges we experienced involved our initial approach. We quickly came to learn that our community based approach was flawed as prior relationships were not fully developed prior to the luncheon. The target population expressed that it would have been preferable to have a say in what was being researched rather than being questioned about a topic of general disinterest. However due to the nature of our project, we were unable to do so.

### ***Recruitment Template***

The recruitment template we were given was not well received by the Longhouse as it appeared uninviting and culturally inappropriate (Appendix A). Therefore, the template was not

displayed and our study was not advertised outside of the times we were present in the Longhouse. Instead, there was expressed preference for a simplistic and colourful poster which would be more enticing for the given demographic (Appendix B). This information however, was issued half way through our week of study, providing minimal time to create a poster and only one day to advertise. Further, the Longhouse staff did not take well to our optional survey. Thus, it was omitted and focus was placed on the open-ended interviews.

### ***Communication***

Communication was a significant barrier as it led to the majority of the aforementioned challenges. The majority of communication was done via email, however there was no direct correspondence between the researchers and the Longhouse. As a result, the long line of communication ultimately led to unintentional distortion of information. After arriving on the week of our research, we were able to connect with a Longhouse staff member, which is when project discrepancies were noted. In the future, if feasible, direct communication between both the target demographic and researcher should be provided. This would allow the ability to address any foreseen problems immediately and for a more respectable project to be completed.

### **Recommendations**

After carrying out our study and compiling our findings, we have come up with a few recommendations that may help improve engagement and participation of the UBC Indigenous community with UBC Recreation.

#### **UBC Recreation Presence at Longhouse**

UBC Recreation should be present at the Longhouse open house at the beginning of the school year to advertise and educate the students on the importance of participating in PA and



the variety of activity options. Along with this, the Longhouse may want to consider developing a better form of organization for intramural teams. Currently, it is the students' responsibility to form a team if they are interested in a certain sport. However, this has previously been quite challenging and often the student fails to assemble a team. Therefore, the Longhouse could make it easier on the students by creating sign-up sheets with the times and dates of each intramural sport in the student Collegia each semester, and advertising that they will cover the fees. With this, they can encourage new and returning students to sign up for sports they enjoy. Once they feel everyone has had a chance to sign up, they can identify the sports with enough interest, email the players to ensure commitment and register the teams.

### **Culturally Appropriate Activities**

It was expressed to us that there was interest in Pow Wow Zumba. UBC Recreation should look into organizing a Pow Wow Zumba class a couple times a week at differing times, to allow for people to attend on the days that work best for their schedule. As well, there was great interest in the women's only fitness times at the ARC, although no one in our sample had known about these times previously. Therefore, increased promotion of women's only hours is needed to get the word out and hopefully boost attendance of Indigenous women during these times.

### **Participatory Action Research**

Future research should utilize PAR earlier in the research process. In this area of research, it is important to enable the community to make changes they have addressed, but we do not want to impose our own ideas on the community. By recommending UBC Recreation to establish a stronger and more trusting relationship within the community at the Longhouse, we

are suggesting that they use this relationship to enable participation based on the communities' wants.

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Appendix A



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**KIN 464: Health Promotion and Physical Activity Class-based Project**

If you identify as an Aboriginal and are a member of the UBC community, tell us about your perspective on recreation!

**WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?** The purpose of this project is to explore the | experiences and participation in recreation of individuals of Aboriginal descent on the UBC campus.

**YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IF:**

- You are 18 years of age or older.
- You self-identify as Aboriginal
- You are a student, staff or faculty at UBC


**WHAT IS INVOLVED?** If you agree to participate, you will have a conversation with a researcher and will have the option of completing a survey on one occasion at The Longhouse on campus.

**WHO IS DOING PROJECT?** This is a class-based project for KIN 464: Health Promotion and Physical Activity taught by Dr. Andrea Bundon (School of Kinesiology). The students working on this project are Meredith Levorson, Julia Wilson, Shannon Game, Sydney Dowling and Hannah Eborall.

*If you are willing to participate, please email [recreation464@gmail.com](mailto:recreation464@gmail.com) Thank you!*

Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>	Recreation Participation <a href="mailto:recreation464@gmail.com">recreation464@gmail.com</a>
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Appendix B

 **UBC First Nations Longhouse** ...  
February 26 · 🌐

Stay on campus on Friday Feb 28th for a beautiful lunch provided by UBC Recreation, the UBC SEEDS Sustainability Program and students from KIN 464. The lunch will be at noon in Sty-wet-tan (The Great Hall). KIN 464 is looking to explore the experiences and participation in recreation for Indigenous students, staff and faculty. Come share your experiences with physical activity and recreation by completing a survey and enjoy a complimentary lunch.

