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Club Research

(2095 words in Section 1-3)

Section 1: Introduction (338 words)

The University of Washington, Seattle campus, has 800 clubs (Registered Student Organizations) and this number increases every year¹. Clubs are advertised by the University of Washington as a way to be close with a small group of people while studying at an extremely large campus. The goal of my research is to gain an understanding of the relationship between UW clubs and the students on campus. One way to gain this understanding is to explore club advertisement, both from the student and club perspective. I will also explore students' motivations for joining, and in some cases quitting, clubs.

In order to learn about the student-club relationship, I ran a series of field observations, interviews, and a survey. During my field observations, I sat outside of the HUB and watched the tables set up by various on-campus clubs and organizations. My focus was to use pure observation to identify attributes of students who would stop at tables. I found more patterns in the clubs that were tabling than the students themselves, so I decided to speak to club officers for my interviews. I held three semi-structured interviews, where I spoke to club officers. One large gap in the information they were able to provide was in regards to why people quit clubs. This became a large focus for my survey. The survey was posted on Facebook and was directed towards students who are part of clubs.

One club, in particular, I would like to help is the Board Games at UW club. The world of board gaming has had an intense increase in popularity in the past 5 years. I want as many people as possible to experience this hobby. While the officers do a wonderful job of making people feel welcome when they stumble upon meetings, they are fairly clueless on how to advertise to students. While not all clubs are the same, a large amount of clubs can benefit from understanding why students join and quit their club. This research can also help clubs more effectively advertise.

Section 2: Key Findings (1492 words)

Conversations

In all three portions of my research, I learned that conversations between students and existing club members is the most important aspect of being convinced to join a club. In my field observations, I found booths that were yelling at people had more people stop and actually have a conversation about the club. A larger number of booths had people passively sitting at their table, and nobody came up to the booth to talk about them with their club. In my interviews, all three of the participants told me they learned about their club from the RSO fair. All the participants spoke to a member of the club that "was pretty chill", or "seemed like a person I would want to be friends with", and then decided to join the club after that. After these

interviews, I had expected that a large portion of the survey participants to say they had a similar experience. I was extremely surprised to see the results, because almost every participant had reported a different mode of learning about the club that they are currently most involved with. I also asked the participants to comment on why or why not they thought the advertising was effective, and a few of the students that didn't learn about their club through the RSO fair mentioned they liked talking to people in the club.

One of these students mentioned they liked talking to students at the Engineering Club Fair. Personally, I have been in the engineering department for the entire time I've been at UW, and I didn't know that UW hosted an Engineering Club fair. My recommendation in regards to this is to further advertise these types of specialized events. I would also suggest all departments host a similar type of specialized club fair. The business school, for example, has numerous business-related clubs like the Husky Sales Club, but they don't have a fair to showcase all of their clubs. The IMA hosts a yearly open-house type event during Dawg Daze that serves as a club fair for club sports. One problem with this is the fact that not every sport's season is during fall quarter. Students may not want to commit to a club where they won't participate for a few more months, so a quarterly sports club fair could be beneficial.

Overall, I recommend more club fairs in order to provide more opportunities for students to meet people from clubs they might not have heard about otherwise. This is my main key result because it's not a concept that is extremely revolutionary. Students like to meet other people they might have a common interest with. Finding new friends with similar interests is the joy of clubs and is the integral part of the college experience for some students. Holding more club fairs is an inexpensive way to augment the opportunities for students to connect with each other, as long as clubs are willing to table at these events.

Uncertainty in Advertising

One of the main points of importance in my research is the uncertainty on how clubs should be advertising to new students. During my four field observation sessions, there was only one on-campus organizations who were visited by students that actually looked like they wanted to be a part of the club. This led me to believe that tabling is not actually an effective method of advertisement. I asked the club officers if they could comment on their club's stance on advertisement, hoping they could expand on my ideas about tabling. Participant 3 mentioned that they table every day in Red Square. Not very many people stop at their booth, but he rationalized this by the fact that they don't have a large population that would want to join their club. Participant 1 mentioned that they table often, but most of their email list signups come from events at the beginning of the year. Specifically, he mentioned that there were around 300 signups at the RSO fair and there were 600-700 people at their event at the HUB Crawl.

This led me to believe that an overwhelming majority of people will have learned about their club through the RSO fair. The survey I put out, however, didn't agree with this. The results from the survey offered no clear explanation on which type of advertising is the most

important. From these results, I believe clubs are wasting their time if they are tabling for the sole purpose of advertising their club, especially if they sit passively at their table.

When I spoke about the lack of people interested in clubs during my field observations, I excluded a club that was trying to get signatures for an environmental petition. While they are an on-campus organization, they are not tabling for the purpose of bringing in new members that will attend their meetings. There were many tables where students looked very reluctant to stop and talk to the people, but this was the only instance where people looked willing to interact with the booth.

The Student Organization Resource Center (SORC) should offer more assistance to clubs than they currently do, especially in regards to advertising. There are many clubs, especially new clubs, which struggle to keep enough members to actually continue the club. I would recommend that the SORC sends out a newsletter to club officers, maybe just club presidents, where they speak about how to effectively advertise to students. If they want exact statistics to include in these newsletters, they can run a study similar to mine, where they ask about where students heard about all of their clubs. (A possible sample newsletter is included in Appendix 1) On the current SORC website², there is a page titled, “Advertise Your RSO” where they talk about all of the materials that a club can purchase or rent for advertisement, but they don’t mention the methods a club should employ. They definitely should include ways to be creative with advertising or tips on how to most effectively advertise.

Drop off in Attendance

A common pattern in two of my studies is the decrease in meeting attendance as the school year goes on. In my first interview, the participant stated the beginning of the year brings in a lot of new freshmen, but meeting attendance significantly decreased by spring quarter. The interview participants guessed people left clubs because once students made friends, they would hang out outside of the actual club meetings and events. In my surveys, I asked students if they had ever quit a club they had previously been part of and 14 of 22 participants responded they had. There were a variety of reasons, such as disinterest in the topic and unfriendly club members, but 71% of these students reported quitting their club because it was too large of a time commitment. College students are notorious for being extremely busy and so they have to ration their time out wisely. Studying and attending classes do, or at least should, take precedence over extracurriculars.

This wasn’t a result from my field observations because it is nearly impossible to observe someone quitting a club. One would have to constantly follow a student around, just to observe that moment where the student might decide to quit. I had neither the time nor the resources to be able to conduct this type of field work. I also was not looking for why people quit clubs at the beginning of my research. I was originally looking to answer why people join clubs, and not looking at the opposite interaction. It wasn’t until the first interview participant mentioned the lack of attendance in spring quarter that I widened the scope of my research. An important finding from my interviews, was that the reasons they proposed for people quitting didn’t align

with the results from the survey. This is a further argument for the increased assistance from the SORC to help clubs more effectively advertise, which I mentioned in the previous section.

The reason why this is the last key finding I mention, is that the design implications for this are fairly weak. As I mentioned earlier, majority of students who quit attending meetings merely don't have time to attend the meetings. It's not my place to tell clubs how much they should expect from their club members. I also cannot tell students how to spend their time and prioritize their commitments. One solution I have is to specially advertise clubs that have a low time commitment, in order to prevent students from needing to quit a club. This can be done in a place like the RSO directory website. The site has many existing problems that can be fixed, making it a place where people would go to learn about new clubs they could join. For example, it's extremely difficult to find the website and once someone finds the site, it doesn't look like it's affiliated with UW at all. (See Appendix 2)

Section 3: Future Research (265 words)

One of the future research possibilities that I mentioned in the "Uncertainty in Advertising" section was something that the HUB or the SORC can run. The SORC should be providing more assistance to existing clubs, and they can should find very specific quantitative data to convince clubs that one method of advertising will be more effective than another. If I were put in charge of this study, I would begin with a survey without any open-ended questions. This survey would be advertised via flyers around campus, and an email would be sent out to students. I have received emails from the HUB, so I know that they have the authority to do this. I would ask about every club that a student has ever attended meetings for. Where did you hear about this club? How long have you been involved with the topic of the club? If you've stopped attending meetings, why?

This survey would stay open for at least a month, so as to gain as many responses as possible. (This large of a project would simply not been feasible for my study) I would most likely hold semi-structured interviews with students that had survey responses that were unexpected. I wish I had interviews after my survey so I could ask students to elaborate on how they learned about their club if they heard about it before coming to UW. Students majoring in Data Science or Statistics could help with filtering through the information and compile a story backed up by copious amounts of data and this data can be relayed to club leaders.

Appendix 1:

Example newsletter put out to club officers at the beginning of the year

Hi All! Welcome back to a new and exciting school year!

Just as a reminder, the beginning of the school year is prime time to advertise your club to all of the incoming freshmen. Remember: they are your legacy to continue the club after you graduate. <Some percent> of students report joining the club they become most involved with during their freshman year. One club alone reported receiving 300 email list signups during the RSO fair.

Wow! Naturally, not all of those people who signed up are going to be attending the meetings, but it's important to keep up interest for your club.

Check out the Student Organization Resource Center website [hyperlinked] for information on all of the supplies we offer for you to advertise your club. This includes buttons, people! People love to get free buttons! Did you know that the SORC has a karaoke room? You can look into renting this room for your club events on the website as well.

Register for your club to have a table at upcoming club fairs:

- HUB Crawl
- IMA Open House (For sports clubs)
- RSO Fair
- Engineering Club Fair
- Business Club Fair
- Cultural Club Fair
- STEM Career Fair

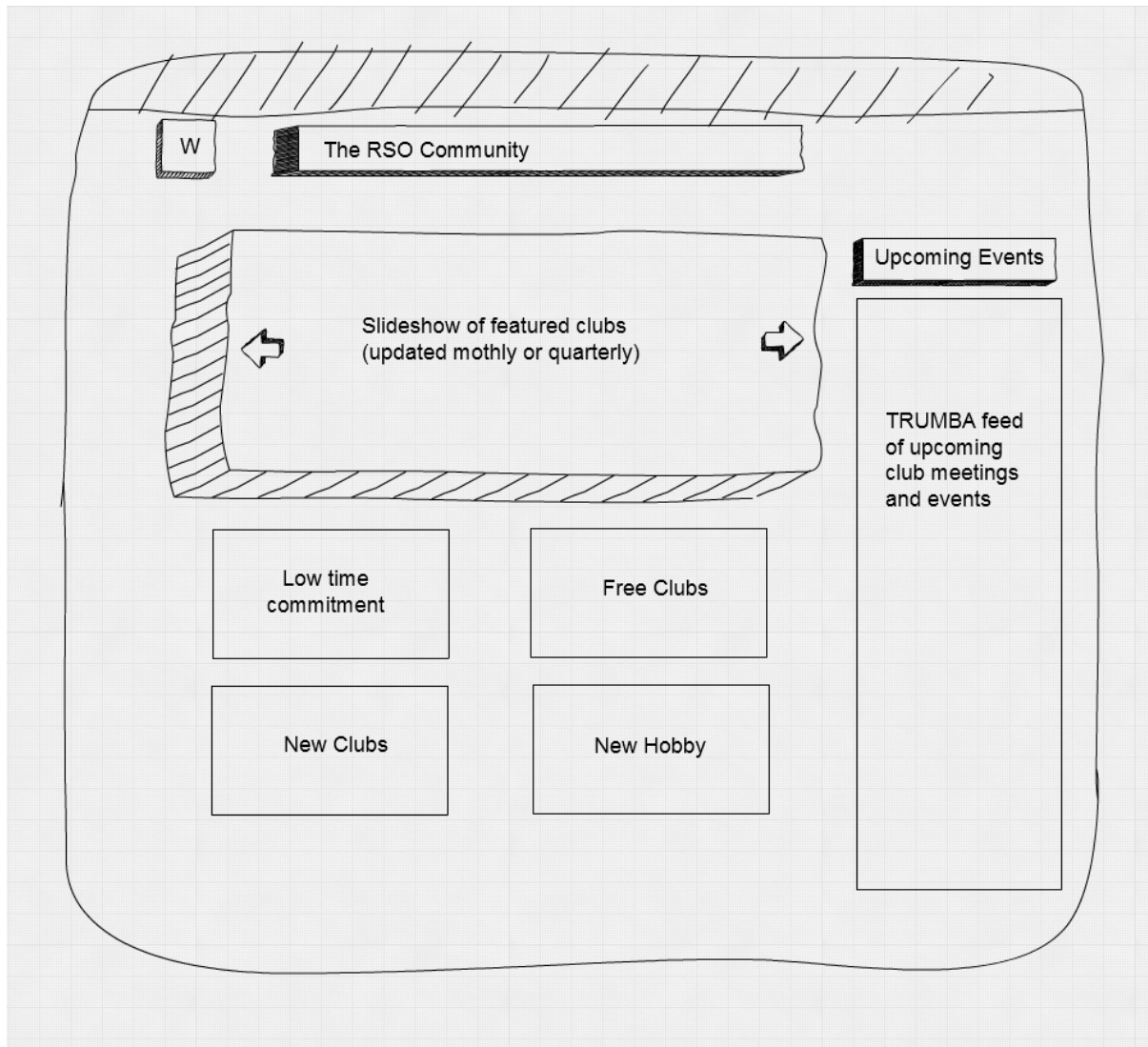
Check out the SORC website for all of your needs, and have a great year Huskies!

Appendix 2:

Possible redesign for the RSO Community website³

The main thing that needs to be changed about this page – which is not shown in this diagram – is that it needs to be easier to find. Currently if one was to search for “RSO Community”, the top three results are links to the HUB website, where you have to follow a series of redirects until you actually find this site. The site should have a more relevant URL, show up on google searches, and be more easily referenced on other UW webpages.

The highlight of this webpage is the featured club section, which can expose students to clubs that don't normally receive a lot of recognition. Underneath the featured club section, I've included fun categories of clubs. This would be in addition to searching for clubs with the broader categories such as “Academic” and “Special Interest”. The “Low Time Commitment” category is most important, as my research showed. Clubs can have the opportunity to assign themselves to one of these smaller categories when they first form or when they renew their RSO status at the beginning of the year.



References:

¹ University of Washington, The HUB, <http://depts.washington.edu/thehub/sao/>

² University of Washington, The HUB, The SORC, <http://depts.washington.edu/thehub/the-sorc/>

³ University of Washington, The HUB, RSO Community, <https://uws-community.symplicity.com/index.php?s=home>