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## Clubs Field Study

### Goals and Context

The University of Washington, Seattle campus, has 800 clubs (Registered Student Organizations) and the number increases every year.<sup>1</sup> Clubs are either a great way for students to find a small group of people to be close with on this huge campus or an opportunity to practice a hobby. Joining the UW Board Game Club was a great experience for me because I initially joined to have access to a large library of games, but I also found great people along the way. I am curious if other students have similar motivations to join clubs or similar experiences once they join a club.

Learning why people join clubs can help make the process of finding a club of people that share an interest easier. Are people joining clubs to make more friends or do people just want access to the resources that clubs provide? When people want to join a club, how do they find it? Do they spend time browsing through the RSO Directory on the HUB website or do they learn about clubs from booths stationed all over campus? Field work would ideally provide a lot of information on whether or not club advertisement is helping students find their own small community.

### Approach

My ideal place to watch people decide on clubs would have been the RSO Fair. Dozens of booths are lined up in Red Square, competing for attention from interested students. Unfortunately, this event only takes place during Dawg Daze in the beginning of the school year. The next best option is the club and student organization booths that are often set up outside the main entrance of the HUB. This is a place where lots of people walk through, often not in a hurry. This makes it more likely that they are going to stop to talk to the people at the booths.

I spent four half hour sessions observing the people walking through that area. They were all afternoon sessions that were between 12:30 and 1:30 on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup>. I decided on observing during lunch time, because this is when the HUB is busiest. The HUB hosts the largest food court on campus<sup>2</sup>, so lots of people go there for lunch. Having observations over multiple days was helpful because I had the opportunity to see how thirteen different organizations interact with the student population, rather than limiting my scope to just following around one club. It also felt important to observe during the same time of day during each session so that I wasn't manipulating many variables which might cause unnecessary variation in my observations.

I decided that a combination of observations and asking questions about interesting behavior that I might observe and want to know more about. Asking questions is very useful for formulating questions for later surveys and interviews. I sat close enough to the booths so that I could hear some of the conversations were being held. I used pen and paper to take my notes,

and developed a diagram method of labeling all of the booths so that I wouldn't have to reference them by name when someone went up to talk to them. After taking all of my notes, I searched for major themes and commonalities in either the organizations themselves or how they were interacting with the people walking through. My results are presented in the categories I sorted the data into.

Something important to note about the ethics of my field work is that I didn't have an opportunity to receive consent from every person that walked through the HUB front area. When I went up to talk to people, I let them know that I am researching clubs and asked them for permission before I asked them questions.

## **Results**

### **The Loud and Proud**

I the first day of my observation, I was presented with the loudest, most excited atmosphere I've ever encountered outside of the HUB. This high energy was the result of a couple booths being really loud and yelling towards people who were walking by. I observed that the booths that actively addressed their audience were more successful in having people come up to the booth to have some kind of conversation.

The most energy was coming from the booth advertising the Acapella Group on campus. I wasn't expecting that they would have very much interest from students passing by because it takes a certain amount of skill in the performing arts in order to be able to join an acapella group. That booth was the most popular that day because of the very bold member that was aggressively pointing at people and asking, "Are you into singing, dancing, or beat boxing?" Some people were extremely put off by this and kept walking, but some people were extremely intrigued and stopped to talk to them. I decided to ask her about why she yells and she said that she figured that if people don't stop to talk to them, they'll continue to think about how they were yelled at by some weird girl standing outside of the HUB. I cannot speak to whether or not people would be thinking of her throughout the day, but I can say with confidence that her yelling brought a lot of attention and students to the booth.

The Pen and Paper Gaming group was stationed in-between the Acapella Group and the HUB entrance. They also had an extremely vocal member yelling to try to attract some attention to their group. I asked him about why he was yelling and he defended himself, saying that he wasn't just yelling because the other girl was yelling, but he was yelling because he wanted to be a vocal member of the club. He also mentioned that the yelling acapella girl was creating a "tunnel vision" because lots of people were just looking away when they heard some girl yelling and pointing. He wanted to let people know that they were a booth there also. They still ended up having more visitors than JSAUW, ISAUW, and the Purple Castor Minions.

### **Dawgs with a Cause**

The most successful booth that spoke to their audience was for the environmentally friendly group WashPIRG. There was a girl standing in the walkway asking for signatures for a petition, and her success rate was astounding. She would scan the crowd like a predator stalking

her prey. When she saw a person walking by themselves in a slow, meandering fashion, she would approach them and ask, “Do you care about the environment?” Eight of the ten people that were walking by themselves ended up signing. One of the guys who didn’t blatantly ignore her and the other said that he had to go to a class. Still, it was impressive to see her at work.

I have a theory about why she was so successful, which was formulated during my second observation session. I saw an athletic looking girl stop at the booth that was spreading awareness for homelessness. I stopped her as she walked by and asked why she stopped. She said that she was asked, “Do you want to help with homelessness?” She stopped because it was such a loaded question and she didn’t want to feel like a “jerk” for saying no. My guess is that the WashPIRG people were operating with the same methods of using guilt to get people to stop.

### **Food Fest**

Lots of the booths I saw were trying to invite people in by bribing them with food. I really enjoy food, so it was surprising to me that these booths were so unsuccessful. In three of the four days where I observed, at least one booth was selling donuts. In those three days, the only person that bought was a group of what didn’t even look like students bought a box for their crew. Another method of food distribution was with the UW American Lung Association. They were handing out vouchers for free ShareTea and literally the only person that took a flyer was a person that was actually part of the booth. The people at the booth weren’t really into it either. One of the girls asked one person, “Do you like ShareTea?” and was completely ignored. These observations lead me to believe that when people are selling food at their booth, it’s mainly for fundraising purposes and not a method of persuading people to join their club.

### **Discussion**

A major shortcoming of this field work has to do with the timing of when I am observing people. Since it is springtime and the weather is so pleasant, there are a lot of tourists and non-college students on campus. Although I had both of these types of people stop at booths, they didn’t look like they had any intention of joining the club, which completely makes sense. Another large category of people are the admitted students that are being toured around campus and hopefully deciding to commit to attending the University of Washington in the fall. These admitted students aren’t going to be looking to join clubs, and on my first observation day, I decided not to count every person that walks through because they would be really inflating that number. These off-campus people were quite excited about one booth that was giving away free popsicles on a particularly warm day, more so than people who looked like UW students, so I excluded that booth from my result analysis. The same observations done at a different time of year might yield different results because of these mentioned factors.

My original questions about clubs were more focused on how people decide to join clubs, but field work can’t very well answer this question. This felt like a major shortcoming for the questions I was trying to answer, but my observations can be a strong base for different types of research, later discussed in the Ideas for Next Project section. These observations also provided a large amount of qualitative data. Quantitative data can be drawn from these results by giving

counts to how many people stopped at each booth, or looking at the percentage of people who stopped for a booth, or what percentage of people agreed to sign a petition when asked. None of these statistics, however, feel as important as the story I can start to build about the relationship between these people advertising their club and the people who are willing to join their cause.

### **Implications for Design**

On a very basic and harshly blunt level, people are most responsive to yelling and being guilted into action. Unfortunately, this is not the best way to build relationships between people. One sure result from these observations is that actively making contact with the people walking by is the way to start a conversation. All booths that passively sat behind and next to their tables didn't have any visitors. People aren't just walking around looking for things to join. College students don't have time to meander around, hoping that they stumble upon something that will suit their interest. Most of all, people don't want to go out of their way to find something that they might like. It really is the responsibility of clubs to make meaningful connections with the people that they want to bring into their club. I have heard of other schools doing information sessions called "callouts", which is a shortened version of a club meeting where the leadership talks about what the club is all about. This would be an excellent opportunity to have these meaningful conversations. This still presents the problem of how to bring people to these callouts.

The tabling outside of the HUB would be very effective for fundraising, where the club members are actively chatting with people walking by. I wouldn't recommend tabling outside the HUB as a means of finding people to join the club. Surveys and interviews should give more concrete information on what kinds of methods are most effective in attracting people and which methods people find the most compelling.

### **Ideas for next project**

The observations I made lend themselves to further investigation in topics other than what I was originally researching. One man at the Pen and Paper Gaming table told me about when girls are interested in the club, but are sometimes put off by the fact that the group is mostly male. A future research project could be conducted with the goal of making it easier for girls to join clubs or groups in general that are mostly male.

To continue with the current topic of why people join clubs, I want to interview people who are leaders of clubs to ask them about how important advertising is to them and the pattern they see with their members. When a new person joins a club with a good leadership, the president or vice president will ask them where they heard about the club and why they joined. Then I would want a wider scope with the surveys, where I would want people who have joined clubs to respond. I also want to survey people who have considered joining clubs and then decided against it, so see why they decided not to join.

## References

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

<sup>2</sup> University of Washington, The HUB, Husky Den Food Court, <http://depts.washington.edu/thehub/services/husky-den-food-court/>

## Appendix 1: Planning Materials

### Part 1: Field Study Plan

1. **Project Focus:** Clubs at UW
2. **Objective:** Why do students join clubs and how do clubs fit into a college student's life?
3. **Field Study Method:** Deep hanging out. If I was to interact with people, it would be a very quick interaction.
4. **Sessions/ Participants:** In order to see how students act when presented with a very easy method of signing up for a club, I'm thinking of doing some observations in front of the HUB where a few clubs set up booths to advertise. I'll do this first, then decide if it would be worth it to return to that spot at different times on different weekdays. If I don't collect any meaningful data there, I might do my following sessions near a bulletin board that has a lot of club flyer postings or I might sit in at a club meeting.
5. **Data Collection:** There is a lot of qualitative data to be gained from watching. When sitting outside of the HUB, I was thinking that I could collect a lot of quantitative data, taking note to how many students stop at each booth while I'm watching or how many students are at each booth. I can also find the clubs popularity by researching the number of members they have. It could be really interesting to see if the more popular clubs would have more general interest in the student population.
6. **Recruitment:** If I wanted to gather information directly from participants, I don't think it would be problematic to approach them and explain what I'm doing there and ask for their assistance.
7. **Ethics:** One ethical aspect to consider is that it isn't feasible to talk to everyone that walks through that area and explain why I'm watching there. I'll try my best to not be a creeper.

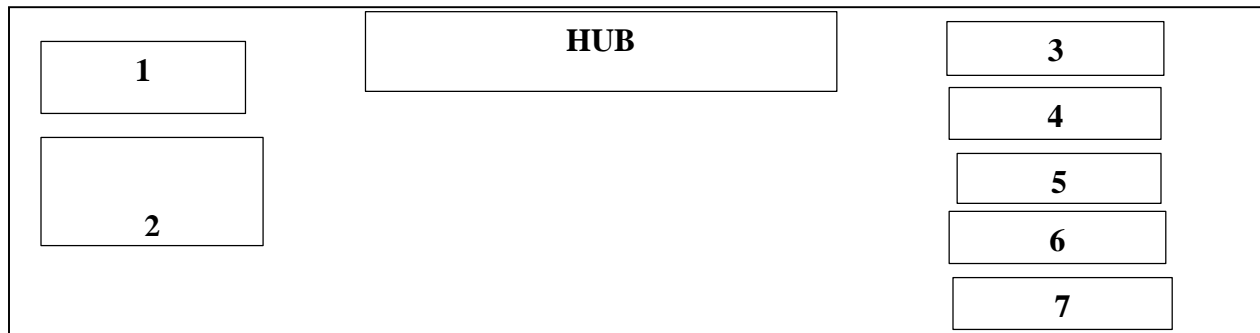
### Part 2: Field Study Protocol

1. **Getting Ready:** Make sure I have notebook and a working pen and everything else is put away so I can jump up and talk to someone if need be.
2. **Getting Started:** Sit in a place where I have good views of the booths, maybe switch up my position so that I have access to people leaving the HUB for half of the time and then sit where I have access to people entering the HUB for the other half. Take note on which booths are there and how many people are at each booth. Note weather and time of day.

3. **Guidelines:** Take notice to what kinds and how many people stop at booth. Take note to whether people look like they're in a hurry or just strolling along like they're in between classes. Note whether people are alone or with others.
4. **Ending:** See if there are any gaps in data collected that can be answered by the environment we're in.

## Appendix 2: Field Notes

Wednesday April 13<sup>th</sup>/ 12:30/ HUB Lawn/ Cold Weather



1. **Purple Castor Minions – 2 Guys, 1 Girl**
2. **JSAUW – Selling Donuts, 1 Guy, 1 Girl**
3. **Pen and Paper Gaming – 4 Guys, 1 very loud guy**
4. **?? – They left right away**
5. **Acapella Group – 2 Girls, 1 very loud girl, 1 Guy**
6. **ISAUW – 3 Girls, 1 Guy**
7. **Relay for Life – 2 Guys**
  - 3 – Guy walked over to talk to group and then walks behind the table. It looked like the rest of guys at table looked surprised but welcoming. [maybe because he brought them Oreos? or maybe he's a casual member of the club that they weren't expecting to help]
  - 5 – The loud girl is yelling and pointing at people saying, "Are you into singing, dancing, or beat boxing?"
  - 5 – A girl responds to the yelling with interest, but says that she doesn't go to UW.
  - 5 – A dog (husky puppy?) was sitting with the guy in the booth, and a group of 3 people came to talk to the dog. Another group of 3 people then stopped to look at the dog
  - 7 – 3 guys and 4 girls stop for info and candy [it mostly looked like it was for candy]
  - 5 – People at the booth started singing for a video someone was recording, and it visibly turned 4 heads of people walking by
  - 5 – 1 guy and 1 girl who had stopped for the dog stayed for information
  - Lots of people walk through the area with food [probably because it's lunchtime]
  - 3 – Girl with braids stopped by
    - The guy talking to her breaks off the sign from the front of the table

- 3 – 3 adults stop by [they don't look like students]
  - One man has a very spirited conversation with the boys at the table
- 5 – Girl keeps pointing and yelling so that people have to give a verbal “no”
- 7 – 1 guy gets info and some documentation from the Relay people [he looks like one of those guys who runs in charity marathons, very clean]

**12:55 – The rain starts and people start running through the area [people really didn't prepare for rain today]**

- 5 – A guy looks very reluctant, but then stops to talk to the table

**Friday April 15<sup>th</sup>/ 12:45-1:15/ cold, overcast**



1. UW Philanthropy – 2 girls talking to 2 other girls
2. Help Homeless – 2 girls, 1 on the computer
3. HGN – 3 guys (2 seated and 1 standing)
4. ASUW Elections – 3 girls chatting, turned around and not really paying attention to people
5. UW American Lung Association – 2 girls and 1 guy
6. JSAUW – 1 girl and 1 guy, selling donuts
  - Very low energy as compared to Wednesday, because it's Friday?
  - 4 – everyone on their phones
  - 3 – Guy in a blue shirt was walking by himself in a leisurely manner stopped at the booth and spent less than a minute there speaking with them
  - 1 – A girl holding a plate with pizza talks to the people at the booth [she looks like she knows the people at the table]
  - **12:55 – The sun comes out, yay**
  - Lots of people looking at booth 1
  - Asian group of adults take a photo with the girls at booth 4 [because they're blonde?] They are carrying campus maps and ask for directions [they're probably tourists]
  - 5 – 4 men stop and buy a box of donuts
    - They're carrying [film?] equipment

- 5 – Girl the booth steps out in front of the table and asks a person walking by “Do you like share tea?” She is ignored and she never asks that again
- 2 – Blonde girl stops, looks like an on-campus athlete. She signs up for something on the laptop at the booth.
  - I ask her why she stopped. She was asked, “Do you want to help with homelessness?” She doesn’t want to say ‘no’ because it’s such a loaded question
- 3 – A man in a long black coat really intensely looks at booth 3. He doesn’t stop
- 1 – A man does a triple take at the booth before approaching. [He looks like he knows the people]
  - The people at the booth let him know when meetings are and he thanks them and leaves
- 5 – A guy with a backpack stops and takes a flyer. [He looks like he knows them] He stays for the rest of the time that I am watching
- 1— an older man turns the corner and eyes the sign, but he doesn’t stop.
- 3 – A student with a backpack, who was walking with other people, stops.

**1:05**

- 2 – Gets a tent
- 1—leaves
- The same tourist group comes back out and pets the metal husky
- 3 – a student with a backpack and a D-20 shirt stops at the booth [he looks like he’s part of the club]
- 2 – A girl with blue hair stops and looks like she is very interested in the cause
  - A group of 3 stop and look at the conversation happening.

**Monday April 18<sup>th</sup>/ 12:45 – 1:15/ Sunny ~ 85 degrees**

- **Only 2 booths out in front of the HUB**
  - **UW American Lung Association – 3 guys, 2 girls, one super cute husky. They’re playing music**
  - **University Christian Fellowship – 3 guys, 3 girls, they have free popsicles [seems like that would be super popular since it’s so hot out]**
- 1 – Girl with a sweatshirt and jean pets the husky [isn’t it way too hot for that?] An older man takes a photo of her and the dog [he looks like her dad?]
  - 2 – She goes over to the popsicle booth a takes a popsicle [she doesn’t look old enough to be a student here]
- 2 – 2 guys sitting next to me want popsicles. One says to the other, “I’ll get one of you get one”
- 2 – 3 Asian girls with backpacks [students?] get popsicles
- People with purple shirts and UW flags keep walking through. UW admitted students are touring campus



- 2 – Boy and older woman [mom?] stop to get popsicles. The boy is holding UW bookstore bag [admitted student previewing?]
- 2 – 1 girl and 1 boy get popsicles
- 2 – 1 boy stops for info and doesn't want a popsicle
- 2 – 2 adults stop for popsicles
- 1 – it looks like the table has been abandoned because the people are just standing next to the table
- 2 – guy with backpack approaches and asks what the catch is, guy replies "there's no catch" and so he takes a popsicle
- 2 – girl with headphones in stops for popsicle
- 2 – guys in black suits walk through looking like they're dying from heat, they eye the popsicle booth, then they don't stop for popsicles
- 2 – 2 girls with backpacks stop for popsicles
- 2 – 2 girls in long black dresses. One girl says, "Dude you wanna stop for free popsicles?", then they don't stop

**Wednesday April 20<sup>th</sup>/ 12:30-1:00/ Pleasant sun, slight breeze**

1	2
	3

- 1. WashPIRG – 1 guy, 1 girl, eventually 2 more girls**
- 2. Purple Castor Minions – 2 guys, 1 girl, 1 more loud girl**
- 3. UW American Lung Association – 1 girl**
  - 2 – 7 kids stop at booth [middle school age?]. One boy takes photo with one of their e-sports jerseys
  - 2 – 1 girl joins table and is a super sales woman for their e-sport jerseys that they're selling
    - Makes a boy with a backpack stop and asks if he's into any kinds of competitive gaming and talks to him about how big e-sports is right now, he buys shirt
    - She runs to other boy and brings him back to booth to try to convince him to buy a shirt, he buys a shirt
    - She leaves with textbooks in hand [to go to class?]
    - She comes back with another girl. The girl buys like 3 shirts
  - 1 – Girl stands out in walkway and talks to some people as they walk by. "Do you care about the environment?"
    - "Sure I'll sign", signs
    - Boy with backpack stops, she directs him to booth. He is very enthusiastic and chats with them for about 10 more minutes
    - 1 boy passes without looking her

- 1 boy stops, signs
- Guy meandering towards the HUB looks annoyed to stop, but still signs
- “Yes, what’s the issue”, says he’s not a student but signs
- Guy with backpack [student], signs
- “I have class”, guy with backpack
- 2 girls walk by, deny
- “Yes”, very firmly, signs. He’s wearing a backpack and a tie-dye shirt and has long hair [hippie environmentalist]
- Guy with backpack stops to sign

Pace of people is much slower today than normal