

RECREATION GAPS FOR MINORITY COMMUNITIES: UBC Kinesiology Graduate Commuter Students

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Background

Previous research findings suggest that commuter students are less likely to participate in recreation programs offered at their university compared to students who live on or close to campus. This occurs as a result of being physically and psychologically removed from life on campus¹. In addition, research shows that graduate students are less likely to participate in recreation programs offered on campus compared to undergraduate students for a variety of reasons including: increased workload and busyness². However, little attention has been paid to the influence of commuting on graduate students' ability to access and participate in recreation programs offered on campus, or elsewhere by the university. As well, little research has been done suggesting ways to improve this unique groups' ability to access and participate in recreation. This research addresses that gap, first identifying the major barriers that are faced in accessing recreation programming offered on campus. In the second phase we formulated alternative solutions based on our research and participant feedback to overcome these barriers.



UBC students lined up to catch the bus on campus

Project Design

The findings presented here are drawn from five qualitative semi-structured interviews that investigated the major barriers faced by UBC graduate commuter students regarding their ability to access and participate in existing recreation programs offered on campus. Following the interviews, the researchers used a thematic approach in which data was organized and key themes were subsequently identified including similarities and differences between participant responses. This process enabled the researchers to identify the major barriers faced by this group of students with regards to their participation in recreation on campus. Based on these new insights and the participants' responses themselves, the researchers made recommendations to help improve UBC graduate commuter students' involvement in recreation.

INCLUSION CRITERIA: UBC graduate commuter students who travel to campus an average of 30 minutes or greater via bus or car.

INTERVIEWS: Five semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted as the only method of data collection.

SAMPLE: This study included 5 participants (3 of which were female and 2 of which were male). They were similar in terms of age and education.

Theme 1:

Commute time as a barrier to recreation participation on campus

3 of the 5 participants interviewed reported their commute being a major barrier to participating in recreation programs offered on campus at UBC with greater commuting time further deterring them from participation.

Participant quote: *"But with the commute it just sucks up so much time, it's very limited time for everything else. There's a reduction in the amount I'm able to do. After being on the bus for two hours the last thing I want to do is go to the gym."*

Participant quote: *"...because of the commute now it makes it really really difficult to participate just because I'm not on campus. It's really not feasible."*

Participant quote: *"Sometimes I skip games because of the commute, I [won't] come in if that's all there is to do on campus."*

Discussion

There is existing literature on the benefits of participating in on campus recreation and the stressors experienced by students that can be mitigated by engagement in these programs. Graduate students who face increased stress as a result of financial constraints and workload are still over two times more likely not to participate in recreation compared to undergraduate students. This study identified major barriers faced by kinesiology graduate commuter students in accessing existing recreation programming including: long commute times, fatigue, tight budgets, heavy workloads, proximity to workout space, gym size and accessibility, and scheduling of intramural games. This study addressed gaps in recreation participation amongst graduate commuter students by forming specific plans and recommendations to create recreation programming better suited to this groups' unique needs and circumstances. Further research needs to be done in order to improve recreation programming offered by UBC so that all of our graduate commuter students are able to get involved.

Mental health was another emerging theme. Some participants felt as though their mental health was aided by recreation, whilst others felt as though their mental health stopped them from participating

Participants continued to be involved in recreation off campus due to convenience and increased professionalism. Scheduling and commute time were heavy in the influence of these decisions.

Theme 2:

Workload and finances as a barrier to accessing recreation on campus

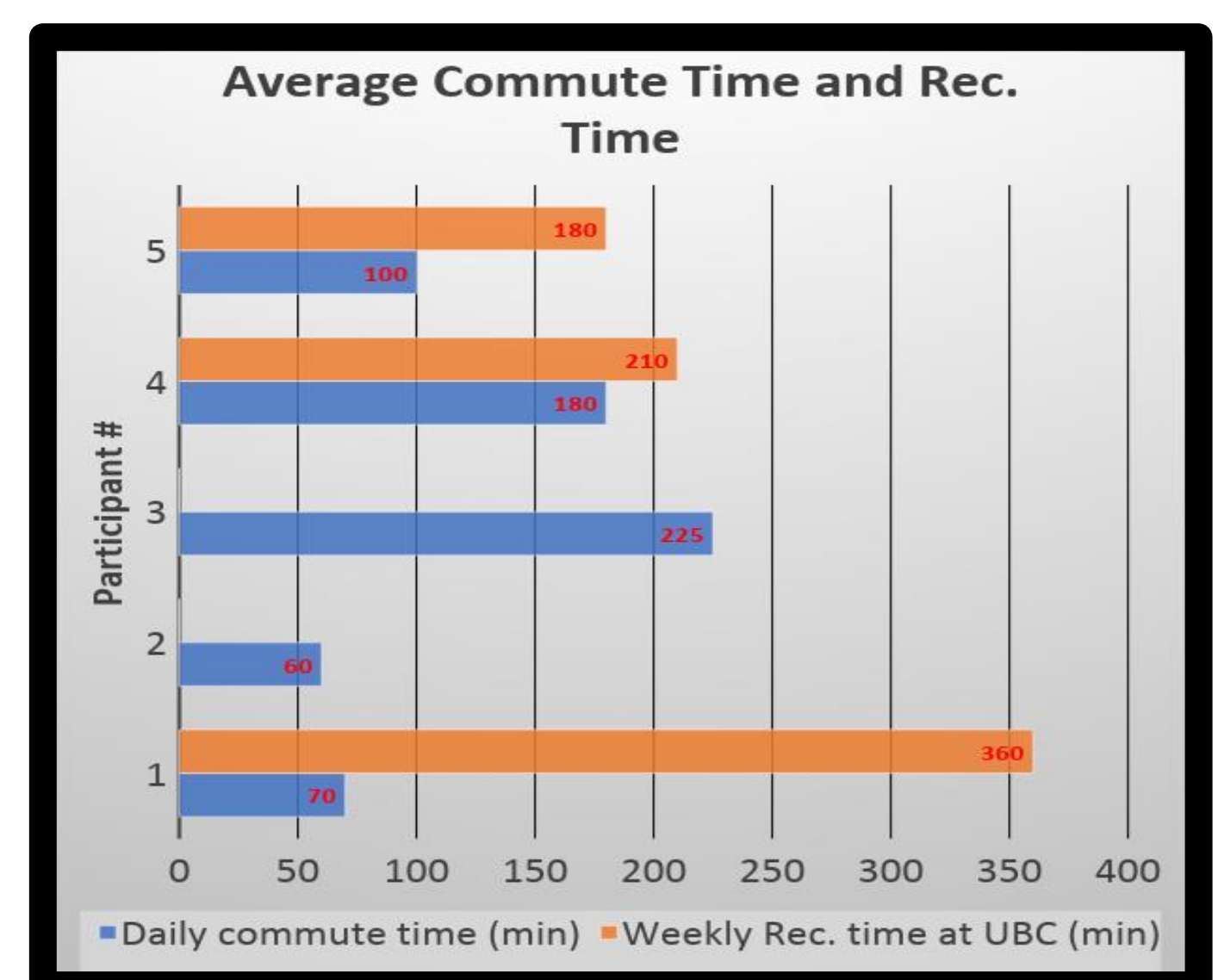
5 out of the 5 participants interviewed reported workload and financial constraints playing a major role in their ability to access recreation programming offered on campus.

Participant quote: *"I would like to [participate] more I just don't have any other money, like I can't afford anything outside of school and right now I'm time constrained...the amount of work I have between now and when I graduate is just ridiculous."*

Participant quote: *"There's a lot more flexibility as a grad student but there's a huge expectation of what you have to get done. You're expected to TA and do research and it's also like financially really hard."*

Implications

Efforts such as Collegia made by UBC must be accompanied by improvements in making recreation accessible to all graduate commuter students. We need to address barriers such as commute time, academic and financial stress, and inadequacies within UBC recreation. This includes understanding the structures in place that deter students from making healthy decisions and participating in recreation.



Weekly Commute and Recreation Time of Participants

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