

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program  
Student Research Report

**UBC Nightlife Events: Women, Transgender, Femme and Nonconforming People**

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**PLAN 522**

**Themes: Community, Wellbeing**

**April 30, 2019**

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# **UBC Nightlife Events – Women, Transgender, femme and nonconforming people**

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this research is to explore the barriers and incentives that exist for women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming people to participate in nighttime events on UBC campus. Through our research, we hoped to be able to understand in what spaces women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming people want to see more events taking place, what would compel them to attend nighttime events on campus, and what is currently preventing them for participating in existing nighttime events.

To answer these questions, we used a mixed-method qualitative approach. We started with a review of key literature on the subjects of gender, nightlife and inclusive spaces. This helped us understand what other Canadian campuses are doing to create inclusive campus events and also to frame our research through an intersectional feminist lens. We then collected our data through three outreach and engagement activities. We set up a booth at the NEST Building in central UBC campus with two large engagement boards, asking “where do you want to see a nighttime event on campus?” and “what would draw you to a nighttime event on campus?”. We approached groups of people passing by, and asked them to participate. Participants were asked to write their identifiers on sticky notes and place them on the two boards. If respondents were willing to participate further, we would conduct a short and informal interview that allowed us to gather more detailed information about barriers and incentives to participating in nighttime events on campus. Our last engagement method was in the form of a short online survey that we sent to three groups on campus that work to promote gender-diversity and inclusion at UBC.

In our research we found that just over 50% of respondents wanted to see nighttime events in and around the NEST. The next most-desired location was in the Arts and Culture District of UBC campus. For type of events, those involving food, music, and drinking were most popular among our studied population. Accessible transportation has been identified as a main draw to nighttime events, specifically for those living off-campus, making up 60% of respondents. We found that many people attend events for social interaction or because their friends are also attending. Music is also a main draw to nighttime events; however, it can also be a deterrent to individuals if it they do not enjoy the type of music being played. Further, transportation, along with distance from

home are the primary factors preventing our targeted population from attending nighttime events. Cost, food and busy schedules were also identified as being important factors.

These findings have led us to make four key recommendations. First, event information should be shared and contained in a central location. Second, events should be free as often as possible. Third, events should be held in central locations, close to main transportation stops on campus and fourth, events on campus should have a greater diversity of content to attract a wider range of students.

## **Literature Review**

### **Intersectional Feminist Lens**

Studies and theories on gender over the years have found that a focus on a person's gendered experiences must involve a variety of other aspects of identity that contribute to the complexity and uniqueness of experiences such as race, sex, class, and sexuality. Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first to label this convergence of systems of gender, race, sexuality, sex, and class as *intersectionality* in 1991, which has since become an integral part of feminist studies. The introduction of intersectionality helped the feminist movement support women's rights for a variety of groups of women rather than the white, middle-class, homogeneous group that second wave feminism was catered to (Claire, 2016). Crenshaw (1991) notes that when it comes to gender-based violence, "intervention strategies based solely on experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who, because of race and class, face different obstacles." Thus, feminism's use of an intersectional lens is necessary to highlight how oppression is created for various identities in the structure of the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" in order to properly tackle these inequalities (hooks, 1982).

"Intersectionality-informed Qualitative Research: A Primer" (2014) suggests that an intersectional lens is an especially useful framework for qualitative research because both intersectional and qualitative approaches "share assumptions about the context-bound nature of research, the importance of foregrounding voices of differently situated individuals, and the need to address power imbalances between researchers and those with whom research is conducted." Qualitative research methods often involve direct engagement with the community that is being studied, which "contribute[s] to an understanding not only of relationships between concepts, but the processes and the meanings that those processes and relationships hold" (Schulz & Mullings, 2006). For example, Nagy Hesse-Biber (2011) discusses that some research

conducted from a feminist perspective includes qualitative methods such as “ethnography, in-depth interviewing, focus groups, [and] oral history” to merge the “personal and political” truths of marginalization. Leavy (2011) also examines how the practice of feminist oral history and focus group interviews are employed by feminists to “produce a multivocal narrative” that touches on a variety of social problems. Overall, an intersectional feminist framework to qualitative research allows for a broad and direct examination of social, cultural, and economic complexities of experiences for a diverse range of populations.

## **Gendered Mediation of Everyday and Everynight Experiences**

Feminist critiques of urban theory and planning emerged in the 1970s and demonstrated “how urban planners have created gendered environments that are predominantly suited to the needs of men and the heteronormative family” (Beebeejaun, 2016). A look at planning from the lens of gender reveals that genders move around and interact with a variety of spaces and places in different ways. Frisch (2015) suggests that the addition of an intersectional lens to a feminist critique of planning reveals that “planning continues to operate as a technology of heteronormality.” In other words, there is a binary categorization of women and men in society – similar to the initial homogeneous grouping of women in the feminist movement – that is reflected in the built landscape. Our study’s inclusion of women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming people in our research population attempts to move outside of this binary categorization in order to emphasize the different experiences within genders. Also, our intersectional feminist lens highlights the imbalance of how different identities move around spaces, and thus this lens should be used in research and planning of cities going forward to discover how “inclusivity, access, and safety are dynamically produced through space and negotiated in tandem with other people” (Beebeejaun, 2016). Altogether, inclusivity, access and safety are the main concerns often considered in studies that look at how gendered experiences vary from place to place and time of day.

Although there is an increased focus in research on the gendered mediation of everyday experiences in urban spaces, gendered interactions with the night are rarely explored within this research. As the built environment becomes less visible and fewer people are typically out on the streets at night, concerns regarding inclusivity, access and safety become heightened. Gallan and Gibson (2011) argue that in this nighttime environment there is a connection between the oppressive gendered landscape of the city and the night; they state that “marginality finds its spiritual home in or at night” because the “expulsion from day” means “their expulsion from the urban capitalist

status quo." This connection between night and the marginalized highlights the necessity for night to be considered in intersectional feminist research that is often about the people who do not fall into the homogeneous grouping created with the help of the city.

This "night-time economy" involves different working and living patterns than the day (Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995), with activities such as drinking and dancing at clubs often popular at night that bring about a different urban culture than the work-driven day experiences of the urban space. Research on nightlife in Wollongong, Australia by Waitt, Jessop, and Gorman-Murray (2011) finds that women drinking at night to the point of becoming drunk is "a strategy young women deploy to intentionally change their bodily performance" that aligns with masculine drinking culture. This approach is dependent on the space or the specific "scene" of the drinking-related nightlife economy that is "embedded in specific socio-economic, historical and cultural contexts" and is dependent on the space or the specific "scene" (Waitt, Jessop & Gorman-Murray, 2011). Grazian's (2007) discussion of urban nightlife from the male's perspective reiterates this idea of gendered performance occurring in the night as he argues that "young heterosexual male students employ the power of collective rituals of homosociality to perform sexual competence and masculine identity by 'girl hunting' in the context of urban nightlife." Overall, the research on nightlife states that the binary categorization of men and women in Western patriarchal society is reproduced in nightlife culture where both men and women put on a performance that reflects heterosexual masculine nighttime culture. This performance by women reproduces cultural norms in order to secure a certain amount of inclusivity, safety, access and safety in urban nightlife activities. Roberts & Eldridge (2007) conducted qualitative research in focus groups on planning for a more inclusive evening economy where participants wanted nightlife planning that does not necessarily involve alternatives to binge drinking venues but "a deeper understanding of the potential range of eating and drinking related activities, particularly those that might be enjoyed by a whole family in the evening and early part of the night." More qualitative research about the experiences of the marginalized and oppressed is needed to find ways to shift the culture of the night so it is inclusive for a variety of identities.

## **Existing Approaches to Inclusive Events by Canadian Campuses**

North American campuses have a history of reproducing heteronormative, gendered cultural practices with events such as drinking-focused parties created by on-campus groups and residences playing a key role in constructing campus culture. Sororities and fraternities in particular are single-gender clubs that promote a "gender-segregated social life" (Case-Levine, 2016). This social structure reinforces the Vancouver

entertainment district's "actively produced, normalizing space" that maintains the "moral contours of heterosexuality (among other things) within the neoliberal city" for students across campus (Boyd, 2010).

Universities have tried to produce a more inclusive campus culture by creating on-campus events for students. For University of British Columbia, university programs such as the SEEDS Sustainability Program and some student run groups such as Bike Kitchen, Totem Park, and the Pride Collective try to provide inclusive events for students. In terms of UBC campus nightlife, most feedback SEEDS received around the nighttime programming is anecdotal. Some information came up in the SEEDS Public Realm Review process in 2017, which was a series of focus groups conducted last year with a variety of campus stakeholders. In the study, a common sentiment that came from the users of the public realm was the desire to "feel more included in campus life" with more seating spaces, more art, feature lighting, and more event communications" as some of the more detailed suggestions (SEEDS, 2017). The Public Realm Plan that resulted from the review focuses on creating outdoor spaces on campus that invite social interactions and connect students, faculty and staff. There was also past UBC SEEDS research in 2016 on accessing outdoor public spaces on campus by Glenn Mendosa that found similar results to the Public Realm Review that includes students' desire for more connection to campus and support from campus services and events.

Other than the UBC SEEDS research, a look at what other Canadian universities are currently doing to create inclusive events showed that many Canadian universities have "inclusive event checklists" to ensure that different physical, cultural, and accessibility needs are met. Our research population is usually mentioned more in the content portion of events rather than in the accessibility and safety of the spaces in the checklists. For example, Carleton University's "Inclusive and accessible event planning checklist" (2018) generally mentions "equity, inclusion and accessibility" once in the "Reflection" section at the end with no direct mention of our research population. UBC has a checklist for accessible event planning (2018) for UBC students and staff with disabilities and a "Planning an Inclusive Event" webpage (2019) that includes general and vague discussion of "inclusive, positive, and respectful advertising and messaging." Overall, how to create an inclusive event for our research population is often mentioned with vague and unclear wording in these checklists and webpages. Checklists and webpages created by universities for inclusive events are only one aspect of the current approaches that universities have for inclusive events but they reveal the need to think more deeply about gendered everyday and night experiences of the landscape from an intersectional feminist lens.

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## **Introduction: Project Focus/Context**

This research explores what barriers and incentives might exist for women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming folks to participate in nighttime events (5 to 10pm) on UBC campus. Our main research question to help us think about where women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming folks want nighttime events is: what prevents and compels women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming (GNC) folks to attend night-time events on campus?

To respond to these questions, our goal was to understand the following:

- What areas of campus are seen as being desirable for nighttime events;
- What barriers exist for women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming people from participating in nighttime events on campus; and
- What would compel women, transgender, femme and gender nonconforming people to participate in nighttime events on campus.

This research will add to the growing body of knowledge about what makes inclusive nighttime events on UBC campus.

## **Framework**

We utilized an intersectional feminist framework from the literature review that helped us think about how to approach inclusive nightlife events in relation to our research population. We decided to use an overarching intersectional feminist lens to inform our qualitative study to make sure we are not only considering gender but a variety of other aspects of identity that also contribute to the complexity of gendered experiences such as race, sex, class, and sexuality. This lens also helped us think beyond the binary categorization of women and men and made us think about our broader research population.

We also focused on the gendered mediation of everyday and everynight experiences in our framework in order to recognize how the binary categorization of women and men in society is reflected in the built landscape. The texts on this topic also looked at the ways different genders move around and interact with a variety of spaces and places. We found that inclusivity, access, and safety are the issues consistently mentioned in the research articles on this topic so we kept these in mind going forward.

## Methods

For this research, we employed a mixed-method qualitative approach. We began by conducting a review of literature on the subjects of gender, nightlife and inclusive spaces. This enabled us to conduct our research through an intersectional feminist lens.

For our data collection, we used three engagement approaches:

1. In-person engagement with sticky notes on engagement boards
2. Informal interviews/conversations with respondents
3. Online survey sent out to specific groups on campus

A major component of our research is that respondents were asked to self-identify their gender. We facilitated this element of our research by approaching groups of people walking through the NEST and asking them to participate in our research. If they consented to participate, we directed them to our two engagement boards where we had a list of common "identifiers" printed out. We encouraged people to read through the list and write their own personal identifiers on a sticky note that they could then place on the boards. We did this so as to not assume the gender of any of our participants.

In total, we had thirty-nine people participate in our study and collected over ninety responses. Once all of our data was collected, we compiled it into a spreadsheet and analyzed it line by line to identify common themes and any outliers.

## Engagement

We used three engagement techniques to gather data for our research; (1) mapping exercise, (2) visual exercise, and (3) survey. We set up at a booth in the NEST during peak hours between 10:00am and 1:00pm to be able to intercept as many participants as we could. We primarily approached groups of students with the intention of engaging a diverse range of participants. We were conscious to not assume identities and attempted to gain representation from the target populations. Further, we engaged many students, including groups that were not relevant to our research, with the intention of sharing our data with other research groups.

We had two poster boards set up at our booth – the mapping exercise poster and the visual exercise poster. The mapping exercise poster had a large map of campus with the question "where would you like to see a nighttime event" displayed in bold letters at the top (see Figure#). The participants would write whatever identifier they chose to share with us on a post-it. We made a list of common identifiers, including gender, sexuality, and nationality, with the opportunity to add more if they felt like it to give

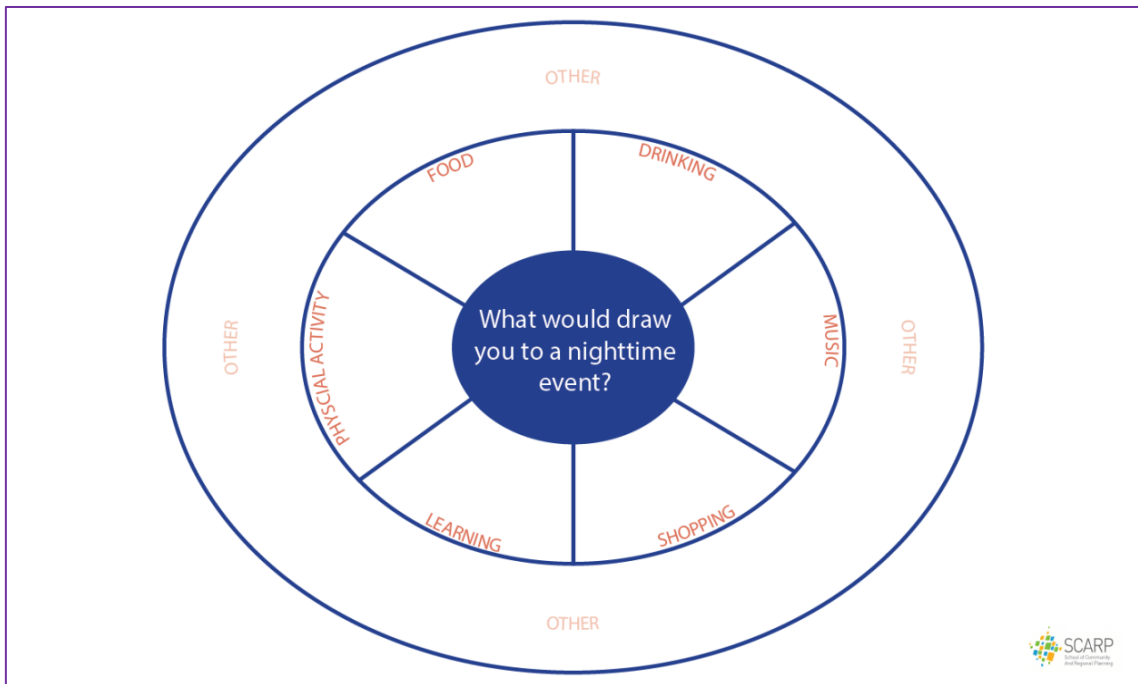
people an idea what we were looking for. They would then place their post-it with their identifier(s) on the map where they thought they would like to see a nighttime event. We were then visually able to see popular locations for events based on participant identifiers.

**Figure#** - Mapping Exercise Poster



Similarly, for the visual exercise, the poster displayed the question "what would draw you to a nighttime event?" As seen in **Figure#**, there were six categories displayed in a circle: physical activity, food, drinking, music, shopping and learning. There was also a circle around the outside where participants could add their own suggestions. Similar to the mapping exercise, the participants would then place a sticky note with their identifier in the category of what would draw them to a nighttime event. This allowed us to easily see the popular categories and suggestions of activities or events that people would like to see.

**Figure#** - Visual Exercise Poster



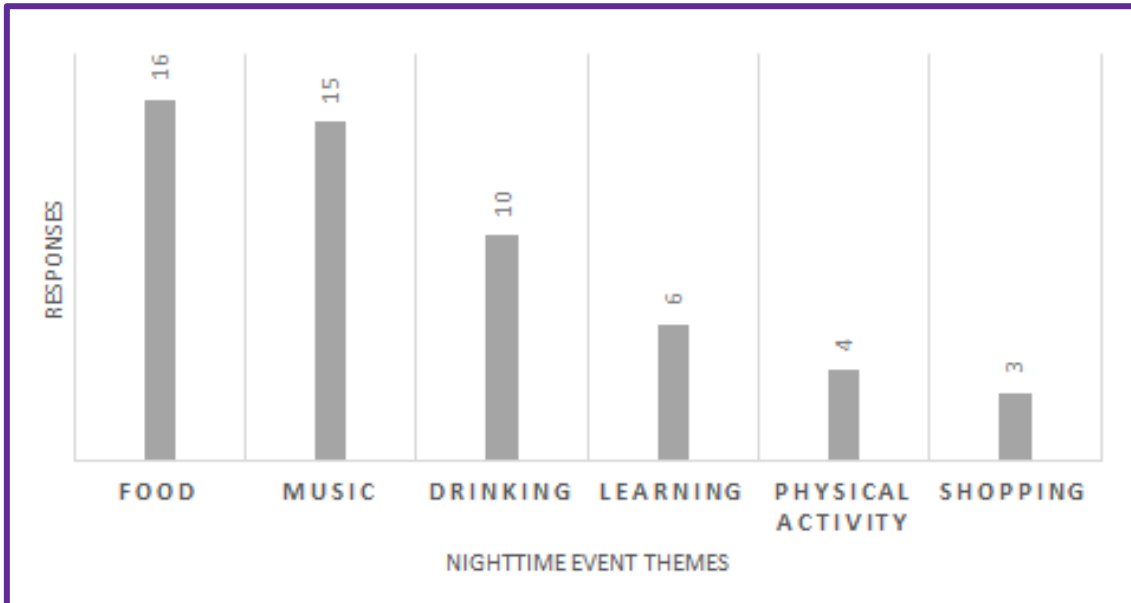
Our final method of engagement was a survey, which was distributed in two forms. First, at our NEST engagement, we would ask people participating with our mapping and visual exercises to answer a few extra questions so we could get a little more detail on what would make a good nighttime event for them. The first three questions were demographic questions: what was their gender, whether they lived on or off campus, and if they were an undergraduate or graduate student. We then asked if they had ever been to a nighttime event on campus and if yes, which one so we could get a sense of what kind of events they are already participating in. They were then asked to talk about the best nighttime event they have ever been to and what elements about it they enjoyed so we could get a sense of examples of what made nighttime events enjoyable for our targeted population. And the final question was what would encourage you to participate in more nighttime events on campus, to help us understand more specifically some of the barriers to participation.

Along with the intercept survey method, we also emailed a slightly more detailed survey out to certain queer groups on campus including the Bike Kitchen, the Pride Collective, and Totem Park. This was to ensure that we were able to see representation in our results from all of our desired research populations, while respecting the anonymity of the participants identifier, which allowed them to choose to share with us as much as they liked.



nighttime events and this option showed the greatest diversity of identifiers. Of those who wanted to see a music event, the self-identifiers included female, male, straight, gay, queer, off-campus, on-campus, international and domestic students.

**Chart#:** Desired Types of Nighttime Events



From this exercise we also developed a list of specific desired nighttime events. Some of the suggestions were: night market, longtable dinner, all-night museum, glow-in-the-dark run, dance, karaoke, open mic, parade, or having food trucks.

## Survey Results

The surveys, both online and in-person, focused on answering what prevents respondents from attending nighttime events at UBC and what would draw them to attend more nighttime events. The online surveys allowed for the analysis of respondents' statements, which then helped us identify the primary reasons why they did not want to attend nighttime events. The following quote illustrates that the amount of work required of students and UBC's lack of sports culture has a direct impact on participation in nighttime events.

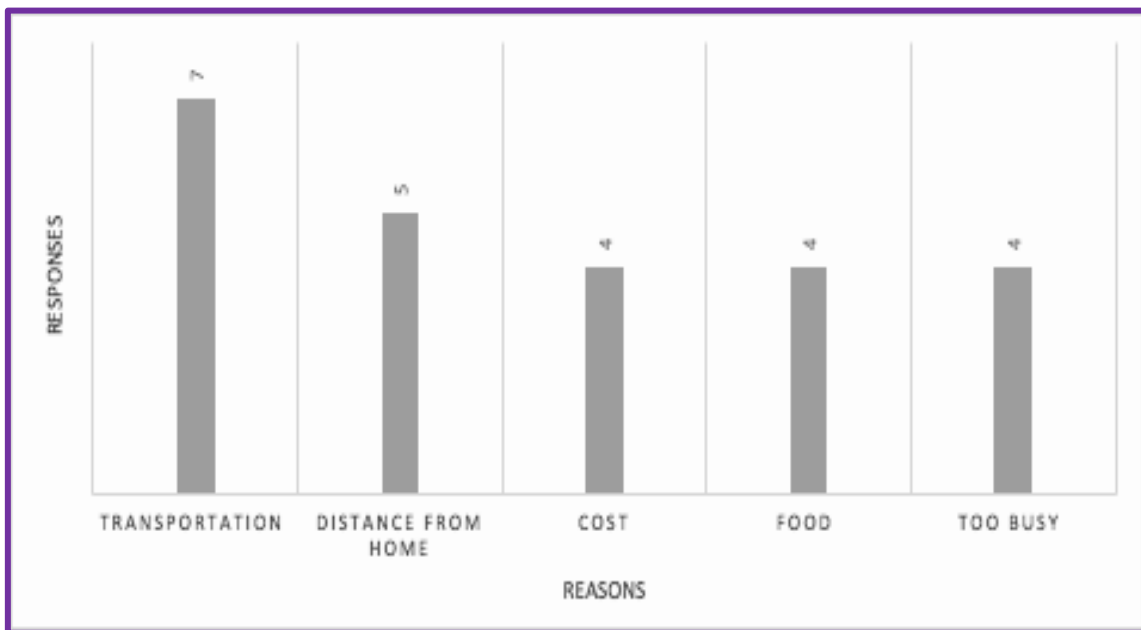
*"UBC in general has a higher focus on education and classes than say an American university with a large sports atmosphere. It isn't part of the UBC culture to do stuff in the evenings, especially during the week."*

As shown below, the following quote highlights one of the primary reasons for the lack of participation, identifying the distance of the UBC Vancouver campus to the rest of the City of Vancouver and access to transportation.

*"Part of the problem is UBC's proximity to the rest of the city- it's kinda a trek to go home then back to campus for a late-night event."*

The theme of distance and transportation were prevalent in both the online and in-person survey results, and can be identified as the top two reasons preventing participants from attending nighttime events as illustrated in the chart below (#). The graph also shows that the cost of events, busy schedule and food not being offered or not free were other key factors deterring respondents from attending nighttime events.

Chart# Factors Preventing People from Attending Nighttime Events



In addition to the five reasons shown in the graph, the respondents identified that certain nighttime events on campus did not align with their personal interests or that they were looking for a specific type of event. For example, the type of music may dictate who attends or, as 7% of participants expressed, their favourite events were those that incorporated a more spiritual aspect. In regards to safety, majority of our respondents did not explicitly express their concern for safety as a primary concern. However, one respondent stated that she had a deep fear of being taken by someone while attending nighttime events. Respondents also said that they would not want to attend an event unless a friend or someone they knew was attending. From this it can be assumed based on the literature, that the participants were not interested in attending nighttime events due to the safety concerns in attending alone, as well as their desire for socializing at events. Furthermore, the location of events being close to transportation hubs was identified as being important, which could be a part of a larger safety concern.



In addition to identifying the reasons why our participants may not attend nighttime events, we also explored what they believe contributes to a good event. Accessible transportation was identified as one of the main draws to night-time events, addressing the concerns over the distance of UBC campus to the rest of the City of Vancouver. The desire for accessible transportation was specifically of interest for those living off campus. The social aspect of nighttime events was another primary factor as many of our participants were attending only if they knew their friends were also attending. The location, types of activities, as well as the option for alcohol and food were the key factors that drew the respondents to events. In addition to being drawn to nighttime events by these aforementioned factors, respondents expressed that the weather of Vancouver, rainy and cold in the winters, was a key deterrent; therefore, if an event accommodated weather-based needs they would be more likely to attend. Accommodating weather-based needs includes, but is not limited to, offering a coat check, specifically if it is free; and, holding the event in a weather appropriate location.

## **Limitations**

A reflection of the results allows for the identification of the limitations. Our limitations fall under three broad categories: timing, representation and method. More time to conduct research and engagement would have allowed for more access to a larger population and ensure a greater representation of those who self-identify as female, transgender, femme and gender non-conforming.

In reflecting on the representations of the respondents, it is evident that there is not an accurate representation of the LGBTQ+ community as only three of the respondents self-identified as queer. In order to increase this representation, a longer project timeline would have provided more opportunities in developing a research method that allowed for more thorough and honest relationship building with this portion of the target research groups. Furthermore, since each of the individuals in the research team self-identify as cis-gender, heterosexual females it added an extra layer of difficulty in the ability to reach out to those who do not self-identify in the same way.

Another limitation can be found in conducting the engagement in the NEST. The NEST often has a higher representation of undergraduate students and, as a result, the respondents were largely undergraduate students. Therefore, conducting the engagement in a neutral space that has a more equal representation of undergraduate and graduate students would have created a more diverse range of students. Overall, the results were high-level due to these limitations of timing, representation and method.

## Recommendations

Considering the results from the mapping exercise, visual exercise, and survey, we have developed several recommendations to allow for more inclusive nighttime events.

### 1. Central Location for Event Information

A number of students said they were unaware of events happening on campus. They identified a central source for event information as an ideal alternative to the individual and ad hoc system of event marketing that currently exists. We suggest compiling all event information in one location and advertising this to students. It would be beneficial if this central location for event information was also available for download to smartphones and computers. Once per month, students could have the opportunity to download "upcoming events" to their personal calendars.

### 2. Free Events

Cost seemed to be a barrier for several students from attending nighttime events on campus. To allow for greater involvement at nighttime events we suggest having free or low-cost events. Alternatives to free events may be incentives to attend events including; prizes, free food, or discounted merchandise.

### 3. Events Close to Transit

Students identified access to transportation as a main draw to nighttime events. We suggest hosting nighttime events near transit hubs to increase accessibility for students living on and off campus. We would also like to suggest hosting events near transit to ease any concerns regarding safety.

### 4. Greater Diversity of Events

Many students attend events based on personal preference. To reach a larger audience we suggest hosting a greater variety of nighttime events or nighttime events that include multiple activities. Specifically, we suggest hosting more music-related events with a wide variety of genres. We would also like to suggest hosting a night-market that offers space for shopping, eating, socializing, and drinking.

It may also be beneficial to collaborate with other clubs or groups on campus to ensure a greater diversity of nighttime events.