

**TASMANIAN**

**UNIVERSITY**

**STUDENT**

**ASSOCIATION**

**Building the Adventure Club Community:**

Recommendations for Growth and Governance

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

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## Executive summary

Adventure clubs of the University of Tasmania (UTAS) affiliated under the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) play a key role in shaping the experience of the UTAS students by providing them the opportunity to engage in risky outdoor activities such as bushwalking, rock climbing, diving, rafting and slacklining. TUSA on the other hand is the standing student representation body which aims to be the independent voice of students at UTAS, effecting change through leadership and community building.

The project report intends to give TUSA with recommendations that, if adopted with more research, will improve the adventure clubs' experience. Throughout the project term, the project scope altered as it first evaluated the viability of establishing a governing body to create a platform for adventure clubs to function. After consultations with Adventure Clubs and TUSA officials, the governing body was deemed impracticable. The research then focused on identifying gaps between the two cohorts through an analysis of conversations and meetings with both sides.

Following that, a thematic analysis highlighted two important themes that describe the existing condition between the two cohorts. 'Awareness' was one of the key themes since there is a knowledge gap between the parties, and 'Availability' was the other essential theme because time restrictions severely limit both parties' abilities to take on new obligations. Both themes highlighted a lack of communication and relationship management processes between TUSA and the adventure clubs, which causes the adventure club executives to be hesitant to join in TUSA initiatives since they feel there would be no

significant benefits to their organisation.

The first recommendation advises TUSA to establish a consistent and simple communication method by introducing a single point of contact and creating a Facebook group with the adventure clubs. This recommendation will ensure that a well-established relationship is maintained in both the short and long term. The second recommendation is focused around creating a stronger base and background for the TUSA Student Research Program in Semester 1 2022, as it is advising that TUSA incorporate adventure clubs into the projects using methods such as focus groups and workshops, to create more accurate findings and take into consideration the adventure clubs' perspectives. Finally, the report advises TUSA to educate the Adventure Clubs in regard to the benefits of the TUSA resources and provide additional assistance if required by the adventure clubs such as providing transportation options or social media marketing. Due to the limited time and lack of responses, the report does not contain sufficient qualitative data to back up the said recommendations. Therefore, it is advised that further research is undertaken before proceeding with the implementation procedures

## Introduction

Clubs and societies are the life and soul of university life, and at the University of Tasmania there are over 130 of them for students to choose from (TUSA 2021). It is observed that with the COVID-19 impact on university life gradually fading, clubs and societies at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) are more active than ever before, with an increase in activities organised by campus organisations seeking to conform to a new normal in the post-COVID-19 era.

The TUSA, formerly known as the Tasmanian University Union (TUU), is the student body that oversees all clubs and societies affiliated with them (TUSA 2021). They strive to be the independent voice of UTAS students, bringing about change through leadership and community development by providing the clubs and societies with the guidance and resources needed to successfully govern their organisation (TUSA 2021)

Students can choose from a variety of Clubs and Societies, ranging from course-related clubs and societies to Residential, Community Building, and Sports and Games. Adventure Clubs are one of such, and currently classified under Sports and Recreational Clubs and Societies (TUSA 2021). For the purposes of this report, all organised clubs of members who meet on a regular basis to delegate, organise, and engage in unique, thrilling, and frequently risky outdoor activities such as camping, canyoning, diving, rock climbing, and hiking will be considered Adventure Clubs because there is currently no direct classification between adventure clubs and other sports and recreational clubs on the TUSA website (TUSA 2021; Shields 2020)

As TUSA is the overarching governing organisation for these adventure clubs, the purpose of this

study is to make practical recommendations to TUSA to resolve specific gaps that exist within TUSA and the adventure clubs, hence enhancing the growth and experience of the above-mentioned cohorts. Firstly, the report will provide an overview of the current state of dealings among TUSA and the adventure clubs and then move on to a thematic analysis which was conducted using consultation notes with individuals from the respective clubs and TUSA. Then it will move on to provide recommendation with implementation plans to advise TUSA of potential actions that could be undertaken to enhance the experience of the adventure clubs. It will then conclude with a summary of the key findings and recommendations of the report.

## Background

The scope of the research report stemmed from a previous research report published by TUSA in May 2021. According to this report by Dejesus (2021) there are eight Adventure Clubs at UTAS and these include the Mountaineering Club, Whitewater Rafting Club, Dive Club, Slacklining Society, Outdoor Society, Acrobat Society, Bushwalking Club, and the UTAS Fishing and Camping Club. However, for the purpose of this report the Acrobat Society will not be considered an adventure club as they do not necessarily engage in “frequently risky outdoor activities” (Shields 2020) unlike the other clubs that fall into this category (i.e., they do not embark on adventures). Further, unlike the previous report the UTAS Surf Sail and Snow Club will be included as an adventure club of UTAS, as they engage in outdoor activities.

As mentioned in the initial research report, the project originally looked at the viability of developing a governing body to create a platform for these adventure clubs to come together and ensure that all adventure clubs of UTAS operate within a standard regulation agreed upon

by all stakeholders. However, after meeting with numerous executives of these adventure clubs and relevant TUSA Officials, it was determined that the formation of a governing body would be impractical for a variety of reasons. It was determined that there are several gaps between the adventure clubs and TUSA, making the adventure clubs hesitant to collaborate with TUSA to obtain better results. These shortcomings were identified in areas such as communication and relationship management, which are examined further in this study.

As a result, this study will address these shortcomings in further detail and present recommendations that TUSA may utilise to develop a stronger working relationship with the adventure clubs listed below:

- Tasmania University Bushwalking Club
- Tasmanian University Dive Club
- Tasmanian University Mountaineering Club
- Tasmanian University Rafting Club
- Tasmanian University Slacklining Club
- UTAS Fishing and Camping Club
- UTAS Student Outdoor Society
- UTAS Surf Sail and Snow Club

## Method

Initially, the approach to data collection was intended to involve the study of the ethnographies based on individual club executive reflections derived from the questionnaires distributed (Appendix 1) to the individual adventure clubs, as well as data from a projected workshop discussion. However, due to time constraints and other impediments such as lack of responses, neither method was able to be implemented. As a result, all data analysed in this report will include notes from discussions with the different adventure club executives, as well as meeting notes from TUSA Officials such as the Chief Executive Officer, Student Experience Program Manager, Clubs and Societies Officer, and State President. The objective for employing this strategy was to support the recommendations with reliable and practical sources to maximise the effectiveness of the recommendations.

Following that, the report undertakes a thematic analysis by familiarising with the data, coding, and searching for themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The Author read through the consultation notes created following the discussions with stakeholders and began brainstorming preliminary ideas for codes that may characterise the information. The parties' similar concepts were then classified on a word document, and each group was given a description, which is referred to as a 'code' in the study. Following that, synthesis was sought in order to group the codes into larger themes. There were two major themes identified: awareness and availability. In the next sections of the study, these topics will be explored and analysed in greater depth.

## Findings

The adventure club executives are a project's primary stakeholder cohort, consisting of UTAS students who are enthusiastic about their society's interests and experts in their disciplines. TUSA is

another important stakeholder whose interests are taken into account in this project. Common themes between both these parties were identified by the author and narrowed down to the following two categories (Table 1).

The following discussion will begin by analysing the subject of 'Awareness' connected with a lack of communication and will then move on to examine 'Availability' as a crucial theme, with both of these themes attempting to justify the adventure clubs' hesitancy to engage in TUSA programmes.

**Table 1 – Themes identified**

| <i>Theme</i>     | <i>Definition</i>   | <i>Example Quotes</i>   |
|------------------|---|---|
| <i>Awareness</i> | <i>Knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information or experience</i> | <p><i>Example 1 - "TUSA does not seem to be the most proactive organisation, which is why we are not that inclined to approach them"</i></p> <p><i>Example 2 - Before adopting additional systems/audits/processes, it is important to be familiar with our current risk management process, systems, and audits.</i></p> |

|                            |  |  |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <p><i>Availability</i></p> | <p><i>The accessibility of a system or human resource in a timely manner</i></p> | <p><i>Example 1 - “However, I don't really see the need for another "supervising entity", which adds more red and green tapes for club executives who could be working full time, studying at uni, and running club events already”</i></p> <p><i>Example 2 - “As with many clubs we struggle to find volunteers able to contribute their time to helping the club – there are already significant demands placed on our committee and executive, we're always disinclined to add additional workloads without tangible benefit to the club”</i></p> |
|----------------------------|--|--|

## **Awareness**

In general, awareness refers to being knowing and conscious; being cognizant, informed, and vigilant (Gafoor 2012). In other words, awareness is the condition or capacity to observe, feel, or be cognizant of events and objects (Endsley 2018; Dourish and Bellotti 1992). In this case there is a lack of awareness between both parties.

TUSA, for example, has been implementing a number of initiatives such as 'Student Research Programs,' and 'Shared Calendars, to improve the experience of the clubs and societies that are affiliated with them (Appendix 2). However, there appears to be a gap in the engagement of Adventure Clubs in these projects. This might be attributable to a variety of factors, but for the purposes of this study, it will be associated with the adventure clubs' reluctance to engage in events owing to a lack of awareness of TUSA's proactive initiatives.

At the same time, stringent risk management processes are in place, and the adventure clubs executives adhere to extreme safety precautions at each of their society activities. However, to make informed decisions to enhance the adventure clubs' experience, TUSA should be more cognizant of these practices and the breadth of the expertise of the adventure club executives. Therefore, the recommendations made will focus on creating more awareness and proper communication between the said stakeholders.

## **Availability**

According to Reber (2017) availability relates to the notion that you have time required for performing something or the quantity of time you can allocate to a certain task (Reber 2017). The majority of Adventure Club Executives are individuals who have multiple responsibilities, such as work, study,

and societal commitments. TUSA officials, on the other hand, are also diligent individuals with a lot of work to undertake in a short amount of time. As a result, both parties have very limited availability, and time is a major constraint. Conversations with several committee members indicated a reluctance among committee members to participate in initiatives that can be time demanding and create additional duties to the club because of their busy schedules.

This theme is considered while providing suggestions, with most of the recommendations being provided as efficiently and simply as feasible. In this context, efficiency is defined as the effective use of time and energy while minimising waste and ensuring that the relationship between capital and human resources provides the greatest possible results. (Torgerson and Palmer 1999).

## Discussion and recommendations

The following section aims to give recommendations to TUSA to improve the adventure club experience and address some of the gaps between the two stakeholders. The focus of this section will be on establishing a solid communication and relationship management strategy while making matters as simple and efficient for both sides as feasible.

**Recommendation 1.** TUSA should initiate the creation of a Facebook Group with all adventure clubs and TUSA to establish an informal contact channel.

As per their Vision, TUSA is currently working towards acting as the independent voice of students at UTAS, effecting change through leadership and community building. However, owing to a lack of communication between the parties, the adventure clubs appear to be less aware of TUSA's projects, which unfortunately makes TUSA appear to be a less proactive organisation as discussed above.

TUSA also seems to be unaware of the extensive risk management protocols and procedures in place, as well as the depth of expertise within the adventure club executive. Therefore, it is important for TUSA to maintain a proper and constant communication channel with the adventure clubs for both parties to gauge a better knowledge and approach a collaborative decision-making process.

According to Daniel Owen (2015) it is critical to have a clear communication strategy among the participants, because elements of trust, performance expectations, knowledge transfer, persuasion, collaboration, and negotiation all have an impact on decision making (Politi and Street 2010). In other words, a collaborative decision-making process accumulates, rather than compromises, decision-makers' understandings. It expresses the aggregate of individuals' understandings of the decision-making framework, the options to be evaluated, the sources of value and risk, and, lastly, the reasons for the resultant collaborative choice. (Owen 2015)

It is advisable that TUSA adopts a simple method such as Facebook group with the Adventure Club executive members (Presidents, Secretaries and the Treasurers of the adventure clubs) as a constant communication channel between the two parties. Because every Facebook announcement or correspondence can be read or acknowledged instantly by both parties at their convenience, this relieves executives of the tasks of checking emails or participating in Zoom meetings while also maintaining constant communication between TUSA and them. Using a simple method such as a Facebook Group would be more beneficial over other platforms such as emails because the majority of Adventure Club Executives are extremely busy individuals who are working full-time, studying at university, and managing club activities, and this communication channel is less time consuming and effective.

TUSA may employ moderator-initiated running programs, multimedia, motivational, opinion polls, or discussion questions, as well as participant-initiated experience shares or questions (Facebook 2021), where both TUSA and the executives take an active role in managing the group. According to a study, moderator-initiated polls and other posts requiring a simple one-click reaction of vote or "like" tend to elicit the highest levels of engagement and may therefore improve intervention efficacy by assisting participant engagement levels and retention (Edney et al. 2018).

**Recommendation 1b.** TUSA should introduce a single point of contact between Adventure Clubs and TUSA.

TUSA currently does not have a designated individual in charge of overseeing communication and coordination between TUSA and adventure clubs, so executives' approach either the TUSA Clubs and Societies Officer, Student Experience Program Manager, Student Representatives, or other TUSA staff for any of the queries. As a result, because the adventure clubs will be contacting different stakeholders at different times, and this might lead to misinterpretation or confusion. Therefore, TUSA should establish proper relationship management process for a variety of reasons, including understanding adventure clubs' expectations, focusing on relationship building, and generating adventure clubs-focused initiatives and solutions in order to address adventure clubs' reluctance to be involved with TUSA (Khedkar 2015).

TUSA should establish a single point of contact for adventure clubs and have that TUSA member manage most of the organization's correspondence. This reduces the risk of miscommunication, ensures timely solutions, and aids in the development of trust between the parties because all communication is handled in one place, and both parties will have immediate access to all necessary

information and resources, allowing them to coordinate more efficiently and solve problems in a timely manner (Doyle 2021; Tedder 2018).

This responsibility would be best handled by either the Student Experience President or the Student Experience Program Manager. This is because both positions are currently assisting in the coordination and direction of student activities on campus by working with student representatives from various clubs and societies (TUSA 2021). These two roles are well-versed in the activities and are expected to have established excellent working connections with the executive members of the Clubs and Societies. Moreover, they are also looking at projects such as the 'Unique Tassie Experience,' which would certainly benefit from collaboration with the UTAS adventure clubs. For this initiative TUSA is partnering with tourism operators for discounted rates for activities such as abseiling, whisky tasting, wildlife or jumping on a cruise and all experiences are subsidised by TUSA (2021). However, given TUSA is in a considerably better position to make this choice, who would be more suitable to take on this job will solely be at their discretion.

**Recommendation 2.** TUSA should create a research project to better understand current and previous perceptions from adventure clubs.

This study, like many others, has shortcomings that will likely lead to suggestions for further research. First, this report was created using minimum qualitative data and the adventure club cohort's viewpoint, as most suggestions are supported only by a few consultations with the aforementioned parties and the author's judgments. As a result, it is proposed that more in depth research should be conducted at the start of the research project in Semester 1 2022 which will allow the student in charge of the project to have a better grasp of the adventure clubs' needs and give more accurate

recommendations and implementations that better cater to the audience.

The utilisation of surveys, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, observation, data collecting using ethnographies are required to gain a thorough understanding of their behaviour. These research approaches allow the researcher to explore what and how participants believe and why they think in a certain manner about an important subject without putting them under pressure to make conclusions (Liamputtong 2011; Stewart & Shamdasani 2015). According to Jenny Kitzinger, these methodologies are appropriate strategy for investigating people's experiences, beliefs, needs, points of view, and issues in a more timely, convenient, and cost-effective manner which is beneficial for both TUSA and the Adventure Clubs. (Kitzinger 2005). The questionnaire in Appendix 1 could be utilise by the Student Researcher as a templat/guide for any forms to be produced in the future research.

During the project period, a workshop was intended to commence but was postponed to an uncertain date owing to unforeseen circumstances; nevertheless, because the timelines of the said workshop fell outside of the project deadlines, the workshop could not be used as a means of data collecting. Therefore, it is advised that TUSA offer this planned workshop at the start of the research programme, so that the student project leader can attend the session as well. If TUSA decides to host the workshop before the start of the next research project, it is recommended that all necessary details and outcomes be provided to the student conducting the research programme so that it may be used as a strong beginning point for the project.

**Recommendation 3a.** TUSA should establish embedded support for adventure clubs assistance (e.g., such as marketing and events management).

It is no doubt that all Clubs and Society Committee members work tirelessly to organise and execute successful events and create everlasting experiences and memories for their members. TUSA provides additional support during these events through the provision of grants, venue and equipment hire, leadership and professional development training and social media promotion. Currently even though there is an event application form and TUSA Calendar in place that aids with marketing and event management, the Adventure Clubs does not seem to be utilising these resources as shown in Appendix 2. This might be due to either being unaware of these resources or being hesitant due to its processes and the Adventure Clubs' mentality that these resources would not provide a tangible benefit to their events.

If the reason is awareness of the resources and its benefits, training sessions such as the Student Leader Conference that TUSA made mandatory for all clubs and societies to attend on 16 and 17 November 2021, will be an excellent opportunity for the Adventure Clubs to learn about the various resources and how it will add value to their society.

However, if it is due to the lengthy processes and lack of time, TUSA could provide further help to the adventure clubs in their events by inquiring what TUSA can do to ease the processes or provide additional event support, such as improved marketing. This might be achieved easily by creating a document that asks the adventure clubs the following two questions: "When and where will the event be held" and "how can TUSA help with the event "and have the Adventure Clubs attach their individual promotional materials to the document. This may be delivered to the adventure clubs at the start of the year, and if the adventure clubs require additional support from TUSA, they can simply submit this document to the their single point of contact who will be assigned to them as discussed in

recommendation 1. This recommendation will ensure that adventure clubs are not only aware of the benefits of utilising TUSA resources, but also can use them at their discretion in a very simple and straightforward approach.

**Recommendation 3b.** TUSA should establish multiple transportation arrangements that Adventure Clubs can deploy for their events.

Most adventure club activities include travelling to distant locations for their adventures, and most clubs adopt to transportation options such as carpooling. Although TUSA presently offers a variety of grants, including capital, activity, maintenance, WHS/safety, conference travel, events, and start up grants (TUSA 2021),. Therefore, it is recommended that TUSA looks in to either providing busses/coaches for the adventures or introduce a grant that would include these transportation costs of the event. This in return would enhance the experience of the adventure club members because a bus/coach where all members could travel together would be more beneficial than carpooling.

Hiring a bus/charter for longer expeditions would be more convenient in most cases because there would be no issues with organising and navigating several cars. Furthermore, a professional driver would be safer because they have decades of expertise in the field and have gone through extensive safety training to assure your safety through unknown streets and traffic and will alleviate the stress of the adventure club members in charge of driving (Ebmayer 2020). TUSA can investigate entering an arrangement with a viable bus company in Tasmania, such as 'Bus Hire', 'Coach Hire Hobart', 'Bus Charters Tasmania', or 'Coach Company Tasmania'. Although the rates and quotes would be different with the nature of the trip, on average a minibus would range around \$60 - \$120 per hour and \$500 - \$850 per day. Although, if TUSA enters a long-term arrangement with the companies, the cost would

be marginally lower with an agreed upon discount rate.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, clubs and societies at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) are more active than ever before, with a surge in activities organised by campus organisations attempting to adapt to a new normal in the post-Covid era. Adventure clubs are one sort of such organisation, and they are classified under Sports and Recreational Clubs and Societies by the Tasmanian University Student Association.

Conversations with both the adventure clubs and TUSA, as well as the use of a prior research report, indicated that there is currently a gap between the adventure clubs and TUSA owing to a lack of communication and relationship management. A thematic analysis revealed two main themes: first, 'awareness,' since there were information gaps between both parties, and second, 'availability,' because there is a large time limitation as both parties have limited free time for additional obligations.

All of these considerations were taken into account when three key recommendations were made to TUSA to address these issues. The first suggestion is for TUSA to create a Facebook group with the adventure club executives as a simple and easy communication method, as well as to establish a single point of contact to keep better records and keep the adventure clubs in the loop by providing better assistance.

Second, it is suggested that TUSA integrate adventure clubs in the TUSA Student Led Research Program using methods such as focus groups and workshops, so that more accurate findings are generated, and the adventure clubs' perceptions are considered. The last recommendation advises TUSA to give additional event management help if requested by the adventure clubs by developing a

document that they can submit to request further assistance and exploring viable transportation solutions to enhance the adventure clubs' experience. Before proceeding with the implementation procedure, more research evidence and consultation with both adventure clubs and TUSA are required.

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## Appendix

Appendix 1 – Autoethnographies sent out to the Adventure Clubs for the purpose of data collection. None for completed and returned.

### TUSA STUDENT LED RESEARCH PROJECT ADVENTURE CLUBS

*QUESTION 1 Which Adventure Club do you represent?*

*QUESTION 2 How would you describe your relationship with the Tasmanian University Student Association?*

*QUESTION 3 Are there any actions TUSA could initiate to make the operations easier for the executives to improve the experience and engagement within the Adventure clubs?*

*QUESTION 4 Is there a benefit to collaborating with other adventure clubs and TUSA, in your opinion? If yes, what is your preferred method for doing so (i.e. working group, committee, etc.)?*

Appendix 2 – Shared Calendar on TUSA’s website for clubs and societies to enter their events.



< > Today October 2021 ▾



MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

| 27             | 28   | 29                       | 30 | 1   | 2   | 3  |
|----------------|--|--------------------------|----|---|---|----|
| Kind September |  |                          |    | 5:00 pm - 10:00 pm<br>TUBES – Multicultural Cuisine Night                                     |   |    |
|                | Pharmacy Student Association (PSA) Careers Speed Networking          | Red Bull Basement x TUSA |    |   |   |    |
| 4              | 5  | 6                        | 7  | 8   | 9   | 10 |
|                | 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm<br>Harvest Trail Info session and networking event |                          |    |   |   |    |
| 11             | 12   | 13                       | 14 | 15  | 16  | 17 |
|                |  |                          |    | 4:00 pm - 8:30 pm<br>6:00 pm - 11:30 pm<br>Fancy Dancing Night – Latin Vibes with Son del Sur | 6:00 pm - 11:00 pm<br>Coachell-HER Music Festival |    |