

**TASMANIAN**

**UNIVERSITY**

**STUDENT**

**ASSOCIATION**

**Enhancing Club and Society Cohesion at The University of  
Tasmania:**

**An Implementation Plan for The Tasmanian University Student  
Association**

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

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Semester 2, 2021

## Executive summary

Personal experiences and discussions among clubs and society executives presented a need for clear collaboration guidelines among clubs and societies. Further research revealed that large-scale collaborations such as the inter-faculty sports shield are loosely organised among faculty societies that have led to disputes among these societies.

The lack of current literature around the topic of collaboration among student-led societies and the processes used by other student-led associations to aid their affiliated student societies, proposes a need for the collection and analysis of primary research data around this topic.

This report, thereby, aims to bring to light these issues faced by the clubs and societies at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) through a carefully constructed ethnography. These ethnographies aimed to collect data on the issues that clubs and societies face when collaborating and what the students thought about the proposed solution of using Microsoft Teams. The data collected is then used to provide the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) with a series of recommendations which were developed after a thorough evaluation of this raw data through a thorough thematic analysis process.

This process identified eight key themes across the six responses to the ethnographies: communication, coordination, commonality, funding, duplication, consistency, and knowledge.

Firstly, these themes were tied to the Microsoft Teams implementation plan that was proposed to determine its feasibility. After a thorough analysis and support for the proposed plan from five out of the six responses, it is recommended that TUSA pilot use of Microsoft Teams to facilitate communication in collaborations, including appropriate training. A sub recommendation of the development of a collaboration management strategy or policy document to compliment the Teams system for internal control, especially when it comes to financial disputes. Another sub recommendation of a need for the TUSA to provide value propositions, such as additional funding or grant limit flexibility when events occur collaboratively, was identified to mitigate the issue of disinterest that was revealed through the responses received.

The second recommendation suggests a need for supported semi-regular meetings among interrelated clubs and societies and is backed by the theme of commonality identified through the thematic analysis.

The third recommendation is based around the need for better communication between the TUSA and the UTAS clubs and societies as the supports needed by a particular student response are already provided by the TUSA. This highlights a communication gap which needs to be investigated.

## Introduction

As identified by several studies, clubs and societies play a key role in enhancing engagement among students at university. It is recognised that clubs and societies enable to stimulate a community spirit by building social networks through multiple events and thereby is an important measure of 'student satisfaction' (Trowler & Trowler 2010).

Collaboration among clubs and societies play a vital role in enabling the development and enhancement of these social networks among students. This is because, when different societies come together, students are given an opportunity to meet students from various backgrounds allowing them to build friendships and broaden their networks (CampusGroups 2018; Trowler & Trowler 2010).

Apart from this, collaboration also allows students from various clubs and societies to share resources, share skills and ideas, enhance creativity, and expose them to additional funds (George State University Student Organisations 2021). This can ensure that collaborations happen smoothly enables clubs and society executives to deliver a quality event and plan more events (George State University Student Organisations 2021).

A need for better processes when it comes to collaboration among societies at the University of Tasmania was discovered after deep research into relevant literature, given the anecdotally scant evidence in the University of Tasmania context. Discussion around a recommendation on a previous research paper (Zou 2021) published by the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) around clubs and societies also sparked interest in the processes that are currently involved in the inter-faculty sports shield at UTAS, which is currently a collaborative event among the academic faculties at UTAS. Based on these grounds, a demand for further research around the topic of collaboration among the clubs and societies at UTAS was uncovered.

This demand was satisfied by conducting an ethnography that was sent out to a carefully selected group of individuals. The research questions aimed to identify the issues clubs and societies face when it comes to collaboration and how well the proposed solution of using Microsoft Teams would work. This report will thereby explore the processes that were involved in collecting these ethnographies and present the recommendations that stem from them, with a special focus on the inter-faculty sports shield at UTAS. Through this, the report also aims to bring to light the issues that clubs and societies face when collaborating and bring about an implementation plan with a proper procedure to aid clubs and societies with this process.

## Background

The research paper that was published by the TUSA around clubs and societies in May 2021, identifies a need for the organisation to provide funding for clubs and societies to join or host university-level competitions (Zuo 2021). There was a special focus on e-sports here which sparked interest in the current interfaculty sports shield that was conducted at UTAS (Zuo 2021). After some research into this and discussions with TUSA officials, it was discovered that this inter-faculty sports shield is currently organised collaboratively by the academic student societies. Additional research revealed that the processes here were very loosely organised and often lead to issues amongst the societies involved. Evidence for this can be seen through the UTAS inter-faculty sports shield Facebook page that has not been updated since 2019 and last minute posts about the games by a

faculty society (UTAS Interfaculty Sports Shield 2019; TUBES - Tasmanian University Business & Economics Society 2021).

This project establishes a hypothesis to gather primary research data and will use research completed on collaborations among similar organisation types, such as not-for-profit organisations, societies, and sports clubs, to validate the project recommendations. This is because, there is no current public literature on the topic of collaborations among student-led societies to identify the processes that other university clubs and societies employ to make successful collaborations, such as inter-faculty sports events.

## Method

An experience mapping process was used to conduct the research required for this project. There are three steps identified for this process (Gibbons 2017):

*Step 1.* Identify the current state – the issues around collaboration and where the process does not work.

*Step 2.* Identify future state – what the clubs and society executives want collaboration among clubs and societies to look like and what is expected of TUSA.

*Step 3.* Identify the necessary process required to be implemented to get from the current state to the future state.

Ethnographies were used to supplement this using rich lived experiences of club and society executives. An ethnography is a form of qualitative research which aims to explain and systematically evaluate personal experiences to understand the social experiences (Braun & Clarke 2006). Holding this understanding, an ethnography was sent out to a selected group of individuals who consisted of executive board members of academic societies and student living clubs.

The ethnographies first describe the current issues that were identified through personal experiences and casual consultations with other clubs and society executives (Ellis Adams & Bochner 2011). These issues identified included the issue of coordination at commencement of collaborated events, the absence of a clear process that needs to be involved and the settling of finances (Appendix A). An implementation plan to help with the process of collaboration among societies is then laid out (Appendix A).

It is important to identify here that these ethnographies followed the experience mapping process, which was defined previously. However, instead of asking the clubs and societies what they would like the process to look like, a hypothesis was proposed around an implementation plan to identify whether the proposed plan would work or not. This was done because of the heavy constraint on time and inability to consult and unpack the thoughts of each club or society member that was involved.

Further, it is critical to note that the implementation plan was laid out after thorough consultation with TUSA officials to identify the best method that could be used to make the process of collaboration easier.

After the brief description on the project and its aims, the ethnography addressed two focused questions (Appendix A):

*What are the issues you face when it comes to collaboration (other than the ones noted above)?*

*Do you think that our implementation plan will help to resolve all or most of these issues? Yes/No.  
Please provide the reasoning for your answer.*

A total of six brief responses were collected from different clubs and society executives, including the clubs and societies involved in the inter-faculty sports, with an average of 174 words per response (range between 42 and 339). The method of thematic analysis was then used to analyse this data, whereby I familiarised myself with the responses, allocated codes to data, searched for themes across the ethnographies and named these themes accordingly (Braun & Clarke 2006). After this, and a thorough review, a series of eight key themes were arrived at: communication, coordination, commonality, funds, duplication, consistency, and knowledge (Table 1). These findings were then used to derive recommendations for the TUSA.

## Findings

### 4.1 Major Findings

The research conducted provides some very similar but a wide range of themes across student responses. These are very narrow in nature but are very strong themes as they are identified by responses from students who hold student leader positions, and these students are directly involved in the processes described previously. This section will thereby look at presenting these themes through the following table.

<b>Themes Identified</b>	<b>Coding Rule</b>	<b>Example Quote</b>
<b>Communication</b>	<p>Communication includes the means and ways which are used to get ideas across to other people.</p> <p>This may also include the various channels used to facilitate this.</p>	<p><i>“The key issues experienced this year in regard to collaborating with other UTAS societies revolved heavily around communication. Whilst planning the Interfaculty Sports Shield, there were often times where communications between societies, particularly those less involved, was not at a standard which it should have been. This typically resulted in a mad last minute rush.”</i></p>
<b>Coordination</b>	<p>Coordination is the ability to keep things organised to enable the smooth completion of a particular activity.</p>	<p><i>“I think a good approach would involve a clear process and guideline for how societies are expected to collaborate and contribute in such cases.”</i></p>
<b>Commonality</b>	<p>Commonality includes bringing together individuals or groups of similar backgrounds based on common grounds shared.</p>	<p><i>“Lastly I think a formalisation of semi-regular meetings between clubs and societies in similar fields would allow for a commonality and social relationship between individuals from committees.”</i></p>
<b>Funding</b>	<p>Funding relates to the</p>	<p><i>“We noticed that deciding how</i></p>

	financing and the division of profits and expenses among individuals.	<i>money was spent (for inter faculty sports) was difficult. It seemed that deciding on what was spent was not necessarily mutual, or the least cost method.”</i>
<b>Duplication</b>	Duplication is when repetition of what was said and/or done occurs.	<i>“I think the implementation plan would resolve the first issue only if [B] moved towards Microsoft teams for our other communications. Otherwise, it’s still duplicating communications channels but on a different platform. “</i>
<b>Disinterest</b>	Lack of interest to participate in something.	<i>“I feel issues stem in large part from a lack of interest in investing time and effort into the arrangement.”</i>
<b>Consistency</b>	Consistency is when similar processes are followed every time an activity takes place. This allows stability and provides clear guidelines.	<i>“I think the structure from the implementation plan could improve consistency of collaboration year-to-year by providing an archive.”</i>
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge is the ability to learn out of an experience.	<i>“I’m not sure that aiming for perfect collaborations with the oversight from TUSA inside the teams is necessary. Working on student society committees are as much about the learning experience as they are the end-product. Some inefficiencies in planning, and the management of interpersonal challenges are a part of the learning experience.”</i>

**Table 1: Themes identified**

It was also found that five out of the six responses received believed that the proposed plan would help

eliminate some of the issues identified due to several reasons and proposed suggestions that could be included to make the implementation work better, as identified in section 5 of the report.

## 4.2 Other Findings

Apart from the main findings that are clearly tied to the issue identified and the implementation plan suggested, a response from one ethnography laid out a list of recommendations that they would like to see being implemented:

*“1. Development of a shared calendar*

*2. Development of multi-tiered inter-society committee communications*

*3. Development of formal affiliations between societies*

*4. Development and maintenance of a clear multiyear succession and event planning program*

*5. Hosting of committee planning events and informal tutorials on grant funding, Eventbrite use, branding and administration”*

## Discussion and recommendations

The above listing and description of the major findings identifies several key challenges faced by clubs and society executives, especially when it comes to the inter-faculty sports shield. The examples provided here shows that most of these issues faced are intertwined. These examples also suggest ways in which the proposed implementation plan could work better which are taken into consideration in this part of the report. Thereby, this section aims to use these issues identified and the suggested improvements for the implementation plan to provide recommendations for the TUSA to aid clubs and societies in making the process of collaboration easier.

Communication among clubs and societies was identified as the most common theme across these responses. As seen through the following examples, communication itself is not only one of the most common issues but is also identified as a cause to other issues such as coordination and the division of the finances:

*“I think a large part of the barrier to collaboration is communication and coordination. While many societies have shared values their membership, communication channels and reach may not overlap in meaningful ways.”*

*“Our workspace only contains the committee, so collaboration has to happen on another platform. This doubles up communication channels and makes it harder to stay on top of messages. Multiple channels makes it easier to miss messages.”*

*“The key issues experienced this year in regard to collaborating with other UTAS societies revolved heavily around communication. Whilst planning the Interfaculty Sports Shield, there were often times where communications between societies, particularly those less involved, was not at a standard which it should have been. This typically resulted in a mad last minute rush.”*

*“We noticed that deciding how money was spent (for inter faculty sports) was difficult. It seemed that deciding on what was spent was not necessarily mutual, or the least cost method. However, this could be due to lack of communication from the [A] society.”*

Communication is identified as one of the three most fundamental needs for a successful collaboration in a not-for-profit organisation (AL-Tabbaa, Leach, & March 2013). All this clearly proposes a need for a proper method of communication in this process.

**Recommendation 1a.** To use Microsoft Teams to facilitate communication among

inter-related societies such as the inter-faculty societies.

Based on the responses received from the ethnographies, the implementation plan seems to resolve issues around communication and funding:

*“The implementation plan would likely help with the issue of communication as identified above”*

*“Yes, it seems like a great way to resolve these issues. Microsoft Teams is easy to use and separate teams would help avoid confusion.”*

*“I think teams would be good for coordination within societies also”*

It was also identified that this would allow consistency in processes and provide clear guidelines especially for year-by-year collaborations such as the inter-faculty sports shield:

*“I think the structure from the implementation plan could improve consistency of collaboration year-to-year by providing an archive.”*

For the implementation plan laid out in Appendix A to work, the TUSA may have to undertake a series of steps. Firstly, they must have a clear understanding of how the Microsoft Teams application is used and all the functions within it. For this, they may have to run a few trials among TUSA staff which will enable them to get a better understanding of how all the functions work and to identify the processes that are needed by the clubs and societies. They may then develop a ‘How to use Microsoft Teams’ guide for the faculty related societies to use in preparation for the inter-faculty sports shield, which could also be used by other societies wishing to collaborate if this experimental plan is successful.

Alongside this, they may also need to develop an internal policy for how management of clubs and societies collaboration should operate and develop an action plan for the management of finances which could be enacted upon by the clubs and societies officer when issue relating to finances occurs.

**Recommendation 1b.** Develop a strategy document with communications and finance management strategies for collaborations to compliment the Teams system.

It is important to identify here that there were some responses which were not completely for the idea of TUSA keeping a close eye on the management of these collaborations:

*“I’m not sure that aiming for perfect collaborations with the oversight from TUSA inside*

*the teams is necessary. Working on student society committees are as much about the learning experience as they are the end-product. Some inefficiencies in planning, and the management of interpersonal challenges are a part of the learning experience.”*

It is therefore, recommended that TUSA takes measures to not put too much control in place when providing guidance for the communications that are required to take place.

For this implementation to be a success, the TUSA should also provide value propositions for the clubs and societies undertaking activities collaboratively. This is necessary to show clubs and societies the value that this shared communication method provides and thereby aim to avoid duplication of communication channels as highlighted by a response:

*“I think the implementation plan would resolve the first issue only if [B] moved towards Microsoft teams for our other communications. Otherwise, it’s still duplicating communications channels but on a different platform.”*

This value proposition may even take the form of additional funding for clubs and societies when events are done in collaboration or an increase in the maximum limit available for grants when an event is conducted in collaboration with other societies. As evidence of collaboration TUSA may require a particular agreement between the two parties involved.

**Recommendation 1c.** TUSA should develop clubs and societies with a value proposition so that students would want to participate in collaborative practices.

This thereby, aims to mitigate the issue of lack of interest in collaborating as identified through several responses:

*“I feel issues stem in large part from a lack of interest in investing time and effort into the arrangement”*

*“Second would be promoting the benefits of what society collaboration can achieve for both parties.”*

*“The capacity of other societies to participate in events also hindered our ability to collaborate at times, whether it be from a lack of interest, insufficient funds or number of students, or another reason. It can be difficult to collaborate with another society when we are not sure whether they will have to pull out last minute or whether they will be able to afford it.*

*The final and perhaps largest issue that [B] has faced when it comes to collaborating*

*with other societies is our disinterest in doing so.”*

The themes listed out through the findings, identifies a need to allow for commonality among societies that are in similar fields:

*“Lastly I think a formalisation of semi-regular meetings between clubs and societies in similar fields would allow for a commonality and social relationship between individuals from committees.”*

*“Development of multi-tiered inter-society committee communications”*

**Recommendation 2a.** TUSA should initiate semi regular meetings between inter-related clubs and societies.

A study conducted on building social relationships in a school through shared school lunches found that “creating an informal setting, enabling inclusive participation, demonstrating sacrifice for the communal good, and facilitating experiences of diversity” as key mechanisms that strengthen social connections (Neely, Walton & Stephens 2015). A similar theory can, therefore, be applied in the context of clubs and societies to show how these regular but informal meetings would help develop and strengthen cohesion amongst clubs and societies that share common grounds.

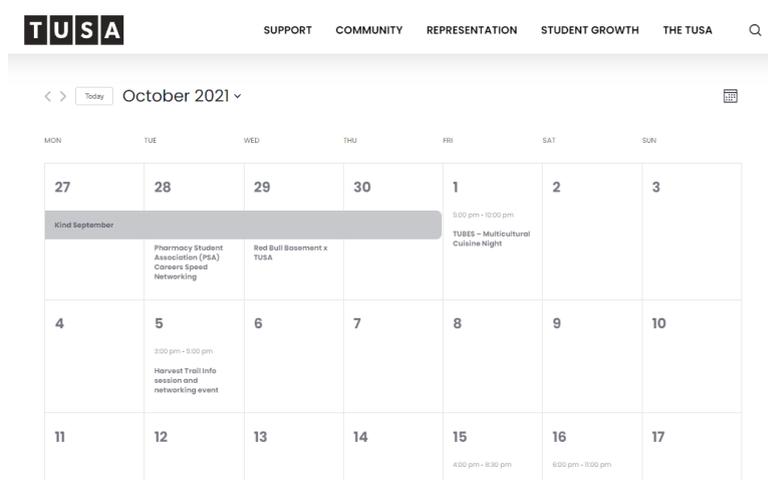
Further, similar to the reasoning behind recommendation 1c discussed previously, TUSA may need to provide a value proposition or a reasoning as to why clubs and society executives, who would otherwise would not want to participate due to *“lack of interest in investing time and effort”*, should participate in these meetings.

**Recommendation 2b.** TUSA should provide clubs and societies with an incentive to participate in these semi-regular meetings.

The incentives that this recommendation suggests could take the form of either extended limit on the grants or more support for collaborated events. TUSA could also provide opportunities for better representation in the decisions taken by the TUSA for the clubs and societies that participate in these semi-regular meetings.

The final recommendation that this project seeks to bring about concentrates on the section of ‘Other findings’ that was listed previously in the report. The recommendations that this particular response lists out includes a series of activities that the TUSA has already developed. For instance, a shared calendar is already available on the TUSA website which is easily accessible and allows societies to share their events along with all

the details (Tasmanian University Student Association 2021):



**Figure 1:**  
Shared  
calendar on  
TUSA website

Through the TUSA events published on the TUSA website and advertised on Facebook, it was also observed that the organisation has been and is currently conducting events that are aimed at providing student leaders with exactly what’s been laid out in this particular response:

*“4. Development and maintenance of a clear multiyear succession and event planning program*

*5. Hosting of committee planning events and informal tutorials on grant funding, Eventbrite use, branding and administration”*

For instance, the TUSA has conducted a Clubs and Society Symposium, which covered topics such as event planning, grants and fundraising (Tasmanian University Student Association 2021) and has advertised a Clubs and Society Handover Conference which is to be held soon. This event aims to provide “skills- focused workshops and planning sessions” for various upcoming events at the university (Tasmanian University Student Association 2021).

This observation suggests that there is a communication gap between the TUSA and the clubs and societies which thereby suggests a need for better communication between these parties.

**Recommendation 3.** TUSA investigates better means of communication between TUSA and the UTAS clubs and societies.

## Conclusion

Collaboration among clubs and societies is identified as an important means in increasing student engagement. This is because, events that are brought about collaboratively enhances opportunities available to students to meet others from various backgrounds and develop social networks. The focus of this study therefore concentrated around the identification of the issues that student societies at UTAS face when collaborating and recommending how the TUSA could best help these societies.

Through the primary research data collection method of ethnographies and the research analysis technique of thematic analysis, this study has identified a number of key issues around collaboration. The main issue identified was communication and this was also identified as the cause of a number of other issues such as coordination and management of finances in collaborations. To tackle this issue, a recommendation to implement the proposed plan of using Microsoft Teams to facilitate better communication was brought about.

Besides this, the research collected presented a need for a finance related collaboration management strategy that is to be kept internally and to be enacted upon when a finance related issue surfaces. The lack of interest that clubs and societies have in engaging in collaborative practices was also identified which proposed a demand to provide incentives for societies that engage in collaborative practices.

Apart from these, the analysis identified that TUSA should provide grounds for inter-related societies to come together as this will allow the development of social relationships among clubs and society executives, encouraging them to take part in more collaborative practices.

A communication gap between the TUSA and the clubs and societies were also identified as one particular response suggested recommendations that were already in place. This shows that improvements need to be made in the ways in which communication takes place among these parties. This requires more investigation which was not possible due to the constraint on time.

Overall, the report aims to produce solid recommendations which aims to polish the process of collaboration among clubs and societies. These recommendations are backed by a series of primary research data gathered from student leaders of the TUSA affiliated clubs and societies at UTAS, who are directly involved in collaborative

practices.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Mr Matthew Knox and Dr Clayton Hawkins.

## Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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# Appendices

Appendix A – The ethnography that was sent out to clubs and societies

## **TUSA: Enhancing Processes involved in Collaboration among C&S**

### **An overview**

The main aim:

This research project aims to enhance collaboration amongst our societies and make this process slightly easier and stress-free for you.

This project started as a plan to light the issues that our clubs and societies face when it comes to collaboration and is now looking at implementing a proper procedure to help you with this process.

Current issues:

Through research and after talking to some of you we've identified that there are a number of issues around this collaboration process. Some of these include the lack of coordination of the processes involved at the start, an absence of the processes that needs to be involved and the settling of finances after the collaboration.

Implementation plan:

We are looking at using Microsoft Teams and creating separate teams for each collaboration. This Microsoft team will be created by TUSA and will remain open until the parties involved in the collaboration decide to terminate it. All teams that you are part of will be accessible on the home page of the Microsoft Teams application and you can invite anyone to the team by simply adding them as a member (a UTAS account is not needed!).

Within each Team, we will include various channels, which will cover most of the subgroups that are needed, and additional channels may be added by you as required. This space can be used to do all your communication relating to the collaboration and to store any documents that are needed.

These Teams will also be regularly monitored by TUSA to ensure the smooth functioning of the collaboration. They will be able to help you understand the processes that needs to be established before the start of a collaboration and help you with any conflicts involved.

The benefit of this is that a clear procedure is in place to guide you with all the processes that are needed for a successful collaboration. This would result in less trouble in setting up a collaboration and a better end goal as a result of clear objectives. Further, for yearly collaborations such as the inter-faculty sports games, these Teams can remain open forever and you will be able to access it to see the processes involved and follow the same procedure every year.

We believe that this implementation plan will help us to make the process of collaboration much easier for you and would really appreciate any thoughts on this. Kindly answer the following two questions with as much (or as little) detail you can.

Thank you in advance!

What are the issues you face when it comes to collaboration (other than the ones noted above)?

Do you think that our implementation plan will help to resolve all or most of these issues? Yes/No. Please provide the reasoning for your answer.