**How UMHB Students Feel About Campus Social Life on the Weekends**

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**Abstract**

Weekends on college campuses create a large portion of the social life and vibrancy of a student body. The ways in which the university itself interacts with its students is essential to the belonging and satisfaction of students at the school. We researched the ways in which individuals who attended the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor felt about the social life on their campus during the weekend. We found that students see this time as a time to be productive instead of rest. This is a result of the lack of things to participate in on the weekends, as well as the lack of effective advertising for things that do occur during the weekends. We also found that students who feel less involved and connected to others will be less likely to stay during the weekends, perpetuating the expectation that no students will be present and that the campus will be empty. These findings will allow the university, and others like it, to see inside the minds of students who attend the school and experience social life on the weekends first hand.

**How Do UMHB Students Feel About Social Life on the Weekends?**

Social life is a crux of any student’s college experience. It is the piece of the triangle that completes the holistic experience of this stage of life; health, academics, and social life. College is a unique era of a young adult’s development into the “real world” as they venture away from their family to find out who they are. This identity comes quickly to some, but not so much for others. There is a meticulous process in forming an identity, which is defined by the ways in which college students interact with their campuses and communities while studying at the university. The interactions between college students and their surroundings - friends, classes, organizations, roommates, etc. - allows them to develop an attitude of their experience while at school. Students can then adjust to the climate of the university while simultaneously finding the role they play on campus and where they belong.

Weekends on a college campus are a great indicator of the capacity to which students are integrating themselves and becoming accustomed to their new life at the university. Weekends play an integral role in the ability of students to find their autonomy and build community. The focus of this paper is to take what we understand to be true about the satisfaction levels and well-being of those who enjoy weekends on campus in a social setting, and analyze them against this present university, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

*Leisure’s Role in Satisfaction and Integration*

Leisure plays a large role in the restoration of individuals - especially college students, who are constantly surrounded by the pressures of being a full-time student and part-time adult. The leisure activities students find themselves in, says a lot about the ways in which they have integrated into life at school and developed social relationships. Barnett (2011) researches the results of leisure time, which show that those who partake in leisure often receive internal rewards, increased social interactions, development of desired skills, stimulation (outside of studies), and begin to collect experiences. All of these results indicate a student’s satisfaction with the way they spend their time in leisure. There are different types of leisure activities. Finlay (2012) operationalizes their research on leisure by creating categories such as serious and casual leisure, whereas other researchers (Jeong, 2020) separate leisure into categories such as joint, individual, and parallel leisure. One definitive statement about leisure is that there are many types and forms, all of which exist to benefit the individual. Leisure is significant in determining satisfaction of college students, especially since the weekends often are the only times students are available to partake in restorative activities.

*Attitude and Perspective*

As a student walks onto their college campus, they begin to create expectations and assumptions about the university. Ficher’s research (2007) investigates how this attitude can influence the individual’s decision to experience leisure and social activity on campus. Impressions from the university that the student observes are key in determining the cost-benefit analysis of participation. This participation is crucial for the integration of students and is impacted by the attitudes the student possesses about the climate of the campus and their willingness to assimilate into campus culture. Kim (2015) researches the connection between leisure attitudes, satisfaction, and well-being. The results determined that the well-being of an individual is a dependent variable, that of which is mediated by satisfaction and driven by attitude. The research suggests that the correlation between these variables is high, which indicates that the attitude and/or perspective of students on campus towards leisure activities significantly impacts well-being. The more involved a student is - whether involvement be via formal (school sponsored activities and such) or informal (such as friends hanging out) events - the more satisfied they are with their experience (Reed, 2007). Weekends provide an opportunity for college students to participate and become more involved, and therefore, more satisfied with their experience.

*Belonging and Identity on Campus*

At the heart of college students and their experience with university life, is their sense of belonging and identity. Believing they belong on campus is both crucial to the leisure events and activities they feel comfortable participating in, and impacts the satisfaction they have of existing on campus. Buckley (2023) investigated the sense of belonging of college students - specifically ROTC cadets - and campus climate. Ultimately, their research states that campus climate and student’s belonging on campus formulate how a student sees themselves in relation to the university. Identity formation is an ongoing process of development, and one that exponentially increases as an individual experiences college life. When a student decides to enroll, move to, and start a life at a university, they have the liberty to create their own sense of autonomy. This newfound autonomy is shocking, and eventually, the college student learns how to wield it. Autonomy precedes the formulation of identity (Sean, 1996); the ways in which a student invests and uses their autonomy is indicative of the things they desire and how they see themselves. The development of autonomy is closely correlated with interpersonal relationships. These relationships are made by integration and assimilation into the social habitat of a university through potential leisure activities and involvement. Therefore, the satisfaction a student finds in life on campus can be a result of the identity they are creating, and the autonomy they have been granted.

The adventure on which young adults voyage to find their identity is a daunting one, and one that can seem lonely. Bui (2022) conceptualizes and operationalizes loneliness. Their research differentiates loneliness into two separate distinctions, social and emotional loneliness. Both types can impact a student’s satisfaction with social life on a college campus, but in determining the origins of their dissatisfaction, this distinction is beneficial. The investment in social support alludes to involvement of individuals as they find their community and sense of belonging with others (Reed 2007).

In reviewing the significance of a multitude of factors, we see how autonomy, satisfaction, well-being, leisure activities, and belonging can influence the way a student feels about their campus and the way they interact with campus life. In order to investigate the students’ feelings about social life on the weekends at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor specifically, we begin with these factors and extract knowledge about the experience with the university and how students spend their weekends.

**Data & Methodology**

*Gathering Participants*

In order to discover how students feel about campus social life on the weekends, my fellow researchers and I have conducted 20 systematic interviews with students who attend a small Baptist school in central Texas, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. With a team of five researchers, each researcher claimed a specific area of residence and interviewed individuals who were willing to participate in a brief interview. Each interview took at least one representative individual from each area of residence by those who attend the university, including a representative for commuters and on-campus houses. The decision to gather an extra interview for College View (the residential area on campus in which a condensed amount of the student population lives) was unanimously agreed upon. Therefore, two individuals from College View were interviewed in order to accurately represent the population. We also find it imperative to mention the abnormal data collection of individuals that we interviewed, this being students who live in houses on campus as well as commuters. There are few on-campus houses, and the students living in on-campus houses are typically more involved and integrated within the university. Overall, from the 14 different areas of residence at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, we interviewed at least one individual from each area (two from College View) and one from the group of students who commute. This gives us an accurate depiction of most students who attend the university.

*Strategy & Expectations*

As our researchers found individuals to interview, we determined that the most valid way to find our sample was to use a systematically random system of knocking on every 3rd or 5th door on every floor of each area of residence. This way, we are able to accurately represent the population. Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed via Dedoose, a qualitative software that effectively allows us to analyze large amounts of data.

Our team expects that students on campus will be unsatisfied with campus social life on the weekends. We investigate the way these students feel and search for the reasoning behind the dissatisfaction. Student dissatisfaction can be the consequence of many things, including the universitys’ neglect of investing in the lives of students outside of the week, campus organizations’ failure to plan events on the weekends, and students' leaving campus on the weekends. Depending on the ways in which students feel about their weekend experience on the Mary Hardin-Baylor campus, we may discover things that students desire to see on campus during the weekends as well as potential issues that may lead to lower satisfaction in not only the weekend life, but the students’ entire college experience.

**Results**

*Demographic Characteristics*

The demographics of the students from our data were recorded alongside their interviews (Appendix A). Each of these students were undergraduates from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. 66.7% identified themselves as White and 33.3% identified themselves as Black/African American. We collected interviews from males (36.8%) and females (63.2%), as well as individuals who identified themselves as a woman (60%), a man (35%), or another gender identity (5%). Some of them had on-campus jobs (20%) - which we call work-study programs - while others had jobs off-campus (60%). There was a fairly equal variation of different degrees represented, in different fields of study. The level of student satisfaction of social life on the weekends was measured, with 1 being the lowest satisfaction and 5 being the highest. We also asked about how safe students on campus feel, with 0 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest.

*Companionship & Expectation*

At the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, many individuals stated that the reason they decided to leave campus on the weekends was due to the fact that no one else would be there. Considering that the majority of the activities in which students participate in on the weekends revolve around others who are present on campus during that time, this is reasonable. Bart explains that “if [other people] are staying, then I’ll try to stay with them. But if people go home… it just seems like there’s no point to be here.” This indicates that the decision of the individual to stay on campus is very dependent on if other people are remaining on campus as well. We found that many students commented on the “dead” state of campus on the weekends. As there is an obvious pertinence of having a place to belong as well as people to spend social time with on the weekends, we see that the lack of individuals on campus during the weekends is a common issue discussed by multiple students explaining their desires and/or frustrations with weekend activities. This expectation of a “deserted” campus affects the university’s social life during the weekends. So much so, that even the institution itself manipulates the social schedule in anticipation that students will not be on campus during the weekends. And if students have nothing to do during the weekends, they are not going to stay on campus.

Nathan, speaking about his dining hall job on campus, says that “they know people leave on the weekends, so they don’t have to be here.” His on-campus job understands that Sodexo does not have to be fully staffed in order to function efficiently on the weekends. This expectation of campus “desertedness” is diverting students from staying on the weekends, while simultaneously reinforcing the institutions’ decision to not create and support activities for the weekend. This cycle of expectation between the students and the university leaves the campus “dry” and “dead.”

*Productivity & Work*

Over and over again, individuals explained their time on campus during the weekends as a time to be productive or “play catch up.” This may be a result of the inability of students to spend their time elsewhere, as well as the pressures of a student to balance work, school, chores, and all of the common tasks which are entrusted upon us as we become independent individuals. For Marvin, “Friday night is just like homework, catch up on the week, anything like that,” which is the case for many students on campus. These students fill their time with school work or find themselves at a job off campus. They are burdened with a constant desire to be productive and “catch up.” Marvin blatantly tells us “I’m working all the time.” Students who are on campus during the weekends fill their time with productive things to do, such as homework or getting hours from their paying job because they have no other options to choose from. This may result in burnout, as well as lower rates of social connectedness and campus unity.

*Planning & Advertising*

One suggestion - that presents itself in multiple parts - was very commonly echoed in most of our interviews; to plan events on the weekends which are effectively advertised. Students consistently suggested that there should be more events planned for the weekend and not during the weekdays. This gives the student body an option to participate in events on the weekends instead of having to be productive during their allotted rest time. It also allows the students to focus on schoolwork during the week, instead of events that might be occurring at the same time. Marvin noted that “usually, if I’m doing anything, it’s a weekday.” This indicates that there is a lack of options for students to participate in on the weekends, but a plethora of options during the week, forcing the students to invest in social life and academia simultaneously. On the weekends, students are left with nothing except “catching up” on the things they missed during the week due to the events they participated in. Yet hand-in-hand with this request for activities on the weekends is a desire to “advertise more because a lot of times [events are] not advertised.” Students mentioned the chalkboards in the middle of campus, but that the inability to see the chalkboards makes the events hard to attend. They suggested the application of flyers, social media, and even email. One interviewee discussed the effectiveness of word-of-mouth, and how that would be a very strategic way of making sure people knew what was happening on campus during the weekends.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research is to inform the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor of the student population’s feelings towards social life on campus during the weekend. We expected the students to be unsatisfied with the social life on campus during the weekend. Being students ourselves, we understood the context and implicit desire of those around us who feel frustrated or dissatisfied with the social climate of the weekend life at the university. Using semi-structured interviews with students who attend the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, we found that the expectation that a majority of students would be off campus during the weekend affects the students' decisions to stay and invest in the campus social life, due to the lack of belonging. This lack of belonging originates with individuals to connect with and build social relationships with.

We also found that productive activity is the default for students who find themselves on campus during the weekends. Whether the reason is due to a lack of options, or the feeling that they need to use the weekend productively so that they can participate in events during the week, students repeatedly mention using their weekends to “play catch up.” Students discussed the amount of events that occurred during the week instead of on the weekend. As we reviewed our data, we also found that the students do not see the university as a place to rest or build a social environment during the weekends. In order to promote student well-being on campus during the weekends, making the weekends a sanctioned time for school sponsored events, instead of making the weekdays incredibly busy with school sponsored events as well as scholarly responsibilities, may provide the students with the chance to appreciate staying over the weekends. Potential improvements for the university include the transitioning from scheduling events during the weekdays, and instead, moving them to the weekends.

We suggest that the university continue to invest in the social lives of the students, specifically in the spring semester. The students who feel the most connected will be the ones who stay and participate during the weekends. The desire to avoid planning events on the weekends is founded upon the fear that no one would participate because they would all be off-campus. Understandably, this fear is then met by the students’ expectations that they are not missing anything during the weekends. Instead of staying on campus with nothing to do except homework, they would rather be off campus, at home or with friends. The students’ suggestions also clearly identified a desire to see more events on the weekends as well as improved advertising for such events.

The university is encouraged to create an atmosphere of staying during the weekends and providing the students with activities and events that will draw them into investing in the social life of the university. To do so, the university needs to not only create more events, but advertise the events effectively. There is a wide range of students who are enrolled at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, all of which are sufficiently informed of events and activities on campus in different ways.

*Limitations*

Issues deriving from the collection of our sample of interviewees may skew our data. We gathered individuals from the areas of residence on campus, yet the extraneous groups (commuters and on-campus houses) have required specific methods in order to gather a considerable amount of data. The methodological system of snow-balling technique was used in order to gather a considerable amount of data to analyze. Practically, my research team and I asked individuals who knew others who lived in on-campus houses or were commuters. This word-of-mouth did not allow us to collect information in the randomized way we desired, but allowed us to find interesting data nonetheless. Throughout the interview process, we have also gathered extra qualitative data through more interviews that did not follow the randomized process of selection.

As students of the university we are evaluating, our research team has implicit disposition and attitudes towards life on campus during the weekends. We experience these emotions and relate to the interviewees, things that may cause us to skip important implications and questions that may have been more informative. We also include the bias and disposition of the position I hold as a researcher of the university. My experiences and interactions of the weekend social life at the University of Mary Hardin Baylor may influence the ways in which data is coded and interpreted.

A campus where students feel like they can sustain themselves and find belonging is important to a thriving social life. An implication of our findings potentially reveal that the distinction between student productivity and participation may grant them a better opportunity to delegate their time and improve their levels of stress. University students are actively experiencing a specific era of their lifetime. This era merges all of the worlds they have ever experienced. In such, they should be provided with the opportunity to foster and maintain a time of rest and community during their time of restoration and rejuvenation; the weekends. The weekends are the student’s opportunity to experience their life outside of academia, and grow holistically as individuals. Although the desire is to see students evolve and remain in control of their work-life balance, we must also provide them with opportunities to utilize the time they have. The weekends are a perfect opportunity for students to invest in their social life, as well as improve campus belonging. Students are able to invest when the university is able to create and advertise more activities on the weekends for all students of the university.

**Conclusion**

This research explores the ways in which students at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor experience social life on campus during the weekends. My research team has shown that while students do not have an inherently negative view of social life at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor on the weekends, they need to find more of a consistent community to reinforce their belonging, options to spark their desire to invest in their social life, and events on the weekends which are effectively advertised to all students.

*Appendix A:*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Demographic Survey Data For UMHB Students |  |  |  |  |
|  | Characteristic | N | % |  |  |
|  | Race |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Black* | 10 | 50 |  |  |
|  | *White* | 10 | 50 |  |  |
|  | Hispanic/Latinix | 6 | 30 |  |  |
|  | Student Athlete | 1 | 5 |  |  |
|  | GenderIdentity |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Man* | 7 | 35 |  |  |
|  | *Woman* | 12 | 60 |  |  |
|  | *Other* *Gender* *Identity* | 1 | 5 |  |  |
|  | Sex |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Male* | 7 | 35 |  |  |
|  | *Female* | 13 | 65 |  |  |
|  | Classification |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Freshman* | 4 | 20 |  |  |
|  | *Sophomore* | 7 | 35 |  |  |
|  | *Junior* | 3 | 15 |  |  |
|  | *Senior* | 6 | 30 |  |  |
|  | Satisfactionof the weekends |  |  |  |  |
|  | *1* | 5 | 25 |  |  |
|  | *2* | 0 | 45 |  |  |
|  | *3* | 9 | 0 |  |  |
|  | *4* | 5 | 25 |  |  |
|  | *5* | 1 | 5 |  |  |
|  | Off-Campus Job | 11 | 55 |  |  |
|  | On-Campus Job/Work Study | 4 | 20 |  |  |
|  | Romantic Partner | 8 | 40 |  |  |
|  | Safety on campus |  |  |  |  |
|  | *0* | 0 | 0 |  |  |
|  | *1* | 2 | 10 |  |  |
|  | *2* | 4 | 20 |  |  |
|  | *3* | 7 | 35 |  |  |
|  | *4* | 7 | 35 |  |  |
|  | *Demographic Survey Data Collection; Qualitative Study of Social Life on the Weekends* |  |  |  |  |

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