

Isabella Lee, Sophia Gao, Lucian Li, Lin Huang

Dr. Dustin O'Hara

DH 110

29 October 2023

Assignment 4a: Project Report

Our project is focused on facilitating connections and formation of groups as well as access to gear for UCLA students who are interested in being more involved in the natural environment and outdoor recreation opportunities of Los Angeles and Southern California. In order to address the challenges and barriers UCLA students may face when attempting to pursue these activities, our team found it highly important to research the ways in which we could better cater to the needs and wants of our potential users.

Research Techniques and Process

In order to delve deeper into the domain of our project and begin thinking about ways to meet the needs of our target user base, we conducted a thorough research process that consisted of a literature review, interviews, and fieldwork.

Literature Review

As part of our research process, we created a literature review by finding online articles about relevant topics like outdoor recreation and community-building.

In regards to community-building, the article "Successful Community Building Using Social Media Platforms" by Emily Jones provided valuable information about the challenges of forming online communities by discussing successful social media companies and giving examples of successful groups formed on those platforms. For example, it is easy to form a

Facebook Group because of the variety of engagement features and Facebook's enormous user base, so there are low barriers to entry for new members who want to explore their interests. One big takeaway from this article was that successful online communities focus heavily on finding new ways to engage users, and have several moderators that help monitor user engagement.

The research article "Beyond 'Because It's There'" by Alan Ewert, et al. described a study on motivations for pursuing adventure recreation activities that was conducted over a 6 year period. Through analyzing their findings, the authors discovered three main factors of motivation: social, sensation-seeking, and self-image. Out of these three factors, the social factor, relating to a sense of belonging, being part of a team, and friendship, was the strongest predictor of group membership. This means that most people are motivated to pursue outdoor recreation activities because of social factors, above both sensation-seeking and self-image. This conclusion provides us with further evidence that a community-building platform for UCLA undergraduates would be valuable in motivating them to pursue outdoor activities.

As for access to outdoor gear, "Creating Access to Outdoor Gear in Your Community" taken from Outdoor Sport Institute provides several solutions to tackle this challenge. Some strategies include gear libraries, rental and lease options, gear collectives, and donations. There are also other factors to consider such as storage, maintenance, gear repair, and sustainability. In order for this to be a functional and long term resource, a lot of roles and partnerships should also be considered, to enable and encourage outdoor recreation. This helps us with understanding how we can tackle finding the right solution for UCLA students, allowing them to benefit while also giving back, all while fulfilling their purposes of enjoying the outdoors.

Interviews

To better understand the needs of our target user base (UCLA undergraduate students), we conducted interviews via a Google Form sent to students in which we asked various questions about their experience with outdoor activities and apps for finding groups to do outdoor activities with. The form was limited to UCLA students and included the following questions:

1. What types of outdoor activities do you enjoy, and how frequently do you participate in them? (Free response)
2. Have you ever used an app or platform for finding outdoor activity partners or renting outdoor gear? If yes, please specify which ones. (Free response)
3. How do you prefer to find/connect with potential outdoor activity communities?
(Select all that apply)
 - a. In app messaging
 - b. Group chats
 - c. User profiles with activity preferences
 - d. Matchmaking algorithms based on interests
 - e. Other:
4. Have you ever rented outdoor gear/equipment through an app? If you own outdoor gear/equipment, would you be willing to loan your equipment to another student through an app? (Free response)

We are also aiming to conduct semi structured interviews as a part of our field research in which we will be asking local activity organizers or store managers a set of questions we have planned

beforehand as well as any unplanned questions that may arise depending on the situation. The list of pre planned questions are as follows:

Section 1: Role and Responsibilities

- 1.1. What is your role within the UCLA rental gear staff?
- 1.2. Can you describe the types of outdoor gear that are typically available for rent to students?

Section 2: User Demands and Trends

- 2.1. What types of outdoor activities are most popular among UCLA students, and what gear is most frequently rented for these activities?
- 2.2. Are there any complaints about the pricing of the gear rental?

Section 3: Challenges and Improvements

- 3.1. What are the primary challenges you encounter in managing and maintaining the rental gear inventory? Late return? Item damage?
- 3.2. Are there any specific improvements or changes that you believe could enhance the rental process or the user experience for students?

Section 4: User Safety and Education

- 4.1. How do you ensure that students are properly educated and informed about the correct use and safety of the rental gear they take?
- 4.2. Are there additional safety measures or educational resources you believe could be beneficial for students?

Section 5: Collaborations and Partnerships

- 5.1. Do you collaborate with any other departments, student organizations, or external partners to support outdoor activities and gear rental for students?
- 5.2. Are there any potential collaborations or partnerships you would like to explore to enhance the rental gear services?

Fieldwork

To conduct our field research, we are planning to visit various stores that allow the renting and/or selling of gear for outdoor activities as well as places that organize and provide outdoor activity opportunities with the goal of simulating the actions UCLA students might take to seek out gear or outdoor activities. Since we are catering to the needs of UCLA students, we will mainly be visiting locations that are close to the UCLA campus to ensure our actions mirror those of our potential users. These locations include UCLA Recreation, the John Wooden Center, and a REI in Santa Monica. For areas that are not a walkable distance from campus, we plan to take a method of transportation that is viable for UCLA students, such as bus or Uber, to experience how convenient it is to travel to these locations. We also plan to observe how gear rental/selling and joining outdoor opportunities might occur and ask organizers/managers questions on how these activities work and any issues they may be facing.

Results

From all our research conducted so far, we have gathered these findings regarding our problem space.

Interview Insights

From our survey results, we saw that a majority of our respondents engage in outdoor activity ranging from either a couple times a week to once a month, giving us a pretty active college student to base our findings and research off of. All of them have also never used an app or platform for finding outdoors activity partners or renting outdoor gear, but 80% of our interviewees communicate through group chats to do so. In addition to this, all respondents have

never rented equipment from an app before, and would not feel as comfortable loaning other students their own equipment. This leads us to find a different resource for gear rentals amongst students, all while allowing them to enjoy recreational activities with peers.

We are also hoping to uncover more after our fieldwork observations, to further understand the current process students are facing, along with their frustrations and needs.

Fieldwork Observations

We predict that visiting UCLA Recreation and the John Wooden Center will allow us to gain insight on how UCLA students might undergo their current process of renting gear or finding peers to engage in recreational activities with. We will be able to understand how it works at our campus specifically, to create the most optimal solution for UCLA students.

In addition to this, we will also be going to REI, a gear rental shop nearby, which we predict will give us a more basic and general understanding of how gear rental works. We hope to learn what the current issues are with renting gear and what feedback they hear from customers, as this is also an option for UCLA students to go to when renting gear.

Conclusion

We hope that our preliminary research will reveal important insights on the challenges and needs of UCLA students and making connections to outdoor recreation and community-building. We have learned that many students are actively engaged in outdoor activities through existing UCLA outdoor interest clubs and groups. They expressed interests about lending their equipment and borrowing from and to others. However, most clubs lack centralized apps for finding outdoor activity partners or renting gear. In future research we hope to learn more about our users and their experiences through our fieldwork and further refine our

solution to better serve the UCLA student community since our goal is to provide a comprehensive platform that enhances outdoor recreational opportunities, fosters connections, and overcomes the barriers that students may face in accessing outdoor gear.

Works Cited

- Alan Ewert, Ken Gilbertson, Yuan-Chun Luo & Alison Voight (2013) Beyond “Because It's There”, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45:1, 91-111, DOI: [10.18666/jlr-2013-v45-i1-2944](https://doi.org/10.18666/jlr-2013-v45-i1-2944)
- Jones, E. (2023, September 10). *Successful community building using social media platforms*. Medium. <https://medium.com/@emijones/social-media-platforms-for-successful-community-building-bcc852054c8c>
- Outdoor Sport Institute. (2021, April 26). *Creating access to outdoor gear in your community*. Outdoor Sport Institute. <https://www.outdoorsi.org/blog/apr21-blog-gear-access>