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DH 110

5 November 2023

### Assignment 4b: Project Report

Our project is focused on facilitating UCLA students' involvement in the natural environment and outdoor recreation opportunities of Los Angeles and Southern California. The main issues we decided to focus on are the difficulties of finding peers to do outdoor activities with and accessing the gear necessary for such activities because we believe that these issues present some of the biggest barriers to students who want to engage in nature and the outdoors. In order to address these challenges, 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, many 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 structured 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 survey was limited to UCLA students by requiring respondents to sign in using their UCLA email 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 also conducted additional structured interviews as a part of our research in which we contacted several organizations at UCLA in order to ask them a set of questions we planned beforehand for efficiency as well as any unplanned questions that may arise depending on the unique circumstances of the organization. The organizations contacted include the Backpacking Club, Outdoor Adventure Club, LA Ski and Board Club, UCLA Recreation Marina Aquatic Center, and Peaks and Professors; we used a combination of email and Instagram messaging to reach out to these groups. The list of questions sent to the organizations 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?

The department we are collaborating are REC rental section,

5.2. Are there any potential collaborations or partnerships you would like to explore to enhance the rental gear services?

OpenAI. (2023, 10 28). Response from ChatGPT.

We used ChatGPT to generate a format of sample questions. We then took the format from Chat GPT generated questions and modified it to fit UCLA students. The questions for UCLA rental staff are also written to broaden the understanding of student needs and preferences.

### *Fieldwork*

To conduct our field research, we are planning to visit websites of various stores that allow the renting and/or selling of gear for outdoor activities 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 and REI in Santa Monica.

## **Results**

From the research we have conducted thus far, we have gathered these findings regarding the domain and problem space of our project.

### *Interview Insights*

We distributed the survey link to UCLA students starting from October 24th and continued to do so for about two weeks afterwards; at the end of the two week period, we received responses from 16 unique respondents. 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.

Amongst the several organizations at UCLA we reached out to, only the Outdoor Adventure Club was able to respond to our request for an interview. The Outdoor Adventure Club at UCLA is a student club at the Anderson School of Management and organizes activities such as camping, hiking, kayaking, and more. We learned that the club does not utilize a gear rental system for members; rather, members are able to borrow gear such as sleeping bags and mats to use on club activities. The club also stated that members are required by the activity provider to sign a waiver before participating in any outdoor activities. Although they do not collaborate with other organizations for gear rental, they often partner with other student clubs at Anderson to support their outdoor activities. From the Outdoor Adventure Club's responses, we can infer that other outdoor clubs at UCLA might have similar systems when it comes to gear or outdoor activities.

### *Fieldwork Observations*

Upon further research, we have found that both UCLA Rec and REI Santa Monica are currently unavailable for rentals. With this, we decided to explore their websites to find out about their usual rental process. With REI, you are able to choose a location from their website to rent from, which then lists the services available. REI's Tustin location provides rental services which include snowshoes, cycling, climbing, camping/hiking gear, and bear canisters. By selecting the dates, you are able to calculate the rental price for the duration needed. You are then able to check out and go pick up the equipment rented. For UCLA Rec, you have to visit the Rental Center in person, fill out the appropriate paperwork for the gear you want to rent, then pay the rental fees. They also provide a pricing sheet for the equipment, along with replacement costs. It also looks like they only provide rental fees for 1-4 days, 5-8 days, and breaks (last week of classes until the beginning of the next quarter).

### **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. Most clubs lack centralized apps for finding outdoor activity partners or renting gear, or only allow access to club members. We also learned that some clubs partner with others to support each other's outdoor activities. Through analyzing our interview responses, we have concluded that the most direct way to engage the undergraduate student population at UCLA with outdoor recreational activities is to provide access to groups and communities to do these activities with. Furthermore, given that

both UCLA Recreation and REI Santa Monica are unavailable for rentals, and that most students were unwilling to rent out their own equipment, we have decided to just focus our design on finding and building groups to engage in outdoor activities with. This will also make our process more consistent when addressing design problems and corresponding solutions in the future.



### 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>
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