

The University of Rhode Island

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Weekend Culture

This information was prepared by Meeghan Harrington and Fran Cohen in November, 2004 with valuable contributions from Jonathan Corey. This is a review of past and current evaluations of URI's social and recreation opportunities, specifically on weekends.

Introduction: why is social environment important?

The social environment of a college campus is critical to recruitment and retention. Maslow's hierarchy reminds us that some degree of social comfort is necessary before higher intellectual needs can be well addressed. Campuses with vitality and multiple leisure options are safer campuses because there are alternatives to dangerous partying and substance abuse. A college community that successfully meets the social needs of its students may be forgiven other shortcomings and is fondly remembered by alumni.

Past efforts

In Spring 2004, a group convened to discuss the campus Weekend Culture. Similar groups convened in 1995, 1996, 1997, 2002, and concerns about a "suitcase campus" date back to the 1970's. In the past, discussions and committees were entitled, Preferred Social Activities, Perfect Social Scene, What Students Want. Prior efforts have included surveys, inventories, brainstorming, and visualization.

Students' interests and needs documented over the years haven't changed much. They talk about essentials such as atmosphere and mood. They ask for a diner or restaurant, a club, an after hours hangout, outdoor events, concerts on the Quad and music festivals.

Directly or indirectly, past discussions have led to some improvements, notably, the creation of Ram Tours, 193° Coffeehouse, First Night, and Rhody Relays. Most everyone would agree there is room for improvement.

Which students are concerned?

A quick web survey will be launched in January '05 to get students' ideas and thoughts. Based on previous surveys and discussions, it is likely that students in their first year and a half are the most dissatisfied with weekend offerings. As students settle in and find their niche, some may even have too much to do. Still, we know there are juniors and seniors who have not established satisfactory or safe social and recreation patterns.

Almost two-thirds of the student body lives off campus and it takes something special to get them back on a weekend. It has been suggested that students are not interested in University-sponsored weekend activities because they are busy partying or working on weekends. A time use survey from a few years ago indicates that students don't spend as much time "partying" as one might assume (an average of .9 hours per weekend). Of the students surveyed last spring by Kate O'Malley, 47% work on the weekend. While this is not definitive information, it is safe to assume that a good percentage of the student body would be happy to have additional weekend options.

What are other Colleges and Universities doing?

Other colleges and universities have been tackling this issue as well, largely in connection with substance abuse prevention efforts. Examples include:

- University of Chicago received this year's USDOE award for a model program that includes alcohol-free events.
- West Virginia University has a nationally recognized social and recreational program called WVUp All Night that provides free food and entertainment in their student Union. More than a thousand students participate each weekend.
- Boston College has a community service program and sports competition designed to replace an annual high-risk weekend event.
- University of Redlands has been recognized for its "PRIDE" program which features live entertainment and hit movies.
- Case Western purchased a fully-furnished old-time diner open until 3 a.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.
- The UNH student union has a series of regular weekend events scheduled and has good student participation on weekends.

What next?

What needs to happen to make this campus come alive all seven days of the week? What if there were more course offering on weekends? How could staffing and programming resources be realigned to make the campus welcoming on weekends? How do we get buy-in from the various stakeholders? Improving the weekend culture at URI will take open minds, imagination, persistence and resources. New challenges will emerge as new campus housing increases the number of campus residents. Site visits to other campuses could generate ideas and enthusiasm to move us forward.

Attachments: Wish List, Inventory

URI WEEKEND INVENTORY 2003-2004

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Total
Thurs.										
Ath	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Club Sp	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	5
OR	4	4	3	1	3	4	3	5	0	27
Ent	2	1	3	2	0	1	0	9	0	18
Social	3	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	10
HRL	13	12	8	3	5	3	0	0	0	44
Friday										
Ath	3	4	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	14
Club	0	2	2	1	2	2	1	0	0	10
OR	4	4	3	1	2	4	2	5	2	27
Ent	2	8	5	3	1	3	0	11	0	33
Social	2	3	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	9
HRL	7	12	6	0	0	7	0	0	0	32
Saturday										
Ath	6	9	4	4	5	2	4	5	5	44
Club Sp	3	10	5	2	2	3	2	4	0	31
OR	4	4*	4*	1	3	2	1	4	2	17
Ent	1	3	5	3	3	5	1	6	1	28
Social	4	1	2	1	0	1	1	6	3	19
HRL	8	0	2	3	5	2	0	0	0	20
Sunday										
Ath	1	4	2	3	1	3	3	3	2	22
Club Sp	0	3	3	0	0	1	2	3	0	12
OR	3	3	4	1	2	4	1	0	1	19
Ent	2	7	8	3	1	6	0	4	3	34
Social	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HRL	6	4	5	7	3	11	2	0	0	38
Overall total	74	97	77	40	43	70	24	67	19	511

Ath= Varsity Athletic Event

OR= Open Recreation In the Athletic Complex. * Signifies Altered Times Due to Athletic Events

Ent= Entertainment. Any event that those attending do not interact with each other

Concerts, Comedians, and Lecturers were placed in this category

Social= Any activity that those attending interacted directly with each other. Example, LASA Dances

HRL= Housing Residential Life. Programming that took place in the Residence Halls sponsored by Resident Assistants

Note: Programming that took place in the dorms accounted for 100 of the programs that took place.

1/5 of all campus programming was geared for only 1/3 of the campus population

Weekend Culture Wish List Spring '04-Fall '05

Need regularity (e.g., always same weekend of the month)
Package smaller events on one weekend
Event selection is important
Free Food always attracts a crowd

Teasers in the dining halls
Ads on buses

Night lights on timers for a variety of outdoor rec areas
Use Boss Arena for late night events
Broom ball
Skateboard park and street hockey
Bowling or Cosmic Bowling
More pool tables on campus

Giant screen halo2 tournament (trial tournament in Dec.)
Air hockey table
Poker tournament
Monopoly/ Scrabble Tournament
Weakest Link
90's Trivial Pursuit
video arcade
Increase rec center access/ facilities
Karaoke
Open mic
Multiple bands
Transportation to Providence + afterhours program on campus

Late-night non-alcohol club or diner at Emporium with food and talent
Sound barrier around Quad to allow increased use
Haven Brother's type food truck
Variety in food vendors inside with good atmosphere
Brewed Awakenings
More than one location for coffee
Dave and Busters
Starbucks
Create combinations of food, music and sports

Movies not out on video/DVD
Movies with food/costume/theme (e.g., My Greek Wedding with Greek food;
Barbershop with free hair styling)

Dorm Competitions
Comfy student-owned-decorated dorm lounges
Trading spaces in lounges
Boardgame set ups in dorms
Commuter lounge big TV, home theater, student decorated

