

ActivateUTS and Student Success Report 2020

Associate Professor Carmel Foley

Dr Anja Hergessel

Professor Simon Darcy

Ms Barbara Almond

Dr Matthew McDonald

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The methodology adopted and sources of information used by the authors are outlined in this report. While all care and due diligence has been exercised in the preparation of this report, the authors assume no responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions. No indications were found during our investigations that information contained in this report as provided is false.

This report was prepared in January 2020 based on the conditions encountered and information reviewed at the time of preparation. This report should be read in full. No responsibility is accepted for the use of any part of this report in any other context or for any other purpose or by third parties.

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If you would like any further information regarding this report, please contact:

Associate Professor Carmel Foley

carmel.foley@uts.edu.au

Dr Anja Hergessel

anja.hergessel@uts.edu.au

Professor Simon Darcy

simon.darcy@uts.edu.au



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

As part of their ongoing commitment to the interests of UTS and its students ActivateUTS have commissioned a 6-year project to gain insights into the impact of ActivateUTS club and society membership on UTS student success. A literature review and empirical research in year 1 of the study provided rich data for analysis. In 2020 an online survey was conducted with more than 500 student members of ActivateUTS clubs and societies and 24 of these students subsequently participated in in-depth interviews.

The analysis identified the following important indicators of student success were linked to engagement in ActivateUTS clubs and societies.

Retention - participants report club and society membership positively impacted their capacity to persist with their studies;

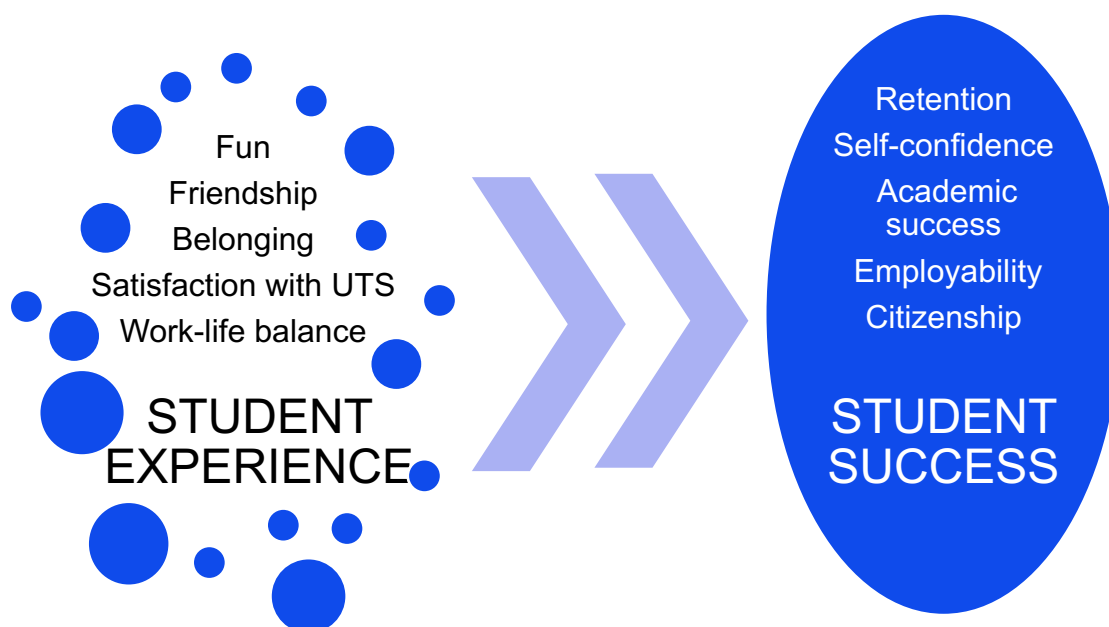
Academic success – participants report that club and society membership positively impacted their ability to thrive academically;

Employability – participants report that club and society membership, and in some cases leadership, enabled the development of skills and attributes valued by employers;

Self-confidence – participants report that club and society membership positively impacted self-confidence in their ability to engage with and contribute to their communities; and

Citizenship - participants report that club and society membership enabled them to have a positive impact as global citizens.

The analysis also suggests that *student success* is impacted by *student experience*.



Several studies have found that a positive relationship exists between a students' *sense of belonging* and their retention in higher education (e.g., Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield & Woods, 2009; Masika & Jones, 2016; O'Keeffe, 2013; Thomas, 2012; Tovar, Simon & Lee, 2009; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). The current study found positive associations between: (1) levels of club and society membership and

sense of belonging; (2) sense of belonging to a club and sense of belonging to UTS; (3) and the level of club engagement and satisfaction with UTS. The following areas of student experience were all found to be positively associated with student success.

Fun – participants report club and society membership made their time at UTS more enjoyable.

Being involved in clubs has definitely made uni a lot more enjoyable. It's been fun. It's definitely been more meaningful because I enjoyed being part of the community.

Friendship - participants report that being involved in clubs was the best way to establish friendships at university.

If I look back on my time as a student, I'd say the true friends I've made is one of the best things that I have gained at UTS.

Sense of belonging - participants report club and society membership made them feel connected to the UTS community.

The club experiences I've had at UTS and being the society president, that makes me feel connected to UTS and proud to be in the alumni.

Satisfaction with UTS - participants report club and society membership had a significant impact on students' satisfaction with UTS overall, its facilities, programs and social environment.

It makes me feel good being [at UTS] as a student just because I am joining the clubs.

Work-life balance - participants report club and society membership assisted them to manage work-life balance.

Being in clubs definitely helps me get a better work-life balance ... I have somewhere to go when I need a break from studying where I can be with people with the same interests as me.

Supporting UTS

The study has identified areas in which ActivateUTS is supporting the initiatives of the University.

Supporting student citizenship is an outcome that shows ActivateUTS is contributing to the strategic initiatives of UTS2027 which seeks to “maximise social impact outcomes across teaching, learning, research and practice at UTS”.

Supporting students to build graduate attributes and employability skills contributes to the UTS Model of Learning and Graduate Attribute Framework, which includes: equipping students for ongoing learning and inquiry in their personal development and professional practice, and committing them to the actions and responsibilities of professional and global citizens.

Both student success and student experience have become increasingly important to UTS. The Australian government (Wellings et al., 2019) has flagged that university funding will be tied to: student success measured by attrition; equity group participation (Indigenous, low socio-economic status, and regional and remote students); graduate employment outcomes, and student experience, measured by student satisfaction with teaching quality drawn from the Student Experience Survey (SES) (Bexley, 2019).

Further research

This is the first progress report of a long-term project which aims to investigate the impact of club membership on UTS student success 2020-2026.

In 2021 UTS 2020 attrition, GPA, SES and SSS data will become available which will allow the researchers to compare student success and student experience data between UTS students and student members of ActivateUTS clubs and societies to gain further evidence of the impact of club membership.

2020 data has been impacted by disruption to clubs and societies' events and activities as a consequence of lock downs, online learning and social distancing measures. The impacts may be largely confined to 2020 or may continue to be felt in 2021 and beyond. The research team will continue to monitor the impacts of the pandemic as the study progresses and future data sets to allow for comparisons.

The research team welcomes feedback on this report.



Report

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Introduction

ActivateUTS is a not-for-profit organisation and a key partner of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). It was established over 40 years ago with a mission to enrich the student experience through the provision of sport and social activities that complement the educational programs delivered by the University. Education at universities was once based on the assumption that learning is individual, curriculum-based, best separated from other activities, and only the result of teaching. However, universities and other educational institutions have increasingly recognised that learning cannot and should not be separated from extra-curricular activities (Foley et al., 2019; Wenger, 2018). According to Wenger (2018, p. 216), extra-curricular participation in university clubs and societies is the “bedrock of learning”.

Previous research commissioned by ActivateUTS linked engagement with clubs and societies to the development of a suite of graduate attributes with particularly strong outcomes for leadership, teamwork and communication skills (Foley et al., 2019). Findings were disseminated at national conferences and this research is now being replicated in higher education institutions around Australia (ActivateUTS, 2019, p. 9). In light of these findings, ActivateUTS has committed to “developing key graduate attributes, ultimately enhancing the employability of UTS graduates” (ActivateUTS, 2019, p. 5).

As part of their ongoing commitment to the interests of UTS and its students, ActivateUTS have now commissioned further research to investigate the impact of club membership on UTS student success from 2020-2026. Insights from this research will enable ActivateUTS to ensure that its activities are focused on “the provision of programs that complement the learning, development and social objectives of the University”, providing impact where it is most needed (ActivateUTS, 2019, p.5). This report presents the year one findings of the student success project.

A number of factors come into play when considering student success. First and foremost is student retention. Successful students find the capacity to persist with their studies until they graduate. An additional and related factor is a *sense of belonging*. Research has shown that a student’s sense of belonging within the higher education institution is critical for student retention (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Masika & Jones, 2016; O’Keeffe, 2013; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). Finally, student success requires the development of skills and attributes while they are at university to ensure they are employable upon graduation. To this end research indicates that student involvement in university-based clubs and societies can significantly enhance their employability skills (Díaz-Iso, Eizaguirre & García-Olalla, 2019; Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli & Wilson, 2017; Lau, Hsu, Acosta, & Hsu, 2014; Thompson, Clark, Walker & Whyatt, 2013). These factors underpin the conceptual framework of the study and are further explored in the literature review.

The project has been designed to rigorously investigate these factors in the context of student members of ActivateUTS clubs and societies. The objectives of the year one project were to:

- Establish methodologies to access and measure indicators of student success influenced by club membership: student retention, employability, student experience and sense of belonging to UTS;
- Collect and analyse data on student attrition, sense of belonging, employability and student experience in the context of data drawn from questionnaires and in-depth interviews with student members of ActivateUTS clubs and societies;
- Conduct a systematic literature review of student retention;

- Draw nuanced findings and conclusions that may assist ActivateUTS and the UTS researchers to plan for 2021 activity.

In addition to the literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions which are presented in the following sections, the report includes a selection of appendices, including the comprehensive data sets collected in 2020 for the project.

Student Retention: A Literature Review

Concepts, Definitions & Common/Popular Theories

Systematic research into student retention did not begin in earnest until the late 1960s and early 70s, which is when the first published research on the topic began to appear (Tight, 2020). It was during this period that the numbers enrolled in higher education institutions in Western countries began to dramatically increase (Aljohani, 2016). Initial research investigated student characteristics such as gender, socio-economic status and race, correlating these with students who dropped out (Burke, 2019). Increasing numbers of enrolments came with increasing numbers of students transferring to other institutions or dropping out altogether. As the higher education sector around the world began to expand, institutions became more focused on student revenues and the reputations of the institutions themselves. Student retention became a marker of quality and it made the institution more globally competitive (Aljohani, 2016; Beer & Lawson, 2017). Tight (2020, p. 689) controversially argues that as government funding for HE has shifted from the state to the student, “so the understanding of student retention and engagement has shifted from being the student’s responsibility to that of the higher education institution”.

Three different terms (concepts) are used interchangeably in research on student retention, these include *student retention* itself, *student attrition* and *student persistence*. Drawing on a range of scholarly work, Burke (2019, p. 13) defines retention as a student’s continued enrolment from the “first year to the second year”, while student persistence is defined as “continued enrolment from year-2 until graduation”. Tinto (2010, p. 53) offers a slightly different interpretation writing that student retention refers to the process “that leads students to remain within the institution in which they enrol and earn a certificate or degree”. In comparison, persistence is defined as the “process that leads students to remain in higher education and complete their certificate or degree regardless of the institution from which the certificate or degree is earned” (Tinto, 2010, p. 53).

Based on reviews conducted by Morrison and Silverman (2012), Aljohani (2016) and Burke (2019), the three most popular theories used in research on student retention are Spady’s (1970, 1971) *Undergraduate Dropout Process Model*, Bean’s (1980, 1982) *Student Attrition Model* and Tinto’s (1975, 1993) *Institutional Departure Model* (see Appendix 4). Although these theories (models) provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables involved in student retention, critics argue they have become increasingly out of date, failing to incorporate students whose enrolment and status is *non-traditional*. The growth in non-traditional students and the increasing flexibility, diversity of study options and delivery modes, also pose a challenge to current definitions of student retention as the parameters upon which the phenomenon is understood is constantly expanding and changing (Beer & Lawson, 2017; Burke, 2019).

Non-traditional study modes include part-time, distance learning, blended (distance and face-to-face residentials) and those articulating from a feeder school or vocational college to a university (Aljohani, 2016). Non-traditional institutional arrangements are now more commonplace as well as. Many higher education institutions comprise multiple campuses across cities, interstate and internationally, and degree programs may be badged by more

than one university. Lastly, non-traditional students include parents, those working full-time and those who did not complete high school (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Radford, Cominole & Skomsvold, 2015).

Beer and Lawson (2017) argue that much of the current research on student retention acknowledges the multiple factors that influence student decision-making. However, the basis upon which decisions are made are constantly changing and so researchers and institutions struggle to keep up and develop solutions that take the dynamic nature of this phenomenon into account. Higher education institutions respond through static planning processes, strategic statements and policies, which fail to address the problem. Beer and Lawson (2017, p. 781) suggest that institutions need to employ *learning strategies* that “recognise the impossibility of attributing causality in complex contexts and focus more generally on relationships and conduits between stakeholders”.

In line with Beer and Lawson, Forsman et al., (2014) offer a framework for understanding student retention by drawing on the concept of *complexity thinking* arguing this approach addresses the multiplicity of perspectives, recognising the complexity of the student retention issue. Complexity thinking is derived from complexity theory, which maps the components of a phenomenon, their interactions and variables that continually emerge or dissolve within the system. Complexity thinking “may open up new ways of viewing and analysing complex educational issues in higher education in terms of nested, interdependent and interconnected systems” (Forsman et al.’s, 2014, p. 68). For example, items/factors implicated in student retention “should not be seen as having direct linear influences, but mainly as influencing what takes place indirectly through other items” (Forsman et al., 2014, p. 81).

Habley, Bloom and Robbins (2012) seek to address issues of complexity by synthesising several theoretical perspectives. They do this by categorising aspects of each into five categories: (1) sociological, (2) psychological, (3) organisational, (4) economic and (5) cultural. Their five categories are supplemented by two additional perspectives, which include the retention formula by Seidman (2012) and Habley’s (1981) staying environment, which is based on enhanced institutional supports. In the same vein, Bowles and Brindle (2017, p. 903) offer a hybrid model targeting the “facilitating factors and barriers to student retention”. The authors conducted a systematic review of the factors and barriers literature, allocating these into three main categories: (1) situational (financial, interpersonal, personal), (2) dispositional (demographics, student behaviour, social engagement) and (3) institutional (size, campus, staff, support services). One area of research which has been found to have a significant influence on student retention is sense of belonging, which we will turn to now.

Sense of Belonging and Student Retention

Several studies indicate that a positive relationship exists between a students’ sense of belonging and their retention in higher education (e.g., Ahn & Davis, 2020; Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield & Woods, 2009; Masika & Jones, 2016; O’Keeffe, 2013; Thomas, 2012; Tovar, Simon & Lee, 2009; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). At this stage, there is no agreed upon definition for sense of belonging in educational institutions; nevertheless, it has been linked to states of mind (psychology), university-based activities/interventions and student motivations.

Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) suggest that sense of belonging is related to the perception of *matter*ing to others, which reduces feelings of marginality and disconnection from the social context. Others suggest that a sense of belonging is fostered when students engage in the university community or are offered opportunities to do so (Fernandes, Ford, Rayner & Pretorius, 2017; Keohane & Petrie, 2017; Thomas, 2012). Hausmann et al., (2009, p. 650) define sense of belonging as a student’s “identification and affiliation with the campus

community". Lawson and Lawson (2013) observed that sense of belonging is composed of two main components: (1) *affective engagement* which is an emotional affinity with the educational institution and (2) *cognitive engagement* which is a student's psychological investments, which might include achieving academic goals, forging new friendships or participating in extra-curricular activities.

Research on sense of belonging in higher education has been conducted with first-year students (Hausmann et al., 2009; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013), higher degree research students (O'Keeffe, 2013), indigenous students (Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018), undergraduate students transitioning into higher education (Meehan & Howells, 2019) and students from ethnic backgrounds (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005).

In a study of business management students in the U.K., Masika and Jones (2016) found that sense of belonging is a critical factor in student retention and that an affinity for an institution is facilitated by engagements in social activities tied to the curriculum. These would include activities where students interact with other student's and university staff over an extended period and in the first year of their study. Libbey (2004; 2007) found that students experience a sense of belonging when they feel close to and a part of their school. An important aspect of this equation is students feeling that teachers care about them and that they will be treated fairly by them. Like Libby (2004; 2007), most of the sense of belonging literature highlights the importance of student-teacher and student-institution (e.g., positive relationships with administrative staff) relationships when it comes to instilling a sense of belonging. O'Keeffe (2013, p. 605) notes:

The capacity of a student to develop a sense of belonging within the higher education institution is recognised by this paper as a being a critical factor determining student retention. The creation of a caring, supportive and welcoming environment within the university is critical in creating a sense of belonging.

Several studies have also been conducted on the role that participation in university-based extra-curricular activities have on sense of belonging. Davalos, Chavez and Guardiola (1999, p. 72) write that "extracurricular activity involvement may provide individuals with a sense of belonging that may contribute to higher retention rates for these individuals". Miller (2011) conducted research on students that participated in activities provided by a university recreation centre finding they experience both place bonding and social bonding. Place bonding refers to an attachment to a place because it conjures up positive memories for the person. While social bonding refers to the development of friendships and connections with other students and staff. Miller draws on Tinto's (1993) *Institutional Departure Model* to explain social bonding which predicts that students who successfully socialise at university are much more likely to persist. "As a result, this sense of involvement the student's desire to persist at that institution increases" (Miller, 2011, p. 119).

Two more recent studies conducted at Australian universities provide further support for these earlier findings. Taylor and Harrison (2018) (James Cook University) tested what effect just-in-time curricular information (emailed newsletters) and extracurricular activities (themed luncheons) would have on first-year students enrolled in a second-choice degree, a cohort that typically suffers poor rates of retention. These interventions were found to increase a sense of belonging facilitated by engagement and sharing between students and feelings of collegiality. Van Gijn-Grosvenor and Huisman (2020) (Macquarie University) conducted a study investigating the essential factors that influence their sense of belonging. The findings indicate that important factors include student's alignment with the values of the university, the physical surroundings (campus) and involvement in university clubs and societies created a

sense of belonging because they provide a basis for social bonding and enhancing student's social integration.

In terms of implications, Thomas' (2012) report found that higher education institutions have several options open to them to instil or enhance a sense of belonging in students. These include interventions focused on creating supportive peer relations, increasing opportunities for meaningful interactions between staff and students, developing students' knowledge, confidence and identity as successful higher education learners, and designing social-based learning activities that are relevant to students' interests and future goals. Thomas (2012) and O'Keeffe (2013) also recommend creating a caring and supportive learning environment by establishing positive student/faculty relationships, providing trustworthy and well-resourced counselling that is timely, particularly for students suffering mental health problems. Lastly, interventions and services that actively include students from diverse and non-traditional student backgrounds is particularly important as this cohort has been shown to have the highest attrition rates in the first year of their studies (Ellis, 2019).

A frequently highlighted factor in the sense of belonging literature is opportunities for shared-learning that emphasise interactions and collaboration among students', however, while this may foster retention it does not automatically guarantee students' academic success (Brouwer, Jansen, Severiens & Meeuwisse, 2019). Masika and Jones (2016, pp. 147-148) add that participative approaches to learning in and outside the classroom foster a sense of community that enhance "students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teachers and peers), and feeling that they are an important part of the life and activity of the classroom". The authors found that to achieve these outcomes time and care needs to be taken with the design of the curricula and teaching practices to ensure that engagement between teacher and students and student to student interactions are to be meaningful (Masika & Jones, 2016). One way for institutions to facilitate retention and sense of belonging is to move toward *cohort models*:

where students move through coursework together and—at some institutions—even live together. These cohorts often have a focus area, such as STEM, that serve as the common ground for connecting students. These cohort models have been shown to increase retention overall and have been particularly successful with female and minority students. (Burke, 2019, p. 18)

Soria and Subblefield (2015) found that working on enhancing students' awareness of their strengths is positively associated with their sense of belonging and persistence in pursuing education. Soria and Subblefield's (2015) research ties in with a broader shift in the psychological sciences away from psychopathology (focusing on fixing student weaknesses) to positive psychology, which aims to focus on students strengths, enhancing positive emotions and facilitating a sense of community (Schreiner, 2015).

Methodology

The methodology for collecting and analysing the subject data of this research included both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A quantitative-qualitative mix (mixed methods research) overcomes the weaknesses inherent in a single method design. A literature review provided a starting point for the study by informing which constructs to include in the survey and how to measure them. The literature review began with an overview of previous research related to extra-curricular activities and student retention and looked at the role of sense of belonging for retention. The review of the literature continued throughout the study as the findings emerged.

The following data collection techniques were adopted:

- Online survey of all ActivateUTS club members
- In-depth interviews with ActivateUTS club members

The literature review informed the design of the research instruments, in particular the questionnaire design. Follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the issues identified in the survey. This type of mixed methods is referred to as an explanatory sequential design. The overall intent of this approach is to “have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the....quantitative results” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222).

Survey

An online survey targeting ActivateUTS club members was developed in August 2020. The survey was sent to ActivateUTS staff for feedback and piloted among general university students prior to finalisation, which helped refine the survey instrument including adjustments to the order of questions and the language used. A copy of the final survey is provided in Appendix 3.

The questionnaire covered:

- sociodemographic and study background;
- involvement in ActivateUTS clubs, which included a scale to measure respondents' level of engagement in the club they are most involved in. The scale was adapted from Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006).
- success factors, namely:
 - benefits of club involvement, which included rating tasks for selected benefits;
 - sense of belonging impacts, which included questions from the nationally conducted Student Experience Survey (SES) as well as a scale to measure respondents' level of sense of belonging. The scale was adapted from Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow and Salomone (2002-2003);
 - other success factors including satisfaction with aspects of respondents' experience at UTS adopted from the nationally conducted Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) and a scale measuring respondents' intention to leave UTS.

In addition to these questions, respondents were asked whether they would be interested in participating in follow-up interviews with the research team. 111 respondents indicated their willingness to be interviewed. All were then contacted by email to arrange for a phone interview. Twenty-four of the initial 111 respondents agreed to be interviewed.

The survey ran from 1 October – 26 October 2020. Prizes were used as incentives to attract participation. The link to the survey was sent to all club and society members directly by

ActivateUTS. Sport club members were informed about the survey via their clubs. ActivateUTS sent out regular reminders and included the survey link in ActivateUTS newsletters.

The data collected online was checked for completion with all respondents who answered at least 90 per cent of the questionnaire considered “completed” and used for the analyses (n=520). The survey data was analysed using SPSS software (Veal & Darcy, 2014). Significant differences reported are at $p < .01$.

The sample is a mix of students (see **Table 1**). 91% of the domestic students live at home, and 80% of the domestic students speak English at home. International students were from a range of countries in particular, those located in Asia and Europe. Of the 107 international respondents, 29 were from India, 12 from Indonesia, 11 from China, 10 from the Philippines and 8 from Hong Kong.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Characteristic		Characteristic	
Student type		Gender	
Domestic	79%	Female	60%
International/Exchange	21%	Male	38%
Degree level		Other	1%
Undergraduate	84%	Prefer not to say	1%
Postgraduate	16%	Age	
Mode of study		Mean (s.d.)	21.4 yrs (3.8)
Full-time	94%	Median	20 yrs
Part-time	6%	Range	18-43 yrs
Faculty Degree based in		Number of Club memberships	
FEIT	30%	Mean All clubs (s.d.)	2.3 (1.5)
Faculty of Science	13%	Mean Sport clubs (s.d.)	0.3 (0.6)
UTS Business School	23%	Mean Social clubs (s.d.)	2.0 (1.5)
Faculty of Law	7%	Year first joined ActivateUTS club	
Faculty of Health	6%	1 st year of studies	87%
FASS	11%	2 nd year of studies	11%
DAB	7%	3 rd + year of studies	2%
Graduate School of Health	2%	Leadership role at ActivateUTS club	
FTI	1%	Yes	34%
Year of study		No	66%
1 st year	41%	Club most involved in	
2 nd year	27%	Social club	82%
3 rd year	19%	Sport club	14%
4 th year	9%	No involvement in any of the clubs*	4%
5 th + year	4%		

*Respondents noted that they did not join activities due to Covid-19 or that the club had stopped activities due to Covid-19. Those respondents were excluded from all analyses focussing on the club most involved in.

Interviews

An interview guide was developed (see Appendix 2). Twenty-four interviews were undertaken by telephone at the convenience of the subject. All interviews were conducted by telephone to ensure student safety during the Covid 19 pandemic. Interviews were recorded with student consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Interviews ranged in duration from 40 minutes to 75 minutes. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2020.

The students interviewed included:

- 16 female and 8 male;
- 16 domestic and 8 international;
- 18 undergraduate and 6 post-graduate;
- 11 students who had held club leadership positions and 13 who had been general members only;
- Ages ranged from 18 to 40 and the average age was 23;
- 7 first-year students, 9 second-years, 7 third-year students and 2 in fourth-year.

The anonymity of participants was ensured via the use of an interview key (see **Table 2** overleaf).

Table 2: Interview key

KEY	GENDER	AGE	P'CODE	YEAR OF STUDY	INT/DOM	U G P G	DEGREE	FACULTY	MEMBER TYPE
P1	F	27	2007	2	I	P	Master of Business Administration	Business	Leader
P2	F	19	2146	2	D	U	Bachelor of Biomedical Science	Science	Leader
P3	M	27	2065	2	I	P	Master of Professional Engineering	Engineering and IT	General
P4	M	31	2009	2	D	P	Master of NFP and Social Enterprise Management	Business	Leader
P5	M	25	2007	3	I	U	Bachelor of Science	Science	General
P6	F	19	2034	2	D	U	Bachelor of Science / BCCI	Science and TDI	General
P7	M	33	2037	1	D	U	Bachelor of Computer Science (Hons)	Engineering and IT	General
P8	F	19	2232	2	D	U	Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Comm.	Law / Art and Social Sciences	Leader
P9	F	24	2044	4	D	U	Bachelor of Communication	Arts and Social Sciences	Leader
P10	F	20	2035	1	D	U	Bachelor of Communication (Major in Political Science)	Arts and Social Sciences	General
P11	F	20	2112	3	D	U	Bachelor of Medical Science	Science	Leader
P12	F	19	2234	1	D	U	Bachelor of Communication (Major in Creative Writing)	Arts and Social Sciences	General
P13	M	21	2153	3	D	U	Bachelor of Communication / BCCI	Arts and Social Sciences	Leader
P14	M	20	2008	1	D	U	Bachelor of Architecture	DAB	Leader
P15	F	20	2087	2	D	U	Bachelor of Accounting	Business	Leader
P16	F	24	2007	3	I	U	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology	Engineering and IT	Leader
P17	M	20	2161	2	D	U	Bachelor of Civil Engineering	Engineering and IT	General
P18	F	18	2133	1	D	U	Diploma of Business	UTS InSearch	General
P19	F	32	2048	1	I	P	Master of Marketing extension	Business	General
P20	M	21	2220	3	I	U	Bachelor of Business	Business	Leader
P21	F	19	2074	2	D	U	Bachelor of Accounting	Business	General
P22	F	40	2208	3	I	P	PhD	Health	General
P23	F	21	2131	3	D	U	Bachelor of Health Science	Health	General
P24	F	25	2007	1	I	P	Master of Business Administration	Business	General

NVivo, the comprehensive qualitative data analysis software, was used to organise, analyse and find connections across all the interview transcripts. Coding themes (or nodes) were identified based on the concepts under investigation and the research design. Manual coding was undertaken, and then common themes identified across the data. Fourteen themes were identified in the analysis of the interview data (see **Table 3**).

Table 3: Interview coding themes

Theme (Node)	Description
Benefits	Students identified multiple benefits – both personal and professional - gained from their involvement with ActivateUTS Clubs. Individual benefits relating to mental health and personal well being Benefits relating to the student’s professional skills and attitudes. Seen to improve both academic success and potential career success
Friendships	Social benefits; develop friendships; opportunities to meet like-minded people with common interests; opportunities to expand and diversify social group
Employability	Development of work-ready skills; soft skills and gaining real world experience; Strengthening professional understanding, attitudes and practices
Sense of Belonging	To a friendship group and to the University community; Belonging to the broader community; feeling a part of the University and supported
Academic Success	Academic success in studies; Improved student performance; Opportunities to learn and practice new skills that can be brought to the classroom
Self Confidence	Increased confidence both socially and professionally; Confidence in the University environment and the broader community
Access	Access to information about the club; Interactions with existing members; Access to events and training
Work-Life Balance	Ability to prioritise and balance commitments; Mental health benefits; Distraction from the stress of study
Fun	Enjoyment; Entertainment, Connection and engagement with campus life; Benefits for mental health
Opinion of UTS	Impact of club membership on opinion of UTS; Satisfaction with UTS; Sense of pride in UTS
Making a Difference	Contributing positively - to the club, club members, friends, the University and the broader community
Areas of concern	Areas where the delivery of club experiences and management could be improved; Challenges with club leadership and involvement; Problems identified
First Event	Range of experiences and emotions associated with their first club event; Benefits of attending their first event
Student Retention	Impacts of club involvement on study; Consideration of leaving UTS or studies
COVID	Impact of Covid-19 on University experience and club experience, changes to club experiences

The 'Benefits' theme was further broken down to personal and professional benefits as interview participants clearly distinguished between these two types. The COVID theme is related to the impact of Covid-19 on the student's university and club experience. This final theme provides some insight into the impact of Covid-19 on club and society activity on those students who were in their second year or above, as they were able to contrast their pre Covid-19 club experience with that in 2020. We anticipate data collected in 2021 and onwards will reflect a different story to the 2020 data as the impacts of Covid-19 on club and society activities decline.

Findings

This section contains detailed findings collated from both interview and survey data sets. Further data can be found in the appendices.

Intention to Leave

The intention to leave scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes to leaving UTS. As **Table 4** shows, some respondents are thinking about leaving UTS. The scale item responses were added following a factor analysis, which showed that the items all loaded on one factor explaining 77.5% of the variance.

Table 4: Intention to leave scale items

	SD	D	SWD	Neither A nor D	SWA	A	SA	Mean	N
I frequently think about leaving UTS	50.0	20.6	6.8	8.3	8.5	2.6	3.2	2.3	470
I am searching for other employment or study opportunities so I can leave UTS	54.5	18.3	6.2	7.4	6.6	3.2	3.8	2.2	470
It is likely that I will actually leave UTS within the next year.	55.4	16.8	3.6	6.6	5.8	5.5	6.2	2.3	469
I am exploring opportunities to leave my studies at UTS	56.9	18.8	4.9	7.5	5.3	3.4	3.2	2.1	469

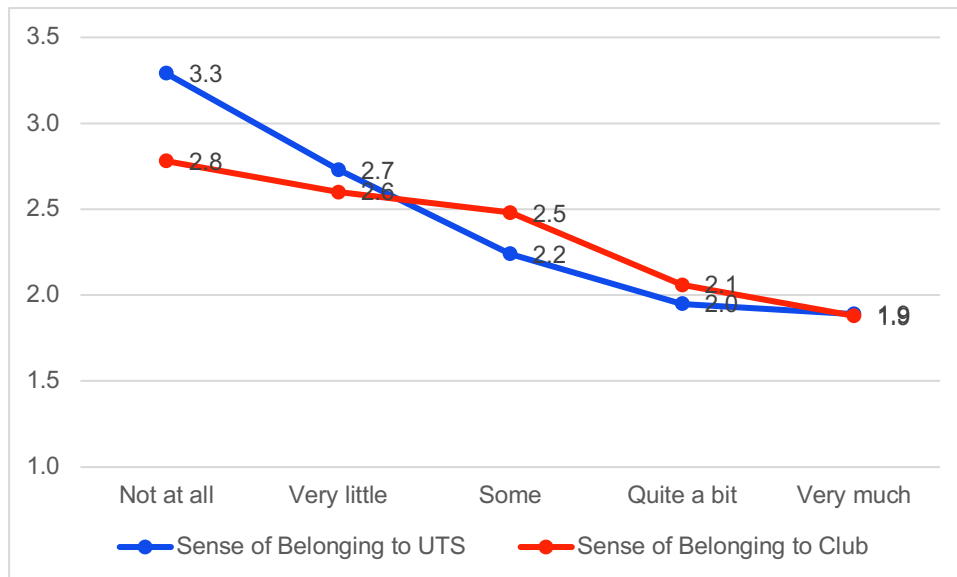
The mean scores were then compared between groups of respondents using ANOVAs: a higher mean score means that a group shows a higher intention to leave. In general, international students had a significantly higher mean score (2.7) than domestic students (2.1), and males had a significantly higher mean score (2.6) than females (1.9).

There are also differences in the mean score by Faculty. In particular, those enrolled in a degree in FEIT, FTI and DAB having a higher mean score than those enrolled in a degree at the Faculty of Law and FASS. Unsurprisingly, there is also a significant difference in mean scores by level of academic performance with those exceeding expectations having a much lower mean score (1.9) compared to those meeting expectations (2.2) and those below expectations (3.1). These findings are in line with Tinto (1993, p. 48) that students "experiencing academic difficulty will withdraw voluntarily to avoid the stigma of failure". However, there is no systematic link between academic performance and Faculty association, so that both factors should be independently considered as factors related to intention to leave.

No significant differences were noted for any other demographic or study characteristics nor for the number or types of clubs involved in or whether the respondent had ever taken over a leadership role at an ActivateUTS club.

It was also found that the level of club engagement and sense of belonging is significantly related to intention to leave. Those who felt never/rarely or sometimes involved in the club had a much higher mean score (2.8 and 2.5 respectively) than those who felt involved with the club (mean score of 2.1). Similarly, the more respondents felt they belong to the club and to UTS in general, the lower their intention to leave (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Mean score of Intention to leave scale by level of sense of belonging to UTS and the club most involved in



While this does not say anything about the causal relationship between club membership and student retention, 50% of the respondents indicated that club membership had a significant impact on their commitment to complete their studies at UTS and another 31% indicated that it had some impact on their commitment to complete their studies at UTS.

The role of club membership in student retention was also highlighted in the student interviews.

Students commented that the support and encouragement they had received as a result of club involvement when they were struggling with their studies helped keep them on track and reduce stress, thereby reducing the likelihood they would consider dropping out.

At times last year if I felt like the study load was getting to be a bit too much and I would have a little cry to myself, and say to my boyfriend 'Should I leave uni? I don't think I can do it', ... but I don't think I really got to the point where I was serious about dropping out. Maybe being in a club helped me not really think seriously about leaving (P2).

I definitely think being in a club helps to reduce the likelihood that a student will consider dropping out of uni. If you're doing a subject that's really difficult, or really boring, if you've got a friend in that class who'll say Wow, this subject is really difficult or boring It means that you're much more likely to stay in that class because you know you've got someone to whinge about it with. For example my contracts class for law was online and it was so dry and so awful, but one of my friends from UTSOC was in it as well, so during the class, if it was really dry, we could just text each other about how boring it was. Just little things like that where you don't feel really alone, and you're not just thinking about, God, this class is awful. You're thinking, God this class is awful and I want to talk to my friend about it – and you can. Whereas some people don't get to do that and they have to endure the boredom or difficulties alone because they don't have those connections (P8).

I haven't considered dropping out of uni but I had been considering going to another University to study. I am not exactly sure what path I want to take in my life, and I was considering applying to go to other universities but it was more just a passing thought because then I realised that No, I didn't want to go anywhere else. I wanted to stay here because of the clubs and societies I am in. I realised I wanted to get into leadership roles on those clubs and societies, so the passing thought about switching unis just drifted away. So instead I decided to get onto the executive of some of the clubs and societies I was in. Next year I also want to be a mentor for other young students. In a way, then, being in the clubs has made me decide to stay a student at UTS, rather than switching unis. I think that the networks and the things you learn from a club leadership role and the friends that you have made, you're not going to leave those people. If you're in these clubs and you're committed to them, you're not going to leave university because the two things are so intertwined (P10).

For some students, these feelings were exacerbated in light of Covid 19 restrictions,

I felt personally that during Covid, if I hadn't had UTSOC I don't know how I would have done because I'm a real social butterfly and I need social interaction, and I really suffered early on mentally with everything being online and I couldn't keep up with my work and I felt like there was just no reason to do it and I was in just such a bad headspace. But every fortnight we did like a UTSOC catch-up call. It was supposed to be about updating how our projects and role were going and that was what kept me going. It was so good. Like I had things with my own friends but because I would have to slightly change what I had said in the previous two weeks so that I had something to say, that meant at least I had steps and something to motivate me and then that would lead to step 2, which was to catch up on my uni work (P7).

If it wasn't for the clubs I know I would find myself becoming demotivated, especially when Covid hit in semester 1 and we all had to go online. Even then I was able to be part of a few societies and they motivated me to keep going. If I hadn't had those extracurricular things and I was just going to online classes and doing those sessions, I would have considered leaving university and would have felt like it was just something I didn't want to do. I just wouldn't have had the same passion for university that I have now (P10).

Some students also believed those students who discontinued their studies were more likely to not have become involved in clubs and as a result had fewer friends, less support and enjoyed their time as a student less. This accords with the literature which indicates that a lack of social integration into the university predicts a higher-than-average likelihood that a student will not persist (Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

I think there is definitely a correlation between being in clubs and not dropping out of uni, 100 per cent. The people I know who have dropped out of uni, it's like they say, 'I haven't made any friends and I've been here for a year'. Like one girl I know, she was doing engineering, she said like, 'I've only made one friend and I don't even get on with her that much, and it's only because we had a group assignment'. She felt like she'd met no-one. She dropped out. She also didn't like the work; she found it difficult – but like I said, even when things are difficult, it's much easier to do it when you've got someone else in the class who is also going through it who's a friend and who you feel like you can talk to, or if you've got people in your club you can go to for support. I have another friend who was doing IT. He deferred, but he's definitely going to drop out now. I know he said he hadn't made any friends at all. He said I just go to my class and that's it. Which is why they find it a struggle; because they feel like they're going through it all alone (P8).

I wouldn't consider dropping out myself, but I'm sure the drop-out rate for those who aren't involved in clubs would be higher than for those who are (P7).

One student also commented that club involvement had been a direct factor in their decision to continue as a student at UTS for a longer period of time than originally planned, because of the benefits they felt they were deriving from club leadership.

Being able to be involved in clubs and the experiences that I got through those clubs definitely was a factor in me staying so long at university. I did my undergrad degree over many years and am now doing a postgrad degree, but I am in no hurry because I know that whilst I'm involved with the clubs I am still developing skills that will make me a more successful professional once I graduate. If I think about UTS without clubs and societies I think about something that is just absolutely soul-less and empty (P4).

Sense of Belonging and Club Engagement

Overall, respondents felt a stronger sense of belonging to the club they were most involved in than to UTS overall (see **Figure 2**). There is, unsurprisingly, a significant association between the sense of belonging to a club and the sense of belonging to UTS overall (Cramer's $V=0.313$).

Figure 2: Proportional distribution of Sense of Belonging to UTS and the most involved with club responses

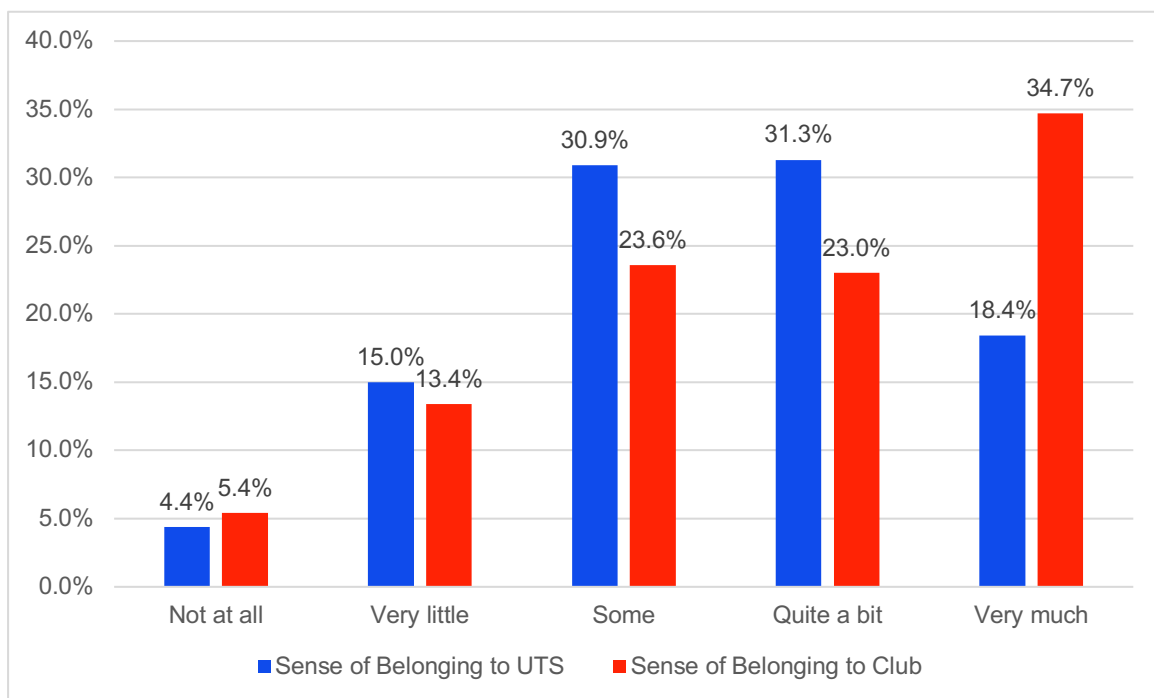


Table 5: Proportional distribution of responses to club engagement scale

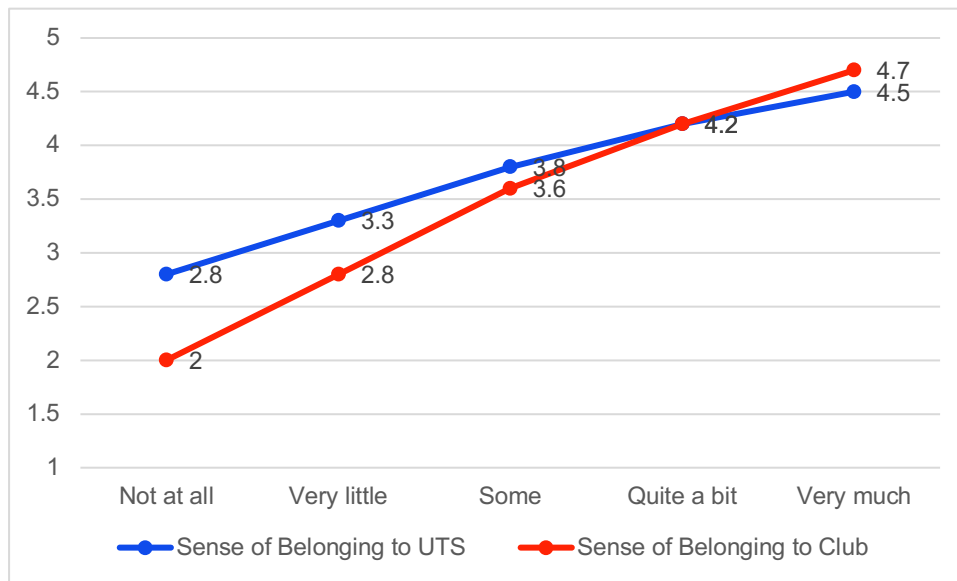
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	N
I am proud of my club.	3.6	3.0	16.5	28.1	48.8	4.2	502
I am enthusiastic about my club.	3.4	5.8	15.7	27.9	47.2	4.1	502
I look forward to going to club activities.	3.6	4.2	16.7	29.1	46.4	4.1	502
I feel happy when I am involved in club activities.	4.4	3.8	15.0	30.5	46.3	4.1	501
My club inspires me.	4.2	5.6	19.8	29.8	40.6	4.0	500
When I am at the club I feel excited.	5.6	4.0	18.7	34.7	37.1	3.9	502
I am immersed in my club.	7.2	10.2	19.7	25.3	37.6	3.8	502
I get absorbed in club activities.	7.0	7.6	25.1	22.7	37.6	3.8	502
As a member of this club, I feel strong and vigorous.	4.0	8.0	22.3	32.5	33.3	3.8	502

The sense of belonging to the club and to UTS overall is associated significantly with the extent to which the respondents feel engaged with the club. The level of club engagement scale scores (see

Table 5) had been added following a Factor Analysis which showed that all items load on one factor explaining 80% of the total variance. The more engaged respondents are with a club, the greater their sense of belonging to the club and to UTS overall (see **Figure 3**). These findings are in line with van Gijn-Grosvenor and Huisman (2020, p. 376) who report that “opportunities to interact with other students, such as within clubs, societies and at events, were reported by students to contribute to their feelings of belonging”. Similarly, the level of sense of belonging also significantly differs by whether the respondent had ever taken over a club leadership role or not with those that have had been in leadership positions more likely to feel a stronger sense of belonging to the club (Cramer’s $V=0.399$).

Next to the roles which students play in a club, no other significant systematic associations could be noted between the sense of belonging measures and sociodemographic, study and club characteristics.

Figure 3: Mean score of Involvement scale by level of sense of belonging to UTS and the club most involved in



The relationship between level of club engagement and sense of belonging to UTS and a community of like-minded people was also explored in the student interviews.

All respondents said club involvement increased their sense of belonging. For some, it was a sense of belonging to a friendship group or to a community, and for many it was also about a greater sense of belonging or connection to UTS as a whole.

A sense of connection to UTS

The overwhelming majority of students felt club or society involvement created or increased their feelings of connection to UTS,

Students involved in clubs absolutely feel more of a sense of connection with UTS because there is that sense of community that comes with meeting other students at all levels of study. But just being with people from UTS and being together in club meetings just makes you feel those sorts of connections. There is a definite sense of belonging that comes with being in a society (P22).

I think being in the clubs was incredibly helpful for getting me to form a connection to UTS and to feel like I was part of the UTS community. I moved here from Interstate to study, so I didn't know anyone. I definitely felt isolated at first but once I joined the clubs I felt more connected to people and to the campus. I could walk around and I was always pretty much guaranteed I would see someone I knew and could have a chat (P9).

It made me feel much more connected to UTS, the institution. I wouldn't have got involved in university life at all if I hadn't joined a club. Like I probably wouldn't have even gone to other events that the university or other clubs hold. I would have just done my studies and gone home. The clubs have definitely made me feel a lot more involved and helped me to develop a sense of connection to UTS (P2).

Being in a society definitely gives you a little bit of a connection to the uni compared to if you've had no involvement. If it wasn't for clubs it would be just like, 'OK. I'm finished, I'm gone. Cool!' (P6).

This is my second degree and I had a sense that when I did my first degree I was a bit disconnected from uni and the whole university experience. At the time I lived off campus and although I would participate heavily as a student in my studies, I always

felt a bit disconnected from the institution itself. I felt like I missed out on the broader uni experience that others speak about, so this time I made sure to get involved in the clubs (P7).

It's the connection I have with staff through my roles with the clubs that gives me the feeling of liking UTS as an institution (P8).

Definitely my involvement in clubs has made me feel more connected to UTS. The friendships I've made are directly related to UTS as an organisation (P10).

You can get a medical science degree at any Sydney university, but the club experiences I've had at UTS and being the society president, that makes me feel connected to UTS and proud to be in the alumni. I think being part of a club helps students definitely feel like they are part of a community. As a uni exec, but also as being just a general member, I've made all of my uni friends through clubs and societies (P11).

I think once students make more friends at uni, it helps them to have more of a sense of connection to the uni overall. I mean if people have heaps of friends outside uni or at their work, then power to them, but if they don't, then I think having that connection with other people at UTS through the clubs is incredibly important (P13).

Once you join a club you definitely feel more like you're a part of UTS. You use their facilities more and you feel more like you belong to the community. You understand university better. I feel like there's more of a support network around me; a larger network than just what's in your own faculty. You might have to step out of your comfort zone for a while but it makes you feel a greater sense of connection over the long term (P14).

Students involved in clubs absolutely feel more of a sense of connection with UTS because there is that sense of community that comes with meeting other students at all levels of study. But just being with people from UTS and being together in club meetings just makes you feel those sorts of connections. There is a definite sense of belonging that comes with being in a society (P22).

Many students also stressed that the sense of connection they had with UTS as a result of club and society membership was particularly important in 2020, because of the significant levels of disconnection being experienced globally as a result of Covid 19 regulations,

I know other students who felt that staying in touch with others on their committees by zoom during Covid was incredibly important in terms of their mental health and staying on track with their studies. One person on our committee started asking us to all think about one good thing that had happened since the previous meeting and things like that. By doing that he helped to make us feel like we were still part of a community that cared and that we had some communal companionship in our fortnightly catch-ups. Then after that the president or vice president would give us a separate call every week or so, just to check up on how we were going, so that also showed me I wasn't just a fly on the wall. Sometimes in the zoom classes or meetings you kind of just feel like you're kind of there but no-one's paying attention and you're kind of insignificant or whatever, but with these follow-up calls it really made me feel like, 'No, I have a purpose at uni, I can do this, I can get this thing done and it will impact people,' and that was really nice for me personally. I would hope other people appreciated it. Maybe they wouldn't find it as therapeutic as I found it, but I think it would definitely helped lots of people to stay feeling connected (P7).

When there are so many other options for people to go and get a drink or hang out in the city that are not related to UTS it's easy for people to not really stay on campus outside their classes to meet people. Being in a club makes you stay and hang out on

campus, which increases things like feeling part of the UTS community. I definitely feel like I belong to the UTS community (P9).

There are so few contact hours, and less now because of Covid, so having friendships and networks of friends through clubs just creates or maintains that connection to the university itself (P13).

Being in the clubs is the best way to feel a connection with UTS. This was particularly so during Covid where we didn't have a normal way of life and classes were mostly online. When I was at home and so disconnected from everything uni, I didn't even know what other people were doing at that time. There was a big time difference between India and Australia, so I felt very isolated. I started thinking, 'I'm not sure what I'm doing here', because I couldn't see anyone else doing what I was doing. So hearing other people in my club, the clubs were the only way to have some really good discussions with students and maintain that sense of connection to the university. We had zoom meetings via the clubs so we were still able to have the electronic contact and continuity, and it helped me to realise, 'Oh, I'm not the only person who is going through all of this'. There were so many other younger people who were coping with it all so much better than me, so that made me cope better too. That is what is so great about being a part of a club community. It made me feel so much more supported (P19).

It was really important through Covid to have the club connections to keep you feeling like you still were a part of a community. Without classes, it was really only the club zoom meetings where you could interact with other students. You got to know their pets and things like that, I guess because they were in their own home so they felt a bit more comfortable to open up and more relaxed (P21).

Some, particularly those not in leadership positions, said the inability to attend club events in person had resulted in them feeling less connected to UTS. One of the challenges that Covid-19 has presented for universities is its potential to undermine student's ability to develop a sense of place bonding (place attachment) with the university, which under normal circumstances plays a role in fostering students sense of belonging (Miller, 2011)

Now, sitting at home, where we can't go to events, I haven't felt that same sense of connection to UTS.

With everything being online and me not having to even come to UTS and not participating in the events, it has made me feel like I'm not really connected to UTS. I just hope that things get back to normal (P3).

In 2019 we had lots of club activities and I made lots of friends. It made me feel really connected to UTS. But this year, because of Covid, many people went back to Taiwan and although we are able to talk to each other on social media, we can't have events. It feels really different. Last year everyone was really enjoying their life and their time at UTS and they were really happy about that, but this year everyone is feeling kind of hopeless because no-one can really come back here and a lot of friendships kind of stopped and became disconnected. So that's kind of awful. Not being able to do the club activities made it even worse. Our club was getting bigger and bigger because people were bringing new friends into it, but this year we don't have that much activities and it is not getting bigger (P14).

Other comments related to the importance of clubs to campus life, and the lack of connection to UTS felt by fellow students who were not members of clubs.

When I meet people now that I'm in third year with but don't really know, I say to them, 'Oh Hi, I'm president of the medical society, have you heard of us?' and they say 'No I haven't,' and I say 'What do you think about UTS; do you like it here?' and they'll say,

'Oh, no. I just go to uni and I go home'. I say to them, 'Oh really I spend all day here because I love it here', and they go, 'I don't have friends like you,' and I tell them I only have all those friends because of the clubs and that makes me feel really connected to the university (P11).

Before I came to UTS some friends I knew, who were already students, said there wasn't a really strong campus life here because there aren't big, central meeting places. People tend to come in, go to their class and then go home. They don't tend to hang around unless they live on campus. I feel like it's because it's quite spread out and there are not the outdoor places to congregate. For example if I go to visit friends who are at USyd I'm usually sitting outside and enjoying the sun on the lawn. But without that here, it makes campus life harder, and that makes it more important to be involved in clubs to make connections (23).

I think if you want to gauge how vibrant and engaging a university is, you just need to look at the clubs and societies. Like, what proportion of the students join in and participate in multiple clubs and societies? This is really good way to evaluate the culture of a university. For those students that really shapes their experience of university. Sure, everyone's got the classes, but hey, I'm also doing all this other stuff (P4).

I think there's a camaraderie, especially in the sports teams, and it's very much about being yourself up and being part of that community and playing for UTS. Last year at uni games for skiing we won the community spirit award and that was the only thing we set out to achieve, and we got it so it was super exciting, but yes, especially at UTS we get really excited and passionate about our team and the people who are involved and I think it's such a nice environment to be a part of (P23).

A few students also noted that sometimes the sense of connection to UTS depended on the type of club one was involved in or the role (leader/non-leader) held.

Obviously being part of a club helps you feel like you're part of a community at UTS, but it depends on the community because let's say in the Indonesian Society I just know that, Oh, this is a society for Indonesian people which are going to UTS but I'm much more feeling that I'm part of the society as a person who is Indonesian, rather than a person who is a student at UTS. It's different with the Futsal club because we are called UTS so we do feel like we are connected because we have the name UTS (P5).

I definitely see this happening, but mainly for those people who are on committees or in leadership positions, and those who maybe attend lots and lots of events. When you only attend sometimes, and only as a general member, not so much (P6).

A sense of belonging to a community

Besides feelings of connection to UTS as a whole, many students made additional comments about how being a part of a club gave them a sense of belonging to a community. For many this was related to the community feeling they had with other club members.

The real advantage of club involvement really comes down to the community connection that you get. There are so many things that come from that; friendships, networks, skills you'll need in the workforce, support through your studies – those things are invaluable. When I'm around that community I always know there's somewhere I can go to for help (P18).

For a lot of people it can be easy to just go through university and be just like: 'I go, I listen, I leave And there's nothing really here. I just go to my classes and piss off,

and, Why are my group members so annoying?' But when you join clubs and meet people you get more of a sense of belonging and connection (P4).

I love all the people at the club and the community we have there (P8).

All of the organisations I'm involved with represent different aspects of my personality. So by being a part of a club that supports that aspect of myself it helps me feel like I belong to a like-minded community. Every single club that you're part of, it is a community and it's a community you can join and where you represent yourself as that persona. Not changing yourself, but that's where you can explore specific aspects of yourself, and feel like you have a group of people who match you on that aspect of yourself. That all builds feelings of connection and community. The more parts of your persona you feel have a home at UTS, the more you feel you belong at UTS. Something people have told me, especially on orientation day, they said 'Join societies because UTS is a very independent uni and no-one really interacts that much with other students unless they know them, so if you want to get to know other students you should join clubs'. Definitely my involvement in clubs has made me feel more connected to UTS (P10).

When you are in a community like that it can give you the motivation to keep going. Just being with people you are sharing the same difficulties with, or with the Red Cross just being there to help other people, just gives me enough satisfaction and inner joy to go through whatever I am faced with from my studies. Even a telephone call, just having a chat with someone and listen to what people are telling me about, just gives me that strength I need. When we are international students, there are often things that happen back home that are upsetting but when you are part of a network at least you have people you can sit with, talk with and just better than being alone (P21).

I definitely think being part of a club gives students a sense of community. Being part of a club helps students to feel more connected. If you are not involved in the clubs you don't really feel like you are part of the university. If you just study and you don't join clubs then you wouldn't feel like you were part of a community (P23).

Some students also saw their club activities as a catalyst for developing greater feelings of connection and belonging to the broader local community around UTS and (for international students) the Australian community as a whole.

Through working together at the club we do gain a sense of community where we think what are we trying to address and what are we trying to create for the community is worthwhile. I live on campus so I would say it is ingrained into me. I am surrounded by the community; the university community and the local community living around the university (P1).

In our club, the TSA, we get a lot of local, domestic students joining in as well, so that helps us all to know more about things to do or places to go in Sydney. It helps us learn more about the local culture. No-one else teaches you that stuff. You have to learn it from the other students, and if there wasn't the clubs and societies you wouldn't be so easily able to learn about those things. This can be how they spend time with their friends, how they talk (in Aussie style), how they spend weekends or holidays and things like that. Just all about the local culture (P14).

Clubs can definitely help international students feel a sense of belonging, but it depends on their level of engagement. Just joining a club doesn't give a student a sense of belonging; you have to actually engage and immerse yourself in the activities and reach out to people to make contacts. It is the engagement that helps create the sense of belonging (P16).

One of the main advantages of being involved in clubs is that you feel like you are part of a larger community. Even more so when you're an undergrad student stepping into uni for the first time, OR when you're an international student who has moved from another country so you don't have any familiarity with anyone or anything here. For those students, being part of a club really makes you feel more connected with uni (P19).

Clubs are absolutely massively valuable for helping students feel like they're a part of a community. I can see some of the dynamics playing out in the clubs I'm involved in and I can only imagine that if you were from interstate or from rural NSW and you were coming to UTS and were feeling like disconnected and perhaps didn't have any peers from your former school, then this would absolutely be a way to bridge that gap quickly and be able to find out the little nuances about how to get around and how to do things more quickly – all of which contributes to a greater sense of community and belonging. No question at all. This would be even more so pertinent for international students (P7).

Being a member of CatSoc (the Catholic Society), in our meetings (either in person prior to Covid or now online) you can feel like you have a kind of a home when you are in a club like this. Just having friends to laugh with us, cry with us or just pat us on the shoulder when we need support. That is what the community feels like in the club (P21).

A few students noted that smaller, strong cliques within some clubs could actually alienate new members and negatively impact their sense of connection,

There is some groupism in the clubs, where people who are all doing say, the same degree or who are all from the same country, they form a smaller sub-group. That probably helps them form a smaller sense of community or belonging. But personally I don't believe in that. If I go to a club I want to just go up to anyone and say Hi (P3),

and that some clubs could do more to develop members' sense of community via use of better communication strategies,

If the clubs used other communication strategies they could create more of a sense of community. Like with smaller messenger groups or Whatsapp groups instead of just posting things on Facebook (P3).

Some students also commented they anticipated their connection with UTS would continue beyond their graduation, either by way of further studies, mentoring, industry panel involvement or even future employment,

Of course I want to stay in touch with UTS and with the people I've met through clubs (P5).

Having that feeling of being connected to UTS would make me look to this university if I wanted to do later study, but only if they had the specific course I wanted to do (P2).

If I wanted to do further study later on, I would definitely first check whether I could do those studies through UTS because I have had such a great time here this time thanks to my club experiences. UTS is perfect for me. It helps me to know that the people here are really good (P5).

If I was going to go on to do more study, and UTS was offering the course I wanted, I'd definitely want to come to UTS again. The club involvement I have had has directly impacted that decision, because if I had to go to another uni I feel like I would kind of have to start from scratch again. But because of everything I've learned and done with the clubs, I feel like I know UTS really well now and just feel connected to it (P17).

I'd definitely consider doing further study at UTS if they were offering the course I wanted to do. All of my friends have had a 100 per cent positive experience with the clubs and activities we've done, and I'd love to come back here to study...all of us have had such positive experiences thanks to the clubs and societies and would 100 per cent recommend the uni (P23).

I'm hoping to one day work for UTS I'm so passionate about it now, so I am likely very much to stay in touch with the university. I'm really close to a lot of first and second year students now as well, and I'm sure they will want to keep linking up with me once I graduate. I will come back and talk on industry panels etc. (P11).

I hope to stay in touch with UTS after I graduate, and I feel like that is because of the club experiences I have had here. I'd love to stay connected like coming back to speak on industry panels myself and inspiring other students to be their best. I definitely feel like I'm part of the UTS community (P17).

Benefits of Club membership

Respondent retention is significantly associated with their sense of belonging and club engagement because of the benefits club membership provide. In particular, respondents benefit from the personal enjoyment club membership brings and the friendships and sense of community developed with other club members. Club membership also encourages the development of networks across degree programs, faculties and student cohorts, as well as with staff and industry professionals. Moreover, club membership helps to grow self-esteem; it provides the opportunity to make a contribution and, at the same time, to gain skills and experiences. Each of these benefits indicates that what makes club involvement an important experience is the way they bring students together who have a shared interest or passion for something and that learning takes place through social interactions and relations. In this respect university clubs and societies are akin to *communities of practice*, which are composed of three factors: (1) *domain* (a shared interest or passion), (2) *the community* (members engage in joint activities that hold a particular interest) and (3) *the practice* (members develop a shared repertoire of resources) (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2)

Table 6 overleaf provides an overview of the level to which these and other benefits are gained through club membership.

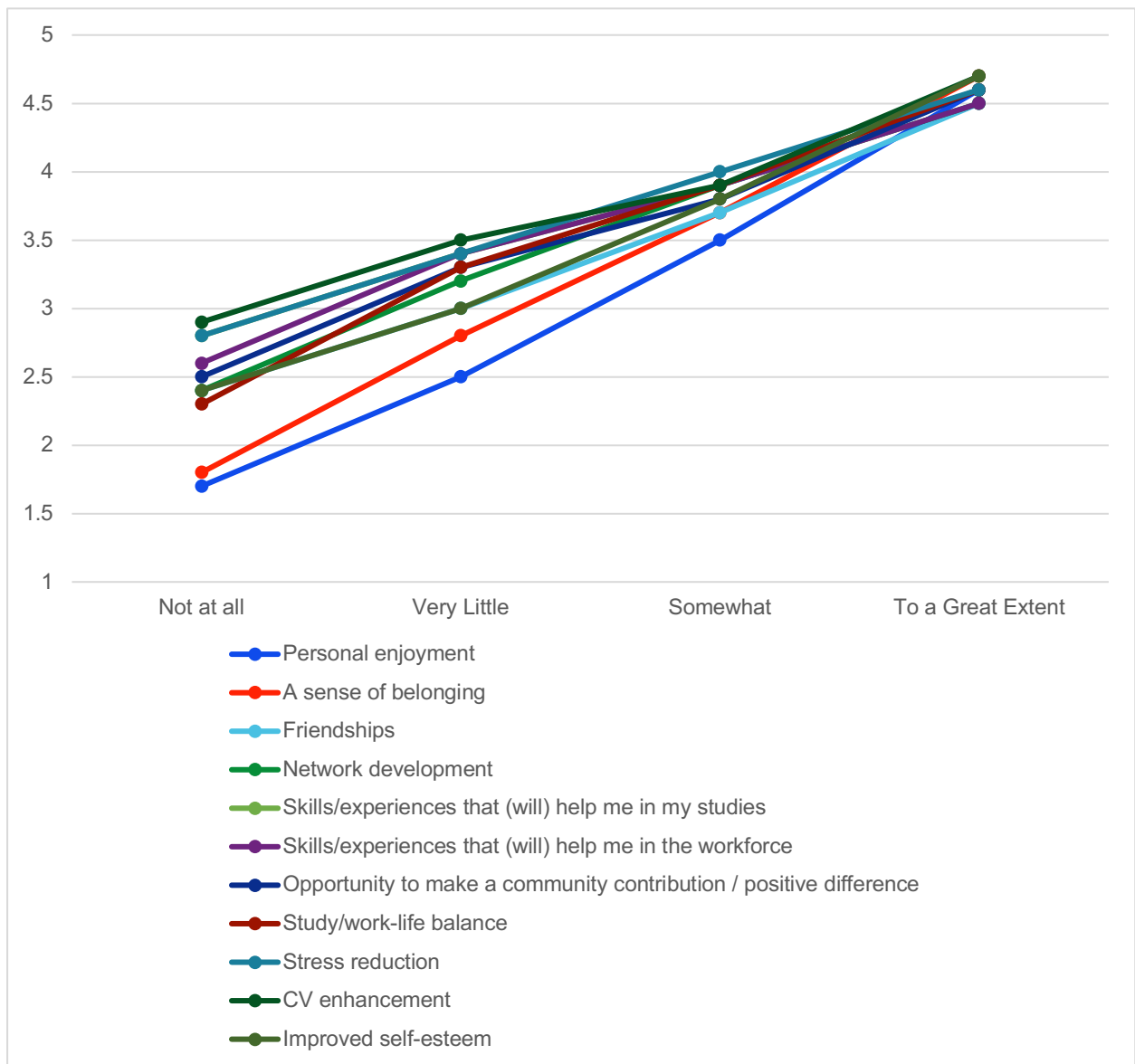
Table 6: Proportional distribution of responses to benefits gained by club membership

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Mean	N
Personal enjoyment	3.4	7.8	32.5	56.4	3.42	502
Friendships	6.2	11.8	25.7	56.3	3.32	501
A sense of belonging	3.8	12.2	34.9	49.1	3.29	501
Network development	5.2	16.9	35.5	42.4	3.15	498
Improved self-esteem	7.2	15.4	34.4	43.0	3.13	500
Opportunity to make a community contribution / positive difference	6.6	17.2	35.1	41.1	3.11	501
Skills/experiences that (will) help me in the workforce	7.2	18.0	32.7	42.1	3.10	501
Study/work-life balance	6.6	15.8	42.2	35.4	3.06	500
Skills/experiences that (will) help me in my studies	8.2	18.2	39.3	34.3	3.00	501
Stress reduction	10.2	20.6	33.1	36.1	2.95	501
CV enhancement	12.2	23.4	30.5	33.9	2.86	501

Little differences in the extent to which benefits were gained could be noted by sociodemographic characteristics. However, some systematic differences could be noted by club membership characteristics. Firstly, sport club members rated the benefits of “study/work-life balance” and “stress reduction” significantly higher than social club members did. A potential explanation for this is that extra-curricular activities that involve sustained physical activity such as sport reduce levels of stress hormones in the body (adrenaline and cortisol) while stimulating those that are mood enhancing (endorphins) (Wang, Li & Dou, 2020). Secondly, the duration of membership in the club and the duration of respondents’ studies showed significant differences for most of the benefits listed. Those who had joined the club at the beginning of 2020 and were in their first-year of studies were more likely not to have experienced a benefit or to have experienced very little of that benefit. Especially those who had joined the club before Covid-19 restrictions, rated the benefits gained very negatively, which can be expected given that many club events and activities had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. In contrast, those who had been with the club before 2020 had experienced “normal” club life and, as such, was significantly more likely to rate the benefits gained higher.

As expected, the extent to which the benefits are noted by respondents is directly associated with the level of club involvement. In other words, the more engaged the respondent, the greater the extent of a benefit gained (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Mean score of club engagement scale by extent to which a benefit is experienced



Similarly, those who have held a leadership position in the club rated all benefits except for stress reduction significantly higher.

The benefits of club membership were extensively discussed in the interviews and provide supporting evidence for the associations noted between club engagement and the extent of benefits gained. The interviews also highlighted the impact of Covid-19 related changes to the running of clubs and the benefits gained.

Students were initially asked to state what it was that they liked most about being involved in clubs and the benefits they felt they derived from that involvement. Those students who had held leadership positions identified more career-oriented benefits, whilst general members spoke more often about friendships, a sense of community and work-life balance or time away from their studies. Most students, however, felt there were numerous benefits across the board.

When you join a club it's like for 40 per cent of your life at uni. If you go to uni without joining a club, you're basically spending your whole uni time enjoying it at only about

60 per cent of what you would have enjoyed it if you'd joined a club. So you're losing almost half of the uni life experience just because of not joining the club (P5).

I think the advantage of being involved with clubs definitely outweighs the disadvantages. The advantages for me in taking on leadership roles, are making new connections with people and new friends, learning to manage your time better, having something you're really passionate about to do and feeling like you have a way to actualise the values you have inside (P10).

I really feel like being involved in clubs is the icing on the cake as far as my education goes. There is a lot to be said about the real benefit of being involved which passionate people who are interested in what you are interested in. They are focused on their topic but of course it doesn't always stay that way. Being able to get access to the subculture of it through these University clubs is really really valuable (P7).

Some students said the main advantages they saw in being involved in clubs and societies were around career development and the acquisition of skills,

Apart from making new friends, I know I benefit a lot from joining clubs because you can learn so many new skills. This year, I joined the photographic society and I learned so much more stuff on photography from the people in the society than I would have from doing a class. The people in that society they are so talented. Basically, you get free tutoring. I went to some meetings, and these people just spend their whole time talking about and teaching each other about photography. They were all telling me how to do it. This was just sharing and learning together (P5).

It's having the opportunity to listen to people who are already doing the work you might want to do. For me, as an individual, to try to find someone who has done my sort of degree and is working in the field, would be hard. But they find the people and we can just listen to what it has been like for them. Professionals who are working in the field (P6).

Anyone can get a degree, but what can make you different to most people is the extra things you have on top of that degree. The extracurriculars and experiences that you did whilst at university are one of the best ways to make yourself stand out. The club leadership experience enhances your graduate attributes and your professionalism to a whole new level. Maybe you don't get into the clubs, but even helping with the SRC or interning or working on campus – but it's all those things that make the difference (P11).

It is a really good experience. I get to meet people from a whole lot of different faculties. In the UTS Consulting club we work with actual businesses. We help small to medium businesses. These are real clients that we get, and we essentially work with other students. There are about five consulting teams with five students on each team from different faculties. So on mine I had people from law, business, IT and then we work together for 12 weeks. We have industry workshops where we were taught the skills like how to problem solve, how to work with a client, and then at the end we go down and pitch our ideas and then there will be a winner, where the judges – who are some of the consultants – say which is the best. Then we go to the client and give them the solution to their problem. It is just such a worthwhile experience and we learn so much because we can put everything we're learning in the classroom into a real-life experience (P15).

For others, it was the potential to make friendships, enjoy socialising opportunities and develop a sense of belonging, connection of community which was the priority,

I like the social aspect. I like being able to go out and do something I really enjoy whilst meeting other people who are interested in similar things, so especially for Engineers

without Borders, I really enjoy volunteering and doing humanitarian work aid and I like knowing I'm surrounded by like-minded people. So the clubs are a place where I feel like I can belong at uni. On top of that, we get to practice our skills and to learn new ones. For example, the photography society I signed up for (P17).

The main reason I wanted to join a society was for networking opportunities and I wanted to know more people and meet like-minded individuals who also are in the same faculty and have the same interests as me. I also really wanted to join a society which had a lot of international students because we are all in the same boat, in that we're new to the country and there is a lot that is new to us. Eighty per cent of the students in the International Students Finance club are internationals and 20 per cent are Australians. We welcome everyone to join (P20).

I also do like going to some of the on-campus social events, but I'm not willing to go unless I can find a friend to go with me. I like meeting new people. I've added people on Facebook and people I can message and ask them degree questions. Without the clubs I wouldn't probably meet those people. People will introduce you to other people who are also doing the same sort of course but maybe they're further along in their degree. The clubs are definitely a great way to get involved at uni and a great way to meet friends, especially as a first year (P6).

Clubs give students the freedom to experiment. But having a sense of community at uni is my main thing. And it doesn't stop when uni stops. Those connections can continue throughout your career or your social life, which is really great. This is definitely so for international and interstate students. I would love us to have more international students (P8).

A number of students stated their prime objective in joining clubs and societies was to access opportunities to improve their communication skills, and for international students, their English-speaking skills,

The benefits are huge, like making new friends, improving your communication and in particular your English-speaking skills. In fact that was the main reason I did my masters in Australia. I've come all the way from another country for the purpose of improving my English communication skills. Being in clubs helped me a lot with improving my English and communication skills because when we approach club members at an event we always have to communicate in English. If we didn't speak in English we would be having a drink alone, and that is no fun at all (P3).

Some international students might think they can communicate with other students in their classes, but it doesn't work like that. Especially with IT students. They wake up in the morning, we put music in our ears, we go to the class, open the laptop making some notes, put the music back in and we go home. We don't need to communicate. Often we don't communicate with anyone in the class. But with clubs you join because you have the same interests and you enjoy talking to each other about those interests. That's the difference (P5).

I have only been a student for the past year, and with Covid most of the events have been online and there are lots of cancellations. Despite this, the idea of being able to have a conversation with other students, or even observe conversations between students who have been studying for longer in my interest areas, rather than being inactive, have been really helpful. So what I like is the ability to just listen to other students (P7).

While there were other students who saw that the major benefit of their involvement in clubs was being able to enhance their education and make their classroom experiences more meaningful,

There are two main things I think are great about being involved in leadership in clubs. The first one is that I will have a better understanding of the things that I am learning in class at uni (P1).

I also wanted to learn about tips on studying here, how to get internships and how to get jobs and things like that. I knew I would be in a supportive community to be around so many other international students going through the same things I was going through. Also to improve my skills and professional development as well (P20).

I am now doing my PhD, but when I look back over all my studies I can see the incredible benefits I have received from being involved in clubs. The benefits are just massive. They form your foundations for being involved in society ... Clubs help students with their mental health and I feel they help us work harder as students, so I would think it is something I would like to recommend every student to take advantage of the opportunities that universities offer to join in clubs (P22).

Employability

Interviewees stated there were many ways in which club and society involvement had developed their work-ready skills and increased their chances of future employment. In general terms, these included developing soft skills, gaining 'real-world' experiences, and strengthening their personal and professional understanding, attitudes and practices. Díaz-Iso, Eizaguirre and García-Olalla (2019, p. 21) found that extra-curricular activities provided opportunities for students to reflect on the real-world experiences they provide, which led to changes in their "beliefs, attitudes, and daily behaviours".

I realised early on in my studies that if you got involved in clubs and especially in leadership of clubs, you got to be in real life situations, work on real life projects, and find solutions. I now have the experience of not really ever having to use my resume. A big reason for that is all the club and society stuff (P4).

Just the same as I put time and effort into a subject that would improve my employability and make me a better student or a better person or extend my mind, I also value the experiences I get as a club executive the same way. I see it as yes; it's an extra-curricular - but it's an extra-curricular that sets me apart from the other hundred people applying for a job that I want or develops my skills so that I can be more professional and I can be more qualified. So I feel like I'm investing my time into my own professional development and growth (P11).

The clubs definitely help you to build a professional network, to be part of a community and to develop your soft or transferable skills. These are the three main benefits I see the clubs doing. They are also good for making new friends and improve your self-confidence. It was scary to go to the first meetings, but I am over that now and I feel more confident in the classroom, in applying for jobs and in the Australian community in general (P19).

UTS has a reputation for being strongly focussed on being a real-world learning experience. I know someone at the head of a large fitness company, and she said that for that reason, if she has a bunch of resumes for a job and she sees someone from UTS, she's moving it to the top of the list. Clubs really add to that real-world aspect of learning. I feel like having the industry panels and careers events, the academic material we get from class, the connections we make and the workplace experiences we get from being involved in clubs, I feel like it makes me a really well-rounded student/graduate. I feel like clubs compliment the academic side of things because the clubs and societies have the time and energy to put those things on (P13).

Another interesting perspective was presented by a mature-aged student who had already gained extensive professional experience, but who (through club experiences) developed insights into students' minds which he felt were invaluable for his new career pathway,

Just by being exposed to the thoughts, ideas and experiences of the rest of those in my cohort and the other students in the clubs and associated forums, I feel my work-ready skills in other areas were greatly improved. I was able to listen to the students' stories about what their learning experiences had been of coding and IT as they went through school and how that contrasts with what is now happening for their younger siblings. As someone who wants to enter high school IT education, these were invaluable insights I would otherwise not have had access to, and which I feel will make me more prepared and informed about what my future work experiences might be. I got to see what, for some of them, were examples of teaching and teachers who had imparted to these (now) university students a passion and incredible understanding of coding, and I got to hear what they'd done in order to achieve that. Absolutely for me invaluable learning and preparation for my future (P7).

Virtually all students stated that transferable skills such as time management, communication (written and oral), negotiation, conflict resolution, strategy and planning, meeting procedures, people management, general business cultural practices and professionalism were some of the most important attributes they had acquired through club membership. Similar findings have been reported on in the literature. For example, students that participate in extra-curricular activities felt these had improved their "communication, leadership, creativity and self-promotion skills" (Lau, Hsu, Acosta & Hsu, 2014, p. 26), as well as time management, written communication and organising, planning and coordinating skills (Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli, & Wilson, 2017) The students in this study believed these skills complimented the hard skills they learned in the classroom and would significantly enhance their capacity to gain employment after graduating.

I learned a lot about meetings and how they run and professional skills for very first meeting I went to. We would take minutes of the meeting – but I wasn't used to going to meetings basically. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what a briefing was. I didn't know anything that was going on. But the committee were very, very helpful so it was only intimidating at first and I learned very quickly about how meetings work just by being in the meetings. My oral communication skills have improved too. Being a host for events and all of that I have to force myself to be good communicator and be confident, but I have to get my point across to people (P2).

Being in clubs has really helped me to improve my communication skills and this is going to be really important for my career. Communication will play a key role in my interviews and then if I get a job, also in my workplace because I will have to communicate with other people in my teams. The more I participate in the clubs, the more I communicate and the more I learn. At the moment, all my thoughts come into my head in my home language, my mother tongue – and then I need to translate that into English and then I speak. But what I want to do is cut this process in half. I want to think in English and speak in very fluent English (P3).

I had to attend a student conference in NSW in my third year and the facilitators, many of whom were the same age as or younger than me, were brilliant facilitators. I remember thinking wow – I want to be as good as that. For me, that was when I decided that any public speaking opportunity I get, I'm going to just take it. Even if I think I'm not ready enough or educated enough or confident enough I'm just going to take it. I looked for as many workshops as I could. Now, six or seven years later, I'm running many, many workshops, even over zoom and I'm on panels all over the place. Public speaking wasn't something I was naturally great at, but I used my club experiences to develop the skill and now I'm much better at it, just because I decided this was what I

wanted to do. If the club executive opportunity wasn't there, I don't know where those learning opportunities would have come from (P4).

Being an executive and doing the club executive training program makes me so much more employable. My time management and communication skills have been really elevated over the past two years and the professionalism that Activate expects of you in your communication, in your reporting, etc. they really teach you how to manage your documents and your writing correctly. That makes you more employable (P11).

Learning to deal with politics and negotiate your way through it to achieve the outcome you want to achieve. It happened in quite a few of the executive roles I was in and it offered me opportunities to manage group dynamics, manage people, manage conflict, and everything. This was something really new to me because I usually work very independently. That's why it was so valuable for me to learn these things before trying to go out into the workplace (P9).

Time management is one thing that has definitely been improved since I have been in leadership positions in clubs at UTS. You really need to learn when is the time to play and when is the time to study (P16).

Whilst I think being in the club does improve my English skills, but I was always looking at getting more skills than just my English. I was looking for skills more like public speaking, communication skills, leadership and team management. The club definitely gave me a lot of those skills. For example I had never really written professional emails before, but when we need to find speakers for events, such as industry professionals, we have to write professional emails to them. We need to convey everything we want them to cover in the event, and so we need to communicate all of those things in writing. We get help from the other students to show us how to write those types of emails. There are previous examples for us to learn from. I also learned how to interview people for positions. That will be really valuable (P20).

The activities we do in our club, where we have to present ideas to start-ups, really helps build up skills like leadership and presentation skills. We are put through a week of workshops before we go ahead and launch into our project. They are on things like design thinking and ideation skills, which was really cool. And we learnt about how we can take our initial idea and build on it to make it like a feasible project to pitch to a judging panel. We then put it all together in our work groups, and do the presentation, so I think there are just so many important transferable skills in there. The groups include mixed disciplines and mixed years. My group was a computer engineer, doing coding and that sort of thing. Another student was doing accounting. We could make friends and networks with people from other years and other disciplines.

Being in the club has definitely given me the opportunity to learn how to balance my workload and time. I have learned how to set priorities and be organised, and I think that will be useful in so many future situations (P21).

There was one event where we were competing with other universities. Everyone wanted to do really well and I took on a co-ordinator role. It was a lot of stress and pressure and I had to do a lot of people management to get everyone working well, but it was definitely a great experience. I really had to challenge myself in that role and push beyond my comfort zone. But coming out of it I learned a lot about my character and how I perform under pressure, and I think I just came out better because I knew how important it was to keep calm, keep things in perspective, and to manage relationships with other people by giving constructive feedback (P15).

Almost as many students made specific mention of the significant impact club involvement had upon their leadership abilities. This was particularly evident in the responses of those who had held leadership positions within clubs,

I definitely feel like I've developed a lot of work skills. As a leader I get paired with someone from out in the field (non-student), to help me with my leadership skills. He taught me so much in terms of leadership; things like the language I used, the way you should organise or motivate people. Doing that throughout the year has given me so many skills in those areas and I feel like I am now more of an efficient and effective leader who can get the task done (P17).

Students who take on leadership roles definitely get great experiences to improve their work readiness. You just get so regularly exposed to it. When I was president I had the experience of half of my executive team dropping out. When I looked back on that a couple of years later, I thought to myself, What type of leader was I being that I had half of my team quit? Obviously at the time I just passed it off as them being in some way flawed, but being realistic further down the track, I realised I must have been doing something wrong. I realised when I looked back on my early leadership roles in clubs, that I was so focussed on the outcomes and achieving success, that I didn't really get to know my team. I realised that to have been a good leader I should have first tried to figure out what they needed from the experience; what they were after from their club executive role. I've then been able to take that learning to subsequent leadership roles; leading volunteers especially. It helps me to get people behind organisational activities and goals – just knowing what people want to learn or achieve from the experience. That can be taken forward into professional leadership roles as well, to help me know how to get the most out of my work teams (P4).

Particularly in terms of my leadership skills, I have learned so much about what works as a leader and what doesn't. Just having opportunities through club leadership to see different styles of leadership and to be in that kind of position (being impacted by different leadership styles being practised on you) where you have to suffer being under a style of leadership that's terrible, that can be an opportunity for you to think about your own leadership style (P11).

Many students also recognised that the links with those in the industry, and the networks they were creating with other students, were important factors that were likely to improve their employability in the future,

Being in clubs really helps with things like helping you make networks and connections. I've just had my last exam and now I'm ready to get a job but I don't want to work in another industry or in a lower job. I want a very good job in my chosen area. I'm going to be contacting a lot of the people I have met through the clubs and saying I am ready to get a job and asking if they have a job (P3).

The other thing is that I have developed networks with other people in the clubs and I can contact them with any sort of question that I might have. If they start a job in a company in the future for example, I would be able to still contact them and ask them questions even if they were in a different industry. We become close when we've worked together on the committee, and I expect that same closeness would happen once we go out and work in the field (P2).

Being in a club leadership position significantly impacts your networking and communication skills. Getting to know people can be a challenge but having opportunities to meet people and establish a relationship with them is a great skill to have. Especially in Engineers without Borders, because at the camps we have there are students from other universities who we got to meet and chat with, and even today I still meet up with these people and we chat about different ideas, humanitarian aid and other things and we keep the contacts going. So that is great for future networking opportunities and helps our communication skills as well (P17).

The clubs have definitely helped me develop my networks outside of uni as well. We have panels and networking events with industry professionals. Lots of the students in our club have got internships as a result of those connections made at the events. Internships can often turn into honours placements which can often turn into a job. That's really cool (P11).

I feel like the connections I am making will be able to help me once I graduate and throughout my career. I'm about to enter my fourth year, and I feel like I'm in a pretty fortunate position because I now know so many people already working in the industry. I know two people working at Channel 10, someone who works in a big ad agency, another person working in a communications start-up and more. Just knowing them and keeping tabs on them I know those networks will be important. I know if someone I knew needed help, I'd be able to know where to send them.

So the connections are about fun at the time, while you're at uni – but over time I know they're going to be helping in careers and in getting jobs. The connections are meaningful and I've met them through the society, either because they've been students and then graduated but also from industry professionals who I've met doing my leadership roles in the society (P13).

Even just having the connections, you hear about job opportunities opening up or companies that other companies are wanting to link up with – so having those broad ranges of contacts I know would be very valuable (P18).

A number of students highlighted the fact that clubs and societies were able to help students develop these work-ready skills and increase employability because of the relatively 'safe' environment they create to allow students to test, practise and hone their abilities,

It is a very safe environment where you can test things. Even if I go wrong, I can say I'm so sorry about that, and the club is always like it's okay, we will handle it. So it's like a test run before I'm actually working in the real world where I might have to risk my job or my reputation if I made a really big mistake. When you are doing it with the clubs you can make mistakes without it damaging you significantly (P1).

It was a really cool place to just explore different systems to get things done, and not all of them worked and some worked better than others – and that was frustrating – but it was incredibly valuable as a whole experience (P4).

It was really rewarding to have a vision and then to see it come to fruition. I did a lot of work around the values space so we now have an Equity Director and I can say that that culture that I established has continued in the club. It's so rewarding to be part of something like that and it helped me develop my leadership skills significantly and my people management skills. I also realise just how hard it is to be a manager or a leader (P9).

The roles I've had at the clubs have definitely given me the chance to test out my leadership skills and work out what type of leader I want to be. That's heavily influenced the way I've run the society this year. I can see what things work well and what don't.

When I was events director, it was great to be able to organise events and see how I could improve each time on what I'd done before. So many skills were developed, like contacting people, organising venues, coordinating activities – I guess organising an event for a couple of hundred people and knowing all the steps involved in going about it, is a really great experience to have had. It's given me great confidence in my own workplace now as well and I can offer those experiences to future employers once I graduate (P13).

It's like the club creates a safe environment where I can test out my skills that I'm learning in class and that I'll need later in life. Things like groupwork, public speaking, problem-solving, communication and all that. The culture in the clubs and societies is that they provide you with room for error and they provide feedback in a really constructive way (P15).

I feel like the experiences you have in uni kind of happen in a safer environment. The club is a safe little environment where I can learn and grow and apply skills in what is more like a workplace. If it was in an actual workplace it might be a more challenging thing to do because the risks would be higher. It's better to be able to make those early mistakes now, learn and grow from them, and be able to push on to do bigger and better things once you graduate (P21).

Whilst others noted that it was the way in which clubs enabled them to 'bridge the gap' between theoretical concepts and real-world practices,

It makes what we are learning more real and I have a frame in which to put the knowledge I'm given in class. Being in leadership on the Post-grad Business Society is like having something to bridge the gap between the academic and the real world. That's the motto of our club; Bridging the Gap. When they get industry panellists or anyone from the industry or the corporate world to come and speak with us, they are trying to bridge that gap from the academic world. It makes the transition into that world easier (P1).

Some students spoke about how their involvement with clubs and societies would very directly enhance employability through interview skills and having 'workplace-like' experiences to draw upon when demonstrating their abilities to potential employers.

I'm fairly sure having held this leadership position had an impact on me getting my current part-time job, like at interview they brought up, 'How would you manage a team?' and I could talk about my experiences. Definitely joining the society has given me a wealth of experience to draw from in terms of being able to give examples of where I've achieved certain things if needed in interviews etc. (P13).

I'm very passionate about getting into the real world but I don't really have corporate world experience and I really want to get it. And so hence I'm trying to prepare a crack interview and that means using examples of the things I have done in the club. This is my final semester so I'm trying to do everything I can to make sure I can perform well in interviews (P1).

I feel like having the responsibilities that you do in a club, shows a future employer that you're a responsible person and that you have a track record where you have performed. It shows that you are capable at whatever sort of role you are involved in at the club (P2).

Being in clubs definitely helps you improve your professionalism if you are in a leadership role. Things like how to dress and how to speak to people, how to communicate with them in writing, and many other things. I have just finished my degree, and I applied for my first job and I got it straight away so I am really happy with the decisions I made as a student. My employer did ask me during the interview, what I did as president of the society. I told them all of the things that I did and the skills that I had to use every day as president. I told him that I managed a team of more than 20 people; that we had different departments and how we had to keep track of everyone's progress and that we hosted successful events with 100 per cent attendances. And how we had coordinated events with people from some of the big investment and banking companies and he was really impressed. I explained how it was a relatively new club and all the ways that I was able to contribute to the development of the society. He said it was really great that I had had those experiences in different things

already, so he said he wouldn't have to waste time teaching me how to write emails or speak to people and things like that or host a meeting in the company. It was really great (P20).

For possibly the first time, students in club leadership positions in 2020 faced additional challenges as a result of the impact of Covid 19. The global pandemic saw physical distancing regulations and a drop in social interaction, requiring that scheduled events be modified and that alternate means of engaging and communicating with club members be implemented. Whilst such difficulties were initially quite daunting, once changes had been made a number of students recognised the experience as one which reflected their capacity for innovation, flexibility and resilience,

Planning all the events at the beginning of this year, and then having to change or cancel things because of Covid, was a hassle but it was also a really important learning curve that I don't think many students who aren't in societies, necessarily had to go through. Maybe in their jobs but probably those decisions were made for them by bosses. For us, we had to learn to adapt and change because of the circumstances. We had to find that internal self-motivation to keep things going under new conditions. That was a great experience to have that will make us more resilient in the future. Just going through the process of trying to still make those events worthy of being an event. Rather than just an online Kahoot just for the sake of it. With Social Justice I was told they wanted to do a lot more hands on things this year, so I was in the process of organising those types of things. Then it was ... oh... actually it's going to have to be virtual. So then there was the challenge of still trying to make those initiatives worthwhile (P8).

This year really helped us learn about resilience. We'd had all our events planned for the year, but with Covid, everything had to change. We had to have another planning day over zoom and tried to flip every event idea we'd had into an online version. Not all of them worked. And not all of them were as successful as they would have been in person, but our thing is it's better to give it a go and give students opportunities. Sometimes they just don't want to come to an online event, but as long as they see that we're trying, it is all worthwhile I think (P11).

Friendships

Survey respondents indicated that especially social events, trips and sports help to develop friendships. The students interviewed also believed that being involved in clubs was the best way to establish friendships at university. They spoke of lasting friendships formed as a result of meeting at events (for general members) or in working on executive committees together. One of the characteristic features of extra-curricular activities is not just friendships per se, but their enduring nature. Tinto (1993, p. 108) for example found that "student participation in extracurricular activities often leads to friendships that extend well beyond those formal social activities". While Anh and Davis (2020) found that friendships formed through clubs and societies often endured over the time that students attended university, which played an important role in their feelings of sense of belonging.

I've definitely made friends within the medical society and community. it's been really helpful going to the meetings and talking to other people. The study sessions are especially helpful. Particularly when I was in my first year. The other people in second and third year were giving me a lot of information about how to navigate stuff like with my subjects. Just a whole lot of stuff about how uni worked in general. I still had to get used to doing things but it was great to have the information first (P2).

You absolutely make friends by joining clubs and if you are on the executive those friends can become even closer because you're working together over time. Some of

the people, especially from the year I was president, are my close friends to this day. In working together to actually achieve something, there's something really profound in that because it's like, Okay, here's this big task. We have to achieve it. How are we going to do that? We're going to have some wins and we're going to have some losses, but we're all working towards this. And there's a real sense of belonging in that. I think joining clubs and making friends whilst at university is critical. There are lots of students who I've spoken to who their experience is that once they've joined a society and actually connected with people, that's the first time where they felt like they belonged to the university (P4).

I look for clubs who have friendly people because I want to be around people who are positive about life. Making friends is definitely one of the benefits of being in clubs. Sometimes the people who are in clubs together are already friends, but for those who do not know a lot of people, then joining a club is a great way to make friends (P6).

It's definitely a great way to meet people. I love all the people I know through UTSOC. My boyfriend's in UTSOC and I met him through UTSOC, so that's great. I also have some close friends that I've made there (P8).

I definitely think the main benefit of club involvement is the social aspect and I think those people who aren't involved in clubs and societies usually don't have as many friends at uni. Clubs are definitely the number one way to make friends at UTS. The campus culture isn't as good at UTS as it is at some other universities because it is so spread out over different buildings and there's not one central, large meeting place for everyone to go. There are bars, but it's not like everyone just hangs out at the Loft, but because we're in the middle of the city, so there are plenty of other bars around to go to. In other words there's a lot of competition all around us for people's spare time or recreation time. If you want an experience at University where you want to be involved with other people and more connected, then joining a club is the best way to do it (P9).

I have some people who joined our team and they knew no one and then they came to our meetings and they made a friend and then they made another friend and then they had a whole group of people and felt really connected and want to be at uni (P11).

The main benefit of being clubs, for me, is just the incredibly large social network that you form and the connections you have with those people. The friend groups I've seen created as part of the society have been really long-lasting and strong. Other friends I've known at uni who weren't part of the society, they reflect and say, 'Like, I didn't really have that many friends at uni' – so I think joining clubs and societies makes a huge difference to the number of friends you make at uni (P13).

Because we form groups in our club and everyone wants to help each other get better, there are lots of really caring people involved and I have made so many friends which I can really see myself being friends with for the rest of my life. If I look back on my time as a student, I'd say the true friends I've made is one of the best things that I have gained at UTS (P15).

The clubs are a great way for people to meet. My parents actually met through clubs at university. My mum was an ex-UTS student and my dad went to another university. I've still got one of her T-shirts from when she was in the club as a student here (P18).

My parents were both in clubs when they were at uni and they said it was a really important part of their university experience. My mum was part of the ski society at UNSW and all of her closest friends now are from that society to this day. They went on so many trips and had such a great time that they became really good friends and stuck with each other. And my dad, was playing first grade cricket at UNSW, so also very strong club presence at uni. They actually met on a Geography Society harbour cruise because they were both in that society as well. That brought them together on

the cruise because my dad was the (then) current president of the club and my mum had been the president the year before. So they were sporty nerds.... And they have been together ever since (P23).

Many of the responses specifically focused upon the advantages of club membership for international or interstate students or those from other areas of NSW who may not have existing friends or contacts at UTS,

Clubs are a great way for students to make friends, especially if you are new to the city or the country you really don't know what to do next and you are scared that if people won't accept you. So I think that clubs are a great way to be able to meet people in a professional but also not totally professional environment and start speaking and start interacting. They give a very good pathway for people to start mixing and get involved in the local environment (P24).

I made a lot of new friends from just one event and I meet them outside the club now a lot. I still have contact with them, in fact, in two hours I'm going to have coffee with my friend from the Indonesian Society. So if you ask me did I make new friends, yes I made a lot (P5).

When you're an international student and you're just coming out you are trying to make new friends and create new experiences for yourself. I joined the clubs because I wanted to make friends, and I did that. I am still friends with them now. I would say clubs are great for making friends (P1).

I knew that joining clubs would help me make friends at university. There are various things you have to do as an international student. So a person sometimes gets depressed, sometimes he feels lonely, so if there are many friends around him it really helps. That was the other main reason I wanted to join clubs and societies. I have made a lot of friends. Some of them I see every day. I have made one good friend who is doing Engineering. We are really good friends (P3).

Especially for international students, we come here with a different language. English is not my first language. So when we come to Australia, getting a new friend, especially a person who speaks English, I'm forced to speak up. Because we are talking about the same hobbies or interests, it is easier. Much better than when you are just listening in class or speaking on a topic, because when you are speaking with a friend about games, about politics and things like that. It's really a life-changing experience. That's why I looked hard at the people who were running the club. I want to know what they are like, because I want to be in a club that encourages friendships and welcomes people (P5).

I think the clubs are an incredibly important way for new students and international students to be able to make friends. I don't think domestic students realise this enough. International students tend to stick with each other, especially if there's a language barrier. I will always go up to those international students at welcome drinks and tried to get to know them. To know their story and introduce them to other people. That might not be the case in every society. I have been to other events where I have seen students come and stay for 15 minutes and no one talks to them and they leave. Executive leaders need to make sure that doesn't happen (P11).

I joined the club to make friends because I wanted more friends in Australia. I came to live in Australia in 2018 and I have dual citizenship but I have not met a lot of friends yet. This year we haven't been able to have very many activities, but it was great in 2019 (P14).

Given that most clubs and societies include students from a range of disciplines and stages of their studies, many students spoke about the significant benefits they saw in having a diverse group of friends and contacts outside their own cohort,

One of the great things about clubs is that you can meet people who are in different years. Just because it might be your first year, it's not necessarily everyone else's first year – so it's a great way to build networks and contacts in different years to you. That means people might be open still to making friends, so it increases your potential circle of friends.

It's like a lot of first years always want to join the club and they're new ones, but you also get some second and third years who might not have made a strong friendship group in their previous years. They might be the same age as you or even younger but be further along in your course, so they can be great friends to make too (P9).

I met people from all walks of life in the club. People I most probably would never have met if I hadn't joined. It expanded my horizons, in terms of meeting people from all different parts of Sydney, different religions, different backgrounds and everything (P10).

The biggest advantage of clubs is you can make more friends from different faculties or from different subjects. I met people studying business, I met people studying engineering, studying accounting... so people who are not just studying architecture. That is a great advantage of being in a club (P14).

Students noted that friendships were not as easy to establish at the university as they anticipated. A common observation was that making friends during the course of everyday classwork was difficult,

Some people might think they're going to just automatically make friends at uni like they did at school, but that doesn't necessarily happen in the classrooms. I think it's quite difficult for people not in clubs to make friends. Some of the tutors encourage people to get to know each other in class and incorporate activities to facilitate that interaction, but it is up to the tutor. Some tutors don't do any group work or encourage interaction at all..., In class, especially because of Covid, but even before Covid, you see someone for two hours a week, and you're not really talking to them because you're doing the class. It's really hard to make a meaningful connection just through class. And it's just such a step, I find, to say, 'Like do you want to get food after this' or something because usually both of you are travelling an hour or so in different directions, so you have to make quite a commitment to have something to eat with someone you're not sure of. Whereas if you spend time getting to know each other through extracurricular things like the clubs, it just so much easier to talk. It's a great way to meet people properly and without the stress. I honestly don't know what my social life at uni would look like if I didn't have clubs (P8).

It's very hard to make friends in class. In class everyone is just focused on the content. It is just difficult to go up and start talking to someone. I have made all of my friends at uni through the clubs. When you're in the club atmosphere there's no barrier of the academia and there's no competition so it's just really easy for everyone to have time it's just such a more casual and easy way to make friends. In an indirect way it forces you to be social and to make friends (P11).

Some felt it was also more difficult to make friends at very large events unless they were already attending with a group of friends. They suggested that joining smaller, boutique clubs or going into a leadership role may be more rewarding for those seeking to make friends,

If it was a massive event, it was a bit harder because it was harder to make friends. I prefer things like the Debating Society, where you go along every week and it's pretty chill, and you meet people. I think the social aspect with things like that is better (P9).

Finally, some students noted that whilst Covid 19 restrictions had impacted their capacity to form friendships in 2020, the presence of clubs did at least offer some opportunities for social interaction and supportive relationships,

Obviously the disadvantage of the Covid era is social interaction, but I think it's a bit interesting that some forms of social interaction were still occurring. There were a bunch of very strong personas in some of the chats and in some of the societies I was in, and they managed to just bring people into conversations, encouraged introductions and then bantered with the people who do introduced themselves. So there was still a really strong attempt to maintain a social element, despite the fact that people weren't able to meet face to face. I found that to be fascinating because in my current personal situation I'm not likely to attend an event in the city in the evening and that has alcohol as a focus, but that the social interaction can still be built up for someone like me through this other medium of online forums (P7).

Definitely I think being in clubs helps you meet new people and giving you a break from your work. It's a great way to make friends. Obviously it was harder this year with Covid, because so many things got cancelled, which is really sad. I guess that first year experience that most uni students get is going to be another casualty of Covid. But having the clubs once I joined in second semester, at least gave me some way of connecting and making friends. That's why clubs are even more important now. I've already been told my whole degree will be online next year, so I'm not even allowed on campus, except when I'm going in to do club stuff (P12).

Fun

All students interviewed believed club involvement had made their time at UTS more enjoyable. Responses predominantly focused upon the joy and friendships the club brought them, the balance it brought to their student experience, the positive impact it had on their mental well-being and the positive attitudes towards UTS that club involvement had left them with.

Comments included such things as:

Being involved in clubs whilst at University has definitely made my time as a student more enjoyable. I can't really imagine what my uni life would have been like if I hadn't been involved in clubs or societies, or at least going to the events that the societies put on. Because if you're studying and not doing anything social it's not a good balance for yourself. I think that is not only boring it would also be likely to contribute to student burnout. I would not have enjoyed uni so much if I hadn't been involved in societies. If I was just studying and not going to events - even if it is just career development events - they are definitely more enjoyable than just what we do in class (P2).

Definitely made University more enjoyable. Even things like the food society that gives away free food on certain days or the well the dance society is running a bit of a performance, so even if you're not directly involved in a club the atmosphere you can get when the club events are happening (P6).

Being involved in clubs has definitely made uni a lot more enjoyable. It's been fun. It's definitely been more meaningful because I enjoyed being part of the community (P9).

The findings correlate with previous research that found social networks developed by students provide support to overcome stress and difficulties associated with their studies (e.g., Yeh and Inose, 2003).

Being in the clubs and societies I am in has made uni 110 million percent more enjoyable. University can get really stressful, and if you don't have a good balance in other areas of your life sometimes it can consume you as a student. Involvement with clubs subconsciously helps you associate positive feelings and thoughts to the uni because you're associating the clubs with the uni. That means you're not just associating negative or bad feelings (like about bad exams, bad assessment feedback etc.) to your university experience. You're also attributing these positive thoughts and feelings that you're getting through club involvement to the whole university experience. Don't get me wrong, I love university and I love studying... but sometimes it can get really overwhelming (P10).

If you're part of this extracurricular things an clubs and societies, you're not just associating University with work, you're associating it with positive emotions too, Because there's somewhere you can make friends, have fun, be heard, share your feelings etc. That means when I think if you need I don't just think about the bad parts, I think of the good times and even the amazing teachers and tutors I have and my peers because I'm getting good feelings about uni as well. I have a real sense of pride in the clubs and what they achieve and help students to achieve. I just feel like the clubs have totally changed my University experience for the better (P10).

I definitely believe that being in clubs has enriched my uni life. It has made uni life more interesting because you look on the calendar and there are some good things to do instead of just studying, studying, studying (P16).

The club experience has definitely made my time at UTS more enjoyable. Just the friends and people I'm able to talk with now and get work done with now and move forward, so that even when I'm not in class I like just hanging around the campus because it feels good. It's just opened a lot of doors, both socially and educationally for me (P18).

There is no doubt being involved in a club makes university life more memorable and enjoyable. Just being part of a society and the memories that we carry forward even after we graduate, most of it is embedded into how well we've interacted with other people in different societies. When I graduate I know I will look back on my community volunteer scheme at Red Cross that I have been involved in and it will be giving me that inner joy that I could just walk from UTS to Chambers Court and then get back again, but in that time I will have had this interaction with a person who needed someone to talk to and that I made their life better for doing it. There is just that feeling of belonging to the university just by being in a society (P22).

Students also noted that being involved in clubs enhanced their university experience by helping them feel more connected to UTS and more engaged with campus life.

I definitely think the clubs added to my uni experience. If I was a member of a rowing and a ski club outside of uni, I probably would have still been having just as much fun, but because the clubs were through uni, it meant the whole time I have been a student the whole of my experiences have been related to uni. You know, all the memories, having friends across different sectors – it all is related to my UTS experience now (P23).

I feel like with my previous degree University was just a thing that I went to rather than something I was connected to or engaged with, but this time at UTS I feel totally connected (P7).

I can still tell you about all the universities and colleges I have been involved in. I remember them all so well because of the clubs and societies I have been involved with and that left an imprint mark and when I look back it feel so fulfilling. I will now feel that about UTS as well (P22).

Some students also made particular note of how important clubs had been to the enjoyment of their time at UTS in light of the impacts of Covid 19,

With Covid, and everything going online, I struggled. Having the regular online catch-ups with the rest of my committee helped me stay on track and because I had to do updates on how my events and role were progressing, it also motivated me to catch up with my studies. It was definitely really important to me for my mental health (P7).

Being part of a club definitely makes university more enjoyable. Especially with the situation I'm facing next year – because of Covid and everything going online. So if it wasn't for the clubs I would have virtually no interactions with other students (P11).

Other aspects of club involvement that translated into greater enjoyment overall for students were the friendships they formed, the support they felt that they had access to throughout their studies, and the opportunities they had to interact with (familiar or diverse) cultures.

Being involved in clubs has made my time at University so enjoyable. My vice president, treasurer and secretary in our club are like my best friends now. We didn't even know each other before we joined the SoC, but now I'm going to be one of their bridesmaids. The friends I have made have been such high-quality friends (P11).

If there weren't clubs I would have felt like I'd just been thrown into the sharks going to this whole big university with lots of people. It's like with clubs you have a backbone that is supporting you. If you didn't have that support you would be so much less confident to go up to people and be yourself. I feel like the club is a stabilising factor (P18).

It was like the knowledge and information I could absorb through the people in the clubs were icing on the cake of the information that I was given in class. In this way I felt I was getting more out of my education and my time at University (P7).

I joined the Indian Society, not just because I am Indian, but really because they celebrate all the festivals I like to celebrate. They have lots of festivals and they are really fun. I really enjoy participating in things like that (P3).

Self-Confidence

Most students stated their self-confidence had been significantly enhanced as a result of their club and society experiences. Aspinall (cited in Institute of Student Employers, 2018, p. 14) argues that confidence is a key skill that employers look for in their graduates: “the main challenge graduates face is accessing opportunities to develop key *soft skills* such as leadership, confidence and resilience. There is often a lack of awareness about the need to develop these skills”.

Being involved with the clubs was the first time at university where I got to work on independent, long-term projects and utilise my skills on those projects. I got to really think about what might work and to put those ideas into place. I was very self-confident to start with, but being involved in clubs definitely helped my confidence improve even further (P4).

The club encouraged students to test their wings. Whatever you need help with, there are people there to contribute and share with you how they would do it. These things help us in our understanding or getting a better view of the world. The more tasks I accomplish as part of being in leadership in the club, the better I am at it and the more self-confidence I have (P1).

Being involved in clubs has definitely helped me to build up my self-confidence because being a committee member I have been assigned to do all these tasks and I have to rely on myself to get stuff done. And then there are times where I have to make speeches in front of other people, or be a host for an event [most of the events we've done this year I've been the host] and I have to coordinate the speakers and thank them for coming and show them around and everything and introduce them to people so it has definitely improved my self confidence in that sort of a way (P2).

Especially for students who have held leadership positions and who have had to interact with industry [like arranging industry panels and workshops and things like that], it not only makes you more confident as a student but I think you are more confident once you graduate because you already have industry Connexions and feel like you know more about the industry. When you work in a leadership role in a club you know how to prepare for meetings and everything, so when you start working you have that experience already and you know what to expect (P20).

Many students said that simply by having friends and acquaintances they'd met through club interaction; they were more comfortable on campus in general and their self-confidence was increased.

When you have more friends, you have more self-confidence because you feel like people care about you and you have people who want to go to things with you (P14).

Definitely by joining the clubs and meeting more people I have become more self-confident as a student. If you know more people and feel like you have friends around you, you will become more confident (P16).

I definitely think the things students do in clubs help them to improve their self-confidence. Self-confidence is something that is usually lacking in a student when they first enter university. If they don't find somewhere they can talk to people and just come up to people and have conversations with them, and meet new friends, then their self-confidence will not go up. I don't see any other way they can increase their self-confidence if they don't start meeting people by joining clubs (P24).

Other comments related to how the experiences and connections made through clubs helped students feel more self-confident in their studies and in the classroom.

Being in clubs has helped me be more confident in class – to speak up – but I do still need to improve this even more (P3).

My involvement with clubs has definitely made me feel a lot more self-confident because if I wasn't in the clubs I would never have been able to do this interview with you. I am now more confident in class to speak up. I was a fairly confident person but English is not my first language. I've already done a marketing degree and I talk to new people quite freely, but I think the club has definitely helped me increase that confidence to a higher level (P5).

Being in clubs has definitely helped my self-confidence as a student because I've been able to have conversations with students outside of my tutorials and lectures and with my mentor, and those conversations have definitely helped me with my confidence in approaching assignments and assessments (P10).

Being involved in the clubs has definitely made me a lot more confident. Before, I felt generally quite shy. I wouldn't do anything 'outreache'. I'd just do my uni classes and go home, but now knowing people and being confident enough to go up to people and ask for stuff just carries over into my overall self-concept and I feel so much more confident in lectures and tutorials as well (P17).

When we had to present our ideas as part of the start-up support program it definitely helped improve my presentation skills and my confidence because we had to make sure it was well researched and thought through and that our presentation was engaging. Because we got a good result out of it, that helped boost my confidence all round as a student. I guess just having the club support behind me somehow made me feel more confident just to go up to other people I met at uni and introduce myself as well. I hadn't done those kinds of things before, so it really helped me do better in presentation assessments and group work (P21).

Work-Life Balance

Almost all students interviewed felt that whilst club leadership did involve extra work, the load could easily be managed if students organised their time well, made study a priority when necessary and learned to delegate tasks.

They also felt the time management training and skills club leaders received, and the opportunity to learn how to prioritise and manage their time well, meant that their work-life balance was improved as a result of club or society membership,

I think being part of a club actually helps clubs with their work-life balance from a sense of all the people... I'll split this up. As a member of a club, yes, from the perspective of 'Okay, here are a whole lot of things I can do at university apart from my studies and if I show up to them I'm going to get a lot of value, and if I don't, then ok I'm going to miss it. People aren't necessarily aware of that at the start but once they start joining in they realise how good they are. Now I'm going to start looking for more'. Once they attended three or four events they often start to want to get involved and it really helps make their free time more valuable (P4).

Being in clubs definitely helps me get a better work-life balance because I have somewhere to go when I need a break from studying where I can be with people with the same interests as me (P5).

Personally, being in clubs and societies has actually helped me with work-life balance because I like to be busy. If I've got seven things to do in a day I'll probably get them all done. If I've got two things to do I'll struggle. That's just how I operate. I'm highly scheduled and I like being busy. That's why I struggled during Covid. It felt like, I've got two weeks to read three paragraphs and I just couldn't do it. So bad (P8).

We have executive training days through Activate UTS and in those training days they talk a lot about time management, how to schedule your time, how to deal with burnout, how to communicate effectively in a team, how to resolve conflict. So those sessions are great. I found that the executives from my team who went to that had a much better handle on their time management and how to prioritise things as we went through the semester (P22).

What matters when you are student is learning how to divide your time. Once you are good at time management, you will be able to allocate time for everything that you have to do in your daily activities. So I think being involved in a society only helps students with being able to get their work-life balance right because you learn to manage your time well (P22).

Other students, while admitting the workload for club executives could at times be daunting, felt the advantages of learning to cope with time constraints and competing priorities, and to organise yourself accordingly, were important professional attributes that would be integral to their career progression,

From an executive's point of view, I remember often sitting up working on club stuff until midnight, 1am; a lot of things I wasn't doing very efficiently, but that was part of the learning experience too. Doing all the tasks that needed to be done took a lot of energy that wasn't related to studies – but in another way it was quite exciting to know that I was actually creating something really cool. I guess it's like, 'Oh, it was such a good year and I'm glad it's over' (P4).

It definitely can be challenging at times to have to balance my personal life, my studies and my club activities but I wouldn't really have it any other way. It keeps me grounded. When you have this range of responsibilities you have to plan things well and be prepared for things to pop up so you learn to be flexibly and responsible and you learn how to meet deadlines. When something has to be done it always gets done, even if it means a sleepless night... it never doesn't get done (P18).

There was a small number of students who felt the additional workload or attending numerous events could negatively impact student performance for those who took on too much, who had competing pressures or who found it difficult to prioritise,

For people who struggle with competing pressures, however, I think being heavily involved in clubs could be really hard (P8).

Work-life balance is manageable, but for me personally – I'm a bit of a 'yes girl'. I find it hard to say no – so I take on too much and then struggle a bit with burnout after a while. But I do say to my executive team, that really they should only need to do about 20 minutes of work a day on club activities. If you stick to that and plan so that it is a regular daily thing, it's manageable – but if you do nothing all week and you go and find you've got 100 unread emails and jobs that need to be done for an event then that's when your schedule gets thrown off because you've done nothing (P11).

I have quite a full study load (five subjects per semester) so I only joined the one club because I wanted to make sure I didn't get overloaded and that I could keep my studies on track. If it weren't for that I would love to have been able to join a whole range of clubs (P21).

However, most respondents said club members were very understanding and helpful if one's workload became overwhelming, and that being in a supportive club environment meant there were always other people to share the load, thereby reducing pressure,

Societies know that you're a student and that you're juggling a lot of things to get the work done. They know you have other commitments and they're very conscious about finding a time that suits everyone. No one is excluded from this sort of thing. When events are organised, they are not very often... maybe once every couple of months. They are always done in ways where people can say no to things that they feel might take up too much of their time. The societies are always very accommodating of people's external lives. It really hasn't had much of an impact on my external life. Other things take up much more of my time (P10).

Citizenship

Many students believed club and society activities created opportunities to make a difference; whether that be to the club itself, other club members, the wider UTS community, the local community or global initiatives. Responses in relation to making a difference to the lives of fellow students included,

It is really important to me to have the opportunity to share with others and help them. The university clubs are an excellent way to do that. I want to help nurses who are starting their careers who may be a midwife in 10 years' time. I always encourage

people to get into all the activities that will help them develop the important skills they will need once they graduate (P22).

I also do a lot of photography for a lot of the other clubs that they can then use on their social media and stuff, so that is pretty rewarding too. They're extra things I like to do. I love photography and I love learning, so being able to go and take photos that are going to be used in a professional sense, it actually helps me improve my skills as a photographer but also helps the clubs (P17).

Another one of our club goals is to involve more international students and get them to engage because we really want to help them out and include them. I know for a fact it can be hard for them to get internships because they don't have the networks. So we've made that a goal for us and we've had a few international students come through and I think they've had a really lovely time. We all work hard to try to get the international students internships at places we either work at or where we know people. It's great for us to learn about their culture, but we can both gain from having international students (P15).

Part of why I wanted to join the club was that I really wanted to help other Taiwanese students who have come to Australia to study because I know what it is like. Especially because I have studied in Taiwan and now here, I can help give them advice and tips. I can share my experiences, like, 'Oh first year, what was it like? What are the challenges? Etc.' and that will help make their own student experience a bit easier I think (P14).

I've decided that next year I am going to be on an executive team for some of the clubs and societies I'm in and I'm going to be a mentor for younger students. I do feel this sense of wanting to give back. I want to continue with these clubs and contribute to their development (P10).

When you are in a leadership role on a club you have the opportunity to help other students connect with each other and to achieve things. Really for the club itself, each club has some sort of purpose and outcome. It might be to support a particular element of culture, or art, or food or even the video gaming community, just by the presence of having those sorts of clubs, people have the opportunity to come together, so that gives the students leading those clubs to contribute (P4).

Students also saw clubs and societies contributing to the positive development of their university, the local community surrounding UTS, and global initiatives such as the Red Cross. Responses often highlighted the sense of joy and rewarded that came from spending non-study time with other students whilst making a difference to the lives of those in need or to socially responsible causes.

The thing I like most, or the reason I am a part of the extra-curricular activities is because I really believe in giving back to this community in small and many other ways. Clubs are really a way I can give back to the community (P1).

There are a lot of societies for which actually going out there and making a difference is their core goal. AIESEC is one of them. They actually help students take a role in global leadership and pass on important skills. SSI which we just started is another one. The Big Lift – going out around Australia and doing volunteer trips for the last five years. Red Cross Society. All those different things. Some of those clubs have a very clear purpose of making a difference. But even the ones who don't have that as their core purpose, still contribute and make a difference (P4).

You're making something of your life and it gives you a feeling of self-fulfilment and pride at your achievements. That makes you feel really happy (P10).

The consulting club I'm in works with small to medium enterprises to solve problems or issues they are having in the workplace. They're real clients who we've either had to source ourselves or start-ups associated with UTS. In a way they're getting free consulting. They're not paying anything; the students are basically volunteering their time to help them with their issue. They might be smaller start-ups and they're looking at how to grow their business across Australia, or it might be an investment advisory company and they want some research into how they can better cater to their customer needs, so we'll look at doing marketing strategies. It ranges in terms of the scope of problems, which is why the teams have students from different disciplines. That really helps us with networking and building up good relationships across industry (P15).

I like knowing I'm making a difference and the clubs give me that opportunity, especially with Engineers without Borders, where we can volunteer our time and do some humanitarian aid work (P17).

I definitely think being part of a club helps you to have opportunities to contribute. You can create different opportunities for others and put opinions forward that can have an impact on how something is created or develops. You can do that independently but also with the support of your club (P18).

The main club I am in is entirely focussed on helping students undertake socially and sustainably responsible projects on a voluntary basis. It encourages new ideas and supports start-ups. I 100 per cent think being in clubs give students opportunities to make a difference and contribute. My club is all about social entrepreneurship and bettering the community we live in, so it is all about opportunities to give back. I also think that club activities like what my club does helps to connect UTS, the institution, with the surrounding community. Our ideas are coming from UTS students when we do our competitions, and that gets out into the community, with people saying, 'Oh, do you know what the UTS students are doing here?' and the community appreciates that we are giving back. That is all good for UTS's reputation in the local area. I know in the past Enactus has helped lots of local businesses and organisations (P21).

Academic Success and Club membership

31% of the survey respondents indicated they are exceeding expectations academically, while 60% stated they are meeting expectations and 9% stated they perform below expectations.

Significant differences could be noted between international and domestic students ($\chi^2(2)=28.9$, Cramer's $V=.241$), with international students more likely to state that they perform below expectations and domestic students more likely to think they exceed expectations. Differences by other sociodemographic characteristics could not be noted.

Some club membership characteristics also showed a strong association with academic performance. While there were no differences between social and sport clubs, academic performance by club membership duration showed significant differences. Those being in the club during the first semester were more likely to assess their academic performance as below expectations. However, the study duration did not have a significant association with academic performance.

There is a significant relationship between the level of club engagement and academic performance. Those that perform below expectations had a significantly lower mean club involvement score (3.3) compared to those that meet expectations (3.9) and those that exceed expectations (4.3). Similarly, leadership in the club was significantly associated with academic performance, with those in leadership positions more likely to state they exceed expectations. The literature indicates that involvement in clubs typically boosts students' academic performance (Chan, 2016; Hunt, 2005). While no causal relationship can be determined as

part of the survey, the student interviews suggest that engaging in a club can positively influence on academic performance.

All students interviewed said they believed there was a direct correlation between club involvement and improved student performance and success. The main reason given for this was the significant support they felt they received from other club members. This included support from students in their own year and course, mentors, students doing their course but who were further along in their studies or even students from other disciplines. Sentiments were expressed in various ways, including:

I feel like being in club leadership helped me get better academic results. For me, I had a mentor who was a year above me in most of the same subjects and a lot of the time she would share resources and her experiences with me and that definitely helped me to understand the material and what we were being asked to do a lot better. She was very helpful, especially during Covid when I wasn't able to meet with anyone. Usually you'd at least be able to collaborate with your peers and say, like, 'What are you thinking of doing for this assignment, or what mark did you get for this and everything', but without face to face classes this wasn't possible. The majority of advice and guidance I got came from my group of mentees and my mentor. So that definitely helped boost my academic results, as well as my feeling of involvement with the university (P10).

The older students were often happy to help other students with things like study notes etc. If I had questions about like what major should I go into or should I transfer into another course or something like that they could give me helpful insight into what it was all about. That helped me so much knowing which type of subjects to do. Being in the clubs has helped me perform better in my studies mainly because other club members help you out so much (P2).

I do think being a part of a club helps you be a better student and get better outcomes. MedSoc helped this year organising study sessions for our last exam, being online, and they were really good because they worked like a group study session so they got someone who had done well in the subject the year before to run it, and they really helped my studies in that way. Another thing I got from being in a club that helped with my studies was the MedSoc chats. From them I've managed to form group chats with people who have done the same subjects as me, especially being online we can chat about the same subject. It's been really useful in that way (P6).

There were benefits I had not even contemplated. One was around assignments. Not so much getting help with assignments but more about things not to bother doing in an assignment. Helping you not waste time... because they were going to be a bit rabbit hole and not deliver any outcomes. This is beyond what the description is within a subject. They can just help you with things like hey when you're in this subject just ignore this area because it's not relevant to what we do. Focus on this over here, this is really important. That was completely unexpected. I didn't realise that that would be part of the mix. Added to that is the idea of historic context. Those students who have done things a semester or a year or even two years before and who know those particular lecturers have valuable contextual knowledge to give you about what has happened in the past. You don't get that from anywhere else other than those students you made in clubs who are further ahead in your degree (P7).

It's kind of weird the amount of future opportunities that can be set up through the support network and the relationships you make, because you play with a whole different range of ages and students are at different stages of their studies or their careers (P18).

One interesting thing I witnessed was where some of the alumni were still in a forum and they were helping the students get their head around some big concepts. For example, one of the job types that's around at the moment is a full stack developer. Basically means you do software engineering from the very start for the very start of the user experience right through to the back end of storing the data and system interaction. At times it is hard for a 20-year old to know what that means if they've not been out there doing it in their job. They can read it and understand the logic of what's being described, but some of these alumni have been absolutely amazing at being able to provide translation for the current students. Just being able to say, 'This is what it is in the context of what you're studying right now. So you're doing Java, so it would be like you did Java and then you added on this over here and then you put some HTML here,' etc. and it was just beautiful to watch. It happened multiple times and I thought gosh, that's a really clear purpose or the reason why the alumni are involved. Obviously they get some early talent on the way through as well, but I thought this is a fantastic forum for students to understand exactly what the job market is all about (P7).

A lot of the people I know from the club are also willing to help me in things like assignments or exams that are coming up that I know I'm going to struggle with. I can ask them questions and maybe access some of the resources that they were given that might be different to what I've already got and things like that. They can also make suggestions, like have you tried this and have you done that... so that's really helpful knowing you've got that support network you can access when you need to (P18).

One of the great things that the Society of communications does is if you sign up to their mentoring programme as a mentee, you get paired with an older student who is studying the same degree as you and usually doing the same major. I was paired with an amazing mentor, and she has just helped me so much this year (P10).

Being in clubs made me a better student because it helped me get a broad overview as to what the priorities are, that UTS wants to create in their student or for their students. I guess in terms of making them employment-ready. Because being in the president's role, I've had to come from, 'Why are we holding these parties in pubs where everyone's drinking?' to now seeing the product of those parties, where people have hung out together over the years because of those friendships they made at those parties, and helped each other through the classes and now in the third year, they're still maintaining those friendships along the way and about to enter the workforce together and they can say, 'Yep. I know this person in this industry, I know that person in that workplace...' I do feel now that I can see the benefits of having those connections and friendships from the start (P13).

Some of my subject planning has been deliberately structured around the interactions I have been able to have with other club and society members who have done or are doing subjects I am interested in. Being involved in the clubs has definitely helped me with being a successful student in a couple of ways. Firstly my subject selection. There are certainly subjects I have selected for the future that I would have selected on my own if I hadn't been in those two societies, but I learned so much about them and decided they were going to be very useful. The second thing is around what not to do, so streamlining study and avoiding trying to focus on an area that I realised (after discussions) wasn't going to be as useful to me as other subjects were (P7).

I think being in club leadership definitely increases my motivation to do well academically. There's a buddy program in UTSOC and I love being part of it, and I feel like I have been able to help my buddies who are in first year. That's facilitated through the club, and even on our committee, someone will be like, hey, I'm tossing up between this major and that major – has anyone done it? And there will be someone who says, yeah, like this major is rubbish and this one is great and here's why. So that's really good. It makes it so much better if you want to know about things like transferring, or

subjects or majors and things like that. You don't have to go through the student centre, you can just ask the other students and there's always someone to help with information. As well as getting a relationship with that person it also makes you feel like you are part of a community (P8).

I guess things like having other people in the society who were doing the same classes meant you could think through assignments or compare feedback on things and it helped you feel more supported or like other people were having the same feelings as what you were having about the course material. Sometimes if I was procrastinating about things, just being able to talk to those people really helped. Or if they were doing work, it would motivate me to do work (P13).

Students also felt their club experiences had improved their oral and presentation skills, their group-working skills, their problem-solving skills and their verbal communication skills overall. They said these skills then had a direct positive impact upon their confidence as a student and their performance in presentations in the classroom. This was particularly evident for those who had held leadership positions,

I definitely think being in a club or society helps students perform better, especially in things like their presentation skills. It also helps students, particularly international students, contribute more in tutorials because they are more confident and their communication skills are improved (P20).

Being in clubs have definitely helped me with my studies, particularly in the area of communication. I have to do presentations, and also with many assignments I have to write reflections about my past experiences and internships and everything. We also have to make video presentations for the teachers, so by improving my communication I am much better and faster at all these things. I am starting to think in English instead of my native language, so that shows how much the club interaction is helping. The more I participate, and the more I speak with other club members, the better I'm becoming (P3).

Prior to Covid our club groups had to go to the Price Waterhouse offices and pitch our solutions to a room full of like 30 or 40 people that included industry people who worked in the different professions. Everyone is always very nervous, everyone has lots of rehearsals and puts so much effort into it. It's like doing group work in a way but with the club it's voluntary so you know everyone in your group is working really hard and wants to do a great job and that motivates you to do really well too. Once you've had to do a big presentation in front of industry professionals, and then you go back and do a presentation in the classroom, you're just not scared anymore because you've already done something scarier. You've got to the point where you think, 'Oh – it's just kids my age. I'm not worried about this one now' (P15).

Because of my club involvement and the friends I've made through the clubs I feel like I'm now much more confident to speak up in lectures and tutorials (P17).

I think working on the group projects that we did in our club, and presenting our ideas to a judging panel, we were definitely better placed to do the oral presentations and things that we often have to do at uni. Having already been in a stressful or pressured environment where we had to present as part of a competition, it made class presentations seem less stressful (P21).

The training, workshops and industry panels offered for club members was another major factor which students stated had contributed to them achieving greater student success. This was a common aspect cited by both general club members and leaders, although leaders noted the additional benefit of having more direct access to professionals and academics sitting on such panels and they felt the relationships they built with panellists gave them even greater development,

When I became president of my club we were given workshops about how to approach our assignments more effectively. That really helped me in my studies. Also they offered lots of leadership workshop training for executive club members and that has benefitted me as well. They have a lot of events to help develop our leadership skills. They helped me learn things that will help me in my career and professionally (P16).

There were career-related events run through the clubs by students online this year (because of Covid). They were incredible! Just super, super interesting, usually run by 3rd or 4th year students who were usually sharing something that was either topical or controversial and they were just outstanding. Just the level of detail that was there. It definitely had a somewhat nerdy flavour to it, but I got off each of them completely energised and excited at the prospects, and with a level of understanding that I would never have got from doing just readings. It was fascinating and I loved those (P2).

What we learn at our club and the workshops we do on presenting and problem-solving 100 per cent makes me a more confident and competent student and perform better in the presentations I have to do for class assessments (P15).

You are able to meet people from your industry via the networking events, you are able to meet other students so that you have some support in your studies, you are able to be a part of the activities, you are able to attend the information events and I think all of that really creates a success mindset for the students at UTS. They are the building blocks and conditioning that the students need to create their careers the way they want to. I think it is very crucial from the success standpoint (P24).

I definitely think it helps you with your networking, which makes everything much easier for you after that; in your studies and also for job opportunities. It helps you go in through the back door sometimes in a job that might not be advertised. You already have a foot in the door. Most jobs are not ever advertised. Around 80 per cent of the jobs available are never advertised and are filled through networks, so that is why networking in the clubs is just so important If you want to think about your future career (P20).

Being on the ethics committee I was able to read through submissions for the Faculty of Health and it also helped me on getting insights into what they look for when they are reading through a submitted proposal. So all of that built on my knowledge on every stage and I aspired to go on with my studies (P22).

I've had job interviews set up for me and I've been recommended to people by the older girls helping me out, who have already been established in their careers, so not even just job interviews but also advice. Like when it comes to something they're doing in their career how I resonate with that, having people to talk to, to find out more about a certain career path, or things to do post-university. It's a great community (P18).

For many students, club activities provided opportunities for them to not only learn new skills but also practice the theoretical concepts they had been exposed to in class. They described the club environment as a 'safe space' in which they could test out their skills without too great a risk and gain first-hand experiences around how the classroom theory related to the 'real world'.

Whatever I was learning from my degree, this was a good platform to actually utilise it. Even something as simple as doing marketing research; things like who was my audience, what they wanted, and how I should measure the data I had. Somewhere down the line I could always apply what I was learning in the classroom to what I was doing at the club. So I could say 'Alright this is what I read in class, how can I apply it now?' The club was very proactive in encouraging me to apply anything that I was giving them. They were happy to apply any of the concepts I wanted to try to try out (P1).

I think the experiences I've had as a result of being part of a club have definitely helped me develop as a student and as a professional. Being an architect or a designer, you need to spend a lot of time discussing things with other people, like other designers, builders or clients. So that is really the main area of my future industry that I have gained skills around because of being involved in clubs. I have had to learn how to manage people, how to negotiate through conflict, how to motivate teams and those types of people skills. I have had to do those things in my club roles, which is something I would never have been able to learn just from readings or sitting in class (P14).

In club leadership I am definitely trying to bridge that gap between the theory and academic material and what happens in the real world. I was doing a subject in strategic management - that was my sub major. So with the club I actually had a team around me and we could develop a strategy or create a strategy because at the end of the day we all are students. What we were doing was we were just borrowing the academic material and applying it to the club, seeing what could work here and what might work there. Certain concepts we discussed in class I then used the opportunities in the clubs to apply those concepts and test them. When you apply your concepts to real life your knowledge becomes more enhanced. Then you can actually understand why you're reading about in a particular thing in class or how can you extract more (from what you're reading). You get more in-depth details about what your topic is and what you're learning (P1).

For example, I'm expected to understand things like marketing and branding in some of my classes or how to communicate in writing with people, how to get people to participate or engage with things. That's really the goal of marketing – so by being able to do all those things in a club you get to practice what you are learning in class. Doing a marketing role in a club would give you real-life examples to use in class or in assignments about how the theory works in the real world. This helps students do better because it really gives you a flavour of real life looks like, or the real world (P19).

Other ways in which students felt their club experience had made them more successful in their studies included enhanced time management skills, improved self-confidence, increased motivation to succeed and by providing them with balance and mental health benefits as a result of being able to spend time away from study,

Being in the club has helped me be a better student by making me get serious about time management. I'm not quite on top of it to the extent to where it should be, it is definitely the club involvement that is helping me get better at it. Just having the skill of being able to juggle competing commitments has made me realise what it takes to get the range of things I want to do, done (P18).

The importance of clubs and societies is huge at university. Being involved with clubs will help you in your mental state, it will help you in career objectives, it will help someone in each and every field. Whether you are here for your personal development, or your career, they will definitely get benefit from being involved in clubs (P3).

I definitely think it's important to have a lot of different and diverse clubs at uni for whatever interest students may have, because I feel like uni life really needs that sort of balance in between studying and having fun. Also, with clubs they give you a lot of opportunities to make friends and have events that are really cheap but I found it the whole time, so students... they don't have so much money. Societies will have a lot of events that are really cheap or even free, like a lot of social events such as drinks night, alot of the time they are free after you join the society which is usually only about \$15.00 to join. Societies and clubs are just a great way to connect with people so that people don't feel like uni life is boring and mundane (P2).

We learn a lot from interacting with other people and when you are in a society or club you meet people that are at different levels and people who have had different experiences and you learn from them. It builds your confidence as a student, which helps you to perform better (P22).

The main way the clubs have really helped me be a better student is because they are a necessary distraction from just studying all the time. They keep me balanced. If I was studying 24/7 I would not be a good student. I want to have some fun too, so that was why I joined the clubs, so the clubs make my studies more enjoyable (P5).

Some students also noted that at times they were able to use their club experiences as examples in classroom discussions, helping classmates better understand concepts being presented by academics.

One subject I took - I think it was strategic communications - and it was pretty much how communication structures work but within organisations, and the tutor must have known I was president of the society, so she asked me for an example where I've encountered an obstacle in my communication with society members. So I gave her an example, and she was able to use that to demonstrate the concept she was teaching. So that was relatable and interesting for everyone (P13).

In relation to whether club involvement impacted relationships with academics, most felt that given there was little interaction between club activities and academics, the impact was minimal, and at best coincidental.

Unfortunately, there's not a lot of involvement from the academics in the clubs, so it doesn't necessarily help you create connections or relationships with teachers (P17).

One respondent had a different view, however, stating they felt there were some club activities which offered opportunities for enhanced student-academic relations,

I definitely think being involved with the faculty-based clubs gets you more involved with the faculty in general. For example, I can speak to not only the staff in our own faculty, but we also have connections with other faculties through the club and I get to interact with staff from them as well. All of our networking, academic and professional events are supported by these faculties and have representatives from the faculty there. For example, our medical science and research career panel includes six researcher coordinators from UTS who are at that event to find honours students so they can connect with them for research projects. They can then pick them up on LinkedIn and get an honours project lined up, and the society platform makes it all such an easy process. Being in leadership and helping to organise those types of panels means I form lots of connections with staff and researchers across the university. I have also spoken on some industry panels, which have been organised by some of the teachers, so I've had interactions with them and they see me as being a responsible student, so I feel like they see me as a committed and driven student and I feel they treat me a little differently. These are really good relationships to have for a number of reasons (P11).

Satisfaction with UTS

Respondents were also asked about the impact of their club membership on their opinion of UTS. **Table 7** shows that club membership greatly influenced students' satisfaction with UTS overall, its facilities, programs and social environment.

Table 7: Student satisfaction with UTS and aspects of UTS

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Mean	N
Satisfaction with UTS	3.0	10.0	43.0	44.0	3.28	470
Satisfaction with your choice of program at UTS	7.0	9.1	39.6	44.3	3.21	470
Satisfaction with UTS facilities	5.8	10.9	40.2	43.2	3.21	468
Satisfaction with UTS social environment	4.5	13.0	41.8	40.7	3.19	469
Satisfaction with ActivateUTS	6.2	10.0	48.0	35.8	3.13	469
Satisfaction with UTS Student Services	11.1	13.9	40.6	34.4	2.98	468
Satisfaction with UTS Teaching Quality	13.4	16.4	44.3	25.8	2.83	469

There are few significant differences in the responses noted by groups of respondents. Respondents in leadership roles were more likely to indicate that they are satisfied with ActivateUTS and the UTS social environment to a great extent.

Moreover, there were significant differences in the responses by club engagement. Those more engaged in a club, also rated their satisfaction with UTS and its aspects higher than those who were little engaged in a club.

The student interviews supported the finding that club membership affects satisfaction with UTS. Many students stated that the range and number of clubs and societies on offer at UTS impacted their opinion of the university as a whole. They referred to having a ‘sense of pride’ in the university, a feeling of patriotism and a bond where the university felt like ‘a part of their life’. Some said they believed these sentiments would continue once they had graduated,

I honestly felt such a sense of pride going to UTS because I’m part of this society. I think if I hadn’t joined any society I would just think of UTS as just a uni. Like I would feel like ‘Yeah I could switch to USyd or UNSW’, but because I’m like part of a society I feel connected to the university in a way that most students wouldn’t if they weren’t part of a society. I definitely have a much deeper relationship with the university because of my extracurricular involvement (P10).

We compete a lot with other domestic universities in our club, especially USyd and UNSW, and although UTS is comparatively quite a young university and quite new, and they have been the underdog of these types of things. But in terms of case competitions in the recent years, what I’ve seen is that even though we haven’t been there for as long as they have in this kind of space, the nice thing about UTS is that the students are very creative and forward-thinking, and not your typical ‘old-school’ way of thinking. The culture of UTS, with the diversity of thought that we have here, is what makes it so special and unique, and we’ve been able to see a lot. Being in the clubs, therefore, has definitely changed my perceptions of UTS. IT’s like, ‘Yes, we may not have the history and tradition of the other big Sydney universities, but that means we’re not as set in our ways or have feelings or superiority and instead we use creativity and new thinking and cross-disciplinary approaches to problem solving. I’m very proud of UTS as a university because of that (P15).

I definitely don’t think my University experience would have been as positive if the clubs didn’t exist. I definitely think the clubs have a really valuable place (P6).

If the clubs did not exist, I would probably view university just as something I turn up to do my work and then leave. I would not consider it to be a big part of my life. My relationship with the university during semester is, I'm at uni my whole life is uni and I focus on being a UTS student. I'm like on this day I'm at this club, on this day I have this club meeting on this day I'm meeting my friends at the library etc. Uni becomes my whole life during semester. I love that and I think that if the clubs didn't exist I would find it much harder to make uni a big part of my life and I would be demotivated (P10).

I think in the UTS clubs you can be anyone and do any sort of activities you want, so it makes me feel good being there as a student just because I am joining the clubs (P5).

Some students drew comparisons to what was offered at other universities, or the experiences of their family members and friends,

Being in clubs have definitely influenced my opinion of UTS. My sister does Business and Law at Western Sydney University, and she always complains to me saying, 'Oh, you do so much at uni. You're part of all these societies. We don't really have that here at Western Sydney,' and when she says that I kind of feel a lot of gratitude for UTS and for having Activate UTS which supports the societies and keeps them running year after year (P17).

Because of my involvement with clubs, my patriotism for UTS has definitely been heightened, because in my conversations with people who go to other universities they aren't part of many clubs or societies, and they do feel a bit of connection to their universities, but the connection I have seems to be much stronger (P10).

There were also references made regarding how people outside UTS perceived the university as a result of the club and society profile.

I know many people who are already working in my industry at the moment, and when I tell them that we have this huge number of clubs and societies at UTS their impression of UTS definitely increases. They tell me about what it was like where they studied in their colleges and they compare it to what it is like studying at UTS ... their perspective of UTS raises in a very positive direction, and they feel like they wish they could have participated in those sorts of clubs when they were students (P3).

I think the clubs are a big factor of people's perception of UTS. The UTS clubs are known so well as being a big part of this university, and I guess if the clubs didn't exist when other unis have them, UTS wouldn't look so good (P6).

I think generally throughout the region, UTS has a good reputation for offering lots of clubs. Maybe it is because of having lots of different buildings and being spread out, that the clubs have become so important, but definitely in my conversations with friends at UNSW and USyd, none of my friends really join clubs. They don't feel it's as necessary there. But it definitely makes a big difference here (P10).

Areas of Concern

Students were invited to comment on any negative aspects of club involvement they perceived. Whilst approximately 60 per cent of students did respond; there was little consistency in the issues raised. This indicates that people's individual experiences are quite varied, and that whilst there is a range of areas in which delivery of the club experience at UTS could be improved, no single issue is able to be identified as common or pervasive.

For some students, there were challenges associated with carrying out their club leadership role, including dealing with conflicts and clashes, managing under-performing team members and coping with the disappointment of failed events.

I have also had some difficulties to overcome in my roles with clubs. With the politics of clubs there are sometimes clashes, and you have to deal with them in a professional way. An example was when someone wasn't doing their job. We had six people in one particular team. We really needed more people, because the workload was really high, but for that semester we only had six people. I had to do two roles, marketing and club administration and sponsorship. Everyone was all doing their own role as well as someone else's because some roles were vacant. This was really hard when it comes to assignment time. If you're preparing for an event (which usually are held right after the assignment periods are finished) you have to be doing a lot of the work at the same time as when assignments are due. On top of that, you have your own social life and your friends or family at the same time. Time management is really important. Sometimes it can all end up really negative. It is usually then, when everyone is under pressure, that the clashes come, like 'You were supposed to do this. Why didn't you?' etc (P1).

Sometimes it is even necessary for the club executive to take disciplinary action because someone in the team may just not be doing their job at all. This makes it so hard for everyone else. They had done nothing at all for the whole semester (P1).

It can also be very disheartening if you organise an event and the audience doesn't turn up. We do the best we can, and if an audience turns up that demonstrates a good success – but if they don't you feel you have failed. We deliver a lot of quality so if they don't we feel like we're going down the drain (P1).

One issue upon which many students did agree was that the workload associated with club leadership was at times overwhelming, and that there were few external motivators to inspire or recognise one's efforts.

A negative impact of club involvement for me as a student was that sometimes the burden was too high for me to do everything. If you don't have enough people on your team, sharing the burden, then it can be too much to the ones doing all the work (P1).

Definitely for me, one of the drawbacks was the amount of time I had to spend on club activities. Especially when I was the only person on the executive. For me personally, it took time away from what I otherwise could have done with my spare time (P9).

I also think burnout can impact some of the clubs. Some come out and have a lot of great events in semester 1 and then they don't do nearly as much in semester 2 and I think it comes down to having a large team and good delegation of tasks. You have to make sure you don't burn out, so people don't get tired. Being an executive takes a lot of time too. As president I had heaps of work to do, but that was because I do put a lot of effort into anything I take on. It gets to a stage where it's hard to separate your own time from your executive role time, and it's hard to switch off and it can be quite exhausting (P11).

I would say the only disadvantage of being involved in leadership of a club or society is that at times I had to say no to things I could have done, because I had to carry out club duties. Even at times I've seen some full-time jobs I could probably have gone for, but didn't because I know that although I could probably work full-time and do uni part-time, I couldn't do the club stuff as well. That was mainly because I was just so heavily involved in the club, but if you were only a general member or only had a small exec role, it wouldn't be so much of an issue. Still, I think I made the right choice because I want to be able to say to future employers, yes, I have had the opportunity to lead a big team, and the club has given me that (P13).

Undoubtedly it is harder when you have to balance club duties with uni work and sometimes your own job but I think it's good to learn to have to cope with a bit of pressure like that (P15).

I am internally motivated to do things and strive to do well, but I think it would be nice if there were more external motivators as well, like courses or trainings being offered by Activate UTS, or other things. Having internal motivation does drive me to do things, but it would be great to have additional, external motivators provided by the Activate UTS team. Even if it was as simple as food coupons or something; something that said 'You're a valued part of us', a part of the Activate UTS community (P1).

Other students expressed concerns with things such as inconsistencies in the quality of club leadership across the board, a lack of adequate funding, poor communication practices between some club leadership and its members and challenges related to administration process with Activate UTS or the broader UTS institution,

I think the clubs could improve their communication strategies because once you join as a general member, then the clubs just post all the information on Facebook. People can ask questions, but the events aren't explained in much detail. I think anyone who joins should be contacted by other communication channels as well. Perhaps they could create more WhatsApp groups or messenger groups or personal emails because not everyone just uses Facebook. This way I think they would get more people participating in more events (P3).

I'm someone who does not have any social media; no Facebook or Instagram or anything like that. So there were a couple of clubs I joined and a couple of things I was sent which tried to push me onto those platforms too try to get me to engage that way, but I couldn't really do. That meant it was a bit of a struggle to stay engaged with them. As opposed to Flap or Discord and they're easy to get involved with without giving away your life's personal details. I guess that's something those clubs need to be aware of, like how are they engaging people who are not necessarily on those platforms? (P7).

I don't think there is enough funding for the clubs or promotion. I think there are a few people who are super involved in clubs and societies, but most people are just not involved at all. That is not good. I think there needs to be more done to get more people involved. I don't think engagement is their strong point. Some of the clubs are really great, but most could be better (P9).

Some of the things we have to do in club leadership can be very frustrating too, because they take much longer to get going than it would if you were just doing them yourself or if you were a staff member. Like, why does it take four weeks to get a room booking confirmed etc? Things have to go through processes and get approvals and all of that – so you do have to have patience. Like, as a society we want to do 'x', but the university won't just let us do it straight away. That can create a slight sense of frustration, which at times negatively impacts your sense of connection to UTS because it feels you are not as closely connected to the university as others are. Especially if it builds up over time or it's not resolved. Overall the experience of being on the exec team of a club outweighs these negatives, but this is just one frustrating aspect (P4).

Education and Data struggled to find a way to engage people more broadly. They were very good at the events and stuff, but when they disappeared because of Covid, it felt like they were a little bit lost at sea compared to some of the others who had this really strong forum structure which just grew and grew (P7).

This isn't so much a negative, more an observation. I attended two AGMs this year and was involved in what was happening as an observer, and listening to see

comments made by potential incoming executive members and those made by outgoing office bearers... It did strike me there were so many things that could be added which were very simple but which could also add a dash of reality as to what the real world is going to look like when the students arrive there. an AGM that is being run by a corporate well looks slightly different. It's not too far from where they are but there are just a few little things that could help them run things more smoothly and prepare them better for the outside world to come. I guess I just feel like there was some things I contribute but there isn't really a pathway for those contributions to be made by someone like me (P7).

Different clubs and societies have different offerings and it depends on the staff that are on the committee at the time. It's compulsory for all clubs to have an O-week stall, otherwise they don't get funding. But if they're there it doesn't necessarily mean they're a great club to join. Some of the less active clubs that don't have a lot of activities and don't post a lot might not be good ones to join, so you need to do a bit of research before you just join what sounds like a good club on the day (P11).

With the dog society, which was a paid membership (\$5) it was a big society and nothing at all was done for the whole semester. I know we couldn't go and walk dogs, which had been the original plan, but they just did nothing at all in its place. Other clubs changed plans for what they were going to do, but this society didn't which was very frustrating. I think they had one photography contest towards the end, when they must have realised, 'Oh, we didn't do anything all semester', and I realise it was difficult for everyone to manoeuvre through these times but I think it would have still been nice if they'd kept in touch with members because that money went completely down the drain (P19).

On the other hand, the Adventure Club went to great lengths to organise things and they were great with their communication. I would receive at least two emails from them each week. The problem, however, was that all the activities they offered required that you have your own gear, and you had to have some level of expertise in that activity. I had joined the club because I wanted adventure but I wasn't told I had to already have skills. I was a beginner, and whilst I realise that in Australia everyone is used to being outdoors and hiking etc., but for an international student these things may be something we've never done, so having a beginner level would have been helpful. They told me at the beginning there would be activities for all levels, but there weren't (P19).

The standard across the board is not there and in some clubs, where I was just a general member, I didn't necessarily get great benefits. I just think some of the clubs could do more in terms of growing their clubs and giving members good value. The resources are there for them to utilise if they want to, and many of the clubs utilise those resources well for members, but there are others I was associated with where the executive would access all the resources and trainings for themselves, but then not actually put what they'd learned into practice for the benefit of members (P11).

In some clubs and societies there seems to be hierarchy and a structure and at times it seems like they place so much importance on people being part of the group. And I find that strange. It's a little bit toxic. I know two people who have prolonged their degree, just because they wanted to make president and vice-president of a society, and that seemed strange to me. I think they wanted the status of having those titles, and they liked people looking up to them or something. It was almost like this weird high school mentality they haven't been able to get themselves out of (P23).

Finally, some students said they thought inclusiveness was lacking in certain clubs. They felt people could feel more welcome if more inclusive practices were introduced.

Bachelor students do have more time to spend at clubs so there are more of them in the clubs and more of them on the executive because they will naturally get voted in by their peers. There are not a lot of post graduate students in some clubs and at times when I attend events, if there are no other post-grad students there, I get left alone. In the technical society, for example, I was the only post-grad at most of the events. I think there should be some seats reserved on the executive for post-grad students to ensure their needs are met and they feel more connected to the club. For example, there should be two president positions; a post-graduate president and an undergrad president. In this way, the post-grad president will make decisions with the post-grad students' needs in mind, and the undergrad president will think about the needs of the undergrad students and both groups will be benefitted. If they had a Post-graduate President they would probably then get more post-graduate students involved in the clubs (P3).

I see a lot of international students get ignored at events by the domestic students. I encourage all of my team to make an effort to really talk to the international students and introduce them to other people. I think it is really important, and I think Activate needs to try to change the current attitude of many students towards international students. There is this stigma that they are sometimes perceived as hard to talk to because they don't speak English well, or not able to contribute meaningfully to group assignments. This tends to make the internationals want to stick with other internationals, because they don't feel welcomed at times. Activate could put strategies in place to change this culture and celebrate all that international students can bring to a club. I think the international students are an awesome target market for clubs to tap into for events. The engagement they get from international students who are welcomed is immense. Some domestic students will just come to an event for a short time and then leave because they have other things to do but international students will often become highly engaged as long as they are made feel welcome. The internationals desperately want to network and make Contacts with people in Australia (P11).

Another perceived disadvantage is that it's scary and that you don't know anyone, And I completely understand that perspective especially from people who might suffer from social anxiety or who really struggle to make new friends, but I would encourage people to try to step outside of their comfort zone and just try because usually university students, especially at UTS, are generally very friendly. If the people in a society you join are interested in the same things that you're interested in then that gives you a good opportunity to make friends too. I know it's not for everyone so I wouldn't want to push it on to people who weren't interested, but I would highly recommend that people just at least give it a go. It's not like you're losing money or losing time, it's just a choice about where you want to invest your time and I think the investment is definitely worth it (P10).

Accessing clubs

Students offered a range of motivations for joining clubs and societies. For many, the orientations sessions they attended during O-week included information about the opportunities and advantages of club involvement.

I started joining clubs in my first semester at university. At my orientation session they briefed us on the fact that here, your studies are not the only thing that is important. Here, you have to make connections because 70 per cent of jobs are not even advertised here and the way you get those jobs is by making contacts, making references. That was why I started joining clubs straight away (P3).

I heard about UTSOC during O-week and I thought it would be a good way to meet friends (P13).

Or, as one post-graduate club member stated,

There was a postgraduate welcome by the Business School where they told us about the club. I thought I could look up to one of the people speaking because they were really good in academics and also engagement and a lot of other things. They told me about all the activities they were doing and said just come along and you will definitely learn something from it (P1).

During O-week many students were also prompted to join a club because of interactions they had with people on club information stalls,

I registered in my first club in my first year of undergrad study because I saw them being offered in O-Week. I knew clubs existed, but I didn't know much about them prior to O-Week. The people at the stall were really friendly. I'm not a Malaysian student, but the people were really friendly. They said they had a BBQ coming up, and they said why not come along, so I said, Yeah, Why not? (P4).

I found out about all the clubs at O-week. I hadn't done any research or anything beforehand, but when I came to O-week I was going to the stalls and collecting the bags and everything and was talking to the people from the clubs. They were telling me what they did and how they did it, but when we had the same interest, like with the gaming society, we also talked about games (P5).

In fact, the way people on the stalls interacted with people was frequently cited as a reason for joining – or not joining – a particular club,

Most of the clubs I joined because I was interested in what they did, but it also came down to how the people on the O-week stalls interacted with me. Some of the people seemed almost like they were gate-keeping, so whilst I was almost joining, when I talked to them they seemed to put up a block so I didn't join that club and I just went on to another one (P5).

There were also students who were aware of what clubs offered prior to physically attending the campus, based on prior knowledge or experiences and their own research. Many of these students intentionally sought clubs out based on what they had been told by previous (family or friend) members.

I joined the Society of Communication because an older friend of mine who had done communications said that that was the Society to join. He said that this was the place to be because it opened up good opportunities for networking with industry professionals (P10).

My brother went to UTS and just hearing him talk about all the friends and the clubs and the things they would do made me realise what a great time people had in the clubs. I know a lot of UTS students do water polo, especially with Balmain, so it seemed like a family-friendly but also academically inclined university (P17).

My parents were both strong club members when they were at university and they always talked about what great time they had, and how important it is for having a social presence at uni, and people I had spoken to who were already at UTS, they said there wasn't that much of a social scene outside the clubs. With all of that I decided I wanted to join clubs (P23).

A number of students explained why they had not joined a club at the commencement of their studies but had joined at a later date. For some of these students, the reason was that they

had failed to make any friends, meaningful contacts or connections with other students through the course of their student experience.

I was working when O-week was on, so I didn't get to see all the clubs. I guess that's why I didn't join up. I got to hear about the clubs from other people I talked to later in the year in classes then (P12).

I wanted to join a club because with Covid and things going online, in my first semester I didn't actually meet anyone who was doing the same degree as me and I wanted to connect with those people. I did try to go to a few events in first semester, and just tried to find people who were doing the same degree as me, but couldn't – so in second semester I thought I'd try to access the clubs to meet them (P12).

These students intentionally sought out clubs which they felt would enable them to make such connections and enjoy their university experience more fully. There were also some who had joined just one club during O-week, but upon realising the benefits, joined others as their studies progressed,

After I joined the first club I realised I liked helping them out. That was the only one I joined in O-week, but all the others I joined as the year progressed. One I joined because it was focussed on global responsibilities, so that was right up my alley (P4).

A range of perspective was offered in terms of students' motivations for joining clubs at the outset. Many were motivated strongly by the desire to make friends and social contacts, and to feel more connected to the university culture.

The main reason I joined at the start was that I needed friends, to be honest. I went to a university in Indonesia, and although they did have clubs, there were not very many and they were not very big. So when I saw all the clubs UTS has I was really, really excited because I could join any club that I liked (P5).

I also think that being a part of the clubs is a great way to feel more connected to the University and to make contacts (P7).

At open day there were a lot of ActivateUTS clubs there for everyone to talk to and they welcomed me to join their club because it was a club for students from my birth country. They talked about the events they had coming up and it sounded good, so I joined because I wanted to make more friends. I didn't care if they were Chinese or Taiwanese or from other nations; I just wanted to make new friends (P14).

However, there were just as many students who stated they were highly focused on the professional skills they hoped to attain as a result of being a club member,

I wanted to have more friends at uni who were business-centric so joining the PBS was a good way to meet those types of people. Some of the people there were really brilliant minds because I knew them from the classes, and I thought I would just like to hang around more with them to enhance my skills and everything. So it was a way to make more friends and also to meet more people who were doing a similar degree to me (P1).

My career goals are very high, and I know that by joining clubs I would have a better chance of getting a good job because of all the contacts I could make. It will not only help me in achieving my career goals it will also help me making friends (P3).

Back when I was an undergrad, I realised in my first year that being involved with clubs was a great way to practice leadership management. Those were the biggest opportunities I saw were there through clubs (P4).

I was also told the society I was joining had a mentoring program, so that was really the main reason I joined. Having an older student who'd done the same subjects last year or the year before was really valuable. They gave me so much advice (P9).

There were also those who saw joining some of the career-related clubs as a good way to help them decide which direction to take their own studies in, or to more fully understand what differentiated one area of their broader chosen area of study from another,

I hadn't made my final decisions at that stage on my subjects, so I really wanted to get some information that would help me make those decisions. I felt that each of the societies were quite specific in the areas of activity at their core, so it was a bit easier to see what that might look like three years down the track. I also realised they would be great people to learn from. I wanted to immerse myself in that sense of passion so I could understand the real level of what it takes to be passionate like that and engage with that thing to find out which area I wanted to work in (P7).

Still, others hoped that by joining a club they would be able to improve things like cultural awareness and knowledge of local norms and to improve their English communication skills,

One of the main reasons I joined a club was to help me understand the local culture better. Being an international student, I am not really immersed in the culture yet. So sometimes when I have to talk about something I don't really have the right words to say, purely because of the cultural differences (P1).

For me, one of the most important reasons for joining clubs was to learn to communicate more with other students (P16).

In fact, most respondents expressed a combination of the motivations listed above,

I wanted to join clubs because I was new to the community; new to Australia. I wanted to meet people and learn about the community. I also wanted to make new friends and learn some soft skills, some employable skills so that I set myself up for a professional life here in Australia (P19).

I'm quite passionate about volunteering, so I just thought it would be good for me to do. I knew I would be able to develop new skills but also meet new people in a social environment that I was passionate about and enjoy (P21).

First Event Experience

Students experienced a range of emotions when it came to attending their first club or society event. Some were nervous because they did not have anyone else to attend with.

The only events I go to is if my friends are also going otherwise I don't feel like going. I don't want to go by myself. It would be quite nerve wracking to go by myself. Some of the activities on offer, I have wanted to go to them but I didn't because my friends couldn't go to them (P6).

I usually felt shy and uncomfortable at most of the first events I went to for each club, unless I had joined with friends and we would go together. If it was for drinks or something like that, and I didn't know anyone, it would be really awkward at first. But I just kept doing it and after a while if I started feeling comfortable around the people and they made me feel welcome, I'd keep going – but if they all seemed to have their own friends and they'd just talk to the people they knew, I'd just go, Oh well, this one is not for me. If there were a lot of new people there, you'd make friends – but if they were already in formed groups it was harder. I remember with ultimate frisbee I went along to a first training thing and they were trying to get a team for uni games. There were one or two people (like me) who were new to the sport, and we were all first or

second year, but we were made to feel like a part of it so we kept going, because they made us feel welcome (P9).

It was a bit of a challenge for me at first to go to the events because I'm quite shy and reserved and I didn't know anyone who was going to them, so it was a bit of a mental hurdle for me to get over, but I did (p12).

I was totally freaking out. I was very nervous when I went to my first meeting because most of them were all second year or third year, final year, and I'm like really fresh person in the club and didn't know what was going on there, and they started meeting and said, 'You have to record everything and write down the notes and control the money we spend and everything' and that was really interesting for me because I'd never experienced anything like that before. I learned a lot from that first meeting. Then after a few more meetings we had a social event and I got to make some friendships and relationships and after that I wasn't nervous at any of the meetings anymore (P14).

Others were excited and enthusiastic.

I love meeting people so I was really excited to go along to the early events and workshops (P19).

I was excited when I was going to my first meeting because I was able to go with a few friends. We then talked to other people, and our friendship group grew, so that was really good (P21).

I didn't know people at first but I wasn't nervous in joining the societies because it was helping my career. I didn't feel like I was at risk at all, so I wasn't nervous. Before Coronavirus happened, when everything was normal, this great Clubs Day used to happen and I really enjoyed that; where all the clubs and societies operate their stalls. I talked to many, many people. I spoke to the badminton and table tennis society people and they were really great (P3).

I felt pretty excited when I was attending my first event, which was the Malaysian Society's BBQ. I'm not Malaysian, and everyone else was, so that was kind of fun. They'd planned a BBQ at the beach, but none of them realised going to the beach meant that you should go for a swim. I told them we should swim. None of them knew how to work the BBQs at the beach either, and they'd all brought their own lunch to the BBQ. I showed them how to work the BBQ and used a metal fork and a spoon someone had brought to eat with and I did the BBQ for them with that and I just hung out at the BBQ and made friends with everyone. It was really good (P4).

I'm living in the student housing with many, many international students, so every day I am meeting new people and talking to them so when I joined the club I wasn't nervous at all. I was just happy to meet all these new people. Especially new people with the same interests, you know (P5).

All, however, found that once the initial feelings of awkwardness passed, the benefits were enormous and they were happy they had met the challenge,

I felt differently at each different club or society I attended. UTSOC is huge so going to a meeting is very daunting and very nerve wracking and you feel like, 'Oh, I'm just a first year and there are all these older people', I didn't know anyone but I met people and made friends. It was also on zoom, and it was worrying to have to try to work out to look good on zoom too. So I was scared and felt overwhelmed at the number of people there. Once I got to know everyone a bit better I found everyone was amazing and being part of their mentor program was such a huge benefit. When I went to one of the other club's first meetings, I wasn't nervous at all because it was much smaller plus I knew a few of the other club members. Going along to the UTSOC one, whilst

daunting, took me out of my comfort zone. It took a lot more confidence to go to it (P10).

COVID

This was an unusual year for the clubs and societies of ActivateUTS. Following a successful O-Week the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted many of the activities planned for 2020. Many commented on the change from previous years

I believe clubs and societies are an integral part of UTS, especially when they were offering events, before Covid. Now, sitting at home, where we can't go to events, I haven't felt that same sense of connection to UTS (P3).

It was particularly hard for many international students who either went home or missed friends who did so.

In 2019 we had lots of club activities and I made lots of friends. It made me feel really connected to UTS. But this year, because of Covid, many people went back to Taiwan and although we are able to talk to each other on social media, we can't have events. It feels really different (P14)

When I was at home and so disconnected from everything uni, I didn't even know what other people were doing at that time. There was a big time difference between India and Australia, so I felt very isolated (P19)

It was also hard for first-year students who had not developed networks at UTS before everything moved online.

I joined a club because with Covid and things going online, in my first semester I didn't actually meet anyone who was doing the same degree as me and I wanted to connect with those people. I did try to go to a few events in first semester, and just tried to find people who were doing the same degree as me, but couldn't – so in second semester I thought I'd try to access the clubs to meet them (P12).

However, some managed their experience in very positive ways.

Especially with Covid a lot of them, in the absence of social events, have actually run career building events which is especially helpful for studies. They've held study groups online or things like that (P6).

This year really helped us learn about resilience. We'd had all our events planned for the year, but with Covid, everything had to change. We had to have another planning day over zoom and tried to flip every event idea we'd had into an online version. Not all of them worked. And not all of them were as successful as they would have been in person, but our thing is it's better to give it a go and give students opportunities. Sometimes they just don't want to come to an online event, but as long as they see that we're trying, it is all worthwhile I think (P11).

I have only been a student for the past year, and with Covid most of the events have been online and there are lots of cancellations. Despite this, the idea of being able to have a conversation with other students, or even observe conversations between students who have been studying for longer in my interest areas, rather than being inactive, have been really helpful (P7).

Obviously the disadvantage of the Covid era is social interaction, but I think it's a bit interesting that some forms of social interaction were still occurring. There were a bunch of very strong personas in some of the chats and in some of the societies I was in, and they managed to just bring people into conversations, encouraged introductions and then bantered with the people who do introduced themselves (P7).

Staying in touch with other committee members throughout the pandemic has been helpful to some student leaders.

With Covid, and everything going online, I struggled. Having the regular online catch-ups with the rest of my committee helped me stay on track and because I had to do updates on how my events and role were progressing, it also motivated me to catch up with my studies. It was definitely really important to me for my mental health (P7).

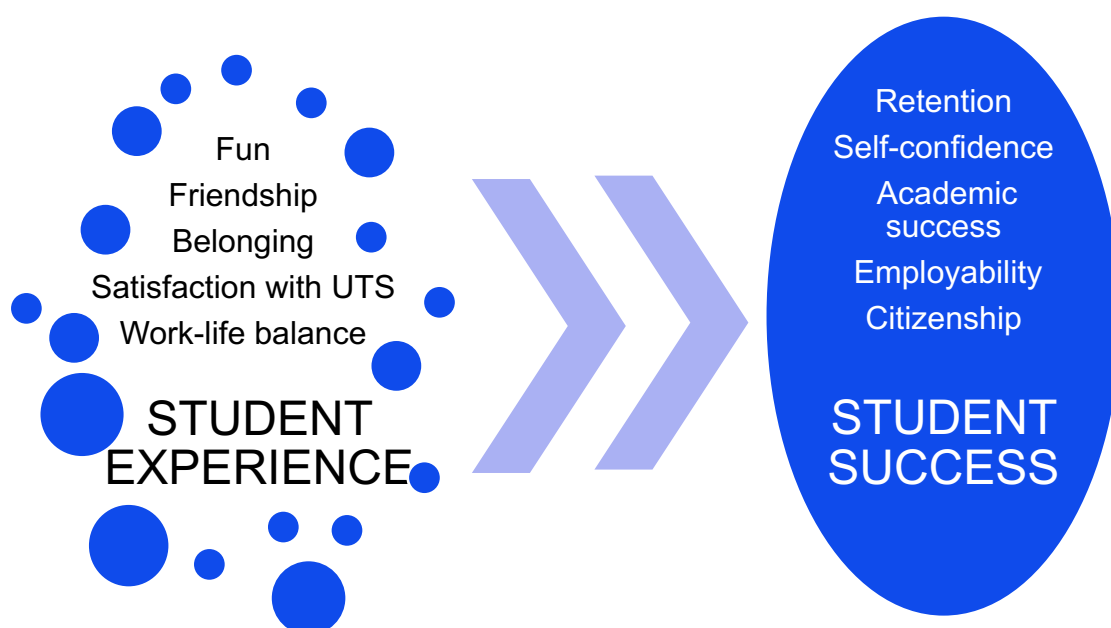
One person on our committee started asking us to all think about one good thing that had happened since the previous meeting and things like that. By doing that he helped to make us feel like we were still part of a community that cared and that we had some communal companionship in our fortnightly catch-ups (P7).

Summary of findings

The findings have been organised into sub-themes which can be loosely related to the key themes of *student experience* and *student success*. The data indicates that engagement with clubs and societies enhanced the research participants (students) experiences by enabling positive outcomes in the areas of friendship, fun, work-life balance, sense of belonging, and satisfaction with UTS. Findings under each of these themes suggest that outcomes are interdependent. For example, making friends at the clubs and societies (social integration) helps to develop a sense of belonging and satisfaction with UTS. Students used their engagement at clubs and societies to balance the hard work of their studies and have fun, which was important to their student experience.

Further, the data suggests that student experience has a significant influence on student success (see Figure 5). Friendships, sense of belonging and the other factors associated with the student experience boosted self-confidence, which in turn, supported retention and academic success. Fun, friendship and belonging were the top three benefits of club membership reported by students. Engaging with peers in clubs and societies allowed students to develop employability skills such as, teamwork and leadership. Indicators of student success that emerged from the data included retention, self-confidence, citizenship, academic success and employability.

Figure 5: Relationship between student experience and student success



Opportunities for making a difference to their communities (citizenship) gave students a sense of pride and purpose: *“You’re making something of your life and it gives you a feeling of self-fulfilment and pride at your achievements. That makes you feel really happy”* (P 10).

Areas of concern reported by small numbers of students may require the attention of club and society executives as well as ActivateUTS.

- Some student leaders find their roles overwhelming at times and feel they need extra support occasionally to deal with issues such as conflict, underperforming teams, inconsistent leadership and heavy workloads. They would like additional support in areas such as funding, communication and administrative support.
- Most students reported very positive experiences with regards to accessing clubs and being made to feel welcome, however a few reported feeling excluded by “cliques” and “gatekeepers”. These behaviours are clearly out of line with ActivateUTS values of social inclusion.
- Attending a first event is reportedly extremely daunting for some students, particularly those who did not have anyone to attend with. It is possible that some clubs lose members at this early stage if new students fail to attend events.

Finally, the reduced levels of club activity in 2020 is particularly relevant to retention; survey results showed retention is significantly impacted by both sense of belonging to the club and the level of club involvement. Further, there are significant associations between a sense of belonging to a club and a sense of belonging to UTS, and between the level of club engagement and satisfaction with UTS. Many club activities were cancelled, and students experienced a level of isolation. However, for some, regular club meetings, strong and caring leadership, and career-relevant online events were helpful.

Conclusion

As part of their ongoing commitment to the interests of UTS and its students ActivateUTS have commissioned a 6-year project to gain insights into the impact of ActivateUTS club and society membership on UTS student success. A literature review and empirical research in year 1 of the study provided rich data for analysis. The analysis identified the following important indicators of student success.

Retention - club and society membership positively impacted students' capacity to persist with their studies.

Academic success – participants report that club and society membership positively impacted their ability to thrive academically.

Employability –club and society membership and leadership enabled the development of skills and attributes valued by employers.

Self-confidence – participants report that club and society membership developed their self-confidence in their ability to engage with and contribute to their communities.

Citizenship – some participants reported that club and society membership enabled them to have a positive impact as global citizens.

The analysis indicates that *student success* is impacted by *student experience*. Several studies have found that a positive relationship exists between a students' *sense of belonging* and their retention in higher education (e.g., Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield & Woods, 2009; Masika & Jones, 2016; Miller, 2011; O'Keeffe, 2013; Thomas, 2012; Tovar, Simon & Lee, 2009; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). The current study found positive associations between: (1) levels of club and society membership and sense of belonging; (2) sense of belonging to a club and sense of belonging to UTS; (3) and the level of club engagement and satisfaction with UTS.

The following areas of student experience were all found to be positively associated with student success.

Fun – participants reported club and society membership made their time at UTS more enjoyable.

Being involved in clubs has definitely made uni a lot more enjoyable. It's been fun. It's definitely been more meaningful because I enjoyed being part of the community.

Friendship - participants reported that being involved in clubs was the best way to establish friendships at university.

If I look back on my time as a student, I'd say the true friends I've made is one of the best things that I have gained at UTS.

Sense of belonging - participants reported club and society membership made them feel connected to the UTS community.

The club experiences I've had at UTS and being the society president, that makes me feel connected to UTS and proud to be in the alumni.

Satisfaction with UTS - participants reported club and society membership had a significant impact on students' satisfaction with UTS overall, its facilities, programs and social environment.

It makes me feel good being [at UTS] as a student just because I am joining the clubs.

Work-life balance - participants reported club and society membership assisted them to manage work-life balance.

Being in clubs definitely helps me get a better work-life balance ... I have somewhere to go when I need a break from studying where I can be with people with the same interests as me.

Supporting UTS

The study has identified a number of areas where ActivateUTS is supporting the initiatives of the University.

Supporting student citizenship is an outcome that shows ActivateUTS is contributing to the strategic initiatives of UTS2027 which seek to “maximise social impact outcomes across teaching, learning, research and practice at UTS”.

Supporting students to build graduate attributes and employability skills contributes to the UTS Model of Learning and Graduate Attribute Framework: equipping students for ongoing learning and inquiry in their personal development and professional practice and committing them to the actions and responsibilities of professional and global citizens.

Both student success and student experience have become increasingly important to UTS. The Australian government (Wellings et al., 2019) has flagged that university funding will be tied to: student success measured by attrition; equity group participation (Indigenous, low socio-economic status, and regional and remote students); graduate employment outcomes, and student experience, measured by student satisfaction with teaching quality drawn from the Student Experience Survey (SES) (Bexley 2019).

Next steps

This is the first-year report for a longer-term project investigating the impact of club membership on UTS student success 2020-2026.

Data requirements for 2021

The researchers will seek access to UTS 2020 attrition, GPA, SES and SSS data to compare the UTS population with ActivateUTS 2020 member data.

ActivateUTS has provided the research team with membership data for 2020, which will be compared to UTS data, analysed and reported in January 2022 (Year 2 report).

It is hoped that ActivateUTS may be able to provide records of UTS student numbers from 2022 onwards to assist with data analysis. At this stage we again envisage following up the quantitative phase of the study (analysing GPA, SES and SSS) by conducting a limited number of semi-structured qualitative interviews to further explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Based on the literature review of the topic and the main findings to emerge from the current study there are several elements to consider in moving forward with the next phase of the research: These include:

- What are the participation rates of non-traditional students in university clubs and societies such as part-time (full-time work) students, students who articulated from UTS Insearch and TAFE Colleges and students who did not complete Years 11 and 12?

- Given that one of the most positive benefits of extra-curricular activities is the facilitation of positive student to student and student to staff relationships, and its links with sense of belonging, how might this aspect of the experience be enhanced?
- Can insights gained from the success of the 'shared learning strategies' that are characteristic of extra-curricular activities be transferred to the classroom? One example of this could be the use of a 'cohort model' (Burke, 2019).
- How effective are 'just in time' retention strategies for use on cohorts with poor retention outcomes (Taylor & Harrison, 2018)?
- What are the ongoing implications of Covid-19 for UTS clubs and societies?

Covid-19

The survey and interviews were conducted in August and October-November 2020 respectively. The pandemic caused significant disruption to clubs and societies' events and activities from March 2020 as lock downs, online learning and social distancing measures came into effect, which resulted in reduced club engagement. The empirical findings reflect this. For example, students reported that it was harder to make friends in 2020 with limited opportunities for engagement. However, the results overall were largely positive in terms of student reports of the impacts of club and society involvement, possibly because of the significant number of students who had experiences with club and society engagement for one or more years prior to the pandemic. The impacts may be largely confined to 2020 or may continue to be felt in 2021 and beyond. The research team will continue to monitor the impacts of the pandemic as the study progresses and future data sets allow comparisons.

The research team welcomes feedback on this report.

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Appendix 1: Interview data

BENEFITS OF CLUB INVOLVEMENT

P1

There are two main things I think are great about being involved in leadership in clubs. Firstly I will have a better understanding of the things that I am learning in class at uni (P1).

The other main thing I like about being in clubs is that it will make me more skilled when I am out in the workplace.

I went to the first event and it was all a very good learning lesson. There was a lot to learn and the best part was that for these experiences I don't even have to pay (P1).

P2

There are a lot of educational, professional and social events through the club which I really enjoy (P2).

P3

The benefits of being in clubs far outweigh the demerits. The benefits are huge, like making new friends, improving your communication and in particular your English-speaking skills. In fact that was the main reason I did my masters in Australia. I've come all the way from another country for the purpose of improving my English communication skills.

English is not my first language. But I'm listening and practicing and I'm trying to make English my first language so things will be easier for me. Because English is the language that is connecting all international languages.

Being in clubs helped me a lot with improving my English and communication skills because when we approach club members at an event we always have to communicate in English. If we didn't speak in English we would be having a drink alone, and that is no fun at all.

If there was a communication society I would even want to join that, just to help with improving my skills in that area (P3).

P5

I think every student should join at least one club. It's really, really good. Students who don't join clubs and who just go to the library every day and study, how do you communicate with people. You cannot learn anything from outside the classroom. They say to me they communicate with people all the time in the classroom, but it is different. When you are in class you are only talking about the studies, and people want to listen to the academic, but in clubs you can talk about so many things and people want to communicate with you.

Some international students might think they can communicate with other students in their classes, but it doesn't work like that. Especially with IT students. They wake up in the morning, we put music in our ears, we go to the class, open the laptop making some notes, put the music back in and we go home. We don't need to communicate. Often we don't communicate with anyone in the class. But with clubs you join because you have the same interests and you enjoy talking to each other about those interests. That's the difference (P5).

Apart from making new friends, I know I benefit a lot from joining clubs because you can learn so many new skills. This year I joined the photographic society and I learned so much more stuff on photography from the people in the society than I would have from doing a class. The people in that society they are so talented. Basically you get free tutoring. I went to some meetings, and these people just spend their whole time talking about and teaching each other

about photography. They were all telling me how to do it. This was just sharing and learning together (P5).

Some types of clubs are just for entertainment, some are for exercise and sport, some are for learning new skills and some are for doing good for other people or society.

I can take part in things when I have the available time and there is no pressure. I put my studies first, so I always check my schedule and if I am not doing anything and don't have assignments due I always will go, but I don't have to. Except with the Futsal club. I always go to that because that is for exercise, so that's different. Overall I do two activities per month for each club.

When you join a club it's like for 40 per cent of your life at uni. If you go to uni without joining a club, you're basically spending your whole uni time enjoying it at only about 60 per cent of what you would have enjoyed it if you'd joined a club. So you're losing almost lost half of the uni life experience just because of not joining the club (P5).

Being in a club is like part of the best part of uni life. It is really important to join a club, even if you only join one club.

It makes you more likely to be better in your career once you leave uni (P5).

P6

I like the activities they have and I like the events, but also both the groups I'm in are helpful in my degree. There are study groups, and I like the BCI Connect runs in the holidays (Creative Intelligence) to relate to the degree. Then there will be a party at the end.

I've wanted to attend a couple of the career-based activities but the timing just hasn't worked with my classes and everything. But they are the types of things I want to attend; the career-based things. I like those things because they seem relevant, and being in third year now I am starting to try to work out where I want to go in my degree and I think those sorts of things can help me make decisions. They are a gateway to help you connect and speak with people working in your field.

It's having the opportunity to listen to people who are already doing the work you might want to do. For me, as an individual, to try to find someone who has done my sort of degree and is working in the field, would be hard. But they find the people and we can just listen to what it has been like for them. Professionals who are working in the field (P6).

I also do like going to some of the on-campus social events, but I'm not willing to go unless I can find a friend to go with me.

I like meeting new people. I've added people on Facebook and people I can message and ask them degree questions. Without the clubs I wouldn't probably meet those people. People will introduce you to other people who are also doing the same sort of course but maybe they're further along in their degree.

The clubs are definitely a great way to get involved at uni and a great way to meet friends, especially as a first year (P6).

P7

I have only been a student for the past year, and with Covid most of the events have been online and there are lots of cancellations. Despite this, the idea of being able to have a conversation with other students, or even observe conversations between students who have been studying for longer in my interest areas, rather than being inactive, have been really helpful.

So what I like is the ability to listen to other students (P7).

I really feel like being involved in clubs is the icing on the cake as far as my education goes. There is a lot to be said about the real benefit of being involved which passionate people who are interested in what you are interested in. They are focused on their topic but of course it doesn't always stay that way. Being able to get access to the subculture of it through these University clubs is really really valuable.

Joining clubs and societies is a very clear investment for the university around making sure that students find their feet.

If you were a student and you'd just started at UTS I'd strongly encourage you to think about the passions you have, or even fringe passions you might never have explored, or fringe interests even and to sign up to those clubs.

The cost is minimal, and the benefit of being able to interact with a whole bunch of students who are interested in the same things you're interested in is really worthwhile. Because at the end of the day they're all students too, and they give you great perspective on student life about all the different aspects of UTS and they give you great hacks and tips to get your way through uni, so highly recommended. The more the merrier. Sign up for lots, and hey, if a few don't work out, then just join the next few (P7).

P8

There are so many opportunities to get involved with so many different things. Getting onto any sort of committee in any sort of club is a gateway into other opportunities. In the leadership role I have held in my club, I've been given so many opportunities to get involved, in ways I know wouldn't have been available to me if I wasn't a committee director (P8).

Being in clubs and societies at UTS definitely gives you a sense of community and a sense of individual purpose outside of the academics, having things to look forward to. For me it's just having something else, because sometimes work is not that for people. Clubs give students the freedom to experiment. But having a sense of community at uni is my main thing. And it doesn't stop when uni stops. Those connections can continue throughout your career or your social life, which is really great.

This is definitely so for international and interstate students. I would love us to have more international students (P8).

P10

I think the advantage of being involved with clubs definitely outweigh the disadvantages. The advantages for me in taking on leadership roles, are making new connections with people and new friends, learning to manage your time better, having something you're really passionate about to do and feeling like you have a way to actualise the values you have inside (P10).

P11

Anyone can get a degree, but what can make you different to most people is the extra things you have on top of that degree. The extracurriculars and experiences that you did whilst at university are one of the best ways to make yourself stand out.

The club leadership experience enhances your graduate attributes and your professionalism to a whole new level. Maybe you don't get into the clubs, but even helping with the SRC or interning or working on campus – but it's all those things that make the difference (P11).

P15

It is a really good experience. I get to meet people from a whole lot of different faculties. In the UTS Consulting club we work with actual businesses. We help small to medium businesses. These are real clients that we get and we essentially work with other students. There are about five consulting teams with five students on each team from different faculties. So on mine I

had people from law, business, IT and then we work together for 12 weeks. We have industry workshops where we were taught the skills like how to problem solve, how to work with a client, and then at the end we go down and pitch our ideas and then there will be a winner, where the judges – who are some of the consultants – say which is the best. Then we go to the client and give them the solution to their problem. It is just such a worthwhile experience and we learn so much because we can put everything we're learning in the classroom into a real-life experience (P15).

P17

I like the social aspect. I like being able to go out and do something I really enjoy whilst meeting other people who are interested in similar things, so especially for Engineers without Borders, I really enjoy volunteering and doing humanitarian work aid and I like knowing I'm surrounded by like-minded people. So the clubs are a place where I feel like I can belong at uni. On top of that, we get to practice our skills and to learn new ones. For example the photography society I signed up for (P17).

P20

The main reason I wanted to join a society was for networking opportunities and I wanted to know more people and meet like-minded individuals who also are in the same faculty and have the same interests as me. I also really wanted to join a society which had a lot of international students because we are all in the same boat, in that we're new to the country and there is a lot that is new to us. Eighty per cent of the students in the International Students Finance club are internationals and 20 per cent are Australians. We welcome everyone to join (P20).

I also wanted to learn about tips on studying here, how to get internships and how to get jobs and things like that. I knew I would be in a supportive community to be around so many other international students going through the same things I was going through. Also to improve my skills and professional development as well (P20).

P22

I am now doing my PhD, but when I look back over all my studies I can see the incredibly benefits I have received from being involved in clubs. The benefits are just massive. They form your foundations for being involved in society.

Clubs help students with their mental health and I feel they help us work harder as students, so I would think it is something I would like to recommend every student to take advantage of the opportunities that universities offer to join in clubs (P22).

REASONS TO JOIN A CLUB

P1

There was a postgraduate welcome by the Business School where they told us about the club. I thought I could look up to one of the people speaking because they were really good in academics and also engagement and a lot of other things. They told me about all the activities they were doing and said just come along and you will definitely learn something from it.

When you're new in the country and you don't have a job or anything you don't want to spend money easily. Other clubs were charging fees but the PBS wasn't. I was trying to work out why are their service is free? I was very intrigued so I thought, 'Okay let's do it then'.

Then they had a networking night. They were trying to give us small tips and tricks to train us or help us in our networking. When the panel was done we could network with them. They also helped us network and at events.

I wanted to have more friends at uni who were business-centric so joining the PBS was a good way to meet those types of people. Some of the people there were really brilliant minds because I knew them from the classes, and I thought I would just like to hang around more with them to enhance my skills and everything . So it was a way to make more friends and also to meet more people who were doing a similar degree to me

*One of the main reasons I joined a club was to help me understand the local culture better. Being an international student, I am not really immersed in the culture yet. So sometimes when I have to talk about something I don't really have the right words to say, purely because of the cultural differences. Sometimes it a genuine mistake but sometimes it is about not understanding the culture. So once what happened at an event – a yearly event we have at the club – and by mistake after it was almost finished I asked the industry panelist, 'How did we go?' And she just looked at me a bit funny and she said, 'Oh it was really nice', and didn't say anything else. I didn't realise at the time and my colleague touched me on my arm and said 'It's okay but we don't ask those things we ask for feedback later via email. I just felt so stupid and so embarrassed I was like oh **** I should have been a bit more careful, but it was a good learning opportunity. Anyway, because it was something I was doing in the club, it didn't have any negative impacts.*

P2

When I went to the science camp when I first started uni and I met a bunch of people who were in the science clubs and they'd organised the camp. They seemed like a fun bunch of people and they said they had a vacancy for a 1st year student on their committee, so I applied for that and got that position.

Even though I had already met some of the people at science camp I was still nervous about going along to the first meeting because I didn't really know what was going to happen. I didn't know how clubs worked. I remember being really really nervous for the interview for the first year representative but then I found out they didn't really care about my professionalism or anything they just wanted to know whether I was a nice enough person to help other students want to be part of the club.

when I went along to my first meeting it was still a bit intimidating because they were all talking about their subjects and their assignments and their classes and everything. And they were using terms I had never heard before. They were talking about all the stuff that have to do to get into medicine and it was a bit overwhelming because they were so confident and knowledgeable.

P3

I started joining clubs in my first semester at university. At my orientation session they briefed on the fact that here, your studies are not the only thing that is important. Here, you have to make connections because 70 per cent of jobs are not even advertised here and the way you get those jobs is by making contacts, making references. That was why I started joining clubs straight away.

My career goals are very high, and I know that by joining clubs I would have a better chance of getting a good job because of all the contacts I could make. It will not only help me in achieving my career goals it will also help me making friends.

When I first joined, most of the clubs charged around \$5. I didn't mind paying that because I knew that it was worth it. I knew I was going to utilise all they offered and get that amount of value back easily by participating in events, by improving my English, by making new friends – so that was my aim.

P4

I registered in my first club in my first year of undergrad study because I saw them being offered in O-Week. I knew clubs existed, but I didn't know much about them prior to O-Week. The people at the stall were really friendly. I'm not a Malaysian student, but the people were really friendly. They said they had a BBQ coming up, and they said why not come along, so I said, Yeah, Why not?

After that I liked helping them out. That was the only one I joined in O-week, but all the others I joined as the year progressed. One I joined because it was focussed on global responsibilities, so that was right up my alley.

Back when I was an undergrad, I realised in my first year that being involved with clubs was a great way to practice leadership management. Those were the biggest opportunities I saw were there through clubs.

P5

The main reason I joined at the start was that I needed friends, to be honest. I went to a university in Indonesia, and although they did have clubs, there were not very many and they were not very big. So when I saw all the clubs UTS has I was really really excited because I could join any club that I liked.

I found out about all the clubs at O-week. I hadn't done any research or anything beforehand, but when I came to O-week I was going to the stalls and collecting the bags and everything and was talking to the people from the clubs. They were telling me what they did and how they did it, but when we had the same interest, like with the gaming society, we also talked about games.

Most of the clubs I joined because I was interested in what they did, but it also came down to how the people on the O-week stalls interacted with me. Some of the people seemed almost like they were gate-keeping, so whilst I was almost joining, when I talked to them they seemed to put up a block so I didn't join that club and I just went on to another one.

Also with the Indonesian Society that was just about wanting to be connected to people from my own country.

P6

I saw all the clubs on offer during in O-week and my friends all joined at the same time with me.

P7

There was a faculty information session which was mandated for IT students, and at the end of the session we were provided with lunch. We then broke out into our particular degrees, and at the lunch there were a group of societies who were linked with IT in subject content and they had booths and I took the time to eat lunch then go and chat to each of the societies to understand what they did, what they were offering and what their proposed events were. So that was my introduction.

I hadn't made my final decisions at that stage on my subjects, so I really wanted to get some information that would help me make those decisions. I felt that each of the societies were quite specific in the areas of activity at their core, so it was a bit easier to see what that might look like three years down the track. I also realised they would be great people to learn from. I wanted to immerse myself in that sense of passion so I could understand the real level of what it takes to be passionate like that and engage with that thing to find out which area I wanted to work in.

I also think that being a part of the clubs is a great way to feel more connected to the University and to make Contacts.

P8

When I started my degree I went to the club open day and it was my priority to join the ones for my degree. Once I'd done them I thought any others that looked good I could add if I wanted to. I put an expression of interest to join the ones related to my studies, plus a few others, but I can't remember them all getting back to me. I think I was ambitious and joined too many groups, then later I realised there wouldn't be enough time for them all. So I pared it back to the Law Society and the comms one.

Then the first year camp came up really quickly. I could only go on one because I had work, and because I knew someone who was going to the law camp, and no-one going to the other one that I knew, I decided the law camp was it. That then determined who I socialised with in first semester because I'd met them all on the camp.

P9

I'd been in a debating society at a previous institution and wanted to join the one at UTS. A few of them I joined were just because my friends joined them.

P10

I joined the Society of communication because an older friend of mine who had done communications said that that was the Society to join. He said that this was the place to be because it opened up good opportunities for networking with industry professionals. This was pre covered, so originally what they were referencing was events with these professionals and create networks with them. Unfortunately this semester with zoom, we lost that side of it, the personal interaction, but there were still so many advantages. So I took his advice and I'm so glad I did.

I was also told the society I was joining had a mentoring program, so that was really the main reason I joined. Having an older student who'd done the same subjects last year or the year before was really valuable. They gave me so much advice.

P11

I did every orientation activity I could during O-week and at the medical science welcome talk they had the president of the medical society at the time give a speech about the clubs and societies at UTS. It sounded great and so I made a point of joining up during O-week.

I checked out the Facebook pages of some of the clubs I wanted to join, prior to O-week, so that I could make sure they really were active and held lots of events, rather than just made out that they did on the O-week stall.

P12

I joined a club because with Covid and things going online, in my first semester I didn't actually meet anyone who was doing the same degree as me and I wanted to connect with those people. I did try to go to a few events in first semester, and just tried to find people who were doing the same degree as me, but couldn't – so in second semester I thought I'd try to access the clubs to meet them.

I was working when O-week was on, so I didn't get to see all the clubs. I guess that's why I didn't join up. I got to hear about the clubs from other people I talked to later in the year in classes.

P13

I heard about UTSOC during O-week and I thought it would be a good way to meet friends. I signed up to go to the UTSOC camp, again hoping to make friends. I had no intention of becoming a first year rep, but then my friend and I both decided to go for it. And I was elected. If I hadn't been voted in, I probably would never have been so involved in clubs, but because they'd voted for me, I wanted to do a great job. It wasn't ever the plan, but it worked out to be just so good for my university experience.

P14

At open day there were a lot of Activate UTS clubs there for everyone to talk to and they welcomed me to join their club because it was a club for students from my birth country. They talked about the events they had coming up and it sounded good, so I joined because I wanted to make more friends. I didn't care if they were Chinese or Taiwanese or from other nations; I just wanted to make new friends.

P15

I joined the club in first year because I really just wanted to make friends outside my own degree. Not only from a personal level but I thought that would be a good thing to do on a professional level as well. That's why the clubs I chose were ones that people from cross-disciplinary subject areas would be in.

I went on the Activate website prior to O-week because I wanted to do my own research about which clubs would best suit my needs.

P16

For me, one of the most important reasons for joining clubs was to learn to communicate more with other students.

P17

My brother went to UTS and just hearing him talk about all the friends and the clubs and the things they would do made me realise what a great time people had in the clubs. I know a lot of UTS students do water polo, especially with Balmain, so it seemed like a family-friendly but also academically inclined university.

Even though I often wasn't totally sure what I wanted to do at university, I was always certain that I wanted to go to UTS because of the stories I'd heard from my family and friends and other people I knew from sport about how great the clubs were and what a great time they had in the clubs and societies.

P19

I joined the clubs in O-week. I like what I saw that the clubs offered.

I wanted to join clubs because I was new to the community, knew to Australia. I wanted to meet people and learn about the community. I also wanted to make new friends and learn some soft skills, some employable skills so that I set myself up for a professional life here in Australia.

P21

I saw the stall at O-day and I had a couple of friends who recommended the club to me because they'd gone in the competitions before. I learned more about it, and I'm quite passionate about volunteering, so I just thought it would be good for me to do. I knew I would be able to develop new skills but also meet new people in a social environment that I was passionate about and enjoy.

P22

When I was doing my masters in Cape Town in South Africa I was heavily involved in clubs because I think it is very important to get involved in the university community life and clubs are the best way to do that.

P23

I joined all the clubs during O-week. I have been rowing since 11 and skiing since I was 7, so I knew I wanted to join sports clubs at uni. Because I wanted to meet people outside my own degree. My parents were both strong club members when they were at university and they always talked about what great time they had, and how important it is for having a social presence at uni, and people I had spoken to who were already at UTS, they said there wasn't that much of a social scene outside the clubs. With all of that I decided I wanted to join clubs.

EXPERIENCE OF FIRST EVENTS**P3**

I didn't know people at first but I wasn't nervous in joining the societies because it was helping my career. I didn't feel like I was at risk at all, so I wasn't nervous. Before Coronavirus happened, when everything was normal, this great clubs day used to happen and I really enjoyed clubs day, where all the clubs and societies operate their stalls. I talked to many, many people. I spoke to the badminton and table tennis society people and they were really great (P3).

P4

I felt pretty excited when I was attending my first event, which was the Malaysian Society's BBQ. I'm not Malaysian, and everyone else was, so that was kind of fun. They'd planned a BBQ at the beach, but none of them realised going to the beach meant that you should go for a swim. I told them we should swim. None of them knew how to work the BBQs at the beach either, and they'd all brought their own lunch to the BBQ. I showed them how to work the BBQ and used a metal fork and a spoon someone had brought to eat with and I did the BBQ for them with that and I just hung out at the BBQ and made friends with everyone. It was really good (P4)

P5

I'm living in the student housing with many, many international students, so every day I am meeting new people and talking to them so when I joined the club I wasn't nervous at all. I was just happy to meet all these new people. Especially new people with the same interests, you know (P5).

P6

The only events I go to is if my friends are also going otherwise I don't feel like going. I don't want to go by myself. It would be quite nerve wracking to go by myself. Some of the activities on offer, I have wanted to go to them but I didn't because my friends couldn't go to them (P6)..

P9

I usually felt shy and uncomfortable at most of the first events I went to for each club, unless I had joined with friends and we would go together. If it was for drinks or something like that, and I didn't know anyone, it would be really awkward at first.

But I just kept doing it and after a while if I started feeling comfortable around the people and they made me feel welcome, I'd keep going – but if they all seemed to have their own friends

and they'd just talk to the people they knew, I'd just go, Oh well, this one is not for me. If there were a lot of new people there, you'd make friends – but if they were already in formed groups it was harder.

I remember with ultimate frisbee I went along to a first training thing and they were trying to get a team for uni games. There were one or two people (like me) who were new to the sport, and we were all first or second year, but we were made to feel like a part of it so we kept going, because they made us feel welcome (P9)..

P10

I felt differently at each different club or society I attended. UTSOC is huge so going to a meeting is very daunting and very nerve wracking and you feel like, 'Oh, I'm just a first year and there are all these older people', I didn't know anyone but I met people and made friends. It was also on zoom, and it was worrying to have to try to work out to look good on zoom too. So I was scared and felt overwhelmed at the number of people there.

Once I got to know everyone a bit better I found everyone was amazing and being part of their mentor program was such a huge benefit.

When I went to one of the other club's first meetings, I wasn't nervous at all because it was much smaller plus I knew a few of the other club members.

Going along to the UTSOC one, whilst daunting, took me out of my comfort zone. It took a lot more confidence to go to it (P10).

P12

It was a bit of a challenge for me at first to go to the events, because I'm quite shy and reserved and I didn't know anyone who was going to them, so it was a bit of a mental hurdle for me to get over, but I did

P14

I was totally freaking out. I was very nervous when I went to my first meeting because most of them were all second year or third year, final year, and I'm like really fresh person in the club and didn't know what was going on there, and they started meeting and said, 'You have to record everything and write down the notes and control the money we spend and everything' and that was really interesting for me because I'd never experienced anything like that before.

I learned a lot from that first meeting. Then after a few more meetings we had a social event and I got to make some friendships and relationships and after that I wasn't nervous at any of the meetings anymore.

I love meeting people so I was really excited to go along to the early events and workshops (P19).

P21

I was excited when I was going to my first meeting because I was able to go with a few friends. We then talked to other people, and our friendship group grew, so that was really good (P21).

CLUB INVOLVEMENT AND WORK-READY SKILLS

P1

I feel like my soft skills have really developed overtime. I mean things like my planning and my strategising skills.

It is a very safe environment where you can test things. Even if I go wrong, I can say I'm so sorry about that, and the club is always like it's okay, we will handle it. So it's like a test run before I'm actually working in the real world where I might have to risk my job or my reputation if I made a really big mistake. When you are doing it with the clubs you can make mistakes without it damaging you significantly.

(When you are in club leadership or on the executive and you are able to carry out the tasks involved in that role): "It makes what we are learning more real and I have a frame in which to put the knowledge I'm given in class. By doing these things in class, I've done them in the real world environment. Being in leadership on the Post-grad Business Society is like having something to bridge the gap between the academics and the real world. That's the motto of our club; Bridging the Gap.

When they get industry panellists or anyone from the industry or the corporate world to come and speak with us, they are trying to bridge that gap from the academic world. It makes the transition into that world easier.

I'm very apprehensive about entering the workforce again because it's not a face to face networking environment any more it's more a LinkedIn or online networking environment which is not my forte because my messages don't seem to come across clearly online. The club has definitely helped me in this area. I keep getting suggestions from everyone in my club like helping me know how to best proceed and showing me what to do so I get better at it. For example, when I started out trying to get speakers for our events, I never really got any replies to my invitations. I was using LinkedIn but no one really would say yes to me or even reply. It brought me down quite a lot. My colleagues were like 'Hey, it's just a task; you don't have to do it. We have plenty of others who can do it. It is just a learning lesson so if you don't want to do it we can just move on'. But I wanted to improve from my failure so I kept trying with their help. I still kept getting no replies, but eventually (during Covid) I tried again – and said to myself, ok let's do something a bit similar but in a different way; a better way. And finally, someone said yes. I am much more confident now.

I know I manage things a bit better than I used to. I have definitely learned time management, that's very important. I am shaping up to be in a corporate world, so my professional skills are definitely enhanced. Like how to draft emails, or the language to use and trying to learn the team codes, and other soft skills that you don't even notice, I'd say.

Being a member of the club has also helped me learn to speak more slowly. I'm still learning but I am improving.

P2

I learned a lot about meetings and how they run and professional skills for very first meeting I went to. We would take minutes of the meeting – but I wasn't used to going to meetings basically. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what a briefing was. I didn't know anything that was going on. But the committee were very, very helpful so it was only intimidating at 1st and I learned very quickly about How meetings work just by being in the meetings.

Being involved in clubs has definitely allowed me developed my professional skills, especially things like teamwork, communication, leadership even. For example, my whole involvement in clubs has required me to be an effective communicator in terms of both written and oral communication. For example in writing briefings for people I have to be really clear or when I'm writing up proposals and all that paperwork I have to make sure it's concise but also understandable and we can come back to it if we need it . In that sort of way it forces me to come an effective communicator.

My oral communication skills have improved too. Being a host for events and all of that I have to force myself to be good communicator and be confident, but I have to get my point across

to people. I have to try not to be an awkward sort of person , because especially is in social events and stuff like that I have to try to be self-aware an I don't want people to feel uncomfortable in any sort of way. There is a lot of opportunities for awkward moments when you're a host of a social event and you have to try to avoid them. You have to know about the timing of your speech and you have to be able to think very quickly off the top of your head about what you're going to say next etc.

P3

Being in clubs really helps with things like helping you make networks and connections. I've just had my last exam and now I'm ready to get a job but I don't want to work in another industry or in a lower job. I want a very good job in my chosen area. I'm going to be contacting a lot of the people I have met through the clubs and saying I am ready to get a job and asking if they have a job.

Being in clubs has really helped me to improve my communication skills and this is going to be really important for my career. Communication will play a key role in my interviews and then if I get a job, also in my workplace because I will have to communicate with other people in my teams.

The more I participate in the clubs, the more I communicate and the more I learn. At the moment, all my thoughts come into my head in my home language, my mother tongue – and then I need to translate that into English and then I speak. But what I want to do is cut this process in half. I want to think in English and speak in very fluent English.

P4

With AIESEC the goal is to develop people's leadership skills and their global awareness and that involves attending different trainings, running workshops, running conferences and also sending students on international exchange opportunities. It is part of an Australian and international network, so we had to interact and work with 13 other local committees. It was an environment where.... I realised that this was a really serious process. I remember that the USyd elections (where UTS gets a vote) and I remember talking about it and we were all really focussing on which person was really going to bring the society forward, and really be the best – not only for the society members but for AIESEC in general as a whole, and I'd never been at that level of thought or discussion before. Anyway, there were seven UTS people involved, and after we talked about it for a long time, we decided we didn't think any of the three candidates were viable based on what had been presented. We (UTS) only had one vote on the committee but we voted No Confidence. Everyone on the Sydney University Committee gets one vote, so that's 30 or 40 votes, so we didn't think our vote would make a difference, but it ended up that the final result was No Confidence. They had to then run the election again, and one of the people who ran the first time, and who'd taken on the feedback and used it to re-do their election, so I was like wow. This is very legit.

This was all a really accurate depiction of real life. It wasn't a popularity contest. The a discussions were: what's this person done, what are they going to do for next year, it was a formal process and it was a great learning experience because it was taken very seriously.

A few years later I went through the process myself and was elected VP at UTS so I had really learned a lot about presenting your case as a result of those experiences.

As president of one club, I had to help organise a state conference, so there is so much learning that goes into something like that.

In working together at club level at university, you also learn the value of working as a team and you learn skills to get along. I mean, if you're working with someone on something, you don't necessarily have to agree – and you don't necessarily have to like them – but you have

to accept that hey, we all belong here and we can work on the goal we have to achieve success.

Some of the things I learnt in my early years leading clubs were like – how do I get people together? How do I get students to join the society? How do I do interviews for new members? That was a lot of my thing. Like what do we need to talk about in an information session? How do we run an information session? What sort of things do we take people through? – So I started working out strategies to improve how these things were done. I set up databases and contact lists and established ongoing communication strategies to get people involved and engaged. At that time no other clubs did that, many still don't.

I got to figure out how to incorporate different systems and strategies into what we did.

It was a really cool place to just explore different systems to get things done, and not all of them worked and some worked better than others – and that was frustrating – but it was incredibly valuable as a whole experience.

Students who take on leadership roles definitely get great experiences to improve their work readiness. You just get so regularly exposed to it. When I was president I had the experience of half of my executive team dropping out. When I looked back on that a couple of years later, I thought to myself, What type of leader was I being that I had half of my team quit? Obviously at the time I just passed it off as them being in some way flawed, but being realistic further down the track, I realised I must have been doing something wrong. That's interesting. So you learn from even things like that and improve your leadership style for the next role you have.

I also realised when I looked back on my early leadership roles in clubs, that I was so focussed on the outcomes and achieving success, that I didn't really get to know my team. I realised that to have been a good leader I should have first tried to figure out what they needed from the experience; what they were after from their club executive role. I've then been able to take that learning to subsequent leadership roles; leading volunteers especially. It helps me to get people behind organisational activities and goals – just knowing what people want to learn or achieve from the experience. That can be taken forward into professional leadership roles as well, to help me know how to get the most out of my work teams.

For me, I started in 2009, had a gap year, came back, did three subjects a semester whilst working part-time, then studied part-time and worked full-time; a whole lot of different types of experiences. I was involved in clubs the whole time too. That meant that I was growing as I was learning and I had a whole lot of opportunities to try out different stuff. The degree is definitely important but it is only a part of the entire university experience for me. I had no hesitation around taking a bit longer to get it finished, because I knew I was still developing employability skills and had paid jobs relevant to my career.

Even learning to have the patience to wait for things to go through the necessary processes contributes to a student's learning and work readiness. Just having to work with others and get approvals rather than being able to just go and do things on your own. If I was a staff member, for example, I could just go and book a room or a space myself, but in my club executive role I have to go through a long process and wait for the approval to come through. It helps students to understand bureaucratic friction and processes.

P5

I think for many students who are part of a club, it helps them to learn to manage their time better because they want to be able to do the club activities but they have to learn how to get their studies done first. Obviously. Anyone at uni needs to learn to manage their time really well; especially if you are in clubs. To be honest I am normally someone who procrastinates and puts off their assignments but I have learned that 'Oh! The club has a meeting or an event I want to go to next week, so if I want to go I have to start my assignment early so I will be able to go'.

By learning to manage my time better, it will help me later in my employment when I have to manage many tasks.

Also, when you are in clubs you need to learn how to handle people and interact with them. People skills are so important because everything relies on how you handle people, how you talk to people, how you communicate, how you project yourself. So by joining a club you can practice how you will be at the workplace later on. Like it's your first day. Practising these people skills is so important.

P6

It hasn't really been an area I've developed personally because I am not in an executive or leadership role, but I can definitely see how it would help people in those roles with their work ready skills like teamwork and leadership and networking and everything. For me personally I am in quite a few committees outside of University, and those have really helped my skills in networks and if you were on a University committee it would do the same sort of thing. I think it could be really useful.

P7

I guess for me, being a mature-aged student with lots of previous work experience, the clubs per se did not necessarily improve my own work-ready skills, but just by being exposed to the thoughts, ideas and experiences of the rest of those in my cohort and the other students in the clubs and associated forums, I feel my work-ready skills in other areas were greatly improved.

I was able to listen to the students' stories about what their learning experiences had been of coding and IT as they went through school and how that contrasts with what is now happening for their younger siblings. As someone who wants to enter high school IT education, these were invaluable insights I would otherwise not have had access to, and which I feel will make me more prepared and informed about what my future work experiences might be. I got to see what, for some of them, were examples of teaching and teachers who had imparted to these (now) university students a passion and incredible understanding of coding, and I got to hear what they'd done in order to achieve that. Absolutely for me invaluable learning and preparation for my future, anticipated roles. This was hugely inspirational and I'd had no idea that was going to be something I would take away from club and society involvement, but it definitely has made a difference to what I have thought about this experience.

P8

So being in club leadership gives you hard skills as well as the soft skills. I think a lot of people go, 'Oh no, I don't need it. I know how to socialise. I know how to make an event on Facebook for my friends. I don't need to be involved in a committee and taking on one of these roles to learn those sorts of soft skills'. But there are just so many other opportunities you can get to further your confidence and skill set.

The soft skills start as early as when you apply for a leadership position with a club or society. You're sending out an email to apply, and even that is the start of what you can learn.

This year I was on the receiving end of the applications being sent in from students seeking positions. There were some applications that basically just said, 'Hi, I'm interested in applying. Cool,' then I'd be like great ... come and do a speech. But I remember doing mine and doing like a really proper email. Even just doing a draft and editing it and then in UTSOC you have to do a speech (for a director role) in front of the committee and whoever attends the annual general meeting to vote you in. Usually around 20 people when it was in person and then about 30 when it was on zoom. But I only knew one person in the audience, so that was scary but a great experience.

There are so many learning curves involved in being on a committee. Starting from getting appointed, where you're trying to persuade the audience to vote for you and that you are confident and competent through to getting the role, coming up with your own initiatives, sending out cards and invitations, setting out calendars and timelines, establishing data bases, who your contacts will be, what you'll have to organise for the events you want to do ... and that's all before the semester even starts.

It's all great for time management and developing your own initiative in a director role.

Networking and teamwork are of course very important skills you learn in leadership roles. I've made so many connections from UTSOC; so many people I'm confident that if I needed their help in anything in the future, they'd be there for me. And if they wanted my help I'd be so happy to give it. Because I think networking essentially comes down to, you need to form a friendly relationship with that person first and I think clubs like UTSOC are a great way to do that because the networking starts first with the authentic relationship and connection first. Committees are such an excellent way to do that. Even when doing collaborations with other societies. We did one with the Business Society and Law Society this year and it was great. I met so many people I would never have otherwise met.

I think that's the thing. If I picture what things would have been like if I hadn't been in this role, I know so many fewer people.

Planning all the events at the beginning of this year, and then having to change or cancel things because of Covid, was a hassle but it was also a really important learning curve that I don't think many students who aren't in societies, necessarily had to go through. Maybe in their jobs but probably those decisions were made for them by bosses. For us, we had to learn to adapt and change because of the circumstances. We had to find that internal self-motivation to keep things going under new conditions. That was a great experience to have that will make us more resilient in the future. Just going through the process of trying to still make those events worthy of being an event. Rather than just an online Kahoot just for the sake of it. With Social Justice I was told they wanted to do a lot more hands on things this year, so I was in the process of organising those types of things. Then it was ... oh... actually it's going to have to be virtual. So then there was the challenge of still trying to make those initiatives worthwhile.

Being in the club leadership role has also helped me with time management. I have learned how much I can push myself, which is great. And with time management I could look at the schedule and say, right – I've got two assignments and all these club activities lined up. What do I need to do to get them all organised. Often the events are scheduled for the time just after assessment periods; in other words, when you are most likely preparing for an exam or stressing over an assignment that's due, is the same time as when you're usually the most busy organising the final details of a club event. That means you just can't leave everything to the last minute or you're going to fail on every level. I found that really helpful if I have lots of things to do. It takes away your procrastination time when you just have to do it.

P9

Being on the executive of a club was hugely beneficial, not only for social reasons but also for things like learning how to organise better, and manage a team, and general professional skills. That was really useful.

For example in both the societies I was an executive for we had to deal with conflicts or student concerns. For instance when we were doing our magazine and we wanted something from the university. So one thing I really had to learn how to do was have very constructive conversations with people who are in.... like they were my teachers, and my lecturers, so they're in a position of authority over you, but you had to learn to work things out and handle those conversations professionally with people above you.

Basically, it was learning to deal with politics and negotiate your way through it to achieve the outcome you want to achieve. It happened in quite a few of the executive roles I was in and it offered me opportunities to manage group dynamics, manage people, manage conflict, and everything. This was something really new to me because I usually work very independently. That's why it was so valuable for me to learn these things before trying to go out into the workplace.

I never felt that my leadership skills or people management skills were very strong, but an email came out that they were asking for a first year representative in one of the societies so I went along to apply for that position. When I got there I was told that everyone who had held their roles the previous year intended to resign and that unless I took on the president's role, they would be shutting the society down so I said, Yeah, sure. It wasn't what I'd planned, but it was really good for me because I had to learn about marketing and social media and my leadership skills were also incredibly improved.

I didn't know many people in journalism at that stage or in my course, and I had set myself a goal to make networks and establish Contacts the following year, so this was really a great way to do it. I didn't even have an executive team around me and was doing it all alone for the first six months. We had 22 events that year and this year I've stepped away from president and among the general executive but we have a good committee. We still had 18 events this year during Covid, so I'm really proud of what I did and what I learnt.

It was really rewarding to have a vision and then to see it come to fruition. I did a lot of work around the values space so we now have an Equity Director and I can say that that culture that I established has continued in the club. It's so rewarding to be part of something like that and it helped me develop my leadership skills significantly and my people management skills. I also realise just how hard it is to be a manager or a leader. At the end of it I realised how much I just really wanted to go back to creating things for a while. I mean it was great to learn all that and I know they will be useful in the future, but for me it taught me that I didn't necessarily want to go down the leadership and management pathway for now. I think I like to take control too much, and because of that I think I prefer to do things on my own. I learned I don't want to pursue leadership just for the sake of it.

Being in the executive role with the clubs just extended my network of contacts so much. I had a goal to extend my networks through the clubs and I met so many people. It extended my network by 100%. Obviously I met the people on my team and the people who went to events but there was also a lot of collaboration so I collaborated with a lot of people in different clubs and societies, collectives and that kind of thing and also a lot of professional networks. They were from like industry, who came and spoke on different panels that we organised.

The people on the panels are people I can now contact to ask for advice or get information. Journalism is quite a small industry so having someone who is already in the industry know your name, is half the battle in getting a job, so I think it is incredibly valuable. Like to be able to go to an organisation when you're looking for a job and to be able to say like, I know two or three people that work here already Because I've met them through these industry panels or through uni or whatever, that's really valuable.

P10

I have recently been elected to be secretary of one of my clubs in 2021. I definitely believe that is going to help develop my professional skills, particularly things like my leadership skills. Being in an organisation like that will provide you with skills that are very similar to the ones you need in the workforce. Things like teamwork, collaboration, building interpersonal Connections with others, how to organise yourself and your time [time management]. I think that's the benefits of having a leadership position in a club is unmatched, and I just don't think you would get as rich an experience for your career if you didn't try for one of those roles.

I think that more than anything you create friendships, which are really important at university an especially in a Covid climate. I think that building partnerships with people who have similar passions to you will benefit your life in so many ways. You learn how to work with people, you understand what it's like from another's perspective, you learn some of the soft skills that I mentioned before because they're things that employers look for – but even just self-development.

P11

This year really helped us learn about resilience. We'd had all our events planned for the year, but with Covid, everything had to change. We had to have another planning day over zoom and tried to flip every event idea we'd had into an online version. Not all of them worked. And not all of them were as successful as they would have been in person, but our thing is it's better to give it a go and give students opportunities. Sometimes they just don't want to come to an online event, but as long as they see that we're trying, it is all worthwhile I think.

I think personally my maturity level has increased significantly. I've learned a lot from having to manage a team and it's helped me grow up a lot and be ready for the workplace. If I start a new job, I will feel like I've got relevant skills now to prepare me for it. Communication skills, networking, people management. When I started uni I'd just turned 17, but now I'm 20 and I feel like I have grown professionally and personally so much and a lot of that is because of the roles I've carried out through the clubs.

I learnt so much from my predecessors and had a lot of mentoring from the Activate team as well, because I do some work for them on the front desk.

When I came into a leadership position as a first-year rep, the leaders at the time had different qualities. I had some great leaders and some that were not so great, and it really helped me fine-tune my leadership skills, to be able to compare those two different styles.

When I found myself unexpectedly in the role of president and no other team members I had to go through the process of finding people to fill the roles (recruitment) then interviewing (appointing staff) over zoom for people I'd never met before and I'd never done anything like that. I guess I had to use the 'fake it till you make it' theory. Everyone else was older than me; they were in 2nd or 3rd year and I was only in first year, so I really needed to be mature and earn the respect from these individuals and be a good leader.

In one role I had with Activate UTS I got to see how some of the other clubs and societies operated and I remember thinking how some of them, like the Law Society operated really well. I found out as much as I could from them, asking what traits they saw as being positive for their executives to have etc. I got a lot of that kind of mentoring, which I know will be really helpful in future roles.

My time management skills thanks to being in a club leadership role, have improved so much. I came to University straight from school and like I used to use a paper diary Anne just write notes everywhere and stuff like that. I have drawings on it make my diary look pretty to make it look like i was organised but i was not organised.

P12

The KYHO club is a networking club for female students. A lot of the students in the club do business and marketing degrees. That is a great way to form networks, and by making those connections now is really important. Most of them are 3rd or 4th year students, so they'll be going into the industry before me, and hopefully they'll remember me and we can continue networking once we're out there in the workforce.

P13

The roles I've had at the clubs have definitely given me the chance to test out my leadership skills and work out what type of leader I want to be. That's heavily influenced the way I've run the society this year. I can see what things work well and what don't.

When I was events director, it was great to be able to organise events and see how I could improve each time on what I'd done before. So many skills were developed, like contacting people, organising venues, coordinating activities – I guess organising an event for a couple of hundred people and knowing all the steps involved in going about it, is a really great experience to have had. It's given me great confidence in my own workplace now as well and I can offer those experiences to future employers once I graduate.

Even handling the society's social media accounts is a skill that will be useful in finding future employment.

I'm fairly sure having held this leadership position had an impact on me getting my current part-time job, like at interview they brought up, 'How would you manage a team?' and I could talk about my experiences. Definitely joining the society has given me a wealth of experience to draw from in terms of being able to give examples of where I've achieved certain things if needed in interviews etc.

I feel like the industry panels were also incredibly valuable, because we were then able to also connect with people who were out there working in the field already, and they can be used as a valuable resource for future employment.

We had some internal drama in our club and as we worked through it I realised that whilst I'd originally thought that getting all the tasks done for the year was going to be the most difficult part of my job, it was actually managing people. I had to mediate things and hold discussions, plan compromises and bring parties on board, so everyone could at least agree to some extent, and that was really, really good experience for me for the future. I will now know how to handle a similar situation. I had time to reflect on how I did. What things worked and what didn't. Need to improve here etc. You can only learn those things from experience. I'm happy I've got that experience now, in a society, rather than in my future place of employment where the stakes might be a little bit higher.

P14

In the leadership role I held with my club I have learned to manage a team and work with people, as well as learn how meetings run and how to record notes and manage paperwork etc.

The leadership role I held required me to organise events and to make them more successful it was important that I helped people get to know each other. I became much better at talking to people and getting people to socialise, so my people skills really improved.

I definitely improved my communication skills in my club roles. We had people from a few different countries in the club so I had to speak in both English and Taiwanese. That did challenge my brain sometimes but it was a good experience and helped me improve my English.

I had to also organise a big event at the end of the year. I had to plan and organise all the transport, booking of the event venue (Aqua Park) where we went and organise food for the lunch we were providing for everyone. There were about 50 or 60 people, so it was a big event and I learned a lot in that process. I had a good team working with me and so I learnt a lot about teamwork too.

Another advantage of being in club leadership is that it teaches you to manage your time better. You definitely want to attend all the events, but you don't want to do badly in your

studies, so you have to plan when you are doing your work to get a good balance and get things done so you can attend the events. You have to get a good balance between your studies and your social life.

P15

What we gain from the consulting club I am in is just immense in terms of actually working in a team with other students and it brings students from different faculties. I normally would only have business students as friends but because of this club I have friends doing IT, law and other types of degrees. This really helps us establish strong networks for the future.

Working with a real-world client is amazing. Being hands on and knowing how to act professionally and meet their deliverables, developing your presentations skills; like how do you pitch in front of a board, how do you actually use data to analyse problems and I have definitely used those skills in these club activities.

In your own academics at uni you do a lot of presentations and power points and how to put forward your argument and that but doing it to a real client just gives it that extra bit of professionalism. The club tries to help you with those skills. At the start of the 12 week group consulting period, before we meet the client and get the deliverable, we have workshops on things like how to break down a problem. After we get the problem from the client, we have industry representatives talk to us. They explain how they would face that sort of a problem, and then we have a week to apply what we've learnt in that workshop to our ideas. Then the next stage has more workshops. So the whole way along we're getting industry guidance that helps move us toward our own group solution and then present it to the client at the end of the 12 weeks. It is so real and you absolutely learn so much about it really works. It has definitely enhanced my analytical and problem-solving skills.

It's like the club creates a safe environment where I can test out my skills that I'm learning in class and that I'll need later in life. Things like groupwork, public speaking, problem-solving, communication and all that. The culture in the clubs and societies is that they provide you with room for error and they provide feedback in a really constructive way. One of the missions of our club is to help our members develop professional skills but also to develop on a personal level, so everything we do we try to give as much feedback to our consultant members as we can so they can learn. There isn't always time for that in the classroom environment. Honest, constructive and helpful feedback – and because we know everyone there wants to get better at something, everyone is happy to help each other out.

On one occasion I needed some marketing collateral to come out about a particular event so I explained to marketing what I needed and when I wanted it out and all those details, but on the day it didn't come out. I messaged them and something was quickly put up, but the quality wasn't good and it seemed they'd forgotten completely about the whole campaign until I'd messaged them. I was worried about letting them know the quality wasn't to a standard that I thought we should be putting out, and I checked with other people first – but then I realised I wouldn't be helping them in the long run if I told them I was happy with it. I learned how to give them good, constructive feedback – explaining What I wasn't happy with, and I also learned that perhaps I wasn't clear enough in my messaging or that I should have provided them with a calendar or some reminders. So I took responsibility for my part and also learned how to manage this human resource in what was a situation of some conflict. It all worked well so that was another good learning experience for me.

P16

I learned a lot of organisational skills. I had to discuss things with people across the campus to organise things so I had to communicate with many people. This helped my communication skills a lot.

Time management is one thing that has definitely been improved since I have been in leadership positions in clubs at UTS. You really need to learn when is the time to play and when is the time to study.

P17

Being in a club leadership position significantly impacts your networking and communication skills. Getting to know people can be a challenge but having opportunities to meet people and establish a relationship with them is a great skill to have. Especially in Engineers without Borders, because at the camps we have there are students from other universities who we got to meet and chat with, and even today I still meet up with these people and we chat about different ideas, humanitarian aid and other things and we keep the contacts going. So that is great for future networking opportunities and helps our communication skills as well.

The industry talks we get to go to as part of a club are really useful too. They're aimed at developing us professionally. They're the times where we are encouraged to go and communicate and make networks and everything. When professionals are there telling you how valuable those networks are, it really hits home and makes sense.

Because of CREDO and me leading the team I'm responsible for each week, I definitely feel like I've developed a lot of work skills. As a leader I get paired with someone from out in the field (non-student), to help me with my leadership skills. He taught me so much in terms of leadership; things like the language I used, the way you should organise or motivate people. Doing that throughout the year has given me so many skills in those areas and I feel like I am now more of an efficient and effective leader who can get the task done.

Also playing in the team sport, in the frisbee club, helps with things like working as part of a team. Especially with me not knowing anyone else on the team, I had to develop quick thinking to try to gather what was going on and apply it. I haven't really done an internship yet so I can't really tell you how it specifically relates back to the workplace, but I feel fairly confident that it will be helpful.

I think the skills I've learnt across the different clubs I feel like inter-relate to each other and have given me a good overall balance of skills I'll need in the workplace.

P19

The soft skills I was aiming to develop through the clubs were networking and doing LinkedIn profiles and resumes and there was one called the Design Your Life series which helped a lot. So all of these helped with things like collaborating, working with teams, and different sorts of skills, building your personal brand.

Most of the workshops I really enjoyed were from the Women in Business Society. Those guys did a really good job at not just delivering high quality workshops but also regularly communicating with the student community and their members, and also responding on time to any enquiries people had.

The clubs definitely help you to build a professional network, to be part of a community and to develop your soft or transferable skills. These are the three main benefits I see the clubs doing. They are also good for making new friends and improve your self confidence. It was scary to go to the first meetings, but I am over that now and I feel more confident in the classroom and also in the Australian community in general.

P20

Whilst I think being in the club does improve my English skills, but I was always looking at getting more skills than just my English. I was looking for skills more like public speaking, communication skills, leadership and team management. The club definitely gave me a lot of those skills. For example I had never really written professional emails before, but when we

need to find speakers for events, such as industry professionals, we have to write professional emails to them. We need to convey everything we want them to cover in the event, and so we need to communicate all of those things in writing. We get help from the other students to show us how to write those types of emails. There are previous examples for us to learn from.

I also learned how to interview people for positions. That will be really valuable.

Another thing I learned which I think will help me perform better once I graduate, is how to resolve conflicts when dealing with people. For some people they take on leadership roles in clubs just so it looks good on their resume, but that is not fair if they don't also do the tasks required for that role. Because I was in a leadership role, I had to learn how to resolve conflicts like that. I'm sure I could use those experiences that I had in the club during interviews, for example if an interviewer asked me about my people skills or leadership skills I could use those examples.

Another thing that we do in our club is that we have our own website. Our club has our own IT department and we have to build our website from scratch and manage it. We have to do all our own coding as well, so they are all great experiences for us to have. I don't study IT, so I had to recruit someone who studies IT for that role. Things like that would be really good for those students resumes as well, being able to say that they built the society's website and maintained it.

P21

The activities we do in our club, where we have to present ideas to start-ups, really helps build up skills like leadership and presentation skills. We are put through a week of workshops before we go ahead and launch into our project. They are on things like design thinking and ideation skills, which was really cool. And we learnt about how we can take our initial idea and build on it to make it like a feasible project to pitch to a judging panel. We then put it all together in our work groups, and do the presentation, so I think there are just so many important transferable skills in there. The groups include mixed disciplines and mixed years. My group was a computer engineer, doing coding and that sort of thing. Another student was doing accounting. We could make friends and networks with people from other years and other disciplines.

Being in the club has definitely given me the opportunity to learn how to balance my workload and time. I have learned how to set priorities and be organised, and I think that will be useful in so many future situations.

I have also developed my leadership skills, just because with my involvement I joined a project team and we had to put in an application to get that role, so that was really cool and we have to use teamwork and leadership. I went for an executive position recently and got it, so I feel the leadership training I have had so far really helped me to get that role.

P22

There is a lot of team building and collaboration to get the activities happening. Even when we are planning something like a hiking trip, we have to consider those in the group who are faster, those who are slower and all the different levels and we have to plan the activity so that it meets everyone's needs. That is a type of teamwork that is also useful in an employment situation.

Those same skills are then transferable into workplaces. I can guarantee it. I have been so much involved in uni activities since the time that I started as an undergraduate and I would say that each time I have had to go for interviews most of the time I am the preferred candidate because I have the attributes that come with interacting with different groups of people, who is respectful, somebody who is able to collaborate with different types of people and someone

who is very open. All of those are things that we get when we are working in university clubs with a diverse range of other students.

Clubs are also important for international students because they help them develop their English language skills and communication and that is really important for forming networks and friendships as well.

The leadership skills you develop are incredibly important too.

P23

Being involved in clubs definitely have the potential to enable students to build soft skills like networking and communication skills. You're intermingling with a lot of different people and people from a lot of different degrees, so you are creating networks of professionals who are all about to go out into different sectors of the workforce. When you are out in the workforce you might need to mingle across those same sort of sectors to get approval for things or to be part of a cross-disciplinary team and things like that. Having that skill set is really important and often different sectors have to blend within a company or a business.

For example, if you're working in health, at some point you are going to have to talk to finance and things like that, so it's important to be able to understand where those people are coming from and maybe to have contacts who can help you.

P24

I did some Activate UTS workshops which were very useful. Unfortunately they were online as well because of Covid hence she did not really make many new friends and networks.

The sessions were useful in learning how things were done in Australia. A lot of the sessions were also focussed on giving us information about how to go about finding jobs. They had some Bingo nights, and a trivia night, and dance nights which I attended. I attended all the online events. They did a good job of it considering.

In my undergraduate degree I held a leadership position at the university where I prepared students to go on placements. That definitely developed my leadership skills.

A lot of the soft skills you gain are really important. They are just as important as the hard skills you gain as part of your degree.

EMPLOYABILITY

P1

I think it will look really good in my profile.

I do not have experience outside of University in terms of work or corporate history. If you don't have those corporate skills then you're not really ready to enter the corporate world. So by being in leadership in the club I am trying to do my best to enhance my skills; learn the most skills that I can learn when I learn the academic.

I have tried to apply them as much as I can so that I can give examples to the corporate world in an interview of how I have done things. I can tell them this is where I learned things and this is where I applied them, and now I think I am now ready to be a corporate.

So I'm trying to bridge that gap in my own way. This is just me. It's not necessarily that all other club members will be trying to apply the same academic concepts or anything, but for me I like to do it this way.

(Being involved in club leadership) I will also definitely be able to use the examples of things I have done in job interviews. This is where I will draw my examples from. For me this is where most of my interview preparation will come from. I mean this is just me, and I am very eager. I'm very passionate about getting into the real world but I don't really have corporate world experience and I really want to get it. And so hence I'm trying to prepare a crack interview and that means using examples of the things I have done in the club. This is my final semester so I'm trying to do everything I can to make sure I can perform well in interviews.

P2

I feel like having the responsibilities that you do in a club, shows a future employer that you're a responsible person and that you have a track record where you have performed. It shows that you are capable at whatever sort of role you are involved in at the club.

Of course there is all the job skills that you get better at when you're involved in a club. Things like teamwork and communication and being a good leader and things like that, so I definitely think that would benefit me in the way of standing out from the crowd when I'm applying for jobs after I graduate.

Even the interviews that you have to do to get the roles on the committees, they help you develop professionally and be more confident and prepared when you have a real job interview later in life.

The other thing is that I have developed networks with other people in the clubs and I can contact them with any sort of question that I might have. If they start a job in a company in the future for example, I would be able to still contact them and ask them questions even if they were in a different industry. We become close when we've worked together on the committee, and I expect that same closeness would happen once we go out and work in the field.

the career development events that we do at the clubs are also really helpful. We get people to come in and talk about their career path and what they went through and where they are and what they are doing now. That really helps give us an understanding of what the real world is like. I'm not sure I would 100% just be confident enough to just ring them up and ask them for advice or their opinions on things, but I might because I could say to them 'Oh, you came and gave us a talk at University and I was organising the event. Do you mind if I ask you a question?'

P3

I applied for a leadership position and was given an interview, but my exams were going on at the time so I couldn't give the interview 100 per cent. I was not successful but just going through the experience was very useful. I thought it would be similar to a job interview, so I was very nervous – but they made me very comfortable. They sat on the same side of the desk as me and the person was around my age and offered water etc. That experience will definitely help me in other interviews I go for.

When international students hear they have to go for an interview, they get really nervous because they don't like interviews. It takes a lot of courage for them to do it, but now that I have done this one and I know it is not so bad, I'm really looking forward to doing more because it is a great way to get experience and help in my job application process.

I think the interview I went through will really help me in future interviews. I had to prepare myself and gather all my courage to go the interview and although I knew it would not affect my grades or my career if I did not succeed at the interview, I knew it would improve my interview skills and I'm looking forward to having more opportunities like this through the clubs and societies.

P4

When I was VP of AIESEC I had to attend a national conference in Perth. It was so good being in an environment surrounded by all of the other VP marketings from across Australia and all of the other teams and attending different take-out sessions, I realised okay, cool; everyone's dealing with the same challenges – so what do we need to do as AIESEC to help us all learn and develop strategies to meet those challenges.

We got to see what the benchmarks were and how we were performing and to see what others were doing in other states or regions.

I realised early on in my studies that if you got involved in clubs and especially in leadership of clubs, you got to be in real life situations, work on real life projects, and find solutions. I now have the experience of not really ever having to use my resume. A big reason for that is all the club and society stuff.

Because of my club experience I was invited to work in UTS Careers in 2013 and 2014 and was running the 2014 UTS Careers Fair. I got that job literally because of someone who knew what I was doing in my role at the club. That was really powerful. I was also working as a student promotion representative for the business school as well.

By reflecting on some of the leadership roles I held in the clubs, I can see now there was definitely an element of me being very fixed about everything that had to be done and what was the best way to do it, so why aren't we doing it? I didn't really give any sense of ownership to others or opportunities for them to make a major contribution – so of course, they lost interest in their roles. In the space of then trying to be a one-man team, there were things that weren't working. I then used those reflections and those experiences to change my leadership style to become a much better leader.

I really feel I have learnt so much from my club leadership positions that make me more employable, not just from the successes but also from all the joyful mistakes I've made along the way. It's just made me a much stronger leader.

I had to attend a student conference in NSW in my third year and the facilitators, many of whom were the same age as or younger than me, were brilliant facilitators. I remember thinking wow – I want to be as good as that. For me, that was when I decided that any public speaking opportunity I get, I'm going to just take it. Even if I think I'm not ready enough or educated enough or confident enough I'm just going to take it. I looked for as many workshops as I could. Now, six or seven years later, I'm running many, many workshops, even over zoom and I'm on panels all over the place. Public speaking wasn't something I was naturally great at, but I used my club experiences to develop the skill and now I'm much better at it, just because I decided this was what I wanted to do. If the club executive opportunity wasn't there, I don't know where those learning opportunities would have come from.

P5

Even though I might not be learning professional skills as a general club member, I definitely still think being in a club has helped make me more employable in the future because I have learned many, many more people skills and learned to speak English more fluently and more freely like this. These sorts of things will definitely help make me more employable.

P6

Being involved in leadership in clubs at university is a great way to boost your resume, to meet new people and to learn new skills; particularly if you're someone Who hasn't done many extracurriculars. Maybe you dropped out after doing your HSC, maybe you've never been in outside clubs and things, maybe you once were but haven't for a long time. The clubs at uni are a great way to get back into utilising all those skills.

I see so much value in being involved in extracurriculars. For me most of them are external but I would definitely see value in being involved in the uni ones if I wasn't already so busy.

P7

There are so many different ways being involved in clubs could lead to higher employability opportunities and experiences. From my personal experience, I'm not seeking employment at this stage, but for those on forums there are often opportunities that arise. I know for me, over the past six months a couple of mates who've worked in organisations have said to me 'Hey, I'm looking for this type of employee. Do you have anyone in your network you could suggest?' and another time there was some suggestions around initially pro bono work that could lead into paid employment through one of the big 4 banks – so I went back to people in forums I'd been in contact with and started a very basic conversation about whether there was interest. In other words, just by being active and showing your interest and making networks through these clubs, all sorts of opportunities are possible.

The Education Society had a great initiative where they were helping students to understand what is happening in the real world. They were describing the way the Education Department asks in their advertisements, for teachers. So there are three levels looking firstly at whether you are certified to teach a particular thing, whether you are able to teach a certain thing and whether you are willing to teach a certain thing. And those three terms are actually a code the ED uses to describe the types of jobs they're expecting to attract teachers for, and what your specialisation would deliver in terms of those expectations. The fact that those explanations and terms be delivered inside the society means those job seekers will have a much, much better understanding of the market they're about to go into.

P8

Being in the clubs is also a great way to get some accreditations that can help get you into a job. I know you can get so many things, like you can do an RSA course if you want to through Activate when they're running normally (without Covid), you can use it if you're helping to organise first year camp, so you can look after people responsibly. You can get mental health and first aid certifications, through the well-being representative program. Some of those things help you get other sorts of employment. I did that course and loved it. It was so useful and it was free for me because of my club role.

If I wanted to go for some sort of role in UTS (which I may want to do some day) I feel confident that I have people who would give me good references from the areas of the university I have interacted with in my club role. I've had opportunities to interact with staff on quite a few occasions and they can be really important if you want to secure future employment, especially with UTS.

I have a few part-time jobs, and my employers would definitely give me references, but the difference between having a reference from those sorts of jobs, and a reference from a UTS staff member I have worked or interacted with in the course of my club leadership role is significant. It would definitely be more valuable for me in terms of my career. Those are some of the ways your employability increases as a result of taking on leadership or executive roles in UTS clubs and societies.

P10

The reason I'm so passionate about being involved in clubs and giving up my time is because I think that the self-development I will get from having a leadership position and doing something I'm passionate about is very rewarding. It's beyond, 'Oh, this will look good on my resume; this will get me a job, this will get me good networking contacts' and things like that. Probably yes, all of those things will happen but at the same time I'm more interested in the actual skills that I will gain and the experience that I will gain in carrying out the role's tasks.

As more and more people get university degrees, they're not so much looking at the fact that you have a degree, they're more looking at things like what experiences you've had outside that and the experiences you have had to shape your character. I think having a leadership role on an executive board is a very important thing they look at because it indicates this person is reliable, a leader, is responsible, and therefore this person is someone we should consider.

You gain organisational skills and experiences you'll need for the workforce once you leave university.

P11

Particularly in terms of my leadership skills, I have learned so much about what works as a leader and what doesn't. Just having opportunities through club leadership to see different styles of leadership and to be in that kind of position (being impacted by different leadership styles being practised on you) where you have to suffer being under a style of leadership that's terrible, that can be an opportunity for you to think about your own leadership style.

Just the same as I put time and effort into a subject that would improve my employability and make me a better student or a better person or extend my mind, I also value the experiences I get as a club executive the same way. I see it as yes it's an extra curricular but it's an extra curricular that sets me apart from the other hundred people applying for a job that I want or develops my skills so that I can be more professional and I can be more qualified. So I feel like I'm investing my time into my own professional development and growth.

At times I had to manage a team of around 10 20 to 25-year olds, and had to motivate them and guide them, when I was one of the youngest there. It can be stressful but there are definitely times where you realise why you are doing it. After one event I ran I got so many messages from international students and other people saying how grateful they were that it had happened, or that they made a friend that night and they hadn't met anyone at all since they had started going to UTS. Things like that make it all worthwhile.

I definitely put a lot of time and commitment into my leadership role at the club and I'm really glad there's the recognition for what you do on your transcript and that you did the club executive program. I think that's really important because it's adding to my resume; it makes me more employable and it's benefitting not just my time at UTS it's going to benefit me further in life. So it all pays off.

Being an executive, and doing the club executive training program makes me so much more employable. My time management and communication skills have been really elevated over the past two years and the professionalism that Activate expects of you in your communication, in your reporting, etc. they really teach you how to manage your documents and your writing correctly. That makes you more employable.

Being able to say I was president of the UTS Medical and Health Society will really stand out when I'm going for a health job because it show I'm passionate and committed to the area. They see me as being involved in the health care community.

The clubs have definitely helped me develop my networks outside of uni as well. We have panels and networking events with industry professionals. Lots of the students in our club have got internships as a result of those connections made at the events. Internships can often turn into honours placements which can often turn into a job. That's really cool.

P13

I feel like the connections I am making will be able to help me once I graduate and throughout my career. I'm about to enter my fourth year, and I feel like I'm in a pretty fortunate position because I now know so many people already working in the industry. I know two people working at Channel 10, someone who works in a big add agency, another person working in

a communications start-up and more. Just knowing them and keeping tabs on them I know those networks will be important. I know if someone I knew needed help, I'd be able to know where to send them.

So the connections are about fun at the time, while you're at uni – but over time I know they're going to be helping in careers and in getting jobs. The connections are meaningful and I've met them through the society, either because they're been students and then graduated but also from industry professionals who I've met doing my leadership roles in the society.

UTS has a reputation for being strongly focussed on being a real world learning experience. I know someone at the head of a large fitness company, and she said if she has a bunch of resumes for a job and she sees someone from UTS, she's moving it to the top of the list. And clubs really add to that real-world aspect of learning. I feel like having the industry panels and careers events, the academic material we get from class, the connections we make and the workplace experiences we get from being involved in clubs, I feel like it makes me a really well-rounded student/graduate. I feel like clubs compliment the academic side of things because the clubs and societies have the time and energy to put those things on.

P14

When I was doing all the work and things for the event I organised I realised the club was just like a small world for me. We had a president, who was like the boss; a treasurer, who was like the accountant; and other members like our communication person who had to collaborate with people from other clubs and things, so I feel like I was learning real knowledge but I was learning it before I went to work for other companies. These companies have those departments and you have to learn to work with them, just like we did in our club. I had to negotiate with my 'boss', I had to get approvals from the 'accountant' and I had to communicate with my 'clients' so it was just like a work team in the workplace. The club was a place where we could learn those skills and practice those skills before going into the real world.

I cannot learn those things from normal uni studies because I'm doing architecture and normally in class you just learn the knowledges of architecture or of design. You don't learn how to manage a team, or how to organise events. No. There's no way you can learn that. But you can learn them by being in a club executive position.

Because you build friends in the clubs from outside your own area of study, it really helps you with networking across other disciplines and to understand those disciplines better.

For example, my best friend is studying construction work. We often talk about how architecture works with construction, and how architecture and design is practical or impractical in terms of construction. So it might be ok to design a building one way or have a certain type of architecture idea but it's helpful to know whether that's a practical idea in terms of actually having to construct that building. For example when we are doing creative design, we might design something that works well from a design point of view, but we are not really thinking that much about how it will be constructed. My friend helps me think about that side of things. Sometimes I will say to him, 'How about this design. Is that possible to do that in real life?' or what can we change to achieve or accomplish this project and he gives me his ideas. Like, maybe he'll tell me to add more columns for supporting a structure or something, because he is purely thinking about the construction and engineering side of things, rather than design. So we learn from each other.

That type of connection helps me to understand other disciplines' perspectives and how architecture accommodates those perspectives. I think it makes me a better architect, and those connections wouldn't happen so easily if it weren't for clubs. It helps you develop your thinking in different ways.

Another student I know from the club does a lot of study on stocks and she has also taught me all about that. So there is another advantage.

I think those sorts of contacts will also be important out in the real world once we graduate.

P15

There was one event where we were competing with other universities. Everyone wanted to do really well and I took on a co-ordinator role. It was a lot of stress and pressure and I had to do a lot of people management to get everyone working well, but it was definitely a great experience. I really had to challenge myself in that role and push beyond my comfort zone. But coming out of it I learned a lot about my character and how I perform under pressure, and I think I just came out better because I knew how important it was to keep calm, keep things in perspective, and to manage relationships with other people by giving constructive feedback.

P17

At the last industry panel night I went to there was a heavy emphasis on start-ups and how they work and how you can use networking to benefit you if you were starting up your own company or a UTS start-up. These give us the skills and the knowledge; to know the right people and to have the right mindset. You have the right mindset when you're surrounded by the right people and they give you tips and ideas in how to pitch and how to effectively deliver your ideas in like one minute. There was some really good advice. It challenged your way of thinking, and it encourages us to break down the barriers and go for it. It definitely made me think a lot about the ideas I've got and the opportunities I need to look for to bring those ideas to fruition.

P18

I think the connections I've made through the clubs are going to make me more employable once I graduate and throughout my career. Especially with the experience of having worked in a team, it brings in things like teamworking skills and cooperation skills. So they're really important attributes everyone needs in the workforce, or even as a student.

Even just having the connections, you hear about job opportunities opening up or companies that other companies are wanting to link up with – so having those broad ranges of contacts I know would be very valuable.

I've had to develop my communication and negotiation skills in a lot of my club roles and they will be useful as well. As a leader I had to make sure everyone's voices were being heard, so that I think will help me be better in the workplace.

My people skills have definitely improved, especially in the way of being able to identify new members who might be struggling with making connections and being able to go up to them, introduce myself and start talking to them. It's just thinking outside just your own circle of needs and thinking more broadly about the organisation. I've also had to negotiate at times and find ways the club can help students achieve what they want to at UTS.

P20

Being in clubs definitely helps you improve your professionalism if you are in a leadership role. Things like how to dress and how to speak to people, how to communicate with them in writing, and many other things. I have just finished my degree, and I applied for my first job and I got it straight away so I am really happy with the decisions I made as a student. My employer did ask me during the interview, what I did as president of the society. I told them all of the things that I did and the skills that I had to use every day as president. I told him that I managed a team of more than 20 people; that we had different departments and how we had to keep track of everyone's progress and that we hosted successful events with 100 per cent attendances. And how we had coordinated events with people from some of the big investment and banking companies and he was really impressed. I explained how it was a relatively new club and all the ways that I was able to contribute to the development of the society.

He said it was really great that I had had those experiences in different things already, so he said he wouldn't have to waste time teaching me how to write emails or speak to people and things like that or host a meeting in the company. It was really great.

P21

I feel like the experiences you have in uni kind of happen in a safer environment. The things you have to do to get projects done are not so much of an unknown thing now, just because I've been at uni for a couple of years and have been doing them in the club. The club is a safe little environment where I can learn and grow and apply skills in what is more like a workplace. If it was in an actual workplace it might be a more challenging thing to do because the risks would be higher. It's better to be able to make those early mistakes now, learn and grow from them, and be able to push on to do bigger and better things once you graduate.

P24

When you are meeting a lot of people from different disciplines it helps you to create networks that will be useful once you graduate. Clubs are the perfect platform for establishing networks that can help you throughout your career. They enable students to try out their skills more safely than if they were in a job. They don't have a lot of pressure in the club; you can make mistakes and it is not the end of the world. In a job you would have all the pressure, and the responsibility level is quite high. So university is a safer space and students are more free to try things out. There is also more support around them, more people, more people to go to for help, and you can informally go up and speak to anybody and the society is more inclusive.

MAKING FRIENDS AT UTS

P1

When you're an international student and you're just coming out you are trying to make new friends and create new experiences for yourself.

I joined the clubs because I wanted to make friends, and I did that. I am still friends with them now. I would say clubs are great for making friends (P1).

It is also a good way to make friends outside your actual year. The clubs are a good way for students from different stages of their degree to meet up. First year students look up to the older students. I know I carry my friendships forward so people I met in my first semester who are face to face I am still friends with them through WhatsApp and some of the other social media accounts I have (P1).

The PBS is specifically for post grads but there are many, many similar clubs and societies for undergrad students.

P2

I've definitely made friends within the medical society and community. It's been really helpful going to the meetings and talking to other people. The study sessions are especially helpful. Particularly when I was in my first year. The other people in second and third you were giving me a lot of information about how to navigate stuff like with my subjects. Just a whole lot of stuff about how uni worked in general. I still had to get used to doing things but it was great to have the information first (P2).

One of the people in the committee was a really meticulous person and he had stacks of notes from the subjects that he had done and he brought his notes to the society and people could just go through them and photocopy them or take photos of their phone to help them with their studies. He didn't mind. He was happy to share. Which was just such a great help. That was one incredible benefit to me of being in the society (P2).

P3

I knew that joining clubs would help me make friends at university. There are various things you have to do as an international student. So a person sometimes gets depressed, sometimes he feels lonely, so if there are many friends around him it really helps. That was the other main reason I wanted to join clubs and societies.

I have made a lot of friends. Some of them I see every day. I have made one good friend who is doing a Bachelor Degree in Engineering. We are really good friends (P3).

P4

You absolutely make friends by joining clubs and if you are on the executive those friends can become even closer because you're working together over time. Some of the people, especially from the year I was president, are my close friends to this day. Probably at least four very close friends, and lots of other great friends, even people from other years or other universities.

In general, clubs are a really helpful experience where people can actually go and just align with people who are passionate about the same sorts of things as they are.

In working together to actually achieve something, there's something really profound in that because it's like, Okay, here's this big task. We have to achieve it. How are we going to do that? We're going to have some wins and we're going to have some losses, but we're all working towards this. And there's a real sense of belonging in that.

I think joining clubs and making friends whilst at university is critical. There are lots of students who I've spoken to who their experience is that once they've joined a society and actually connected with people, that's the first time where they felt like they belonged to the university (P4).

P5

I came here without any family. All my family are back home, so by joining clubs I can make some new friends with the same interest. So my main reason for joining it was to make friends.

Especially for international students, we come here with a different language. English is not my first language. So when we come to Australia, getting a new friend, especially a person who speaks English, I'm forced to speak up. Because we are talking about the same hobbies or interests, it is easier. Much better than when you are just listening in class or speaking on a topic, because when you are speaking with a friend about games, about politics and things like that. It's really a life-changing experience. That's why I looked hard at the people who were running the club. I want to know what they are like, because I want to be in a club that encourages friendships and welcomes people (P5).

I look for clubs who have friendly people because I want to be around people who are positive about life.

I made a lot of new friends from just one event and I meet them outside the club now a lot. I still have contact with them right now. In fact, in two hours I'm going to have coffee with my friend from the Indonesian Society. So if you ask me did I make new friends, yes I made a lot (P5).

P6

Making friends is definitely one of the benefits of being in clubs. Sometimes The people who are in clubs together are already friends, but for those who do not know a lot of people, then joining a club is a great way to make friends (P6). For me the best time to join and make friends would have been first year. By second year I think oh, I'm not sure whether this is friend making capacity anymore or not. Because I already have a lot of friends.

At the beginning when you start at uni everyone is looking to make new friends. But by second year you are often already in some groups. And other people are in groups too. I guess it's just less certain because people might be there for other reasons now, whereas at the start just about everyone is there to try to make friends, And the clubs are a really great way to make friends at the start.

There are a lot of 1st year events, like first year meeting great, first year pub call, first year this that and the other. They are really tailored to first years and aimed at helping new students make friends. but if you're not a first year, and you are still in the club, you are really only invited to the main events. That's fine, but for me being in second or third year, making friends becomes less of a motivator for being in a club (P6).

If you didn't have friends, and you wanted to make friends then joining a club is the perfect way to do it (P6).

At some of the events I've met new people and sat with new people, but I wouldn't say good friends, I'd say more like acquaintances through the clubs.

P7

Obviously the disadvantage of the Covid era is social interaction, but I think it's a bit interesting that some forms of social interaction were still occurring. There were a bunch of very strong personas in some of the chats and in some of the societies I was in, and they managed to just bring people into conversations, encouraged introductions and then bantered with the people who do introduced themselves.

So there was still a really strong attempt to maintain a social element, despite the fact that people weren't able to meet face to face. I found that to be fascinating because in my current personal situation I'm not likely to attend an event in the city in the evening and that has alcohol as a focus, but that the social interaction can still be built up for someone like me through this other medium of online forums (P7).

As I am a mature-aged student with a young family, I was not really aiming to make friends from my university experience, but I would definitely say I have made acquaintances. If I think about the workplaces I've enjoyed so far in my career (and there have been about 20), I would often take a few key traits from a particular workplace delivered by one or two people who I would identify as people who I would use as resources in the future; people who were very skilled in a particular area.

P8

It's definitely a great way to meet people. I love all the people I know through UTSOC. My boyfriend's in UTSOC and I met him through UTSOC, so that's great. I also have some close friends that I've made there (P8).

It just gives you opportunities to meet people and to interact with them properly, because I think that like, in class, especially because of Covid, but even before Covid, you see someone for two hours a week, and you're not really talking to them because you're doing the class. It's really hard to make a meaningful connection just through class. And it's just such a step, I find, to say like do you want to get food after this or something because usually both of you are travelling an hour or so in different directions, so you have to make quite a commitment to have something to eat with someone you're not sure of.

Whereas if you spend time getting to know each other through extracurricular things like the clubs, it just so much easier to talk. It's a great way to meet people properly and without the stress.

I honestly don't know what my social life at uni would look like if I didn't have clubs.

Some people might think they're going to just automatically make friends at uni like they did at school, but that doesn't necessarily happen in the classrooms. I think it's quite difficult for people not in clubs to make friends. Some of the tutors encourage people to get to know each other in class and incorporate activities to facilitate that interaction, but it is up to the tutor. Some tutors don't do any group work or encourage interaction at all (P8).

Overall it seems like some of the tutors seem to feel friendships are important enough that they include it in their early class activities, others don't give class time to it but encourage us to go to camps and do club activities to meet people who might one day be interviewing us for a job or that we might work with, and others don't seem to make reference to it at all.

I'm a very social person, but making friends just through what happens in class is really hard. Like even for me, I've only made one or two friends just by being in class with them. If you're not a really, really social person it would be almost impossible. So difficult (P8).

In terms of making friends when you have absolutely no connections, like when you're from interstate or overseas, the clubs are definitely the best thing for it (P8).

P9

IF it was a massive event, it was a bit harder because it was harder to make friends. I prefer things like the Debating Society, where you go along every week and it's pretty chill, and you meet people. I think the social aspect with things like that is better (P9).

One of the great things about clubs is that you can meet people who are in different years. Just because it might be your first year, it's not necessarily everyone else's first year – so it's a great way to build networks and contacts in different years to you. That means people might be open still to making friends, so it increases your potential circle of friends.

It's like a lot of first years always want to join the club and they're new ones, but you also get some second and third years who might not have made a strong friendship group in their previous years. They might be the same age as you or even younger but be further along in your course, so they can be great friends to make too (P9).

I definitely think the main benefit of club involvement is the social aspect and I think those people who aren't involved in clubs and societies usually don't have as many friends at uni. Clubs are definitely the number one way to make friends at UTS. The campus culture isn't as good at UTS as it is at some other universities because it is so spread out over different buildings and there's not one central, large meeting place for everyone to go. There are bars, but it's not like everyone just hangs out at the Loft, but because we're in the middle of the city, so there are plenty of other bars around to go to. In other words there's a lot of competition all around us for people's spare time or recreation time.

If you want an experience at University where you want to be involved with other people and more connected, then joining a club is the best way to do it (P9). Clubs and societies help students be more engaged in the University side of their lives. Most people have different aspects of their lives; Their work their family their friends their sports or whatever, outside of university. So the more clubs and stuff you join, the more central University becomes in your life.

P10

I met people from all walks of life in the club. People I most probably would never have met if I hadn't joined. It expanded my horizons, in terms of meeting people from all different parts of Sydney, different religions, different backgrounds and everything (P10).

P11

I think the clubs are an incredibly important way for new students and international students to be able to make friends. I don't think domestic students realise this enough. International students tend to stick with each other, especially if there's a language barrier. I will always go up to those international students at welcome drinks and tried to get to know them. To know their story and introduce them to other people. That might not be the case in every society. I have been to other events where I have seen students come and stay for 15 minutes and no one talks to them and they leave. Executive leaders need to make sure that doesn't happen (P11).

It's very hard to make friends in class. In class everyone is just focused on the content. It is just difficult to go up and start talking to someone. I have made all of my friends at uni through the clubs. When you're in the club atmosphere there's no barrier of the academia and there's no competition so it's just really easy for everyone to have I put time it's just such a more casual and easy way to make friends. In an indirect way it forces you to be social and to make friends (P11).

I have some people who joined our team and they knew no one and then they came to our meetings and they made a friend and then they made another friend and then they had a whole group of people and felt really connected and want to be at uni (P11).

P12

Definitely I think being in clubs helps you meet new people and giving you a break from your work. It's a great way to make friends. Obviously it was harder this year with Covid, because so many things got cancelled, which is really sad. I guess that first year experience that most uni students get is going to be another casualty of Covid. But having the clubs once I joined in second semester, at least gave me some way of connecting and making friends. That's why clubs are even more important now. I've already been told my whole degree will be online next year, so I'm not even allowed on campus, except when I'm going in to do club stuff (12).

P13

The main benefit of being clubs, for me, is just the incredible large social network that you form and the connections you have with those people.

Once I became the first year rep I started getting a whole lot of facebook friends request from people I didn't even know. My social connections basically just grew immensely and over time people just knew who I was pretty much wherever I went and it has been really, really useful. I found out about job opportunities, and lots of other opportunities as well.

It provided me with a very diverse range of people who I then knew.

The friend groups I've seen created as part of the society have been really long-lasting and strong. Other friends I've known at uni who weren't part of the society, they reflect and say, 'Like, I didn't really have that many friends at uni' – so I think joining clubs and societies makes a huge difference to the number of friends you make at uni (P13).

P14

I joined the club to make friends because I wanted more friends in Australia. I came to live in Australia in 2018 and I have dual citizenship but I have not met a lot of friends yet. This year we haven't been able to have very many activities, but it was great in 2019 (P14).

The biggest advantage of clubs is you can make more friends from different faculties or from different subjects. I met people studying business, I met people studying engineering, studying accounting... so people who are not just studying architecture. That is a great advantage of being in a club (P14).

P15

Because we form groups in our club and everyone wants to help each other get better, there are lots of really caring people involved and I have made so many friends which I can really see myself being friends with for the rest of my life.

If I look back on my time as a student, I'd say the true friends I've made is one of the best things that I have gained at UTS (P15).

P16

I made lots of friends in my first year in the club because they had lots of social events.

P18

The clubs are a great way for people to meet. My parents actually met through clubs at university. My mum was an ex-UTS student and my dad went to another university. I've still got one of her T-shirts from when she was in the club as a student here (18).

P20

I made lots of friends through joining the club. When I joined the international students finance society I wanted to join in a leadership position. I had joined a few clubs in my first semester as a general member, but I found that it wasn't that engaging. And I didn't meet anyone when I attended events. So I thought I could engage with people more as a committee member (P20).

P21

I think the clubs are absolutely a great way to make friends. I found I was lucky because with my course being a scholarship course we have a really small cohort, of like 20 people. We all have to go through a reflection process to get in. But for other students who don't have that it's really hard to make friends because tutorials and lectures include people from so many diverse courses and it's kind of hard to hold onto people (P21).

P23

My parents were both in clubs when they were at uni and they said it was a really important part of their university experience. My mum was part of the ski society at UNSW and all of her closest friends now are from that society to this day. They went on so many trips and had such a great time that they became really good friends and stuck with each other. And my dad, was playing first grade cricket at UNSW, so also very strong club presence at uni. They actually met on a Geography Society harbour cruise because they were both in that society as well. That brought them together on the cruise because my dad was the (then) current president of the club and my mum had been the president the year before. So they were sporty nerds.... And they have been together ever since (P23).

The biggest advantage of joining clubs is that you can easily meet people outside your own degree. We have 60 students in my year and we don't intermingle with other students like some of the bigger cohorts do. So I really value being able to meet other students from all different faculties and get more of a sense of what other people want to do with their lives and their aspirations and just learn more about other people (P23).

I made friends with people who had such specific goals about what they didn't want to do with their career, and I didn't even know some of those career paths even existed. Like you know how sometimes you hear about a certain person's profession or their sector, and you think like, 'Wow, people do that in their life?' – so learning about some of those chosen career paths has been cool.

P24

Clubs are a great way for students to make friends, especially if you are new to the city or the country you really don't know what to do next and you are scared that if people won't accept you. So I think that clubs are a great way to be able to meet people in a professional but also not totally professional environment and start speaking and start interacting. They give a very good pathway for people to start mixing and get involved in the local environment (P24).

FUN AND ENJOYMENT

P2

Being involved in clubs whilst at University has definitely made my time as a student more enjoyable. I can't really imagine what my uni life would have been like if I hadn't been involved in clubs or societies, or at least going to the events that the societies put on. Because if you're studying. And not doing anything social it's not a good balance for yourself. I think that is not only boring it would also be likely to contribute to student burnout.

I would not have enjoyed uni so much if I hadn't been involved in societies. If I was just studying and not going to events - even if it is just career development events - they are definitely more enjoyable than just what we do in class.

P3

I joined the Indian Society, not just because I am Indian, but really because they celebrate all the festivals I like to celebrate. They have lots of festivals and they are really fun. I really enjoy participating in things like that.

There are lots of advantages to joining clubs and societies. I am in four clubs already. I wanted to join more, for example I wanted to also join the table tennis and the lawn tennis society because back home I used to play a lot of these things, but actually there is just no more time for me to join those clubs as well.

P4

I feel that even if you are just a general member you are contributing to the club and you will definitely have opportunities come up that will help you progress as a student and professionally.

Being involved in the clubs has definitely made my time at university more enjoyable.

P5

Yes. I definitely think being in the clubs has definitely made studying at UTS more enjoyable. Obviously, yes. It helps me endure the assignments especially if it is a boring assignment.

P6

Definitely made University more enjoyable. Even things like the food society that gives away free food on certain days or the well the dance society is running a bit of a performance, so even if you're not directly involved in a club the atmosphere you can get when the club events are happening.

Also the career building events can be really helpful.

P7

I feel like with my previous degree University was just a thing that I went to rather than something I was connected to or engaged with. It was like the knowledge and information I could absorb through the people in the clubs were icing on the cake of the information that I

was given in class. In this way I felt I was getting more out of my education and my time at University.

With Covid, and everything going online, I struggled. Having the regular online catch-ups with the rest of my committee helped me stay on track and because I had to do updates on how my events and role were progressing, it also motivated me to catch up with my studies. It was definitely really important to me for my mental health.

P9

Being involved in clubs has definitely made uni a lot more enjoyable. It's been fun. It's definitely been more meaningful because I enjoyed being part of the community.

P10

Being in the clubs and societies I am in has made uni 110 million percent more enjoyable. University can get really stressful, and if you don't have a good balance in other areas of your life sometimes it can consume you as a student. Involvement with clubs subconsciously helps you associate positive feelings and thoughts to the unique because your associating the clubs with the uni. That means you're not just associating negative or bad feelings (like about bad exams, bad assessment feedback etc.) to your university experience. You're also attributing these positive thoughts and feelings that you're getting through club involvement to the whole university experience.

Don't get me wrong, I love university and I love studying... but sometimes it can get really overwhelming. If you're part of this extracurricular things an clubs and societies, you're not just associating University with work, you're associating it with positive emotions too, Because there's somewhere you can make friends, have fun, be heard, share your feelings etc. That means when I think if you need I don't just think about the bad parts, I think of the good times and even the amazing teachers and tutors I have and my peers because I'm getting good feelings about uni as well. I have a real sense of pride in the clubs and what they achieve and help students to achieve . I just feel like the clubs have totally changed my University experience for the better.

P11

Being involved in clubs has made my time at University so enjoyable. My vice president, treasurer and secretary in our club I'll like my best friends now. We didn't even know each other before we joined the SoC, but now I'm going to be one of their bridesmaids. The friends I have made have been such high-quality friends.

Being part of a club definitely makes university more enjoyable. Especially with the situation I'm facing next year – because everything is going online so I would have virtually no interactions with other students if it wasn't for the clubs.

P16

I definitely believe that being in clubs has enriched my uni life. It has made uni life more interesting because you look on the calendar and there are some good things to do instead of just studying, studying, studying.

P18

If there weren't clubs I would have felt like I'd just been thrown into the sharks going to this whole big university with lots of people. It's like with clubs you have a backbone that is supporting you. If you didn't have that support you would be so much less confident to go up to people and be yourself. I feel like the club is a stabilising factor. If I hadn't known anyone at UTS already I know I would have joined a club and made connections but without the clubs I couldn't have done that.

The club experience has definitely made my time at UTS more enjoyable. Just the friends and people I'm able to talk with now and get work done with now and move forward, so that even when I'm not in class I like just hanging around the campus because it feels good. IT's just opened a lot of doors, both socially and educationally for me.

P22

There is no doubt being involved in a club makes university life more memorable and enjoyable. Just being part of a society and the memories that we carry forward even after we graduate, most of it is embedded into how well we've interacted with other people in different societies. When I graduate I know I will look back on my community volunteer scheme at Red Cross that I have been involved in and it will be giving me that inner joy that I could just walk from UTS to Chambers Court and then get back again, but in that time I will have had this interaction with a person who needed someone to talk to and that I made their life better for doing it. There is just that feeling of belonging to the university just by being in a society.

I can still tell you about all the universities and colleges I have been involved in. I remember them all so well because of the clubs and societies I have been involved with and that left an imprint mark and when I look back it feel so fulfilling. I will now feel that about UTS as well.

P23

I definitely think the clubs added to my uni experience. If I was a member of a rowing and a ski club outside of uni, I probably would have still been having just as much fun, but because the clubs were through uni, it meant the whole time I have been a student the whole of my experiences have been related to uni. You know, all the memories, having friends across different sectors – it all is related to my UTS experience now.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

P1

The club encouraged students to test their wings. For example last semester when I was an Events Officer I asked my colleagues why don't we have merchandise , and they said it's a bit difficult. They said that because the merchandise we had from before hadn't been sold yet, they didn't really want to get more. But all they had were business cards which were not even relevant anymore. I asked 'Why don't we have some good things to give when we have an event?'

From there they started to ask me well what actual merchandise do you want? So the whole experience of being able to start from the point of, well what merchandise do you actually want and then to go from there to, well do you want to do the ordering to how do you want to design it etc. We came up with PBS steel aluminium water bottles. Really good ones like a sports bottle that has a flask in black. We had to get their designs improved by Activate first. And then you process it and the procedure of actually getting the order approved; another procedure that I had to learn. Then the procedure of applying for the funding and getting approval which was all a learning experience to. We also got branded PBS diaries.

We learned from a whole lot of things in these processes, like what to do when your goods don't get delivered on time, or if the design isn't right - so we learned how to deal with these problems.

Going through the whole process of getting approval for it, ordering it, designing it, collecting it and then actually delivering it to the students was something wonderful. They just said if you want to do it then please do it. That's the whole liberty you feel from this sort of club involvement because you feel like you know the whole process from the start.

And everything you want, everybody helps you with it. Whatever you need help with, there are people there to contribute and share with you how they would do it.

These things help us in our understanding or getting a better view of the world.

The more tasks I accomplish as part of being in leadership in the club, the better I am at it and the more self-confidence I have (P1).

P2

Being involved in clubs has definitely helped me to build up my self-confidence because being a committee member in the club I have been assigned to do all these tasks and I have to rely on myself to get stuff done . And then there are times where I have to make speeches in front of other people, or be a host for an event [most of the events we've done this year I've been the host] and I have to coordinate the speakers and thank them for coming and show them around and everything and introduce them to people so it has definitely improved my self confidence in that sort of a way (P2).

I never felt as confident before doing this as I do now. I think that also makes me more confident in the classroom. I participate more in class, but I can't directly say for sure that is being involved in clubs, because I would normally try to participate - but I think because I've been in the clubs I am more confident when I participate (P2).

P3

Being in clubs has helped me be more confident in class – to speak up – but I do still need to improve this even more (P3).

P4

Being involved with the clubs was the first time at university where I got to work on independent, long-term projects and utilise my skills on those projects. I got to really think about what might work and to put those ideas into place.

I was very self-confident to start with, but being involved in clubs definitely helped my confidence improve even further (P4).

P5

My involvement with clubs has definitely made me feel a lot more self-confident because if I was not in the clubs I would never have been able to do this interview with you. I am now more confident in class to speak up. I was a fairly confident person. I've already done a marketing degree and I talk to new people quite freely, but I think the club has definitely helped me increase that confidence to a higher level (P5).

P6

I am already quite a confident person, and because I'm not in club leadership I couldn't really say that being in the clubs has helped to develop my own self confidence. I am already a moderator on the Facebook group for students in my cohort (not associated with any club or society) so a lot of people already know me, or know my name, and I get a lot of people talking about things. So I'm confident already in other ways.

P7

Being a mature-aged student who has already had a fairly successful career, I haven't really needed to develop my self-confidence through club activities.

P10

Being in clubs has definitely helped my self-confidence as a student because I've been able to have conversations with students outside of my tutorials and lectures and with my mentor, And those conversations have definitely helped me with my confidence in approaching assignments and assessments. Even just realising that no, not everyone is getting distinctions and high distinctions. I mean just being able to talk to a lot of other people and see how your feedback compares with theirs can be really helpful. It's been really good to be reassured that I'm doing well , and to have people in my own degree be able to share with me that they thought this specific assignment was hard or this specific test was easy and to have people in a group of mentees that you can communicate with about that sort of thing, it has given me confidence about my student abilities and my performance which I would otherwise have felt self-conscious about. It just helps me get a benchmark that I would not get if I wasn't involved in a club (P10).

P14

When you have more friends, you have more self confidence because you feel like people care about you and you have people who want to go to things with you (P14).

P16

Definitely by joining the clubs and meeting more people I have become more self-confident as a student. If you know more people and feel like you have friends around you, you will become more confident (P16).

P17

Being involved in the clubs has definitely made me a lot more confident. Before, I felt generally quite shy. I wouldn't do anything outreachie. I'd just do my uni classes and go home, but now knowing people and being confident enough to go up to people and ask for stuff just carries over into my overall self-concept and I feel so much more confident in lectures and tutorials as well (P17).

P20

Especially for students who have held leadership positions and who have had to interact with industry [like arranging industry panels and workshops and things like that], it not only makes you more confident as a student but I think you are more confident once you graduate because you already have industry Connexions and feel like you know more about the industry. When you work in a leadership role in a club you know how to prepare for meetings and everything, so when you start working you have that experience already and you know what to expect (P20).

P21

When we had to present our ideas as part of the start-up support program it definitely helped improve my presentation skills and my confidence because we had to make sure it was well researched and thought through and that our presentation was engaging. Because we got a good result out of it, that helped boost my confidence all round as a student.

I guess just having the club support behind me somehow made me feel more confident just to go up to other people I met at uni and introduce myself as well. I hadn't done those kinds of things before, so it really helped me do better in presentation assessments and group work (P21).

P24

I definitely think the things students do in clubs help them to improve their self-confidence. Self-confidence is something that is usually lacking in a student when they first enter

university. If they don't find somewhere they can talk to people and just come up to people and have conversations with them, and meet new friends, then their self-confidence will not go up. I don't see any other way how they will increase their self-confidence if they don't start meeting people by joining clubs (P24).

FURTHER STUDIES

P2

Having that feeling of being connected to UTS would make me look to this university if I wanted to do later study – but only if they had the specific course I wanted to do.

P5

If I wanted to do further study later on, I would definitely first check whether I could do those studies through UTS because I have had such a great time here this time thanks to my club experiences. UTS is perfect for me. It helps me to know that the people here are really good.

P17

If I was going to go on to do more study, and UTS was offering the course I wanted, I'd definitely want to come to UTS again. The club involvement I have had has directly impacted that decision, because if I had to go to another uni I feel like I would kind of have to start from scratch again. But because of everything I've learned and done with the clubs, I feel like I know UTS really well now and just feel connected to it.

P23

I'd definitely consider doing further study at UTS if they were offering the course I wanted to do. All of my friends have had a 100 per cent positive experience with the clubs and activities we've done, and I'd love to come back here to study. The people I know who want to do post-graduate work, most of us can't because there's only about three masters in the health sector at UTS which sucks, but all of us have had such positive experiences thanks to the clubs and societies and would 100 per cent recommend the uni.

ALUMNI

P5

Of course, I want to stay in touch with UTS and with the people I have met through the clubs.

P11

I'm hoping to one day work for UTS I'm so passionate about it now, so I am likely very much to stay in touch with the university. I'm really close to a lot of first and second year students now as well, and I'm sure they will want to keep linking up with me once I graduate. I will come back and talk on industry panels etc.

P17

I hope to stay in touch with UTS after I graduate, and I feel like that is because of the club experiences I have had here. I'd love to stay connected like coming back to speak on industry panels myself and inspiring other students to be their best. I definitely feel like I'm part of the UTS community.

SENSE OF BELONGING

P1

Through working together at the club we do gain a sense of community where we think what are we trying to address and what are we trying to create for the community is worthwhile. I live on campus so I would say it is ingrained into me. I am surrounded by the community; the university community and the local community living around the university.

I know I can go to my club members if there is a lot of assignment pressure. I can even get help from them for my assignment if I'm struggling with something. So that's an indication of how the clubs help create a sense of community at UTS.

P2

Being at UTS in these societies made me feel like I was connected to a community. If I hadn't been in this society I know I would have been extremely bored. I feel like I've gotten to know all these people and it's really nice because it feels like it's a family and we're working together in all these projects and stuff like that. And it's for a long period of time as well, because usually in high school you see all these people every day year after year but at University you might only see people in your class for a few hours a week and only for a few months, or you might have someone as your lab partner for one semester and then you never see them again. When you are in a society you see those people sometimes nearly every day or at uni, and for the whole semester and maybe following semesters or even years. So that helps you to build up those relationships and feel like you're part of a real community.

University life does get a bit more lonely than high school I would say, so having a sort of community or a family or a committee to come back to is really helpful for making you feel connected.

P3

There is some groupism in the clubs, where people who are all doing say, the same degree or who are all from the same country, they form a smaller sub-group. That probably helps them form a smaller sense of community or belonging. But personally I don't believe in that. If I go to a club I want to just go up to anyone and say Hi.

If the clubs used other communication strategies they could create more of a sense of community. Like with smaller messenger groups or Whatsap groups instead of just posting things on Facebook.

P4

For a lot of people it can be easy to just go through university and be just like: 'I go, I listen, I leave And there's nothing really here. I just go to my classes and piss off, and Why are my group members so annoying?' But when you join clubs and meet people you get more of a sense of belonging and connection.

P7

When completing my earlier degree I wasn't really involved in clubs as I had a very busy life as it was. Now that I am back here to study again, I can see that if you look at UTS as a whole, the student leaders in clubs and the faculty members are very good at making sure everyone is taken care of. I think the closer you get to the core group of the people you most value or who are most aligned with what's important to you, the more that level of care becomes what you are looking for. So I think societies have a huge role to play in ... if people are hunting for their passion that exists outside uni, and then they match that with a club or society that exists within uni, then I think those bonds will be strengthened.

I think the clubs have a huge role to play in that way. Absolutely massively valuable. And I can see some of those dynamics playing out in the clubs I'm involved in and I can only imagine that if you were from interstate or from rural NSW and you were coming to UTS and were feeling like disconnected and perhaps didn't have any peers from your former school, then this could absolutely be a way to bridge that gap quickly and finding a way to find out the little nuances about how to get around and how to do things more quickly – all of which contributes to a greater sense of community and belonging. No question at all.

This would be even more so pertinent for international students.

P8

I love all the people at the club and the community we have there.

P10

All of the organisations I'm involved with represent different aspects of my personality. So by being a part of a club that supports that aspect of myself it helps me feel like I belong to a like-minded community. Every single club that you're part of, it is a community and it's a community you can join and where you represent yourself as that persona. Not changing yourself, but that's where you can explore specific aspects of yourself, and feel like you have a group of people who match you on that aspect of yourself. That all builds feelings of connection and community.

The more parts of your persona you feel have a home at UTS, the more you feel you belong at UTS. Something people have told me, especially on orientation day, they said 'Join societies because UTS is a very independent uni and no-one really interacts that much with other students unless they know them, so if you want to get to know other students you should join clubs'.

Definitely my involvement in clubs has made me feel more connected to UTS. The friendships I've made are directly related to UTS as an organisation.

P14

In our club, the TSA, we get a lot of local, domestic students joining in as well, so that helps us all to know more about things to do or places to go in Sydney. It helps us learn more about the local culture. No-one else teaches you that stuff. You have to learn it from the other students, and if there wasn't the clubs and societies you wouldn't be so easily able to learn about those things.

This can be how they spend time with their friends, how they talk (in Aussie style), how they spend weekends or holidays and things like that. Just all about the local culture.

P16

Clubs can definitely help international students feel a sense of belonging, but it depends on their level of engagement. Just joining a club doesn't give a student a sense of belonging; you have to actually engage and immerse yourself in the activities and reach out to people to make contacts. It is the engagement that helps create the sense of belonging.

P17

Being a part of a club and volunteering to help other people really helps me to feel like I belong at UTS, especially because I'm working alongside people who I know feel the way I feel about doing that kind of work.

It has definitely helped me get more of a sense of community, especially through FREDO, which is a very large society, so knowing I'm a part of that and it's massive, is really great. It makes you really feel like you're part of the community here at UTS.

P18

The real advantage of club involvement really comes down to the community connection that you get. There are so many things that come from that; friendships, networks, skills you'll need in the workforce, support through your studies – those things are invaluable. When I'm around that community I always know there's somewhere I can go to for help.

P19

One of the main advantages of being involved in clubs is that you feel like you are part of a larger community. Even more so when you're an undergrad student stepping into uni for the first time, OR when you're an international student who has moved from another country so you don't have any familiarity with anyone or anything here. For those students, being part of a club really makes you feel more connected with uni.

P21

Being a member of CatSoc (the Catholic Society), in our meetings (either in person prior to Covid or now online) you can feel like you have a kind of a home when you are in a club like this. Just having friends to laugh with us, cry with us or just pat us on the shoulder when we need support. That is what the community feels like in the club.

When you are in a community like that it can give you the motivation to keep going. Just being with people you are sharing the same difficulties with, or with the Red Cross just being there to help other people, just gives me enough satisfaction and inner joy to go through whatever I am faced with from my studies. Even a telephone call, just having a chat with someone and listen to what people are telling me about, just gives me that strength I need. When we are international students, there are often things that happen back home that are upsetting but when you are part of a network at least you have people you can sit with, talk with and just better than being alone.

P23

I definitely think being part of a club gives students a sense of community. Being part of a club helps students to feel more connected. If you are not involved in the clubs you don't really feel like you are part of the university. If you just study and you don't join clubs then you wouldn't feel like you were part of a community.

SENSE OF CONNECTION TO UTS

P1

Being involved in clubs helps me feel more connected to UTS.

P2

It made me feel much more connected to UTS, the institution. If it wasn't for the clubs I wouldn't have got myself involved in anything and I would feel like I had no connection at all to the University other than that I was going there for an education. But I wouldn't have gotten to know my university so well.

I wouldn't have got involved in university life at all if I hadn't joined a club. Like I probably wouldn't have even gone to other events that the university or other clubs hold. I would have just done my studies and gone home.

The clubs have definitely made me feel a lot more involved.

I do think the club involvement helped to develop a sense of connection to UTS.

P3

Being in clubs has definitely made me feel a lot more connected to UTS. I believe clubs and societies are an integral part of UTS, especially when they were offering events, before Covid. Now, sitting at home, where we can't go to events, I haven't felt that same sense of connection to UTS.

With everything being online and me not having to even come to UTS and not participating in the events, it has made me feel like I'm not really connected to UTS. I just hope that things get back to normal.

P4

I do think being in a club helps to increase students' sense of connection, but there are some caveats as well. In terms of community, belonging, friends – all go into the yes category for me.

I think if you want to gauge how vibrant and engaging a university is, you just need to look at the clubs and societies. Like, what proportion of the students join in and participate in multiple clubs and societies? This is really good way to evaluate the culture of a university. For those students that really shapes their experience of university. Sure, everyone's got the classes, but hey, I'm also doing all this other stuff.

P5

Obviously being part of a club helps you feel like you're part of a community at UTS, but it depends on the community because let's say in the Indonesian Society I just know that, Oh, this is a society for Indonesian people which are going to UTS but I'm much more feeling that I'm part of the society as a person who is Indonesian, rather than a person who is a student at UTS.

Being able to join clubs has kind of made me feel more connected to UTS. It doesn't really make me feel like I'm connected to the campus or something like that, because we rarely talk about uni stuff whenever we have a meeting. We're usually just playing our games, having coffee and that.

It's different with the Futsal club because we are called UTS so we do feel like we are connected because we have the name UTS.

P6

I definitely see this happening, but mainly for those people who are on committees or in leadership positions, and those who maybe attend lots and lots of events. When you only attend sometimes, and only as a general member, not so much.

Being in a society definitely gives you a little bit of a connexion to the uni. And compared to if you've had no involvement then it would be just like OK I'm finished, I'm gone. Cool

P7

This is my second degree and I had a sense that when I did my first degree I was a bit disconnected from uni and the whole University experience. At the time I lived off campus and although I would participate heavily as a student in my studies, I always felt a bit disconnected from the institution itself. I felt like I missed out on the broader uni experience that others speak about, so this time I made sure to get involved in the clubs.

I know other students who felt that staying in touch with others on their committees by zoom during Covid was incredibly important in terms of their mental health and staying on track with their studies. One person on our committee started asking us to all think about one good thing that had happened since the previous meeting and things like that. By doing that he helped to

make us feel like we were still part of a community that cared and that we had some communal companionship in our fortnightly catch-ups. Then after that the president of vice president would give us a separate call every week or so just to check up on how we were going, so that also showed me I wasn't just a fly on the wall. Sometimes in the zoom classes or meetings you kind of just feel like you're kind of there but no-one's paying attention and you're kind of insignificant or whatever, but with these follow-up calls it really made me feel like, 'No, I have a purpose at uni, I can do this, I can get this thing done and it will impact people and that was really nice for me personally.

I would hope other people appreciated it. Maybe they wouldn't find it as therapeutic as I found it, but I think it would definitely helped lots of people to stay feeling connected.

P9

I think being in the clubs was incredibly helpful for getting me to form a connection to UTS and to feel like I was part of the UTS community. I moved here from Interstate to study, so I didn't know anyone. I definitely felt isolated at first but Once I joined the clubs I felt more connected to people and to the campus. I could walk around and I was always pretty much guaranteed I would see someone I knew and could have a chat.

As far as connection to UTS itself goes, I definitely felt that quite strongly. I have studied somewhere else prior to this, and I can say that this is a really great uni with all the clubs but the politics and dealing with Activate policies etc. wasn't always easy. At times it was frustrating, but because the club culture could be better.

P11

I think being part of a club helps students definitely feel like they are part of a community. As a uni exec but also as being just a general member, I've made all of my uni friends through clubs and societies.

When I meet people now that I'm in third year with but don't really know, I say to them, 'Oh Hi, I'm president of the medical society, have you heard of us?' and they say 'No I haven't,' and I say 'What do you think about UTS; do you like it here?' and they'll say, 'Oh, no. I just go to uni and I go home'. I say to them, 'Oh really I spend all day here because I love it here', and they go, 'I don't have friends like you,' and I tell them I only have all those friends because of the clubs and that makes me feel really connected to the university.

You can get a medical science degree at any Sydney university, but the club experiences I've had at UTS and being the society president, that makes me feel connected to UTS and proud to be in the alumni.

P12

I never got to meet anyone during my classes really, but as soon as I went to UTSOC I started meeting lots of people doing communications. I just feel like I'm not alone at university anymore. During my first semester I just felt like I was the only person doing this degree, because I just knew no-one. That meant I didn't have anyone to talk to who knew what communications was like, and so I felt just by myself. It was just so much better to have people to talk to who were doing the same classes and we could laugh about things that were said in the lecture or talk about assignments. I don't feel like I'm alone any more.

P13

I think once students make more friends at uni, it helps them to have more of a sense of connection to the uni overall. I mean if people have heaps of friends outside uni or at their work, then power to them, but I think having that connection with other people at UTS is important. There are so few contact hours, and less now because of Covid, so friendships and

networks of friends through clubs just creates or maintains that connection to the university itself.

P14

In 2019 we had lots of club activities and I made lots of friends. It made me feel really connected to UTS. But this year, because of Covid, many people went back to Taiwan and although we are able to talk to each other on social media, we can't have events. It feels really different. Last year everyone was really enjoying their life and their time at UTS and they were really happy about that, but this year everyone is feeling kind of hopeless because no-one can really come back here and a lot of friendships kind of stopped and became disconnected. So that's kind of awful.

Not being able to do the club activities made it even worse. Our club was getting bigger and bigger because people were bringing new friends into it, but this year we don't have that much activities and it is not getting bigger.

Once you join a club you definitely feel more like you're a part of UTS. You use their facilities more and you feel more like you belong to the community. You understand university better. I feel like there's more of a support network around me; a larger network than in your own faculty and you're stepping out of your comfort zone for a while but it makes you feel a greater sense of connection over the long term.

P19

Being in the clubs is the best way to feel a connection with UTS. This was particularly so during Covid where we didn't have a normal way of life and classes were mostly online. When I was at home and so disconnected from everything uni, I didn't even know what other people were doing at that time. There was a big time difference between India and Australia, so I felt very isolated. I started thinking, 'I'm not sure what I'm doing here', because I couldn't see anyone else doing what I was doing. So hearing other people in my club The clubs were the only way to have some really good discussions with students and maintain that sense of connection to the university. We had zoom meetings via the clubs so we were still able to have the electronic contact and continuity, and it helped me to realise, 'Oh, I'm not the only person who is going through all of this. There were so many other younger people who were coping with it all so much better than me, so that made me cope better too. That is what is so great about being a part of a club community. It made me feel so much more supported.

We also had some really meaningful and highly relevant workshops and things that helped me find my place in the community.

P21

It was really important through Covid to have the club connections to keep you feeling like you still were a part of a community. Without classes, it was really only the club zoom meetings where you could interact with other students. You got to know their pets and things like that, I guess because they were in their own home so they felt a bit more comfortable to open up and more relaxed.

P22

Students involved in clubs absolutely feel more of a sense of connection with UTS because there is that sense of community that comes with meeting other students at all levels of study. But just being with people from UTS and being together in club meetings just makes you feel those sorts of connections. There is a definite sense of belonging that comes with being in a society.

P23

Before I came to UTS some friends I knew who were already students said there wasn't a really strong campus life here because there aren't big, central meeting places. People tend to come in, go to their class and then go home. They don't tend to hang around unless they live on campus. I feel like it's because it's quite spread out and there are not the outdoor places to congregate. For example if I go to visit friends who are at USyd I'm usually sitting outside and enjoying the sun on the lawn. But without that here, it makes campus life harder, and that makes it more important to be involved in clubs to make connections.

I think there's a camaraderie, especially in the sports teams, and it's very much about g-ing yourself up and being part of that community and playing for UTS. Last year at uni games for skiing we won the community spirit award and that was the only thing we set out to achieve, and we got it so it was super exciting, but yes, especially at UTS we get really excited and passionate about our team and the people who are involved and I think it's such a nice environment to be a part of.

RETENTION

P2

At times last year if I felt like the study load was getting to be a bit too much and I would have a little cry to myself, and say to my boyfriend 'Should I leave uni? I don't think I can do it', and he'd say no... but I don't think I really got to the point where I was serious about dropping out. Maybe being in a club helped me not really think seriously about leaving.

P3

Since coming to UTS I've never thought about leaving because this is the best thing that has happened to my life for sure. I'm living a normal life and the environment is good at UTS. Students can be there whenever they need to be; for the whole night if they have to.

P4

Being able to be involved in clubs and the experiences that I got through those clubs definitely was a factor in me staying so long at university. I did my undergrad degree over many years and am now doing a postgrad degree, but I am in no hurry because I know that whilst I'm involved with the clubs I am still developing skills that will make me a more successful professional once I graduate.

If I think about UTS without clubs and societies I think about something that is just absolutely soul-less and empty.

P7

I wouldn't say the club involvement stopped me from dropping out or anything, but with Covid this year it definitely helped me get through some of the tougher times where I was struggling with staying on track.

I felt personally that during Covid, if I hadn't had UTSOC I don't know how I would have done because I'm a real social butterfly and I need social interaction, and I really suffered early on mentally with everything being online and I couldn't keep up with my work and I felt like there was just no reason to do it and I was in just such a bad headspace. But every fortnight we did like a UTSOC catch-up call. It was supposed to be about updating how our projects and role were going and that was what kept me going. It was so good. Like I had things with my own friends but because I would have to slightly change what I had said in the previous two weeks so that I had something to say, that meant at least I had steps and something to motivate me and then that would lead to step 2, which was to catch up on my uni work.

I wouldn't consider dropping out myself, but I'm sure the drop-out rate for those who aren't involved in clubs would be higher than for those who are.

P8

I definitely think being in a club helps to reduce the likelihood that a student will consider dropping out of uni. If you're doing a subject that's really difficult, or really boring, if you've got a friend in that class who'll say Wow, this subject is really difficult or boring It means that you're much more likely to stay in that class because you know you've got someone to whinge about it with. For example my contracts class for law was online and it was so dry and so awful, but one of my friends from UTSOC was in it as well, so during the class, if it was really dry, we could just text each other about how boring it was. Just little things like that where you don't feel really alone, and you're not just thinking about, God, this class is awful. You're thinking, God this class is awful and I want to talk to my friend about it – and you can. Whereas some people don't get to do that and they have to endure the boredom or difficulties alone because they don't have those connections.

In another really dry class I had in first semester I didn't really know anyone and didn't have anyone to whinge to and I remember it being so boring and I sat there thinking, Why am I doing law? I hate this it's so bad. But once I went to law camp and met a few people who were in that class and once I got through that class and I went into second semester I knew some people from law camp and it was so much better. We sat in group tables, rather than the lines where you don't talk to anyone and I had a much better time because I had friends.

I think there is definitely a correlation between being in clubs and not dropping out of uni , 100 per cent. The people I know who have dropped out of uni, it's like 'I haven't made any friends and I been here for a year'. Like one girl I know, she was doing engineering, she said like I've only made one friend and I don't even get on with her that much, and its only because we had a group assignment. She felt like she'd met no-one. She dropped out. She also didn't like the work; she found it difficult – but like I said, even when things are difficult, it's much easier to do them when you've got someone else in the class who is also going through it who's a friend and who you feel like you can talk to.

I have another friend who was doing IT. He deferred, but he's definitely going to drop out now. I know he said he hadn't made any friends at all. He said I just go to my class and that's it. Which is why they find it a struggle, because they feel like they're going through it all alone.

P10

I haven't considered dropping out of uni but I had been considering going to another University to study. I am not exactly sure what path I want to take in my life , and I was considering applying to go to other universities but it was more just a passing thought because then I realised that No, I didn't want to go anywhere else. I wanted to stay here because of the clubs and societies I am in. I realised I wanted to get into leadership roles on those clubs and societies, so the passing thought about switching unis just drifted away.

So instead I decided to get onto the executive of some of the clubs and societies I was in and next year I also want to be a mentor for other young students. In a way, then, being in the clubs has made me decide to stay a student at UTS, rather than switching unis.

There are two sides to this. I have been in Group chats where someone has said , I'm thinking of dropping out . Does anyone know somebody else who's dropped out and what happened data and people have said yeah I know someone I'll put you in touch with them , which isn't a great sing... But that alone wouldn't have made someone make a choice to drop out.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

P2

Really I don't think that being a committee member on a club takes that much time out of your day. Unless you're the president, because the president has to be involved in so many things. But if you're just a committee member I don't feel like it takes up that much time. All the paperwork I have to do is pretty simple. If I had a lot to do it might get tedious but it doesn't require a lot of thinking about and it's not draining or very hard. So for me it doesn't really feel like work, Because I enjoy doing it as well.

P4

I think being part of a club actually helps clubs with their work-life balance from a sense of all the people... I'll split this up. As a member of a club, yes, from the perspective of 'Okay, here are a whole lot of things I can do at university apart from my studies and if I show up to them I'm going to get a lot of value, and if I don't, then ok I'm going to miss it. People aren't necessarily aware of that at the start but once they start joining in they realise how good they are. Now I'm going to start looking for more'.

Once they attended three or four events they often start to want to get involved and it really helps make their free time more valuable.

From an executive's point of view, I remember often sitting up working on club stuff until midnight, 1am; a lot of things I wasn't doing very efficiently, but that was part of the learning experience too. Doing all the tasks that needed to be done took a lot of energy that wasn't related to studies – but in another way it was quite exciting to know that I was actually creating something really cool. I guess it's like, 'Oh, it was such a good year and I'm glad it's over'.

P5

Being in clubs definitely helps me get a better work-life balance because I have somewhere to go when I need a break from studying where I can be with people with the same interests as me.

P6

The reason I haven't done some of the social things is that I had to work . With work and study there can be conflicts between other commitments, so that is why I haven't been able to attend as many events as I would have liked. My study and work has to take priority. There have been a few things where I have blocked out work when I really wanted to attend an event, but I can't do it too often.

P8

Personally, being in clubs and societies has actually helped me with work-life balance because I like to be busy. For people who struggle with competing pressures, however, I think being heavily involved in clubs could be really hard. If I've got seven things to do in a day I'll probably get them all done. If I've got two things to do I'll struggle. That's just how I operate. I'm highly scheduled and I like being busy.

That's why I struggled during Covid. It felt like, I've got two weeks to read three paragraphs and I just couldn't do it. So bad.

P10

I don't feel like being involved in clubs has negatively impacted my work life balance at all. Apart from my studies, I am also involved as a volunteer in a youth organisation . I have an extremely busy life and the volunteering at the youth group takes up most of my weekend. It

takes up a lot more of my time than the club rolls do , but the rewards I get from it make it worthwhile.

Societies know that you're a student and that you're juggling a lot of things to get the work done. They know you have other commitments and they're very conscious about finding a time that suits everyone. No one is excluded from this sort of thing. When events are organised, they are not very often... maybe once every couple of months, they are always done in ways where people can say no to things that they feel might take up too much of their time. The societies are always very accommodating of people's external lives. It really hasn't had much of an impact on my external life. Other things take up much more of my time.

P11

Work-life balance is manageable, but for me personally – I'm a bit of a 'yes girl'. I find it hard to say no – so I take on too much and then struggle a bit with burnout after a while. But I do say to my executive team, that really they should only need to do about 20 minutes of work a day on club activities. If you stick to that and plan so that it is a regular daily thing, it's manageable – but if you do nothing all week and you go and find you've got 100 unread emails and jobs that need to be done for an event then that's when your schedule gets thrown off because you've done nothing.

We have executive training days through Activate UTS and in those training days they talk a lot about time management, how to schedule your time, how to deal with burnout, how to communicate effectively in a team, how to resolve conflict. So those sessions are great. I found that the executives from my team who went to that had a much better handle on their time management and how to prioritise things as we went through the semester.

Like I've done a full time study load pretty much all through uni as well as internships and I have two part time jobs and being president of one club and involved in other ones, plus I have lots of friends and a good social life , but I've still got a 6.5 GPA [a distinction average]. To me that shows it is very possible to get a good work life balance as long as you're organised.

P18

It definitely can be challenging at times to have to balance my personal life, my studies and my club activities but I wouldn't really have it any other way. It keeps me grounded. When you have this range of responsibilities you have to plan things well and be prepared for things to pop up so you learn to be flexibly and responsible and you learn how to meet deadlines. When something has to be done it always gets done, even if it means a sleepless night... it never doesn't get done.

P21

I have quite a full study load (five subjects per semester) so I only joined the one club because I wanted to make sure I didn't get overloaded and that I could keep my studies on track. If it weren't for that I would love to have been able to join a whole range of clubs.

I don't feel like the clubs take you away from your studies. I feel like if you are going to study well you need to take breaks and do other things because it's a good change for the brain. It provides creative stimulation and other elements that you would not get if you were just working all the time. So doing something with a university club is a great way to do that whilst still staying connected to other students and to the university.

I think it actually makes my work-life balance even better.

P22

What matters when you are student is learning how to divide your time. Once you are good at time management, you will be able to allocate time for everything that you have to do in your

daily activities. So I think being involved in a society only helps students with being able to get their work-life balance right because you learn to manage your time well.

P24

Again, if you do a lot in a leadership position in a club, you need to learn to manage your time. It is giving the students an insight into what they will have to do in their workplace, so they have to learn how to get a good work-life balance.

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

P1

The thing I like most, or the reason I am a part of the extra-curricular activities is because I really believe in giving back to this community in small and many other ways. So clubs are really a way I can give back to the community (P1).

P3

A post-graduate degree is a very short course. I don't think there are really a lot of opportunities for me to contribute or make a difference when I'm doing post-grad study because there is not a lot of spare time.

P4

I even started one club. A few of my friends and I were talking one day, and we were saying how we really wanted to make a difference. We felt something that was missing was a society that was specifically there to help people develop their personal and professional skills, so we decided to start one. It was quite easy to start it up. There were three of us and then we brought in a fourth person and divided up the roles. It kept going for about five years. It had it's ups and downs. We ran 24 events that first year, and recruited a new team the following year but a club's success directly depends on the people running it that year, and when students move on it is totally up to the new people to keep the momentum going. It was still around last year, so it has lasted for five years, but I'm not sure that it is around this year (P4).

When you are in a leadership role on a club You have the opportunity to help other students connect with each other and to achieve things. Really for the club itself, each club has some sort of purpose and outcome. It might be to support a particular element of culture, or art, or food or even the video gaming community, just by the presence of having those sorts of clubs, people have the opportunity to come together, so that gives the students leading those clubs to contribute (P4).

There are a lot of societies for which actually going out there and making a difference is their core goal. AIESEC is one of them. They actually help students take a role in global leadership and pass on important skills. SSI we just started is also another one. The Big Lift – going out around Australia and doing volunteer trips for the last five years. Red Cross Society. All those different things. Some of those clubs have a very clear purpose of making a difference. But even the ones who don't have that as their core purpose, still contribute and make a difference (P4).

P6

The clubs haven't personally provided me with opportunities to make a difference, because I am only a general member and not in any leadership position. The clubs I am in are mainly for entertainment or enjoyment for me. But I know there are some clubs, like the Red Cross society, Thurs would definitely give students an opportunities to make a difference. I do volunteer work outside of uni. I'm someone who definitely does want to do volunteer work. But

if you didn't have access to volunteer opportunities outside of University, then the clubs would be an obvious choice to give you those opportunities.

If I wasn't involved in volunteer activities outside of uni I would definitely get involved in some of those clubs, to give me opportunities to make a difference (P6).

P7

For each of the societies I am in, I do have more of a sense of what can I do to help shape the future directions of the organisation, or to do things as much as I possibly can. So it's a bit of give and take; like I'm learning some technical skills and information by being in the societies but what can I give back in return. Especially where I have found them to be most interested and interesting. I don't think I would look at taking an office bearer role, because I think there is going to be more value for my fellow students to take on those roles and then to run with them, to learn some of the things I've already learned while I've been out there working in my previous career.

But what else can I bring? What else could I do to help shape the organisation to be a better version of itself. Things like how might we change the AGM structure so that it's a lot cleaner and more aligned with what an ASX company would do. I mean everything's the same, the logic is there, but how can we make it a bit more straightforward and workable.

Even if it's just trying to add explanation to why some of the rules are there and why they shouldn't be skipped over just because it's 6.00 at night and everyone wants to go out or go home etc. Just to help awareness or pass on advice or guidance that can be helpful (P7).

P10

You're making something of your life and it gives you a feeling of self-fulfilment and pride at your achievements. That makes you feel really happy (P10).

I've decided that next year I am going to be an executive teams for some of the clubs and societies I'm in and I'm going to be a mentor for younger students. I do feel this sense of wanting to give back. I want to continue with these clubs and contribute to their development (P10).

P14

Part of why I wanted to join the club was that I really wanted to help other Taiwanese students who have come to Australia to study because I know what it is like. Especially because I have studied in Taiwan and now here, I can help give them advice and tips. I can share my experiences, like, 'Oh first year, what was it like? What are the challenges? Etc.' and that will help make their own student experience a bit easier I think (P14).

P15

The consulting club I'm in works with small to medium enterprises to solve problems or issues they are having in the workplace. They're real clients who we've either had to source ourselves or start-ups associated with UTS. In a way they're getting free consulting. They're not paying anything, the students are basically volunteering their time to help them with their issue. They might be smaller start-ups and they're looking at how to grow their business across Australia, or it might be an investment advisory company and they want some research into how they can better cater to their customer needs, so we'll look at doing marketing strategies. It ranges in terms of the scope of problems, which is why the teams have students from different disciplines. That really helps us with networking and building up good relationships across industry (P15).

Another one of our club goals is to involve more international students and get them to engage because we really want to help them out and include them. I know for a fact it can be hard for

them to get internships because they don't have the networks. So we've made that a goal for us and we've had a few international students come through and I think they've had a really lovely time. We all work hard to try to get the international students internships at places we either work at or where we know people. It's great for us to learn about their culture, but we can both gain from having international students (P15).

P17

I like knowing I'm making a difference and the clubs give me that opportunity, especially with Engineers without Borders, where we can volunteer our time and do some humanitarian work aid (P17).

I also do a lot of photography for a lot of the other clubs that they can then use on their social media and stuff, so that is pretty rewarding too. They're extra things I like to do. I love photography and I love learning, so being able to go and take photos that are going to be used in a professional sense, it actually helps me improve my skills as a photographer but also helps the clubs (P17).

P18

I definitely think being part of a club helps you to have opportunities to contribute. You can create different opportunities for others and put opinions forward that can have an impact on how something is created or develops. You can do that independently but also with the support of your club (P18).

P21

The main club I am in is entirely focussed on helping students undertake socially and sustainably responsible projects on a voluntary basis. It encourages new ideas and supports start-ups.

I 100 per cent think being in clubs give students opportunities to make a difference and contribute. My club is all about social entrepreneurship and bettering the community we live in so it is all about opportunities to give back.

I also think that club activities like what my club does helps to connect UTS, the institution, with the surrounding community. Our ideas are coming from UTS students when we do our competitions, and that gets out into the community, with people saying, 'Oh, do you know what the UTS students are doing here?' and the community appreciates that we are giving back. That is all good for UTS's reputation in the local area. I know in the past Enactus has helped lots of local businesses and organisations (P21).

P22

It is really important to me to have the opportunity to share with others and help them. The university clubs are an excellent way to do that. I want to help nurses who are starting their careers who may be a midwife in 10 years time. I always encourage people to get into all the activities that will help them develop the important skills they will need once they graduate (P22).

STUDENT SUCCESS

P1

I was doing a subject in strategic management - that was my sub major. So with the club I actually had a team around me and we could develop a strategy or create a strategy because at the end of the day we all are students.

So what we were doing was we were just borrowing the academic material and applying it to the club, seeing what could work here and what might work there.

My strategy on a personal level was that I was extracting the academics and applying them to the real world. Others in the club who weren't doing the same course as me, they were just applying whatever they knew and whatever they could enhance to get the club into a better position at all times.

Certain concepts we discussed in class I then used the opportunities in the clubs to apply those concepts and test them. A few of my colleagues were doing a similar degree to what I was, so I was finding it very easy to talk to them about strategy because they knew what I was talking about because we were doing the same thing. But the moment we talked to somebody who was say doing a Masters of Marketing, rather than the strategic subjects that I was, they would not understand what I was talking about when I talked about a club strategy.

When you apply your concepts to real life your knowledge becomes more enhanced. Then you can actually understand why you're reading about in a particular thing in class or how can you extract more (from what you're reading). You get more in-depth details about what your topic is and what you're learning.

When I discuss my ideas with other club members and we all contribute, then yes we come up with better things sometimes as well - but like I say I can only chat with one or two who are really interested in the academic side of things. Many of the other students don't necessarily want to do the same things, which is understandable, but for me I just want to extract the maximum value from what I am learning. I am definitely trying to bridge that gap between the theory and academic material and what happens in the real world.

Being on leadership of a club helps you be actively involved with students from other societies and communities so you create more opportunities for yourself and your networking skills are positively enhanced. Not just face to face, but email networking too.

P2

There were career-related events run through the clubs by students online this year (because of Covid). They were incredible! Just super, super interesting, usually run by 3rd or 4th year students who were usually sharing something that was either topical or controversial and they were just outstanding. Just the level of detail that was there. It definitely had a somewhat nerdy flavour to it, but I got off each of them completely energised and excited at the prospects, and with a level of understanding that I would never have got from doing just readings. It was fascinating and I loved those.

The older students were often happy to help other students with things like study notes etc. If I had questions about like what major should I go into or should I transfer into another course or something like that they could give me helpful insight into what it was all about. That helped me so much knowing which type of subjects to do.

Being in the clubs has helped me perform better in my studies mainly because other club members help you out so much. But also I feel like there is a little bit of a sort of unspoken expectation that if you're in leadership in one of these types of clubs, then you are most likely going to be a reasonably strong student. That means you sort of know the expectation is there that you will do well. You want to prove you're a good organiser because look I've got all HD's in my results, look at my notes there so beautiful, obviously I'm also good at organising things... so this will naturally lead into that I am good at organising events.

I do think there is a tiny bit of pressure on people to achieve more when you're on a committee, because of that expectation that you will be a better committee member if you're a good student.

P3

The importance of clubs and societies is huge at university. Being involved with clubs will help you in your mental state, it will help you in career objectives, it will help someone in each and every field. Whether you are here for your personal development, or your career, they will definitely get benefit from being involved in clubs.

P5

The only way the clubs have really helped me be a better student is because they are a necessary distraction from just studying all the time. They keep me balanced. If I was studying 24/7 I would not be a good student. I want to have some fun too, so that was why I joined the clubs.

The clubs make my studies more enjoyable.

P6

I do think being a part of a club helps you be a better student and get better outcomes. MedSoc helped this year organising study sessions for our last exam, being online, and they were really good because they Worked like a group study session so they got someone who had done well in the subject the year before to run it, and they really helped my studies in that way.

Another thing I got from being in a club that helped with my studies was the MedSoc chats. From them I've managed to form group chats with people who have done the same subjects as me, especially being online we can chat about the same subject. It's been really useful in that way.

P7

There were benefits I had not even contemplated. One was around assignments. Not so much getting help with assignments but more about things not to bother doing in an assignment . Helping you not waste time... because they were going to be a bit rabbit hole and not deliver any outcomes. This is beyond what the description is within a subject . They can just help you with things like hey when you're in this subject just ignore this area because it's not relevant to what we do. Focus on this over here, this is really important. That was completely unexpected. I didn't realise that that would be part of the mix.

Added to that is the idea of historic context. Those students who have done things a semester or a year or even two years before and who know those particular lecturers have valuable contextual knowledge to give you about what has happened in the past. You don't get that from anywhere else other than those students you made in clubs who are further ahead in your degree.

One interesting thing I witnessed was where some of the alumni were still in a forum and they were helping the students get their head around some big concepts. For example, one of the job types that's around at the moment is a full stack developer. Basically means you do software engineering from the very start for the very start of the user experience right through to the back end of storing the data and system interaction. At times it is hard for a 20-year old to know what that means if they've not been out there doing it in their job. They can read it and understand the logic of what's being described, but some of these alumni have been absolutely amazing at being able to provide translation for the current students. Just being able to say, 'This is what it is in the context of what you're studying right now. So you're doing Java, so it would be like you did Java and then you added on this over here and then you put some HTML here,' etc. and it was just beautiful to watch. It happened multiple times and I thought gosh, that's a really clear purpose or the reason why the alumni are involved. Obviously they get some early talent on the way through, but also I thought this is a fantastic forum for students to understand exactly what the job market is all about.

P10

One of the great things that the Society of communications does is if you sign up to their mentoring programme as a mentee, you get paired with an older student who is studying the same degree as you and usually doing the same major. I was paired with an amazing mentor, and she has just helped me so much this year.

P13

Being in clubs made me a better student because it helped me get a broad overview as to what the priorities are, that UTS wants to create in their student or for their students. I guess in terms of making them employment-ready. Because being in the president's role, I've had to come from, 'Why are we holding these parties in pubs where everyone's drinking? – Like, UTS isn't going to sponsor all these parties,' but being in first year and thinking, wow – I can't believe we're holding these parties, but to now see the product of those parties, where people have hung out together over the years because of those friendships they made at those parties, and helped each other through the classes and now in the third year, they're still maintaining those friendships along the way and about to enter the workforce together and they can say, 'Yep. I know this person in this industry, I know that person in that workplace...' and I do feel now that I can see the benefits of having those connections and friendships from the start.

Also career events with industry. They really help the students have a good understanding of what life is like beyond UTS.

One subject I took, I think it was strategic communications, and it was pretty much how communication structures work but within organisations, and the tutor must have known I was president of the society, so she asked me for an example where I've encountered an obstacle in my communication with society members. So I gave her an example, and she was able to use that to demonstrate the concept she was teaching. So that was relatable and interesting for everyone.

P14

When you only have three or four years of the uni experience you want to get the most out of it and you want it to be really rewarding, so if you don't join clubs it won't be as rich an experience.

P15

What we learn at our club and the workshops we do on presenting and problem-solving 100 per cent makes me more confident and competent student and perform better in the presentations I have to do for class assessments. Prior to Covid our club groups had to go to the Price Waterhouse offices and pitch our solutions to a room full of like 30 or 40 people that included industry people who worked in the different professions. Everyone is always very nervous, everyone has lots of rehearsals and puts so much effort into it. It's like doing group work in a way but with the club it's voluntary so you know everyone in your group is working really hard and wants to do a great job and that motivates you to do really well too.

Once you've had to do a big presentation in front of industry professionals, and then you go back and do a presentation in the classroom, you're just not scared any more because you've already done something scarier. You've got to the point where you think, 'Oh – it's just kids my age. I'm not worried about this one now.'

P16

When I became president of my club we were given workshops about how to approach our assignments more effectively. That really helped me in my studies.

Also they offered lots of leadership workshop training for executive club members and that has benefitted me as well. They have a lot of events to help develop our leadership skills. They helped me learn things that will help me in my career and professionally.

P17

Because of my club involvement and the friends I've made through the clubs I feel like I'm now much more confident to speak up in lectures and tutorials.

P18

It's been really valuable to have the support of people in the club around me when I was maybe struggling with things in my studies. It's kind of weird the amount of future opportunities that can be set up through the support network and the relationships you make, because you play with a whole different range of ages and students are at different stages of their studies or their careers.

A lot of the people I know from the club are also willing to help me in things like assignments or exams that are coming up that I know I'm going to struggle with. I can ask them questions and maybe access some of the resources that they were given that might be different to what I've already got and things like that. They can also make suggestions, like have you tried this and have you done that... so that's really helpful knowing you've got that support network you can access when you need to.

Definitely being in the club has helped me be a better student by making me get serious about time management. I'm not quite on top of it to the extent to where it should be, it is definitely the club involvement that is helping me get better at it. Just having the skill of being able to juggle competing commitments has made me realise what it takes to get the range of things I want to do, done.

P20

I definitely think being in a club or society helps students perform better, especially in things like their presentation skills. It also helps students, particularly international students, contribute more in tutorials because they are more confident and their communication skills are improved.

P21

I think working on the group projects that we did in our club, and presenting our ideas to a judging panel, we were definitely better placed to do the oral presentations and things that we often have to do at uni. Having already been in a stressful or pressured environment where we had to present as part of a competition, it made class presentations seem less stressful.

P24

In terms of the kind of student and the kind of orientation they choose, it is important to delve into that mindset and I think the clubs do a great job in giving students that moulding. You are able to meet people from your industry via the networking events, you are able to meet other students so that you have some support in your studies, you are able to be a part of the activities, you are able to attend the information events and I think all of that really creates a success mindset for the students at UTS. They are the building blocks and conditioning that the students need to create their careers the way they want to. I think it is very crucial from the success standpoint.

P1

Whatever I was learning from my degree, this was a good platform to actually utilise it. Even something as simple as doing marketing research; things like who was my audience, what

they wanted, and how I should measure the data I had. Somewhere down the line I could always apply what I was learning in the classroom to what I was doing at the club.

So I could say 'Alright this is what I read in class, how can I apply it now?' The club was very proactive in encouraging me to apply anything that I was giving them. They were happy to apply any of the concepts I wanted to try to try out.

P2

I definitely think it's important to have a lot of different and diverse clubs at uni for whatever interest students may have, because I feel like uni life really needs that sort of balance in between studying and having fun. Also, with clubs they give you a lot of opportunities to make friends and have events that are really cheap but I found it the whole time, so students... they don't have so much money. Societies will have a lot of events that are really cheap or even free, like a lot of social events such as drinks night, alot of the time they are free after you join the society which is usually only about \$15.00 to join.

Societies and clubs are just a great way to connect with people so that people don't feel like uni life is boring and mundane.

P3

Being in clubs have definitely helped me with my studies, particularly in the area of communication. I have to do presentations, and also with many assignments I have to write reflections about my past experiences and internships and everything. We also have to make video presentations for the teachers, so by improving my communication I am much better and faster at all these things. I am starting to think in English instead of my native language, so that shows how much the club interaction is helping.

The more I participate, and the more I speak with other club members, the better I'm becoming.

P6

Especially with Covid a lot of them, in the absence of social events, have actually run career building events which is especially helpful for studies. They've held study groups online or things like that

P7

Some of my subject planning has been has been deliberately structured around the interactions I have been able to have with other club and society members who have done or are doing subjects I am interested in.

Being involved in the clubs has definitely helped me with being a successful student in a couple of ways. Firstly my subject selection. There are certainly subjects I have selected for the future that I would have selected on my own if I hadn't been in those two societies, but I learned so much about them and decided they were going to be very useful.

The second thing is around what not to do, so streamlining study and avoiding trying to focus on an area that I realised (after discussions) wasn't going to be as useful to me as other subjects were.

It's definitely gone both ways and I've got lots of hints and tips and tricks that have helped me through the course so far.

P8

I think being in club leadership definitely increases my motivation to do well academically. There's a buddy program in UTSOC and I love being part of it, and I feel like I have been able to help my buddies who are in first year. That's facilitated through the club, and even on our committee, someone will be like, hey, I'm tossing up between this major and that major – has

anyone done it? And there will be someone who says, yeah, like this major is rubbish and this one is great and here's why. So that's really good.

It makes it so much better if you want to know about things like transferring, or subjects or majors and things like that. You don't have to go through the student centre, you can just ask the other students and there's always someone to help with information. As well as getting a relationship with that person it also makes you feel like you are part of a community.

P9

For me personally, I don't think it has enhance my performance as a student because I'm already very confident and like to work independently, but I know a lot of other students have found huge benefits from knowing people in clubs because they've been able to have someone to ask questions to, get help from assignments and have that sort of support, and knowing the faculty as well.

P10

I feel like being in club leadership helped me get better academic results. For me, I had a mentor who was a year above me in most of the same subjects and a lot of the time she would share resources and her experiences with me and that definitely helped me to understand the material and what we were being asked to do a lot better. She was very helpful, especially during Covid when I wasn't able to meet with anyone. Usually you'd at least be able to collaborate with your peers and say, like, what are you thinking of doing for this assignment, or what mark did you get for this and everything, but without face to face classes this wasn't possible, the majority of advice and guidance I had came from my group of mentees and my mentor. So that definitely helped boost my academic results, as well as my feeling of involvement with the university.

P13

I guess things like having other people in the society who were doing the same classes meant you could think through assignments or compare feedback on things and it helped you feel more supported or like other people were having the same feelings as what you were having about the course material. Sometimes if I was procrastinating about things, just being able to talk to those people really helped. Or if they were doing work, it would motivate me to do work.

P14

I think the experiences I've got through clubs has definitely helped me develop as a student and as a professional. Being an architect or a designer, you need to spend a lot of time discussing things with other people, like other designers, builders or clients. So that is really the main area of my future industry that I have gained skills around because of being involved in clubs. I have had to learn how to manage people, how to negotiate through conflict, how to motivate teams and those types of people skills. I have had to do those things in my club roles, which is something I would never have been able to learn just from readings or sitting in class.

P18

I've had job interviews set up for me and I've been recommended to people by the older girls helping me out, who have already been established in their careers, so not even just job interviews but also advice. Like when it comes to something they're doing in their career how I resonate with that, having people to talk to to find out more about a certain career path, or things to do post-university. It's a great community.

P19

For example, I'm expected to understand things like marketing and branding in some of my classes or how to communicate in writing with people, how to get people to participate or

engage with things. That's really the goal of marketing – so by being able to do all those things in a club you get to practice what you are learning in class. Doing a marketing role in a club would give you real-life examples to use in class or in assignments about how the theory works in the real world. This helps students do better because it really gives you a flavour of real life looks like, or the real world.

P20

Being in a club helps you be more successful in your studies because it helps you improve skills in a whole range of things; not only communication but also you have the potential to do a leadership role and learn a whole lot of important skills. It's good practise and you are still a student, which means it is a learning experience and you don't have anything to lose.

I definitely think it helps you with your networking, which makes everything much easier for you after that. Your studies and also for job opportunities. It helps you go in through the back door sometimes in a job that might not be advertised. You already have a foot in the door. Most jobs are not ever advertised. 80% of the jobs available are never advertised and are filled through networks, so that is why networking in the clubs is just so important. If you want to think about your future career.

P22

We learn a lot from interacting with other people and when you are in a society or club you meet people that are at different levels and people who have had different experiences and you learn from them. It builds your confidence as a student, which helps you to perform better. I also think being involved in a society makes you less likely to leave uni before completing. I will give you an example of when I was at university in Cape Town where we were in a post-graduate leadership society, and in that society I learned a lot of things between my Masters in Philosophy and being a leader of the post-graduate students I was able to interact with the PhD students and even fellow masters students and it gave me the opportunity to fully understand what supervision was and how people define the purpose of supervision. It was those interactions that helped me form my own ideas for future study. Being on the ethics committee I was able to read through submissions for the Faculty of Health and it also helped me on getting insights into what they look for when they are reading through a submitted proposal. So all of that built on my knowledge on every stage and I aspired to go on with my studies.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FACULTY

P11

I definitely think being involved with the faculty-based clubs gets you more involved with the faculty in general. For example, I can speak to not only the staff in our own faculty, but we also have connections with other faculties through the club and I get to interact with staff from them as well. All of our networking, academic and professional events are supported by these faculties and have representatives from the faculty there. For example, our medical science and research career panel includes six researcher coordinators from UTS who are at that event to find honours students so they can connect with them for research projects. They can then pick them up on LinkedIn and get an honours project lined up, and the society platform makes it all such an easy process. Being in leadership and helping to organise those types of panels means I form lots of connections with staff and researchers across the university.

I have also spoken on some industry panels, which have been organised by some of the teachers, so I've had interactions with them and they see me as being a responsible student, so I feel like they see me as a committed and driven student and I feel they treat me a little differently. These are really good relationships to have for a number of reasons (P11).

P17

Unfortunately there's not a lot of involvement from the academics in the clubs, so it doesn't necessarily help you create connections or relationships with teachers (P17).

PERCEPTION OF UTS

P3

I know many people who are already working in my industry at the moment, and when I tell them that we have this huge number of clubs and societies at UTS their impression of UTS definitely increases. They tell me about what it was like where they studied in their colleges and they compare it to what it is like studying at UTS. There is huge difference. These are people in Australia. I live with those people. One of my room mates studied at the University of New England in Armidale. And another room mate studied a hotel management course at another Australian university and they say they never had anything like what UTS offers.

When I tell my room mates about what is offered in clubs at UTS, their perspective of UTS raises in a very positive direction, and they feel like they wish they could have participated in those sorts of clubs when they were students.

I think having the clubs and societies makes me – and my friends who study at other universities – feel like UTS is very good. We sometimes have competitions between clubs or societies from other universities across Sydney. We went to the University of Sydney for one competition, and that was an opportunity for me to look around the campus and they showed me all around the official areas and everything. I got to see what they offered.

P5

I think in the UTS clubs you can be anyone and do any sort of activities you want, so it makes me feel good being there as a student just because I am joining the clubs

P6

I think the clubs are a big factor of people's perception of UTS. The UTS clubs are known so well as being a big part of this university, and I guess if the clubs didn't exist when other unis have them, UTS wouldn't look so good. Coming to uni I wanted to join a club. That was part of my goal. Obviously that's changing a bit as the friends group that I am in becomes bigger, but I definitely don't think my University experience would have been as positive if the clubs didn't exist.

I definitely think the clubs have a really valuable place.

For me, definitely, if you are involved in a society and especially if you're a president or involved in the committee, you would have made friends and be more like wanting to stay because he'd be really enjoying things and would be more likely to want to come back to events and stuff.

P10

I honestly felt such a sense of pride going to UTS because I'm part of this society. I think if I hadn't joined any society I would just think of UTS as just a uni. Like I would feel like 'Yeah I could switch to USyd or UNSW', but because I'm like part of a society I feel connected to the university in a way that most students wouldn't if they weren't part of a society.

Because of my involvement with clubs, my patriotism for UTS has definitely been heightened, because in my conversations with people who go to other universities they aren't part of many

clubs or societies, and they do feel a bit of connection to their universities, but the connection I have seems to be much stronger.

I definitely have a much deeper relationship with the university because of my extracurricular involvement.

I think generally throughout the region, UTS has a good reputation for offering lots of clubs. Maybe it is because of having lots of different buildings and being spread out, that the clubs have become so important, but definitely in my conversations with friends at UNSW and USyd, none of my friends really join clubs. They don't feel it's as necessary there. But it definitely makes a big difference here.

If the clubs did not exist, I would probably view University just as something I turn up to do my work and then leave. I would not consider it to be a big part of my life. My relationship with The University during semester is, I'm at uni my whole life is uni and I focus on being a UTS student. I'm like on this day I'm at this club, on this day I have this club meeting on this day I'm meeting my friends at the library etc etc. You need becomes my whole life during semester. I love that and I think that if the clubs didn't exist I would find it much harder to make uni a big part of my life. I would be demotivated good that that especially during covered in semester one when we were all on line, even then I was able to be part of a few societies and they motivated me to keep going. If I hadn't had those extracurricular things and I was just going to on line classes on doing those sessions, I would have considered leaving University and would have felt like it was just something I didn't want to do. I just wouldn't have had the same passion for University that I have now.

P15

We compete a lot with other domestic universities in our club, especially USyd and UNSW, and although UTS is comparatively quite a young university and quite new, and they have been the underdog of these types of things. But in terms of case competitions in the recent years, what I've seen is that even though we haven't been there for as long as they have in this kind of space, the nice thing about UTS is that the students are very creative and forward-thinking, and not your typical 'old-school' way of thinking. The culture of UTS, with the diversity of thought that we have here, is what makes it so special and unique, and we've been able to see a lot. Being in the clubs, therefore, has definitely changed my perceptions of UTS. It's like, 'Yes, we may not have the history and tradition of the other big Sydney universities, but that means we're not as set in our ways or have feelings or superiority and instead we use creativity and new thinking and cross-disciplinary approaches to problem solving. I'm very proud of UTS as a university because of that.'

P17

Being in clubs have definitely influenced my opinion of UTS. My sister does Business and Law at Western Sydney University, and she always complains to me saying, 'Oh, you do so much at uni. You're part of all these societies. We don't really have that here at Western Sydney,' and when she says that I kind of feel a lot of gratitude for UTS and for having Activate UTS which supports the societies and keeps them running year after year.

It makes me feel very grateful for us to have those opportunities here, whereas other universities are missing out on those opportunities.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS

P1

I have also had some difficulties to overcome in my roles with clubs. With the politics of clubs there are sometimes clashes, and you have to deal with them in a professional way. An

example was when someone wasn't doing their job. We had six people in one particular team. We really needed more people, because the workload was really high, but for that semester we only had six people. I had to do two roles, marketing and club administration and sponsorship. Everyone was all doing their own role as well as someone else's because some roles were vacant. This was really hard when it comes to assignment time. If you're preparing for an event (which usually are held right after the assignment periods are finished) you have to be doing a lot of the work at the same time as when assignments are due. On top of that, you have your own social life and your friends or family at the same time. Time management is really important. Sometimes it can all end up really negative. It is usually then, when everyone is under pressure, that the clashes come, like 'You were supposed to do this. Why didn't you?' etc. (P1).

Apart from the problem of clashes, the work gets delayed and you still have to deliver the event on time. You have to investigate what is the problem, what is happening and what is the solution. This all takes a lot of time....

Sometimes it is even necessary for the club executive to take disciplinary action because someone in the team may just not be doing their job at all. This makes it so hard for everyone else. They had done nothing at all for the whole semester (P1).

One thing that was hard when I was working in the clubs if there was someone who wasn't carrying out their tasks. Because it's voluntary, you can't be too harsh on them. It was really hard. But we are all here to work together and we have the same vision and goal, to support international students, so it's just not really fair if one person took a leader role but they're not doing anything (P20).

It can also be very disheartening if you organise an event and the audience doesn't turn up. We do the best we can, and if an audience turns up that demonstrates a good success – but if they don't you feel you have failed. We deliver a lot of quality so if they don't we feel like we're going down the drain (P1).

A negative impact of club involvement for me as a student was that sometimes the burden was too high for me to do everything. If you don't have enough people on your team, sharing the burden, then it can be too much to the ones doing all the work (P1).

I am internally motivated to do things and strive to do well, but I think it would be nice if there were more external motivators as well, like courses or trainings being offered by Activate UTS, or other things. Having internal motivation does drive me to do things, but it would be great to have additional, external motivators provided by the Activate UTS team. Even if it was as simple as food coupons or something; something that said 'You're a valued part of us', a part of the Activate UTS community (P1).

P3

I think the clubs could improve their communication strategies because once you join as a general member, then the clubs just post all the information on Facebook. People can ask questions, but the events aren't explained in much detail. I think anyone who joins should be contacted by other communication channels as well. Perhaps they could create more WhatsApp groups or messenger groups or personal emails because not everyone just uses Facebook. This way I think they would get more people participating in more events (P3).

Bachelor students do have more time to spend at clubs so there are more of them in the clubs and more of them on the executive because they will naturally get voted in by their peers. There are not a lot of post graduate students in some clubs and at times when I attend events, if there are no other post-grad students there, I get left alone. In the technical society, for example, I was the only post-grad at most of the events. I think there should be some seats reserved on the executive for post-grad students to ensure their needs are met and they feel more connected to the club. For example, there should be two president positions; a post-

graduate president and an undergrad president. In this way, the post-grad president will make decisions with the post-grad students' needs in mind, and the undergrad president will think about the needs of the undergrad students and both groups will be benefitted. If they had a post-graduate president they would probably then get more post-graduate students involved in the clubs (P3).

P4

Some of the things we have to do in club leadership can be very frustrating too, because they take much longer to get going than it would if you were just doing them yourself or if you were a staff member. Like, why does it take four weeks to get a room booking confirmed etc? Things have to go through processes and get approvals and all of that – so you do have to have patience.

Like, as a society we want to do 'x', but the university won't just let us do it straight away. That can create a slight sense of frustration, which at times negatively impacts your sense of connection to UTS because it feels you are not as closely connected to the university as others are. Especially if it builds up over time or isn't resolved. Overall the experience of being on the exec team of a club outweighs these negatives, but this is just one frustrating aspect (P4).

P5

Sometimes if there are a lot of activities and events on, the clubs can be a distraction, but we cannot blame the clubs for that. It is their job to offer activities so the students need to learn to manage their time well. If I can manage my time, I can feel like, 'Oh, I can join the club, join the meeting and do my studies as well. But if I don't study enough I need to study first before other commitments.

Obviously with Covid, being part of a club this past year hasn't been as good as it has in previous years, because so many events had to be cancelled, but I can't blame the clubs for that.

P7

This isn't so much a negative, more an observation. I attended to AGM's this year and was involved in what was happening as an observer, and listening to see comments made by potential incoming executive members and those made by outgoing office bearers. It was very interesting. I don't know that I would have the time to personally stand on an executive myself as I have a young family, but I think there is probably some value I could add from a position of providing support and guidance from an outside perspective.

It struck me there were so many things that could be added which were very simple but which could also add a dash of reality as to what the real world is going to look like when the students arrive there. An AGM that is being run by a corporate well looks slightly different. It's not too far from where they are but there are just a few little things that could help them run things more smoothly and prepare them better for the outside world to come. I guess I just feel like there were some things I contribute but there isn't really a pathway for those contributions to be made by someone like me.

I'm someone who does not have any social media; no Facebook or Instagram or anything like that. So there were a couple of clubs I joined and a couple of things I was sent which tried to push me onto those platforms too try to get me to engage that way, but I couldn't really do. That meant it was a bit of a struggle to stay engaged with them. As opposed to Flap or Discord and they're easy to get involved with without giving away your life's personal details. I guess that's something those clubs need to be aware of, like how are they engaging people who are not necessarily on those platforms?

Education and Data struggled to find a way to engage people more broadly. They were very good at the events and stuff, but when they disappeared because of Covid, it felt like they

were a little bit lost at sea compared to some of the others who had this really strong forum structure which just grew and grew (P7).

P9

I don't think there is enough funding for the clubs or promotion. I think there are a few people who are super involved in clubs and societies, but most people are just not involved at all. That is not good. I think there needs to be more done to get more people involved. I don't think engagement is their strong point.

Some of the clubs are really great, but most could be better (P9).

Obviously joining a club depends on your own personal circumstances but professionally I found club involvement really valuable. I think it was certainly worth investing in relevant club.

Definitely for me, one of the drawbacks was the amount of time I had to spend on club activities. Especially when I was the only person on the executive. For me personally, it took time away from what I otherwise could have done with my spare time (P9).

P10

I think there are some perceived disadvantages about being a member of a club, there's the perceived disadvantage that it will take up a lot of your time, that you will have to stop other commitments in order to dedicate more time to the organisation, that you're not getting paid - it's only voluntary so why do it instead of paid work in a part time job... basically the idea that you're not going to get enough out of it compared to what you have to put in.

But I would like to debunk all of those perceived disadvantages because I think there is just so much that you get out of volunteering your time, and the good thing about the club you're not the only one in it and if you can't make something, or you need to take time for yourself, or you've got too much uni work on at the time, you can always speak to other people and that definitely improves your communication ability and the relationships with other people, just by saying I can't do this at the moment can you help dot that helps to improve their relationships and it also takes the pressure off you 2 do the thing you feel you haven't got time to do.

All of that is tide in with learning about what you need for yourself, what you should and shouldn't take on, what you need to say no to and how to say no, how to rely on other people when you need help to all of those are important things to learn in my opinion (P10).

Another perceived disadvantage is that it's scary and that you don't know anyone, And I completely understand that perspective especially from people who might suffer from social anxiety all have really struggled too make new friends, but I would encourage people to try to step outside of their comfort zone and just try because usually University students, especially at UTS, are generally very friendly. If the people in a society you join are interested in the same things that you're interested in then that gives you a good opportunity to make friends too. I know it's not for everyone so I wouldn't want to push it on to people who weren't interested, but I would highly recommend that people just at least give it a go.

It's not like you're losing money or losing time, it's just a choice about where you want to invest your time and I think the investment is definitely worth it (P10).

P11

Different clubs and societies have different offerings and it depends on the staff that are on the committee at the time. It's compulsory for all clubs to have an O-week stall, otherwise they don't get funding. But if they're there it doesn't necessarily mean they're a great club to join. Some of the less active clubs that don't have a lot of activities and don't post a lot might not be good ones to join, so you need to do a bit of research before you just join what sounds like a good club on the day (P11).

I also think burnout can impact some of the clubs. Some come out and have a lot of great events in semester 1 and then they don't do nearly as much in semester 2 and I think it comes down to having a large team and good delegation of tasks. You have to make sure you don't burn out so people don't get tired.

Being an executive takes a lot of time too. As president I had heaps of work to do, but that was because I do put a lot of effort into anything I take on. It gets to a stage where it's hard to separate your own time from your executive role time, and it's hard to switch off and it can be quite exhausting (P11).

The standard across the board is not there and in some clubs where I was just a general member, I didn't necessarily get great benefits. I just think some of the clubs could do more in terms of growing their clubs and giving members good value. The resources are there for them to utilise if they want to, and many of the clubs utilise those resources well for members, but there are other clubs I was associated with where the executive would access all the resources and trainings for themselves, but then not actually put what they'd learned into practice for the benefit of members (P11).

I also see a lot of international students get ignored at events by the domestic students. I encourage all of my team to make an effort to really talk to the international students and introduce them to other people. I think it is really important, and I think activate needs to try to change the current attitude of many students towards international students. There is this stigma that they are sometimes perceived as hard to talk to because they don't speak English well, or not able to contribute meaningfully to group assignments. This tends to make the internationals want to stick with other internationals, because they don't feel welcomed at times. Activate could put strategies in place to change this culture and celebrate all that international students can bring to a club. I think the international students are an awesome target market for clubs to tap into for events. The engagement they get from international students who are welcomed is immense. Some domestic students will just come to an event for a short time and then leave because they have other things to do but international students will often become highly engaged as long as they are made feel welcome. The internationals desperately want to network and make contacts with people in Australia.

When you have international students in your club you open your club up to a whole new world of possibilities. Everyone likes to say they're open minded to everyone, but they're not. You just have to look at what happens and you will see the natural biases. Meeting these people who are from different countries and who have different backgrounds to you can share experiences with you that they have been through that you have never had. The stories they share about their countries are amazing and I have made some really good friendships with international students I have met through the clubs. It has been awesome getting to meet them and to listen to their stories. I am not highly travelled internationally so I have found the things they told me incredibly useful. I think all domestic students could benefit from those sorts of things (P11).

So it's just the inconsistency between clubs that can be an issue, and it might come down to something as simple as one year having a really motivated team, but then the next year having a team who are just doing it for their resume. It's a very democratic thing. You get voted into these positions, so it's hard to kind of find the best person when it's a popularity contest and they might not have a lot of friends to vote for them (P11).

P13

I would say the only disadvantage of being involved in leadership of a club or society is that at times I had to say no to things I could have done, because I had to carry out club duties. Even at times I've seen some full-time jobs I could probably have gone for, but didn't because I know that although I could probably work full-time and do uni part-time, I couldn't do the club stuff as well. That was mainly because I was just so heavily involved in the club, but if you were only a general member or only had a small exec role, it wouldn't be so much of an issue.

Still, I think I made the right choice because I want to be able to say to future employers, yes, I have had the opportunity to lead a big team, and the club has given me that (P12).

P15

Undoubtedly it is harder when you have to balance club duties with uni work and sometimes your own job but I think it's good to learn to have to cope with a bit of pressure like that (P15).

P19

One of the negatives of the club experience was where a club For example, with the dog society, which was a paid membership (\$5) it was a big society and nothing at all was done for the whole semester. I know we couldn't go and walk dogs, which had been the original plan, but they just did nothing at all in its place. Other clubs changed plans for what they were going to do, but this society didn't which was very frustrating. I think they had one photography contest towards the end, when they must have realised, 'Oh, we didn't do anything all semester', and I realise it was difficult for everyone to manoeuvre through these times but I think it would have still been nice if they'd kept in touch with members because that money went completely down the drain.

On the other hand, the Adventure Club went to great lengths to organise things and they were great with their communication. I would receive at least two emails from them each week. The problem, however, was that all the activities they offered required that you have your own gear, and you had to have some level of expertise in that activity. I had joined the club because I wanted adventure but I wasn't told I had to already have skills. I was a beginner, and whilst I realise that in Australia everyone is used to being outdoors and hiking etc., but for an international student these things may be something we've never done, so having a beginner level would have been helpful. They told me at the beginning there would be activities for all levels, but there weren't (P19).

P20

One thing that was hard when I was working in the clubs if there was someone who wasn't carrying out their tasks. Because it's voluntary, you can't be too harsh on them. It was really hard. But we are all here to work together and we have the same vision and goal, to support international students, so it's just not really fair if one person took a leader role but they're not doing anything (P20).

P23

In some of the clubs and societies there seems to be hierarchy and a structure and at times it seems like they place so much importance on people being part of the group. And I find that strange. It's a little bit toxic. I know two people who have prolonged their degree, just because they wanted to make president and vice-president of a society, and that seemed strange to me. I think they wanted the status of having those titles, and they liked people looking up to them or something. It was almost like this weird high school mentality they haven't been able to get themselves out of (P23).

Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. **The consent statement:**

If you can please give me your name _____. Today's date is _____ and I am conducting a telephone interview as part of the ActivateUTS student engagement research project on the impact of club involvement on student success 2020-2026.
Do you agree that I have sent you an information sheet on the project?
Do you agree to participating in the project?
And do you agree to being audio-recorded during this interview?
Thankyou.

2. **Demographics**

Gender
Age
Postcode
Year of study
International/domestic
Identify as Indigenous
Undergrad/Postgrad
Name of degree/faculty

3. **Involvement in ActivateUTS clubs**

Which clubs?
Any leadership positions (president, secretary, events...)
How long?
What do you like about it?
How/why did you come to join?
How did you feel initially?
Anything other details re your involvement

4. **Benefits/drawbacks of club involvement**

Friends
Sense of community
Self confidence
 In general
 Re learning
 Re making new friends
Work ready skills (networking, teamwork, communication, negotiation...)
Work/life balance
Opportunity to make a difference/contribute
Were there hard things?
Did they end up creating positives?

5. **Club involvement and Success factors**

- Sense of Belonging to UTS
 - Has it influenced your opinion about UTS?
 - Will you stay in touch with UTS once you finish?
 - Do you feel you belong to the UTS community...
 - If you do further study would you choose UTS ...
- Student experience
 - Has it made uni more enjoyable, meaningful?
 - Closer to teachers, ...)

- Student Retention
 - Has it influenced your commitment to persevere with your studies, why?
 - Did you ever think about leaving uni (or the club?) – why?
 - What was it about club membership that made you change your mind?

- Student Academic Performance
 - Has club membership helped you to succeed with your studies – how?
 - Networks?
 - Better communication skills?
 - Encouragement of friends?
 - Feeling more confident to speak up in the classroom?
 - Better self-management skills?
 - Taking more responsibility?

Appendix 3: ActivateUTS Survey 2020



Linking your participation with clubs with your graduate success

The UTS Business School is conducting a research project on behalf of ActivateUTS. The purpose of this project is to investigate the relationship between student involvement in extracurricular activities provided by ActivateUTS and the effect this has on student success (including student retention).

We'll ask you to answer an online survey, which will take you about 10-15 minutes.

All responses are anonymous and treated confidentially. Responses are de-identified, so we'll be unable to retrieve responses from an individual once you complete the survey.

By agreeing to be part of the research any data gathered from this survey that is to be published, will be done so in a form that does not identify you.

WIN!

Students who complete the survey by 11.59pm on the 26 October 2020 have the **chance to win one of ten (10) Visa gift cards to the value of \$200 each.**

The winners will be drawn by 28 October 2020 and will be notified via email. For more details, please read the [terms and conditions](#).

If you'd like to go into the prize draw you will be asked at the end of the survey to follow a link to a separate document where you can provide your contact details. That way, your survey responses and contact details will be recorded separately and your responses remain anonymous.

If you have concerns about the research that we can help you with, please feel free to contact Associate Professor Carmel Foley on +61 2 9514 5102 or email carmel.foley@uts.edu.au.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you

may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772 or Research.ethics@uts.edu.au and quote this number **(ETH20-4984)**.

On behalf of ActivateUTS, thanks in advance for completing this survey. Your responses will help us identify any links between club participation and student success outcomes, which will in turn help us evolve our programs to better assist students.

By clicking the “Next” arrow, you are consenting to participate in this survey.

SECTION A: Student Information and Characteristics

Are you a(n): (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Domestic student
 - International student (completing your whole degree at UTS)
 - Exchange student (studying 1-2 semesters at UTS)
-

Are you currently enrolled in a(n): (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Undergraduate degree
 - Postgraduate degree
-

Are you currently studying: (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Full-time
 - Part-time
-

In which faculty is your degree primarily based? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology
- Faculty of Science
- UTS Business School
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Health
- Graduate School of Health
- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building
- Faculty of Transdisciplinary Innovation

If applicable, please identify any other faculties involved in your degree. (Please tick all responses that apply)

- Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology
 - Faculty of Science
 - UTS Business School
 - Faculty of Law
 - Faculty of Health
 - Graduate School of Health
 - Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
 - Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building
 - Faculty of Transdisciplinary Innovation
-

In which year are you studying your current degree: (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5th year
- 6th year
- 7th year
- 8th year
- 9th year
- 10th year

Are you living at home during your studies at UTS? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Yes
- No

Which language do you primarily speak at home? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- English
- Australian Indigenous languages
- Arabic (incl. Lebanese)
- Cantonese
- Croatian
- German
- Greek
- Hindi
- Italian
- Korean
- Macedonian
- Maltese
- Mandarin
- Netherlandic
- Polish
- Punjabi
- Serbian
- Spanish
- Tagalog (Filipino)
- Turkish
- Vietnamese
- Other (please specify) _____

Which country do you come from? Please write down the name of the country in the text box below.

Do you identify as being from a culturally or linguistically different background? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Do you identify as having a disability? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Yes.
- No.
- Prefer not to say

Q15 What do you regard as your main disability? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Mobility/physical
- Speech
- Vision
- Hearing
- Intellectual/cognitive/learning etc.
- Mental health
- Acquired brain injury/neurological
- Other (please specify) _____

How old are you in years? (please state the number of years in whole numbers only)

What is your gender? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Intersex
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify) _____

SECTION B: Involvement in ActivateUTS

How many ActivateUTS clubs are you currently a paying member/executive of? (please state in whole numbers only)

How many of those are sport clubs (marked in blue on the website)? (please state in whole numbers only)

When did you first join an ActivateUTS club? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- 1st year of my studies
- 2nd year of my studies
- 3rd year of my studies
- Later than my 3rd year of studies

Have you been or are you currently in leadership positions (e.g. treasurer) at ActivateUTS clubs? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Yes
- No

Which leadership position(s) have you held? (please tick all responses that apply)

- President
 - Vice President
 - Treasurer
 - Secretary
 - Manager UniGames
 - Other, please specify
-

Which club are you most involved with? Please provide the name of the club.

How long have you been involved with CLUB NAME? (please choose the one most appropriate response)

▼ This is my first semester ...

Since before 2014

What is your primary role in CLUB NAME? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Member
- Executive
- Former Executive
- Manager Uni Games

How many of the events/activities organised by CLUB NAME have you attended this year?
(please tick the one most appropriate response)

	None	Less than half	About half	Most	All
Face to face events/activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online events/activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you been involved in CLUB NAME in any additional ways than attending events/activities? E.g. helping to plan events, volunteering on the day, promoting events, inviting students to join the club, etc. If yes, please provide examples.

Yes _____

No

The following nine (9) statements are about how you feel about CLUB NAME. If you have never had this feeling, select "never". If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you felt that way.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
When I am at the club I feel excited.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a member of this club, I feel strong and vigorous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am enthusiastic about my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My club inspires me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I look forward to going to club activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel happy when I am involved in club activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am proud of my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am immersed in my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get absorbed in club activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SECTION C: Club involvement and success factors

Benefits of club involvement

From your involvement in \${q://QID4/ChoiceTextEntryValue}, to what extent have you gained the following benefits? (please tick the one most appropriate response for each benefit listed)

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent
Personal enjoyment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A sense of belonging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Network development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills/experiences that (will) help me in my studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills/experiences that (will) help me in the workforce	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to make a community contribution / positive difference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study/work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stress reduction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CV enhancement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved self-esteem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you please share any examples for the benefits you said you gained? (please type your response in the text box below)

Sense of belonging

At your institution during 2020, to what extent have you had a sense of belonging to UTS? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Not at all
- Very little
- Some
- Quite a bit
- Very much

During 2020, to what extent have you had a sense of belonging to CLUB NAME ? (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Not at all
- Very little
- Some
- Quite a bit
- Very much

Please rate the following statements related to your involvement in CLUB NAME. (please tick the one most appropriate response for each statement listed)

	Completely untrue	Mostly untrue	Equally true and untrue	Mostly true	Completely true
I discuss events which happen outside of UTS with people in my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have discussed personal matters with students who I met through my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have developed personal relationships with other students in my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I invite people I know from my club to do things socially.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinions at club events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking at club events is easy because I feel comfortable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult to meet other students at my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No one in my club knows anything personal about me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rarely talk to other students at my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know very few people in my club.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent are the following club activities useful for establishing friendships? Please tick the one most appropriate response for each club activity listed. Choose NA if the type of activity is not relevant / offered at your club.

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	NA
Club meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trips (incl. Uni Games)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career networking events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skill development events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sport (games & training)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please explain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Other success factors

Overall, in terms of your academic studies at UTS, do you consider yourself to be: (please tick the one most appropriate response)

- Exceeding expectations
- Meeting expectations
- Below expectations

To what extent has your club membership impacted on the following aspects of your experience at UTS? If it has an impact, please indicate whether this impact is of a positive or negative nature. (please answer both dimensions unless you select "Not at all" for the Extent of impact)

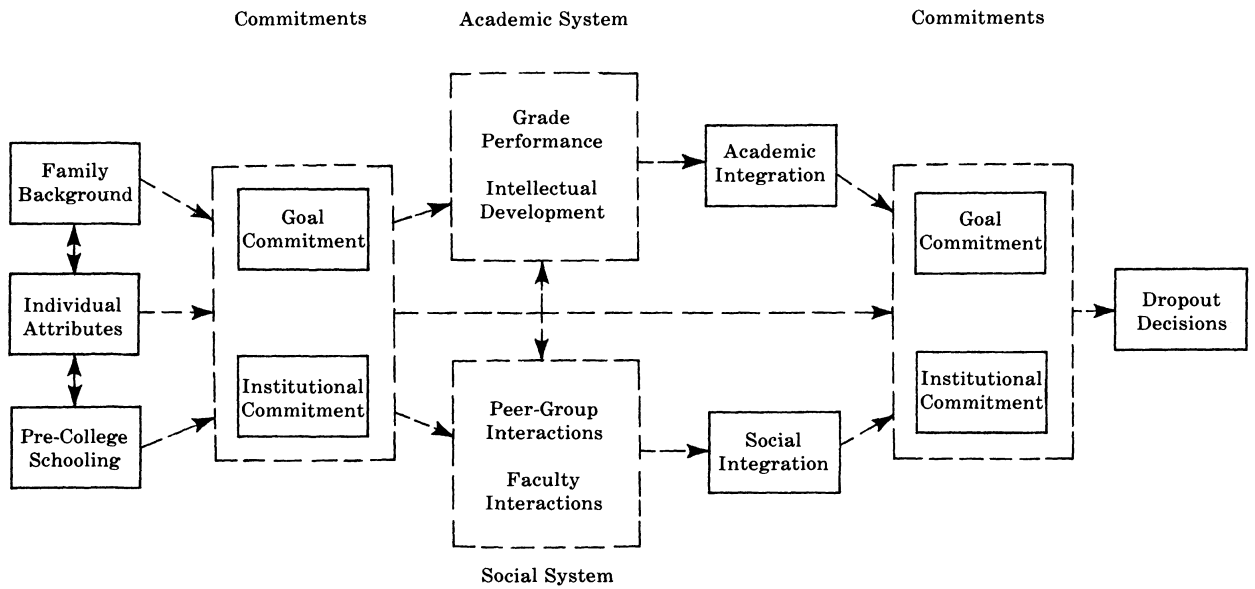
	Extent of impact				Nature of impact	
	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Negative	Positive
Satisfaction with ActivateUTS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with UTS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with your choice of program at UTS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Commitment to complete your studies at UTS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with UTS facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with UTS Student Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with UTS teaching quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with UTS social environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Are you thinking about leaving UTS? Please rate the following statements by selecting the one most appropriate response for each statement listed:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I frequently think about leaving UTS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am searching for other employment or study opportunities so I can leave UTS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely that I will actually leave UTS within the next year.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am exploring opportunities to leave my studies at UTS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any further comments on the benefits you have gained through involvement in ActivateUTS clubs? We would be happy if you shared them with us. (please type your comments in the text box below)

Appendix 4: A longitudinal model of institutional departure (Tinto, 1994)



Appendix 5: Overview of Nvivo Analysis of Interviews

Interview insights supported questionnaire survey findings. The table below provides an overview of the number of references associated with each of the themes identified. Examples of responses for each theme are also provided.

Theme	Sources (24 interviews)	References	Example
Benefits	24	156	<i>“When I started uni I’d just turned 17, but now I’m 20 and I feel like I have grown professionally and personally so much and a lot of that is because of the roles I’ve carried out through the clubs” (P11)</i>
Personal Benefits	19	52	<i>“I think that building partnerships with people who have similar passions to you will benefit your life in so many ways. You learn how to work with people, you understand what it’s like from another’s perspective, you learn some of the soft skills that I mentioned before because they’re things that employers look for – but even just self-development” (P10)</i>
Professional Benefits	24	104	<i>“It is a very safe environment where you can test things. Even if I go wrong, I can say I’m so sorry about that, and the club is always like it’s okay, we will handle it. So it’s like a test run before I’m actually working in the real world where I might have to risk my job or my reputation if I made a really big mistake. When you are doing it with the clubs you can make mistakes without it damaging you significantly” (P1)</i>
Friendships	24	109	<i>“I think that more than anything you create friendships, which are really important at university an especially in a Covid climate.” (P10)</i>
Employability	23	143	<i>“The club was a place where we could learn those skills and practice those skills before going into the real world” (P14)</i>
Sense of Belonging	21	85	<i>“Once you join a club you definitely feel more like you’re a part of UTS. You use their facilities more and you feel more like you belong to the community. You understand university better. I feel like there’s more of a support network around me; a larger network than in your own faculty and you’re stepping out of your comfort zone for a while but it makes you feel a greater sense of connection over the long term” (P14)</i>

Academic Success	20	52	<i>"What we learn at our club and the workshops we do on presenting and problem-solving 100 per cent makes me more confident and competent student and perform better in the presentations I have to do for class assessments." (P15)</i>
Self Confidence	19	42	<i>"Definitely by joining the clubs and meeting more people I have become more self-confident as a student. If you know more people and feel like you have friends around you, you will become more confident." (P16)</i>
Access	17	25	<i>"Most of the clubs I joined because I was interested in what they did, but it also came down to how the people on the O-week stalls interacted with me." (P5)</i>
Work-Life Balance	16	42	<i>"Being in clubs and societies at UTS definitely gives you a sense of community and a sense of individual purpose outside of the academics, having things to look forward to. For me it's just having something else, because sometimes work is not that for people." (P8)</i>
Fun	13	21	<i>"I definitely believe that being in clubs has enriched my uni life. It has made uni life more interesting because you look on the calendar and there are some good things to do instead of just studying, studying, studying" (P16)</i>
Opinion of UTS	13	30	<i>"I honestly felt such a sense of pride going to UTS because I'm part of this society. I think if I hadn't joined any society I would just think of UTS as just a uni. Like I would feel like 'Yeah I could switch to USyd or UNSW', but because I'm like part of a society I feel connected to the university in a way that most students wouldn't if they weren't part of a society" (P10)</i>
Making a Difference	12	35	<i>"Being a part of a club and volunteering to help other people really helps me to feel like I belong at UTS, especially because I'm working alongside people who I know feel the way I feel about doing that kind of work." (P17)</i>
Areas of Concern	12	32	<i>"Activate could put strategies in place to change this culture and celebrate all that international students can bring to a club. I think the international students are an awesome target market for clubs to tap into for events. The engagement they get from international students who are welcomed is immense." (P11)</i>

First Event	8	10	<i>"I learned a lot from that first meeting. Then after a few more meetings we had a social event and I got to make some friendships and relationships and after that I wasn't nervous at any of the meetings anymore." (P14)</i>
Student Retention	7	14	<i>"I haven't considered dropping out of uni but I had been considering going to another University to study. I am not exactly sure what path I want to take in my life , and I was considering applying to go to other universities but it was more just a passing thought because then I realised that No, I didn't want to go anywhere else. I wanted to stay here because of the clubs and societies I am in. I realised I wanted to get into leadership roles on those clubs and societies, so the passing thought about switching unis just drifted away." (P10)</i>
COVID	11	28	<i>"For us, we had to learn to adapt and change because of the circumstances. We had to find that internal self-motivation to keep things going under new conditions. That was a great experience to have that will make us more resilient in the future. Just going through the process of trying to still make those events worthy of being an event." (P8)</i>