An Investigation into Fostering Vibrant Social Spaces through Games and Activities

Aaron Bazzana, Cindy Ngaserin, Curtis Kerr, Luke Wang

University of British Columbia

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Aaron Bazzana

Cindy Ngaserin

Curtis Kerr

Luke Wang

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ABSTRACT

This report will look into ways of making enjoyable social spaces in the new Student Union Building (SUB). Currently at UBC there is not enough social spaces where people can relax and have fun or study in a relaxing multi-tasking environment. There will be space allocated in the new SUB for small lounges for students to relax and socialize in. These spaces will contain couches, tables, and games. This report uses the new SUB layout, survey results, and research to suggest which games should be included in the new SUB. The results show that pool tables are popular and that they fit the requirements of a social space. Foosball tables and Ping-Pong tables also fit the requirements of a social space but the focus of the report is on pool tables as they are the number one choice. They can be considered if space is available and they are in demand. It is suggested that the AMS rents pool tables or buy a cheap synthetic table, to see how students respond to the tables. If the response is positive a slate pool table should be purchased, as they are more durable than a synthetic table. Pool tables create the relaxed social atmosphere that the space wishes to provide. The AMS can also consider buying foosball tables or Ping-Pong tables as alternatives to pool.

List of Abbreviations:

- SUB – Student Union Building

- AMS – Alma Mater Society

- SFU - Simon Fraser University

- LAN - Local Area Network

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

The AMS is building a new student union building to provide a space for students on campus to meet, socialize, and relax in between classes. The AMS wishes to include social space in this building that utilizes activities to foster an energetic environment and shed the image of being a "no-fun" campus.

The following section will describe general guidelines and suggestions for designing student social spaces. In 2007 Simon Fraser University Burnaby Campus did a study into the design and usage of student spaces. This study is relevant to the University of British Columbia as the demographics, location, and needs/behavior of the student body is very similar between the two schools. The following is a summary of the findings by the SFU Burnaby campus.

The usage of social space has changed over the years. Traditionally students studied in the library or private study carols. Over the years students have preferred to study in groups with a lot of outside stimulus such as conversations, music, and food and drinks. These changes in study habits have moved students out of libraries and study carols and into student lounges and other casual spaces. As a result social space has merged into social-study spaces were a wide range of activities are present. When selecting an activity to include in a social space consideration into how this activity will affect other activities especially study/school work is a key criteria. The chosen activity should not be too disruptive to others.

The increase use of technology amongst this generation is also a key design point when planning social spaces. Students' usage of laptops for studying and recreation has increased and current lounges do not fit this need. The SFU study suggests replacing lower coffee tables with higher tables to reduce the strain of bending over to use laptops or the practice of resting laptops on the knees. The usage of custom made chairs with an attached table can also fit this need. The access to power outlets is another concern, either increasing the number of outlets or the use of power cords can alleviate this.

Student space is a dynamic and changes as the cohort of students change from year to year. Consultation with students for what activities they would like to see is an important part in the design of the space. But this should not be the only investigating undertaken. Talks with the

building owners over security and maintenance must also be undertaken. As surveys can not reach the whole student body the results should be taken with a grain of salt. The report suggests experimenting with different designs/activities and see how they are accepted by the students. Once a design seems to be a good fit with the students there should be constant observation of the space to note any changes in the usage of the space. Any changes/additions to the space should be made to accommodate how the space is being used. For example if chess boards are put in and end up being used as laptop tables, these boards should be replaced to tables to better service the students. These are general design considerations when designing student social space.

2.0 SURVEY RESULTS

We chose pool table as the type of game that we want to add into the pocket lounge at the New SUB, but we have to know if the students want to have a pool table in one of the lounges. This is why the survey is conducted in the first place. We used Google docs to collect the data because nowadays people use the internet so much that is why we choose Google docs as it will be the best way to do it rather than handing out papers and wasting them in the end. We posted the survey link to some Facebook groups that UBC students created and it is easier for us to reach out to them because people check their Facebook account at least once a day.

We listed some of the options, such as: pool tables, ping- pong tables, karaoke lounge, LAN games, console games, board games and card games. The students are allowed to pick more than one options given. This survey received a positive feedback from the students. There were 82 students that filled out the survey during the first day and another 40 responses until Nov 9,2012. Around 122 students filled out the survey and we concluded that pool tables has the most vote around 20% and ping pong table came second with only 1% difference. (See Figure 1 below)
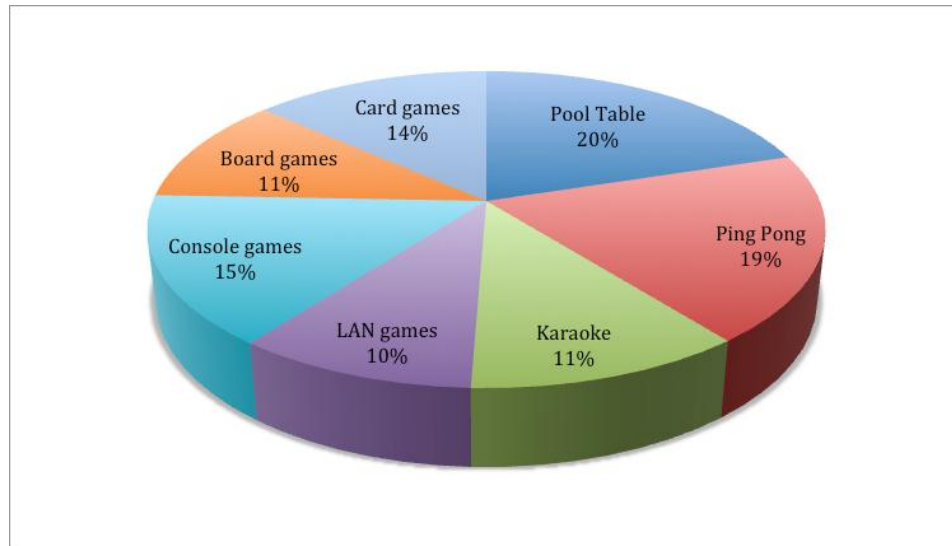
Figure 1: Online survey results.

Pool tables can be played as a non-competitive game, which is probably one of the reasons why students voted pool table as the type of games they would like to have at the new SUB. This survey helps us in how to provide a better service for students at UBC.

Pool was also chosen because unlike ping pong its a low energy game that will minimally distract surrounding students.

3.0 Triple-Bottom-Line Assessment for different games

This section will compare ping-pong, foosball, and pool tables by looking at their economic, social, and environmental factors. It provides additional information for choosing the best game for the social spaces. Social factors will be considered the most important, and environmental factors will be considered the least important.

In terms of capital cost, pool tables are the most expensive, followed by foosball tables, then ping-pong tables. Lowest prices for an acceptable quality table are around $1800-$2500, $900-$1200, and $200-$500 respectively. For maintenance, foosball tables require the most due to lubrication required and pieces breaking from heavy use. Pool tables receiving moderate to heavy use will need to replace the cloth every 2-3 years. No maintenance is required for a ping

pong table. A lifetime of all 3 tables is limited to how well they are taken care of. Proper care can ensure a lifetime of 25 years or more.

The pool and foosball tables considered for the new SUB would be coin operated at a price of one dollar per play. If each table had 5 games played on it per day for 300 days of a year, $1500 would be collected.   This calculation seems modest and means that a well used table can pay for itself easily in a few years. Having the tables collect revenue without supervision is a major advantage over Ping-Pong tables. Revenue collected this way can go towards the table capital and maintenance costs as well as other things.

Socially, pool is the most popular, followed closely by Ping-Pong, and lastly foosball. Foosball was not mentioned in the survey so it is assumed to be at least half as popular as the other two. Also important are the ways that the tables impact the atmosphere of the social spaces. Pool is played at a much more relaxed pace than the other two, allowed more opportunities socialize while playing the game. This is preferred because it allows the players to add more fun to the game by having conversation. Having 4 people playing results in much more socializing due to having more people waiting for their turn. In terms of competitiveness and barriers to entry, competitive and casual players alike enjoy pool. Foosball and Ping-Pong require some practice to become good enough to play at an enjoyable level, but Ping-Pong is much easier than foosball to play for two people with different skill levels if they are playing casually. The higher barrier of entry for foosball may be the reason it is less popular than the other two. All 3 games attract competitive players at similar rates.

Another social factors for these tables is the space required for these tables and the number of people who play them.   The total space required would limit the possible locations in the new SUB to only a few. The space available for a Ping-Pong table could quite likely fit 2 pool tables or a pool table and a foosball table. Foosball tables require about half the space that a pool table would.   Ping-Pong tables take up the most space and are usually played with 2 people. Pool and foosball tables can be played enjoyably by 2-4 people so more people can be playing at once than Ping-Pong. Regarding space considerations, pool and foosball tables are much better than Ping-Pong.

Environmentally, all tables have some environmental impact, but the difference between them is not too significant. The slate in pool tables requires mining, but minimal processing is required to create the product.   Wood used in pool and foosball tables can be made with recycled products and may be recycled when the table is removed. Ping pong tables are generally made of pressed wood products for the top and hard plastic legs. Ping pong tables are more difficult recycle effectively.

After doing the triple bottom line assessment, pool was chosen as the primary game for these social spaces. Pool tables can pay for themselves over time, can fit into many spaces in the new SUB, are popular amongst students, and create a good atmosphere for the social spaces.

4.0 Pool table material selection

Figure 2: A pool table

This sections looks into the materials commonly used in pool tables and makes recommendations for the materials used for a pool table.

4.1 **Slate bed vs Synthetic bed**

Slate is heavy, hard, stiff, and durable, but is much more expensive the synthetic tables. Synthetic beds have a tendency to warp over time and their light weight can cause them to tip over easily, causing major damage to the table. A heavily warped table cannot be fixed and needs to be replaced.

Overall, slate will provide a better quality gaming experience. It will cost more initially, but the cost per year should be lower because it will last much longer. Socially, slate will be more popular because it provides better quality play experience, however, slate is produced in locations where unfair labor laws may be present like China and Brazil. Environmentally, slate cannot be recycled, but synthetic beds can.

4.2 **Base Material**

Wood is the material used for all pool table bases, except in luxury tables, which are very expensive.   A strong, stiff, heavy wood is preferred so that the table does not strain, move or break when a load is applied to it. By comparing the strength, density, and cost it shows that oak wood is the cheapest wood that is strong enough for this task. Socially, all woods are acceptable, but more aesthetically pleasing wood will be more socially acceptable. Environmentally, recycled woods could be considered and all woods are recyclable.

4.3 **Other Materials**

Rails will be made of oak, just like the base. Rail cushions will be made of synthetic rubber. Woolen cloth will be used because it can withstand heavy usage. Pockets will be leather-lined and drop into ball-return troughs made of plywood so the balls can be collected in the table.

5.0 Floor Plan and Space Factors

According to the new SUB building plan, every floor that is level 3 or higher has several pocket lounges. Those areas are semi isolated, easy to manage and have space that is suitable for pool table placement. The purpose of those lounges is for students to relax and socialize which is ideal to have sociable games and activities included.
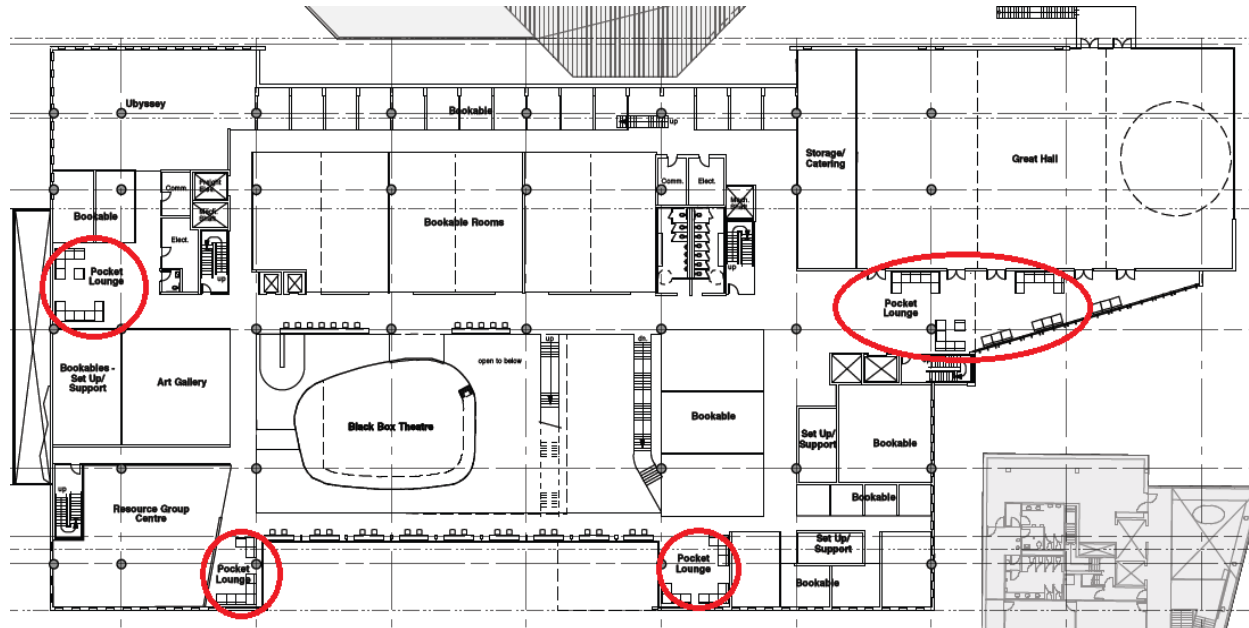

Figure 3: Floor plan of new SUB level three.

There are four pocket lounges on the third floor. One is located at the north side near the Art Gallery, one is located at the north west corner near Resource Group Centre, another one is located the at south west side surrounded by bookable rooms, and the last one is located at the south beside Great hall. The north lounge and west lounge are semi isolated with dimension approximately five by five meters. Their size and location are suitable for pool table placement. The other two lounges, however, are not very suitable. The north west lounge is trapezoidal shaped with room size approximately two third of the south west lounge. The south side lounge is very spacious but it is located at the hallway between the Great Hall and elevators. There would be a lot people walking by and may cause traffic jam if pool tables are installed.
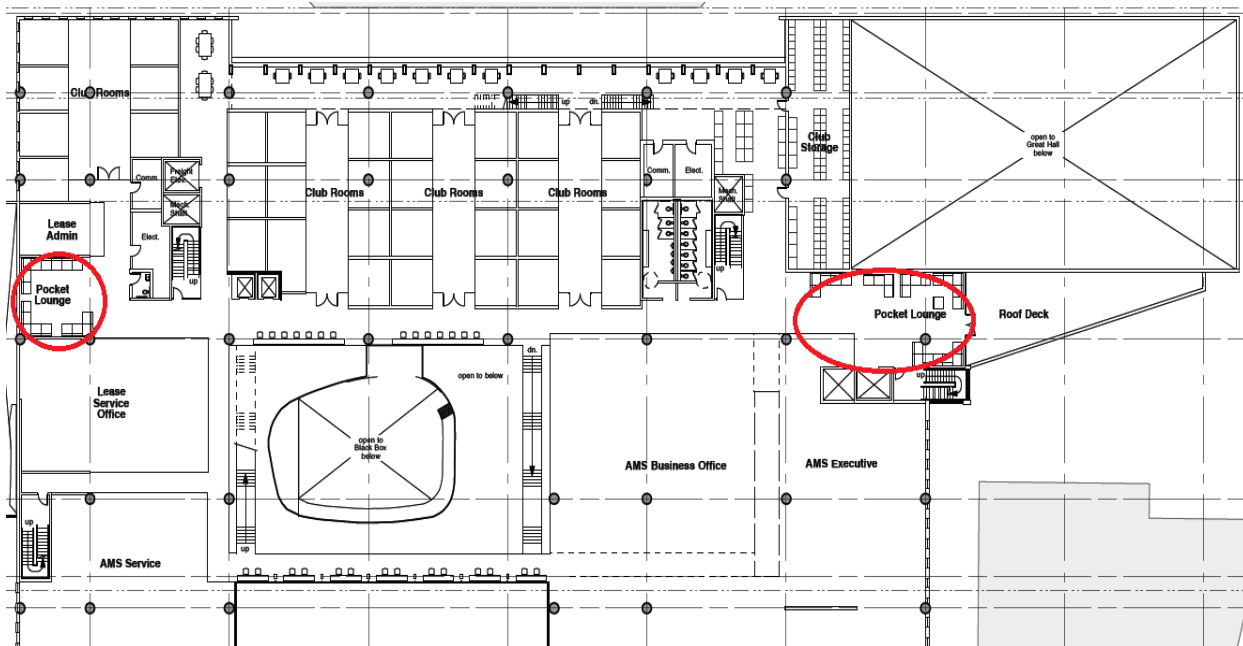
Figure 4: Floor plan of new SUB level four.

There are two pocket lounges on the fourth floor and they are located at the north side beside lease admin office and south side beside elevators and stairs. The north side lounge is identical to it's third floor counterpart which makes it suitable for pool table placement. The south side lounge, however, may need more investigation in order to determine whether it's suitable or not. This lounge approximately seven by ten meters in dimension and has direct access to the building elevators and stairs. Since this floor is mainly used as office for AMS and clubs so that the traffic volume may be unsuitable for any pool table installment.
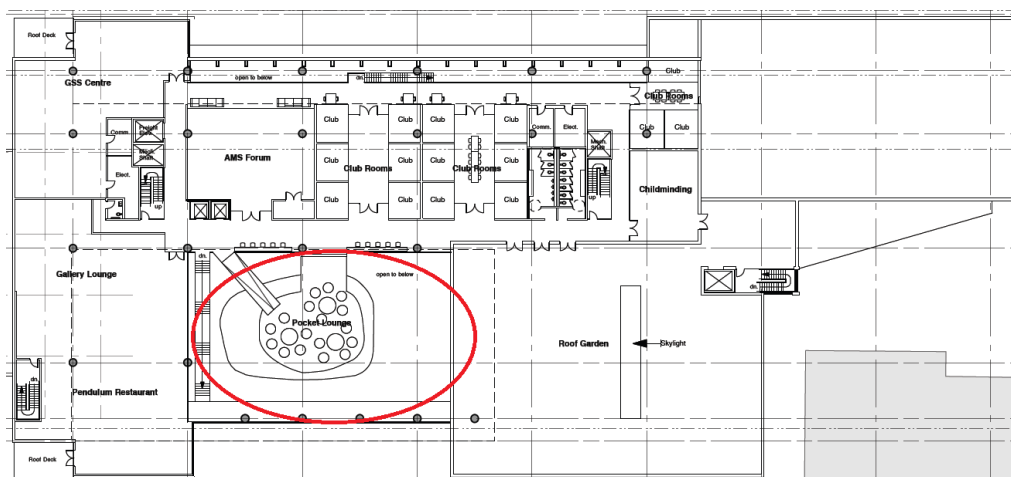

Figure 5: Floor plan of new SUB level five.

The fifth floor has one big pocket lounge that is located between the Roof Garden and the Gallery Lounge. The design of this lounge is not suitable for pool table placement because of its unique structure. This lounge is island like and has chairs and table placement intended for people to sit down and have conversation and drinks.
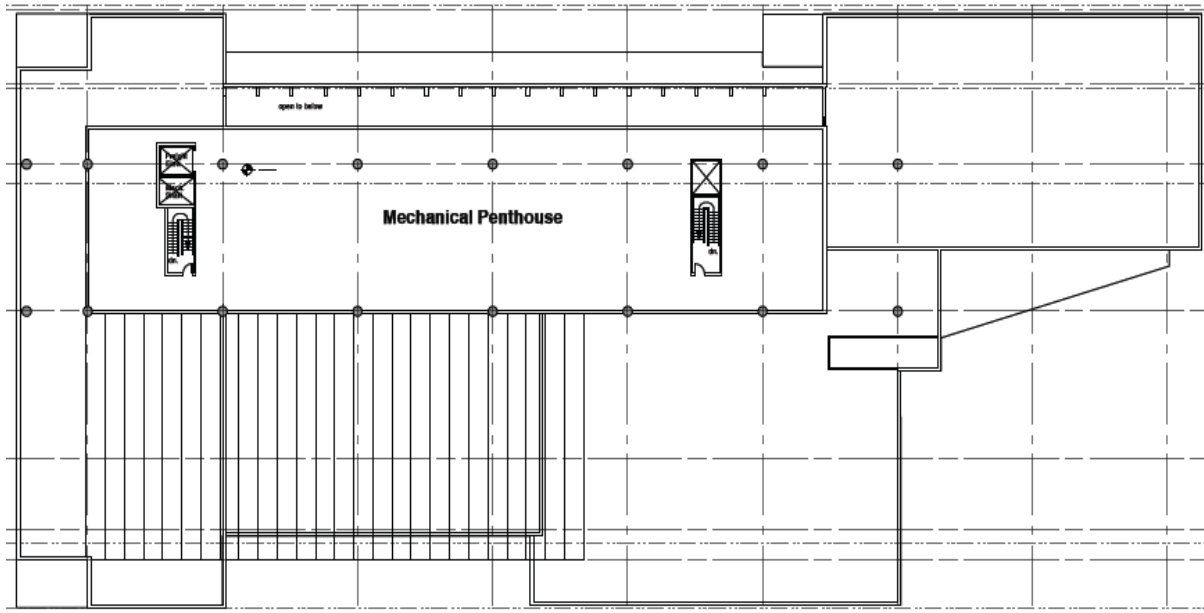

Figure 6: Floor plan of new SUB roof level.

Finally, the roof of new SUB is the Mechanical Penthouse, which is, require additional research and evaluation for any pool table installation.

http://www.dkbilliards.com/faq/

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

    6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion social space is needed in the new SUB to foster an energetic community on campus. From surveying the student body pool is the most popular activity they would like to see in the new building. Pool also agrees with the guidelines for implementing an activity in a social space as it is low energy and is minimally disruptive to others who are not playing.

    The ideal placement of a table would be in one the various pocket lounges located around the new SUB. Selection of what lounge to use should be based on observation of traffic flows and how students are utilizing these spaces. Initially a pool table should be rented or a cheap synthetic one purchased. This allows the AMS to observe the impact of the pool table on the space. If it is positive a slate table should be purchased, as the durability of slate will be able to with stand the high traffic of users.

    6.2 Recommendation

This report recommends the AMS to take a serious look into implementing a pool table in the new SUB. Further surveys can be executed to get the opinion of the larger student body. Research into different table materials and design can be under taken in a more in depth matter, once the AMS has experimented with a cheaper pool table and has determined a pool table fits in with the flow and function of the new student lounges.

Research into the other games should also be undertaken, as a variety of games will appeal to a larger percentage of students. Again a cheaper/temporary option should be experimented with before a large investment on a high quality durable option is purchased. These are the recommendations that the report makes to the AMS on the new SUB building.

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