

# **Becoming Wildcats: Developing Social Connections Through Effective Communication At California State University, Chico**

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**Abstract:** The authors carried out ethnographic research, using structured interviews and auto-ethnographic methods, to study the experiences of first-year students at California State University, Chico. A research team of four first-year students conducted fifteen interviews to see how effective the communication is between Chico State and its students in actively engaging student participation. Through student responses and personal journal entries, the research team came to discover the university's issues in communication; failure to reach off campus students when advertising events, events clashing with transportation needs, and social events creating intimidation more than engagement. The research team suggests implementing a buddy system, a more available transportation option and a central advertising source for all students as ways to improve these issues. By doing so the university will improve the experience of its students and the students will be able to develop social connections with each other and within the university.

**Research Question: How well is the University helping first year students create social connections?**

- We researched how and what Chico State is doing to help first year students make social connections.
- This is important because there is a six-week period from the start of the semester that acts as the "sink or swim" period. Those who are able to create positive connections are more likely to succeed socially and academically. Those who do not are more likely to have a negative experience and often fail.

## **Methods**

- Interviews
  - In face-to-face interviews we asked participants questions regarding their experiences. We used two interviewers and two notetakers.

- We interviewed first-year students after obtaining their consent
- We used the data to identify common student experiences at the university
- Auto-ethnography
  - Similar experiences with the interviewees

## **Results**

- Fear of attending alone
  - Most students are not comfortable attending events without a friend
- Failure of Advertisement
  - Many students are not aware of school-sponsored events due to the lack of advertisement and its short reach
- Lack of Transportation
  - Especially for off-campus students, events are not accessible due to transportation

## **Recommendations**

- Create a buddy system
  - University could create a program to pair students together who have the same interests, hometown, or same majors.
  - Students will have someone to attend events with and a place to start their social connections
- Establish a website solely for the purpose of advertising school events
  - This website will be a digital calendar for students to check on their own time
- Schedule earlier social events or create a 24 hour transportation service

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