

On Campus Third Spaces

Qualitative Research on Impacts to SFU Students' Perceived Social Interaction and Sense of Belonging.



Cora Dickson

BACKGROUND: This research aimed to answer: how do SFU's third spaces support students' social interaction and sense of belonging on a commuter campus?

METHODS

1. A **semi-structured survey** asked participants about perceived sense of belonging, time spent on campus, and suggested improvements to campus third spaces. **20 SFU students participated** in total.
2. **Observations** were conducted in the **West Mall Centre** and **W.A.C. Bennett Library**. Noting use of space, group size, seating arrangement and general design.

RESULTS

Survey:

- Sense of belonging is **neutral-low** and with a **minority** reporting a perceived very active social scene.
- Sense of **belonging rises** with **time spent** with peers, hours on campus and **satisfaction** with third spaces.
- **Participants value** proximity to amenities, comfort, natural lighting and a non-disruptive environment most.

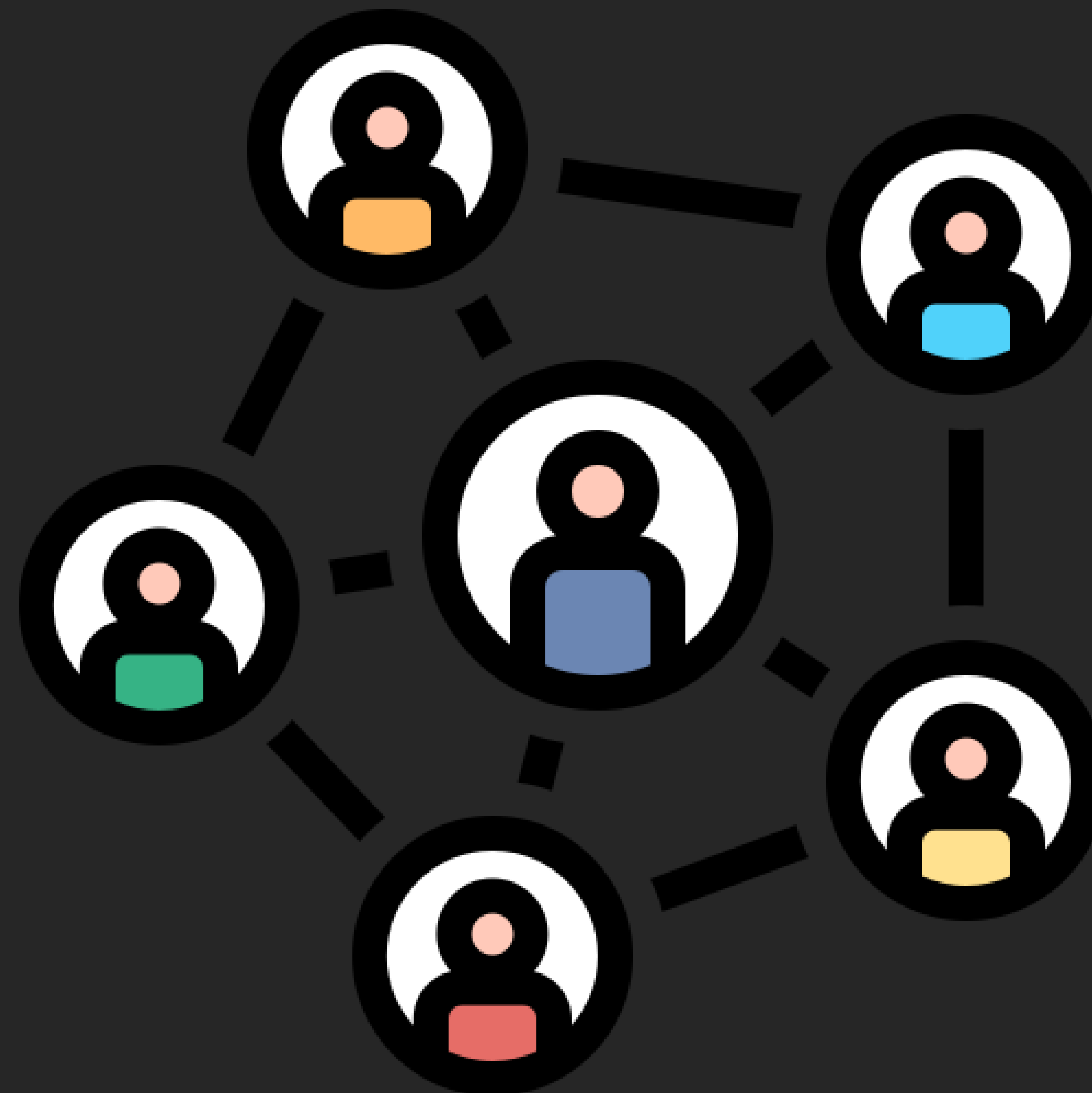
Observation:

- Flexible seating arrangements for groups and individuals, as well as comfortable design present.
- Most users were **not engaging socially** while in the space.

DISCUSSION

- Since almost half of participants spend less than one hour on campus outside of class, increasing social events could give reason to stay on campus and boost belonging.

Belonging is highest when students spend time with peers and when third spaces support community and social interaction.



THEORHETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Third spaces (cafés, libraries, study spaces) provide essential space for social interaction and place-making (Lee, 2022).
- Design and use of third spaces can influence attachment, inclusion and perceptions of belonging (Banning et al. 2010; Goosen and Cilliers, 2020).
- The goal of this project is to examine to what extent SFU's third places mediate commuter-campus challenges.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

- While some third spaces on campus may be providing ample student support, most participants did not report a strong sense of belonging on campus or satisfaction with third spaces.
- There were strong associations between peer interaction and belonging

LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size
- Spatially limited observations
- Self-reported sense of belonging

REFERENCES

- Banning, J. H., Clemons, S., McKelfresh, D., & Gibbs, R. W. (2010). *Special places for students: Third place and restorative place*. *College Student Journal*, 44(4), 906–913.
- Goosen, Z., & Cilliers, E. J. (2020). Enhancing social sustainability through the planning of third places: A theory-based framework. *Social Indicators Research*, 150(3), 835–866. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02350-7>, vol. 150(3), pages 835-866u st.
- Lee, N. (2022). *Third place and psychological well-being: The psyhkingl benefits of eating and drinking places for university students in Southern California, USA*. *Cities*, 131, 104049.

Cora Dickson, csd12@sfu.ca