Final Research Report
December 3, 2020

**"Study of the Auburn University Swim Team and Potential Factors
Affecting Attendance at Meets"**

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Executive Summary

My topic surrounding the Auburn University Swim Team is significant because this research will help readers to understand why Auburn Swimming and Diving has a lower attendance rate compared to other sports at Auburn. During this time, I have gathered secondary research and primary research by conducting an online survey questionnaire through the survey tool Qualtrics.

This topic is necessary and important because it analyzes why student attendance at meets is low, and provides specific factors that may cause this lack of attendance. The overall purpose of researching this topic is to help my client, Auburn University Swimming and Diving, understand why they experience a low attendance rate, and specifically identify what is causing students not to attend by providing survey respondents with a range of possible factors, and allowing them to rate the importance of these factors on a specified scale.

Major findings in my secondary research include information found that suggests that students who are previously involved in an extracurricular that already involves some type of sport, are more likely to be interested in, and engage with social media posts, emails and announcements from the majority of sports teams at Auburn, even those sports that are not generally followed or attended by the student body. These findings are in contrast to the number of students that are involved in extracurriculars like SGA, leadership organizations and academic fraternities that monopolize their time on campus, and make them less likely to attend a sporting event outside of football and basketball. This allows me to conclude that extracurriculars and academic obligations play some role in a student's decision to attend an Auburn swim meet. Other findings within my secondary research cite parking and towing at Auburn University as a potential factor in low attendance at meets. With steadily increasing parking fees and virtually every lot labeled a 24-hour tow-away zone, students find that the risk is not worth the reward.

When conducting my primary research through an online survey, my major findings were that nearly half of participating respondents "strongly agree" that parking at Auburn University discourages them from attending swim team events on campus and 37% of participants "strongly disagree" that they see and read emails, social media posts and flyers dispersed by the Auburn Swim Team. Other factors listed in my survey such as other obligations, academic or otherwise, and a general lack of interest were more evenly distributed in regards to respondent's answers. This would leave me to believe that in addition to parking at Auburn, another factor that plays the largest role in the lack of attendance at meets, is a lack of engagement with information about swim team events.

My overall conclusion regarding the information that I have gathered, is that students are dissatisfied with available parking options at Auburn, which in turn deters their attendance at Auburn swim meets and other smaller sporting events. Likewise, information about swim meets is not easily accessible to students who are not actively seeking out that information. I have also concluded that an overall disinterest in the program does not serve a significant role in low attendance.

Secondary Research Report

Auburn University Swimming and Diving

I.   Introduction

I have chosen to research the Auburn University Swim Team and focus on its attendance issue. I want to know why attendance is so low, why students who do not have any personal ties are not interested in participating, and what factors specifically affect this issue. I believe this issue is of interest and importance because, like many other sports teams at Auburn that are not football or basketball, attendance and participation is an issue. I think it would be interesting to see what causes these dips in attendance and what could be done to raise interest so that the swim team can boost its sales and participation within the program.

The questions I want to answer within this research are:
- Why is attendance so particularly low?
- What causes these attendance issues and the lack of interest?
- Could attendance issues be caused by the inconvenience of parking and towing at Auburn University?
- Is the lack of interest due to other commitments like academics and leadership roles?
- Is the swim team's communication effective in reaching all students, or does it only reach those interested enough to seek out the information?

These questions are crucial to the research because it will be a guide through information I seek out during my research and it will help me to narrow down where I need to focus, in order to answer the question surrounding my general topic. Specifically, these questions all pertain to certain issues that could be causing the lack of interest and attendance at Auburn swim meets.

II.   Key-Publics

I have identified two different groups of publics related to my research. The first consists of "involved" Auburn University students and the members of the Auburn University swim team and staff. These two groups will serve as my active publics. More specifically, I have decided to focus my research toward Auburn students who don't necessarily have special ties to the swim team either through a familial relationship or friendship. Since this particular group is aware of the swim team but does not necessarily seek out information regarding meets, it will serve as my passive or non-public. These groups will make up a majority of the general student population and this focus will help me to determine the overall reach of communication between the swim team and staff, and their student peers. I will also attempt to determine how I can increase awareness in my passive publics and boost interest in attending meets. These publics are relevant to my topic because they are the group that I will be using to measure the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication and information generating from the swim team and its staff. I will be recording characteristics based on demographics and psychographic behavior, asking the question, how can these students be grouped further and how do they respond and react to involvement opportunities presented by Auburn University? (Specifically focusing on the probability of these groups to attend swim meets). The source College Simply presents Auburn

University students as between the ages of 18-25, with just 4.3% of students being over the age of 25. The University holds a current enrollment of 30,440 with 51% of those being male students and 49% being female students. I will be looking at these demographics while trying to determine what specific age range and gender is more likely to have an interest in involvement at Auburn University, and how this will help the swim team's staff modify their way of engagement and communication to reach more of this group as a whole.

III. Background Research and Literature Review

a. Level of Involvement Within Students at Auburn University

A relevant issue that surrounds my research topic is the level of interest regarding involvement among students at Auburn University, and specifically their levels of engagement with sports teams and events outside of football and basketball. I also wanted to know if gender played a role in the willingness to attend these events. When looking at the difference in time spent at sporting events between men and women, I was surprised to learn that there was not a wide gap of involvement between the two groups. According to a study conducted by Andrei Markovits and David Smith with the Scholarly Monograph Series, the mean difference between men and women's time spent at live sporting events was separated by just three points (Male-3.0, Female-2.7). This leads me to believe that gender will not have a significant impact on my study.

Furthermore, I want to determine how many students are considered "involved" at Auburn and what that involvement entails. Some students are involved with an extracurricular that involves sports, which would make them more likely to engage in social media posts, emails and announcements from sports teams at Auburn, while other students' involvement include organizations and clubs that do not pertain to sports. These are more likely geared toward academics and leadership roles. According to CollegeFactual.com, Auburn University has a total of 578 athletes. There are 315 men and 263 women that participate and compete in inter-collegiate sports. I want to answer this question; how can the Auburn swim team reach students whose involvement and interests do not surround the sports community and culture at Auburn?

On the "Student Life" page posted on Auburn University's website, it is stated that there are over 500 organizations that a student can join related to leadership, communication, and specific academic major extensions. USNews.com states that there are approximately 6,000 students involved in these extracurriculars and Greek Life at Auburn. Some organizations specify their focus as related to a specific major or program, and require certain commitments and qualifications. This leads me to conclude that students involved in these groups place a heavy emphasis on their academic studies, which will most likely affect their willingness to participate in other programs and extracurriculars that will monopolize their time. I will be focusing on how these factors affect the swim team's attendance and enthusiasm, and how they can strategize their communication with all students to maximize involvement and participation.

b. How Parking and Towing Affects Attendance at Auburn Sporting Events

Many students attribute the parking situation and fear of being towed toward their reluctance to go to campus. Some students cannot afford to buy parking passes, placing their access points to campus sometimes a mile and a half away. This has affected attendance not just at sporting

events, but also classes and other functions hosted anywhere on Auburn's campus. Auburn University's interactive parking map places parking for the Martin E. Aquatics center in the south lot of the Beard Eaves Memorial Coliseum, but to be able to park in this area, you must have a parking pass designated for the PC 1 lot, or you risk being towed. So where can students park that will give them relatively easy access? The closest place to park without consequence is public parking located on side streets that are up to a mile away from the facility. This could serve as a significant factor in the low attendance at these swim meets, resulting in family and friends of the athletes being some of the only ones willing to make the effort to attend.

IV.   Research Questions or Hypotheses

The overarching question I have formulated based on my research and subtopics is this;

- What factors play the most vital role in preventing or deterring students from attending Auburn University swim meets?

I am predicting that some of these factors will include the inconvenience of parking at the facility, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the swim team's communication and its reach to students, and other obligations that students hold more value toward, like academic priorities and other organizations that they are directly involved in.

V.   Justification for Primary Research

I believe that an online survey is essential to my research because it will allow me to gather hard and measurable data from real survey participants related to my topic. After completing my secondary research, it is clear that more can be learned by collecting data from real students here at Auburn University. An online survey would help me to obtain information regarding why students do or do not attend swim meets, and what their motivation or lack-there-of, is for doing so. Conducting this survey will give an insight into students' opinions regarding my topic, and how important this topic is overall to individuals participating.

In collecting the data and being able to understand and analyze it, the information I obtain could be useful to Auburn athletics and the Auburn Swim Team when strategizing and implementing plans to boost ticket sales and attendance at swim meets. This survey could assist the swim team in understanding what motivates attendance at meets and events, and help them formulate a more effective way to disseminate relevant information to the student body.

In addition to helping the swim team, my online survey could benefit other teams with overall low attendance at Auburn revise their process of communicating with the student body in a way that will increase interest and attendance at their events as well.

Lastly, by conducting this primary research, I will be able to discern how to effectively communicate with, and encourage engagement between Auburn students and the swim team. After this study is completed, it could guide further research to accommodate other sports at Auburn and on other college campuses that also struggle with low attendance rates that are hoping to raise interest in their program.

Survey Report

I.   Overview and Purpose

My survey objectives were to collect data from the Auburn student body and gain insight on how they interpret the information I am trying to see if they receive, or if they receive the information at all. Another objective is to see how students feel about my topic and what their attitudes are toward attending meets and following the progress of the swim team.

A survey is the best way to collect this data because it allows me to see how participants responded in a controlled way that is easy to read and interpret. It also allows users a set number of options to express how they feel or think that covers a specific range of feelings about the topic. I think this is also the best method because it is simple and easy to complete, so it will not deter respondents from participating.

Other details regarding my survey is my method of distribution. I posted my survey link on platforms like snapchat and twitter, where I know I am connected to a certain number of Auburn students, I sent out text messages to my personal friends, and I sent the link in Auburn student group messages I am in and have been in the past to reach students that I have not personally connected with. My ultimate goal for this survey is to get a decent amount of responses and be able to turn the data collected into a conclusion that will flow well in my report.

II.   Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

The population of interest for my survey is Auburn students. I chose to use the convenience sampling method to ensure that I would receive a decent amount of participation in the given time frame. I wanted to target students who were classified as heavily involved in the student life at Auburn, as well as students who were not as involved or not involved at all in order to compare differences in interest between these groups of students. The sampling type I set was to gather at least 20-30 students.

I started by sending the link to my survey out in many different Auburn GroupMe's hoping to get a wide range of responses. The groups I sent my link in range from old class groups that would reach students of different majors, and more general groups that consisted of students in specific years at Auburn. I found that this would be the best way to reach a variety of different students, some of who I know and some that I do not.

I started my data collection on October 30 and ended my collection on November 15. My survey took around 5 minutes or less to complete, and participants would complete it on either their mobile devices or laptops.

III.   Description of Participants

For my survey, I requested that only current Auburn students participate. 18 are female and 12 are male, while the age ranged from 18-25 years old. I have found that most answers remain similar and judging from the responses I received, there is a relatively low level of interest in my research topic. Since my topic surrounded a sport at Auburn, I felt that it was important to

encourage participation from students outside of my personal circle so that I was able to gather a wide range of opinions from different groups of the student body.
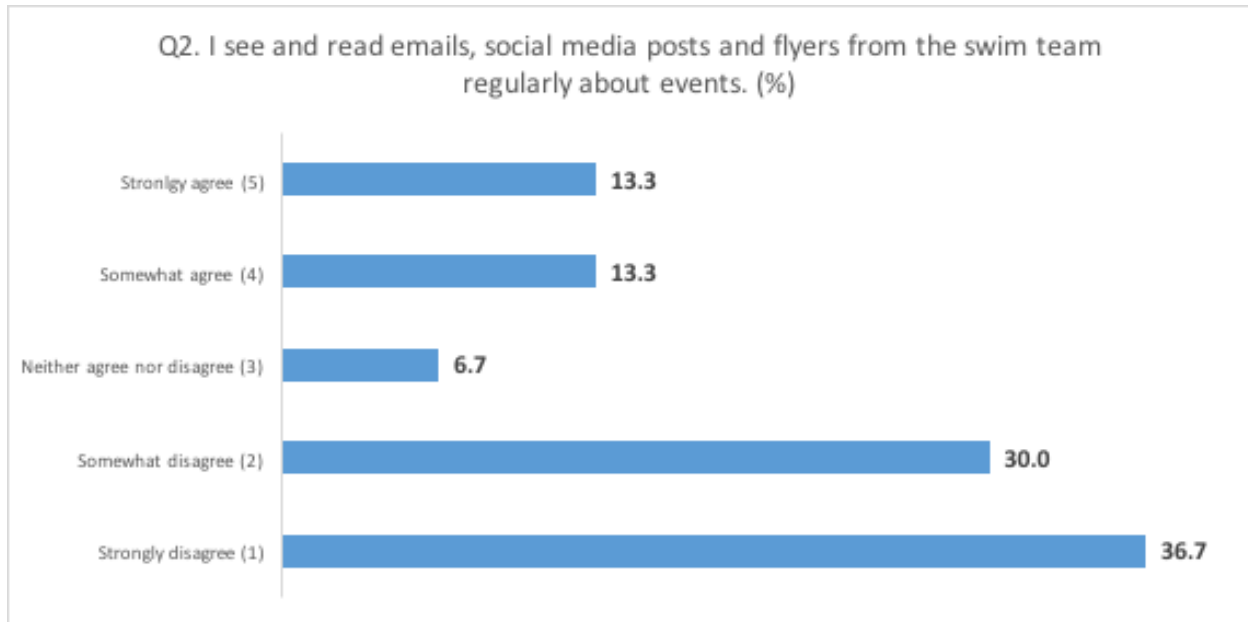
IV.   Results

The goal of my survey was to present Auburn students with a variety of factors that might prevent their attendance at Auburn swim meets and determine which of the presented factors plays the biggest role in the lack of attendance of most students at Auburn. My questions focused on specific factors like parking availability, prior academic obligations, lack of information about swim events and general interest in attending meets.

My first question after my introduction asked survey respondents to rate the statement "Parking at Auburn University prevents and discourages me from attending swim team events on campus" on a scale of 1-5, 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree". 13 participants answered (strongly agree), 5 (somewhat agree), 10 (neither agree nor disagree) and only one answered (strongly disagree). Out of 29 respondents, the majority said they either somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement, so it is reasonable to assume that parking on campus plays a strong role in preventing students from attending meets.
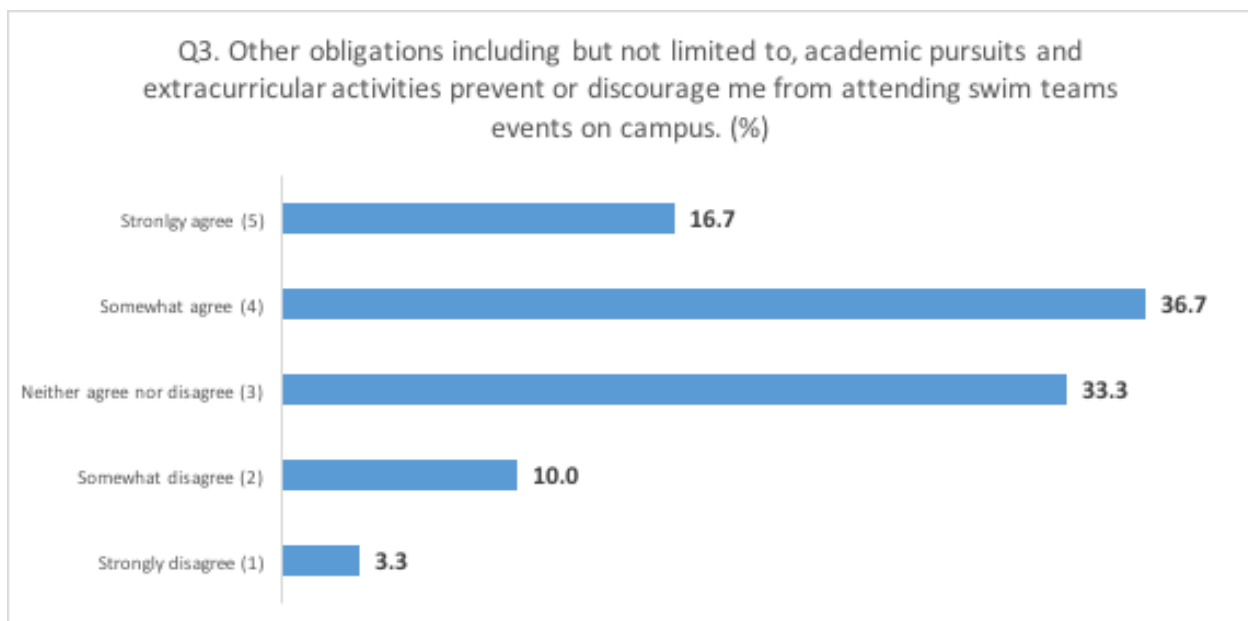

Q1. Parking at Auburn University prevents and discourages me from attending swim team events on campus (N=29)

Category	Value
Stronlgy agree	13
Somewhat agree	5
Neither agree nor disagree	10
Somewhat disagree	0
Strongly disagree	1
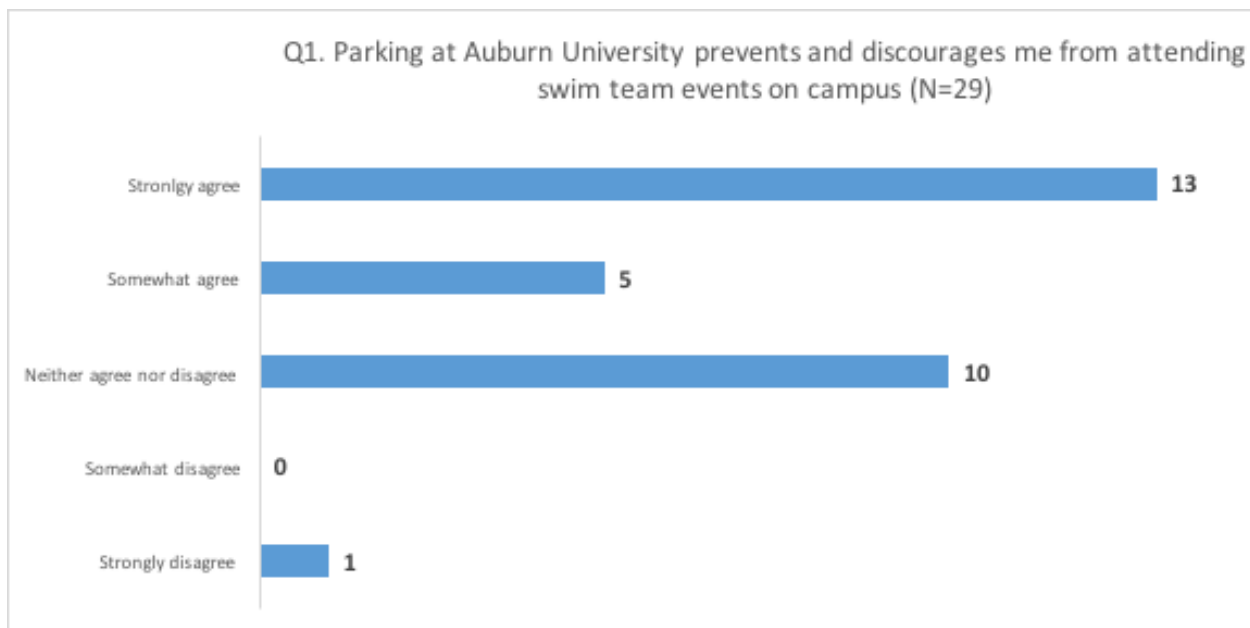
My second question asked participants to rate the statement "I see and read emails, social media posts and flyers from the swim team regularly about events" on the same 1-5 scale. 37% (11) of survey respondents answered: "strongly disagree", and 30% (9) answered "somewhat disagree." From this data, it can be said that a majority of students do not either read, receive or pay attention to posts or information put forth by the swim team.

Q2. I see and read emails, social media posts and flyers from the swim team regularly about events. (%)

Stronlgy agree (5)	13.3
Somewhat agree (4)	13.3
Neither agree nor disagree (3)	6.7
Somewhat disagree (2)	30.0
Strongly disagree (1)	36.7

My third question asked students to rate the statement, "Other obligations including but not limited to, academic pursuits and extracurricular activities prevent or discourage me from attending swim team events on campus." The majority of survey respondents (36.7%) answered "somewhat agree," while 33.3% answered "neither agree nor disagree" and 16.7% responded with "strongly agree." This data tells me that academic and extracurricular obligations do play a relatively large role in students' willingness to attend meets.

Q3. Other obligations including but not limited to, academic pursuits and extracurricular activities prevent or discourage me from attending swim teams events on campus. (%)

|	
Stronlgy agree (5)	16.7
Somewhat agree (4)	36.7
Neither agree nor disagree (3)	33.3
Somewhat disagree (2)	10.0
Strongly disagree (1)	3.3

My fourth and final question asked Auburn survey participants to rate the statement, "I am not interested in attending Auburn University swim team meets now or in the future." Participants were tied at 16.7% (5 each) for "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." Others were tied at 23.3% (7 each) for "neither agree nor disagree" and "somewhat disagree." Other respondents

answered "somewhat agree" at 20% (6). Since participants seemed to be spread out evenly for the most part, with majority leading with only a 3% margin, it is reasonable to say that respondents are spread on their general interest in attending Auburn swim meets.
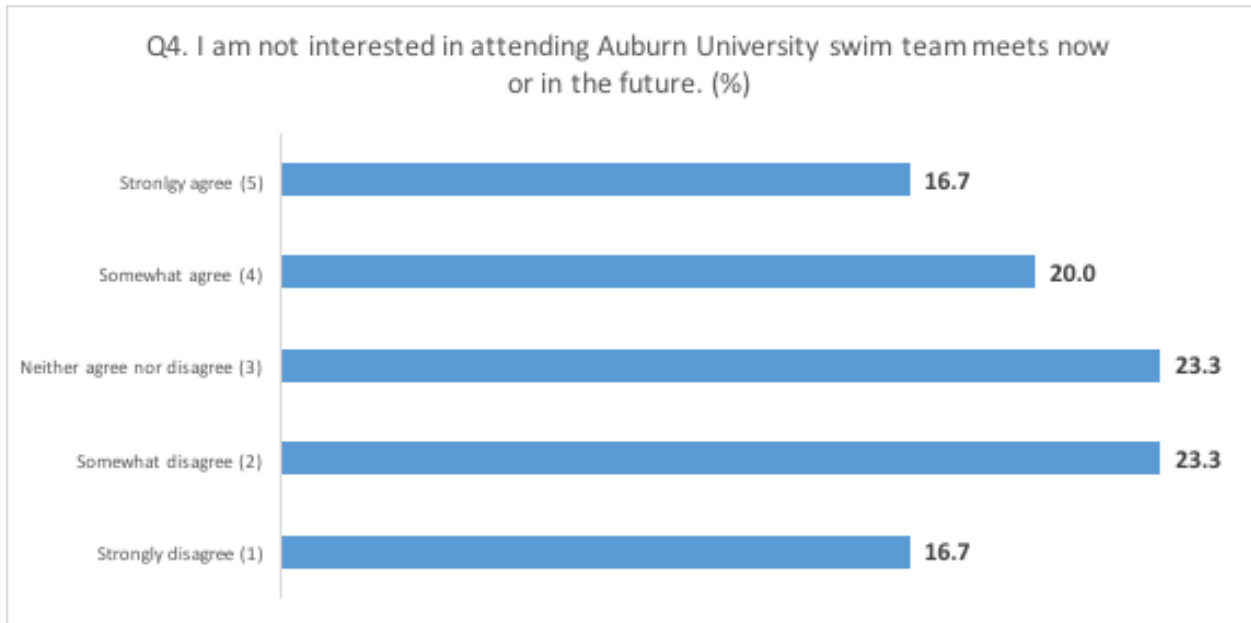
My demographic questions asked participants their gender (male or female), and provided an open-ended question to record their age. My survey respondents ranged between the ages of 18-25 with 40% being male and 60% female.
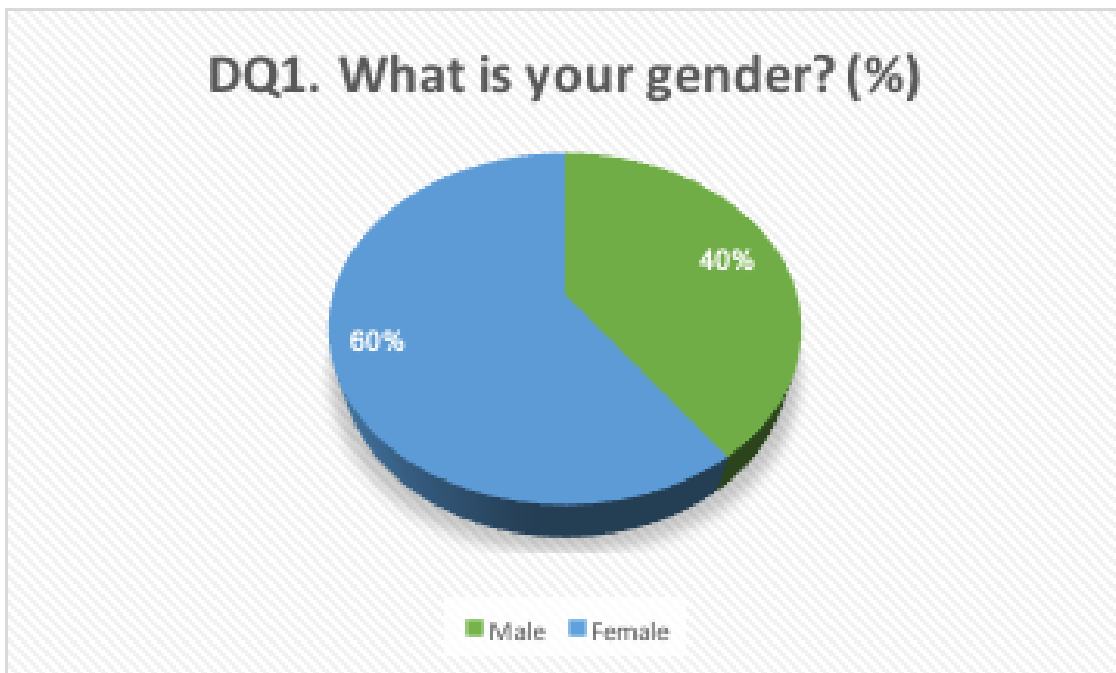
V.   Implications and Recommendations for Communication Strategies

As stated earlier, the purpose and goal of my survey was to identify what factor played the biggest role in preventing or discouraging students from attending Auburn Swim meets. From the data gathered, I can conclude that a majority of survey respondents agree that parking at Auburn University, lack of communication between students and the swim team and other obligations such as academics and extracurriculars prevent and discourage them from attending meets, while other factors were generally spread more evenly throughout regarding participant responses.

Since parking at facilities is not an issue that the swim team can address directly, I think it would be beneficial for them to work with Auburn Parking Services on an efficient and helpful way to boost attendance at their meets by making parking easier to navigate and more accessible for students that do not have a parking pass for a designated zone that is located near or around the James E. Aquatic Center.

They could implement a team of workers or volunteers specifically designed to help students and attendees find a place to park, offer a valet service for meets, or have a designated meeting place where guests can safely park their car and be shuttled to the facility.

In order to remedy a communication deficit between the student population and the Auburn swim team, paid and promoted advertisements would be a good way to ensure that the target audience is receiving your message. One suggestion to make relationships more personal

between the two publics would be to host meet-and-greets between students and members of the swim team, scheduling events that are hosted and sponsored by Auburn University. This would help to bridge the gap between student athletes and the general student body.

Conclusion

I started off my research with one question; "What factors play the most vital role in preventing or deterring students from attending Auburn University swim meets?" From there, I was able to build and expand my research to suggest certain factors that might help explain the lack of attendance at meets and create an online survey that would help narrow down specific causes of disinterest.

After conducting my secondary research, I was able to conclude that there was no significant relationship between men and women and there attendance at live sporting events. I also explored the different opportunities for involvement presented to students at Auburn University, and was able to determine the behavior that students across different programs would most likely engage in. From this research, I was able to distinguish four likely causes of low attendance rates at Auburn University swim meets: parking on campus and the fear of getting towed, lack of information about events sought and received, prior academic or extracurricular obligations and a general lack of overall interest among students.

For my primary research, I conducted an online survey through Qualtrics in which 30 Auburn students participated. After analyzing the data I received, 62.07% of participants agreed that parking at Auburn University prevents or discourages them from attending meets, 66.7% agreed that they do not see and read emails, social media posts or flyers from the swim team about events, and 53.34% agreed that other obligations such as academics and extracurriculars prevent and discourage them from attending meets. These findings provide strong evidence that these three factors play a significant role in students' motivation to attend swim meets, while an overall lack of interest in the program was not so strongly reported.

Combining all the data I have collected and all the research I have conducted, I am confidently able to conclude that, in order to boost attendance at Auburn University swim meets, we should collaborate with parking services at Auburn to devise a solution that enables easy access to meets, emphasize the cultivation of a relationship between the student body and student athletes and work harder to promote content creation and engagement with information that is sent out for public consumption.

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Appendix 1

Survey Questionnaire

Start of Block: Auburn University Swim Team Attendance

Q. Hello. I am Lora Bishop, a senior at Auburn University studying public relations. I am currently conducting a survey studying the potential causes for low attendance at Auburn University Swim Meets. I'd like to ask you a few questions regarding this topic.

Would you mind answering these questions?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)

* The following questions are asking about your perceptions and attitudes toward these predicted factors. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the provided 1-5 scales, 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 5 representing "Strongly Agree."

Q1. Parking at Auburn University prevents and discourages me from attending swim team events on campus.

- o Strongly Disagree (1)
- o Somewhat Disagree (2)
- o Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- o Somewhat Agree (4)
- o Strongly Agree (5)

Q2. I see and read emails, social media posts and flyers from the swim team regularly about events.

- o Strongly Disagree (1)
- o Somewhat Disagree (2)
- o Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- o Somewhat Agree (4)
- o Strongly Agree (5)

Q3. Other obligations including but not limited to, academic pursuits and extracurricular activities prevent or discourage me from attending swim team events on campus.

- o Strongly Disagree (1)
- o Somewhat Disagree (2)
- o Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- o Somewhat Agree (4)
- o Strongly Agree (5)

Q4. I am not interested in attending Auburn University swim team meets now or in the future.

- o   Strongly Disagree (1)
- o   Somewhat Disagree (2)
- o   Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- o   Somewhat Agree (4)
- o   Strongly Agree (5)

* You are almost done with this survey. The following questions are demographic questions.

DQ1. What is your gender?

- o   Male (1)
- o   Female (2)

DQ2. What is your age?

_____

* Thank you for your time. I appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to write me at lcb0035@auburn.edu or (256)-458-7504.

End of Block: Auburn University Swim Team Attendance