

Are Anime Clubs Obsolete?

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- Anime Clubs used to be how you watched the latest anime on 6th generation video tapes.
 - Now you just BitTorrent the latest episode and watch it in your room.
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- Anime Clubs used to be how you borrowed tapes to watch from their extensive library.
 - Now you just BitTorrent all 26 episodes, or NetFlix it, or buy it on DVD.
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- Anime Clubs used to be the locus and sole promoters of anime and Japanese culture.
 - Now, libraries are holding manga workshops, there's 100 cons a year in the US, and you can watch anime on Cartoon Network, in movie theatres, and there's a wikipedia article for melon-pan.
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- Anime Clubs used to be where socially awkward otaku gathered to hear news and chat.
 - Now you can voice your opinion on that episode of Full Metal Alchemist in blogs, forums, and ratings sites.
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Are anime clubs obsolete? What is it that an anime club can do that can't be done outside of an anime club? What is the new face of anime club?

First, who are the new faces at anime club? Who goes to anime clubs?

newbies. People who recently got into anime from Cartoon Network, or from Borders, and would like to know more.

social geeks. Especially true at UChicago, but these are geeky people who like anime, who might have their personal obsessions, but can also not scare people away.

casual anime fans. Sure, they like anime, but they might not like it enough to spend hours scouring the internet for the coolest new series. And if they do download something, they might forget to watch it. These people find little point in watching anime with the door closed. But anime club provides a nice break from study, and they get to watch something new and different.

What do they need?

Newbies need to be introduced to stuff. BitTorrent. Conventions. The Classics of anime (Eva, Utena, Akira, etc). The schema for evaluating and watching anime.

Social geeks need an arena to socialize, so events, parties, activities, shiny things to coo over...

Casual anime fans need quality and quirky. Might be impelled to socialize, but generally just there to watch a bit. Might go home and download the rest if they find something they like.

Who doesn't go to anime club?

Established anime fans.

They know how to find and download anime.

They have an established taste.

They have their own way of watching anime, be it in their dorm room by themselves, or with a bunch of dorm friends.

They have their own social outlets, be it forums or friends.

Closet anime fans.

The ones who would prefer not to have their image associated with geekiness

People who think anime is stupid, narrow, childish.

in relation to Japanese culture

in relation to American culture

in relation to animation culture

in relation to geek culture

As long as there are people to cater to, needs that we can provide, anime club is not obsolete. So.... what is the purpose of anime club?

- Anime Clubs used to be how you watched the latest anime on 6th generation video tapes.
 - Anime club should be where you watched anime you haven't seen before.
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- Anime Clubs used to be how you borrowed tapes to watch from their extensive library.
 - Not everything is always available on the internet. Anime club should have a consistent collection of quality anime, as well as reviews and recommendations. Also, a good place to swap manga.
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- Anime Clubs used to be the locus and sole promoters of anime and Japanese culture.
 - Now Anime Clubs should be the link to Japanese and animation culture
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- Anime Clubs used to be where socially awkward otaku gathered to hear news and chat.
 - Now Anime Clubs should be the arena where social geeks can have fun, and the shy newbies and traditional geeks can feel welcomed.
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The question is, should anime club have a personality? On the one hand, you want people not just to hang, but hang with UCJAS, which is infinitely cooler than hanging with the normal social groups. On the other hand, you want activities and events where people don't feel turned off by exclusivity.

There need to be activities mentioned where people are like "That's UCJAS" (those crazy people).

In essence, UCJAS is a frat. For otaku.

Skit is branding in the otaku sense. (Insane yet brilliantly executed skits? That's gotta be UCJAS)

UChi-Con is branding in the academic sense. (Academic anime? That's gotta be UCJAS)

But those aren't a specific social style. What does a UCJAS social look like?

A Garden Party?

A Marathon?

Anime Games?

A Soap Bubble-esque Party?

An Anonymous response to this article:

This issue goes waaay beyond anime clubs. Geeks have access to computers and know how to use them, so everything geeks (and to an extent normals) do that can be computerized is being computerized. Skiffy has fallen to message boards. Many tabletop gamers now do their gaming on World of Warcraft. And many anime fans now watch at home.

But if you want to know whether anime clubs are obsolete, count the number of attendees at a typical club meeting, or a convention, and compare it to previous years. Ask them why they come. I bet most of them come because when you computerize anime you lose the social element. There are some who don't care, but those who do need people to watch with. Without anime club, who could I inflict my running commentary on? More generally, who will I share in-jokes with? Who will show me bad anime? Who will show me good anime that I would have expected to be bad (and never downloaded)? Who will show me anime I'd never have heard of? Who will duel for the revolution of UCJAS? For me, it's this social element, these "who" questions, that make (or made :'() UCJAS relevant. Skiffy and tabletop RPGs are succumbing to computers because you can do that stuff on computers and still socialize. Anime you can't. That is our great advantage, and our buffer against irrelevance.