

EFFECTS OF OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAMS ON
LEARNING TRANSFER OF UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

by

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For my parents and all of their hard work raising me, and for my beautiful sisters
and the wonderful friendship we have.

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ABSTRACT

Many universities struggle to maintain high student retention rates as many students drop out before graduating. Previous studies indicate that the most crucial period to retain students is between their freshman and sophomore year, and that students are more likely to leave an institution during this time frame (Wang, Cullen, Yao, & Li, 2013). As an effort to intervene low retention rates, universities have implemented student orientations to help with the transition from high school to college.

One type of student orientation is an outdoor orientation program (OOP). OOPs are designed to use the outdoors as a medium to teach participants valuable skills such as effective communication and teamwork, and then later the skills can be used in another setting.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of freshmen college students as compared to upperclassmen concerning how well OOPs influenced specific life skills, as well as explore what type of transferrable life skills were considered most important to participants.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first year of college is a significant transition for most college students. Students have graduated from high school, have often moved out of their parents' home, and are able to make many of their own daily decisions for the first time in life. College freshmen will form different social networks, experience new things, and be exposed to all types of people. At first glance, this new stage of life is the beginning of a great adventure, but students will also be faced with academic challenges, time management responsibilities, and caring for themselves. Simple things such as eating healthy meals, getting adequate sleep, and showing up to class will be challenging tasks and may cause severe stress for many first-year college students. Studies show that if these stresses are not addressed properly, a large percentage of freshmen will not return for their sophomore year (Lau, 2003). The subsequent loss in student retention has the potential to be expensive and devastating to financial and academic success of higher education institutions, and more importantly to the individual student.

Most colleges recognize that the first-year transition can be a difficult time for students and have implemented student orientations, tutoring programs, and mentorships to help with the process. The primary goal of such interventions is to promote student involvement within the university community, which has been shown to positively affect retention (Gass, 1987). According to Lau, "institutions must work towards providing students with a meaningful learning environment, so that these students will become connected to the institution by developing a sense of belonging within the student body" (Lau, 2003, p. 126-127). If administrators connect students with unique and impactful

learning opportunities, students may be more likely to bond with the institution and stay enrolled. The benefits of Outdoor Orientation Programs (OOPs) have the potential to have a positive impact on students, and would be a great program for university administrators to offer to incoming freshmen.

Orientation Programs

One common intervention that most universities provide are Orientation Programs (OPs) for first year students in which they learn about academics, campus life and the logistics of being a college student, and also have opportunities to gain emotional and social maturity (Lathrop, O'Connell, & Howard, 2012). OPs also offer opportunities for social networking with other freshmen, upperclassmen, and faculty. Another variation of OPs is an OOP, which shares many of the same goals as OPs, but takes place away from campus in an outdoor environment, and lasts several days. Students participate in adventure activities and are faced with challenges that they must overcome as individuals, and as a part of a group (Starbuck, 2013). Previous research has shown that this type of orientation is effective for student development as it takes students out of their comfort zones and magnifies teamwork, even more so than traditional OPs (Vlamiis, Bell & Gass, 2011).

There are several components of OOPs that include activities that are designed to be fun, challenging, and exciting to help participants reach specific program outcomes. Outcomes may vary for each program, but common goals of OOPs are to promote self-confidence, critical thinking, time management, problem solving and teamwork (Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003). Programs are designed for a specific time and place in an outdoor setting, but what is unique about outdoor adventure and education programs is

the concept of learning transfer. Transfer in this context is a term used to describe skills that are learned in one setting and can be applied in another setting. An example of this type of transfer is learning how to work as a part of a team while white water rafting, and later applying that skill for a group project in the classroom. OOPs design each activity to not only be fun and exciting in the moment, but to teach valuable skills that can be applied in many other aspects of life. This type of education has significant implications for university administrators as it teaches useful skills to college freshmen who may otherwise not succeed in school (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012).

Student Issues

As mentioned above, first-year university students are full of potential to thrive and do great things in a new environment away from home, and to finally be able to make more of their own choices. Many successful students likely possess skills such as independence, good time management, communication, teamwork, and have high self-esteem. Several factors may lead to student success in college, and the first reason why some college students are more prepared than others is having parents with a college education. If their parents possess a college degree, they are likely to instill good study habits and encourage their children to pursue college as well (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012). The type of high school they attended may also be a factor to college preparation as well. Attending a quality high school may do a better job at preparing students for college than below-average schools that do not focus on college preparation (Wyatt, Wiley, Proestler, & Camara, 2012). Private tutoring, involvement in student government, and other extracurricular activities also factor into the preparedness of certain first year college students (Gibbs, Erickson, Dufur, & Miles, 2015). Although there are many

variables that can lead to successful college students, not all students are fortunate enough to possess these skills before entering a university.

Research has shed light on some of the variables that may inhibit student success. Perhaps they are first generation students who have no clue how to maneuver through university life (Westbrook & Scott, 2012), or went to a low-income high school that did not properly prepare them for the academic demands of college (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Another factor contributing to poor performance is not having accountability from parents for the first time in their lives, resulting in poor time management and not prioritizing school work over social activities (Gregory, Horsham-Brathwaite, Queenan, & Skott, 2010). Having not been properly equipped for the new, demanding circumstances of a university student, many freshmen fall victim to bad habits that result in unhealthy lifestyles, low self-esteem, high stress levels, poor grades, and eventually dropping out of college (Cherif, Movahedzadeh, Adams, & Dunning, 2013) & (Hurst, Baranik, & Daniel, 2013). Thus, it is paramount that colleges and researchers alike explore programs such as OOPs to help build skills that may encourage student success.

University Administration

Students that do not possess these positive habits and skills should not simply be written off, but should be acknowledged and assisted by university administration. Administrators should do all that they can in order to instill skills necessary to thrive in their institutions so that they can keep enrollment high. Universities are businesses trying to be profitable, and when students that are recruited do not do well their first year, it is expensive to keep on recruiting more students if they drop out of school (Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 59%

of freshmen beginning in 2006 completed their degree within 6 years (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathbun, Kristapovich. 2014), which indicates that a large amount of students are either transferring to different universities or simply dropping out of college altogether (Kot, 2014). Therefore, it is extremely beneficial for universities to retain the students that they already have, and they need to provide sufficient OPs that reach specific needs of students (Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003). Administrators for many schools already do a sufficient job at providing for freshmen, and should continue to invest in the development of orientations that enhance the success of their students (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor & Tran, 2011).

Rationale for the Study

The present study attempts to observe some of these areas, and furthermore, to extend the body of knowledge concerning OOPs and how they affect freshmen skill development. Based on freshmen retention issues that universities face, the following research question was asked: can students who attend an OOP develop valuable life skills that can be transferred back to life on campus that may help them succeed in college? The study was performed using data from 12 different university sponsored OOPs across the United States. A quantitative research design was utilized, and consisted of an online survey tool that was sent to participants through email. The survey was a questionnaire that consisted of 22 questions that rated what types of skills are important to participants, as well as how effective OOPs were at teaching the students the skills. Participants were first, second, and third year students from the 12 OOPs, and completed an OOP in the summer of 2014. The same questionnaire was administered to all students during the Fall 2014 semester.

The study was necessary in order to gain insight to some of the questions raised by university administrators that promote freshmen to re-enroll into their second year of college, and ultimately for all students to graduate from the university where they started. Additionally, this study aimed to benefit OOP programmers, as the results helped confirm that their teaching methods and curriculum significantly affected skill development among participants that may lead to higher university retention. Lastly, the study hoped to provide insight as to whether or not the skills that OOPs teach were actually important to students, and particularly, did the answers vary between freshmen and upperclassmen college students.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Retention

Students who do not return for their sophomore year are a concern to university administrators for reasons including loss of tuition, high turnover rates, and simply that their students are not reaching their full potential of gaining a college degree. Given that the average freshmen to sophomore retention rate in the United States is between 67-71%, it is valuable to identify ways that universities can maintain a high student retention rate (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathbun, Kristapovich, 2014). University retention rates are an important factor for administrators and public policy makers as this measure ultimately effects graduation rates and is indicative of the overall quality of an institution, including its financial health (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor & Tran, 2011). If retention is low, it may “affect how stakeholders, legislators, parents and students view the institution” and more money is lost on recruiting potential students when current students leave (Lau, 2003, p. 126). The average of students who began college in 2011 and reenrolled at the same university was 79%, varying between 61-95% depending on the institution’s selectivity (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathbun, Kristapovich, 2014). Older studies indicate “approximately one-third of each year’s full-time entering students are not enrolled at the same institution one year later” (Terenzini, Rendon, Millar, Upcraft, Gregg, Jalomo & Allison, 1996, p. 44). There are many reasons why students do not make it to their sophomore year, including personal issues that cannot be controlled by the university, lack of finances, and the institution not doing a good job of providing an encouraging learning environment (Terenzini et al., 1996). Another significant factor that causes the high attrition rate of freshmen is that “first year students might be overwhelmed with the transition

from high school to college life, and they might become overly stressed by the dramatic changes even before they finish their first year of college” (Lau, 2003, p. 127), therefore student retention between their first and second year is critical in order for them to continue on to graduate. As a result, many universities offer mandatory OPs before the fall semester, special events such as concerts and social gatherings within the first month of classes, and encourage student organizations to reach out to new students. Researchers suggest that it is crucial that these interventions take place early on in the transition period from high school to college, particularly in the first weeks and months of enrollment (Terenzini, et al., 1996) & (Wang, Cullen, Yao, & Li, 2013).

When universities face retention issues, it is vital that they continue to take advantage of the positive impacts that OOPs provide for new students (Galloway, 2000). Although standard OPs that are held on campus can help with the transition to college, prior studies suggest that OOPs may do a more thorough job of meeting the demands of students than other university OPs (Vlamis, Bell, & Gass, 2011). It is evident that OOPs provide participants with “higher commitment to their university, an enhanced transition to university life, emotional, social, and personal growth, and positive relationships with sophomores, juniors, and seniors” (Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

Orientation Programs

As new college students often need help with the transition from high school to college, most universities in the United States currently require freshmen and transfer students to attend an OP. They usually last 1-2 days, are on campus, and focus on getting familiar with campus, learning how to choose classes, meeting staff and faculty, and making friends with peers and upperclassmen. This type of OP has many positive attributes including increased retention,

higher grades, and higher satisfaction of the overall college experience (Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). While university administrators have recognized the positive impacts of OPs on new students, other variations of OPs have been developed. OOPs are one approach that seek to enhance the transition period for first-year students.

Outdoor Orientation Programs

There are many types of OOPs that are tailored to the specific needs of the participants, but all OOPs consist of small groups, 15 or fewer incoming students, use adventure experiences, and include at least one overnight stay in a wilderness setting (Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010). Adventure experiences vary, but the most popular activities for OOPs consist of white water rafting, canoeing, backpacking, mountain biking, climbing, and challenge course activities. Above and beyond the acquisition of technical skills, adventure experiences are used to “present challenging activities which are aimed at developing group support, have participants work toward specific and intended goals, and focus on the transfer of lessons from the adventure to the participant’s life” (Vlamiš, Bell, & Gass, 2011, p 130). OOP staff is usually comprised of a handful of full time university staff, faculty members, and upper-class students who serve as counselors and guides.

History of Outdoor Orientation Programs

Recognizing that outdoor adventures were a way to recruit new members for their club, the Dartmouth University Outing Club created the first OOP prototype in 1935 (Hooke, 1987). Although the Outing Club’s original intent for the program was to serve itself, they soon recognized that the wilderness trips helped incoming students to transition to the college and began implementing a first-year OOP for that purpose (Hooke, 1987). Following Dartmouth’s lead, other schools such as Prescott College and Harvard University began to implement OOPs

in the 1960's and 1970's (Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010). Prescott and Harvard based their programs on the Outward Bound (OB), and according to Josh Miner and Joe Boldt, co-founders of OB-USA, "this was the first time an institution of higher learning tied the OB experience directly into its curricular scheme" (1981, p. 306). The OB model began to gain popularity among other universities throughout the next few decades as it provided students with a smoother transition into university life. Currently there are more than 200 universities modeling their OOPs after OB (Austin, Martin, Mittelstaedt, Schanning & Ogle, 2009).

Outward Bound

OB is an international organization that uses adventure education as a vehicle for teaching community engagement and fostering participant development. The Outward Bound Process Model (OBPM) is the methodology that guides most of these types of courses (Ritchie, Enosse & Peltier, 2013) and presents "the structures, components, and conditions whose presence and interaction ensure that an experience is educative along the lines of OB (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 11). The OBPM is not a specific program, but is a process that provides general guidelines for programmers including instructions, type of activity, time limits, and tools for participants to achieve certain outcomes (Walsh & Golins, 1976). This process has been used almost all adventure-based research (Sibthorp, 2003, p. 81), and although created nearly 40 years ago, little has been done to critique it as it is such a great model (Ritchie, Enosse, & Peltier, 2013).

Learning Transfer

A major component to the success and justification of OOPs is the concept of learning transfer, where students learn skills that are relevant to the adventure setting, but are applicable to another setting. In the case of OOPs, the initial learning takes place in an outdoor setting such

as rafting, where teamwork, critical thinking, and effective communication are vital factors to successfully navigate down a river. Participants learn these skills while rafting in a specific place and time, but may later apply these three skills in the classroom (Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005). The definition of transfer varies among scholars and fields, but for the purpose of this study it is defined by Baldwin and Ford's model (1988). This model suggests that learning transfer is based on "the characteristics of the trainees, the characteristics of the training, and the characteristics of the context where the learning will be applied after the training" (Sibthorp, 2003, p. 87).

Skills of Successful Students

Over the last several decades, the opportunity to go to college has become widely available to students across the United States and has created countless opportunities for them. Although college is readily accessible to people who have the means to attend, functioning at a university level is arguably not for everyone. Previous studies reveal that university students who are successful possess certain skills and characteristics that help them succeed in college (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). There are several categories of these characteristics broken down into groups according to Kuh, including "cognitive complexity, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, practical competence and knowledge acquisition and application," (Kuh, 1993, p. 277). Some students possess these attributes from an early age, but some learn them later on, perhaps even while enrolled in university. College administrators interested in keeping their students enrolled should pay special attention to these attributes in order to teach students how to develop and improve them.

Cognitive characteristics include critical and quantifiable reasoning, conflict management, and rational flexibility (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Students who have these skills can critically think for themselves, can think outside of the box, and are

open to new ideas and people. They do well in a college atmosphere where most modern institutions encourage creative learning and introduce students to previously encountered subject matter. The intensely social nature of university life, both in and out of the classroom, necessitates that students can also maturely and efficiently deal with conflict among peers and faculty.

Teamwork, self-confidence, and honesty are tied to interpersonal and intrapersonal competence and are indicators to success in college for many reasons (Kuh, 1993). In the classroom, it is important for students to have the confidence to speak up, whether for general discussion, working in peer groups, or giving a presentation in front of the entire class. Having strong intrapersonal competence in terms of being able to work with different types of people is important for students, as there is such a diverse population of students across universities. It is also an important factor outside of the classroom in terms of interacting with other students, forming friendships, and getting involved in campus organizations. Although it is a non-academic skill, according to previous findings, social development is a major factor for university students, and in many cases, social success is valued more than academics (Vlamiš, Bell, Gass, (2011).

Practical competence is another significant skill set for students to obtain and includes time management, decision-making, and problem solving (Kuh, 1993). Students who are able to manage their time have an advantage over students who struggle with this issue as they make their own decisions balancing work, pleasure, and course work; unfortunately students who have not been properly equipped with good time management skills do not allot a sufficient amount of time for their studies and begin to struggle in school (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burrus, & Roberts, 2014; Longman & Atkinson, 2004; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye & Phillips, 1990).

Knowledge acquisition and application touches on the idea of transfer as students are able to learn about information and concepts in one class and are able to apply the knowledge gained in other areas of school and life (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Instead of simply learning class material and only using the information in that one class, successful students build upon information learned throughout their college career and have an edge over those who simply struggle to get by from class to class.

Paired with the suggested characteristics of a successful college student, OOPs offer many important benefits to students' academic and social goals. Wolfe and Kay state that "OOPs attempt to utilize the novel setting of adventure activities to teach lessons related to successful student transition to university life and to provide opportunities for social and emotional developments" (2011, p. 22). When students are exposed to these experiences, there is the opportunity for positive changes to take place that will help them be successful, as OOP participants are reported to have higher GPAs and retention rates (Gass, 1987).

Based on previous research, it appears that OOPs have a positive effect on the transition from high school to college for first-year university students (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012). Additional studies have examined ways to maintain positive university retention rates (Pfitzner, Brat, & Lang, 2011), evaluate the effectiveness of OOPs (Vlamiš et al., 2011), and determine student's perceptions of OOPs (Wolfe & Kay, 2011), but none have compared the perception of OOP effectiveness between freshmen and upperclassmen that participated in an OOP at the same time. This study aimed to address if OOPs significantly influenced incoming college students more as compared to upperclassmen, as well as determine what type of transferrable, life skills were most important to participants.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study was performed to observe how freshmen who attended an OOP utilized the activities and teaching methods that foster skill transfer, as well as investigate which skills are most valuable and important to university students. This chapter outlines the study methods and examines the participants, study design, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Middle Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board granted approval before any data was collected from participants.

Participants

The sample consisted of first, second, and third year university students who were over the age of 18 and completed an OOP in the summer of 2014. The researcher reached out to 40 OOP directors in the United States to participate in the study. Directors were contacted via email, mainly through *The Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE)*, as well as from a Google search of college OOPs in the United States. Fourteen directors responded positively, although only 12 programs ended up participating. Once the directors agreed to participate, the directors were emailed the link to the online survey, and they in turn forwarded the survey link to their OOP participants. OOPs that participated consisted of 4-year institutions across the United States and include the following schools and demographic information as of Fall 2014:

Table 1: Participating Universities

University	Public/Private	Type of University	Enrollment	Tuition (In-State)
Bucknell University	Private	Liberal Arts	3,618	\$48,234
Colgate University	Private	Liberal Arts	2,927	\$47,855
College of William and Mary	Public	Research Based	8,258	\$17,656
Colorado School of Mines	Public	Research Based	4,293	\$19,168
Eastern Tennessee State University	Public	Liberal Arts	15,25	\$7,985
Georgia Institute of Technology	Public	Technical	21,471	\$8,258
Houghton College	Private	Liberal Arts	1,081	\$27,728
Middle Tennessee State University	Public	Liberal Arts	22,729	\$7,546
Ohio State University	Public	Research Based	63,964	\$23,589
University of Georgia	Public	Research Based	34,536	\$10,836
Utah State University	Public	Research Based	27,812	\$5,518
Western State Colorado University	Public	Liberal Arts	2,400	\$7,800

Study Design

For the purpose of this study, an online survey tool method was used and administered through Survey Monkey (Create Surveys, Get Answers, n.d.). The questionnaire used was adapted from a National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) survey from a study conducted at the University of Utah (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, & Gookin, 2009). The original NOLS survey was composed by interviewing NOLS alumni who had completed one of the month-long NOLS backpacking courses in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming between 1995 and 2005. The interviews helped in the development of a list of skills that were learned by NOLS alumni, and skills that were still valued years later. Significant questions asked were “What did you learn on your NOLS course? [and] What are you using in your life today that you learned on your course?” (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, & Gookin, 2009). From the interview answers, researchers comprised a list of seventeen areas that were most relevant to alumni. The instrument itself was comprised of four main sections: “(1) a ten-point rating scale assessing the importance of the learning areas in everyday life; (2) a ten-point rating scale assessing the role of NOLS in developing these learning areas; (3) a forced-choice section where participants selected the primary setting responsible for development in each learning area; and (4) a series of open-ended questions” (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, & Gookin, 2009, p. 91). For the purpose of this study, 11 of the 17 areas (refer to table 3) were used that pertain more specifically to OOPs rather than what was important for the purpose of NOLS. Additionally, sections (3) and (4) were omitted as it was not necessary to include the forced-choice and open-ended questions for this study. The reasons these sections were not included was the fact that the independent variables from the forced-choice section were not as relevant to OOP participants as it was to NOLS students, and the current study was a quantitative study rather than qualitative one, therefore open-ended

questions were not possible. The last adaption was that instead of a 10-point scale, the scale was lowered down to a 7-point scale.

The instrument distributed in this study was a questionnaire that consisted of 27 questions, including five demographic questions, and rated on a 7-point likert-scale. Demographic questions include university where they attended the OOP, gender, date of birth, and highest level of completed education. The questionnaire asked participants to rate each skill twice. First, they were asked how important the 11 specific skills were to them in their daily life at their college, and secondly, how well the OOP influenced each particular skill for the students. The survey, instructions, and informed consent statement were made available to students via Survey Monkey (Create Surveys, Get Answers, n.d.), and all data collected was kept confidential.

Table 2: Sample Questions from Survey Instrument

Section 1	How important is the ability to “communicate effectively” with others in your daily life at your college?	Very important					Very Unimportant	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Section 2	The OOP has strongly affected my ability to “communicate effectively”.	Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Note.</i> In this example, “communicate effectively” is just a place-holder for any of the 11 skills from Table 3.								

Table 3: Skills from Survey Instrument

Ability to:
Communicate effectively
Work as a team member
Serve in a leadership role
Manage conflict with others
Make informed and thoughtful decisions
Function effectively under difficult circumstances
Identify strengths and weaknesses
Be adaptable and flexible in your thinking and ideas
Plan and organize
Have self-confidence
Get along with different types of people

Procedure

The researcher contacted OOP directors from various universities across the United States that offer OOPs and asked them if they would like to be included in the study. Directors were contacted initially in August 2014. A second and final email was sent out to remind them about participating in September 2014. Once OOP directors agreed to participate, the researcher sent all instructions, the informed consent statement, and survey materials to the OOP directors via email, and they in turn forwarded all materials to their OOP participants. Before sending the survey to all participants, the survey was pilot tested by Middle Tennessee State University's OOP. Based on feedback from the pilot, some wording was changed on several questions to help clarify the survey. Once adjusted to its final draft, the survey was sent to directors on October 15, 2014 and was made active to participants, and remained active until December 15, 2014. Follow up emails were sent out to participants at the beginning of December. The survey took participants approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Once the survey was closed, the data was first entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then the software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and paired-samples t-test were used. All survey entries were screened for eligibility and then coded. A p value $< .05$ was chosen as the level of satisfactory statistical significance based on past research findings to reduce Type II errors.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

A total of 729 students were emailed the survey link. 212 participants initially responded and began the survey, however 56 participants only partially completed it. There was one participant ineligible as they were under the age of 18. Therefore the final number of eligible participants was 169, resulting with a response rate of 22.86%. Add existing acceptable response rate citing

Although there was some variation, all of the 11 skills were generally rated as important by all of the participants. Leadership was rated as the least important to all participants in their daily lives with a mean of 1.95 (scale is rated 1-7, with 1 being the strongest and 7 the least strongest). Informed decisions were viewed as the most important with a mean of 1.26.

Table 4: Important Skills to All Students

Skills Important to All Students (n = 169)	Mean
Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	1.26
Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	1.33
Plan & Organize	1.36
Communicate Effectively	1.40
Get Along with Different Types of People	1.44
Self-confidence	1.45
Adaptability and Flexibility in Thinking and Ideas	1.51
Identify Strengths & Weaknesses	1.70
Manage Conflict with Others	1.78
Work as a Team Member	1.81
Serve in a Leadership Role	1.95

Note 1: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat Disagree, 6 = Disagree, 7 = Strongly Disagree

The mean score of freshmen and upperclassmen were also compared to each other to see if they rated them similarly.

Table 5: Skills Most Important to Freshmen Versus Upperclassmen

Skills Most important to Freshmen	Mean	Skills Most important to Upperclassmen	Mean
Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	1.20	Effective Communication	1.35
Self Confidence	1.28	Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	1.39
Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	1.29	Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	1.39
Plan and Organize	1.31	Plan and Organize	1.46
Get Along with Different Types of People	1.32	Get Along with Different Types of People	1.67
Adaptable and Flexible in Thinking and Ideas	1.41	Work as a Team Member	1.70
Effective Communication	1.43	Adaptable and Flexible in Thinking and Ideas	1.72
Identify Strengths and Weaknesses	1.61	Self-confidence	1.79
Manage Conflict with Others	1.76	Manage Conflict with Others	1.82
Work as a Team Member	1.89	Identify Strengths and Weaknesses	1.89
Serve in a Leadership Role	1.94	Serve in a Leadership Role	1.98

Several of the skills were rated in the same order as both groups including the ability to function effectively under difficult circumstances, plan and organize, get along with different types of people, manage conflict, and serve in a leadership role. The remaining skills were rated in a different order, although all skills had a close mean score to each other.

The first analysis was an exploratory analysis and was conducted to look at how all students rated the value of OOPs on their skill development. A paired-samples t-test was used in order to see if there were significant differences between all students' reactions to the various dimensions of the OOP. Results revealed that informed decisions, conflict management, effective

communication, and planning and organizing were areas of the OOP that all students rated as very important in their daily lives, but perceived these four areas as statistically significantly less effective ($\alpha = .05$) than all other aspects except for self-confidence, which was not significant. Therefore, these four elements were statistically significantly different than the other seven skills. The implication is that OOPs need to do a better job at teaching these four skills because students rate them as important, but feel that they are not being taught as well as other skills. In terms of how well the OOP taught skills to participants, getting along with different types of people was rated most significant with a mean of 1.69, while planning and organizing was perceived as the most least effective skill taught by the OOP with a mean of 2.63.

Table 6: OOP's Influence For All Students

OOP's Influence For All Students	Mean
Get Along with Different Types of People	1.69
Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	1.89
Work as a Team Member	2.03
Serve in a Leadership Role	2.04
Identify Strengths & Weaknesses	2.06
Adaptable and Flexible in Thinking and Ideas	2.12
Self-confidence	2.16
Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	2.33
Manage Conflict with Others	2.45
Effective Communication	2.56
Plan and Organize	2.63
<i>Note 1: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat Disagree, 6 = Disagree, 7 = Strongly Disagree. Also, bolded values indicate skills that were rated statistically significantly less effective ($\alpha = .05$).</i>	

With the second analysis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to see if freshmen and upperclassmen perceived the OOP's intervention differently. The reason this analysis had value

is that upperclassmen have had 1-2 years more experience than freshmen to have the opportunity to learn about what it takes to be successful college setting.

Table 7: OOP's Influence Rated by Freshmen and Upperclassmen

OOP's Influence Rated by Freshmen	Mean	OOP's Influence Rated by Upperclassmen	Mean
Get Along with Different Types of People	1.52	Get Along with Different Types of People	2.02
Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	1.78	Serve in a Leadership Role	2.11
Self-confidence	1.94	Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	2.12
Adaptable & Flexible in Thinking & Ideas	1.95	Work as a Team Member	2.18
Work as a Team Member	1.96	Identifying Strengths & Weaknesses	2.21
Identify Strengths and Weaknesses	1.98	Adaptable & Flexible in Thinking & Ideas	2.46
Serve in a Leadership Role	2.01	Manage Conflict with Others	2.54
Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	2.17	Self-confidence	2.60
Manage Conflict with Others	2.40	Effective Communication	2.65
Plan & Organize	2.49	Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	2.65
Effective Communication	2.59	Plan & Organize	2.89

The ability to get along with different types of people was most influential to both groups, and then the order of ratings was varied for every other skill area. Effective communication was least effective for freshmen, while the ability to plan and organize was least effective to upperclassmen.

Table 8: OOP's Influence between Freshmen and Upperclassmen

OOP's Influence On:		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-confidence	Between Groups	16.405	1	16.405	13.957	.000
	Within Groups	196.282	167	1.175		
	Total	249.716	168			
Get Along with Different Types of People	Between Groups	9.432	1	9.432	12.408	.001
	Within Groups	126.947	167	.760		
	Total	136.379	168			
Make Informed and Thoughtful Decisions	Between Groups	8.685	1	8.685	6.231	.014
	Within Groups	232.759	167	1.394		
	Total	241.444	168			
Function Effectively Under Difficult Circumstances	Between Groups	4.523	1	4.523	4.562	.034
	Within Groups	165.560	167	.991		
	Total	170.083	168			
Plan and Organize	Between Groups	6.155	1	6.155	4.025	.046
	Within Groups	255.359	167	1.529		
	Total	261.515	168			
Adaptable and Flexible in Thinking and Ideas	Between Groups	9.814	1	9.814	8.041	.005
	Within Groups	203.819	167	1.220		
	Total	213.633	168			
Identify Strengths and Weaknesses	Between Groups	1.970	1	1.970	1.755	.187
	Within Groups	187.438	167	1.122		
	Total	189.408	168			
Work as a Team Member	Between Groups	1.830	1	1.830	1.462	.228
	Within Groups	209.022	167	1.252		
	Total	210.852	168			
Manage Conflict with Others	Between Groups	.762	1	.762	.507	.477
	Within Groups	251.060	167	1.503		
	Total	251.822	168			
Effective Communication	Between Groups	.742	1	.742	.498	.481
	Within Groups	248.974	167	1.491		
	Total	249.716	168			
Serve in a Leadership Role	Between Groups	.351	1	.351	.292	.590
	Within Groups	200.359	167	1.200		

Note 1: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat Disagree, 6 = Disagree, 7 = Strongly Disagree. Significance at the $p < 0.05$ level.

The ANOVA test revealed that the OOP intervention for all of the 11 skills was perceived to be more influential to freshmen than upperclassmen. Furthermore, freshmen rated self-confidence (.000), getting along with different types other types of people (.001), informed decisions (.014), functioning effectively under difficult circumstances (.034), planning and organizing (.046), and adaptability and flexibility in their thinking (.005) as statistically greater ($\alpha = .05$) than upperclassmen.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study identified participant's perceptions of the importance of 11 different skills (refer to table 3) that were taught through outdoor adventure activities in order to help OOP directors examine if what they taught was actually important to participants. Additionally, this study investigated differences in how college freshmen and upperclassmen perceived the effectiveness of the OOP intervention. There is already a sizeable amount of research that has been conducted on OOPs regarding programming and outcomes, and the observed statistics were consistent with previous research (Vlamis, Bell, & Gass, 2011; Bell, Holmes, & Williams, 2010; Austin, Martin, Mittelstaedt, Schanning & Ogle, 2009). Results from the survey implied that the OOP was meaningful to participants and positively impacted their skill development with various degrees of significance. This was noteworthy as it indicates that students who went through an OOP may cultivate valuable skills that will potentially set them up for a successful college career and eventually graduate from the same institution. College graduates are valuable to universities as it keeps retention and graduation rates high, resulting in higher financial gains and less money wasted on recruiting new students.

This study utilized data from 12 OOPs across the United States through an adapted questionnaire originally designed for NOLS participants. The survey utilized descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and paired-samples t-tests to reveal the difference between how freshmen and upperclassmen participants perceived the importance of certain skills, and to see how well the OOP intervention worked. Data analysis reported that participants perceived all skills as important, but self-confidence, getting along with different types other types of people, informed decisions, functioning effectively under difficult circumstances, planning and organizing, and

adaptability and flexibility in their thinking were found to be statistically more important ($\alpha = .05$) to freshmen than to upperclassmen.

The first analysis revealed that OOP participants perceived informed decisions, conflict management, effective communication, and planning and organizing as skills that are very important as compared to other skills. However, they did not think their OOP experience helped them develop a higher level of these skills as compared to the others skills. The implication is that OOPs need to do a better job at teaching these four skills because students rate them as important, but feel that they are not being taught as well as other skills.

The second analysis was interesting as it indicated that freshmen felt like the OOP did an overall better job at providing adequate teaching methods for every skill area than upperclassmen did. Most OOPs are specifically designed for freshmen, but in the case of this study, many upperclassmen that had transferred to a different university were allowed to be a part of the OOP. This finding does not mean that upperclassmen should not be included in OOPs because the intervention is not as effective, but on the other hand, these findings suggest that OOP outcomes are indeed very useful for freshmen. The implication is that upperclassmen participants have already been exposed to many, or all, of the 11 skills within their first 1-2 years of school, therefore the effects of the OOP were less significant. They have already found a way to navigate through college, and most likely have used some, or all, of the skills from this study to do well in school. Freshmen on the other hand, may have not had to use these skills to get through high school, or may not realize how important some of the 11 skills will be throughout their college career. It makes sense that the impact of an OOP on freshmen is greater than that of a sophomore or junior, and the OOP is somewhat of a learning curve for freshmen to catch up with upperclassmen over the duration of the OOP.

Discussion

As stated above, the main purpose of this study was to compare how college freshmen and upperclassmen perceived the intervention of an OOP. The positive impacts that were suggested from existing literature concerning OOPs and their effectiveness for student transition into college were in line with the results from this study (Galloway, 2000). Findings also suggest that although all participants experienced a positive impact from the OOPs, freshmen perceived a higher influence on the 11 skills than upperclassmen (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012). Therefore, the current study suggested some confirmation that participation in an OOP did provide effective learning outcomes through learning transfer for participants (Frauman & Waryold, 2009; Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010; Vlamis, Bell & Gass, 2011). Although the results from the data revealed positive impacts, it should be mentioned that it was unmanageable to control for additional variables that may have taken place before the OOP, or between the time of OOP completion and taking the survey that may have affected perceptions of the OOP's influence on students. Variables that may have affected participants include attendance of a traditional orientation before the OOP, or perhaps the participants gained some of the skills within the first few weeks of college after the OOP but before completing the survey. Ideally, the survey could have been administered right before and after the OOP to control for possible pre and post intervention variables.

Given that this study provided further evidence in addition to previous findings that OOPs are perceived to do an effective job at preparing students for the challenges of college, universities should utilize OOPs more frequently. Perhaps administration could incentivize students to participate in OOPs so that more students could reap the benefits of an OOP and likely be more prepared for college. Possible incentives include offering college credit for

participation, waiving university registration fees, or providing participants with an additional outdoor pursuit's trip of their choice within their first semester free of charge. Additionally, university administrators could provide better resources and funding for OOP staff so that they could handle more students, and offer multiple OOPs throughout the summer. Most OOPs cost between \$175-\$500 for each participant, and administrators should explore the cost-benefit analysis of providing OOPs at no additional expense to students. If the university paid for the OOP and potentially gave the students the tools to do well in college and eventually graduate, it would save the school money in the long run. When students drop out before graduating, the university must then recruit new students. Recruitment expenses vary between schools, but one source states that for the 2012-2013 school year, universities were spending between \$457-\$2,433 per new student (Noel-Levitz, 2013). Therefore, the initial cost of providing OOPs for new students may outweigh the cost of having to replace students who drop out before graduating. Furthermore, many universities do not even offer OOPs at all, and given that many studies are linking positive student development with OOPs, more universities should implement OOPs within their institutions.

Implications

There are several recommendations for future research regarding OOPs and learning outcomes. First, this study should be replicated with more OOPs at a time, which would potentially increase the sample size for the researcher to have a broader outlook on skill importance and OOP effectiveness. Another recommendation is to consider administering the survey multiple times to participants over the course of their college career as it would help to monitor whether or not long-term skill transfer actually took place. A pre-test post-test design would be helpful as the researcher could gather data before and after the OOP intervention to

have a more accurate account of which skills were effectively taught to participants.

Additionally, it would be valuable to compare a control group that did not participate in an OOP with the intervention group, as there may be significant differences between groups. The control group could be gathered as a random sample from students that only completed a mandatory orientation program. Future research could also include indirect variables such as high school GPA, gender, socio-economic status, and capture actual retention rates of students each semester until they graduate or drop out. Lastly, an additional design change that would be beneficial would be to perform a qualitative study rather than a quantitative one. Although the survey was beneficial to this study, individual interviews and field notes from participants would provide more in depth insight to participant's perceptions of the OOPs.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First of all, the survey used in this study was originally designed for NOLS participants, and not specifically intended for OOP's design and participants. There is the chance that the skills described on the survey were less relevant to the OOP participants than they were to NOLS students. The NOLS courses that were used in Sibthorp's study lasted 30 days, which would have allowed more time for the implementation of skill transfer to take place. OOPs from this study, on the other hand, only last 4-7 days, which may limit authentic learning transfer to take place. Secondly, the sample was taken from 12 different OOPs, and although the OOPs were designed similarly, some programs focus more heavily on certain skills and learning outcomes than others, which may skew the results. Lastly, OOP participants chose to attend an OOP as they were not required to participate. Students that go out of their way to participate in an extracurricular activity such as an OOP likely are more motivated than the average student to begin with, may already possess the hard and soft skills

needed to complete an OOP, or were already leaders before the intervention. Furthermore, students that chose to complete the survey were self-selected and had the choice to respond to the survey. Therefore, the profile of participants that completed an OOP and the survey from this study may alter the results as they could have the effect of skewing the sample towards students who value the nature of the OOP and skills more than other students in the first place. They may be innately more motivated to participate in a survey than other students who do not care about the skills, nor motivated to participate in an optional survey.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the results of this thesis, it does appear that the OOPs did positively influence transferable skills for all participants regardless of years of college completed. Findings also indicate that freshmen perceived to be more affected by the OOP intervention than the upperclassmen. Those who have already been in college for 1-2 years have already been exposed to many of the skills that the OOPs focus on; therefore, the OOP was less effective to them. This confirms that OOPs are a meaningful learning curve for freshmen in that they may potentially learn in a week what takes most students 1-2 years to figure out while in college. Findings also support that OOPs can be a great learning tool for students to not only learn skills that pertain to outdoor activities, but can effectively teach life skills such as self-confidence, teamwork, and getting along with different types of people.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval



9/15/2014

Investigator(s): Blake Osborn, Dr. Rudy Dunlap Department: Health and Human Performance Investigator(s) Email Address: dbo2f@mtmail.mtsu.edu; Rudy.Dunlap@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: Effects of Outdoor Orientation Programs on Learning Transfer of University Freshmen

Protocol Number: #15-056

Dear Investigator(s),

Your study has been designated to be exempt. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

We will contact you annually on the status of your project. If it is completed, we will close it out of our system. You do not need to complete a progress report and you will not need to complete a final report. It is important to note that your study is approved for the life of the project and does not have an expiration date.

The following changes must be reported to the Office of Compliance before they are initiated:

1. Adding new subject population
2. Adding a new investigator
3. Adding new procedures (e.g., new survey; new questions to your survey)
4. A change in funding source
5. Any change that makes the study no longer eligible for exemption. The following changes do not need to be reported to the Office of Compliance:
6. Editorial or administrative revisions to the consent or other study documents
7. Increasing or decreasing the number of subjects from your proposed population

If you encounter any serious unanticipated problems to participants, or if you have any questions as you conduct your research, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely, Lauren K. Qualls, Graduate Assistant Office of Compliance 615-494-8918

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Informed Consent

This survey is designed as part of a research study for a thesis. The purpose of the study is to document the effects of outdoor orientation programs on college freshmen.

Your participation in this study is voluntary (you are not required to complete it) and you are free to exit the survey at any time without penalty.

Please answer all questions provided on this survey honestly. The survey should only take 5-10 minutes to complete.

If you need to contact the investigator for questions or concerns, please feel free to do so.

Blake Osborn

Dbo2f@mtmail.mtsu.edu

(615)-521-5576

STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read the above material. I understand each part of the document, and I have no additional questions regarding this survey. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Yes

No