

College-bound: Integrating Environmental Ethics into College Outdoor Orientation Programs

ENVR 395

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Introduction

Every year more than 25,000 new college students participate in an outdoor orientation program at their college or university. These trips allow students to transition into college by gaining confidence, leadership, social skills, and meeting other incoming students in an outdoor setting. Students participate in an adventure activity such as canoeing, rock climbing or hiking with a small group of students and current student leaders. The focus of these programs is on social benefits for students and thus students are passing through nature disconnected from the landscape surrounding them. **College outdoor orientation programs serve as powerful tools that positively impact incoming college students, have the potential to incorporate environmental goals and educate participants on the natural environment, allowing them to cultivate an environmental ethic of their own.**



Figure 1. 2015 Collegebound Participants and Facilitators in Grand Marais, Minnesota.

Methods

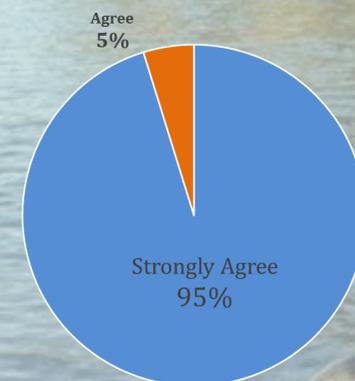
Research for this project was conducted by reviewing literature from the journal of experiential education on college outdoor orientation programs and literature on adventure programming, outdoor recreation, and school-specific studies to demonstrate the potential of environmental outcomes. Five program directors were interviewed and used to create five case studies of programs that demonstrate strong environmental goals. 162 Participants from St. Bens and St. John's Collegebound trips were surveyed to measure their environmental concern following their trip. This information provides data on specific actions that programs take and outcomes of students related to the environment.

Collegebound Participant Survey: Participants between 2012 and 2015 were sent an environmental outcomes survey to complete:

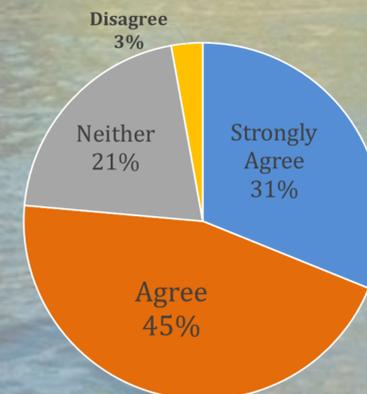
**Note: As a 2012 participant, I excluded myself from the survey*

Year	Collegebound Participants	Number that no longer attend CSB/SJU	Participant Retention	CSB/SJU Average Retention	Number Issued The Survey	Response Rate
2012	48	10	79%	87%	37	50%
2013	34	3	91%	88%	31	74%
2014	33	2	94%	88%	31	48%
2015	63	0	100%	n/a	63	76%
Total	178	15	92%	88%	162	65%

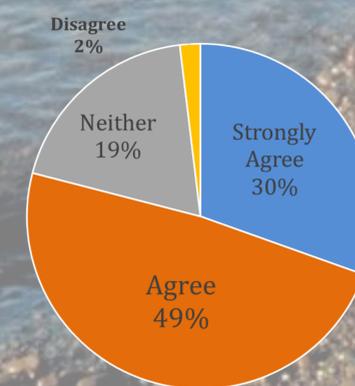
I appreciated the natural environment and wilderness setting that surrounded me during Collegebound:



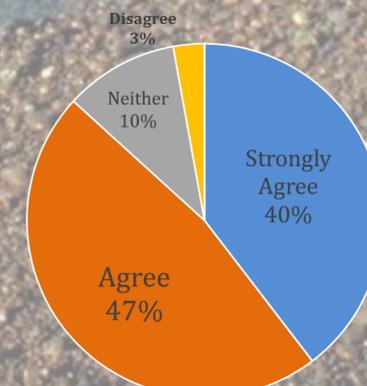
During Collegebound, I developed an outdoor/environmental ethic of my own:



After Collegebound I feel capable to make environmentally responsible decisions of my own:



After Collegebound I have a greater concern for the natural environment and wilderness in northeastern MN:



Clearly participant responses denote a sense of environmental appreciation and concern, with few intentional actions in place. Stronger environmental goals and actions are likely to increase environmental outcomes. The following actions and goals are used by other programs across the country.

Integrating Environmental Actions

Leave-no-trace outdoor ethics	Minimizing camping and backcountry travel impacts to sustain healthy, vibrant natural lands for all people to enjoy now and into the future.
Landfullness	To ensure participants are actively engaged in the land surrounding them through awareness, interpretation, sense of place, and connecting to home.
Place based connections	Instill a connection to a particular place surrounding participants. Students at Northland College receive a stone from Lake Superior to understand it's meaning.
Sustainable trips: travel, and food	Northland college purchases 60-80% of local food for trips and does not travel more than 90 miles from campus.

“Without more attention to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in adventure programs, the very environment upon which the education/recreational experience depends will be destroyed” - Glenda Hanna, Department of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta

Conclusion

Given the positive responses of Collegebound participants on the environmental outcomes survey, it appears that an outdoor orientation program can create a greater environmental concern and lead to the development of a personal outdoor ethic. While this program has few intentional environmental actions in place, incorporating environmental actions is likely to increase environmental concern, awareness or behavior amongst participants. While these programs do have the potential to connect students to the natural environment, there are many other barriers programs face. Institutions and programs have other intentions that include educating students on sexual assault, drug and alcohol awareness, academic success and increasing retention rates. These factors stand in the way of integrating environmental actions into college outdoor orientation programs.

References:

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