

THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAMMING IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN  
OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM AT KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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## **Abstract**

Outdoor orientation programs (OOPs) have the same goal as traditional first-year student orientation programs (e.g., First-Year Seminar), that is, helping facilitate the transition of first-year students to collegiate life. There are many challenges first-year students face while transitioning into college. Research shows that OOPs can increase retention rates of first-year students; help first-year students to grow personally, socially and spiritually; and increase friendship formation among this population (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996; Devlin, 1996; Galloway, 2000). Today, there are approximately 164 higher education institutions in the United States that offer OOPs to their first-year students. Currently, Kansas State University has several programs that aid students in their transition to collegiate life. However, they do not currently have an OOP in place. A survey was conducted at Kansas State University to evaluate the level of interest in an OOP and/or an outdoor trips program. Survey results suggest that there are a significant number of current students on campus who would have participated in an OOP if one were offered when they first arrived. Recommendations for the development of an OOP at Kansas State University are made utilizing survey results and interviews with successful OOP program directors at several universities.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Literature Review**

Outdoor orientation programs (OOP)<sup>1</sup> have the same goal as traditional orientation programs (e.g., First-Year Seminar), that is, helping facilitate the transition of first-year students to collegiate life (Gass, 1987). Outdoor orientation's differ, in that they "work with small groups (15 or fewer) of first-year students, use adventure experiences, and include at least one overnight in a wilderness setting" (Bell, Holmes, & Williams, 2010, p. 2). In 1935, Dartmouth College began what is regarded to be the first higher education institution to use the OOP model for incoming freshmen. It was not intended to be an orientation to the college, as such, but more of an orientation to the Dartmouth Outing Club (Hooke, 1987). Thirty-three years passed before another institution adopted the use of the OOP model.

In 1968, Prescott College established the second OOP in the nation, but it was the first institution to use Outward Bound U.S.A.'s (OB) curricular structure in the design of its program. The OB curricular structure is based on the theoretical model of participant change by Walsh and Golins (1976). Walsh and Golins (1976) stated that when, "the individual is placed in a unique physical setting and unique social setting (Group) and faced with progressively more challenging tasks and exposed to feedback and personal reflection, results in a change in values, behaviors and attitudes" (as cited in Hopkins & Putnam, 1993, p. 92).

Prescott College was aided by OB instructor, Roy Smith, who created a rigorous three-week program for the year of inception. The successes of the Dartmouth and Prescott OOP

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses outdoor orientation program instead of wilderness orientation program (WOP) due to the fact that WOP can also mean a racial slur towards immigrants.

programs helped to lay the foundation for the development of many collegiate OOPs in the U.S. (Miner & Boldt, 1981).

Many studies have been conducted on the benefits and outcomes of outdoor orientation programs upon first year students (Frauman & Waryold, 2009; Galloway, 2000; Garvey & Gass, 1999; Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003; Rastall & Webb, 2003; Waryold & James, 2010). Research has shown that first-year student participation in OOPs provides **social benefits** (Austin, Martin, Mittelstaedt, Schanning, & Ogle, 2009; Bell, 2007, 2012; Bell & Holmes, 2011; Gass et al., 2003) and **spiritual benefits** (Bobilya, Akey, & Mitchell, 2009), promotes **personal growth** (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996), leads to **increased friendship formation** (Devlin, 1996), and **increased retention rates** among first-year students (Brown, 1998; Galloway, 2000; Gass, 1987, 1990). Examples of social benefits include making connections with peers and social integration (Bell, 2007), and examples of spiritual benefits include increased trust in God and an increased awareness of one's personal faith (Bobilya et al., 2009).

Astin (1993) proposed that “the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group” (p. 3). Bell and Holmes (2011) and Bell (2012) tested Astin's (1993) belief with their research investigating the outcomes of two First-Year Experience (FYE) curricula. Researchers gathered data over the course of two fall semester's (2006 and 2007). One group ( $n= 396$ ) received content in an adventure-based class while the other group ( $n= 41$ ) received content in a conventional classroom during the first 10-weeks of the fall semester. Both classes used the same curriculum and shared the same goals. Researchers administered the First-Year Initiative Survey (FYI) (Swing, 2002, as cited in Bell & Holmes, 2011) 12 weeks into the semester, in order to compare the learning outcomes between the two groups. The adventure-based class scored higher than the

classroom-based class on “improved connections with peers” and “improved knowledge of wellness” (Bell & Holmes, 2011. p. 27). Although, researchers were unable to determine exactly why the adventure-based class scored higher than the classroom-based group on knowledge of wellness, both groups strongly supported having their peers deliver the knowledge of wellness curriculum. Furthermore, comments by students in the adventure-based class suggest that the group developed trust and strong connections with their peers because they shared challenges and discussions on a daily basis.

Bell (2012) suggested that “the use of a pedagogy designed specifically to promote teamwork is ideally matched for creating a powerful experience” (p. 353) for students transitioning into college. Good teamwork is synonymous with trust among team members. Trust must be developed over a various length of time depending on the social dynamics of the team. Bell and Holmes’ (2011) found that student development literature lacks research and discussion on the influence of trust “on how students engage (or not) with norms, ideas, and the institution itself” (p. 38). Bell and Holmes (2011) research results are consistent with that of Bobilya et al. (2009), Wardwell (1999), and Austin et al. (2009) who also found that adventure-based experiences can produce strong student connections (social benefits) for first-year students.

Wardwell (1999) studied the effects of first-year students’ participation in Princeton University’s outdoor orientation program. The study focused on the pluralistic ignorance of first-year students. Pluralistic ignorance is defined as a “situation where individuals misperceive a social norm because they and everyone else are masking their true feelings for fear of embarrassment” (Wardwell, 1999, p. 12).

Wardwell's (1999) study consisted of students who participated in the OOP ( $n=605$ ) students who were on a waiting list ( $n=58$ ) and another group ( $n=301$ ) who had no interest in the OOP. Research findings suggest that even though the OOP participants reported less anxiety than the "typical student," they still felt anxious towards fitting into the university socially. A comparison of pre and post-trip data demonstrated a drop in their anxiety towards self-other discrepancy on social-fit, but fell short in proving that the OOP caused the drop in self-other discrepancy on social-fit. Wardwell (1999) suggested that additional research is needed to find out if participating in an OOP can cause a reduction in pluralistic ignorance on social-fit.

Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) "share concern that higher education has for far too long encouraged the development of fragmented and inauthentic lives by ignoring the 'inner' development of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding among college students" (as cited in Bobilya et al., 2009, p. 440). Outdoor orientation programming has the potential to coalesce these inner development traits of first year students.

Bobilya et al. (2009) conducted a study at the faith-based institution, Montreat College. They compared 11 students who participated in the OOP and 9 who participated in a traditional orientation program. Findings suggest that the "wilderness journey" establishes community, facilitates the development of competence, enhances a sense of stewardship and responsibility to care and promotes spiritual development (Bobilya et al., 2009 p. 442). Bobilya et al. (2009) concluded that it is important for institutions to create a space for students to explore their spirituality by reducing distractions and encouraging regular reflection throughout the college careers of students.

Austin et al. (2009) explored two program outcomes, fostering a *sense of place* and *social benefits*, of first-year students' participation in an OOP at a small Midwestern liberal-arts college. Sanger (1997) defined sense of place as "an experientially based intimacy with the natural process, community, and history of one's place" (p. 2). Austin et al. (2009) used a pre/posttest questionnaire to explore program outcomes. A total of 118 students completed both surveys. A majority of respondents (93%) reported receiving *social benefits* as a result of their participation in the OOP. All of the participants perceived an increase in *sense of place*. For example, there was significant increase in the number of people on campus they would trust with an emotional secret. Austin et al. (2009) suggested that there is a possible connection between students' development of a *sense of place* and the *social benefits* of participating in an OOP. Additionally, Austin et al. (2009) proposed that the program outcomes, *sense of place* and *social benefits* could further be explored with research to determine their influence upon student retention.

A meta-analysis of research literature on student retention concluded that "there is moderate to strong positive evidence that transition or orientation programs can improve student retention rates" (Patton, Morelon, Whitehead, & Hossler, 2006, p. 21). There have been several studies (Brown, 1998; Gass, 1987, 1990; Galloway, 2000) showing the positive effects OOPs have on student retention.

Brown (1998) compared three types of orientation programs at Salisbury State University (Maryland): traditional, alternative, and outdoor. He found that enrollees in the outdoor program had better adjustment and higher retention rates than enrollees in the traditional or alternative programs. Furthermore, student and faculty interaction and collaboration in the outdoor

orientation program helped to create feelings of “accomplishment and “empowerment” among students.

Gass (1987, 1990) found similar results as Brown (1998) in his longitudinal study at the University of New Hampshire. Gass (1987, 1990) suggested that higher retention rates, higher grade averages, and positive changes to specific student development behaviors are possible benefits of first-year student participation in an OOP. Gass (1990) compared the retention rates between participants of an OOP ( $n=32$ ), discussion-oriented program ( $n=64$ ) and a control group ( $n=64$ ), that participated in neither program. Retention rates were compared at 12 and 42 months. The OOP group experienced a significantly higher retention rate than the other two programs at 12 months.

Gass et al. (2003) investigated the effects of an OOP upon participants over a 17-year period. Gass et al. (2003) interviewed 50 percent ( $n=16$ ) of the original cohort of participants from an earlier study by Gass (1987). Participants in the study reported that the OOP influenced the “direction in their careers, direction in their personal lives, development of personal values and skills, and development of live long friendships” (Gass et al., 2003, p. 39). These influences can be correlated to the objectives of the OOP model, which is to “foster positive peer-group development, develop positive interaction with faculty members, focus attention on career and/or major course of study plans, heighten interest in academics, develop a sense of urgency in being prepared for a positive start to school, insure that students understood how to match their interests and expectations to university offerings” (Gass et al., 2003, p. 35). All of the participants mentioned that the OOP had challenged their assumption of themselves and their preconceived notions and biases of how people should act and what others should believe. Additionally, all of the interviewees mentioned that the OOP created a support network of peer

friends that not only lasted during their undergraduate career, but long after their college experience. Lastly, some of the interviewees mentioned that participation in the program “had changed the direction they took in their lives” (Gass et al., 2003, p. 37).

The future of outdoor orientation programming in higher education looks promising with a growth rate of approximately 10 programs every year (Bell & Vaillancourt, 2011). This growth in outdoor orientation programming and the influx of recent research on OOPs in the past five to ten years (Bell, 2006; Bell & Holmes, 2011; Bobilya et al. 2009; Frauman & Waryold, 2009; Gass et al., 2003) suggests that a diversity of variables have been found to positively affect students’ transition to collegiate life. These variables include, but are not limited to appropriate behavior with the opposite sex and tolerance, interdependence, interpersonal relationship, increases in grade point average, increases in friendship formation, formation of social support systems, and increases in retention (Austin et al., 2009; Bell, 2007, 2012; Bell and Holmes, 2011; Bobilya et al., 2009; Brown, 1998; Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996; Devlin, 1996; Galloway, 2000; Gass, 1987, 1990; Gass et al., 2003). Furthermore, these variables could ultimately be used as a guide for institutions working to establish outdoor orientation programmatic goals.

While most of the research on OOPs focuses on the affects they have on students, it is important to note that OOPs are not without their fair share of challenges. According to Bell and Vaillancourt (2011), about six outdoor orientation programs a year discontinue, even though the aforementioned research suggest that there are many benefits to keeping such programs going. Why then, do institutions shut down these seemingly successful programs? Bell and Vaillancourt (2011) sought to answer this question by interviewing 13 former staff members of OOPs that had discontinued between 2003 and 2008. The study was based on concerns from

active OOP program directors on the discontinuation of seemingly successful programs. Bell and Vailancourt (2011) discovered several barriers that impeded the successful establishment and sustainability of OOPs. One such barrier was support. All of the discontinued programs shared one commonality, they started without the support of a president (e.g., Prescott College), a dean (e.g., Harvard University), or an administration committee. However, they did have the dynamic support of campus faculty, staff, and students.

All of the interviewees reported that their program was successful with students, but despite this success, they believed their program was underrated by campus administrators. Several of these programs had existed for years and gained growing interest and support among students, but were ultimately cut. It was suspected that the cuts were related to the success of the OOP competing directly with the traditional orientation program. One program in particular had impressive outcome data (e.g., increased retention), but was discontinued due to the atmosphere of exclusivity. The majority of this institution's 500 incoming freshmen wanted to participate in the OOP, unfortunately, the program could only take 150 to 175 students. This caused a divide amongst the students who participated in the OOP and the students who either chose not to participate or were on a waiting list (Bell & Vailancourt, 2011).

A couple of the interviewees mentioned experiencing conflict within their funding structure, because they relied solely on the financial support of the student participation fee. The financial stress was seen to be caused by the competition between the OOP and the traditional pre-orientation program, specifically that the traditional orientation programs required student participation (i.e., had the full financial backing of the institution) while the OOP was a choice. In order to gain support, these OOPs were creating their own student-focused curriculum, but fell in conflict with the curricula of the traditional orientation program.

One thing is clear, orientation programs must be adaptable. According to Hunter (2006), it does not matter whether an institution is undertaking new initiatives, such as a First-Year Experience (FYE) program or an outdoor orientation program. Being aware of and attending to the campus political process, can increase the likelihood that new initiatives will be successful (Hunter, 2006). Bell and Vaillancourt (2011) concluded that successful OOPs must integrate themselves within the campus as a whole and hire program directors who work to understand campus politics.

Throughout the seventies and eighties, a large growth in the adoption of the Prescott/OB OOP model occurred. This growth sparked two main questions from new and existing outdoor orientation program directors. What are other programs doing?; Where are other programs located? Over the past couple of decades, various research studies (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996; Galloway, 2000; Gass, 1984; O’Keefe, 1989) have tried to determine how many of these programs exist. Bell et al. (2010) conducted the first ever census of OOPs at four-year institutions in the United States. Under the tutelage of University of New Hampshire professor Brent Bell, three research assistants contacted all four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. Institutions included in the census had to meet the following criteria: offer a baccalaureate degree, be accredited, and have a primarily residential campus (i.e., no online institutions). The researchers identified 202 OOPs from the 1,758 institutions contacted. After further analysis, it was determined that 38 programs did not meet the researcher’s criteria for an OOP because they did not include “at least one overnight in a wilderness setting” (p. 1) but did use adventure based activities (e.g. rock climbing). The research revealed that there are 164 (9% of 1,758) OOPs in the United States, serving more than 17,000 first-year students who were being led by more than 4000 upperclassmen student leaders in 2006 (Bell et al., 2010).

The steady increase in research over the past 10 years on the impact OOPs have upon first-year students (Bell, 2012; Bell & Holmes, 2011; Bell et al., 2007) validated the many positive benefits such programming provides for student participants (e.g., social benefits and personal growth) and university administrators (e.g., increased retention rates). Kansas State University does not currently have an OOP, but is interested in establishing such a program. The results from the following survey combined with previous research findings, will provide evidence for the feasibility of establishing an outdoor orientation program at Kansas State University.

## **Chapter 2**

# **A Survey of Kansas State University's Interest in Outdoor Programming and an Outdoor Orientation Program**

### **Introduction**

Collegiate outdoor programs offer the opportunity for students, university employees, and members of the general public (e.g., Alaska Pacific University) the chance to participate in a variety of outdoor activities (e.g., road biking, canoeing and hiking). Several Midwestern universities including Iowa State, Oklahoma State, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and University of Missouri-Columbia as well as hundreds of other institutions around the country, offer outdoor programs on their campuses.

Kansas State University does not currently have an outdoor program. However, the campus recreational center is currently undergoing an expansion which includes a climbing wall. The indoor climbing wall will provide an opportunity for students to get interested in outdoor activities. Students will eventually want to put into practice the rock climbing skills they learn on the climbing wall. The university could provide safe and enjoyable off campus outdoor activities (e.g., rock climbing and hiking) that could potentially lead to the creation of an OOP at Kansas State University.

Bike rentals and bike shops are sometimes attached to university outdoor programs. Bike rental programs allow the university to offer an affordable mode of transportation to students, while bike shops offer opportunities for students to learn how to properly maintain their bike as well as offer affordable bike maintenance by student bike mechanics. Kansas State University does not currently have a bike shop or bike rental program.

Up to this point, Kansas State University has not evaluated the level of interest in establishing an outdoor program or an outdoor orientation program. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the level of interest Kansas State University students, staff, and faculty have towards an outdoor program, outdoor orientation program, bike rental program, as well as a campus bike shop. Having an outdoor program on campus will ultimately allow Kansas State University to develop an outdoor orientation program. This survey was conducted during the fall of 2011 as part of my practicum with Kansas State Recreational Services.

### **Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey (see Appendix A) was created using Kansas State University's Axio Survey System. Participants were chosen from the Kansas State Recreational Services database of over 21,800 current students, staff, and faculty. A random sample of 5,195 was chosen using [www.AbleBits.com](http://www.AbleBits.com)'s random generator for Microsoft Excel, resulting in a sample population of 4989 Kansas State students and 206 combined staff and faculty members. Respondents were given 11 days to complete the survey. Two additional e-mails were sent during that 11-day period to remind participants to complete and fill out the survey in its entirety. Respondents were only allowed to complete the survey one time. This eliminated the possibility of multiple submissions.

### **Results**

The response rate for the online survey was 9.8% ( $n= 511$ ) for a total of 472 student and 39 staff and faculty respondents. Only a small percentage of the 511 respondents, responded to the demographics portion of the survey, thereby limiting the use and generalizability of the demographic data.

Respondents who identified themselves as a “student” were directed to the following brief example of an outdoor orientation trip:

*Some universities offer Outdoor Orientation trips for incoming freshmen and transfer students. These trips are typically led by upperclassmen and take place prior to on-campus orientation. An example of what K-State could offer is a trip with 8-10 students and 2-3 qualified leaders that go on a 4-6-day backpacking trip in the Ozark region of Missouri.*

Students were then asked the following question: “If an Outdoor Orientation Program was in place at Kansas State when you entered as a freshman or transfer student, would you have been interested in participating in such a program?” A significant number of students ( $n= 337$ , 69.1%) answered “yes” to this question.

The results presented in table 1 are from a question related to specific outdoor activity interests. All of the respondents were asked to list their top five outdoor adventure topics that would be of most interest to them in learning about and/or participating in. Results revealed that hiking was the most popular interest followed by rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing, and backpacking.

**Table 1. Outdoor Activity Interest**

|               | <i>n</i> | %  |
|---------------|----------|----|
| Hiking        | 295      | 57 |
| Rock Climbing | 245      | 48 |
| Kayaking      | 234      | 46 |
| Canoeing      | 208      | 40 |
| Backpacking   | 179      | 35 |

Knowing how far one is willing to travel and what one is willing to pay to participate in an outdoor activity, will allow future program directors to design programs that best meet the

needs of willing participants. Participants were asked, “What is the furthest you are willing to travel by vehicle, one-way, in order to participate in an outdoor adventure activity?” and “What is the maximum amount you would be willing to spend for a quality outdoor trip that includes transportation, equipment, food and instruction?” Results indicated that 31 percent of respondents ( $n=159$ ) would be willing to travel up to 8-10 hours and 30 percent ( $n=153$ ) would travel 2-4 hours away from campus. In addition, respondents would be willing to pay between \$150-\$199 ( $n=88$ , 17%); \$100-\$149 ( $n=87$ , 17%); and \$200-\$299 ( $n=83$ , 16%). Comments from some respondents mentioned offering financial assistance to low-income students.

At the end of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to leave comments or suggestions. The majority of respondents expressed excitement over the potential establishment of an outdoor program at Kansas State University. Examples of their comments include:

- *Please do this! I am from Northern New Mexico and miss the hiking SOOOO much and wish I could meet people here with the same outdoor interests!*
- *Please do this!*
- *I am very excited to see that there is a growing community of people who want to spend their time outdoors. There is a HUGE presence of students who love camping, trail running, etc. that go out and do these activities. If K-State started up a program like this that actually organized these excursions I'm positive there would be enormous support. There is already a large number that are already doing these activities! Finding guides and experienced students wouldn't be a problem either.*

- *I am excited to hear about the possibility of this program. It sounds like a great experience. I am a firm believer that we need to experience more of the amazing outdoors that this nation offers.*
- *I think this is a good idea and one that I would support fully. I just wish it wouldn't have come at the end of my college career so I could have actually participated.*
- *I would LOVE it if KSU had an outdoor adventure program! I'm a freshman and was really disappointed when I found out we didn't have one. I really hope this will happen!!*
- *I am in full support of this initiative.*

Additionally, respondents were asked about the addition of a campus bike shop and bike rental program: “*How interested are you in having a bike shop on campus? How interested are you in bike rental program?*” A majority ( $n=323$ , 63%) of respondents were in support of a bike shop on campus and a significant number of respondents indicated that they would use a bike rental program ( $n=163$ , 31%).

### **Limitations**

Web-based survey tools are a convenient way of distributing a survey to a large population size; however, researchers have to be willing to accept a certain loss of control once the survey has been distributed. It is hard to answer questions and deal with concerns as they arise in a timely manner. I did, however, attach my e-mail address to the survey to allow respondents to ask questions for clarification. An additional down side to web-based surveying is the likelihood of having a low response rate.

## Conclusion

Results indicate strong student support for an outdoor orientation program at Kansas State University ( $n= 337$ , 69.1%). This large student interest should give administrators an incentive to provide further inquiry from students (e.g., focus groups). In addition to an outdoor orientation program, an outdoor trips program had strong support by all of the respondents ( $n=511$ ). There was also strong support for a bike rental program ( $n=163$ , 31%) and a campus bike shop ( $n=323$ , 63%). I found it very interesting the high level of interest in the use of a bike rental program considering I only surveyed a very small sub-set of the university. The high level of interest in a bike shop on campus was remarkable.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Recommendations for the Development of an Outdoor Orientation Program at Kansas State University**

This chapter profiles several successful outdoor orientation programs, concluding with recommendations for the possible direction Kansas State University could take in successfully establishing its very own OOP. The following institutions have very successful OOPs that are used by a majority of their first-year students: Princeton University, Dartmouth College, and West Virginia University. The success of the outdoor orientation programs at these institutions stems from the strong support they receive from campus administrators, students, staff, faculty, and their local community. I chose these programs because of their unique administrative structure and their wide variety of trip offerings that appeal to a variety of student interests. Each of these programs reaches out to a diversity of students, such as graduate students, international students, students with dietary restrictions, low-income students (offering financial assistance) and students from religious minorities (i.e., Princeton University). A program that can appeal to a wide variety of students and administrators reduces the chances of the program feeling exclusive (Bell & Vaillancourt, 2011).

#### ***Princeton University's Outdoor Orientation Program***

Established in 1973, Princeton University's Outdoor Action OOP is one of the largest in the country. It has been under the direction of its founding director for over 30 years. The program saw its largest enrollment in history during the 2011 fall semester. There were 790 (60%) newly enrolled students that were led by 233 upper-class student leaders. The program is housed under the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life. Having the program housed under Campus Life unequivocally shows that the outdoor orientation program is regarded as a

mainstay of the university's orientation program repertoire (R. Curtis, personal communication, October 12, 2011). Director Richard Curtis has built a program using resources that he has compiled over the years. He has written a manual on backpacking, presented about OOP at various conferences, and created software templates that new and existing programs can use to better manage their outdoor program. All of these resources can be found on the Outdoor Action website ([www. http://www.princeton.edu/~oa/index.shtml](http://www.princeton.edu/~oa/index.shtml)).

### ***Dartmouth College's Outdoor Orientation Program***

Mentioned in Chapter One, Dartmouth College has the oldest, continually operating OOP in the United States (Hooke, 1987). The success of this program stems from the fact that it is supported by an advisory board comprised of members from residence life, the freshman dean's office, campus security (Bell & Vaillancourt, 2011). The Dartmouth Outing Club (DOC) First-Year Trips, as it is known by, is housed under the Student Life Division of the Dean of the College.

This past year, 97 percent of freshmen participated in DOC (Ramer, 2011). Dartmouth is able to get almost every incoming freshman to participate in its outdoor orientation program by offering a wide range of activities. Flagship outdoor activities, such as backpacking and canoeing appeal to the outdoor enthusiast, while other activities, such as organic farming, cabin camping, community service, hiking, yoga, horseback riding, nature exploration, nature photography, and nature writing are geared toward a much broader audience.

### ***West Virginia University's Outdoor Orientation Program***

Established in 2003, West Virginia University's (WVU) OOP goes a step further than most programs by offering trips tailored to specific majors and colleges, such as the School of Journalism and College of Business and Economics (Ramer, 2011). The WVU OOP teaches the

University 101 curriculum to over 450 first-year students (Bell & Vaillancourt, 2011). Other unique programs include SOAR (Sophomore Outdoor Adventure Reorientation), an experiential-based, 3-credit course designed for students who have just finished their freshman year, and Adventure Veterans, designed to support veterans making the transition into their first year at WVU through a multi-day adventure experience and follow up sessions throughout the fall semester (<http://orientationtrips.wvu.edu/>).

### **Recommendations for Kansas State University**

For the past nine years Kansas State University has offered the opportunity for first-year students to make social connections through its pre-orientation program called Wildcat Warm-Up. The program lasts for three days, costs \$175, and takes place in the month of June. Similar to what most OOPs do, Wildcat Warm-Up is run by student leaders. Over the course of the three days, participants go to social events (e.g., Union Program Council 'After Hours' activities), meet athletic coaches and players, participate in a low and high ropes challenge course, and attend a presentation on healthy relationships, to name a few of the many activities. The Wildcat Warm-Up orientation program could complement an OOP by giving students a wider variety of choices.

When it comes to developing a comprehensive OOP that has the ability to draw in students from a diversity of interests and backgrounds, the first step involves establishing a set of programmatic goals. Based on these goals, the program can then develop a focused repertoire of programmatic offerings.

Program goals could include:

- Create a fun and exciting environment that fosters new friendships as well as individual growth.
- Develop a positive connection with Kansas State University students, faculty, staff and administrators.

- Ease the transition to college life.
- Offer opportunities for leadership, teamwork, and community service with other incoming freshmen.
- Enhance interpersonal skills such as trust, communication, acceptance, and social interaction.
- Encourage improvement of participant self-awareness, decision making skills, initiative, and self-confidence.
- Develop wilderness skills and awareness of outdoor recreational opportunities at Kansas State University.
- Improve student retention.

Note: These goals have been adapted from West Virginia and Princeton University's outdoor orientation programs.

One of the best resources for colleges starting an OOP is the annual Outdoor Orientation Program Symposium (OOPS). Sending a representative to OOPS is one way to garner a treasure trove of resources and professional contacts that could be helpful when building a successful OOP from the ground up.

Kansas State University is uniquely situated, geographically, to be able to offer a wide range of outdoor program activities that could be tailored to meet the interest of a diversity of students. Within the state of Kansas, there are many geographical locations (e.g., Clinton Lake State Park) that could host a lake canoeing and camping trip. States nearby such as Colorado, Missouri and Arkansas, could offer many outdoor trip activities such as, but not limited to, backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing, and birding.

Students entering college are faced with many social and cognitive risks. Outdoor orientation programs offer the promise of engaging students through the development of interpersonal trust and peer-based support networks. Kansas State University has the

opportunity to capitalize on these benefits starting this year, 2012, with the addition of the climbing wall to its repertoire of on-campus recreational activities. Although this will be an on-campus, indoor activity, I suspect that students will want to venture off campus to test their climbing skills on actual rock formations. This could present an opportunity for the university to design a pilot OOP using rock climbing as an active pedagogy for orienting new students to the university by starting out on the indoor climbing wall and then traveling to one of the Mid-West's many climbing destinations.

As an added bonus, certain academic departments could benefit from the resources (e.g., equipment and training) from an outdoor program. For example, if an English class is studying and writing about natural history and conservation (e.g., Jon Muir & Aldo Leopold), they could use the outdoor program resources (e.g., equipment & training) to be able to go on a backpacking trip during spring break, allowing the students to fully immerse themselves in the readings by being in the very setting that the curricular material is describing.

Risk management is an additional consideration for outdoor programs and is a vital component to any outdoor program, especially at a time when colleges are becoming more risk-adverse (Ramer, 2011). When training staff in risk management, a question to ask is "Does this choice support what we are trying to help the student accomplish?" Students want to remain uninjured both mentally and physically. The largest component in the accident equation is the human element. Humans, when making decisions, will eventually make errors (mistakes) (Cline, 2004). As a result, I would recommend that administrators and students highlight potential errors and teach skill sets in student leader training and program curriculum that reduce the amount of human error. Additionally, I recommend including student participants in the risk analysis process from the beginning of the program.

Many scholars have identified that “campus cultures do not change easily or willingly” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 106). Despite this pessimistic outlook, OOPs provide an opportunity for outdoor education to integrate with traditional college orientation programs. Traditional college orientations have often focused on introducing students to the institution (policies, registration, campus layout), but they have “neglected the social connections between students, which is often students greatest concern” (Bell et al., 2010, p. 16).

It is my hope that Kansas State University incorporates the outdoor orientation ethos into its student support program repertoire. By joining a small, but growing number of institutions, Kansas State University has the opportunity through outdoor orientation programming to offer a powerful and intense experience (outdoor activities) that engages students “so they can be prepared to receive the maximum social and educational benefits from college” (Bell & Holmes, 2011, p. 38).

*“The wilderness gave them their first taste of those rewards and penalties for wise and foolish acts which every [woodsperson] faces daily, but against which civilization has built a thousand buffers.” -Aldo Leopold*

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# **Appendix A - Interest Survey for the Possibility of a Future Outdoor Adventure Program for Kansas State University**

## **Survey Description**

K-State Rec Services is looking for your help as we look into the feasibility of creating an Outdoor Adventure Program for K-State students, staff and faculty. This future program would offer trips and workshops related to human powered outdoor adventure activities. Your participation and feedback will help determine what kind of Outdoor Adventure Program is right for K-State. We appreciate your participation!

## **Opening Instructions**

This survey should take approximately 5 minutes.

1. What is your status on campus?
  - a. Student
  - b. Staff
  - c. Faculty
  
2. Some universities offer Outdoor Orientation trips for incoming freshman and transfer students. These trips are typically lead by upperclassman and take place prior to on-campus orientation. An example of what K-State could offer is a trip with 8-10 students and 2-3 qualified leaders that go on a 4-6-day backpacking trip in the Ozark region of Missouri.

If an Outdoor Orientation Program was in place at Kansas State when you entered as a freshman or transfer student, would you have been interested in participating in such a program? Yes or No

(This question was only asked if a respondent chose “student” in the previous question.)

3. Please select your top five outdoor adventure topics you would be interested in learning more about and/or participating in, if an Outdoor Adventure Program existed at Kansas State.
  - a. Hiking
  - b. Trail Running
  - c. Mountain Biking
  - d. Road Biking
  - e. Mountaineering
  - f. Rock Climbing
  - g. Ice Climbing
  - h. Open Water Swimming
  - i. Canoeing
  - j. Kayaking

- k. Fishing
  - l. Wilderness Survival Tactics
  - m. Skiing/Snowboarding
  - n. XC Skiing
  - o. Snowshoeing
  - p. Backpacking
  - q. General Outdoor Skills (e.g. map reading, packing, knots, etc.)
  - r. Other\_\_\_\_\_
4. Are there any other outdoor adventure topics you would like to learn more about? (e.g. Caving, Primitive skills, etc...) \_\_\_\_\_
5. When would you be willing to spend time learning these skills in the form of a workshop?
- a. Weekday Session
  - b. Weekend Session
  - c. Either Weekday or Weekend Session
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. When would you be interested in going on an outdoor adventure trip?
- a. Weekends
  - b. Fall break
  - c. Winter break
  - d. Spring break
  - e. Summer break
  - f. Other\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the furthest you are willing to travel by vehicle, one-way, in order to participate in an outdoor adventure activity?
- a. 0-2 hours, e.g. Kansas (camping etc...)
  - b. 2-4 hours, e.g. Missouri (rock climbing, canoeing...)
  - c. 4-6 hours, e.g. Arkansas (canoeing, backpacking...)
  - d. 6-8 hours, e.g. Texas (hiking, MT biking...)
  - e. 8-10 hours, e.g. Colorado (skiing, white water rafting, backpacking...)
  - f. 10+ hours, e.g. Montana (backpacking, climbing, rafting...)
  - g. Other\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the maximum amount you would be willing to spend for a quality outdoor trip that includes transportation, equipment, food and instruction?
  - a. \$50-\$99
  - b. \$100-\$149
  - c. \$150-\$199
  - d. \$200-\$299
  - e. \$300-\$399
  - f. \$400-\$499
  - g. \$500-\$600
  - h. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. K-State is looking into the possibility of adding a bike rental program. This program would allow you to rent a bike for a day or for an entire semester. How interested are you in such a program?
  - a. Not interested at all
  - b. I would not use it but support the idea.
  - c. I would rent a bike occasionally.
  - d. I would rent a bike for an entire semester.
  
10. K-State is looking into the possibility of adding an on-campus bike shop. The bike shop could potentially provide free access to tools for self-service bike maintenance/repairs, low cost bike workshops and/or basic low cost full-service bike maintenance/repairs. How interested are you in having a bike shop on campus?
  - a. Not interested.
  - b. I would not use it but support the idea.
  - c. I would use the shop for basic self-service repairs
  - d. I would use a full-service bike shop.
  - e. I would attend a bike maintenance workshop.
  - f. Comments:\_\_\_\_\_
  
11. If you have experience and knowledge of an outdoor skill or technique, would you be willing to teach and/or lead a workshop or trip on it? (e.g. rock climbing, trip planning, bike maintenance, etc.)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
12. If you answered yes to question 11, Please provide your name, email and any of the outdoor skills or techniques that you would be willing to teach.
  
13. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other\_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your age?

- a. 18-19
- b. 20-21
- c. 22-23
- d. 24-25
- e. 26-34
- f. 35-44
- g. 45-54
- h. 55-64
- g. 65+

15. If you are a student, what year are you in school?

- a. Freshman
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. Graduate school-Master's
- f. Graduate school-Doctorate
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. Please leave any additional comments or suggestions you may have for an Outdoor Adventure Program here at Kansas State.

**Closing Message**

Thank you for your time and contribution to this survey.