

GETTING THE ENGINE STARTED: MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN A UNIVERSITY OUTDOOR RECREATION PROGRAM

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Abstract.—This study was conducted to identify the motivations of trip participants in the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Program at the University of Georgia during the fall semester of 2007, and to collect baseline data about their participation. Participants were asked to fill out a survey and return it to the trip leader at the conclusion of each trip. Participants' activity selection was found to be significantly related to motivation for: gaining new experiences, seeking solitude, experiencing a thrill, visiting a new place, and meeting new people. Activity selection was not motivated by: wanting to join a friend who was participating in that activity, taking a trip as part of a personal hobby, or getting physical education credit. Discussion focuses on providing a better understanding of student motivations for participation in university recreation programs and how this understanding can provide for better programming.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Georgia Outdoor Recreation Program (GORP) is part of the Department of Recreational Sports at the University of Georgia (UGA). The program was established 20 years ago to provide outdoor recreation experiences primarily for university students, and to a lesser extent faculty and staff of the university and residents of the surrounding community. GORP has grown from offering a few trips and clinics per semester to offering a large number of trips (80-100

trips and clinics annually serving more than 700 students), renting equipment, managing and providing instruction for a climbing/bouldering wall, and conducting a challenge course program. The primary focus of this paper is to examine the motivations of people who participated in a GORP trip. Trips are generally organized around a specific activity such as hang gliding, backpacking, whitewater kayaking, and horseback riding. Trips are led by UGA students and faculty members and are supported by an assistant director of the recreational sports department.

This study arose from a need to better understand participants and their motivations for participating in the GORP program. No study of participants had been undertaken during the 20-year history of the program and members of the Department of Recreational Sports were unsure about the effectiveness of the GORP program's marketing.

The University of Georgia has more than 34,000 undergraduate students and about 2 percent of this population takes a GORP trip each year (GORP programs also include more students through other activities). Therefore, one goal of this study was to understand who exactly was going on GORP trips. The second goal of this study was to try to understand the motivations of GORP trip participants; this information can be used to refine and improve GORP's programming and marketing. This study may also be beneficial for other university outdoor recreation programs given the lack of research in this area.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Outdoor recreation programs at universities throughout the United States are generally located within existing departments and rarely stand alone; most are found in recreation departments (Taylor et al. 2002). For this reason, university outdoor recreation programs have not been well studied. Research by Taylor et al. (2002)

found that outdoor recreation programs can help to increase student retention rates and promote personal growth of participants. A connection is assumed between involvement in a program and the motivations for participation, but few studies have addressed this connection (Kyle et al. 2005), especially in a university outdoor recreation setting.

One goal of outdoor recreation programs is to foster involvement and retention. Therefore, the ability of a program to meet the needs of the participants, understand their motivations, and ensure positive outcomes may be an antecedent of enduring involvement (Kyle et al. 2005). This understanding can also provide for better programming and less possible conflict between users (Manfredo et al. 1996). Understanding participants' motivations, however, is not an easy task. Individual and situational differences will determine participant motivations and perceived needs (Weissinger and Bandalos 1995). Todd et al. (2003) identify and describe the motivations of four different types of outdoor recreation participants: beginners, intermediate, advanced, and expert. The beginner struggles to achieve because the activity is new and challenging. The intermediate participant has some exposure to the activity and thus seeks out opportunities for excitement and risk. Advanced participants have a strong background in the activity and want to work on self-actualization. Experts have mastery of the activity and seek out new and exciting challenges for themselves. It appears that the more experience a participant has, the more serious he or she becomes about a particular activity, and the more important and intrinsic the rewards become (Todd and Graefe 2002). Understanding participants' skill levels will therefore help outdoor recreation programs better match activities to the motivations of the particular user groups mentioned above.

Outdoor recreation programmers and marketers also need to consider participants' social motivations. Schuster et al. (2003) suggest that the social component of outdoor recreation includes self-centered values, family/social values, and human

values. Self-centered values focus on direct benefit to the individual. Family and social values are concerned with building relationships. Going on the trip to meet new people or going on the trip because your friends want to go are examples of this value. Human value is concerned with connecting to the natural world. People who participate in outdoor recreation experiences often seek an understanding of the natural environment (Frauman 2002) and would like to go to a place of "natural peace and quiet" (Hammitt 2000, p. 522). Schuster et al. (2003) identify solitude as an important human value, but solitude has different meanings for different groups and individuals. For example, physical isolation may have less to do with a feeling of solitude than with interactions between individuals and groups (Manning 1999). Considering the individual and social motivations of outdoor recreation participants can direct programming away from outdoor elitists (Jones 1997) and provide opportunities for a much broader participant base.

3.0 METHODS

During the fall semester of 2007, GORP participants were able to sign up for trips that were conducted between August 16 and November 14. There were 17 trips to choose from and none had prerequisites so participants were able to choose freely. Upon completion of the trip, participants were given an information sheet outlining the reason for the study and asking them to fill out the survey with 22 questions related to participation motivations, trip experience, and demographics. Participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed using SPSS 15.0 (SPSS Inc. 2007), stratifying data by trip activity, and looking at motivations by activity. Frequencies were tabulated for demographic variables, and Pearson's chi-square analysis using cross-tabs was conducted to determine relationships between activities and motivations for participation. A 7-point Likert-type scale used on the survey to measure motivations (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) was condensed to a 3-point scale (1 = disagree, 2 = neutral and 3 = agree) for ease of analysis.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Trip Participation

Completed surveys were turned in by 152 of the 201 participants for a response rate of 75 percent. For 69.4 percent of the respondents, this was their first GORP trip. The average age of the participants was 21.9 years; the average age of the general population of UGA is 23 years old. More than 71 percent of the trip participants were female; in contrast, females make up 56 percent of the general UGA population. The ethnicity percentages were similar between the UGA general population and GORP trip participants (Table 1). Students attending UGA made up the majority of the trip participants (88.2 percent) while the rest (11.8 percent) were faculty, staff, and non-UGA students. The majority of the GORP trip participants were undergraduate students at UGA (77 percent) and 23 percent of the UGA students were first-year students. The remainder of the trip participants were graduate students at UGA (10 percent), transfer students (2 percent), or those identifying themselves as “other” (10 percent).

4.2 Results for Trip Participants’ Motivations

Trip participants were asked a series of eight Likert-type questions to determine their motivations for participation. Person’s chi-square analysis showed that five of the eight motivators were significant at an alpha of .05. The activity chosen by the participants was significantly related to: seeking solitude on the trip ($X^2 = 43.40$, $p = 0.004$); wanting to visit a place they had never been ($X^2 = 61.18$, $p = .000$); going on the trip to create new friendships ($X^2 = 54.95$, $p = 0.000$); seeking out a new experience ($X^2 = 38.26$, $p = .017$); and going on a GORP trip to seek a thrill ($X^2 = 42.47$, $p = 0.005$). The activity chosen by the participants was not significantly related to: going on the trip with their friends ($X^2 = 32.34$, $p = .072$); taking the trip to receive a physical education credit ($X^2 = 33.77$, $p = 0.052$); or going on the trip because it was related to a hobby ($X^2 = 28.06$, $p = 0.174$) (Table 2). Participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement about whether they were motivated by specific factors. Based on a 3-point scale (1 = disagree, 2 = neutral,

Table 1.—Comparison of race between GORP and the UGA general population

Race/Ethnicity	GORP %	UGA %
Caucasian/White	86.2	82
Asian American	5.3	7
African American	3.3	6
Hispanic/Latino	3.3	2
Other	2.0	3

Table 2.—Pearson chi-square for activity and motivation for attending a GORP trip

Item	X^2	df	Sig.
Activity & seeking solitude	43.40	22	0.004*
Activity & visiting a new place	61.18	22	0.000*
Activity & creating new friendships	54.95	22	0.000*
Activity & seeking a new experience	38.26	22	0.017*
Activity & seeking a thrill	42.47	22	0.005*
Activity & going with friends	32.34	22	0.072
Activity & taking trip for PE credit	33.77	22	0.052
Activity & type of trip is a hobby	28.06	22	0.174

*Significant at an alpha of .05

3 = agree), participants gave low scores to going with friends (1.74), taking the trip for physical education credit (1.43), and going on the trip because it is their hobby (1.91); these low scores correlate with the results of the Pearson’s chi-square test. The mean scores for the motivations of visiting a new place (2.56), creating new friendships (2.43), seeking out a new experience (2.85), and seeking a thrill (2.54) were higher on the 3-point scale as would be expected based on the Pearson’s chi-square analysis. The mean score for the motivation of seeking solitude (2.01) was neutral despite having a significant Pearson’s chi-square ($X^2 = 43.40$, $p = 0.004$).

5.0 DISCUSSION

It appears that GORP’s recruiting efforts have generally been successful at attracting different segments of the university population. The racial identification breakdown between UGA and GORP is similar, but this consistency does not imply that GORP, or the university, could not do a better job of recruiting a more diverse population. That being said, one of the

goals of this study as identified by the Department of Recreational Sports was to understand the current GORP participants, not to comment on current practices. GORP seems to attract a disproportionate number of female participants when compared to the UGA population as a whole. Several factors may contribute to this result. The Outdoor Recreation Center, where many of the trips are advertised, is on the only route to the women's locker room in the recreation center and women may therefore have more exposure to GORP advertisements. Men may also be less inclined to participate in GORP trips because they feel like they can do these activities on their own and do not need someone to "show them how." Furthermore, men who participate in outdoor recreation may be more likely to initiate and organize these types of activities on their own while females may seek out a more structured environment. It is also possible that women are more likely to participate because there are more male trip leaders than female leaders.

GORP is catering to the university student population with nearly 90 percent of the trip participants being UGA students. This number could be higher, but GORP also advertises to the local community and faculty and staff. GORP could do a better job of advertising to specific groups of students in order to increase the number of graduate and transfer students that participate in the program. GORP advertises heavily each semester in the undergraduate dorms and incoming first-year students have the option to take an outdoor adventure orientation course through GORP. The advertising and course options may explain why the undergraduate population is well represented among participants. On the other hand, incoming graduate and transfer students do not participate in GORP programs as frequently, perhaps because GORP does not actively reach out to them.

When this study was initiated, one research hypothesis was joining a trip to be with friends would be a primary motivating factor. This hypothesis was based on noticing during numerous trips that many people knew each other prior to the trip. As the results show,

however, going with friends was not a significant motivator when based on activity type ($X^2 = 32.34$, $p = 0.072$). It became apparent after analyzing these data that GORP participants had more internal motivations for going on trips. Seeking solitude, seeking a thrill, and going to experience a new place were all significant motivators and have very little to do with going with friends. The solitude motivator had a significant Pearson's chi-square ($X^2 = 43.40$, $p = 0.004$), but a low mean on the 3-point scale (2.01). The neutrality of this score may be due to the nebulous nature of the concept of solitude. Solitude means different things to different people and can be obtained in a wide variety of ways. In addition, the trips offered by GORP offer different opportunities for solitude. For example, a backpacking trip to a Wilderness area will offer more opportunities for solitude than a whitewater rafting trip down class IV and V rapids. It appears that GORP marketing needs to focus more on personal experience and less on social aspects of the trips. In contrast, making new friends was a significant motivator based on activity. This finding may have been a result of the participants' taking the survey after the trip had concluded and they had made new friends. If the survey had been administered before the trip, the results may have been different.

The question regarding the physical education (PE) credit as a motivating factor was included to determine whether a newly added credit course was influencing participation. The PE class was not a motivating factor based on activity type ($X^2 = 33.77$, $p = .052$), but was close enough to ask the question, Should students be going on GORP trips of their own accord, or for PE credit? One case study is the SCUBA course offered by GORP, which had a high number of PE-credit students because it helped to satisfy a portion of their course requirements. However, the trip leader noticed a significant decline in the number of people following the SCUBA course through the open water certification once the PE course was offered through GORP; many people appeared to be taking it for the sole purpose of gaining PE credit. The data, however, refute this theory; of the 28 GORP participants that took SCUBA during this study, 22 disagreed with the

statement, “My primary motivation for going on this trip is PE credit.” Poor question wording or a lack of complete honesty on the survey participants’ part may have contributed to this discrepancy, but more time needs to be spent on this question to understand the impact it may be having on the GORP program.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study was long overdue for the GORP program at UGA. Although it appears that GORP is providing outdoor recreation opportunities to a wide variety of participants (when compared to the UGA population as a whole), more could be done to reach potential segments of the outdoor recreation market. It has been shown that the background (ethnicity, race, sex) of individuals does have an effect on their participation in outdoor recreation (Walker et al. 2001). The majority of the trip participants are white, female undergraduates, which neglects a large portion of the university. Advertising and reaching out to populations currently underserved by GORP (minorities, males, and graduate students) will help bring new insights to the programming and will also help the program serve more students. Having the academic community at UGA involved in the GORP program—in this case the physical education department in particular—is a tremendous opportunity to get more students involved in outdoor recreation. However, it is important to set clear expectations for involving more students so that the integrity of a given trip or clinic is not compromised (see SCUBA course above). Offering a wider variety of trip opportunities including introductory clinics and intermediate and advanced trips might allow GORP to reach a wider audience. The trips and clinics themselves need to be novel to maintain interest in GORP. Unfortunately, GORP and programs like it have become comfortable offering the same trips to the same destinations year after year. This approach may sustain the program but will certainly not provide for growth and diversification. This type of study is not done enough with outdoor recreation programs on university campuses. Understanding participant motivations for taking part in outdoor recreation activities can lead to programming that will better suit not only the students, but also the program.

7.0 CITATIONS

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