10.5193/JEE33.1.1
Journal of Experiential Education • 2010, Volume 33, No. 1 pp. 1–18

A Census of Outdoor Orientation Programs at Four-Year Colleges in the United States

Brent J. Bell, Marion Reid Holmes, and Brady G. Williams

Researchers surveyed colleges and universities in the United States to assess the number providing outdoor orientation programs (OOPs). OOPs are defined as college orientation programs that work with small groups (15 or fewer) of first-year students, use adventure experiences, and include at least one overnight in a wilderness setting. This census identified and received survey data from 164 separate OOPs, representing at least 97% of all programs. From the data, researchers ascertained common peer practices describing the current state of OOPs. Although programs differed significantly by age and by size, programs generally shared common practices. With the number of OOPs growing—an average of 10 new OOPs begin each year—the current census was designed to better understand how OOPs operate and how they may be changing.

Keywords: Outdoor Orientation, Wilderness Orientation, College Orientation Programs, Pre-orientation

Brent J. Bell, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Outdoor Education at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA. E-mail: bbell@unh.edu

Marion Reid Holmes is currently a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Brady G. Williams was a research assistant to Dr. Bell at the University of New Hampshire and is currently living the nomadic life of an outdoor educator.

A number of colleges and universities in the United States provide outdoor orientation programs (OOPs)[1] for incoming students. For the purpose of this study, outdoor orientation programs were defined as orientation or pre-orientation experiences for small groups (15 or fewer) of first-year students that use adventure experiences and include at least one overnight in a wilderness setting. The use of outdoor orientation programs to facilitate the transition to college is largely a United States–based phenomenon, mainly occurring at four-year colleges and universities. Although three prior studies have investigated common themes of outdoor orientation programs at U.S. colleges and universities, there has never been a complete census of programs. This project sought to learn more about the OOP "neighborhood of practice": Each OOP was viewed as a "house" in a broader "neighborhood" of pre-orientation programming. The researchers chose this metaphor because neighborhoods are "districts or areas of distinct characteristics" (which we defined for OOPs previously) and are associated with being "neighborly," which recognizes the interdependent influences between neighbors (as cited in *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000). Like neighbors, outdoor orientation programs share broad programmatic similarities with each other (e.g., overnight wilderness experiences) that are distinct from most other college programs. Further, evidence demonstrates that programs do influence each other (Bell, 2006; Gass, 1984). Using this metaphor, the researchers sought to identify all the programs (houses), and the common peer practices and baseline data, to describe this metaphorical neighborhood. Gass (1984) reported that knowing about other programs may encourage networking, but no recent or definitive accounting of these programs had occurred.

Earlier attempts to survey OOPs have used various techniques to locate programs and gather information. In 1984, Gass used expansion sampling to identify and gather data from 34 OOPs. In 1989, O'Keefe located and surveyed 58 programs using the Delphi method. In 1996, Davis-Berman and Berman used a convenience sample of 64 programs. Each of these studies used sampling techniques that did not account for all OOPs, and all agreed that more OOPs were likely to exist.

These three studies suggested that the number of OOPs was increasing. This census sought to substantiate this hypothesis first by determining the number of OOPs, and then by reporting the year when programs started. The researchers also wondered how the variables of age or size affected program characteristics. Comparing new, developing programs

(created since 2000) with older, more established programs (created before 1990) would show the researchers if programs differ by age. Also, given that managing large numbers of students is a very different task than managing a few, it was expected that larger programs (more than 60 students) would have different characteristics from their smaller counterparts (fewer than 30 students).

The researchers sought to answer these questions through a census of outdoor orientation programs in the United States. Further, researchers addressed the following items:

1. What is the number of outdoor orientation programs at four-year colleges and universities in the United States? Is the number of programs growing?
2. What are the distinct and common peer practices among programs (e.g., number of days spent in the wilderness, size of average group, staff ratios)?
3. How do outdoor orientation programs differ with respect to the key variables of size and age of program?

History of Outdoor Orientation Programs

In 1932, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire created a wilderness pre-orientation program, not as an orientation to college per se, but rather as an orientation to the Dartmouth Outing Club (Hooke, 1987). The fact that the program's wilderness trips helped students transition to the college was originally seen as an ancillary benefit. Its efficacy as a first-year orientation experience was identified as the program matured; it is now a large and successful orientation to Dartmouth College (Hooke, 1987).

The use of outdoor orientation as student preparation for the stresses of college itself was an idea heavily influenced by the U.S. Outward Bound (OB) organization. In 1968, Roy Smith, an OB instructor, developed an extensive (21-day) wilderness orientation program for Prescott College in Arizona. Josh Miner and Joe Boldt, co-founders of OB-USA noted, "This was the first time an institution of higher learning tied the Outward Bound experience directly into its curricular scheme" (Miner & Boldt, 1981, p. 306).

Both the Dartmouth and Prescott experiences paved the way for other colleges to develop outdoor orientation programs. The Harvard First-Year Outdoor Program was developed in 1978 after Henry Moses, then Dean of Freshmen, participated in a two-week OB course. His experience inspired him to use OB small-group challenges to help first-year students develop social support. The fact that another Ivy League school, Dartmouth, was already running an outdoor pre-orientation program helped convince administrators of the practicality and feasibility of the Dean's idea (H. Moses, personal communication, October 2004).

The positive experiences with outdoor orientation at Dartmouth and Prescott and the excitement of combining OB principles with college curricula led to the development of many outdoor orientation programs, in addition to Harvard's, throughout the early 1970s. Among them were programs at Earlham in Indiana, Cornell in New York, Princeton in New Jersey, Colby in Maine, Northland in Minnesota, and the University of Vermont. These programs tended to include shorter wilderness trips (four to seven days) with trained student leaders (consistent with the Dartmouth model), and they utilized backcountry travel experience to help students learn problem-solving, teamwork, and self-confidence—all consistent with the Prescott/OB model—to promote an effective transition to college.

Review of Literature

Enough outdoor or wilderness orientation programs were in operation by 1984 to prompt Gass's study to identify locations and create a network among programs. Using an expansion technique, Gass located and surveyed 34 operational programs. In addition to the survey, Gass's study identified a list of existing programs willing to assist other colleges in developing their own OOPs. It also provided a descriptive rationale for using wilderness as an orientation tool. Rising student attrition at some colleges was problematic. Students identified peer isolation, isolation from faculty and staff, dissonance between initial expectation and actual circumstance, boredom, and irrelevancy as reasons for leaving school early (Gass, 1986). Outdoor orientation trips that placed students into small groups in challenging environments were posited to impact positively the attrition variables by deepening peer and staff relationships, while simultaneously providing important information on the actualities of attending college (Gass, 1986).

O'Keefe (1989) surveyed outdoor orientation programs, attempting to define the programs according to their goals, activities, instructors' roles, and importance placed on evaluations. O'Keefe used a three-round Delphi survey technique. She concluded that first-year wilderness orientation programs can be categorized into three distinct models according to their goals. Programs that used Model I focused largely on the program being led by student leaders and placing a priority on having fun. Model II programs focused on the role of faculty, on improving decision-making skills, and on instruction in small group skills. Model III programs focused on increasing retention and on enhancing first-year students' adjustment to college. O'Keefe reported that the programs surveyed (n = 22 out of 58 programs) were equally represented in each of the three models (1989). Furthermore, O'Keefe found (a) that a variety of activities were used to reach goals; (b) that student leaders played an important role in the programs (and

that this role varied greatly based on the type and depth of training they received); and (c) that follow-up evaluations were not well developed.

A third study surveying outdoor orientation programs, conducted in 1996, used a convenience sample to expand on the work of Gass and O'Keefe, with a greater number of schools surveyed (n = 62, with 50 responses, 38 of them complete). The Davis-Berman and Berman (1996) study found that many more private schools were offering wilderness orientation programs than reported earlier by O'Keefe (1989). In contrast to O'Keefe's finding that student leaders were commonly paired with faculty, Davis-Berman and Berman (1996) found the majority of programs in 1996 were student led and focused more on facilitating social interaction and social development, a combination of O'Keefe's original models. Davis-Berman and Berman concluded that the seven years between O'Keefe's study and their own survey were years of great change (1996).

All three studies concluded that there remained unidentified outdoor orientation programs and that more interaction was needed among program professionals. Gass (1984) reported that after a conference workshop at the 1983 AEE convention "there was an overwhelming request by the attending participants at the presentation to identify existing programs willing to offer and share information with other programs" (p. 5). Five years later, O'Keefe reported a need for outdoor orientation programs to network with each other in order to provide the best possible programming for first-year students (1989). Davis-Berman and Berman (1996) wrote, "Many of the program directors and staff interviewed for the project reported that they did not know what other universities were doing, or even which universities were offering wilderness orientation programs" (p. 27).

This study sought to identify the number of four-year colleges and universities with outdoor orientation programs in the United States and to develop an accurate description of what this neighborhood of practice looked like in 2006, 10 years after the last survey. Once programs were identified and demographic information was collected, it was possible to describe a "typical" program, as well as to illustrate how programs differ by key variables such as size and age.

Method

To provide a comprehensive census of OOPs, the researchers attempted to contact every four-year college and university in the United States. The first challenge was to define "four-year college" with specificity. Using the *College Handbook* (College Board, 2005), the researchers decided to limit their contacts to colleges that satisfied three criteria: (1) that a baccalaureate degree is provided; (2) that the college is accredited

by an institution recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools); and (3) that the college is primarily residential (defined by the College Board [2006] as institutions with more than 25% of degree-seeking undergraduates living on campus and more than 50% of the students enrolled full time). The above criteria reflected the types of colleges studied by past researchers (e.g., Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996; Gass, 1986; O'Keefe, 1989) and represented the majority of the colleges in the United States.

The original protocol involved contacting the main telephone number of a college or university and asking if an outdoor orientation program existed on campus. Researchers tested this protocol by contacting six colleges known to have outdoor orientation programs. Unfortunately, staff answering the main campus telephone numbers at two of these colleges reported the absence of an outdoor orientation program. The protocol was then adjusted to require contact with multiple offices and departments at each college. A listing of the types of offices from which to seek such information was discussed with each researcher (e.g., orientation, residential life, recreation, college outing club, student development, student affairs), but because colleges varied widely in organizational structure and department names, researchers often needed to follow unique leads in the process of determining whether or not a program existed. For instance, at a large university a researcher may have contacted up to 15 different offices, whereas at a college of 200 students, contact with the dean responsible for orientation may have been sufficient to determine if a program existed. In general, each college was contacted at least three times, and the college web page was searched for key terms (e.g., outdoor orientation, wilderness orientation, and orientation) before determining the absence of an outdoor orientation program. Researchers did use judgment in making their determination, knowing that one measure of reliability was the discovery of programs at a later date, after a researcher had contacted a school. This occurred only once during the 10-month study.

When an outdoor orientation program was found, the researcher asked to be connected to the "best person"—a representative responsible for the organization and administration of the program—who could provide further information. This representative was informed about the research project and the online survey. Program representatives were sent an e-mail link to an online survey hosted by www.psychdata.com. The survey focused on the following: (a) school and program demographics; (b) program history; and (c) program operations and procedures. The survey's length varied between 65 and 68 questions because of the use of "question logic" where only the appropriate questions were seen by the user. For example, if a program representative answered yes to the question, Do you

have a Risk Management Committee? the next question would ask, Has the Risk Management Committee met within the last 12 months? If the program representative answered no, then the more detailed risk management questions did not apply and were skipped.

Survey nonresponse of more than four weeks was followed up via e-mail and/or telephone contact encouraging participation. Researchers making these contacts emphasized the goal of 100% participation. The survey was conducted over a 10-month period between September and July to ensure results would reflect the same year of programming.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data screening and analysis. Because a census differs from sampling, in that a sampled program is representative of other programs, a program in a census only represents itself, allowing researchers to make multiple contacts with programs to verify factual information and to increase the accuracy of the program description.

The researchers used cross tabs to signify differences between groups. Although an argument could be made that statistical analysis is not relevant to a true population (e.g., a difference of one would reflect a true difference), the researchers recognized that other forms of error (e.g., a reporting error) are difficult to control. The use of these statistical methods provided a conservative approach to the data to guard against Type 1 error. Researchers also adjusted the chi-square tests (cell expectancies) for the variable private/public school to reflect the actual proportion of the true population (70% of all four-year colleges in the United States are private), an adjustment that may have been missed in earlier reports.

Results

The final outdoor orientation program response rate was 97% of all identified OOPs. The remaining 3% (five programs) not completing a survey as a part of this project were all at small colleges (fewer than 3,000 students) that reported having outdoor orientation programs during the initial census, but they did not respond to multiple invitations to complete a survey. Researchers were therefore unable to verify or refute the earlier report of an outdoor orientation program, including searches of the public information accessible through web-page searches.

After running descriptive statistics, three colleges were contacted based on questionable answers. Adjustments were made based on these conversations. For instance, one director misreported the number of outdoor orientation leaders, mistakenly reporting all the leaders active in the outdoor program through other programs.

Number and Growth Trends of Outdoor Orientation Programs

A total of 1,758 colleges were contacted. Of these, 202 (11.5%) reported having outdoor orientation programs. Thirty-eight programs were

removed from the study because it was determined they did not meet the project definition of an OOP (orientation or pre-orientation experiences for small groups [15 or fewer] of first-year students that use adventure experiences and include at least one overnight in a wilderness setting). Although most of the eliminated programs used adventure-based activities (e.g., ropes courses, white-water rafting, rock climbing), they did not include an overnight stay away from campus in a wilderness setting. The distribution of OOPs in the remaining 164 (9% of the 1,758) was not centralized to any specific area of the United States, but it generally resembled the geographic distribution of four-year colleges. In other words, states with the highest concentration of colleges and universities also had the highest numbers of OOPs. For instance, although Pennsylvania contained 8% of the nation's outdoor orientation programs ($n = 13$), it also contained 6% of the nation's four-year colleges ($N = 102$). No noteworthy geographical patterns emerged from the data of the colleges listed in Table 1.

The researchers did find a significant pattern regarding OOPs at Ivy League schools ($n = 8$). Each Ivy League school, with the exception of Brown University, has an outdoor orientation program. Brown, however, does have an outdoor leadership program that focuses on the adjustment of rising sophomores, a program that is strikingly similar to other Ivy League outdoor orientation program models (e.g., student-led, 5- to 6-day backpacking trips that are focused on both individual and small group development).

Two survey questions addressed the age and size of the OOPs. The first question asked the year the program began, and the second question inquired whether the program enrollment was currently (a) growing in the number of participants, (b) stable, or (c) declining in the number of participants over the past three years.

The results showed an increase in new programs, as shown in Figure 1. Of 162 OOPs reporting their year of inception, 51 programs began before 1990, 50 began between 1990 and 1999, and 62 began between 2000 and 2006. It was discovered through data collection that 28 colleges had had an OOP in the past but have since discontinued the OOP.

As for program growth, a mere 9% reported declining enrollments. Older programs (begun prior to 1990) were more likely to have stable enrollments, whereas programs beginning after 2000 were more likely to have increasing enrollments. Collectively, 49% of programs reported growing enrollments.

Overall, the outdoor orientation programs reported serving 17,547 student participants in the fall of 2006.

Table 1
Four-Year Colleges in the United States Reporting Outdoor Orientation Programs in 2006

1. Adams State College
2. Alaska Pacific University
3. Amherst College
4. Appalachian State University
5. Asbury College
6. Baptist Bible College and Seminary
7. Bates College
8. Baylor University
9. Bemidji State University
10. Bennington College
11. Bloomsburg University
12. Boise State University
13. Bowdoin College
14. Bucknell University
15. California Polytechnic State Univ.
16. California State University, Chico
17. Calvin College
18. Carleton College
19. Case Western Reserve University
20. Claremont McKenna College
21. Clark University
22. Coe College
23. Colby College
24. Colgate University
25. College of St. Scholastica
26. College of the Atlantic
27. Colorado College
28. Colorado State University
29. Columbia University
30. Connecticut College
31. Cornell University
32. Dartmouth College
33. Davidson College
34. Davis and Elkins College
35. Denison University
36. Duke University
37. Earlham College
38. Emory University
39. Eugene Bible College
40. Ferrum College
41. Florida State University
42. Geneva College
43. George Fox University
44. George Mason University
45. George Washington University
46. Georgetown University
47. Georgia Institute of Technology
48. Gettysburg College
49. Gonzaga University
50. Goucher College
51. Green Mountain College
52. Grinnell College
53. Gustavus Adolphus College
54. Hamilton College
55. Hampden-Sydney College
56. Hampshire College
57. Hartwick College
58. Harvard University
59. Harvey Mudd College
60. Hendrix College
61. Humboldt State University
62. Indiana University
63. Ithaca College
64. James Madison University
65. Johns Hopkins University
66. Juniata College
67. Kalamazoo College
68. Keystone College
69. Lees-McRae College
70. Lewis and Clark College
71. Loyola Marymount University
72. Lynchburg College
73. Lynn University
74. Macalester College
75. Malone College
76. Marlboro College
77. Maryville College
78. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
79. Miami University
80. Michigan Technological University
81. Middlebury College
82. Muhlenberg College
83. Naropa University
84. Northern Arizona University

Table 1 (continued)
Four-Year Colleges in the United States Reporting Outdoor Orientation Programs in 2006

85. Northland College
86. Northwestern College
87. Northwestern University
88. Notre Dame de Namur University
89. Ohio University
90. Ohio Wesleyan University
91. Penn State, Altoona
92. Penn State, Berks
93. Penn State, Lehigh Valley
94. Penn State University
95. Point Loma Nazarene University
96. Pomona College
97. Prescott College
98. Princeton University
99. Radford University
100. Reed College
101. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
102. Roanoke College
103. St. John's University
104. St. Michael's College
105. Salisbury University
106. Samford University
107. Scripps College
108. Simpson University
109. Skidmore College
110. Smith College
111. South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
112. Stanford University
113. State Univ. of New York, Plattsburgh
114. Templeton Honors College
115. Texas State University
116. Texas Tech University
117. Towson University
118. Trinity College
119. Tufts University
120. Tulane University
121. Union College
122. Unity College
123. University of Alabama
124. University of Alaska, Fairbanks
125. University of California, Los Angeles
126. University of California, San Diego
127. University of California, Santa Cruz
128. University of Colorado, Boulder
129. University of Detroit Mercy
130. University of Georgia
131. University of Maine
132. University of Minnesota, Duluth
133. University of New England
134. University of New Hampshire
135. University of North Carolina, Asheville
136. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
137. University of Pennsylvania
138. University of Puget Sound
139. University of Redlands
140. University of Southern Mississippi
141. University of the Pacific
142. University of Utah
143. University of Vermont
144. University of Virginia
145. University of Virginia's College at Wise
146. University of Wisconsin, La Crosse
147. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
148. University of Wisconsin, Stout
149. University of Wyoming
150. Utah State University
151. Vanderbilt University
152. Virginia Commonwealth University
153. Wake Forest University
154. Washington and Lee University
155. Washington State University
156. Washington University in St. Louis
157. West Virginia University
158. Westmont College
159. Wheaton College
160. Whitman College
161. Willamette University
162. Williams College
163. Wright State University
164. Yale University

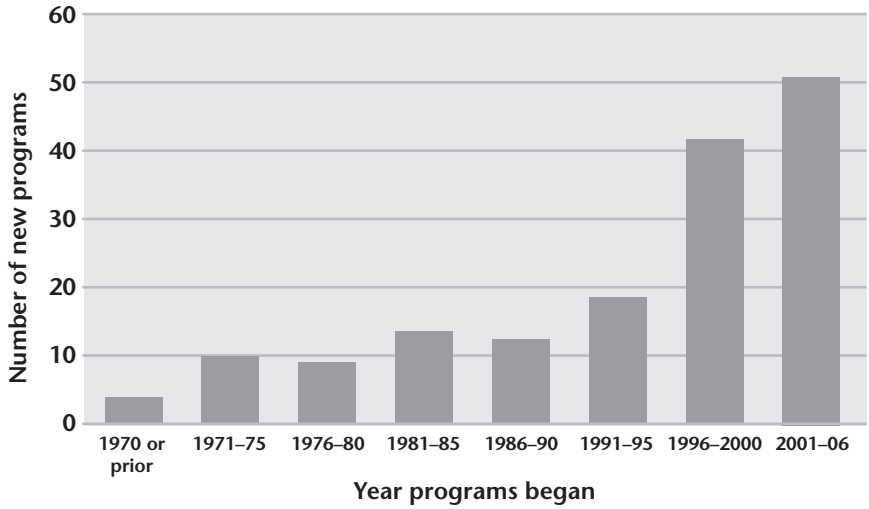

Figure 1. **The year outdoor orientation programs began.**

Common Practices

Common practices in OOPs were reported in two ways. First, researchers calculated the mean, mode, range, and standard deviations of program characteristics as highlighted in Table 2. Second, the characteristics and practices shared by more than 50% of the programs were reported as majority program traits in Table 3. Important to note is that averages are program averages, not the averages of each student participant. For example, in some cases the majority of the 17,547 participants may have participated in a specific practice such as sleeping under tarps (52%), but a majority of programs use tents (69%). These differences appear when the practices of larger programs are different from the practices of smaller programs. The common peer practices of the programs (as listed in Table 3) illustrate these common program features.

Public or Private College

Although the majority of OOPs exist at private colleges, it is important to note that the majority (70%) of all four-year colleges in the United States are private. Currently 66% (n = 107) of outdoor orientation programs are at private schools. When controlling for this 7:3 ratio, OOPs programs generally mimic the private/public distribution of four-year colleges in the United States and do not show significant differences, χ^2 (2, n = 164) = 0.81, p = .36.

Program Age and Program Size

When the outdoor orientation programs were categorized by size and age, some significant differences were discovered, as illustrated in Table 4 for the variable age and the variable size.

Table 2
Averages and Range of Key Variables of College Outdoor Orientation Programs

Variable	Mean	SD	Mode	Range
Year program started	1993	12	2003	1935–2006
Length of program	5.6 days	3.2 days	5 days	1–24 days
Number of leaders	24	34	12	1–250
Cost per day	$51	$34	$0	$0–$212
Cost per program	$291	$311	$0	$0–$2,500
Number of participants	108	138	40	4–1,080
Hours of leader training	111	131	48	0–1,000
Funding provided to program from college	$28,042	$44,820	$0	$0–$184,000
Number of programs started per year since 2000	10	5.6	10	2–14

The oldest programs tend to be significantly larger, to have a physician on call, and to offer financial aid to participants (as shown in Table 5). Comparatively, newer programs are more likely to be smaller in the number of overall participants and to lack a relationship with an on-call physician; generally, they do not provide financial aid to participants.

Larger programs offered a different variety of activities. Being larger significantly increased a program's likelihood of backpacking: for example, Pearson χ^2 (3, n = 159) = 9.150, p = .027. Other significant differences included the larger programs doing more bike touring and mountain biking, but being larger decreased the likelihood of canoeing, Pearson χ^2 (3, n = 149) = 10.23, $p < .05$, Cramér's V = .26. Larger programs were also more likely to have a relationship with an on-call physician, Pearson χ^2 (3, n = 147) = 10.50, $p < .05$, Cramér's V = .27. Very large programs (more than 150 students) were more likely to conduct service work as a pre-orientation experience, and large programs in particular (60–149 participants) were more likely to hire a third-party contractor to provide the OOP, Pearson χ^2 (3, n = 147) = 6.82, $p < .1$, Cramér's V = .27.

Discussion

The purpose of this census was to identify and understand the state of outdoor orientation programs at four-year colleges in the United States. This census will serve as a way for current outdoor orientation program directors to understand the size and relative scope of outdoor orientation

Table 3
The Majority Traits of Outdoor Orientation Programs

Program trait	Actual percentage
Accommodates students with special dietary needs	96%
Does not require attendance (it is an optional program)	90%
Enrollment is stable or growing	90% Growing = 49% Stable = 41%
Travel is greater than a mile from a road/trailhead or from access to definitive medical care	89%
Program leaders are students	88%
Program is run by a professional director (part- or full-time)	79%
Requires leaders to have at least basic first-aid training.	79% Wilderness First Aid = 31% Wilderness First Responder = 25%
Does not provide college credit for program participation	79%
Trip leaders carry a cell phone	78%
Program was started by college staff (rather than students)	75%
Participants backpack	75%
Program staff attend 1–3 professional conferences per year	75%
Program collects accident/incident data	75%
Participants stay in tents (rather than tarps, cabins, etc.)	69%
Most common incident is blisters and/or ankle problems	66%
Program maintained a waitlist for participants in 2006	63%
Program uses initiative games with participants	64%
Leaders are unpaid	50%

programming, allowing program representatives to speak in a context beyond an individual or small collection of programs. As reported in the development of the Harvard OOP, the knowledge of what peer institutions are doing helps create openness to similar ideas on other campuses.

Building on the previous studies of OOPs, this study reveals a growth trend in the number of outdoor orientation programs in the United States. This study also provides a baseline for future research in outdoor orientation by quantifying common program behaviors that can help monitor how programs evolve. In addition, knowing of the existence of programs may encourage current programs to network with each other using the information located in Table 1, a need identified since the original Gass (1984) study.

Table 4
Age of Outdoor Orientation Program Compared With Size of Outdoor Orientation Program

	Date when program was established			
Program size	**1989 or prior**	**1990–1999**	**2000 or after**	**Row totals**
Small	5	9	21	35
	11%	17%	42%	24%
Medium	8	15	17	40
	17%	31%	33%	27%
Large	11	17	9	37
	22%	35%	16%	24%
Very large	23	8	4	35
	50%	17%	9%	25%
Column totals	47	49	51	147

Note. $\chi^2(6) = 35.24$, $p < .001$. Nature of relationship: Over time, a higher proportion of OOPs are smaller in size.

Identifying 164 OOPs at four-year colleges and universities, the census found more programs than previous research studies ($n = 102$), indicating a significantly larger number of programs than reported in the past. Two hypotheses explain this increase. It is possible that programs went unidentified in past studies, or alternately, many new programs may have been created since the Davis-Berman and Berman study (1996). The data show that both hypotheses are valid. Some programs remained unidentified by Davis-Berman and Berman ($n = 12$) and many programs have indeed started since 1996 ($n > 88$). This growth of OOPs is significant. Since 2000, OOPs are increasing at an average rate of 10 new programs a year. Additionally, although the enrollments of older programs have typically stabilized, 49% of newer programs report increasing enrollments. The increasing numbers of new OOPs and the increasing enrollments within these newer programs demonstrate that outdoor orientation is growing at four-year colleges in the United States.

The results of this study also show that OOPs occur at all types of institutions (e.g., public/private, large/small), with no significant patterns of concentration other than their prevalence at Ivy League colleges.

Although OOPs share many similarities, some differences related to size, financial aid, and relationships with physicians do exist in the older and more established programs. These differences are likely due to programs refining themselves. As programs mature, it makes sense they would grow in numbers as well as features (such as developing systems to provide financial aid and developing relationships with physicians).

Table 5
Program Age Relative to Offering Participants Financial Aid

Provides financial aid	Date when program was established			Row totals
	1989 or prior	1990–1999	2000 or after	
Yes	31	19	23	73
	72%	38%	39%	48%
No	12	31	36	79
	28%	62%	61%	52%
Column totals	43	50	59	152

Note. $\chi^2(2) = 13.578$, $p < .05$. Nature of relationship: A higher proportion of older programs, established in 1989 or prior, offer participants financial aid.

Similarly, larger programs have some logistical differences—for example, offering more activities such as backpacking, bike touring, mountain biking, and service projects. Having a large program may simply necessitate a logistical need for a greater variety of activity due to limitations in resources. Besides these few differences related to the age or size of the program, outdoor orientation programs share many common features. This study found that the average OOP is optional and run by a professional director and trained student leaders. These student leaders are responsible for small groups (fewer than 15) of first-year students in wilderness settings. The programs generally include activities such as backpacking and initiative games in locations at least a mile from a road or from access to definitive medical care. The average program is five and a half days long and takes place prior to the first day of the semester. They are very similar in program characteristics to the Dartmouth and Outward Bound models, and they are similar to the type of program reported by Davis-Berman and Berman (1996). In effect, the similarities show a remarkable congruency in how outdoor orientation programs are organized and operate within the United States.

In 2006, 17,547 students participated in an outdoor orientation program upon entering a four-year college in the United States. This is more than five times the number of students who participated in the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) within the same year ($N = 2{,}909$), and almost two-thirds as large as the number of students who participated in Outward Bound (OB) wilderness programs in the United States in 2006 (Read, 2007). A notable finding was also that 3,000 college students were trained as outdoor orientation leaders for outdoor orientation programs.

This study points to several potential areas of inquiry. The growth of outdoor orientation programs at four-year colleges is a significant indicator

of the integration of outdoor education into college programs and student services. Just as the Prescott College program in 1968 tied Outward Bound principles into the curricular scheme of a higher education institution, 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 & Williams, 2006). Future research could explore the multiple needs of incoming college students and how the OOPs can be tailored to help meet those needs.

The impact of the outdoor leadership training on college students is unknown, but it does expose a great number of students to such training at a time when they are contemplating future career decisions and are open to the types of temporary employment depended on by many outdoor programs (summer and short-term employment). Although no current research is available to understand the influence outdoor orientation programs have on employment in outdoor education (OE) programs, the number of leaders being trained in Wilderness First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, Leave No Trace camping practices, and small group management in wilderness environments represents a potentially significant contribution to OE programs. Whether these practices transition directly to a job in outdoor education or become a schema for leadership and group management in other professions, outdoor orientation programs have the potential to make broad impacts.

Further, it is interesting to note that the increase in OOPs is occurring at a time when colleges and universities are becoming more risk averse (Dunderstadt, 2006), so the willingness to support peer-led OOPs in wilderness environments (greater than a mile from definitive medical care) runs counter to current trends in higher education. If OOPs are able to provide well-designed systems for managing the risks associated with experiential activities, these systems could help preserve and inform other college programs wishing to use more experiential activities.

As outdoor orientation programs grow in number and size, many of the concerns originally raised by the Davis-Berman and Berman study (1996) still exist. Davis-Berman and Berman concluded that more marketing, planning, and integration with the university needed to occur. Although this census did not specifically look at marketing and integration issues, the surprising difficulty researchers had in finding and contacting programs within institutions was notable. One successful OOP had operated at a college for 18 years but was not recognized by its admissions office, recreation department, or student affairs office, and it was only through contact with the college outing club that this long-running program

was discovered. This was particularly surprising to researchers. This, combined with the finding that a very small percentage of programs have ever participated in an external review (17%), points to the larger concern that programs may be operating in relative isolation both within and external to an institution.

Most importantly, this study begins to identify the size and scope of outdoor orientation programs at four-year colleges and universities in the United States. The current state of OOPs is that the number of programs is growing: 164 at present with a growth rate of 10 new programs per year since 2000. If the present growth rate continues and outdoor orientation becomes more prevalent at colleges and universities, each new program becomes an opportunity for OOPs to demonstrate their value. Assessing the relative value of these programs was not the purpose of this study but should be a concern to OOPs, especially due to the relative isolation—within their own institutions and from other OOPs—that was observed in collecting data for this study. Exactly how programs will improve is not yet known, but advances in quality are unlikely to occur in isolation. Research such as this census is necessary to chart similarities and differences, to define OOPs issues, and to allow programs to identify with a field of practice rather than operate in isolation.

Footnote

[1] This paper uses the terms *outdoor orientation* and *wilderness orientation* interchangeably, and the term *OOPs* preferably. This decision is in response to the growing use of the acronym WOPs to refer to wilderness orientation programs. The term WOPs may be confused with a derogatory remark directed at immigrants in the United States. In 2002, at the first meeting of wilderness orientation program directors (which eventually became the outdoor orientation program symposium), the term *outdoor orientation programs,* or OOPs, was introduced. This paper uses the terms outdoor orientation and OOPs in recognition of those concerns, defining outdoor orientation as a wilderness experience.

References

Bell, B. J. (2006, June). History of the Outdoor Orientation Program Symposium. *The Nor'easter: Newsletter of the Northeast Region of the Association of Experiential Education*, *14*, 2.

Bell, B. J., & Williams, B. G. (2006). Learning from first-year fears: An analysis of the Harvard First-Year Outdoor Program's "Fear in a Hat" exercise. *Journal of College Orientation and Transition 14*(1), 47–60.

College Board. (2005). *College handbook* (42nd ed.). New York: College Board.

College Board. (2006). *College handbook* (43rd ed.). New York: College Board.

Davis-Berman, J., & Berman, D. (1996). Using the wilderness to facilitate adjustment to college: An updated description of wilderness orientation programs. *Journal of Experiential Education, 19*(1), 22–28.

Dunderstadt, J. J. (2006). Working draft of the quality subcommittee of the Secretary of Education's commission of the future of higher education. Retrieved December 12, 2007, from http://milproj.ummu.umich.edu/publications/quality_commission/

Gass, M. A. (1984). *The value of wilderness orientation programs at colleges and universities in the United States.* ERIC database. (ED242471)

Gass, M. A. (1986). *The effects of a wilderness orientation program on incoming students to a university setting* (unpublished dissertation). University of Colorado, Boulder.

Hooke, D. O. (1987). *Reaching that peak: 75 years of the Dartmouth Outing Club*. Canaan, NH: Phoenix.

Miner, J. L., & Boldt, J. R. (1981). *Outward Bound U.S.A.: Learning through experience in adventure-based education* (1st ed.). New York: Morrow.

Neighborhood. (2000). In *The American heritage dictionary of the English language* (4th ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin

O'Keefe, M. (1989). *An assessment of freshmen of wilderness orientation programs in higher education: A descriptive Delphi study* (unpublished dissertation). Boston University, Boston.

Read, J. (2007). Outward Bound today, Outward Bound alumni. Retrieved December 14, 2007, from http://www.outwardboundalumni.org/obtoday.vp.html