

Evaluating the Impacts of Outdoor Orientation Programs at The Ohio State University

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Across higher education institutions, pre-enrollment programs (PEP programs) have been developed to improve the transition experience for incoming students. Of these PEP programs, outdoor orientation programs have been highly successful in increasing student retention, improving sense of belonging, and increasing student GPA. While there has been previous research looking at programs offered for incoming students at The Ohio State University, there has not been a focused project looking at the differences in outcomes between the various types of programs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that outdoor orientation programs have had success at OSU, but only limited evaluation of these programs have occurred. The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of outdoor orientation programs on incoming students through the use of quantitative measures. Additionally, this study will compare student outcomes between the outdoor-adventure based and other types of PEP programs. PEP programs range from ten-day sea kayaking trips in northern Michigan to five-day leadership programs held on campus. This study utilizes a survey completed by the participants of PEP programs (n=150) before and after their experience. The survey was developed and administered through the Center for Higher Education Enterprise (CHEE) Department at OSU. In order to determine if there are differences in student outcomes in the outdoor programs we will analyze the data using a difference of means test. Preliminary findings suggest that perceptions of leadership abilities were positively affected after completing the outdoor based programs ($p = .01$). Suggestions regarding PEP program design will be offered upon further analysis. This study will help to further advance our knowledge of pre-enrollment programs offered at The Ohio State University.