IT WAS TOUGH, BUT IT WAS KIND OF COOL: EXPERIENCE OF A UNIVERSITY WILDERNESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM THROUGH THE PARTICIPANTS' EYES

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ABSTRACT

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WILDERNESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM THROUGH THE PARTICIPANTS'

EYES

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Many universities are now offering new type of freshman orientation. These Wilderness Orientation Programs offer a unique opportunity to help incoming students transition and adjust into the university setting. Thus far the literature has used pre- and post-test comparisons across many outcomes. Post-program scores indicate that participants have benefitted from these programs. This study uses qualitative data to identify most effective features in wilderness orientation program. This program was run at a public regional comprehensive university in a state in the Southeast. Participants were interviewed on their past experience. The primary goal was to identify reoccurring themes in the participants' experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Wilderness Experiential Programs (WEP) offer a unique and life changing experience to participants. Activities, group-living, and the environment present challenges that participants are forced to take on. Along with confronting challenges, participants are given time to reflect on events which provide learning opportunities that can have a profound effect on them. These effects include, but are not limited to, an increase in self-esteem, improved interpersonal communication skills, and increased tolerance towards others.

The literature shows that post-program participants have increased life management skills (i.e. self-esteem, interpersonal skills, time management, etc...) (McKenzie, 2000). The methods typically used to study these programs are pre- and post-test comparisons of measures of learning outcomes. Several theories on how these outcomes are achieved have been derived from these pre post comparison studies. These theories suggest that learning outcomes from participating in a WEP can be attributed to many factors including the physical environment, activities during the program, explicit and implicit processing of the experience, the group structure and interaction, instructors' actions, and the participant's individual attitudes and beliefs.

McKenzie (2000) noted that the models used and employed are theoretically driven. While there are multiple theories, the research typically have a pre-existing bias. This study qualitatively explores participants' experiences during their participation in a wilderness experiential program. This analysis did not rely upon a particular theory and was free of pre-existing bias. This contrasts with the usual theoretically driven pre post

comparisons that have been done. The purpose of this study is to provide a rich description of a wilderness orientation program. In order to identify reoccurring themes in their experiences, participants were asked to think back on their experience and describe how the program affected them during the program and what aspects of the program had a lasting impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Education

Experiential education (EE) is an alternative form of education in which students' subjective experiences are central to learning. In EE students interact directly with the learning environment or content. Then students are asked to reflect on their experiences. According to theories of EE, successful reflection causes the participants to recognize the underlying meaning of the activity. To put this simply, it is "learning by doing and reflecting." The Association of Experiential Education (AEE, n.d.) defines experiential education as the following:

> Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values. Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing meaning (para. 3).

In contrast, traditional didactic education first acquaints students with the learning concepts through reading or indirect exposure to the learning environment or content. Further, didactic education may not require any active engagement. Finally, didactic education is more likely to require recall or repetition rather than reflection.

Didactic and experiential are approaches to education and can be thought of as two different paths to the same goal. Although the approaches are technically different

they can be used in conjunction. This analysis is considering a program that is predominately experiential.

Applications of the EE approach branch out to several areas including psychotherapy, team building, group development, and alternative education curricula. EE is central to wilderness experiential programs (WEP). WEPs are defined as "organizations that conduct outdoor programs in wilderness or comparable lands for purposes of personal growth, therapy, rehabilitation, education or leadership-organizational development" (Friese, Hendee, & Kinziger, 1998). WEP is a style of delivery of EE.

WEPs oriented towards participants' personal growth "aim at improving functional behaviors and training people to behave in new and different ways through adventure" (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 23). Examples of WEPs focused on personal growth would include Outward Bound (About Outward Bound, 2011) and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS, 2011). Another WEP subtype, educational WEP, focuses on "understanding concepts, enriching the knowledge of old concepts, and generating an awareness of previously unknown needs through adventure" (Priest & Gass, 2005, p.23). Some examples of educational WEPs include Colorado Rocky Mountain High (Colorado Rocky Mountain School, 2011) and the New England Literature Program at the University of Michigan (About NELP, 2008).

Leadership-Organizational WEPs, such as Project Adventure, are designed to offer organizations and individuals activities and challenges that promote teamwork and leadership (Project Adventure, 2012). Other Leadership-Organizational WEPs include the Transformational Leadership program and Team Building programs from Create

Learning (Lean Enterprise Institute, 2008) and Organizational Wide Leadership Solutions (OWLS, 2010).

Therapeutic wilderness programs are a type of WEP that specifically deal with assessment, intervention, and treatment of problem behaviors. They utilize various therapeutic models and approaches. Therapeutic wilderness programs most often enroll youth and young adults, there is no reason that older adults cannot participate in such programs (Russell, 2001). Older adults can certainly participate however they do less due to life and career restraints Therapeutic WEPs include SUWS Wilderness programs (SUWS, 2011) and Four Circles Recovery Center (Four Circles, 2011).

These programs immerse the participants in unfamiliar environments which present significant challenges and demand the use of wilderness skills. For examples in a multi-day wilder ness trip participants must learn and use primitive survival skills. The expectation is not just that students will master the skills, but that students will gain values and mature through confronting challenges. Rising to these challenges is seen as the primary intervention fostering personal growth. This is known as the "Hahnian" approach, which was developed by the German educator, Kurt Hahn. It infuses an EE program with a values-based curriculum, meaning the aim of these programs is to develop both physical and cognitive skills and a specific set of character attributes or beliefs (Russell, 2001). How this occurs is described below.

Wilderness orientations programs, a sub-type of personal growth focused WEPs with a specific aim to "facilitate the process of integrating students into the university," are become popular (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996, p. 22). Wilderness orientation programs are "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" (Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010, p. 8). A major goal of wilderness orientation programs is improving retention rates at their universities (Bell et al., 2010; Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996). Bell et al. (2010) noted that students report that the major factors contributing to attrition rates were "peer isolation, isolation from faculty and staff, dissonance between initial expectation and actual circumstance, boredom, and irrelevancy" (p.4). To reduce the negative impact of these factors t, wilderness orientation programs aim at providing incoming first year students with a positive experience, leadership and decision making skills, and fostering an environment for social interactions (Bell et al.,2010; Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996).

Outcomes of Wilderness Experiential Programs

There have been numerous outcome studies of WEPs, however the nature of WEP make direct comparison of these studies difficult. The nature of WEP (i.e. lack of standardization between programs and the absence of standard sampling) makes exact comparisons of these studies replication difficult (Newes, 2001).

Lan, Sveen, and Davidson (2004) replicated a study measuring the affective and cognitive benefits of participating in the Project Hahn WEP. Lan et al. evaluated pre-test, immediate post-test, and follow-up test scores on hopelessness, self-actualization, self-esteem, and existential wellbeing for at risk youth consisting of 79 male and female participants. The pre-test was given on day one, immediate post-test was on day six, and the follow-up test was given 30+ days after the post-test. With the exception of those participants who had scored in the High risk for suicide range, Lan, et al. found a significant decrease in hopelessness scores from the pre-test (M= 6.57) to the immediate

post-test (M= 5.49) and follow-up (M=3.97). Note that the immediate significant

decrease in hopelessness continued to decrease in the weeks after the end of the program.

The effect size of the drop in hopelessness scores increased from .22 in the pre vs.

immediate post analysis to .55 in the pre vs. follow-up analysis (Lan, et al, 2004). Lan et

al. wrote that the continued decrease in hopelessness suggests a "substantial change in

negative beliefs that are linked to feelings of hopelessness." A quarter of the participants

had hopelessness scores, in their pre-test, that were in the range that suggested they were

at high risk for suicide. The participants who had high risk scores tended to remained

stable in their immediate post-test. However, by the follow-up test half of the

participants showed a significant decrease in hopelessness scores into safer levels. Lan,

et al. conclude participating in Project Hahn will likely lead to decreased hopelessness for

at risk adolescents.

Self-actualization scores also increased from a pre-test average of 41.21, to a post-

test average of 42.05, to a follow-up average of 44.16 (Lan, et al, 2004). The effect size

for the increase was .08 in the pre-test versus immediate post-test, and increased to .49 in

the pre-test versus follow-up analysis. This indicates that participants felt that they were

realizing their potential or self-actualizing (Heylighen, 1992). Self-actualizing persons

are eager to learn and experience new things. They are better at coping with constraints

and shortcomings they cannot change, and are able to make a distinction between what's

good and bad. Heylighen remarks that "they will focus on a problem or task outside

themselves, rather than question their own motives."

Finally, Lan et al. (2004) evaluated the criminal conviction recidivism rates of

participants following the wilderness program. Only 22 of 64 participants had second

convictions post program. Recidivism rates this is in contrast to recidivism rate of 48% ranging from 22-75% in adolescents (Cottle, Lee, Heilbrun, 2001)

West and Crompton (2001) found similar results in their review of WEPs for at-risk youth. West and Crompton did a meta-analysis on 21 programs looking at recidivism and 16 programs looking at self-concept. There are multiple definitions of recidivism (i.e. arrests versus institutionalization). Only one of these 21 studies reported a recidivism rate in participants higher than a similar group of individuals that did not participate in a WEP. Of the sixteen studies that considered self-concept fourteen found significant positive changes in self- concept. For example West and Crompton report that Wright tested Outward Bound participants using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and found a significant increase in self-concept within the participants and a significant difference between the participants and a similar group that did not participate in Outward Bound. They also report Boudette looked at outward bound participants and found that Global Self Esteem and justness inventory scores were significantly higher among participants compared to nonparticipant control group. Consistent with West and Crompton, Herbert (1998) also found a significant increase in Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories scores to pre-test (M=39.74) to post-test (M=51.00). Further analysis also revealed a significant decrease in Internal-External Locus of Control Scale l for the WEP participants from pre-program (M=12.30) to post-program (M= 10.40). A demographically similar control group of non-participants did not show a change in external locust of control

These data clearly suggest that WEP effects, as measured by any of several well-known psychological scales, are positive. However, there is less research examining

whether these changes affect actual behavior and adjustment in the "real world" (Gass, Garvey, & Sugerman, 2003; Lan, et al, 2004). Holman and McAvoy (2005) interviewed 29 participants of a WEP who reported that they were able to transfer what they learned in their program experiences to their work, family lives and other activities. They indicated that the program helped them learn how to develop warm relationships. They felt increased self-awareness and understanding of themselves. They learned new skills and saw new opportunity in life and work to achieve personal goals. Participants' attributed their higher levels of motivation, increased self-confidence in their abilities, better understanding of people with differences, and an increase in respect and trust for others to their wilderness trip experience. Finally, it is no surprise that a wilderness experience also increased their awareness and appreciation for nature and caused them to develop and improve their outdoor skills.

Wolfe and Kay's (2007) analyzed qualitative data gathered from field notebooks of first-year university freshmen in wilderness orientation program. Themes in the participants' writings included increase knowledge about self, learning about the transition to university life, developing a positive attitude towards the university, and the development of positive relationships during the WEP. According to a study by Frauman and Waryold (2009), freshmen who participated in a wilderness orientation program scored higher on measures of time management, social competence, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative, and overall life effectiveness at the end of their first semester than those first year students who did not participate in a wilderness orientation program.

The literature suggests that wilderness orientation programs provide their participants with a positive foundation to transition smoothly into university life. Gass (1987) and Gass, Garvey, and Sugerman (2003), show that wilderness orientation programs have impact that are both immediate and long lasting. Gass (1987) and Gass, Garvey, and Sugerman (2003) compared the effects of "the Summer Fireside Experience Program" (SFEP), a five-day wilderness orientation program for first-year university students, at one year and 17 years post program. The one year follow-up study showed that first-year university students who completed the WEP were more likely to stay in school and have a higher grade point average than first year university students who completed a non-wilderness orientation program or did not attend any type of orientation program. Also the WEP group scored higher in psychosocial areas of autonomy, interpersonal relationships, interdependence, appropriate relationships with the opposite sex, and tolerance. The seventeen-year follow-up study interviewed 16 of the 32 participants about their experience in and how it affected them (Gass et al., 2003). Three major themes were extracted from the participants' recollections of what they gained from their WEP experience: learned to challenge assumptions about self and others, learned to use peer friendships as a support network, and gained long-term positive effects of the orientation program during their undergraduate education as well as after graduation. Participants consistently described a positive program influence in their careers, personal life direction, development of personal values and skills, and development of life-long friendships.

What Contributes to These Outcomes

Walsh and Golins (1976) described the wilderness experiential learning process as when a specific series of conditions, events, and objects act together to produce the desired outcomes. The theoretical model described by Walsh and Golins (1976) is:

[1] the learner is placed into [2] a unique physical environment and into [3] a unique social environment then given a [4] characteristic set of problem solving tasks (creating a) [5] state of cognitive dissonance to which he/she adapts by [6] mastery which [7] reorganizes the meaning and direction of learner's experience (p. 2)

In other words, the reorganization of experience, which represents learning in a WEP, can be attributed to an interaction of variables in the learner, the physical and social environment, the activities, and processing of the experiences. Walsh and Golins theorize that none of these variables alone would produce the same outcome.

Priest and Gass (2005) emphasize factors in the learner with particular emphasis on the importance of motivation and capability. The capability to perform tasks, to think about and reflect on the experience, and to deal with stress that may arise are important if a WEP is to succeed. Without these capabilities the learner will be unable to complete the problem solving tasks and the learner will become discouraged. A discouraged learner is less motivated and the lack of motivation may compromise the reorganization or learning. .

Walsh and Golins (1976) also address the learner's motivation. They define motivation as "thinking, feeling, and behaving as if there is something to be gained from participating" (p. 3). The learner must be open and motivated to learning to be able to successfully adapt to the new environment and tasks.

The physical environment is another key factor in this model. Two different characteristics of the physical environment have been noted by several theorists as influential on the learning process (Walsh & Golins, 1976; Priest & Gass, 2005; McKenzie, 2000; Beames, 2004). The first characteristic is the unfamiliarity of the environment. Walsh and Golins (1976) suggest that participants contrast the new environment to their familiar environments which results in the development of new perspectives. Within the new perspective participants notice overlooked behavior patterns that shed new light on old behaviors (Priest & Gass, 2005). In new environments participants feel that they can "try on" new behaviors without feeling the restriction from fears embedded in their familiar environments.

Walsh and Golins (1976) suggest that the rules of the wilderness are natural consequences. Thus, individuals must take more personal responsibility and be more self-aware to avoid the negative consequences of poor decisions. McKenzie (2003) used questionnaires and interviews with outward bound participants to evaluate the influence of environment. McKenzie concludes that characteristics of the physical environment were one of the five most important aspects of the program. The social environment of WEPs is yet another important factor. In a WEP the social environment is typically a small community of people who work together. These shared tasks provide opportunities for interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. Walsh and Golins (1976) recommend the group size be approximately 10 people. They theorize this group size is large enough to be diverse and have conflict, yet small enough so cliques are less likely to form and resolutions of conflict can be achieved. Both theoretical models (i.e. Walsh & Golins, 1976) and a review of the literature (i.e. McKenzie, 200) suggest that reciprocity between

members, individuals' autonomy within the group, and relationships within the group are key features of the group that influence participants' learning outcomes.

The instructors or leaders of a WEP are also key factors and participants' outcomes are dependent on the instructors' behaviors (McKenzie, 2003). An effective instructor often facilitates the interaction with the physical environment. Initially instructors take the lead in navigating the physical environment. Instructors teach participants how to perform the skills that are essential in the physical environment, e.g. fire building, shelter construction. Finally, within the social environment instructors often work to facilitate the reorganization of thinking at the core of affective growth in the participants (Walsh & Golins, 1976). To fill this role in the social environment instructors need certain key qualities. On the basis of their model, Walsh and Golins argue that instructors must be "empathetic, genuine, concrete, and confrontive when necessary" (p.11).

Priest and Gass (2005) offer a different way of defining the several roles that an instructor may fill in a WEP. The instructor may be a(n)

- Translator- helping the learner interpret and reflect on the experience

- Initiator-engineering the experiences

- Trainer-teaching skills and condition learners for the difficulties ahead

- Maintainer-keeping energy and motivation level high

- Authority-holding influence within the group

- Guardian- being responsible for group safety

- Exemplar- modeling behavior patterns expected of the group (pg.23)

The next factor to consider in WEPS is the set of activities, more specifically the challenging, problem-solving tasks, participants must complete. These tasks range from physical activities, such as rock climbing and hiking, to processing activities such as group discussions (McKenzie, 2000; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Walsh and Golins (1976) explain the importance of organizing the activities and tasks in a way that stirs the participants' curiosity, encourages initiative, and establishes desire and purpose. They go on to explain that is beneficial to incrementally increase the difficulty of the challenge in the activities and tasks which the participants must complete. These authors also describe making challenges concrete and manageable as well as time and space limited. The participants must have the ability to solve the task in order for learning to occur. When participants succeed at a task the subsequent reorganization is more likely to produce learning. The activities and tasks (i.e. setting up camp or navigating with only a map and compass) must be structured so that there are natural consequences for the activities and tasks. It is not enough to present the participants with "vicarious ramifications" or artificial consequences (Priest & Gass, 2005; Walsh & Golins, 1976). For example, a participant is more motivated to learn how to function in the rain if the consequence for not functioning well is feeling wet and cold as opposed to facing a "time out." Finally, Walsh and Golins (1976) stress the holistic quality of task and challenges. In other words, the challenges should be so difficult that the participants have to use their full range of personal cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor resources in order to complete the tasks. Participants are more likely to retain the lessons learned from successfully completing the activity or task if the challenge is extremely difficult (Priest & Gass, 2005). The difficulty level should be set so that the participants question whether they

will be able to accomplish the task or activity. However, the difficulty should not so exceed their abilities that they are unable to believe they can succeed.

The final factor in this model is the processing in WEP during which someone reorganizes the important information to extract and internalize (McKenzie, 2000). In other words, processing is the vehicle that transfers outside experiences into internal learning outcomes. It has been theorized that succeeding at a task that is sufficiently difficult would push the participant into a state of cognitive dissonance (Priest & Gass, 2005; Walsh & Golins, 1976). For example a student who held a belief that he's unable to hike more than five feet but then successfully hiked to the peak of a mountain would experience dissonance since his belief does not match his experience. To resolve the dissonance arising from actions already completed the participants have to change their beliefs about their ability. Reflecting upon their success and the effectiveness of their behavior, participants must adapt a new more positive view of their abilities. Three models have been developed for facilitating this processing: "Mountains Speak for Themselves", Outward Bound Plus, and the Metaphoric Model.

Models for Processing the WEP Experience

The "Mountains Speak for Themselves" model was the first generation of facilitation. This model suggests that the experience is profound enough to cause reorganization to occur (McKenzie, 2000). The emphasis is on the experience alone. This model assumes that nature is the teacher; inherent qualities of the outdoors and activities in the outdoors produce the learning outcomes, instructor facilitation is not necessary (Priest & Gass, 2005). The Outward Bound Plus model also focuses largely on the experience; however, it incorporates self-reflection, discussion, and group processing

(McKenzie, 2000). The instructors play an integral role as counselors, facilitators, and discussion leaders to the participants. Instructors' tasks include at least three important components. First, they frontloading the experience by preparing the participants for what is about to happen. Second instructors interpret the experience with the participants and highlight or emphasize important elements of what happened or what the participants did. Finally, instructors debrief the experience and guide the participants in assigning meaning to the activity and outcome. The model assumes that reflecting and discussing the experience functions to create learning outcomes. The model assumes that reflecting and discussing the experience helps reorganize the learners thinking and produce learning.

In the Metaphoric Model, instructors try to consciously frame the experience to relate metaphorically to challenges in the participants' daily life (Priest & Gass, 2005). It assumes that if the participant views an activity as isomorphic to a challenge in their daily life, they will be able to transfer what they learned from the activity to related situations. The structural similarity between the wilderness challenge and the life challenge is captured in an isomorphic activity and this increase the transfer of learning. In other words, the generalization from an outdoor activity to another personal challenge is responsible for learning outcomes.

Research Objective

Thus far the literature has shown that post-WEP participants have increased life management skills (i.e. self-esteem, interpersonal skills, time management, etc…). The methods typically used to study these programs are theoretically driven quantitative pre- and post-test comparisons of measures of life skills and learning outcomes. McKenzie

(2000) noted that the models that have been developed to explain these outcomes may bias the researchers' perspective or limit their questions. In other words, "I only see what I look for and I only look for what I expect to see."

Since qualitative data are driven by the participant's experience, it may provide a different perspective on the WEP outcomes. It may even identify unanticipated outcomes (Orcher, 2005). Thus the objective of this research is to explore the participants' experiences when they participated in a WEP. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to identify common themes within these experiences that are important in the program.

METHOD

This chapter provides a description of this study's data collection and data analysis procedures. This includes a discussion of the research participants, a description of the WEP used in this study, an overview of the interview protocol, a report of procedures used to protect and identify participants, and a description of data analyses procedures.

Participant and Program Description

To ensure the confidentiality and/or the anonymity of the participants and avoid creating discomfort for members or staff at the university, the WEP mentioned in this report will be referred to as CAMP. CAMP is a wilderness orientation program at a public regional comprehensive university in a state in the Southeast. The program is marketed "to offer a unique outdoor adventure specifically for incoming freshmen" and "is designed to help high school graduates transition to college life" (First Ascent Program, 2012). The program aims to provide incoming students with an opportunity to make new friends, experience and overcome unique challenges, and explore the mountains around the university prior to starting their first semester. The program offers a five day backpacking/rock-climbing expeditions in July and August. Each expedition has a co-ed group which consists of at least six, but no more than 12, incoming first year students and two instructors. Refer to Table 1 located on page 63 for an example of a typical CAMP itinerary.

The participants in this study consisted of four male and four female former CAMP students, with current ages ranging from 19-25. Seven participants identified

themselves as Caucasian and one identified as multiracial. All participants graduated

from a high school in a state in the Southeast. Four participated in CAMP during the

summer of 2010, three in 2008, and one in 2009. There was a varying range of prior

outdoor experience amongst the participants; ranging to "never having been camping" to

"completed an outdoor survival course."

Materials

The materials used for this study included a digital audio recorder for use in audio

recording the interviews with the participants, a paper consent form, and a laptop

computer to transcribe and analyze the data after the interview process was completed.

Procedure

I recruited participants via email to participate in this study. All the students who

had participated in CAMP dating back to the summer of 2008 received an email (n=92).

Eight participants who agreed to participate in this study were available to be

interviewed. All eight of the students who responded were interviewed to provide broad

descriptions of the participants experiences (Orcher, 2005). The full list of participants

included students who have transferred to another school, dropped out, were studying

abroad at the time of the study, or who have already graduated. Those individuals may

have had a perspective during and about CAMP that was different from the eight

participants but their views will not be represented in this report.

On the day of the scheduled interview, each participant signed an informed

consent form, which had been approved by the university's institutional research review

board. The form indicated (1) the study concerns CAMP students' experiences during

their participation in the WEP, (2) the study will be a digitally recorded interview

inquiring about their experience of the program, (3) they are not required to participate,

(4) if they participate, they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This form can be found in Appendix A.

Each participant participated in one semi-structured interview that took place in a

small private conference rooms on campus between the hours of 6-8 p.m. on a weekday

during May 2012. The interviews were conducted between those hours to avoid

distraction from the noise of passersby. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted

between 30 and 45 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews have a set of predetermined, open-ended, core

questions. However, the interviewer has the freedom and is expected to probe as the

opportunity arises to gather additional information (Orcher, 2005; Berg, 1995).

Interviews with the participants began with the following demographic questions

- Age

- Ethnicity

- SAT Score

- High school GPA

- Town where you graduated from high school

- Current Major at the university

- Year you participated in CAMP

- Describe your previous experiences with outdoor activity prior to CAMP

After I gathered the demographic information, I asked the following core

questions:

- Describe a time you experienced success while on your trip.

- Think about a time during the program that you found especially challenging. Tell me about it.

- What brought you to CAMP and what did you hope to gain?

- Tell me about an event you found especially difficult.

- Tell me about your relationships now with the other students that were with you on the trip.

- How do you think you have changed as a result from participating in CAMP?

I used probes following the initial responses to each question addressed to the participants as needed. Berg (1995) explains that probes "provide the interviewer with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects" (p. 67). Examples of probes included: "Tell me about the things that distracted you and helped you move on," and, "How did you overcome the challenge?"

After each interview was completed the audio recording of it was transferred to the computer and permanently deleted from the digital recorder. Then all recording were transcribed. The transcripts and recordings were assigned a numeric code in lieu of identifying information. In this report I refer to the participants by pseudonyms and avoid all other identifying information.

Analysis

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data according to the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). I chose this analytic approach because it is straightforward and flexible way of analyzing qualitative data. In other words, the analysis requires one to find repeated patterns of meaning within a data set and can be used on several different methodological and theoretical approaches. The participants' responses were assumed to be an authentic reflection of their subjective experience. Therefore, an inductive

approach was used to identify themes. In other words, identified themes were closely related to the surface meaning of what the participants said. Themes emerged from semantic consistency in the participants' statements. In other words, I coded and identified themes based on the surface meaning and not beyond what the participant has stated. Themes were not driven by preexisting hypotheses or theoretical interests of the research. I ensured my preexisting ideas did not bias these themes by participating in a bracketing interview. My interview included a series of questions about my beliefs and experiences with WEPs. In this interview I acknowledged that I believe WEP programs transform participants' lives. I also indicated I believe that instructors are an important part of a WEP experience. Having acknowledged my beliefs I was better prepared to avoid bias while collecting and analyzing the data.

The following phases were used to analyze the data. It should be noted that these steps are not rigid and the process through the steps is recursive. In other words, I moved back and forth from phases as needed throughout the process. This helped enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability by providing me an opportunity to return to the text after I developed a theme to see if any there were any data I missed that would support the theme.

Phase 1. After I transferred the audio files from the recorders to a laptop computer, I transcribed the data from audio form into written text. As I transcribed the data, I began familiarizing myself with the data and noted some initial ideas for coding. Braun and Clarke (2006) note the importance of reading the data once before one starts analyzing so one can be familiar with the depth and breadth of the content.

Phase 2. After transcribing the data I generated and assigned initial codes to the participants' statements. Braun and Clarke (2006) define codes as labels "identify[ing] a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst and refer to 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (as cited in Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63)" (p. 88). For example, a participant stated, "…it was extremely challenging, it was hot, and there was one girl in the group that kept everyone's motivation up…." This was coded as "environmental challenge" and "group support."

I used Microsoft Excel to aid me in the coding process; specifically to help me organize my codes between and within participants. I entered each line of transcript into one cell on the excel sheet. Additional columns were created for codes. When I saw something to code, I highlighted the phrase and put a one in its corresponding column. After going through each interview once, I combed through each transcript again adding text to support preexisting codes and to ensure the data were sufficiently coded, I collated all the data extracts together into their respective codes.

Phase 3. After I coded the data, I searched for themes. The steps in this phase were similar to phase two, but at a broader level. The first step I analyzed the list of codes created in the previous stage and combined and assigned different higher order codes to form overarching themes. For example I grouped together data coded "making friends", "accustom to the area", and "independence" because the content within those codes shared a common motif of transitioning to the university. Again relevant data extracts were collated into their corresponding themes.

Phase 4. During phase four I reviewed and refined the generated themes. As a first step I reviewed themes for internal homogeneity; that is, I checked the themes to be sure they were composed of data extracts that are similar in nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). That entailed examining the data extracts within the theme to ensure they formed a coherent pattern. When a theme included data extracts that were too diverse, I broke it into separate themes. For example a theme of challenge may have included references to challenge from the environment and challenge from the group. These are different enough that ultimately two themes emerged, "Person versus Nature" and "Person versus Team."

In the final step of phase 4 I analyzed the themes for external heterogeneity (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words, I ensured that the themes were distinctive from one another. Themes that were too similar were collapsed. For example I collapsed the themes "Mental Challenge" and "Emotional Challenge" into "Person versus Self." Once I defined the themes, I reread the entire data set in order to make sure the themes accurately reflected their meaning.

Phase 5. The main task of phase five is to define and name the themes. The first step is to write a detailed analysis of each theme that identifies the essence of the theme itself and the essence of the theme in relation to the other themes. The next step is to create a definition for each theme that encompasses what they are and are not. The final step of this phase is to create a concise, illustrative title for each theme.

Phase 6. The main task of the final phase was to produce the report. This phase involved writing a "complicated story of [the] data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of [the] analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

RESULTS

This Results section includes a report of the results from the participants who were interviewed. This report includes excerpts and quotations from the interviews as well as common themes that emerged within each interview and across interviews. The participants' perspectives are reported within four themes that were common among the participants. Each thematic category consists of various sub-themes that emerged. The sub-themes capture significant elements of the participants' experiences that were not seen across all participants.

CAMP Participant Perspectives

All past CAMP participants were contacted via email to participate in this study. The views of the eight participants who responded and consented to partake in this study are presented individually in the four following thematic categories:

- Survival Challenges,

- Surviving Challenges,

- Positive Outcomes

- Transitioning to University Living.

These four thematic categories were derived from overarching themes that emerged from the eight participants' responses to the six prompts. It should be noted that no clear theme emerged from the participants' accounts that differentiated between experiencing a time that was challenging and an event that was difficult, hence it was collapsed into one category. The four themes were chosen because each is clearly demonstrated in all of the transcripts as an overarching, universal theme.

Participants are referred to by a pseudonym that will be typical of their genders, which were selected from the first names listed by an online random name generator. A complete transcript of an interview with a participant is provided at the end of the report in Appendix C. This transcript was chosen because it is profuse with rich, insightful text. Provided below are brief descriptions of each of the eight participants in the order in which they were interviewed.

- Donna: A 20-year-old Caucasian female who participated in CAMP two years prior, in 2010. She reports having prior experience in outdoor activities (i.e. kayaking and rock climbing, and hiking); however, she had never been on a backpacking trip for that long.

- Arthur: A 19-year-old Caucasian male who participated in CAMP two years prior, in 2010. He reports having minimal outdoor experience prior and participating in CAMP was the first time he ever got into backpacking.

- Andrea: A 22-year-old Caucasian female who participated in CAMP four years prior, in 2008. She reports enjoying being outdoors but not having any outdoors experience prior to CAMP, other than some camping trips with Girls Scouts when she was younger. It should be noted that although she reports with Girl Scouts, she "wouldn't consider that camping."

- Michelle: A 20-year-old Caucasian female who participated in CAMP two years prior, in 2010. She reports having some prior outdoor experience (i.e. day hiking trips), but had never done any "surviving and camping really."

- Kimberly: A 20-year-old Caucasian female who participated in CAMP two years prior, in 2010. She reports being "very outdoorsy" prior to participating in CAMP. She indicates that when she was younger her family went camping almost every weekend and she currently enjoys white water rafting and meeting her friend in Colorado to go bouldering, rock climbing, etc...

- Ronald: A 22-year-old Caucasian male who participated in CAMP three years prior, in 2009. He reports having "participated in many outdoor activities" prior to CAMP. He indicates he had previously completed a NOLS course in the peninsula of Washington his sophomore year in high school, various other camps, and several hiking trips on the Appalachia.

- Ernest: A 25-year-old Multiracial male who participated in CAMP four years prior, in 2008. He reports having minimal to no outdoor experience prior to CAMP. He indicates going on some precious missionary trips that required him to travel throughout the states and be "exposed to different outdoors stuff", but he "wasn't in Boy Scouts or anything like that."

- Alan: A 22-year-old Caucasian male who participated in CAMP four years prior, in 2008. He reports not having any real outdoor experience prior to CAMP.

Survival Challenges. Three themes emerged from the eight participants' accounts of a time or event that was difficult or challenging. These themes include the following:

- Person versus person/team (interpersonal challenge)

- Person versus nature (environmental challenge)

- Person versus self (intrapersonal challenge)

It became apparent that the events or aspects of the program the participants' found particularly challenging or difficult typically involved an interaction between two or all three of the challenges. However, since no apparent pattern of combination emerged as an overarching theme, I decided to keep the challenges broken down into the aforementioned themes.

Person versus Person/Team. All of the participants, with the exception of Arthur, described interpersonal challenges amongst their group members. When asked to describe a point in the program that was especially difficult, Michelle answered, "Teamwork was really hard…. Uhh, clashing personalities. It wasn't that we were clashing. We all really got along but it was…it was the fact that we were all stuck together for a week and we all had to share." Kimberly noted, "I don't pick the people to be in the program, so. But I mean that was a little challenging and sometimes, you know, just like different personalities coming out and different strong suits and stuff like that." Alan also reported, "There are certain people that definitely poked at your negatives."

Many of the narratives pointed toward group decisions as being the root of discord among group members. Donna commented:

There were a lot of kind of hard decisions and people got kind of irritable at times. I just remember one night we hiked 9 or 10 miles that day and everyone was really tired and um we couldn't figure out which campsite we wanted to camp at because there was one that was closer but the other one was closer to water. Everyone was just kind of tired and instead of listening to what people

actually had to say, it would be like "I just want to stay here", "I don't really want to move", or "we should move and not stay here."

In particular, the map and compass challenge, where the members of the group had to navigate themselves to their next campsite without help from the instructors and using only a map and compass, appeared in several of the participants' accounts as a significant event where group decisions evoked discord amongst group members. Earnest recollected:

> There was this waterfall, we were trying to go to and people were just like walking to. And I was just like, "Y'all, we can't just walk and hope we get there," you know, "we need to look at the map." So a lot of times, we would fight. We would be like, "We need to figure out exactly where we are." And some people were, like…wanted to just walk and hope we would just come across it. I was like, "we need to know exactly where we are at," you know, and "we need to keep checking cause like on the map we should be here, but I don't see no mountain to our left" or whatever.

Michelle recounted:

> It was that day when Dave and Alex wouldn't help us with the map. They were like you are all on your own for navigating. And we were sitting on the road and we are looking at the trail on the map. And there's a railroad that we had to cross and this kid…he was like, "we are not going the right way." And I was like, "Yes we are. I am the leader of the day. Yes we are." And he was like, "No we're not." And I was like, "I am pretty sure…"

Other interpersonal challenges described centered on general group living issues. Ronald shared, "There were definitely heavier set people in the group, slower. And, you know, we had to wait, take a lot of breaks and, you know, I want to keep going. When I start, I don't want to stop." Andrea disclosed, "One time, like I don't want to go into too much detail, but they brought up politics and I ended up walking off."

Person versus Nature. Themes of environmental challenges also emerged from the participants' narratives. A reoccurring theme that emerged from several of the participants' accounts was regarded navigating through the wilderness with no help from the instructors and using only a map and compass. Kimberly stated, "They got us lost on purpose. And then, you know, then everyone had to look at their maps and stuff and their compasses." Donna stated:

 This one time I remember we were trying to keep on a trail but we really didn't

 know if we were on the right trail or not. He had taught us how to use the map

 and the compass in trying to figure out things and no one knew where we were

 going and he would not tell us. It was kind of irritating at the time, because we

 really didn't want to walk five miles in the wrong direction.

Ronald explained:

 Dismal Falls is so far out in the map you have to plan to go there and if you don't

 get there, you have to go all the way back to main stream Panther Town to find

 camping. And so that's why it was frustrating to the whole group, because we

 walked all the way there and can't find it and have to walk all the way back

 Themes of being confronted with nature's obstacles with only the bare necessities appeared in several of the participants' accounts. Arthur recalled:

Well, we really didn't have a trail at one point, cause it was I think we just started backpacking after a storm I believe and the trail was just all messed up and you couldn't see where it went. You could only see where it started and we pretty much had to bushwhack our way for two days up on top of the mountain.

Andrea described, "There was like a lot of small challenges… sleeping outside was definitely a different experience." She also noted in particular, "Bugs. That's one part of nature I'm not too fond of. I got so many mosquito bites; I bet you could have created a picture if you wanted to by connecting them all. Like you're just like 'it hurts.'" Earnest recalled:

I don't know if it was by choice or because we had to, cause we were delayed or something. … It was like pitch dark. We could not see anything. And then, um, like making your tent in the middle of the night, I think we might have even cooked that night, like dinner or something.

Alan expressed:

Well, it rained for two days, so staying dry. Like I woke up, and we had put our tent in a puddle and we didn't realize it. So we wake up and our socks and sleeping bag were completely wet. Really don't have a way of drying it, so you just have to deal with it. It was just frustrating to have to walk around in wet socks for a day…the next night you go to bed you like expect to get into this warm sleeping bag and it was wet and cold and it was just annoying.

Michelle disclosed:

> The last climb up the mountain was so hard for me.… And then I'm also
> a person that like doesn't do like extremely well in the sun, like I just
> really get hot and stuff and so just like climbing straight up…

Person versus Self. Themes of mental obstacles emerged from the participants' accounts. Some participants described a time where they did not think they had the capability within them to overcome a particular struggle. Donna disclosed:

> I think it was probably after we had climbed you know the really big hill and I
> was really tired and I was at the point where I was really over it and I really didn't
> like want to talk. I kind of wanted to sit there and not talk to anybody and not do
> anything and not move and just drink water and eat. And that was kind of the
> point where I had to decide like I was either going to adapt a better outlook of it…

Andrea explained, "The lack of sleep was the hardest physical thing to deal with, because I just don't do well with no sleep… We woke up kind of early and the mornings were kind of miserable…" She also noted, "Whenever you do something that you never thought you would of be doing…it shows how much you're capable..." In response to a time she found particularly challenging, Michelle expressed, "The rock climbing day. I never rock climbed before..." Kimberly recalled:

> The last climb up the mountain was so hard for me like I was just so tired. And
> like not getting that many calories a day…. So it was just like stressful and
> challenging and I was like is this ever going to be over

Earnest expressed:

> Um, we did some rock climbing. I was actually able to get to the top…. I've
>
> never done outdoor climbing, just like a wall in a gym or whatever. So this was
>
> the first time outdoors. It was more challenging...

A theme of boredom emerged from Allan's account:

> The monotony of it. It was boring at times cause you just walked and walked and
>
> walked…. just wandering through the wilderness on these paths where you can't
>
> really have these landmarks. There are just trees.

Fear also emerged from several of the participants narratives. Donna disclosed,
"The day we went rock climbing … like there was obviously a lot of fear there." Andrea
stated, "Like sometimes at night, like it was kind of scary." Michelle noted, "I'm really
afraid of heights." Kimberly recalled, "One of the girls was really afraid of heights and
she was also kind of shy….

Surviving Challenges. Surviving challenges is an overarching theme that refers
to ways in which participants overcame and/or were supported through challenges.
These themes include the following:

- Adapting

- Humor

- Unity

- Instructors

- Technological Buffers

Adapting. A theme of adapting, physically and/or emotionally/mentally, emerged
from the text. Michele stated, "So it kinda just taught me to calm down." Donna

claimed, "But in the end, it really did help us, because we had to learn it from first-hand experience instead of him, you know, doing it for us." Kimberly explained:

> Everyone's like, "I think it's this way," you know." And then someone's like, "I definitely think it's this way." Well, we kind of like, you know, go to the guides and ask them, "Ok, this is what we think. What would you suggest pending your expertise" or whatever. And you know, we generally find common ground, or we help the other one see, you know, if there was an error or, you know, like maybe you're looking at it wrong. Because, you know, reading the contour lines aren't supper easy, so maybe you're reading it wrong. And someone can point it out to you or they're reading it right and they'll help you see it, or help you see a structure you didn't see at first that could be something. So just kind of working it out.

Several participants framed their learning experience as having to make a choice considering the consequences. For example, Alan's rationale, "If you want to hate each other, then, yeah, then you won't have a fun trip, but if you want to have a fun trip, then you have to learn how to be friends with a lot of other people." Earnest stated, "…what can I do to make the situation better instead of just like complaining about it." Donna expressed:

> We really had to learn to communicate instead of just yelling at each other and just ignoring each other and just kind of doing our own thing. Because if we did that if we just ignored each other, it wasn't going to work out at all.

Donna also recounted:

> That was kind of the point where I had to decide like I was either going to adapt a
> better outlook of it, like I was really going to gain something or just be a lump on
> a log and not do anything, not want to participate and, like that was the point
> where I kind of gained a lot of value in it and figured that I really wanted to do it
> and I really put my all into it.

In some cases, participants reported overcoming challenges by just moving on or
dealing with the conflict. Andrea's expressed, "They might be annoyed with something;
then they said there thing and then moved on." Michelle noted, "By the end of that
day… uh the next day, was fine. We got over it. Yeah, you can't stay mad at each other
in the wilderness." Kimberly expressed, "So I think everyone did a good job of making
everyone else feel welcomed even if they are getting on each other's nerves."

Humor. Themes of humor emerged from a couple participants as a means to deal
with conflict. Ronald reported "Cracked jokes with buddies I made. I mean not about
them but you know just talked to pass time," in response to handling his out-of –shape
group members. Michelle stated, "But it's so hard to be mad at each when there are
guides in the back singing stupid songs about stupid plants and they would cut open and
it would bleed." Alan stated, "You kind of bring it back to reality by just joking around,"
in response to dealing with monotony.

Unity. Team unity emerged as a theme that supported the participants during the
challenges. The participants' accounts indicated there was a sense of "all for one and one
for all" amongst their team members which fostered a supportive and accommodating
atmosphere to overcome obstacles. Ronald said, "Yeah, we all got along really well. And

helped each other where we needed it." Donna expressed, "It kind of helped to know that you were not the only one or that you're struggling during the day and that there are other people with you that were also struggling." Also Donna explained, "I think the biggest factor in it was being able to communicate openly with everyone. It was kind of like a friendly atmosphere." Kimberly expressed, "Well, there is this one guy and nobody liked him. But you know you don't want to like make him feel isolated like when you're out in the middle of nowhere." Earnest stated, "We had to make sure we were all together, you know, like verbal communication, you know, like the front to the back, to make sure no one got lost because it was like pitch dark." Kimberly stated, "Everyone was kind of helping her like 'Oh, you can do it!' and looking for holds and stuff like that." The following are excerpts from the participants that have themes of taking leadership for the greater good of the group. Arthur recalled:

> I literally had to go up first and like help people up I had to pull their arms up, because it was like really, really steep, especially the women in the group and the instructors would tell us what we needed to do. We tied ropes down to help us get up It was a lot of fun It was interesting

> Ronald emphasized, "I knew more than the other kids did…They would ask me questions when the instructors were not around, you know, and that kind of stuff." Michelle explained, "I'm really enthusiastic…. And I was like, 'We got to keep going!' 'Let's keep going guys!' 'Don't stop!' Kimberley gave her thoughts, "But you know just make conversation and give him my input and make him like part of the group." Earnest asserted:

So it was like, you know, it was kind of for me, like, "I'll help out. Give me your

bag and I'll help carry some stuff or whatever." Or things like that. So it kind of

more like you know like what's the right thing to do or what can I do to make the

situation better instead of just like complaining about it or whatever so.

Themes of team unity also emerged as a means of providing support in a less

explicit manner. In a manner of speaking, peer pressure was a source of support and

motivation. Kimberly stated, "But they made me be in the front so if I didn't go,

everyone had to stop. So I didn't want to hold everyone up just because I was having

issues." Earnest stated:

I got new boots for the trip, so like they were really wearing on my feet, hurting

my soles and so like the last two days I had a limp and it was like a pain in the ass

or whatever. I was able to deal with it because I did not want to hold up people

while hiking

Michelle disclosed:

….like I didn't wanna go a few feet up and then be like "I'm too scared," to go

back down. Everyone else was doing it and I kinda just had to put on a brave face

and, you know, I didn't want to look like a fool.

A few participants noted the importance of a unified goal for team unity to exist.

Kimberly explained:

Just being altogether and working together to like find the right way. …and then

just kind of working together to get to the same goal

Arthur stated, "In the wilderness everyone has the same goal…" Also Andrea remarked:

Well I guess people just naturally bond whenever there is like a task to perform or

a challenge of some sort Um, so I felt like whenever that sort of thing happens,

people are more likely to communicate and open up because like you're not just a

bunch of people thrown together, you're a bunch of people working to do

Instructors. Another theme that emerged as a form of support was the

Instructors. I found in several of the texts that the instructors played a noteworthy part in

helping the participants. Donna indicated:

He was really someone who kind of knew the ropes and how to talk to you and he

would really sit down with us and kind of talk with us about what we wanted to

accomplish and how he could help us and his experiences in the past-- like how

you really need to take time and evaluate your life and what kind of choices you

want to make

In response to a question about attributes that fostered teamwork, Andrea stated,

"Well, our leaders did a very good job with providing like night time activities and I

think that's really what did it." Kimberly mentioned, "And then you know the guides

were like resources as well." Ronald remarked:

I had a great set of leaders because one was a college student working for base

camp and she taught me a lot about the university and how classes work, you

know, and how to keep the teachers on the good side and how to make good

grades. And she taught me a lot of things about the college that I didn't know.

On the other hand, to balance it out, we had an older man as another leader and he

was just amazing, had an amazing life and cool stuff and a lot of difficulties he's

had, but you know he's put together and he's really an amazing guy, great

character and he taught me a lot about the outdoors, the plants and everything

about the outdoors and the land and map reading. He's a guy you can trust He's a

guy you can ask questions, anything about the outdoors and he would know it. So

I had this really experienced outdoorsman and I had like this experience college

student and together they were a great combination

Earnest stated:

Dave, who is like in charge of the group or whatever, he's like "I'll give you

enough rope to like hang yourself but I won't let you jump," kind of thing. So

like "I'm not going to tell y'all where to go or where you're at," kind of thing….

but the experience of like dealing with using the map and trying to figure out was

more rewarding and beneficial.

Technological Buffers. Being in the wilderness and stripped of technology

appeared in several of the narratives as an important factor that fostered positive

outcomes for the participants. Earnest mentioned, "…kind of like changes my

perspective on like what to get stressed out about and like I didn't have a cell phone."

Michelle remarked," Everyone is just kind of calm and you can hear the river and the

whole atmosphere just kind of calms people." Alan said:

I guess it was knowing that not even using a GPS, but just using a map and

compass, you could pretty much find your way around. It was just fun knowing

that I actually like found where we were trying to go and didn't get too lost.

Andrea noted, "It was just that it was the outdoors and like there's sunlight and

it's warmer and we got to go swimming and like by night time, you're not tired at all."

Andrea also expressed:

> … plus we're in the wilderness. Like other factors are eliminated, you know
>
> everyday distractions, you know, like you can't use your phone, so you're not,
>
> like, during conversation, you're not watching T.V. when you're talking.

Arthur stated:

> I guess when you're doing something like that like backpacking through
>
> wilderness without communication, we didn't have any cell phone or any tracking
>
> devices, just map and compass--this is as bare grills as it get. And, um, I guess
>
> you really think about how you can help your friends, what you're doing right
>
> then and there.

Positive Outcomes. An overarching theme of positive outcomes emerged from the participants' recounts of their experiences and overcoming challenges. The sub-themes that emerged within the participants include:

- Success

- Enjoyment

- Strong group bond

- Appreciation of the outdoors.

Success. When asked to describe a time during the program that felt particularly successful, two themes emerged that were closely related to how the participant translated success. Some participants described their experience of success in more literal terms as just completing a task. Alan stated, "I guess it was when we took turns leading the group using a map and trying to get to certain places. And, um, this other guy

successfully led the group to find this waterfall in the middle of the wilderness." Ronald answered:

> I felt most successful when, well when I came to the program I already knowing how to read a map and, you know, other people didn't know how to read it. So I felt successful there and how I'm navigating my way through trails. So I could do that.

> Others described their experience of success as a rewarding feeling or a sense of personal achievement. Donna remarked, "I made it to the 200 feet; it was really rewarding." Arthur expressed, "I feel like I achieved something great because there was no trail." Michelle stated, "It was fun because you get that personal achievement. Like, you actually did it. So you just kind of have it and you're like fist pump. I did do it. Thank god." Kimberly noted, "But your body can do a lot of stuff, go thru a lot of stuff, but you don't necessarily think you can so." Earnest answered, "I was actually able to get to the top and that was pretty successful."

> ***Enjoyment.*** Themes of enjoyment emerged as an outcome of overcoming challenges. Arthur mentioned, "It was a lot of fun," when talking about trying to get to the next campsite safely. Andrea disclosed, "Because that was the first big time I have stepped out of my comfort zone and I really liked it." Michelle expressed, "But I'm glad I pushed myself. Um, but yeah, it was the scariest part of the trip, I think, but it was the most fun at the same time." Kimberly noted about witnessing another group member overcome a challenge, "…and enjoyed that she was able to do it even though she didn't think she could and she was really nervous about it." Earnest stated, "It was more

challenging and more fun." Alan expressed, "It was just fun knowing that I actually like found where we were trying to go and didn't get too lost"

Strong Group Bond. I noticed many participants expressed themes of a strong group bond and a safe nonjudgmental atmosphere as a result of working through challenges. Andrea expressed, "So it was like um, um, well I guess people just naturally bond whenever there is like a task to perform or a challenge of some sort." Earnest's viewpoint was, "After five or six days after being around people for 24 hours, you kind of develop this niche and you kind of have this role in the group and what you're supposed to do." Ronald stated, "I just felt like a part, a big part of the group." According to Donna, "Even though you might get kind of irritated at some point over something that was usually stupid, it was nice to know that that was kind of a minor thing and it kind of helped that everybody at some point did something wrong." Arthur noted, "Like you really form that trust with them."

Appreciation of the Outdoors. Several participants indicated the wilderness environment had a significant impact on them. Arthur expressed, "I thought that was pretty significant, because you feel like you're not trapped in a material stick world all the time and it's good to get out like that; ever since then I enjoy being outdoors." Andrea explained, "It's like a seeing a mountain for the first time kind of deal and being on top of it was kind of cool." Michelle pronounced:

> While everyone else is on Facebook, and getting their eyebrows waxed and stuff like that we're out here trying to survive on our own….And putting a bear trap up in a tree like to hide all your food and like is all so surreal.

Ronald described:

There was this gorgeous area with a nice beach on the other side and it was just

like paradise to me. I had never been to Panther Town and it was really amazing

and we were having a blast riding down this rock and into the water. That

moment was pretty cool for me. And I think that everyone would agree it was a

pretty neat experience because we were bush-whacking through the woods, pretty

much on like a little foot trail, not the main trail. The guide just tells us to pop our

heads out and look at this crazy awesome beautiful waterfall and its like get on

your butts and slide down it. And you know, we all had a blast.

Ernest stated:

Um, pretty much like all the outdoors, like making a fire um just like the

equipment you use and more like knowledge more exposure to like different gear

and stuff and uh just kind of a more like appreciation of the wilderness and like

more knowledge of--those blueberries you can have those- like don't eat those.

Transitioning to University Living. Andrea's statement below exemplifies the

overarching theme of transitioning to university living that emerged from the

participants' narratives:

Well, I think because of it, it made the transition to college easier because I went

on the trip because um you have that like break from your family but you get like

the support group sort of so it is not just like throwing you in accounts bet not all.

The subthemes that make this theme include:

- Get to know the area\

- Independence

- Friendships

Get to Know the Area. A couple of participants expressed that they had hoped to gain information about the area and outdoor activities. Ronald stated, "And also it would be a good experience to learn more about the land around here." Ernest expressed, "… and I would learn a lot and actually get exposed to this area. Cause I've never been around in the mountains, so for me it seemed like an opportunity to try things I wanted to do."

In addition several participants conveyed that the program encouraged and influenced them to engage in and try more outdoor activities. Arthur stated, "After that, I started rock climbing all the time, going on hikes, going on hour trips to waterfalls for no reason with friends….I wanted to be outdoors more." Donna expressed, "I think it kind of gave me a new outlook on how I was going to enter Western, …I kind of wanted to go to Western to kind of open new doors …and enjoy new things." Andrea voiced:

> I think I am more willing to try something new because that was the first big time I have stepped out of my comfort zone and I really liked it. And I have more of an interest in that kind of stuff."

Earnest said:

> Like with the trip, I actually got a job at base camp from it, working at the rock climbing wall for about a year or two. So the trip got me the job there and so people working at that place kind of exposed me to different trails of hiking. Things that I've done like rock-climbing places and bouldering and that stuff, which never would have happened, if I had not gone on the trip

Independence. A theme of aiming to gain independence emerged from the narratives. Andrea stated, "I guess, um, it was also kind of like my first shot at

independence too, cause I don't think I think that's the longest I've been away from my family." Michelle expressed, "And uh so I think I just at that time really wanted to learn to survive out on my own." Earnest explained:

> So it was like my first year at a university. I went to a community college first, like back home, so I'd just be like at the house doing school work and I never really, like well, I partied and stuff. I never got that like individual testing of, like, who I am and all that mumbo jumbo stuff or whatever.

> *Friendships*. A theme of gaining friends before entering the university emerged from the participants' answers to what they were hoping to gain from the experience and how their relationships were now with the other group members. Most participants reported a goal of gaining friendships. Earnest said, "And like networking and meeting people and like a bucket list to take things off." Donna answered, "I really wanted to meet people and kind of get a foot in before I came in here and um I thought that the program sounded really interesting." Andrea responded, "Um, as for what I was hoping to gain was like friends." Alan stated, "…so I only knew like three people up here so I figured it would be a good chance to like meet people and have the same general experiences with them and friendships." Kimberly explained, "So you know, you come and you kind of like, you know, you make friends with people and then on campus. You also recognize them, so it's someone you kind of have something in common with." Ronald said, "Um, I didn't know anyone at Western. I thought it would be a good way to meet people." Arthur explained:

> Um, well, I didn't know anyone from my high school coming up here, so I thought it would be a good way to meet people right off the bat, um, like before

classes started and like just get a good group of friends and sure enough, that is what happened.

Several participants conveyed that they run into their other group members from time to time; however, for the most part they have lost contact. Earnest explained, "As far as hanging out, there might be some that I saw from the trip that I would say 'Hey' as I'm passing by, you know, but not like talking or hanging out." Ronald stated, "Mmm. No they kind of disintegrated after a couple of years but they were good friends at the time." Kimberly reported, "I don't really keep in contact with them Um and so it's not unfriendly but it's not like we keep in contact or like we're close friends." Donna explained:

> Right after and for the first half of our freshman year, we kept in really close contact and we kinda all went about, you know, we kinda got our foot into Western and got our own niche and kind of have not talk as much since then But we're still friends.

Michelle explained, "We tried to stay together. We just you know it's different the relationships you make inside somewhere is just way different from the ones you make inside school." Alan and Arthur both expressed that though they lost contact with most of the others, they made at least one really good friend. Alan reported:

> One of the girls that I was on the trip with, I lived with for three years. And then there's a lot of other people that have either graduated or are gone on internships that I don't keep in contact with and there's still some people that after the first semester we lost track.

Arthur explained:

Um I'm friends with every single one of them. Some of them aren't here at the

school anymore, so I don't really talk to them much, but actually my best friend

my absolutely best friend at the school that I had met on that trip and we still hang

out all the time and the weekends and whatever and it's really good.

Several of the participants also conveyed that although the friendships made

during CAMP faded out, they felt it still helped support them in their transition to

university living. Kimberly noted, "And not necessarily that you talk to them all the time

but you know you can wave and say hi and stuff so. Just knowing some people going in I

guess." Ronald expressed:

I guess after coming from that group, people I never met before, I was more

prepared freshmen year to meet people, like I already had a solid foundation of

peers that I knew and trusted. And I could build on that instead of starting from

scratch.

Andrea explained:

Even though I haven't really stayed in touch with the people like with a lot of the

people who went on it, it was nice to have someone. Like the smallest things

make a difference in one's day. You know, like you may not see them very

frequently but just like knowing someone on campus and saying hi to them every

once in a while, kind of helps the person out.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to identify common themes within these experiences that are important in the program. The Four male and four female students at a public regional comprehensive university in a state in the Southeast, who participated in CAMP within the past four years, were interviewed. Results indicate this study was successful in illuminating several factors that contribute to a successful WEP.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the participants' perspectives into what aspects of a WEP most affected them. There have been several studies that show WEPs benefit their participants (Heylighen,1992; West & Crompton, 2001; Lan et al, 2004). Far less investigation has been done on what the participants' experience to achieve those benefits and what the benefits mean to them. Instead of hypothesizing what factors matter most and testing or those factors, this study approached this question by asking the participants about CAMP in a semi-structured interview.

Universities use wilderness orientation programs as an intervention to improve retention rates (Davis-Berman and Berman; 1996). Out of the 73 CAMP participants from 2008-2011, 20 students are no longer attending the associated university. Fifty-one students are currently enrolled, and two have graduated, thus the retention rate for CAMP participants is 72.6%.

Gass (1987) explained that WEPs improve retention and attrition rates by targeting "the intellectual, moral, identity, and interpersonal; development of students… (p. 1)" as opposed to campus based programs that focus on issues that lead to drop out.

The findings of this study suggest that participants were optimistic and appreciative of their wilderness experience. This positive evaluation occurred despite all the undesirable conditions which the participants reported. Finding the positive despite negative conditions may reflect personal development of the participant's self-efficacy. Though the long-lasting effects of CAMP varied across the participants the immediate benefits consistently included support for students' transition to university life. The participant viewed all of the effects as constructive for their lives.

Participants indicated being faced with several challenges during CAMP (i.e. sleeping outdoors, rock climbing, communication, etc.). Some of these challenges were classic "challenge by choice" activities (rock climbing) but others were an unavoidable aspect of living in a wilderness setting (sleeping outdoors). It is interesting to note that although each of the eight participants described various struggles during their trip, all of them also indicated that they felt positively about their trip and the CAMP program in general. Perhaps the process of overcoming the struggles is so rewarding that the experience becomes a positive. Walsh and Golins (1976) report that when an activity offers participants the opportunity to engage in survival behaviors, in order to overcome a challenge, participants experience it as a positive event. They also note that the novelty and stimulation of the wilderness environment offers benefits beyond the simultaneous challenges, which optimize participants' outcomes. Specifically, the straightforward nature of wilderness tasks provides a clear path to success and a positive experience. Additionally Walsh and Golins (1976) theorize that an outdoor setting positively affects self-awareness and self-responsibility because it has natural consequences and clear rules that must be followed in order to survive. Finally, a wilderness setting lacks typical

comforts that detract from a need to be aware and responsible. Thus, even though not all struggles were resolved (For example, Ronald's group never found the waterfall), the participants in CAMP still reported a positive experience. It could be that engaging in behaviors such as adapting to the natural demands of the trip, talking to instructors, building teamwork, and finding humor in a wilderness environment are just as rewarding as successfully completing a specific challenge.

Wilderness orientation programs aim to increase participants' social support to help with the transition to university life (Bell, 2006). Bell found a positive correlation between participation in WEP and degree of social support a year and two years after participation. Bell suggested that research needs to be done to understand how students develop social support. In this study participants clearly indicated that they signed up for CAMP in order to make friends with other students before starting college. Participants described having both positive relationships with other group members and a strong team bond during the trip. However, with the exception of Arthur and Alan, the friendships built during CAMP appeared to slowly fade out after the program. Participants said that school and life demands and relocations away from the university were the major reasons for losing touch. Nonetheless, it appears that even though the bonds made during the program didn't last as intended, participants found it helpful to know other people at the university before starting college. They indicated that they enjoyed running into other group member every now and then. This result suggests that participation in WEPs affect student social support by providing them with "we are starting college" rather than "I am starting college." Perhaps the comfort and confidence of beginning with other people are

as valuable as more typical forms of social support (i.e. Greek life, freshman transition

courses, and residency halls)..

Limitations of This Study

There are limitations to this study. All of the participants were selected from a

single WEP associated with a university in the southeastern United States. Because of

the low response rate, several of the participants had participated in CAMP several years

before the interview. Thus there is some risk that the memories have changed over time

to fit CAMP into the overall experience of attending the university. "My time at the

university is positive therefore CAMP had to be a good beginning."

It could be that the culture of each CAMP group is unique and the data reflect that

impact of the group's culture, as opposed to a more general WEP impact on its

participants. While these individual variations are important and valuable in this

qualitative study, further investigation may find that other groups or other program

produce different variations.

Finally, other WEPs include different wilderness activities. This variation may

also threaten the generalizability of this study's results to other programs (Davis-Berman

& Berman 1996).

Future Research

Future research should attempt to gather in-field, real-time qualitative data on the

participants' experiences in a WEP. Though reflective data is informative and beneficial,

it is limited by flaws in the participants' memory of the actual experience. For example

major events tend to be over represented in memory and negative events may seem

positive in retrospect. Piasecki, Hufford, Solhan, and Trull (2007) discuss the benefits of

collecting data about experiences at or near the time that they occur. They primarily explain that this method allows the researcher to gain participants' "unfiltered perspective" by reducing "the influence of processes unique to recall." Real-time data may clarify how specific challenges are experienced and distinguish between a specific success versus overall success. More immediate reports may also suggest which activities are associated with which outcomes.

In general the qualitative approach does offer interesting and valuable insights into the processes of "learning" among WEP participants. Real-time qualitative data would offer even better information about the mechanisms of WEPS that foster positive outcomes for participants.

Implications and Recommendations

This study attempted to identify the most important factors in a wilderness orientation program. Those factors are listed above. This study was not started for specific assessment of CAMP, nor was it designed to identify changes that may be made in CAMP. However, several suggestions for change seem apparent and appropriate.

During CAMP all the participants developed confidence in and high regard for their instructors. Future instructors should be prepared for this to happen in their trips. Instructors should help participants realize that this confidence and positive regard could also develop for their professors. Essentially the instructors could say, "What you feel for me now is what you could feel for your professors later." This transfer will help foster a more positive classroom experience.

These retrospective interviews found that friendships formed during CAMP were not a major part of later university life. While the friendly feelings persisted, daily interactions were not common. However, the CAMP participants began university life

with more confidence that they would find friends and enjoy a successful social transition to the university. Therefore future CAMP instructors should highlight the social bonding going on during the trip and help participants recognize their social roles. Then participants may have a clearer expectation of creating that social role at the university.

Participants also reported they enjoyed facing challenges. Future CAMP instructors should help participants see that taking on a challenge is a positive experience. Instructors can then draw the parallels between wilderness challenges and challenges at the university. Hopefully participants will develop more positive expectations about what awaits them at the university.

Finally a logistical recommendation seems appropriate. When a participant has more wilderness experience CAMP instructors should be prepared to program differently for that person. Additional opportunities or different roles may help these experienced participants remain engaged and therefore benefit.

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TABLES

Table 1 *Sample Backpacking/ Rock Climbing Itinerary*

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
• A.m. arrival Lunch, • Ice Breakers • Review expectations and what to pack • Set goals • Sleep in residence hall.	• Issue gear and food • Transport to trailhead, • Hike short distance • Learn camp craft • Set up camp	• Learn Map and Compass • Hike • Camp	• Hike • Camp	• Rock Climb	• Hike out to trailhead • Return to Campus • Clean Gear • Debrief • Return to residence halls

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

What is the purpose of this study?

You are invited to participate with no obligation in a research study intended to describe participants' experiences during the First Ascent program. This study intends to explore aspects of WCU's First Ascent program that have had immediate and lasting effect on its participants. You will be asked to think back on your experience in First Ascent and describe what parts of the program affected you during the program and which had a lasting impact. The primary goal is to identify reoccurring themes in the participants' experiences.

What will be expected of me?

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in either a one-on-one an interview r a small focus group interview. The interview will ask which of your experiences during the First Ascent program were important to you during your participation and which had a lasting impact. You will not be asked about topics or activities beyond First Ascent and its impact. The interview will be recorded.

How long with the research take?

The interview should take approximately 30 minutes, but may go as long as an hour.

Can I withdraw from the study if I decide to?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time or decline to answer a question if you choose. If you choose to do so, you have the right revoke our use to any of your recordings. There is no consequence if you decline to participate or withdraw.

Is there any harm that I might experience from taking part in the study?

Your responses will be held strictly confidential. There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study.

How will I benefit from taking part in the research?

You will be entered into the drawing for one of the three participation premium. Further, this research will provide First Ascent with feedback about course factors that contribute to participants' personal growth. Thus, you will be helping First Ascents. No other incentive for participation will be provided.

Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about the research?

If you have questions about the study contact Susan Al'Khafaji (sfalkhafaji1@catamount.wcu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Windy Gordon, faculty director of the project (828-227-3361 or wgordon@wcu.edu).

If you have concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, contact the chair of WCU's Institutional Review Board through the office of Research Administration at WCU (828-227-7212).

My signature below indicates that I have participated in WCU's First Ascent Program, am at least 18 years old, and consent to participate in the study.

Name_____Date_____

Signature_____

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcript

Today I'm going to ask you some questions regarding your First Ascent experience. First, I am going to ask you some demographic questions. How old are you?

20

Do you remember your SAT scores?

I think it was 1840.

High school GPA?

Like a 3.9 or something like that.

Where did you graduate from high school?

Um, in Concord.

What's your major?

Forensic anthropology.

What year did you participate in First Ascent?

The summer before my freshmen year, 2010.

Describe to me what your previous experience is in outdoor activities prior to your experience in First Ascent.

I've been camping all my life, so kind of that. I've been hiking. For …. I've been hiking quite a bit. I've never been on a backpacking trip that long. It was like six five six days. I did other outdoor activities, like kayaking and rock climbing. And that's all.

What was experience when you first came to First Ascent?

I was a little nervous because I really didn't know what I was getting in to and I didn't know anybody and I never really been up here so it was a little nerve racking but it wasn't that bad.

I'd like you to think back to a time during the program that you found especially challenging. Tell me about it.

Probably the most challenging was one day when we had to hike up one mountain that I can't remember what it's called, but it was extremely steep and it was the fourth day so I was just really tired. Um, it was extremely challenging, it was hot, and there was one girl in the group that kept everyone's motivation up. That was really the most challenging day, but after that I figured I could do the rest of it.

Describe a time when you experienced success during the expedition.

There were a lot of little successes. Like being able to build a fire, like being able to orientate us a certain way, because they would force us, but not force us, but teach us how to orientate and that was really successful, because I did not know how to orientate before that and I didn't really and I couldn't really build a fire from just you know piling things together. So that was good.

What aspects of the program supported you in success?

Pretty much the whole program. A big factor in it was every night before we went to bed, we would just kind of review the day and talk about what's good and why we were there and what we wanted to accomplish and that really helped a lot. Because everybody was kind of in the same boat and kind of tired and and kind of nervous about starting school, but it all kind of helped to talk about it.

Can you tell me a little more about how talking about it helped you?

Um, for me entering college was kind of like of a new start and I think everybody was on the same page and um the group leader and he was really good talking to us because he kind of knew I was kind of shy and didn't want to talk and he talked to me um about starting over in college and just getting out there and it was a great start in First Ascent and it was really nice just knowing everybody was also really nervous and that each day we kind of had to overcome a new challenge or a new difficulty and that just really helped a lot.

Can you tell me about your feeling nervous and how it was throughout the program?

It definitely faded because you are with these people and I slept in tents with them and I didn't even know really there last name or anything. But really we all kind of bought in together cause we had to support each other or else we would not have gotten anything done because our leaders were kind of like would teach us the skills and just kind of put us out there and we had to kind of figure it out. And there were a lot of kind of hard decisions and people got kind of irritable at times, but it really helped a lot because we kind of had to learn how to overcome that.

Can you describe to me an instance where your group overcame irritability?

Yeah, um, I just remember one night we hiked 9 or 10 miles that day and everyone was really tired and um we couldn't figure out which campsite we wanted to camp at because there was one that was closer but the other one was closer to water. And everyone was just really hungry and tired and we all kind of stood around and had to make a plan of which like the pros and cons list and it eventually worked out. So it was kind of rough for a few minutes there so.

Can you tell me more about the rough time?

Well, I mean everyone was just kind of tired and instead of listening to what people actually had to say, it would be like "I just want to stay here, I don't really want to move, or we should move and not stay here." It was just we had we really had to learn to communicate instead of just yelling at each other and just ignoring each other and just kind of doing our own thing, because if we did that if we just ignored each other, it wasn't going to work out at all.

Can you describe to me what you learned about communication?

I just learned that everyone as a whole group had to decide on things. It couldn't be just one person's decision or you know we couldn't half of us be doing one thing and half of us doing the other. We had to decide once and for all what we were going to do.

Can you tell me a little bit about what brought you to First Ascent and what you hope to gain?

One of the things I wanted I really didn't know anyone coming into Western. I really wanted to meet people and kind of get a foot in before I came in here and um I thought that the program sounded really interesting. I really enjoy doing outdoor things. It was like everything rolled into one.

How did you find out about the program?

I think I saw it online when I signed up for orientation. There was a little advertisement for it and I signed up for it right then.

Can you described for me a point in the program that you found especially difficult?

I think it was probably after we had climbed you know the really big hill and I was really tired and I was at the point where I was really over it and I really didn't like want to talk. I kind of wanted to sit there and not talk to anybody and not do anything and not move and just drink water and eat and that was kind of the point where I had to decide like I was either going to adapt a better outllook of it, like I was really going to gain something or just be a lump on a log and not do anything, not want to participate and like, but that was the point where I kind of gained a lot of value in it and figured that I really wanted to do it and I really put my all into it.

How do you think you came to that decision?

I think I was just doing like a couple of us sitting down and kind of taking everything in and there were a few people who were like kind of goofing off and stuff and I was just like I don't want to be the person just sitting there like really tired and not and you know not having the best time I can and then kind of realized I shouldn't do that.

So I noticed that the other participants and the guides helped really support you and get you through the hard times during the program. Can you tell me about your relationships now with the other participants who were on the trip with you?

I keep in contact with a couple of them. I know there's one girl who went to another school. Our group leader, Dave, is not here anymore. And Alex isn't here anymore Still…if I ever see them, we all stop and talk to each other. We just don't see each other super often.

How were they right after the program?

Right after and for the first half of our freshman year, we kept in really close contact and we kinda all went about, you know, we kinda got our foot into Western and got our own niche and kind of have not talk as much since then. But we're still friends.

How do you think you have changed as a result of participating in First Ascent?

I think it kind of gave me a new outlook on how I was going to enter Western, cause I never really liked high school and I kind of wanted to go to Western to kind of open new doors and, um, meet new people and enjoy new things. That really kind of pushed it off, so you know I think about it sometimes. It's really been like an influence, especially the group leaders. They are really a good influence and kind of helped me get into the whole college thing.

Can you tell me a little bit about the instructor's influence?

Dave had been an Outbound instructor for a few years I think. He was really someone who kind of knew the ropes and how to talk to you and he would really sit down with us and kind of talk with us about what we wanted to accomplish and how he could help us and his experiences in the past-- like how you really need to take time and evaluate your life and what kind of choices you want to make. He would just say things like that-he was really motivational. He really helped us and pushed us even when I did not want to be pushed but he would do it and it really helped out in the end.

Can you give me a specific instance where he pushed you when you may not have wanted him to at the time?

This one time I remember we were trying to keep on a trail but we really didn't know if we were on the right trail or not. He had taught us how to use the map and the compass in trying to figure out things and no one knew where we were going and he

would not tell us. He said you know if we go the wrong way, he'll let us go that way and we'd have to figure it out ourselves. It was kind of irritating at the time, because we really didn't want to walk 5 miles in the wrong direction. But in the end, it really did help us, because we had to learn it from firsthand experience instead of him, you know, doing it for us.

You had mentioned that you sometimes still think back about your experiences at First Ascent. Can you describe to me a specific instance where that occurred?

I think a lot of what we learn in First Ascent kind of applies to academics and um I know my first semester kind of didn't really didn't pay attention to my school and stuff. And I didn't do well on my grades and I kind of thought back and I was thinking why didn't I do good, why can't I do better, and from First Ascent, we kind of learned that you have to make life what you want and you can sit and do nothing or you can actually do something about it. Since then I have made good grades and have not slacked as much. I think that kind of applies to that situation.

What about the First Ascent program contributed to that message?

It was really just one of those situations where no one was there babying you or you know or giving too much…nobody was really uh how should I word it-- it sort of taught you the skills and it's up to you to decide whether you want to push yourself and do it or if you wanted to not do it and that kind of applies in my school work where I could kind of do it you know not really that well and just kind of skate by or I could actually push myself and use the tools I have and actually do a good job at it and um and a lot of that was at First Ascent. Like we could just do a couple of miles a day and not

rush ourselves but if we wanted to, we could walk a few extra miles and see a waterfall or something like that. It was an incentive to do better.

Cool. I noticed that you said that it helps, you know, that you can utilize tools. Can you tell me what you mean by tools?

I define tools as things that you learn that I learned in First Ascent or more like a personality things, like motivation or determination and those are kind of tools that you can use your motivation that you can use your um you can ah you can either push yourself or you can't and those are kind of tools you use to motivate and to not procrastinate and kind of do what you have to do and actually want to be good at it and not just kind of do it, like you know not as well as you could have. You have to put your all to it. Those are the kind of tools that I like was talking about. Like for one example, the day we went rock climbing and you could either do a 100 foot wall or go to the 200 foot and um like there was obviously a lot of fear there. Like I really was really afraid to do but if you use fear as a tool and a motivation and you actually did it and then I did it. I made it to the 200 feet; it was really rewarding. It was a great experience. And if you kind of use those things like fear and motivation as tools to push you further and that kind of applies to school.

How did you learn how to face your fears and turn it into a tool? What experience taught you that?

I kind of thought that there was not going to be many opportunities where I would get to go and do this with someone, with people that I trust to go climbing with and an opportunity like this kind of like either I do it or might not be able to do it again.

Was there anything about the program that you would change?

Um, I mean the only thing I could think is it would be kind of nice if they had a reunion where you could get back in touch with people because I know that there are people that are kind of dispersed and aren't in the area anymore or things like that. That's really the only thing that I can think of.

Could you describe to me a thing in the program that you will never forget?

We had a lot of good talks. We had we would usually like make a fire and talk about days and stuff and there is one night where we all kind of sat around and talked about what we didn't like about high school and what we wanted to change when we came into Western. And what our hopes and dreams were. Kind of how we were going to get there and hearing everybody talk about that and talking to Dave and Alex and kind of knowing that even though I was really nervous and didn't know what I was going to do and that everyone else is in the same place and there were other people there to help you and be a support system if you failed and that was really nice to talk about.

At first you mentioned about these groups at night and they really seemed to be important. Can you tell me a little bit about them?

Um, it was just kind of a way to evaluate what we did during the day, what we did wrong or right, what we'd do the next day and then there would usually be a question that he would ask us like what would we like to do, what was our favorite thing we did, or least sort of thing we did, kind of things like that and it would often lead to discussion and it just helped a lot because throughout the day there were ups and downs. It was really nice to kind of relax and just talk about it and know that, um, that we did do good things and that we might have done wrong things, but how we could fix that. It helped a lot.

Can you tell me how it was like to process the ups and downs of the day and how you found resolutions?

I think the biggest factor in it was being able to communicate openly with everyone. It was kind of like a friendly atmosphere. Even though you might get kind of irritated at some point over something that was usually stupid, it was nice to know that that was kind of a minor thing and it kind of helped that everybody at some point did something wrong. It kind of helped to know that you were not the only one or that your struggling during the day and that there are other people with you that were also struggling. And that tomorrow is a new day and that you didn't have to struggle. If you needed help or anything, that you could always get help.

What do you think contributed to the friendly atmosphere that kept it safe and open?

Um I think a lot of it had to do with everybody really wanting to be there because everyone did sign up for it and everybody had an interest in you know hiking and being outdoors and also our group leaders were really welcoming and opened the door to talk about things. It did not just have to be you know strangers hiking together, but we could actually talk about things to get meaning from the whole trip, because it could have just been a hiking trip, but it was a lot more than that and I think a lot of it had to do with leaders.

Is there anything else you would like for me to know?

Nope.

Thank you for taking time out to be interviewed. I appreciate your participation.