Welcome Back Edition for the Region’s Professional Journal!
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**Mission:** To bring together experts, specialists, and students in the mid-Atlantic region and beyond to develop professionalism and promote experiential education.

**Leadership Team:**

Chair - Colleen Williams, M.Ed.  
collen.miller154@gmail.com

Past Chair - Fred Pierson, MS  
jkpierson@radford.edu

Secretary - Lorilei Dreibelbis  
deelorraine@gmail.com

Membership / Schools & Colleges - David Heath  
dheath@gmu.edu

Member at Large - Al Rock  
alrock@centurylink.net

Treasurer - Jess Rothe  
jrothe1@email.radford.edu

Journal Editor

Matthew Cummiskey  
mccumiskey@wcupa.edu

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**Mid-Atlantic Region**

Welcome!
The Mid-Atlantic Region encompasses the following U.S. States: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington D.C. Our region unifies individuals from a variety of fields; school and colleges, museums, therapeutic recreation centers, camps and conference centers, outdoor recreation venues, etc.

We, as the Mid-Atlantic Region, strive to promote and support the vision of AEE. This vision connects a global community of educators and practitioners, and it expands their capacity to enrich lives through Experiential Education. AEE is currently leading the way in Experiential Education nationwide and they will need our continuous support and efforts in making a difference in the lives of many.

We hope that you will join our AEE family in attending conferences, webinars, local events, and more. This is the valuable opportunity to create a wider network, grow as a professional, and to spread the word about AEE.

We look forward to meeting you soon!

Colleen Williams, M.Ed.
Rebuilding the Region!

Welcome to the AEE Mid-Atlantic Region! For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Colleen Williams and I’ve been the acting Regional Chair for two years. I’ve been involved with AEE for about eight years attending the regional conference as a student, employer, conference convener, secretary, and now chair. AEE values six domains; Global Community, Adventure and Challenge, Reflective Leadership, Social Justice, The Natural World, and Creative Play. For me, AEE feels like a global family of educators willing to support and assist each other in this growing field.

From 2015-2017 we were noticing a steady decline in conference registration and it felt as if we were losing our sense of community within the Mid-Atlantic Region. In 2017, the regional committee and I decided that as a region we needed to regroup and rediscover who we were as a region, as well as what type of regional conference we want to provide. During a conference call, some of the topics we discussed were communities, partnerships, hands on learning, networking, and finding connections. The main theme discussed was finding a location willing to grow with us and encompass the AEE mission and vision. We wanted a location that the Mid-Atlantic Region could call home.

After several hours of researching locations and numerous emails, we found West Virginia University (WVU) Outdoor Education Center in Bruceton Mills, West Virginia. Coy Belknap and his staff at the WVU Outdoor Education Center were 100% ready to assist us in any way possible to accomplish our goal in rebuilding our region. Over the next year we focused on getting the word out about our regional conference leveraging Facebook, email blasts, save the dates, and word of mouth. In 2016, the regional conference was held at Camp Letts in Mayo, Maryland where 35 people attended. In 2018, after months of networking, about 70 people attended our Mid-Atlantic regional conference. It was extremely rewarding and satisfying to see the amount of people who attended the conference. It felt as though all of our hard work was finally paying off!

Once our 2018 conference had come to an end, it was as if our sense of community was reborn. I received many emails of those who attended the conference as well as though who did not, asking how they could get involved, if I knew of other facilities to connect them with, and informing me of the astounding things they were doing with their facility. Our region, which was on the decline, was starting to have life again! We as a regional committee knew that this was only the beginning. We immediately began on our 2019 conference journey.

In 2018 Matthew Cummiskey reached out to me wanting to start an online Journal for our Mid-Atlantic region. I was 100% on board in bringing back a journal to our region because it would allow for networking and the sharing of professional experiences that otherwise wouldn’t be shared with folks of similar interests. This journal was exactly what our region was looking for in continuing to rebuild. The day we sent out the email blast asking who would be interested in getting involved in the journal, I received multiple emails within an hour. This speaks volumes of our region and how we want to get involved, stay connected, and shows others what we are doing in the AEE field.

AEE is such an amazing organization to be a part of and I can’t wait to see our region continue to grow! If you or your facility has something amazing to share please reach out! I love seeing what others are doing and how it might inspire someone else.

Colleen Williams, M.Ed.

aae.org/mid-atlantic
November 2018 found hundreds of experiential educators in Orlando, Florida for the international joint conference of AEE and The Gap Year Association. In case you are curious, yes, the weather was great! We were even able to hold workshops in the pool for consecutive days! The conferencing site provided beautiful grounds, a convenient conferencing center with easy access to workshops, and a beautiful lawn upon which to gather for those all important social networking events – both the impromptu kind as well as the outdoor classic rock concert on Friday night. Connecting to the sunshine just accentuated the warming of our souls as we connected to each other.

Just to assure you, workshops did not stop at the pool! There were over 80 sessions offered across the 3 days of the conference, welcoming the insights of close to 200 speakers from around the world. Heartfelt, eye opening, mind boggling conversations were the norm as professionals across disciplines, organizations, ages, abilities, and experience compared stories, found common ground, and built new visions of possibility. Sharing our conference with The Gap Year Association proved a natural fit, as gap year programs are inherently designed to offer those aspects of education beyond what traditional programs offer learners. Insights and inspiration abounded as processes and models were discussed and demonstrated.

The opening address by Bob Kodzis teemed with creativity as we shared indoor kite flying, music, and magic which reminded us to embrace play and fun. Kurt Hahn Award recipient JA Loeffler shared the wisdom of climbing mountains and connecting to our peers and predecessors. The playnote shared by Christie Miga reminded us that the best learning happens in play and shared stories. Six ActivatEE speakers shared their emotional stories of holding on, letting go, doing better – connecting us to those moments when experience IS the teacher. As we closed, Dan Garvey charged us to go into the world to Do Good, as our shared fellowship and learning renewed our passions and support networks. Our final activity, to defeat the evildoer “Mediocrity” was a rallying cry for the both the organization and the power of working together!

2019 will find AEE joining AORE for an international conference in Spokane, Washington November 13 – 15. It promises to combine the outdoor and experiential learning communities in a never before seen scope focused on health and well-being, for the lives and organizations we touch in our practice as well as for the professionals who lead the way into a more connected future.
Scott Gray

Position: Challenge Course Manager
Organization: Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Center, MD
Number of years in position: 5
Training or Alma Mater: Towson University
Email address: sgray@geneseevalley.org
Website: http://geneseevalley.org/

Bio: Scott Gray has served in the experiential education field for over 10 years. During that time, he has trained dozens of staff members in challenge course facilitation and program transference. Scott is a firm believer in the power of experiential education to change lives and promote empathy. Scott prefers to think of himself as an educator rather than a tree climber or cable rigger. He has presented several topics at regional and national conferences including humility based training and using stuffed animals as processing tools. In addition to facilitating, he writes policies, builds and maintains elements, writes operational procedures and trains his staff. Scott represents the nonprofit, “boots on the ground,” side of experiential education. He will be writing the “Manager’s Musings” column each edition where he can highlight smaller facilities doing quality work and issues affecting all challenge courses. In coming editions, Scott plans to explore such topics as state/local regulations, OSHA laws, hiring qualified staff members, and working with public school systems.

Questions for Scott:
1. In your mind, who in this industry can serve as a good role model? - I have always admired Tom Leahy for his honesty, and dedication to promoting growth in participants. I have attended many of his workshops over the years. Every time I hear him speak, I leave energized and with new insights I can use in my programs. He usually starts his workshops with a statement along the lines of, "I have made more mistakes in my facilitation than everyone in this room together." His willingness to use his mistakes as opportunities for growth has allowed me to feel comfortable to do the same.
2. If you could plan a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would you go? - I would like to visit Sequoia National Park again and really spend some time there. I have visited the grove of giant sequoias a number of times, but only as day trips. There is something profoundly humbling to stand beside a living organism that is over 3,000 years old.
3. Why did you become involved in the Mid-Atlantic AEE? - I think there are two main reasons. As a Challenge Course Manager at an educational facility, I believe it is important to surround myself with people that identify as academics. The challenge course industry is heavily influenced by purely recreational stake holders. I find it grounding to have a refuge from the for-profit interests. The second reason is that I hope to represent and promote the educational non-profit sector to AEE and become active in the organization.
You might be an outdoor education major if you own a Nalgene bottle plastered with stickers. You might be in an experiential education program if your jacket pockets are full of snacks and you have Chaco footwear tan lines by May. You might be in the adventure leadership industry if you wear secondhand Patagonia and can successfully light a Whisper-Lite on the first try. But most of all, you might be an outdoor education student if you constantly hear questions like, “What is your major again? What exactly is that? Your classes are outside??”

If you’re in a program related to adventure leadership, you know how tricky it can be to explain the effort, dedication, and professionalism required in this field, especially if a relative, acquaintance, or even potential boss reduces your passion to simply “playing in dirt.” After all, the existence of collegiate outdoor programs is still a rather young phenomenon. Just a few short decades ago, when basketball players still wore Converse High Tops and Chouinard Equipment had not yet been rebranded as Black Diamond, attending college to become an outdoor leader was largely unheard of. If you wanted to climb rocks or paddle big water, you quit high school early, hopped in your grungy van, and drove out west to find a guru who would teach you everything they knew about pitons and paddles. Forget about earning credit, you dirty hippie.

Now, however, over 35 colleges nationwide offer degree programs in outdoor leadership or adventure education according to CollegeBoard.org and BestCollegeReviews.org. Dozens of others have outdoor clubs or extracurricular adventure opportunities. Increasingly guide services and outfitters require applicants to have a degree in outdoor leadership or a related field, and official certifications such as Wilderness First Responder are nonnegotiable. You can now go to school to become a professional, bona-fide, accredited dirt bag.

You can go online and read about dozens of programs, but the most creditable testimonies come from the students and graduates. Here is what just a few of those students say about their respective outdoor schools in the Mid-Atlantic region.

**Adventure Sports Management (associate’s) – Adventuresports Institute (ASI) at Garrett College, McHenry MD**

- Steve – “I was drawn to outdoor education because of the impact we get to have on so many people’s lives. The ASI was very skills-intensive, which was what I needed at the time. They work on not only the hard skills, but also the soft leadership skills; it really made me grow as an adult. [Outdoor leaders need to have] patience and the ability to see things from all sides, calm in the face of potential danger.”

- Rob – “I [initially] chose Garrett College, Adventuresports Institute because it was a program that I felt I could complete while working full-time and being responsible to my family. ASI provides the students with a healthy balance of skill-based courses towards becoming more proficient in [several] disciplines and certified. I have a greater appreciation for various learning and instructing styles, how to develop a lesson plan, and how to facilitate development of students in a non-traditional setting.”
Rebecca – “What brought me to outdoor education was [being able] to watch people grow and discover themselves in nature. Something my program does well is give you lots of opportunities to learn hands-on and be in the field to expand your knowledge and gain more skills. The most difficult class I took was probably the White Mountains expedition. This class pushed me physically and emotionally, but my positive attitude got me through it all. I learned a lot about myself on this trip and what I am capable of.”

Jenna – “I was drawn to Outdoor Ed because of a transformational summer camp experience as a kid. It wasn’t until I coincidentally heard of Adventure Education at Messiah College that I realized you can actually make a career of this! I visited campus once and was hooked. Adventure Ed found me, to be honest. Messiah helps students recognize the value and importance of community and relationships, which can be uniquely shaped, strengthened and developed through adventure and outdoor experiences in no other way I have ever known. Were it not for Messiah College, I would not be the person I am today in any regard, not just as a facilitator/instructor. Messiah teaches a balance of both technical skills and interpersonal/group facilitation skills. I always say that we are in the career field that desk workers decide to get into after a midlife crisis. I just saved myself 30 years of misery!”

Gretchen – “I always have enjoyed being active and being outside. So, when looking at majors for college, I was naturally drawn to Adventure Education. Messiah did a wonderful job at emphasizing soft skills. I learned the importance of a good debrief; I still use those skills that I learned from our debrief trainings. All my profs demonstrated good communication [and] preparedness. [It is a] great program for people who love being outdoors. But you also really gotta love people too. Or at least be patient with people.”
Borton (1970) developed the “What - So What - Now What” model that was later adapted by Rolfe and colleagues (2001) and Driscoll (2007). The three seemingly simple steps form a process for critical reflection that is transferrable to a wide range of disciplines. The model is especially well-suited to experiential education due to the processing that takes places throughout the learning cycle. Ultimately the goal of experiential education is to transfer learning from the activities to the everyday lives of participants.

Of the three steps, the “Now What” is often considered the most challenging because learning is extended beyond the realm of the activity into the daily lives of participants. Therefore, the facilitator must generalize learning into an arena with which he or she has little to no first-hand experience. Additionally, being able to effectively address the “Now What” is a skill that takes time to develop. Novel facilitators are more likely to struggle here due to a lack of experience and let’s call it accumulated life wisdom.

Matthew Cummiskey is an Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at West Chester University. He is the Director of the Adventure Education Program and has been an experiential educator in for over 20 years having led groups in upstate New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.
The Three Steps

The first step is the “What” (Kolb, 2014) which is essentially historical, it presents what happened and what took place in the activity. It forms a context that guides later discussions. Importantly it is factual, it addresses what challenge were faced, what was said or done and the outcome. Facilitators may choose to take notes during an activity to accurately frame the “What,” of course these facts may be interpreted differently which leads to the next step. The “So What” is an analysis, an interpretation that challenges participants to find constructive meaning from the challenges undertaken. The guiding questions are “Why does this matter” and “What does it mean?” Participants are free to have different opinions and perspectives.

The “Now What” has an altogether different focus, it looks forward to the future. It is about ACTION! What do participants need to move forward and better their lives collectively or as individuals. This is challenging because often participants must look themselves in the eye, honestly interpreting the “So What” to identify realistic and meaningful change. This step is contingent upon successful realization of the two prior steps. If participants cannot identify what took place and its meaning, forming conclusions for the future will be difficult. The facilitator must focus and guide the processing towards fulfillment of all three steps in the reflective cycle.

A central strategy is to ask the right questions which is easier said than done. The questions selected depend on the group, its objectives, prior performance and comfort level among other factors. Below is a list of questions well-suited to translating meaning into action (Cain, Cummings & Stanchfield, 2005; Simpson, Miller & Bacher, 2006; Hilbert College, 2019):

▪ How can you apply this learning?
▪ What would you like to learn more about related to this project or issue?
▪ What similar roots causes exist in your own life? In society?
▪ What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?
▪ If you could do the project again, what would you do differently? Relate it to a project or experience at home or work.
▪ How can you continue your involvement with this group or cause?
▪ How can you improve the functioning of other groups to which you are a member based upon today’s experience?
▪ Where might this reflection lead in the future?
▪ What information can you share with your family, friends or community at home?
▪ What do you need do I need to do to make things better related to…?
▪ What broader issues need to be considered if this action is to be successful?
▪ In your day to day lives, what might be the consequences of this action?
▪ What information can you share with your peers about the issues raised today?
▪ How can society better deal with this issue?
▪ What’s the next step in the process?
These questions are designed for a typical question and answer processing style. However, focusing on the “Now What” also works with other styles. For example, ask a question then have participants select a Chiji card or other processing cards and then discuss. Other Chiji options include picking a mascot, creating a story or laying out the cards as transitions between activities. Isolation and journaling are also quite effective; participants are given time to reflect individually or in writing which can then be shared with the group. Often participants who work better at their own pace or are more introverted excel in this format.

Quotes are impactful and due to the large number available, facilitators can find relevant ones. Many quotes relate to leading a satisfying and successful life and therefore align well with the “Now What.” Present quotes to the entire group or have them blindly select ones from the facilitator’s hand. For example, a favorite quote is “When you judge another, you do not define them, you define yourself” by Wayne Dyer. It addresses not jumping to conclusions and seeing situations from diverse perspectives, all of which are important learning objectives.

Many of the questions can reformulated into statements. For example, change the “How will you use what you learned or discovered?” into “I plan to use the lessons learned from today’s activities in my personal life?” Next use the ladder processing technique where participants stand on a 4-level continuum from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” depending on their level of agreement with the statement. Follow up with participants as to why they chose to stand on that rung of the ladder.

The “What,” “So What” and “Now What” methods ultimately boil down to CHANGE that benefits an individual or an entire group. The funneling method pictured to the left skillfully summarizes the three steps but adds a commitment piece because talking a change is much easier than walking it. If possible discuss concrete steps to be undertaken and roadblocks that may be encountered. If you as a facilitator are not accustomed to using the three steps or the funneling method, be patient with yourself. Script the processing ahead of time but be flexible to deviate from the plan depending on the insights of the group.

References:
The Adventure Park Problem: Experiential Education in the Age of the Adventure Park

Scott Gray

The rise of the adventure park has affected our educational programs in a number of different ways. It has created a crisis of identity for not only how we see ourselves, but how the public at large views our programs. I think the best way to frame the “adventure park” issue is to begin with the simple question:

What is a challenge course?

If you asked that question fifteen years ago to a professional in our field, they would probably give you an answer that would center on experiential education. Courses were initially built to simulate the kinds of growth experiences that might take place during a weeklong backpacking trip or an Outward Bound sailing program. Courses were a tool to foster empathy, communication and all the other buzzwords that corporate clients love to hear.

The whole idea was to promote group and personal learning through novel experiences. Galvanized steel cable, utility poles, eye bolts and climbing ropes were our textbooks and pop-quizzes. Adventure was the catalyst for transformative change in people, or at least a tool for self-reflection.

Ask the same question to the average person a decade ago and they might recall the summer at camp when they did the “leap of faith,” a school field trip when they got their entire class over a wall or a corporate team-building event. Memories of the experience may vary but most will recall the goal of the outing was to learn something.

However, ask the average person today, “What is a challenge course” and you might get a very different answer. Their answer might include that climbing wall they did at the gym, the zip line tour they took in Costa Rica or the steel adventure course they just built in the mall. All these activities have some similarities with our programs, but they lack our program goals.
It is hard to pinpoint when the first adventure parks started popping up as for-profit zip line tours have existed for years. Self-guided static courses, while seemingly everywhere, have only really sprung up in the last twenty years or so.

This leads to a specific problem for our field of study. Adventure recreation on the surface looks a lot like experiential education to the average person, and maybe increasingly to our own practitioners. People can have meaningful, even life changing experiences at adventure park facilities. However, their goals are to provide thrilling adventure to guests, not teach life lessons.

An entire generation of people has grown up with adventure parks and zip tours. To a Human Resource officer looking at team building opportunities for her staff, the college challenge course option and the adventure park option might look very similar. The adventure park probably even markets their program as “team building” when they might offer little if any processing opportunities. This can lead to resentment, or worse, the desire among experiential educators to be more like the adventure park and less like educational challenge courses of the past. I honestly believe there is more than enough room in our industry for us to co-exist with a friendly amount of tension and rivalry.

Still, we need to accept that many of the activities that were exclusive to the experiential education field twenty years ago, are now packaged and sold as purely recreational experiences, often with glossy brochures and/or flashy websites. We need to recognize this and embrace our role as educators. We should not lose sight of the fact that our mandate is to facilitate experiences that promote growth in our participants.

Therefore, we must continue to provide quality programs to our clients, but also to communicate effectively with the public as why those programs are valuable and are different than going to an adventure park. This means that we need to make sure we are not “faking it.” Our staff members need to be invested in education for education’s sake. We need to hire staff members that see themselves as educators first. This also means that we need to allocate time and resources to train our staff in program planning, progression and modeling. More importantly we need to foster work place communities that place educational modeling ahead of getting kids through the zip line as fast as possible.

For a Boy Scout COPE director (Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience) or the summer camp adventure specialist, it can be hard to justify the time or money to provide quality training opportunities. If you just paid a trainer one-thousand dollars and then spend another three days to teach your staff basic facilitation skills, you might upset whoever holds your purse strings.

If you as a manager or lead facilitator really don’t have a good understanding of educational theory, chances are it is not your fault. When I was first trained in facilitation, all I received two sheets of paper with vague references to learning models. The trainers were more interested in making sure we could belay than if we could process the experience with empathy and transference in mind. Trainings often focus on keeping participants alive and not on the differing theories behind “challenge by choice.”

But if our programs are poor quality and our processing skills are lackluster, the participant will just see us as a lame adventure park. “I went to this place and we zip lined. It was not as cool as the zip line I did in the Smoky Mountains.” This means you might need to train your own staff in modeling, or bring in additional resources. Ultimately the first thing we can do to differentiate our facilities is to simply practice what we preach. Train your staff and build your program around education, not the zip line.
If your program is education focused, your staff are trained and your community is built on experiential education, that is only the beginning. The next step is to educate the population you serve. However, most experiential educators do not have backgrounds in marketing or mass media communications. Some of us might even have ethical beliefs that see social media as a negative influence on people as a whole. However, chances are greater that adventure parks have a marketing specialist in-house or contract out for such services. Most often their marketing is going to try to sell excitement and adventure, not growth and learning.

Mass communication is an opportunity for our programs to show what we really offer to our participants. Our social media presence needs to reflect this. Our presence in the community and on the internet should not try to compete with the adventure parks on their own terms. Pictures of a group of people attempting to solve a problem together, or creating an art project as a debriefing tool, need to be the images associated with our programs. This is where we shine, and this is the message we need to show the public. We should also communicate our program goals effectively with potential clients while using the language of education to describe the kind of programs we offer.

When high course elements are used in marketing, the images should focus on people cheering on their co-worker, a child at the top of the wall with her arms up in joy, or a student helping pull their classmate up the Dangle Duo. This communicates an entirely different feeling than an image of a staff member zip lining in sunglasses with their hands making a heavy metal sign. aee.org/mid-atlantic

That representation sends the wrong message. It says come here for a “radical zip line,” not come here to learn about yourself in a healthy outdoor environment.

At Genesee Valley, we tend to find that when we speak to people inquiring about programs, they react more positively when we explain our learning goals and our mission statement. We do not start our conversations trying to sell our high course or zip lines. That might sound obvious, but it is important. When we receive a phone call asking about booking a program, the first thing we ask the group is, “what are your programming goals?” We then explain our standard model for programming and that we can tailor their curriculum to meet whatever goals they specifically want to achieve.

This is an entirely different conversation than discussing how high your challenge course is or how much fun the kids will have on the giant swing. You are framing the conversation around education, not climbing things. At Genesee Valley we sometimes turn away groups that just want to zip, or have no interest in educational programming. I know some facilities might not have the ability to turn groups away, but if you can, it can get the message out that you practice what you preach.

Adventure parks are here to stay. Their presence in the industry is just part of our reality. We need to embrace and reinforce our culture of education. To summarize, it is critical that we control the conversation on our terms. Staff members should be trained in experiential learning models appropriate to our programming and see themselves as educators. It is also critical that we create a media presence that communicates our values. Lastly, we need to explain ourselves in the language of education. If we are to continue to provide our valuable programs, we need to double down on our educational roots, not use the tactics of the adventure park industry. We can’t beat them at their own game, but if we can promote the value of what we do effectively, we won’t have to.
Adventure education can be used to identify privilege and foster a more just and equitable society. Often diversity, equity, and inclusion programs implemented by institutions of higher education and other organizations focus on marginalized groups without acknowledging the need for other groups to be part of the conversation and solution. With the advent of the “Me Too Movement” some males have demonstrated defensive or reactionary stances as they view themselves as falsely accused “nice guys.” Looking at this trend and the increasing rates of depression and suicide in men we need to identify spaces where we can provide opportunities for males to grow rather than being pushed into the panic zone. The outdoors is the ideal venue to do so as the focus is often placed on the activity itself and going through shared struggles (rain in the tent, lost on the trail, stove failure) to foster a stronger connection than sitting in the classroom or scrolling through social media.
Often when we attempt to create gender equity programs we focus on overt forms of harm and oppression such as sexual assault, without discussing more subtle ways everyday actions contribute to the problem. For example, West Chester University’s offers an outdoor orientation program called Ramventure where new students connect and learn leadership skills while enjoying the outdoors. The program includes campouts, ropes course experiences and canoe trips. This past summer participants witnessed how forms of gender inequity play out in our everyday lives. The morning after the first overnight camp, the women initiated the cooking while the men waited for it to be prepared. After breakfast the male students left their dishes to be cleaned by others and when encouraged to contribute, they identified a realization that they had inadvertently played into the system. This led into about an hour’s worth of dialogue around the caretaker role of women in society and how that can cascade into further challenges when it comes to career advancement in the future. Women said they felt pressure to be responsible for the group. This conversation was not planned but did set a tone for openness and understanding for the rest of our trip. Afterwards all parties witnessed concerted efforts to equitably share group tasks and continue conversations around gender inequity. Some of the male participants even identified that they enjoyed cooking and had never been encouraged to do so before in their household. Had this conversation been initiated in another setting I doubt that participants would have developed a similar understanding.

At West Chester University, the outdoor program is partnered with Center for Women and Gender Equity to facilitate a healthy masculinity series. The intent is to provide spaces for males to come together, identify inequity in society and develop a support system in their own identity development. The first event consisted of teambuilding activities at a WCU’s indoor climbing; it consisted of 22 participants mainly from fraternities. As one participant stated, “It was eye opening to me as a white guy who didn’t get why affirmative action was needed to see how being born in a certain area really can make it harder to be successful than those handed the climbing shoes from the beginning” (S.D. Sassaman, Get a Grip Survey, February, 2017). During this program, participants were randomly assigned to two groups, those who could use climbing shoes and those who could not. Some participants were also randomly assigned limitations such as “may only use left arm”. The participants who did not have climbing shoes or had a limitation became frustrated more easily. The students who had climbing shoes, but also a limiting factor still struggled despite their “opportunity”. Some did assist those who had disadvantages, but most climbed with little regard for their fellow participants. The processing thereafter focused on the feelings of those who struggled or were held back by past experiences or current commitments. This casual event set the tone for future programs and allowed students to begin breaking down barriers to vulnerability that we as men are socialized to construct.

Men are often told to “man up” and may be reprimanded for showing emotions because, “boys don’t cry.” Men are taught to hide vulnerability and to present strength. True strength however is a willingness to be vulnerable and open with our emotions. Adventure educators understand that the reflection or de-briefing process is a crucial element of all programming. This process can inspire participants to reflect on their feelings and start to close the empathy gap which permeates our culture. The approach begins with focusing on the task, “What went well?” “Did anyone step up as a leader?” “Did we take time to plan?” As the conversation moves forward the facilitator follows up with, “How did it feel when you didn’t have a voice” “Why were some more confident to present a solution?” These conversations nearly always transpire into an application of how factors play a role in our everyday life. While facilitating a reflection after a group completed the Spider Web Challenge a male student identified the importance of consent that was evident in the activity. He outlined the importance of communication and trust while helping his team members feel confident throughout. He stated that he
was fully confident being lifted through the openings in the web, but had to take a step back to confirm that his team members were also comfortable with this approach. The processes addressed the need for consent and clear communication not only working with teams, but also while navigating future sexual relations. Consent is often a subject that forces people to close off in conversations. Of course, processing does not always go as planned. One member of another group declared that all sexual activity should “wait until marriage.” That is certainly a valid perspective which was explored but it did not address the sexual assault incidents plaguing our campuses. This individual became uncomfortable and was present mostly because of a fraternity requirement, further pushing him into a zone of no growth. The impact of this statement drove other participants into the panic zone as we deviated from the initial focus of the dialogue on empowering men to defending their manhood.

It is acceptable for individuals to identify as cisgender, a term denoting that a person’s gender and identify correspond with their birth sex. Providing this lens to male identified students and colleagues is vital. Many fear this admission as they do not want to come off as a racist or misogynist, but without acknowledging our identity we cannot truly acknowledge the system of oppression and how our silence and inaction feeds into this. Often we avoid the “p-word” as the mere mention of privilege may lead to conflict. As educators, we often struggle to acknowledge our privilege out of fear of losing credibility, but without its acknowledgement, we cannot utilize our privilege to affect the change needed to make a better world for all. Through outdoor experiences we can provide opportunities for our participants to make this connections in a non-threatening manner.

References
very incoming freshman at West Virginia University has the opportunity to sign up for an Adventure West Virginia Orientation Trip. These trips are 5 to 7 days long and consist of many different activities to expose students to the outdoors, develop new friendships, and create a connection with the university. Students who participate are more likely to stay in school and enjoy their experience. And boy are they right! After attending my own Adventure WV Orientation Trip, I developed a deeper sense of self-confidence, gained greater awareness of myself and others, and learned the importance of stepping outside my comfort zone.

Before my orientation trip I did not know what to expect. I knew I was going to be outside with twenty-three strangers learning about what West Virginia University had to offer. What I did not know was how powerfully the trip would impact my life. My trip leaders taught me to see myself and others in the group without judgement. We created an atmosphere of acceptance, purpose, and unconditional regard for each other. This was the first time I was not worried about the clothes I was wearing, where I was from, or with whom I was friends. I was perceived as an individual with quirks, strengths, and traits that made me...me!

After the trip, I knew I had to be a part of this program to share with others the personal growth and fun I experienced. The next three years I led trips all summer long for Adventure WV. Each trip I focused on helping students gain confidence and a sense of purpose and connection with themselves and the community to which they joined. I helped prepare them for stressful moments life may bring, encouraged them to look inward and truly see their worth and begin sharing it with others, and was a reliable listener when circumstances seemed to spiral out of control. I continue to be amazed at the drastic impact such a short trip can have on students’ lives. Students kept in contact with me long after their trip was over, asking for advice on how to manage their time through finals, or which classes were better to take for general electives, or even to meet up for coffee. Seeing students years after their program allowed me to glimpse the impact I had on their transition to college.

The lessons and experiences I have had with Adventure West Virginia are not limited to the outdoors. They are magnified in the classroom, in my relationships, through my teachings, and in my mentorships. This confidence has encouraged me to run for office in organizations, take the lead on projects in the community, and step
into the learning zone with every activity I do, even writing this article.

Recently, I was elected co-president of the Graduate Social Work Organization where I am a liaison between students and faculty in the School of Social Work. The mission of this organization is to engage students in the surrounding community while bringing awareness to the School of Social Work and career opportunities in Social Work. Through this experience I have seen how positive, passionate, and motivated individuals can create a ripple of change in a community. Students are encouraged to be engaged and support each other throughout the semester. Sometimes when personal morale is low I reflect back to times leading Adventure groups through a difficult situation as a source of strength.

Through my graduate assistantship with Adventure WV I have had the privilege of working with several WVU organizations at the challenge course. As a graduate assistant, my role has shifted behind the scenes. I help plan trip outings to provide the best experience possible, including logistics, flow and what activities fit best with their group’s goals. I have found the most rewarding part is building connections with other organizations throughout the university and developing a wider community through these interactions.

Along this journey as an outdoor facilitator I have learned how to empower, motivate, and support others around me. By participating in the opportunities offered by Adventure WV I have witnessed the impact such programs have on individuals. Experiential education has opened my eyes to a new learning style which now guides me through my daily interactions. Stepping outside of my comfort zone, exposing myself to new experiences, and reflecting on the process allows me to grow into new leadership roles I would have otherwise missed. Now when faced with a challenge or opportunity I have the confidence to take the lead!
Collegiate Recovery Programs and Campus Outdoor Programs:

A Case for Partnership

Nathan Harlan  
Cathy Yura

A brief survey of universities and colleges shows that Outdoor Recreation Programs and to a lesser extent, Collegiate Recovery Programs are present on many campuses. What seems to be missing is the intentional and holistic collaboration between these two specialties. Although a long history of therapeutic recreation exists in the addiction services field, the practice has yet to make it onto the college campus with any regularity. This article seeks to build the case for just such a movement. The goals, methods and outcomes of Collegiate Recovery and Outdoor Recreation programs at Colleges and Universities seem to be a natural and complimentary match, especially in this time of diminished funding. Done well, both programs win as do the students of the Institution which they serve.

College campuses are no strangers to substance use disorders. The current opioid addiction crisis that claimed some 30,000 lives in 2017 alone is present in academia as is the broader problem of drug and alcohol addiction. Substance use disorders affect college aged students more than any other age group in the US, affecting about one out of every six people between the ages of 18-24 years according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Many of these individuals, after seeking treatment are in remission from the symptoms of their disorder and have adopted lifestyle strategies that help maintain their continued abstinence, a status referred to as recovery. Some, eager to move on in their college careers need special support systems to persist through the stresses and challenges of college life while maintaining their recovery. More universities are developing Collegiate Recovery Programs that focus on providing activities and communities committed to providing assistance throughout the recovery process. Collegiate Recovery Programs (CPR) have grown in the past decade from 9 in 2009 to 249 in 2017.

More common to the average college campus are outdoor recreation programs. Taking various forms and often housed under different units based on the institution, outdoor programs have been present in American higher education for most of the last century. Increasingly, outdoor adventure has occupied a visible place on campus through facilities such as climbing walls and challenge courses. Less common, but promising in terms of future direction, some campuses have embraced outdoor programs as an effective method to address student’s development, persistence and success. Pre-college Outdoor Orientation Programs in particular have seen growth in the past decade as a key strategy for first year student transition.
To understand the case for partnership, a deeper look at Collegiate Recovery Programs is necessary. Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRPs) began in the 1980s with only eight universities at that time recognizing the need to provide support to college students in recovery from substance use disorders. While Collegiate Recovery Programs grew exponentially in the past decade, the need for recovery support services is being addressed by colleges and universities as the high prevalence of illicit drug use and substance use disorders continues to grow. Transitioning into adulthood is challenging with new freedoms and opportunities, less supervision and structure on a college campus. However, for young adults, post relapse rates are high ranging from 60-70% the first year and within five years, 90% relapse (Brown & Ramo, 2006). Research has shown that acute clinical care alone is insufficient to sustain youth’s long-term recovery, however, the growing number of Collegiate Recovery Programs have shown low relapse rates and above average academic achievement (Laude, Harris, Kimball, Winters, Moberg, 2014). The development of recovery support in academic settings provides an educational opportunity alongside recovery support to ensure that students do not have to sacrifice one for the other.

Every Collegiate Recovery Program varies, however, most programs provide social events, awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts for students in recovery. Collegiate Recovery Programs provide a safe, supportive learning environment for college students who otherwise would need to isolate or face the threat of relapse. Overall, Collegiate Recovery Programs allow students in recovery to participate in a normal college experience without surrendering their educational goals.

Nathan Harlan is Executive Director of the WVU Office of Student Wellness. Cathy Yura is the Director of the WVU Collegiate Recovery Program
WVU Case Study:

As previously mentioned, few institutions of higher education have maximized the opportunity to harness outdoor programming as a partner in mental health or recovery services on campus. Several institutions have pioneered programs on a small scale that feature just such a collaboration. West Virginia University can serve as a case study for programmatic efforts that have laid a groundwork for more systematic and sustainable partnerships in the future. Since 2004, WVU, a large Land-Grant public university has operated an outdoor education program known as Adventure West Virginia (AWV). From its inception, AWV was embraced and supported by the college counseling and health services units. As a means to help support the development of AWV, work with the program was written into the job description of a new psychologist position at the counseling center.

One of the programs created out of this partnership was SOAR; the Sophomore Outdoor Adventure Reorientation. Based on principles of positive psychology, SOAR entails a two-week wilderness expedition in the desert southwest with a follow up class held in the fall semester. The trip, offered to rising sophomores at the conclusion of their first year attempts to address persistence challenges through group development, reflection and strengths based exploration. SOAR is a direct fruit of the willingness to partner and share ideas.

Built off the success of SOAR, AWV joined forces with the Student Assistance Program to offer a group-based experiential intervention for alcohol related sanctions. Coordinated by a counseling center social worker, the program was an alternative to the standard psychoeducational intervention offered by WVU. Titled “High Expectations”, AWV’s low and high ropes course were used to engage the group in a progressive, thematic conversation which imparted consequences and protective factor information around alcohol use. The group, while traversing the challenge course element, could be dealt any number of consequence cards which would simulate a level of impairment. For example, a card may read, “one of your friends blacked out due to overconsumption” The group would then have to transport their friend via a stokes litter. In another example, the card read, “Had unsafe sex due to intoxication – contracted an STI” whereupon the students would have to carry squishy rubber toys around thus adding to their level of challenge (and discomfort). High Expectations showed initial success and was still getting off the ground when the staff member moved on to another institution. Staff turnover is a substantial challenge to the sustainability of integrated programming and highlights the need to coordinate on a more integrated level.

In August of 2018, WVU reorganized several Student Life units including Adventure WV and the Collegiate Recovery Program. Now under the same organizational umbrella, the path is clear for more integrated partnerships and collaborative programming. Several projects have already been put into place with more in the pipeline. One of the lowest hanging fruits was to offer recreational opportunities to the Recovery community. A monthly outdoor recreation trip has been scheduled for the spring semester including hiking, challenge course, canopy tour and snow sports. AWV staff and student leaders will provide the technical instruction, equipment and transportation for these events which are open to members of the Collegiate Recovery Community. A monthly outdoor recreation trip has been scheduled for the spring semester including hiking, challenge course, canopy tour and snow sports. AWV staff and student leaders will provide the technical instruction, equipment and transportation for these events which are open to members of the Collegiate Recovery Community. The long-range plan is for recovery students to complete the outdoor trip leader training so that they can be part of the staff team that delivers the experience. To that end, some Recovery graduate assistants and student workers are participating throughout the spring in the challenge course instructor training class and workshop. Future plans include the intent to build internship
opportunities for students wishing to blend outdoor programming with addiction studies coursework. Other program plans include a Recovery Spring Break trip involving paddling in the Desert Southwest as well as an adventure based orientation trip for residents in the recovery housing which will be piloted in Fall 2019.

**Five Considerations in favor of partnerships:**
The case for partnership between Collegiate Recovery programs and Outdoor Recreation and Education programs is strong. The specifics of how such a collaboration could work will vary across institutions and be shaped by unique program features. Variability notwithstanding, common values, commitments and current campus climate ensure that a partnership between Outdoor Programs and Recovery has a solid basis. Below are five considerations that help make the case for collaboration.

1. **Authentic Community:** One of the hallmarks of both Recovery Communities and Outdoor Education trips is the authentic community that they attempt to cultivate. The intentional use of group development activities and the careful maintenance of group norms leads to outcomes that often include supportive and committed long-term groups. These groups tend to exhibit mutual commitment, trust and even accountability for agreed upon norms and behavior. Based on group development theory and concepts such as belongingness, both professions recognize that peer culture can be extremely influential in the success of college students. Outdoor Education Programs tend to focus on the development of community during the high intensity format of a trip or program while Recovery Programs attempt to maintain these communities as a constant for their members throughout the academic year. The strategic use of outdoor programming to kick off and periodically re-affirm the recovery community is an obvious win. Furthermore, each area has much to learn from the other in the tradecraft of group development.

2. **Substance Free Environment:** Collegiate Recovery programs by nature are alcohol and drug free environments. At their most basic, they provide programs and services in which participants can be confident that the presence of drugs and alcohol won’t be a factor. University operated Outdoor Education Programs provide the same default drug and alcohol-free environment. Additionally, activities with a high perception of risk such as rock climbing, rafting and mountain biking can be a highly engaging but safe environment that occupies the role that high-risk drinking, or drug use once did for a student in recovery. Recovery communities looking for engaging drug/alcohol free options should find a natural fit with outdoor programs. What’s more, given the stated substance free policies on most school sponsored outdoor programs, students can engage in open enrollment programs with the knowledge that the atmosphere will be conducive to their recovery.
3. **Toward a Healthy Lifetime Activity:** Recovery communities are about more than just abstinence from drug and alcohol consumption. Long term recovery ideally involves purposeful choices, behaviors and practices that promote holistic wellbeing. Commitments of drug and alcohol cessation are much more difficult to maintain where a person’s physical, social and mental health are poorly maintained. Cultivating a community that is invested in holistic wellbeing is an essential aspect of Collegiate Recovery programming. The purposeful inclusion of outdoor activities that can form meaningful life-long activities directly support this goal. It is important to note that many college students are at a unique point in their lives. Many have recently transitioned from high school sports and other activities which for years provided both structure and physical activity in their lives. Very few go on to play at a collegiate level, creating the potential for loss of part of their self-identity as well as their main physical fitness driver. While not implicitly the goal of all outdoor programs, many participants do go on to adopt outdoor adventure-oriented pursuits as a core activity following initial exposure on a program. The adoption of a life-long sport such as paddle sports, cycling or hiking can be a sustainable and enjoyable source of physical fitness while also providing a community to which the individual may belong. Given the linkages between mental wellbeing and time spent in the outdoors, the adoption of these activities as part of a routine provides additional benefit that may not be derived from indoor fitness activities. Additionally, many outdoor activities are low cost and low risk (compared to a high cost/high impact sport such as ice hockey). Exposure and competence building in ORE activities can contribute to the long-term well-being of participants – especially participants in recovery.

4. **Building Partnerships and stakeholders:** A common complaint at colleges and universities is the tendency for departments and programs to become absorbed in their work and fail to partner and cooperate with other areas. The term Silo is often used to describe this circumstance, conjuring images of tall isolated containers – a metaphor that most higher education practitioners can identify with. Yet it is understood that much can be gained by culturing an interdisciplinary approach to student services. Some institutions have gone so far as to award funds to departments for special projects that demonstrate cross-departmental collaboration. The reasons to partner are many, but topping the list is the ability to better serve students. In partnering Outdoor Programs with Recovery Services, the students on all sides win. Recovery students get programming options that build their community, introduce them to new activities, and connect them to new peer groups who can help support their recovery. Outdoor programs can gain by serving a new demographic of students thereby increasing their impact. Collegiate outdoor programs are typically led by student trip leaders. Working with recovery students broadens their experiences, exposes them to a niche within the field (Therapeutic Recreation) and can challenge previously held stereotypes and assumptions about substance use disorders. Additionally, both outdoor and recovery programs gain stakeholders when they partner with each other. Higher education practitioners understand that leadership changes and funding challenges can threaten the continuation of their programs. The more
integrated a department is into the fabric of the institution, the more likely it will be to weather difficulties. When programs are being assessed for their value to the institution, the broader the set of stakeholders the better. A well-coordinated partnership can also provide cost savings for both parties. Outdoor programs that are supported by their institution can offer programs and services far below the industry average. The opportunity for cross training recovery staff as trip leaders can increase the volume of programming for departments that have maxed out their staff. Because personnel are often the most expense line item of a trip or program, cross training staff can result in even more cost effectiveness.

5. Contributing to Recruitment and Persistence: Increasingly, Higher Education institutions are approaching student recruitment and student success as a concern in which every employee and department should be engaged. Most campuses have specific offices that lead the charge on recruitment efforts. Commonly they employ a strategy of making early connections between prospective students and various departments that they may interact with during their tenure at the institution. The intense competition to recruit students triggers the need for institutions to differentiate themselves. Novel programs and key services such as the services envisioned in this article can be the difference for a student choosing between institutions.

Student attrition (students who drop out prior to graduation) is a significant challenge for most institutions. Less than three fourths of first year students persist through the first year on average. The causes that contribute to students transferring or withdrawing prior to degree completion are many and varied. Sub-par academic performance, financial hardship and poor social fit tend to top the list. Because institutions rely financially on tuition payments, low retention rates are a fiscal threat as well as challenge to the fulfillment of the Institutional mission.

Both Outdoor and Recovery programs can play a role in recruitment and persistence. As a key differentiator, a well-supported recovery program can be a prerequisite for students and families of students who are on the hunt for a school that can support their recovery and academic goals. A recovery program that combines the success record of Outdoor Orientation Programs with the long-term support of a Collegiate Recovery program would undoubtedly stand out even further. Once recruited, the student would benefit further from the synergies of these innovative units working together to provide support. Programs who can track and document the recruitment and persistence successes of their efforts will be well positioned to receive further support from their institution.
Having articulated the case for partnerships between Outdoor Recreation and Collegiate Recovery Programs on campus, it remains to provide some suggestions on how to initiate a potential collaboration. Practitioners recognize that building a relationship with students on an outdoor program or in a recovery setting is not a given. Rather, it takes purposeful and authentic effort. Similar principles apply in regard to building a collaboration between outdoor and recovery programs. Some suggestions are provided when considering how to get started.

- **Recognize the Context.** Every campus, program and student population are unique. Spend some time evaluating what structures and people make up the contours of your campus landscape. Consider using a SWOT analysis to assist in understanding the context.

- **Find Shared Values and Mission.** Look at the intersection of the goals and operations that the two programs hold. Are there natural points of symmetry? Of compliment or need? The best partnerships operate based on mutual benefit.

- **Invest Time in the Relationship.** It sounds overly simple, but don’t assume you understand the other party’s operations, needs and goals. Review the program’s website, print material and relevant literature about the field in which it operates. Attend the program’s events to learn and show support. Get together for coffee with key leaders, not to just to cast a vision for the partnership but to ask about the operation and become more informed.

- **Start small and look to scale up.** Small manageable programs test the waters and build a foundation for more extensive partnership. Choose a program or partnership opportunity that allows both parties to have equal but manageable investment. Beware of one-sided partnerships where all of the workload or benefits rest on one party.

Practitioners of Outdoor Education and Collegiate Recovery likely have more in common than they may at first suspect. From shared values to mutually beneficial outcomes the prerequisites of a successful partnership are present. Each institution has a blank canvas on which to create beautiful partnerships between outdoor education and recreation and mental health services on campus. With much to be gained on all sides, the case for partnership is strong.
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About our conference lodging
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