

# Adventure

## WELCOME EXPERIENCE 2018

An AWE-some transition and unique orientation program that will engage new CSUSB students!

### Descriptions and Sources of First-Year Adventure and Wilderness-based Outdoor Orientation Programs

#### Noncredit Outdoor Orientation

Program goals for first-year students: establish commitment to the institution, educate participants on the transition to college, promote personal development, and develop relationships with peers and faculty (Wolfe & Kay, 2011)

#### Freshmen Adventure Orientation

Outdoor adventure experience focusing on the development of social interest of program participants (Kafsky, 2001).

#### Noncredit Wilderness Orientation

Program that focused on three factors of successful adjustment of first-year students: level of extracurricular involvement, retention, and academic achievement (Oravec, 2002).

### Adventure Welcome Experience

The AWE program will offer first-year and transfer students a warm welcome to CSUSB, as well as provide tools to successfully navigate the transition to Coyote life. Students will explore the beautiful outdoors and develop relationships while on a fun-filled journey of self-discovery, engagement, and leadership development.

**The AWE program is optional for new first-year & transfer students and consists of various summer trips (Yosemite, Big Sur, Eastern Sierras)**

- » 4 trips, each 4 days/3 nights
- » 6-10 students & 2 student trip leaders per trip

**Collaboration with the Orientation & First-Year Experience will occur to effectively promote AWE and cross train the trip leaders. The program will provide opportunities for participants and leaders to achieve the following positive outcomes:**

- » Engage in self-discovery
- » Increase self-confidence and decrease anxiety
- » Improve leadership and communication skills
- » Learn to work effectively within a group
- » Gain insight and wisdom from leaders and peers
- » Foster a connection to CSUSB
- » Prepare to excel as a Coyote
- » Develop friendships and connections



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## Statement of the Problem – Attrition and Time to Degree Completion

Student attrition from first to second year and increased time to degree completion are challenges for a number of higher education institutions in the United States (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986; Tinto, 2006). The graduation rate, within 6 years, for first-time, full-time undergraduates earning a bachelor's degree from 4-year institutions spans from 89% for highly selective institutions (less than 25% accepted) to 34% for the least selective institutions with open admissions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). First-year to second-year attrition and lack of persistence to degree completion may be due to an unsuccessful transition to college, the inability to integrate into the campus community, or a lack of student involvement (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Tinto, 2006).

## Program History and Research

For decades, universities have been implementing outdoor orientation programs (OOP) or wilderness based orientation programs with significant success; these programs are an engaging type of extended orientation program that offer new students a unique way to start college with a group of peers (Bell, 2006; Pierce, 2002).

According to Bell et al. (2010), "The use of outdoor orientation as student preparation for the stresses of college itself was an idea heavily influenced by the U.S. Outward Bound (OB) organization" (p. 3). The historical beginnings of wilderness based orientation programs began in the 1930s with Dartmouth College and, later, in the 1960s with Prescott College; these two programs provided the template for higher education institutions' outdoor orientation programs (Bell et al., 2014).

Wilderness-based or outdoor orientation programs did not become prevalent in United States until the 1970s and 1980s (Bell et al., 2010). A census published in 2010 indicated that outdoor or wilderness orientation programs in the United States have been rapidly growing with an average of 10 new programs each year (Bell et al., 2010).

## Pathways to Engagement

The OOP experience may impact participants in ways that traditional orientation programs do not, such as development of: meaningful relationships, a social support network (Bell, 2005; Gass et al., 2003; Kafsky, 2001), and a sense of place, (Austin et al., 2009). Research has found that OOP participation develops institutional commitment (Wolfe & Kay, 2011) as well as increased involvement on campus (Oravec, 2002).

## Student Success

Outdoor orientation programs positively impact student retention and persistence to graduation by assisting first-year students with transition and integration to college through early engagement, development of connections, and easing anxiety (Gass, 1990; Lien & Goldenberg, 2012; Oravec, 2002; Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

## Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research by Wolfe and Kay (2011) conducted at a mid-sized university in the southern United States examined the perceived impact of an OOP on first-year college students. Specific goals of the program in Wolfe and Kay's study included: establish commitment to the institution, educate participants on the transition to college, promote personal development, and develop relationships with peers and faculty. The following themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. Becoming real;
2. Consequences rather than lectures;
3. I love my university; and
4. My new family and friends. (p. 25)

A qualitative phenomenological study by Nester (2016) was conducted to understand the transition and integration experiences of first-year freshmen who participated in an outdoor orientation program at 2 higher education institutions in the Southeastern United States. The sample chosen provided information-rich, illuminative detail on the phenomenon of first-year student transition and integration to college. Data collection included the creation of 3 concept maps followed by a semistructured in-depth interview. The highest number of mentioned areas on the research participant concept maps included friends, family, and organizations/clubs (Figure 1).

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