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**Outdoor Programming in Higher Education: Exploring Goals and Sense of Community in
The Trinity College Quest Program**

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Abstract

Outdoor education is a nuanced aspect of experiential learning which is growing in relevance across all levels of education. Such programming greatly contributes to student growth and community building. Previous literature has highlighted the benefits of outdoor programming in the higher education setting, noting that it allows students to adapt better to their college, feel a greater sense of community, and engage in personal growth. Trinity College's Quest program is an outdoor education program which aims to contribute to students' experience at Trinity. Through a quantitative study focusing on Quest, this paper attempts to answer the questions: Do students who participated in the Trinity College Quest Program report the program's goals to be effective? Does the Trinity College Quest program contribute to students' sense of community on Trinity's campus? After analyzing my findings, I can conclude that students who have participated in Quest programming perceive Quest to be an effective program which meets its goals and contributes to a sense of community on Trinity's campus. However, my research also indicates that student demographics—gender identity, race, and class year—potentially impacts students' experiences and perceptions. Thus, I argue that while the Quest program is generally impactful and beneficial, not all students have the same experiences when it comes to building community through Quest, and further work can be done to improve the program when it comes to accessibility and inclusion.

Introduction

When one begins college, they are willingly partaking in a transitional period defined by meeting new people, engaging with challenging academia, and exploring an unfamiliar setting. Higher education, for many students, is a time of consistent growth and change in which individuals learn about themselves and explore their passions, all while navigating a new social

scene. To aid in this transition, colleges and universities typically offer orientation programs which aim to inform students about the campus culture, introduce them to people and resources, help them learn the school's policies and procedures, and just generally become acclimated to the campus. Beyond this, many institutions also offer additional programs throughout the year for the entire student body to partake in. These programs and events vary greatly and can range from community service, outdoors experiences, cultural events, leadership programs, and more. Such programs enable students to step beyond the typical day to day life of a student and connect with others who have similar interests. Beyond this, such programs often enable students to engage more with the community both on and off campus. Overall, these programs consistently offer opportunities for community building and engagement within the university and beyond. One such sphere which achieves this at many colleges and universities is programming in the outdoors, often referred to as outdoor education.

At Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut – a highly selective liberal arts institution with a student body of roughly 2,300 students from across the globe – the Quest program serves as the school's outdoor program (Trinity College, 2023). As an outdoor education program, Quest's central mission is “to establish friendships and support networks among students through personal growth and leadership development in an outdoor environment” (Johnson et. al. 9). Quest, therefore, is open to the entire student body and offers an array of experience for students to get involved in. These include an orientation program, weekend trips, Fall break and Spring break trips, and the Quest Leader program. Such experiences include a multitude of disparate outdoors based activities such as backpacking, rock climbing, canoeing, day hikes, trail maintenance, and more.

Typically, Quest is first introduced to students as a pre-orientation program. Therefore, the pre-orientation program is perhaps the most impactful aspect of Quest's programming. This program is open for all incoming first year students and is typically held prior to the mandatory orientation for all incoming Trinity students. The pre-orientation program offers 4-day backpacking trips, 4-day combination backpacking and rock climbing trips, as well as a 10-day backpacking and rock climbing combination trip. These trips take place primarily along the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut, and sometimes in portions of the Appalachian Trail in New York and Massachusetts. The four-day trips cost \$250 while the 10-day experience is \$500. Quest offers financial aid — in which the entire costs of the trip would be covered—for any students who request it. Additionally, most gear—such as backpacks, boots, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and water bottles—are also available for students to rent out for the trips free of cost. The trips themselves consist of four to eight first-year student participants and two to three student leaders. These leaders are typically students who have participated in the program in the past, though that is not a requirement. All leaders are Wilderness First Aid certified, CPR certified, have been on at least two training trips, and participated in additional on-campus skills training. On the trips, students hike throughout the day and stay at campsites overnight. All students are taught the basic wilderness skills to survive—such as cooking, navigation, and the Leave No Trace principles. Additionally, leaders work to establish a safe and welcoming environment within these groups. They do so by facilitating games, activities, and conversation in order to create comfortability and establish a sense of community among the group. After the trip, leaders are expected to stay in contact with their group members and help ensure a smoother transition into college by consistently checking in on them and just generally supporting them through this transitional period.

As mentioned, Quest also offers programming throughout the semester for all students regardless of participation in the pre-orientation program or not. Student leaders meet weekly to plan weekend experiences and break based trips. Some examples of these weekend experiences are hikes, white water rafting, a corn maze excursion, horseback riding, rock climbing, or participating in community trail cleanup days. For break based trips, Quest typically travels. Recent locations have been Zion National Park, The Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, River Gorge, and more. These trips, like Quest, are cost-free or low in cost. For trips in alternate locations, the only expense for students is typically a plane ticket. All students are informed of these opportunities and encouraged to sign up through links sent out to the student body in weekly emails from Trinity's Recreation Department.

While Quest offers many opportunities for students to get involved and works hard to ensure that the experiences are accessible to the entire student body, there are also some barriers which students perceive which may lead to less involvement. These include access to gear and the perceived price of the experiences. While Quest does pay for the majority of the experiences and supply most gear, this information is not always widely known among the student body. Thus, it acts as a potential deterrent for certain students when searching for programs to get involved in. Additionally, issues of inclusion arise when it comes to outdoor spaces. While this will be further elaborated upon in my literature review, it can be understood that Quest often draws more white students than non-white, thus leading some students to feel unrepresented in this space. As such, issues of inclusion can be interpreted as an additional barrier when it comes to participation in Quest.

In this thesis, I examined the effectiveness of Quest programming at Trinity College based on quantitative research methods. Effectiveness, here, directly relates to the Quest program

goals, which will be explained in detail in my Methods section. This topic is important as involvement in such programming can truly impact student experiences and the sense of community one feels within an institution. The purpose of this quantitative study is to understand the effectiveness of the Trinity College Quest Leadership Program and, consequently, to learn if students perceive the program as contributing to their sense of community on campus or not. This will be understood in terms of the perspectives of the students who take my survey, looking at if the students agree that their experiences with Quest align with the program's established goals. To effectively explore this topic, I created a multi-item survey, open to all current Trinity students who have participated in Quest, which addressed my central research questions: Do students who participated in the Trinity College Quest Program report the program's goals to be effective? Does the Trinity College Quest program contribute to students' sense of community on Trinity's campus?

Literature Review

The Outdoors: An Overview

At its most basic level, outdoor education could simply include existing in the outdoors and learning about your surroundings in that setting. This leads one to wonder: what is it about the outdoors that is so impactful and makes it a prime environment for community engagement and personal growth? In "Adventure Education," Denise Mitten and her co-authors present the general benefits of continued engagement with the outdoors. They explain, "time in nature leads to health benefits through contact with the natural elements, participation in physical activity including recreation and stewardship, and social interactions" (233). These natural elements are rich in diversity as it includes plants, animals, water, and more. To gain a greater knowledge of such elements through interacting with them, first hand, leads to a more well-rounded

understanding of self and one's place in the natural world. As such, there are general health benefits associated with repeated interaction with the natural world.

Kristen Beyer and her co-authors expand upon these ideas in their article titled "Time Spent Outdoors, Depressive Symptoms, and Variations by Race and Ethnicity," as they discuss a study they conducted which examined the effects of time spent outdoors, specifically on mental health. Through their qualitative study which examined neighborhood environmental correlations with mental illness, they determined three pathways through which time in the outdoors contributes to one's general disposition and increased mental health. These pathways were physical activity, general exposure to the natural environment, and activity in nature being "considered a healthy thing to do" (Beyer et. al.). In regard to physical activity, they explain, "Physical activity has known mental health benefits, and outdoor physical activity may have increased mental health benefits over indoor physical activity, which would result in better mental health among those spending more time outdoors" (Beyer et. al.). In this argument, therefore, it can be understood that partaking in physical activity outside, one's mental health can be improved. Beyond this, for exposure to the natural environment, they discuss exposure to green space, particularly in more urban settings, as important, and show that there are "mental health impacts of time spent outside in green environments, with outcomes such as reduced depressive symptoms" (Beyer et. al.). The term "green environments" encompasses many aspects of nature. For, this could simply mean a man-made greenspace or park in a city, a national park, a local forest preserve, or more. Any of these green environments, according to Beyer, have the potential to positively impact one's demeanor. Finally, addressing how such activity in the outdoors is considered a healthy thing to do, Beyer and her co-authors cite how physicians have increasingly been moving towards "prescribing outdoor time to improve

patient's mental health" (Beyer et. al.). Evidently, the impact of the outdoors is becoming recognized among health professionals.

While there are many positives associated with the outdoors, there are some issues around access, as well, which contribute to how individuals perceive it and decide to partake in such activity, or not. Primarily, issues of inclusion arise. In her article, "The Outdoors Was Made for White People," Marya Mtshali states that, "like most American institutions, outdoor space—and, crucially, access to it—has been socially and physically constructed by white supremacy and settler colonialism" (Mtshali). Discussing this, she cites the European colonies and America's history of colonization. For much of the natural land which we exist on and recreate in was indigenous land that was forcibly taken by colonizers. As such, the "great outdoors" that this nation has cultivated was created for a white nation. Mtshali expands, "erasure of nonwhite subjects is inextricable from the project of the American Wilderness." Due to this, the outdoors is not always understood as a welcoming place for all. The spaces, due to their past, often occupy a sense of implicit racial biases which create barriers for inclusion. This issue persists in the realm of outdoor education as well. Many programs often lack diversity or awareness of this past and thus struggle to address problems of inclusion. As presented in this section, these issues will be further discussed in connection with the Quest Program in my discussions section. Despite issues of inclusion, however, the outdoors persists as a generally beneficial means of contributing to both physical and mental health.

Outdoor Education: Onset and Application

Outdoor education, overall, is not a new concept and has been consistently growing in relevance and use since its onset. Many scholars in this field agree that outdoor education is, in fact, one of the earliest forms of education as it predates the establishment of classrooms and

formalized education. Defining outdoor education, therefore, has proved difficult for scholars who have engaged with this topic as, in outdoor education, a variety approaches are taken and a multitude of experiences are represented. Specifically, this programming looks different across the disparate education levels that it exists in. For example, younger students might simply partake in lessons outdoors that include observational walks in which students are called to be attentive to the nature around them. Other programs, typically for older students, may be more intense. For example, this could take shape in the form of multi week backpacking trips in the wilderness or weekly camping trips. Whatever shape they take, outdoor education is growing and proves greatly beneficial to creating a more complex and engaging curriculum and community for students. As James Neil concludes in “Outdoor Education in the Schools,” no matter the different forms and approaches, “outdoor education is a panacea for ills which pervade our contemporary education and societal systems” (1). Essentially, outdoor education provides a unique way in which educators can achieve certain goals, apply practical skills, and create community within their classrooms. Being outdoors, students are challenged in ways that will teach them how to overcome challenges in other areas of their lives.

Some of the earliest programming based in outdoor education was Outward Bound. Originally founded in the United Kingdom by Lawrence Holt and Kurt Hahn in the 1940s, Outward Bound was started with the initial goal of “strengthening the will of young men so they could prevail against adversity during WWII, where the United Kingdom was encountering staggering losses at sea” (Mitten et. al. 233). In this early program, goals were met “by proving mastery over the environment, and mainstream adventure education began using nature as a backdrop for activities that enabled clients to conquer behavioral and physical challenges” (233). Kurt Hahn, eventually moved the programming to the school in Scotland where he was

headmaster and used such techniques to “enhance student engagement and decrease apathy” (Bell 347). Since these early days, Outward Bound has expanded from just the United Kingdom and now includes general outdoor activity and programming such as backpacking, climbing, canoeing, and more. Bell notes that Hahn discovered that “students who learned to engage successfully and surmount physical challenges could do the same with emotional, academic, and moral challenges” (348). Essentially, Outward Bound was one of the first outdoor education programs established which recognized the benefit of continued interaction with the outdoors. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), similarly builds upon this idea and engages with these concepts. Beginning in 1965, NOLS offers multi-day outdoor experiences for young people to partake in. NOLS, in general, “strives to be the leader in wilderness education by combining the development of leadership and technical outdoor skills with education regarding biology and natural history in naturally occurring environments.” Their general objectives include “safety and judgment, leadership, expedition behavior, outdoor skills, and environmental awareness” (Sibthorp et. al. 2). Beyond these programs, outdoor education began to appear in the form of camps and experiences connected to educational institutions. As Donald Hammerman explains in “A Case for Outdoor Education,” “Since 1947, outdoor education has developed from an experiment in camping education to the place where over 800 school districts in practically all of the US participate annually in a resident outdoor education experience” (54). As such, these objectives which were established in the beginnings of such programs are relevant across most outdoor programs and translate well into goals of outdoor education in higher education.

Outdoor Education and Higher Education: Beginnings and Benefits

When it comes to higher education, the majority of research done on outdoor education revolves around the benefits of orientation programming. While most colleges and universities have mandatory orientation for students, there are often programs which supplement such orientation to allow students further opportunities to engage with the university, the surrounding area, and connect with more students. Outdoor education is one such program. In “The Effects of A Wilderness Orientation Program on College Students,” Michael Gass, speaking generally of orientation programs, states, “while the focus of some orientation programs has been to combat the variety of factors which lead students to drop out, the goals of other programs have been intellectual, moral, identity, and interpersonal development of students while they are at school” (30). As such, there are a variety of types of orientation programs that exist which are meant to impact students’ experiences. Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire was one of the first institutions to implement a wilderness orientation program in 1935 (Gass 31). The program proved greatly effective not only for student retention, but also for the personal development of students. As such, many institutions have implemented similar orientation programs which incorporate the outdoors.

There are many ways an outdoors orientation program in higher education can look. Whether it be through backpacking trips, rock climbing, canoeing, general camping, or day hikes, the goals and benefits of such programs remain largely the same. In a study conducted by Robert Ribbe Jr., Rachael Cyrus, and Emily Langan, they examined whether or not outdoor orientation programs improved adaptation to college. In their findings, they discovered that participants in wilderness orientation programs “reported higher levels of social support in attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, tangible support, guidance, and opportunity for nurturance” (357). James Rude, Andrew Bobilya, and Brent Bell support these findings with

their similar study which explored how outdoor orientation experiences contribute to student thriving. Thriving, in terms of university students, can be understood as being energized and engaged with others and with the institution, while also feeling a sense of self-fulfillment. As Bell notes, there appears to be a direct correlation between student participation in outdoor orientation programs and subsequent involvement on campus. In their findings from a qualitative study of an outdoor orientation program, they noted that students benefited across five central factors: academic engagement, engaged learning, positive perception, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness (Bell et. al. 200). In examining the impact, as a whole, they determined that “participating in outdoor orientation appears to set in motion a propensity for students to become more involved in campus life, which fosters a greater sense of community, which then culminates in thriving” (208). Evidently, involvement in outdoor orientation programming proved very beneficial for students.

Beyond the orientation setting, outdoor education can also be applied throughout the academic school year. Gass explains that “It is recommended that colleges and universities view wilderness orientation programs as a year-long process. This is particularly true if these programs are implemented as a strategy to reduce attrition” (31). These programs typically take place on the weekends or during school breaks and are often run by student leaders. They offer similar benefits such as community and engagement with the natural world. Importantly, these programs are crucial as they allow students who may have not been able to participate in the orientation programming to get acquainted with the program and have a similar opportunity to reap the benefits of outdoor education. My study explores such programs, both orientation and semester based, at Trinity College, and contributes to the greater effort of better understanding the benefits of outdoor education in higher education.

Methods

Methods/Methodology

I conducted a quantitative study that surveyed current Trinity College students who have participated in Quest experiences at Trinity about their perceptions of the Quest Program. Using a quantitative study, I felt that I would be able to reach a larger population of students, gain more data, and be better equipped to gather results and draw general conclusions to answer my questions. In “Designing Questions to Be Good Measures,” Floyd Fowler explains how surveys are best to use for content which needs can be “measured” as, generally, “an answer given to a survey is of no intrinsic interest” (87). As I am to simply investigating whether or not the Quest program meets its goals and, further, if it contributes to a sense of community on campus or not, a survey is the proper tool to measure these answers. My survey, made through Qualtrics, consisted of 38 items, including both multiple choice questions and summative statements which participants were asked to rate on a likert scale. On this scale, one indicated strong disagreement, three was neither agree nor disagree, and five indicated strong agreement.

Limitations

While I understand my survey to be effective, I acknowledge that there are some limitations. For example, my answers are rather generalized as I will not be able to gather in-depth feedback about experiences as can typically be obtained with interviewing. Additionally, I believe that many students may have elected to not take my survey due to its length. Furthermore, I gained a relatively small sample size. Although there are over 400 students on campus who have participated in Quest programming, in some form, I only got 70 responses. This small sample size contributes to the significance of my statistics as a greater response rate could potentially garner more statistically significant results. Finally, as with any data collection,

some of my questions and phrasing may have been unclear.

Participants:

My survey was distributed to all students who have participated in any Quest Programming at Trinity through an email sent out by Kevin Johnson, the Director of Quest and Recreation. These experiences include the orientation program, weekend trips, spring break trips, Trinity days trips, Quest reunion events, or involvement as a Quest leader. Eligible students also had to be at least 18-years-old or older. This sample is appropriate because it includes the student population at Trinity who is directly engaging with the experiences offered through the Quest Program. These students, therefore, have the most insight on its programming and, subsequently, its impact on their college experience.

Survey Content and Data Collection:

Once I determined my research questions, I decided that survey research would be the most appropriate means for data collection. After this, I began to construct my survey. To do so, I referred to the official Quest handbook and determined appropriate subtopics and questions for my survey. To answer my first question—Do students who participated in Quest perceive the program’s goals to be effective? —I determined three areas of goals which the handbook presents in its “Goals” section (Johnson et. al 9). These are the general program impact, social development, and personal development. To effectively address if students perceived the program to be impactful, I asked them to rate their agreement with a series of summative statements. These included: through participation in Quest, I feel as if I have: established friendships and support networks with other Trinity students; cultivated a sense of community and made a positive connection with Trinity College; developed an appreciation of the outdoors; developed my wilderness skills, challenged my preconceived physical, mental, and emotional

limits; and had an easier and/or more supported transition into college. To measure students' understanding of their social development, I had them rate the following statements on a likert scale. Through participation in Quest, I feel as if I have developed in: teamwork; listening; communication; conflict resolution; cooperation; and leadership. Furthermore, to measure students' personal development, I had them rate the following statements. Through participation in Quest, I feel as if I have developed in confidence; responsibility; accountability; integrity; and self-reliance. This breakdown of the goals of Quest allows students, and me, to better comprehend the central aims of the program.

To answer my second question—Does Quest contribute to students' sense of community at Trinity? —I identified two subgroupings under which to frame my questions. The first relates to whether participants identify a sense of community at Trinity from Quest after participation in its programming. The second relates to Quest participant's general satisfaction with their Trinity experience. To address this first subgroup, I had participants rate the following statements: I am still in contact with my Quest peers (leaders, other participants, other students, program supervisors, etc); participation in the Quest Program contributed to the sense of community I feel on Trinity's campus; I feel supported by the Trinity College Quest Program; and I plan to stay involved with Quest during the rest of my time at Trinity. This second subgrouping, relating to general satisfaction, contained the following statements which students rated: I enjoy my classes; I am satisfied with my level of engagement at Trinity; I feel a sense of belonging at Trinity College; I feel valued by my peers; I feel supported by my professors; I am satisfied with my Trinity experience; I am happy with the sense of community I feel at Trinity. In constructing these subgroups for to answer my second research question, I referred to the "Philosophy" and "Goals" section of the Quest handbook (Johnson et. al. 8, 10).

In my survey, I also asked a series of demographic questions to determine who was taking my survey. These demographic variables included gender identity, race, and class year. Gender identity included male, female, and non-binary. Race included White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Another Race. For the purpose of organization of my results, and based on the demographic parties which answered my survey, the central groups which I determined are “white” and “non-white.” As presented, non-white included any of the racial or ethnic identities listed which did not fall under “white.” I acknowledge that, doing this, I am grouping many people of disparate identities together and the presentation of results, therefore, may not be as rich. If future research were to be done and a larger sample were to be collected, it would be valuable to compare and contrast the answers of each of these disparate identities. Beyond this, however, I examined class year and determined the grouping to be of lower class year students (first-years and sophomores) and upper class students (juniors and seniors). These demographic questions allow me to gain more in depth data and better understand how my overall results may vary when compared along these variables. Aside from these questions, all of my participants were invited to participate in an anonymous survey to win a ten dollar gift card to an on-campus coffee shop. By incentivizing my survey, I hoped to gain greater participation.

In constructing this survey, I determined some initial hunches of what my results might show. Overall, I presumed that students would generally agree that Quest met its outlined goals and, additionally, that it contributed to their sense of community on campus. However, I expect these results to vary more when it comes to each demographic variable, specifically race, due to the outdoors being understood as a primarily white space, as described in the literature review.

Data Analysis:

When analyzing my data, I used Qualtrics to gather my results and group them into the proper subgroupings, as established above. I then used Stata, a statistical analysis software, to determine the overall mean and standard deviation of each grouping of questions. Beyond determining the overall mean and standard deviation, I also employed Stata to determine these for each demographic variable. Once I gained my results, I ran t-tests to determine if any of my findings were statistically significant. I then constructed tables to format my findings and compare results. Using this software and organizing my findings in this way, I was able to effectively present my results and determine their general significance to answer my research questions.

Findings: Survey Results

Based on my findings, I developed the following thesis to answer my research questions: Ultimately, students who have participated in Quest programming perceive Quest to be an effective program which meets its goals and contributes to a sense of community on Trinity's campus. However, my research also indicates that student demographics (gender identity, race, class year) potentially impacts students' experiences and perceptions. This section of my thesis aims to present my findings in the form of my survey results and thus prove this thesis. Each table addresses a specific area of my study and presents the mean scores of each item as well as the standard deviation and the number of responses garnered. For each table, data is presented as it exists overall and across the demographic barriers of race, gender identity, and class year.

Table 1: Survey Response

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Total Responses</i>	70	100
Gender		
Male	26	37.1
Female	42	60
Non-Binary	2	2.86
Race		
White	45	64.3
Non-White	25	35.7
Class Years		
Lower Class Years	44	62.9
Upper Class Years	26	37.1

Table one presents the breakdown of my survey respondents. Initially, I had 87 responses, However, I had to disregard 17 of these as they did not complete enough of the survey for it to be usable data. Having 70 respondents overall proves a relatively small sample size considering that Quest garners about 100 or more participants each school year, and this survey was sent out to all students currently on campus who have participated in Quest programming. Additionally, more female students took my survey than male. This does not mirror the gender breakdown of Trinity's student body, which is about 50/50 (Student Gender Distribution, 2022). Additionally, this statistic does not reflect the general gender breakdown of Quest participants which tends to be within 10 percent of each other for any given year. I had more white participants than non-white, which does reflect the racial breakdown of students who attend Trinity College. Trinity is a predominantly white institution with about 61.2% percent white

students, which is relatively similar compared to the 64.3% of students who took my survey and are white. Finally, more lower-class year students responded to the survey than upper-class year students. While this does not reflect the class year breakdown at Trinity College, it does follow trends for Quest participation, as students tend to be more active in the program during their lower class years, following the program's introduction as an orientation program.

Table 2: Program Impact According to Quest Program Goals

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Overall Perception (1=SD, 3=neither, 5=SA)	4.46	0.62	70
Gender			
Male	4.4	0.67	26
Female	4.5	0.60	42
Non-Binary	4.91	0.12	2
Race			
White	4.5	0.10	45
Non-White	4.4	0.12	25
Class Years			
Lower Class Years	4.5	0.61	44
Upper Class Years	4.4	0.65	26

Table two presents students' evaluation of whether or not Quest meets its program goals. As outlined in the Quest handbook, these goals include: establishing friendships and support networks with other Trinity students, cultivating a sense of community and a positive connection with Trinity College, developing an appreciation of the outdoors, developing wilderness skills, challenging preconceived physical, mental, and emotional limits, and having an easier/more

supportive transition into college. On a likert scale, students indicated their level of agreement with whether or not Quest achieves these goals. Overall, students indicated that Quest does meet its program goals, with an overall mean of 4.46. When analyzed against demographic variables, there were slight differences, but none proved statistically significant. For gender identity, female identifying students reported stronger agreement (4.5) than male identifying students (4.4). In terms of race, white students reported slightly stronger levels of agreement (4.5) when compared to non-white students (4.4). Finally, lower class year students indicated stronger agreement (4.5) than upper class year students (4.4). These slight differences do not prove statistically significant and suggest agreement to strong agreement that Quest is successful in meeting its goals as it relates to the variables defined in program impact.

Table 3: Social Development of Quest Participants

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Overall Perception (1=SD, 3=neither, 5=SA)	4.36	0.76	68
Gender			
Male	4.44	0.67	26
Female	4.3	0.83	40
Non-Binary	4.33	0	2
Race			
White	4.36	0.82	45
Non-White	4.35	0.63	23
Class Years			
Lower Class Years	4.33	0.82	42
Upper Class Years	4.40	0.67	26

Table three presents students' evaluation of whether or not Quest meets its program goals as it relates to social development of participants. As outlined in the Quest handbook, social development can be defined as developing skills as they relate to teamwork, listening, communication, conflict resolution, cooperation, and leadership. On a likert scale, students indicated their level of agreement with whether or not they feel they have developed these social skills. Overall, students indicated that, through involvement in Quest, they did feel as if they socially developed, with a reported overall mean of 4.36. When analyzed against demographic variables, results did not vary greatly and did not prove statistically significant. For gender identity, male identifying students reported stronger agreement (4.44) than female identifying students (4.3). In terms of race, white students reported slightly stronger levels of agreement (4.36) when compared to non-white students (4.35). Finally, upper class year students indicated stronger agreement (4.4) than lower class year students (4.33). Overall, when analyzed against demographic variables, students still generally agree that they developed socially through participation in Quest.

Table 4: Personal Development of Quest Participants

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Overall Perception (1=SD, 3=neither, 5=SA)	4.4	0.73	68
Gender			
Male	4.34	0.73	26
Female	4.47	0.72	40
Non-Binary	4	1.41	2
Race			

White	4.4	0.78	45
Non-White	4.41	0.65	23
Class Years			
Lower Class Years	4.44	0.68	42
Upper Class Years	4.35	0.82	26

Table four presents students' evaluation of whether or not Quest meets its program goals as it relates to the personal development of participants. Personal development, as it relates to the Quest program and its goals, can be understood as the development of confidence, responsibility, accountability, integrity, and self-reliance. Students used a likert scale to indicate their level of agreement with whether or not they feel they have developed these in these ways. Overall, students indicated that, through involvement in Quest, they feel as if they have gained a stronger sense of self in these ways, with a reported overall mean of 4.4. Demographic variables did not complicate this result, as the resultant means for each subgroup did not prove statistically significant. However, in answering these questions, female identifying students reported higher levels of personal development (4.47) than male students (4.34). White participants (4.4) and non-white (4.41) reported nearly the same level of agreement for personal development. Finally, lower class years (4.44) reported slightly higher levels of personal development than upper class years (4.35). Overall, regardless of demographic breakdown, students generally report high levels of personal development through involvement in Quest.

Table 5: Sense of Community at Trinity from Quest

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Overall Perception (1=SD, 3=neither, 5=SA)	4.28	0.95	68

Gender			
Male	4.21	1.04	26
Female	4.31	0.91	40
Non-Binary	4.5	0.71	2
Race			
White	4.38	0.99	45
Non-White	4.07	0.84	23
Class Years			
Lower Class Years	4.38	0.83	42
Upper Class Years	4.13	1.12	26

Table five presents whether or not students feel a sense of community at Trinity from involvement in Quest. To address this question, students used a likert scale to indicated their level of agreement with the following statements: I am still in contact with my Quest peers (leaders, other participants, other students, program supervisors, etc); participation in the Quest Program contributed to the sense of community I feel on Trinity's campus; I feel supported by the Trinity College Quest Program; and I plan to stay involved with Quest during the rest of my time at Trinity. Overall, students indicated agreement that involvement in Quest has led to a sense of community at Trinity, with the overall mean being 4.28. When analyzed against demographic variables, there were slight differences, but none proved statistically significant. Female identifying students (4.31) indicated that they feel a stronger sense of community from Quest than male identifying students (4.21). White students (4.38) reported a greater sense of community from Quest than non-white students (4.07). Finally, lower class years (4.38) reported a greater sense of community than upper class years (4.13). The slight variation among these means suggest that, with a greater sample size, there is the potential for statistically significant

difference in each subset of demographic variables. However, participants generally agree that they feel a sense of community at Trinity from participation in Quest.

Table 6: Quest Participants' General Satisfaction with their Trinity Experience

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Overall Perception (1=SD, 3=neither, 5=SA)	4.02	0.66	68
Gender			
Male	4.05	0.67	26
Female	4.01	0.68	40
Non-Binary	3.64	0.10	2
Race			
White	4.13	0.67	45
Non-White	3.80	0.60	23
Class Years			
Lower Class Years	4.02	0.58	42
Upper Class Years	4.01	0.16	26

Table six presents whether or not students feel generally satisfied with their Trinity experience. To address this question, students used a likert scale to indicated their level of agreement with the following statements: I enjoy my classes; I am satisfied with my level of engagement at Trinity; I feel a sense of belonging at Trinity College; I feel valued by my peers; I feel supported by my professors; I am satisfied with my Trinity experience; and I am happy with the sense of community I feel at Trinity. Overall, Quest participants indicated that they do feel generally satisfied with their Trinity experience (4.02). However, a significant finding emerged when a t test was run on the demographic variables. Male identifying students reported slightly

higher levels of satisfaction (4.05) than female identifying students (4.01). White students reported higher levels of satisfaction (4.1) than non-white students (3.80). This was statistically significant ($t=2.02$, $p=.046$). In terms of class years, lower class years (4.02) reported slightly higher levels of satisfaction than upper class years (4.01). For gender and class year, students generally agreed that they felt satisfied with their Trinity experience. However, for the variable of race, white students feel more satisfaction with their Trinity experience than non-white students.

Discussion

Beginning this research, my central questions were: Do students who participated in the Trinity College Quest Program perceive the program's goals to be effective? And, does the Trinity College Quest program contribute to students' sense of community on campus? Based on my findings, I can confidently conclude that according to students, Quest meets its goals and that students agree that Quest contributes to a sense of community on campus. To restate my thesis: Students who have participated in Quest programming perceive Quest to be an effective program which meets its goals and contributes to a sense of community on Trinity's campus. The overall mean ratings of each sub category—program impact (4.46), social development (4.36), personal development (4.4), sense of community at Trinity from Quest (4.28), and general satisfaction with Trinity (4.02)—all indicate agreement or strong agreement with the outlined variables. However, my research also indicates that student demographic variables—gender identity, race, and class year—potentially impacts students' experiences and perceptions. Essentially, everyone who participated in Quest generally benefited from it. This aligns with previous literature which states positive benefits personally, with others, and within the institution (Ribbe et. al.). Students felt like the program met its goals, felt like they socially developed and personally developed,

agreed that they feel a sense of community at Trinity from Quest, and are generally satisfied with their Trinity experience. However, who perceived more of each of these specific subgroupings of program goals slightly varies by student characteristics. The only statistically significant data that emerges, after running a t-test, related to race and participant's general satisfaction at Trinity. However, slight variation among other questions indicate that significant data could be found with more data. In this discussion, I will present these variations of statistics in such sections and discuss what they imply, finally ending with addressing the statistically significant point of data which emerged.

When examining the results from the question of whether or not the Quest program meets its goals, it is important to note the slight variations that emerged. Most significant among these was that male identifying students seemed to report stronger agreement in terms of social development (4.44 versus 4.3) while female identifying students were more likely to agree that they personally developed (4.47 versus 4.34). While these calculated means are still very close in value and did not prove statistically significant, such results suggest potential statistical significance if a greater survey sample had been collected. Furthermore, this implies that men were more keen to socially partake in the trips while women felt more impact on a personal level. In reflecting on the program, this could relate to the amount of female and male students who participate, the gender breakdown of the student leaders, or the activities and conversations which students are being engaged in. Overall, in terms of program goals, this was the greatest variation that emerged in my results for these three sub categories of program impact, social development, and personal development.

Looking at the results of my section question relating to whether or not the Quest Program contributes to students' sense of community, there were a few potentially significant

statistics and one result which proved statistically significant. It is of note that both white students (4.38) and lower-class year students (4.38) indicated a slightly greater sense of community from Quest than non-white students (4.07) or upper-class year students (4.13). This aligns with the fact that Quest is presented, first, to students as an orientation program and students are, therefore, typically more involved in the program during their lower-class years. Furthermore, this supports the fact that Quest draws more from the white student population and that the outdoors is often understood as a white space, as presented by Mtshali in previous literature. Yet, this suggests that more needs to be done to prolong Quest's impact and make it a more welcoming environment which fosters community for all. Such ideas will be presented in my conclusion.

As mentioned, one statistically significant finding emerged from this study. When asked about satisfaction with their Trinity experience, white participants reported higher levels of satisfaction (4.13) vs. non-white participants (3.80). When run on a t test, this proved statistically significant ($t=2.02$, $p=.046$). This aligns with the general understanding that white students are generally more satisfied with their experiences at predominately white institutions. As such, this statistic could be seen more so as a reflection of the general Trinity environment than of Quest, specifically. As Quest takes shape as an orientation program and/or short experiences throughout the semester, it is understood that there is much that could happen before or after the experiences within the general Trinity community. Therefore, this result may not really be a reflection simply of Quest, but more accurately a reflection of what Trinity is to different students who participated in Quest. These results, however, do indicate the importance of being attentive to community efforts within the Quest program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While the results from my survey were overall positive and indicated that Quest is a beneficial and impactful program, there is still much that can be done to improve it. In particular, much can be done when it comes to accessibility and inclusion. In terms of accessibility, it is important to offer more trips that are of varying degrees of difficulty. Doing so, students have the ability to decide how much they want to challenge their physical, mental, and emotional limits. For example, there can be more day experiences offered. Additionally, to improve accessibility to the entire student body, Quest can be more straightforward in making the knowledge that gear and trips are free known. While this is included on the website, it is not necessarily clear and needs to be made more central in Quest advertising. This would aid in breaking down the barrier of cost that many students perceive.

Addressing issues of inclusion, Quest needs to be actively hiring a more diverse group of student leaders. Doing so, more students would see themselves represented and, perhaps, be more inclined to get involved. This would, additionally, contribute to the deconstruction of the narrative of the outdoors as a white space. Furthermore, as a new Recreation and Quest assistant is being hired, it is important to similarly keep these goals of accessibility in mind when going through the hiring process and considering the right person to hire. Beyond this, Quest should actively try to get involved with or partner with more on campus student organizations as well as local and state organizations for events and experiences. These could include, but are not limited to PRIDE, the Queer Resource Center, cultural houses, and Greek life. These partnerships would lead to more students being exposed to Quest and garner a community in Quest which more accurately reflects all students in the Trinity community. Furthering this idea of building more community, Quest can go to greater efforts to engage more with students after their

underclassmen years. Quest can offer programming tailored to upper class year students in order to create more incentive for them to become engaged. To have more students in upper-class years involved would, similarly, greater mirror Trinity's general community and create a more well-rounded community of peers of different ages and experiences.

Aside from these suggestions, more research can always be done. To further this research, qualitative methods could be used. Conducting interviews would allow researchers to gain more in depth insight about Quest's impact and therefore would allow them to learn even more about how to better the program. In addition, if more survey research were to be done, a greater sample size would be valuable. Beyond this, it is worth noting that the Quest orientation program is undergoing some changes come Fall of 2023. In the Fall, Quest will be run as an orientation program after the college's mandatory orientation rather than function as a pre-orientation program. As such, all trips will only be five days long. Also, more experiences will be offered, such as day adventures, canoeing, climbing, and more. Doing so, some issues of accessibility will be addressed. One of the most impactful aspects of this change, however, is that the orientation program will now be completely cost free. This, hopefully, will influence more students to get involved and become exposed to the Quest community and the outdoors. As the program is changing, future research on this program would be valuable to understand how perceptions of program goals and community might differ from the program's current structure.

My research proves that Quest is an impactful program. Students perceive Quest to meet its goals of program impact, social development, and personal development. Additionally, students agree that Quest contributes to their sense of community. Overall. Such results indicate the importance of further building upon outdoor programming in higher education.

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