

Walkabout

A Program Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is an in-depth assessment of the Walkabout program for student leadership at Azusa Pacific University. Walkabout is a loved tradition at Azusa Pacific and a central component of the leadership training process. Tradition is great, but tradition without purpose is not beneficial. To evaluate the purpose, research was comprised from two major sources, one historical and one current.

The compilation of the first source can be found in the literature review, which contains multiple research articles. These articles span a large spectrum of time and authors. This compilation provides a continuous testimony to the power and benefit of outdoor adventure programming as a whole.

The second major source is from current students who participated in Walkabout within the last year. Primarily, the objective of this research was to both evaluate how well Walkabout is developing students for their leadership roles and how well it was benefiting students' personal growth. Evaluating this program required the data to be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Results for this study yielded positive results. Quantitative results showed that Walkabout had a positive effect on how often students use meditation as a form of spiritual development and how often they reflect on personal experiences for the purpose of learning. The qualitative results showed that Walkabout had particularly positive effects on student's self awareness and personal faith.

INTRODUCTION

The office of Residence Life at Azusa Pacific University held the first Walkabout in 1974. It was designed as a tool for helping develop and strengthen the leadership qualities within current resident advisors by participating in outdoor education for a week in August, in preparation for the new school year. Walkabout as a whole is just a component of the overall month-long training that all RAs go through and is designed to assist them in working with one another as well as the residents whom they serve. According to their own mission statement and learning goals, Walkabout is a valuable tool in teaching RAs to work together, think clearly and relate effectively in stressful situations. It is believed by the designers and administrators of Walkabout, that the skills discovered and enhanced by the experience are transferable to and indeed usable in the daily life of an RA. Some of these skills include: problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, interpersonal relating and leadership, crisis and stress management, reflective contemplation, and the discipline of solitude.

Walkabout is currently undergoing two separate studies investigating the efficiency and overall competence of the program. One is being conducted by the office of Residence life and the other, our study, is independent of the office. The former investigation is ongoing, so the only shared information is that of the initial collected data. None of the results of either study were shared.

The overall goals of Walkabout are categorized into five separate groups: physical, spiritual, social, mental, and emotional. Overall, the purpose is to further develop student leaders within each of these categories. The learning goals for Walkabout are broken down by Residence Life into the following sections:

1. PHYSICAL

- a. To stretch participants beyond their preconceived assumptions of their own abilities, and their self-imposed limitations.
- b. To encourage each participant to recognize and honor the value of physical fitness in the development of a healthy, whole being.

These objectives are addressed through the physical activities and components of the trip such as hiking, rock climbing, the final stretch, solo, and dealing with the elements.

2. SPIRITUAL

- a. To utilize the majestic and ruggedly beautiful environment of the mountains to help students recover a sense of wonder in the magnificence and grandeur of God's creation.
- b. To provide students with the opportunity for an extended period of quiet reflection, meditation, and solitude.
- c. To provide students with the opportunity to spiritually prepare for the coming year.

These objectives are addressed primarily through informal conversations throughout the trip, solo, and journaling.

3. SOCIAL

- a. To provide the participants with an opportunity to examine their own style of relating to others under personally stressful conditions.
- b. To encourage students to engage in the process of communication, conflict resolution, trust building, and problem solving
- c. To enable students to exercise personal leadership skills among their peers.

These objectives are addressed primarily through situations that develop along the trail and through group experiences such as setting up camp, cooking, and story times around the campfire.

4. MENTAL

- a. To provide students with various opportunities to engage in creative and critical thinking, and original problem solving.
- b. To encourage reflective thought as well as pressured decision making
- c. To challenge students to become more responsible for their activities and decisions made within their roles as leaders.

These objectives are primarily addressed through group experiences and peer leadership opportunities.

5. EMOTIONAL

- a. To provide students with the opportunity to confront and challenge fears and self doubt in a safe and supportive environment.
- b. To encourage in students increased feelings of self-efficiency, self-worth, and camaraderie with others.

These objectives are primarily addressed through group experiences and through encouragement by peers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student affair professionals strive to develop powerful learning experiences designed to develop students holistically. Their role is to foster the development that happens outside of the classroom. For decades, one of the most powerful learning experiences has been outdoor adventure programming. Outdoor programming completely removes students from their daily norms. It removes the common stimulants and distractions of daily life. There has already been an abundance of research and many studies have shown the positive effects of outdoor programming, many of which are documented within this study. The benefits for students are numerous on both the individual and group level.

Let us first examine the positive effects on the personal level. Outdoor programming has been shown to have positive effects on developing leadership skills, emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and on broadening student's worldviews. Because Walkabout is designed to develop leaders, we will start with investigating previous research on developing leadership skills. Greenaway (2009) claims that letting different students take turns at leading in group settings, gives students the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and lead in safe situations, honing their leadership skills whether they are comfortable already or not. In turn, this will give them the courage to do the same in a real life situation months down the road (Greenaway, 2009). Nicolazzo (2009), the director of the Wilderness Medicine Training Center,

agrees with Greenaway in the idea that students must be provided the opportunities to lead in simple situations, with controlled surroundings, in order to become successful, competent leaders. Exercises that allow students to willfully choose and manage their own risks, with minimum to no intervention on behalf of the instructor, can significantly empower those students. (Nicolazzo, 2009).

Along with developing leadership skills, outdoor programs have been shown to develop the emotional intelligence of students. Emotional intelligence might also be referred to as emotional competence. According to two different studies by Hayashi, emotional intelligence is identified as a collection of emotional and social competencies that determine how effectively we relate with ourselves and others, and cope with daily demands and pressures (Hayashi, 2005). Hayashi goes on to explain that emotional intelligence can be broken down into five categories: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability and general mood (Hayashi, 2005). His studies in emotional intelligence identified a link between a leader's outdoor experience and the five qualities of emotional intelligence. This finding was further confirmed when Hayashi teamed up with Ewert and found that leaders' experience level also positively correlated to their level of emotional intelligence and inspiration for individual achievement and goal setting. That suggests that the more a student leads the higher their emotional intelligence and inspiration will be (Hayashi & Ewert, 2006). Another study found outdoor programming developed even more values including "fitness, skill and care, self-discipline, initiative, enterprise, memory, imagination, and compassion" (James, 1990). Giving students an opportunity to lead seems to increase their emotional intelligence as well as other positive attributes.

Outdoor adventure programs also improve student's ability to problem solve. Raiola, Walsh and Aubry identify adventure learning experiences as programs that develop problem solving skills in participants. The reason for developing these problem-solving skills is because, according to Walsh and Aubry's research, there is an identifiable link between learning and problem solving (2007). This in essence identifies reason and validity for adventure programs. Participants focus on their abilities to overcome tasks and obstacles as a method of reaching their goal instead of dwelling on their inability to achieve other goals. This engaging experience develops character through "emotional stability, decision making, assertiveness, and social competence" (Walsh and Aubry, 2007, p. 37). Furthermore, outdoor adventures give students a sense of autonomy. According to Sidthorp, this sense of autonomy has pedagogic value (Sidthorp, 2008), which naturally lowers students' resistance to learning in a classroom, while at the same time teaching them valuable lessons.

Along with all these other benefits, students are simply introduced to a new situation and a new experience. Outdoor adventure programs give students the opportunity to see and appreciate the beauty in the world around them. According to Johnson, the fate of the natural world is the greatest dilemma facing humankind in the 21st century. He hopes that helping students learn to survive in nature and enjoy nature will force students to consider the consequences of their daily actions (York, 2009).

The personal benefits of outdoor adventure programs are many. What is even more impressive about outdoor programs is the unifying impact they have on a group. They have numerous positive effects on a group dynamic. The first and foremost of these benefits is that outdoor adventures build a strong sense of community. For years, studies have shown that adventure programs foster group cohesion and cooperation (von Behren, 1979). Today, it is a

widely held belief that “the purpose of man wilderness trip programs is the development of positive interpersonal relationships and group experiences that lead to enhanced sense of community among group members.” Moreover, it was recently quantitatively and qualitatively empirically proven as well (Breunig, O’Connell, Todd, Young, Anderson, L., Anderson, D. 2008). Through their investigation, Breunig and his associates discovered that through leadership styles, physical challenges, sense of place, group activities, and debriefing activities (among several other explanations as well), students are consistently prone to create positive community within small groups. Other researchers have found that outdoor adventures were beneficial in a business setting as well because it is great for gaining participant commitment (Hornyak, 2004). To put it all in a nutshell, Goldenberg and Prosolino compared two of the most prominent outdoor education programs in the country, a recent study has shown that while the frequency and duration of specific activities within each program (i.e. climbing, hiking, expeditioning). When students exiting each program were surveyed, each program resulted in having almost the same exact learning outcomes. The words “group”, “interaction”, and “warm relationships with others” were each highly used words in each result as well (Goldenberg & Prosolino, 2008).

In accordance with a sense of community, outdoor adventure programs are beneficial in developing communication skills and the ability to work with others. A study done in the early nineties showed that outdoor adventures facilitate team building (Ewert & Heywood, 1991). These findings were further affirmed by a more recent study (Rilling & Jordan, 2007).

In conclusion, outdoor adventure programs are powerful. Sibthorp (2007) showed that in outdoor programs communication, leadership, expedition behavior, judgment, outdoor skills, and environmental awareness were all significantly correlated. The most powerful thing about outdoor adventure programming is that it is such a unique way of learning (Sibthorp, 2007).

While many studies focus on what is learned through the outdoor education, few focus on the process by which they are learned. Through an intricate learning and results catalog and index, a recent study has shown that students are overall more engaged academically. This is because instead of learning about the world, they are interacting with it (Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, and Gookin, 2008). Outdoor programs are powerful because they are hands-on, active learning experiences in which students can learn things that cannot be taught in the classroom, things that can only be learned through interaction and experience.

METHOD

The goal of our study is to find the effect Walkabout has on resident advisors in college. We are trying to see if the program positively develops group cohesion, a student's ability to be a resident advisor and a student's personal growth. Personal growth, as we have defined, would include each student's spirituality, emotional competence, and their ability to lead.

Our methodology for investigation included comprehensive research previously conducted on RAs by a third party, as well as interviews of current RAs. For these interviews, data was collected through a convenience sample. We contacted RAs we knew of, but tried to portray a diverse group of students at the same time. All interviews and surveys conducted by our group were recorded and analyzed qualitatively. We observed the responses and derived recurring themes that are evident within the results. We analyzed data as three separate researchers and then as a group compared findings that revealed the dominant themes.

These were the interview questions asked:

- What was your favorite part of Walkabout?
- What was the most impactful part of Walkabout?
- What was the most challenging part of Walkabout?
- What did you specifically learn from this experience? (skills, life lessons, leadership abilities)
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you take away from your solo experience?
- How has the experience changed you? Have you grown?
- How can you apply your Walkabout experience to leadership/RA position?
- What would you change about the program?

Along with these interviews, we also draw from a wealth of research that had already been conducted by a third party. The existing research consisted of twenty classifications of questions, answered by ninety-four students. Thirty-six of the students were from Greenville College and the remaining fifty-eight were Azusa Pacific students. There were six qualitative and twelve quantitative questions used to evaluate this program. To get a more complete assessment, we drew questions from both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Of the qualitative questions we chose to analyze the following ones finding them to be of particular value for evaluating walk about:

- The greatest thing I learned about walk about was...
- What is one memory from Walkabout you carry?
- What was your favorite thing about Walkabout?
- What was your least favorite thing about Walkabout?
- Did the Walkabout experience provide you understanding for your role this year?
- Did you experience God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit) “on the mountain”?

For each of these questions, we looked for common themes and ideas within participants’ responses as three independent researchers and then found similarities in the findings.

Of the quantitative responses, we primarily focused on pre-test/post-test questions. There was a set of questions that asked how many times students partook in particular activities before going on Walkabout. There was another set of questions asking how often students partake in

particular activities upon coming back from Walkabout. The students were asked to answer how often they participate in the following activities before Walkabout and then after Walkabout:

- Mediation for spiritual development
- Solitude for spiritual development
- Solving problems
- Helping with conflict resolution
- Building trust
- Reflecting on experiences for the purpose of learning

We then compared the before and after results by using a t-test analysis to see if there was a significant difference between their participation in these behavior before and after Walkabout.

RESULTS

The results for this study were gathered in two ways. The first was from research previously conducted by the residence life office at Azusa Pacific University. This research contained a twenty point qualitative and quantitative survey about the students' experience in the program. It was gathered from students from Greenville College and APU who participated in Walkabout (or an analogous program). Students were given a survey and asked to describe their experience through their participation in Walkabout. These questions are documented in the method section and are comprised of both qualitative and quantitative questions.

The second method for gathering data was arranging one on one interviews with current resident advisors at APU who participated in the program. During the interview process resident advisors were presented with nine questions to qualitatively assess their outdoor experience and to measure the success of the learning goals for the program. From those interviews as well as the ones previously gathered, the data showed specific recurring themes that allowed us to evaluate the program's success in meeting the learning goals.

This program met and exceeded these learning goals through the experiences provided in the wilderness. To evaluate the success of these goals, themes were drawn from the qualitative portion of the resident advisor survey results. Common themes were obtained by taking each statement said by students and categorizing it by its particular subject. For instance, if the sentence was, “For me, solo was a spiritual experience where I realized I needed to spend more time with God.” it was categorized under “solo developed spiritual discipline and value”. These themes were then counted and categorized into larger themes. For example, similar yet slightly too particularized themes such as “solo developed spiritual discipline and value” and “frequent quiet time leads to spiritual maturity” where both collected into the theme of “students further defining their personal relationships with God and others through personal reflection and interaction.”

Amidst these many themes, there were four main themes that were prevalent throughout the interview process that generated straightforward conclusions for the qualitative portion of the evaluation. The first theme was students’ realization of their need for interdependence on others. Students enduring their physical hardships realized the need for teamwork and reliance on others in the community to achieve their daily goals. Specifically when students got sick or could not carry their own weight in the group, others would assist them.

The second theme was the students’ understanding of true community and developing what that means within a group of dissimilar individuals. Students were placed in random groups with different individuals from different backgrounds. Individuals became very vulnerable within the group as each night they shared personal stories about their own lives. From this experience, the majority of students surveyed expressed a higher value on community as they developed closer interpersonal relationships with one another. One second-year RA said of

Walkabout, “You learn how to work with people that are different than you and respect them. I learned how to lead with different people who have different ways of leadership. Learning how to lead in the mountains, like a GPS. Keeping track and being aware of everyone else in the group.”

The third theme was the students’ further defining their personal relationships with God and others through personal reflection and interaction. Students reported in the evaluation that they developed friendships that lasted long after their experience. Also, as the students were being encouraged to journal every day, especially in their solo experience, it helped them define and reevaluate their relationship with God and reevaluate personal relationships. One current RA said of their solo experience, “I learned that being alone can calm your spirit and now I take more alone time than before.”

The fourth theme was the students’ development and refinement of personal endurance and perseverance. Students reported that this program pushed them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to expand their limits. Students were challenged physically everyday through their hiking and backpacking experience. Mentally, they were stretched through individual leadership training and personal interactions with others. Emotionally, students were pushed to become vulnerable with one another through the sharing of their own personal life stories with their groups. Finally, students were given the opportunity for spiritual growth throughout the program, specifically through personal reflection during their 48-hour solo experience in the wilderness.

In addition to the qualitative investigation, the quantitative analysis yielded interesting results. The conducted T-tests showed that half of the observed activities were significantly affected by a student’s participation Walkabout. In a larger evaluation of Walkabout students

were asked how often they engaged in particular activities before and after Walkabout. In each of these questions students marked “1” if it was an activity they partook in daily. A “2” signified they engaged in said activity one to three times a week. A “3” signified that students engaged in these activities one to three times a month. A “4” signified that students partook in said activity one to three times a year. A “5” signified that it was something the student never did. To put it simply, the lower the number the more often the activity was partaken in.

The results showed that Walkabout had a significant effect on three of the six of the observed activities. Let us first look at the results that were significant. Table 2 shows the basic statistics for how often students use solitude as a form of spiritual development. By plugging these values into a separate variance formula we were able to calculate the t value. The t value was 2.5, which is statistically significant ($t=2.5, p < .05$). This means that students used solitude as a form of spiritual development more often after returning from Walkabout.

Table 6 shows the basic statistics for how often reflect on their experiences for the purpose of learning before and after participating in Walkabout. By plugging these values into a separate variance formula we were able to calculate the t value. The t value was 2.05, which is statistically significant ($t=2.05, p < .05$). This means that students reflected on their experiences for the purpose of learning more often after returning from Walkabout.

The most troubling results were found in problem solving. Table 3 shows the basic statistics for how often students problem solve before and after participating in Walkabout. The means show that, on the whole, students are less likely to problem solve after returning from Walkabout. The separate variance formula yielded a surprisingly high t value of 3.62. This is very significant ($t=3.62, p < .001$). This means that students solved problems less after returning from Walkabout. This is an unexpected result that would need further investigation.

The other three variables were not shown to be significantly affected by Walkabout.

Table 1 shows the basic statistics for how often students use mediation as a form of spiritual development. By inputting these values into a separate variance formula we were able to calculate the t value. The t value was 1.08, which is statistically insignificant ($t=1.08$, $p > .2$). This means that there is no significant difference between how often students use mediation as a form of spiritual development before going and Walkabout and after returning from Walkabout.

Table 4 shows the basic statistics for how often student's resolved conflict before and after their participation in Walkabout. Oddly enough the two means showed that, on the whole, students were less likely to resolve conflict after returning from Walkabout. However, the t value calculations yielded the t value at 1.08, which is statistically insignificant ($t=1.6$, $p > .2$). This means that there is no significant difference between how often students resolve conflict before going and walkabout and after returning from Walkabout.

Table 5 shows the basic statistics for how often students intentionally build trust with others before and after participating in Walkabout. By plugging these values into a separate variance formula we were able to calculate the t value. The t value was 1.67, which is statistically insignificant ($t=1.67$, $p > .05$). This means that there is no significant difference between how often students intentionally build trust before going and Walkabout and after returning from Walkabout.

In conclusion, the quantitative results were a mixed bag. These results show that participation in Walkabout has a significant, positive affect on how often students use solitude for spiritual development, and reflect on experiences for the purpose of learning. The results suggested that Walkabout has a significant negative effect on problem solving. And finally, our current research was unable to prove that Walkabout has a significant effect on how often

students intentionally build trust with others, resolve conflict, or use meditation as a form of spiritual development.

TABLE 1

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MEDITATION BEFORE	92	2.77	1.039	.108
MEDITATION AFTER	84	2.60	.958	.105

TABLE 2

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SOLITUDE BEFORE	92	3.09	1.086	.113
SOLITUDE AFTER	85	2.71	.949	.103

TABLE 3

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PROBLEM SOLVING BEFORE	91	1.65	.689	.072
PROBLEM SOLVING AFTER	85	1.79	.725	.079

TABLE 4

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CONFLICT RESOLUTION BEFORE	92	2.21	.932	.097
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AFTER	85	2.01	.715	.078

TABLE 5

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
INTENTIONALLY BUILDING TRUST BEFORE	92	2.11	1.010	.105
INTENTIONALLY BUILDING TRUST AFTER	85	1.88	.822	.089

TABLE 6

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES FOR LEARNING	92	2.16	.941	.098
REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES FOR LEARNING	85	1.89	.817	.089

DISCUSSION

Walkabout has shown to be a very beneficial program for students in several different ways. We set out to discover if the Walkabout program was meeting its learning goals, effectively developing student leaders to step into their leadership role on campus. The conducted interviews for gathering data have derived themes from student responses that were helpful in evaluating the positive aspects of the experience. Qualitative results showed students were developing in the areas of leadership skills, community building, and refocusing their lives. Having every student in the program lead their team for a day proved to be a valuable tool, refining their leadership skills to be adapted to their leadership role on campus. Students also reported that they gained a new sense of community and developed new skills building community in their residence halls. Finally, the resident advisors explained that through their experience, specifically their solo experience, students were able to refocus their lives and slow down to perceive their priorities through a clearer lens.

The results, however, showed an interesting anomaly that was unexpected in our initial assumptions. After quantitatively reviewing the data from the previously gathered data, we found that the strongest t value showed that Walkabout had a negative effect on problem solving for students. The t test reported that after Walkabout students are less likely to be able to problem solve situations in their own life. There was no explanation that we could develop that could

account for this discovery. This is in direct contradiction to Raiola, Walsh and Aubry, who stated that outdoor education has a positive effect on problem-solving skills. Further investigation would be needed to better understand why there was this unexpected occurrence.

As students continually change throughout the years, so must programs evolve and adapt to the fluctuating student body. Although showing positive feedback from students, Walkabout continually needs to be advanced and developed in order to be tailored to the ever-changing needs of student leaders. Diversity being a current focal point of the universities direction, we think that it would be beneficial and not surprising to see a more intentional connection instated between diversity and the Walkabout program. This could be done by intentionally creating more diverse groups or providing diverse leadership for those groups. Also, the implementation of a diverse curriculum, activity, or co-curricular exercise could be used to equip the resident advisors with a more diverse leadership style. In the comprehensive research found, there were very few questions involving multicultural awareness. It would be good to see multicultural awareness in the future assessment and evaluation of the program.

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APPENDIX A

SELF-GATHERED SURVEY QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite part of Walkabout?
- What was the most impactful part of Walkabout?
- What was the most challenging part of Walkabout?
- What did you specifically learn from this experience? (skills, life lessons, leadership abilities)
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you take away from your solo experience?
- How has the experience changed you? Have you grown?
- How can you apply your Walkabout experience to leadership/RA position?
- What would you change about the program?

APPENDIX B

PREVIOUSLY GATHERED SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Qualitative survey questions:

- The greatest thing I learned about walk about was...
- What is one memory from Walkabout you carry?
- What was your favorite thing about Walkabout?
- What was your least favorite thing about Walkabout?
- Did the Walkabout experience provide you understanding for your role this year?
- Did you experience God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit) “on the mountain”?

Quantitative survey questions:

Pre-Test:

1. Prior to Walkabout how often did you use mediation for spiritual development?
2. Prior to Walkabout how often did you use solitude for spiritual development?
3. Prior to Walkabout how often did you engage in problem solving?
4. Prior to Walkabout how often did you help with conflict resolution?
5. Prior to Walkabout how often did you intentionally build trust with others?
6. Prior to Walkabout how often did you reflect on experiences for the purpose of learning?

Post-Test:

1. After returning from Walkabout how often do you use mediation for spiritual development?
2. After returning from Walkabout how often do you use solitude for spiritual development?
3. After returning from Walkabout how often do you engage in problem solving?
4. After returning from Walkabout how often do you help with conflict resolution?
5. After returning from Walkabout how often do you intentionally build trust with others?
6. After returning from Walkabout how often do you reflect on experiences for the purpose of learning?

Answer Scale:

- 1 = Daily
- 2 = 1-3 Times Per Week
- 3 = 1-3 Times Per Month
- 4 = 1-3 Times Per Year
- 5 = Never