

## **Collaborative Research and Practice: Aiming to Make a Meaningful Difference**

### **2014 AORE Research Symposium Abstracts: Introductory Paper**

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Since 2010, many abstracts presented at the Association for Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE) Research Symposium and the Outdoor Leadership Research Symposium (OLRS) have appeared in the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership (JOREL)*. Special issues with symposiums abstracts were published in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. With an increasing number of authors choosing to submit full manuscripts instead of abstracts, abstracts were added to last year's fall issue of *JOREL* instead of a separate issue being published. This approach continues this year with select abstracts from the 10th Annual AORE Research Symposium held in Portland, Oregon, November 12–14, 2014.

The AORE Research Symposium continues to provide a forum for the exchange of scholarly work among academics and practitioners. Abstract submissions undergo a double-blind peer review process to ensure the highest quality of research. Similar to previous years, symposium presenters have been invited to disseminate their research efforts in *JOREL*. The publication of these endeavors serves not only to contribute to a growing body of knowledge within the field of outdoor recreation, education, and leadership, but also to foster effective application in practice. Achieving an aim of this sort, however, often requires a research-to-practice model that is collaborative in nature.

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*Research Symposium Note:* The AORE Research Symposium is held at the annual Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education Conference. For more information on the AORE Research Symposium, visit <http://www.aore.org/>

Evidence strongly indicates that collaborations between researchers and practitioners can enhance the prospect that findings derived from research will translate into practice (Huberman, 1990). In pondering the significance of that assertion, we think it seems appropriate to point out some of the reasons why these collaborative efforts are productive. When working in partnership, researchers and practitioners identify a meaningful research agenda. That is, they are apt to address issues and problems of relevance. Second, collaborations between researchers and practitioners offer a unique chance for practitioners to help formulate findings in ways conducive and meaningful for those in the field. Understanding how to package results so the utility of those results is clear is paramount to producing change.

The abstracts, which follow this paper, exemplify synergies between researchers and practitioners and reflect on ways these partnerships may make a meaningful difference. The authors of the first abstract explore the factors that influence college outdoor program staff connectedness to nature. As a construct, connectedness to nature embodies an individual's affective and experiential relation with the natural world (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). People who exhibit a greater sense of nature connectedness are apt to demonstrate more ecologically oriented behaviors (Davis, Le, & Coy, 2011). Given this consideration, the authors contend that by understanding the factors influencing staff connectedness to nature, college outdoor programs may better position themselves to facilitate such an outcome among staff and participants served by the outdoor program.

The author of the second abstract focuses largely on a research method known as autoethnography, a novel approach in bridging the gap between research and practice. Autoethnography is a reflexive method of research whereby the researcher's personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences serve as the primary data source and point of analysis (Anderson & Austin, 2012). As a result, this mode of inquiry often involves writing about oneself as a researcher-practitioner. Taking on this role not only introduces inherent challenges and limitations, but can also provide opportunities to garner unique insights through critical narrative analysis. In the presented abstract, the author uses autoethnography to explore the lived experience of adventure guides. Findings derived from the study offer theoretical and practical improvements of significance.

The aim of collaborative research and practice should be to focus on and address matters of significance. The author of the third abstract addresses the increasing epidemic of obesity within society. As a means of tackling this problem, health professionals have stressed the important role regular physical activity can have in combating and preventing the continued surge of obesity (Frank, Andresen, & Schmid, 2004). For many people, however, constraints to participation preclude such behaviors from becoming part of a person's daily life. This seems to be valid even when viewed from an outdoor recreation context. In this abstract, the author explores the constraints to outdoor recreation as perceived by individuals who self-identify as overweight or obese. Beyond a list of constraints to outdoor recreation, the information derived through focus groups indicates possible strategies for negotiating these constraints. Armed with these findings, outdoor recreation professionals may be primed not only to introduce those struggling with obesity to new and engaging outdoor pursuits, but also to prevent, reduce, or reverse the negative effects of that very problem.

In the final abstract, the authors investigate the function gender and socioeconomic status have on individual status among group members participating in an outdoor adventure (OA) courses. Within these contexts, the authors assert that status differentials can play a major role in determining individual and group outcomes. As OA programs not only evolve to accommodate changing student populations, but also aim to promote diversity, there appears to be a practical need for continued examination of this area. In their study, the authors offer an ideal representation of how research and practice can work in collaboration to produce findings aimed at effecting practice. In this specific case, the researchers perhaps benefited from engaging in dialogue with practitioners (NOLS) who have had direct experience with the phenomenon in question. When researchers and practitioners combine their efforts on a specific task or area of inquiry,

the results of those efforts are likely to extend beyond words on a page and make a meaningful difference in the industry.

Four abstracts from the 2014 AORE Research Symposium follow this paper:

- Influences on College Outdoor Program Staff's Connectedness to Nature  
~ Eric Frauman and Francesca Shaffer
- Using Emerging Methodologies to Examine Adventure Recreation and Tourism Experiences: A Critical Analysis ~ Susan Houge Mackenzie
- Outdoor Recreation for "Every Body"? An Examination of Constraints to Outdoor Recreation for Individuals Who Are Significantly Overweight ~ Gretchen Newhouse
- Social Dynamics in Outdoor Adventure Groups: Factors Determining Peer Status  
~ Dan Richmond, Jim Sibthorpe, Jeremy Jostad, and Mandy Pohja

Thank you,

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## References

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