

## Do formal Outdoor Recreation programs undertaken by young adults change their perceptions?

**Wayne Hooper & Libby Robertson**

The aim of this paper is to analyse the personal reflections of University of South Australia (UniSA) undergraduate students taking part in an elective programme in Outdoor Recreation outside their chosen field of study. The motivation for preparing this paper was that many students involved in this programme in July 2006 expressed the opinion that it was a life changing experience.

The majority of the students undertaking this course did not come from the programs that might traditionally feed into a course in Outdoor Recreation. The students came with a range of previous experiences in Outdoor Recreation, from no experience to extensive involvement via programs such as Secondary Outdoor Education. For many it was their first taste of camping and most had not undertaken an expedition in the past. The following illustrates the apprehension and excitement of someone new to the activity. *I felt blessed to branch out and meet some new faces, who had their own fears of the camp and this reassured me that I was not alone and could talk and laugh about the expedition afterwards with these people.* (student's quote)

The 74 students came from 21 different degrees within the University (as is summarised in the chart below) included those in their first year of tertiary studies to those who would graduate once this subject was completed. A few were including the subject as part of a double degree.

B.Ap.Sc.(Food Sci.Nutrition)	1	B.Ed.(JuniorPrimary,Primary)11	11
B.Ap.Sc.(Occupational Therapy)	3	B.Early Childhood Education 1	1
B.Ap.Sc.(HumMovandHlthSt)	1		
B.App.Sc. (App Geology)	2		
B.Medical Radiation	6	B.Commerce	7
B.Physiotherapy	1	B.Bus(Admin. Mgmt.),B.Commerce	3
B.Pharmacy	17	B.Bus(Management of Inf.Tech)	1
		B.Bus(Management Info.Systems)	1
		B.Bus(Managmt.Inf.Sys),B.Commerce	2
		B.Commerce,B.Bus(Commercial Law)	1
		B.Bus.(Property)	1
		B.Tourism,Hospitality Management	5
B.Engineering	5	B.Industrial Design	1
B.Visual Comm	1	B.Construction Mgt.Economics	3

Over half the students were born in Australia. However, there were a significant number of Asian students with the majority of them coming from South East Asia. There were a few with Middle Eastern, South African or European heritage.

The Introduction to Outdoor Recreation course was run as a two week intensive course during the winter semester break.

*The course involves planning and organization of outdoor recreation programs involving a lightweight bushwalking expedition; design and use of outdoor recreation equipment; participant safety and responsibilities; fundamental outdoor program skills; environmental interpretation and planning for minimal environmental impact camping. Planning concepts and skills developed in class sessions are applied during the bushwalk. Practical applications and personal involvement in small and large groups are the major focus of learning and assessment in this course. Problem solving, group participation and leadership are an integral part of this course. Students are expected to analyze the relevance of these areas to their future endeavours. (Course Outline)*

The course is taught through lectures, workshops, practical sessions and field trips.

Practical sessions included tent pitching, tranguia cooking, orienteering, knot tying and rucksack packing. The students undertook a one day walk in a Mount Lofty Ranges National Park (Parra Wirra) on which group walking skills and navigation were the focus. The culmination of the course was a three day, thirty two kilometre, bushwalking expedition in the Southern Flinders Ranges (Mount Remarkable National Park).

In group activities, we purposefully ensured that each group consisted of students of different gender, degree and cultural background because we wanted to encourage working with new people.

Introduction to Outdoor Recreation is part of UniSA’s Broadening Undergraduate Education (BUGE) program where students are expected to undertake a..... *contrasting study, chosen from one or more discipline categories contrasting with the category of the professional core* (UniSA Website).

As a university whose core business is to train professionals for industry, the BUGE programs encourages graduates to.....*acquire broad concepts, knowledge and skills beyond those gained through their specialist professional study.*(UniSA Website)

UniSA has identified seven qualities which it believes graduates should have gained through their undergraduate studies.

*The following table shows the proportion of UniSA Graduate Qualities applied to assessment in this course. Unit value of the course is 4.5 units*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Graduate quality</i>	<i>Unit weighing</i>
1	<b>Body of knowledge.</b> The major content areas include understanding the fundamental requirements for the conduct of outdoor recreation activities in a safe, purposeful and environmentally sound manner. Students will apply the knowledge through periods of field work.	1.0
2	<b>Lifelong learning.</b> Students will use information in a variety of contexts. They will be encouraged to understand the limitations of their current knowledge and skills and work toward understanding and accepting their personal strengths and weaknesses, ultimately taking responsibility for their own learning and development in the field of outdoor recreation.	0.5
3	<b>Effective problem solving.</b> A large variety of problems are presented in the field component of the course and students will	0.5

	apply a variety of strategies to solve the problems.	
--	--	--

4	<b>Work autonomously and collaboratively.</b> Throughout the course students will work individually and in groups of various sizes. The field trips particularly emphasize consensus decision making and collaborative efforts.	1.0
5	<b>Ethical action and social responsibility.</b> Students will understand the need to be environmentally sound, considerate of the needs of others, and they will be expected to demonstrate a commitment to personal ethical actions within the discipline of outdoor recreation.	0.5
6	<b>Communicates effectively.</b> Communication skills will be reinforced in a variety of ways: Interpersonal – contribute to class discussions, giving and receiving feedback in debriefing sessions both during the field component and upon completion of the trip Small groups – planning for, and attendance on, field trips requires extensive communication between members of small groups responsible for the preparation of food and equipment, navigational decisions, and group management issues. The field trip focuses specifically on the facilitation of group development through the application of field experiences. Consensus decision making on field trips enforces oral communication between all members of the group. Written - in a variety of forms – notes, field log book, essay.	0.5
7	<b>International perspectives.</b> The course is targeted to a mixture of local and international students and provides an ideal environment to learn to value differences that arise from language, culture and place.	0.5
	<i>Total</i>	4.5

(Course Outline)

There were three forms of assessment for the course.

1. The outdoor activity skills (e.g. use of clothing and equipment, organisation, packing and punctuality, menu and food preparation, participation in the group, minimum impact camping/environmental awareness, walking skills and navigation), demonstrated on the expedition were assessed.

2. Log book summary of pre-trip planning and observations while on the expedition

3 Personal Learning Experience Summary paper (the basis of the paper)

*This paper involves an in-depth discussion of what you have learnt from your reading and experiences, about yourself and your ability to work with other people and how this can be applied to other aspects of your life. You may have learnt something new about yourself or there may be something that you already knew and throughout the course it was confirmed. It is important in the discussion that you do not discuss everything about the course and expedition in a literal sense, rather you are to be open-minded in your discussion and apply what you learnt to other aspects of your life e.g. perhaps you learnt that you found it hard to motivate yourself to get going when the weather was cold wet or windy and this prompts you to think about other experiences and you realise that whenever you are in situations where control has been taken out of your hands (you can't control the weather) you have trouble getting motivated. From this you learn that you need to put yourself in more situations where you are not in control so that you can improve yourself, or that you need to .....*

*The areas you must cover in the paper are:*

- *What types of things do and do not motivate you*
- *Discuss your ability to work in a large team (whole group), a small team (2-4 people), as an individual.*

- *What do you find frustrating? What is comfortable for you?*
- *During the course what did you discover or confirm about your strengths and weaknesses. Try to identify things about yourself that you would like to change, things you would like to maintain, things you might consider in the future.*
- *Discuss how what you have learnt about yourself through the course and how this can be transferred to other aspects of your life.*

*You may cover additional topics to the ones listed above as long as they come under the general theme of “Personal development and transfer of learning”. (Course Outline)*

At the beginning of the course the students were given a pre-course questionnaire to identify their expectations. At the end of the course, before revisiting the pre course questionnaire, the students completed a post course questionnaire to assist them in reflecting on their experiences over the fortnight.

Many students indicated through their paper a significant difference between their pre and post course perceptions. Comments such as the following support this.

*When I first began university a bushwalking course was one of the last courses I could ever have seen myself participating in. However after almost completing the course I cannot imagine my university experience without and I dread to think that all the important lessons I have learnt from it may not have eventuated if I had not participated in such a course.*

*My priorities had changed to “experience personal growth through new situations” instead of “gaining 4.5 points”*

The depth of thought and the personal revelations indicating the personal growth of so many students, provoked us to consider how we could share these positive outcomes with the wider community. As practicing Outdoor Educators for many years, we were aware of the value of Outdoor Education through anecdotes and reading the literature, but to have tangible evidence presented over and over again, through the student papers, was too good an opportunity to let pass.

While marking the Personal Learning Summaries presented by the students both of us were inspired by the many comments about the impact the course had made on them, such as;

*.....Upon completion of the course, not only have I acquired many useful practical expeditioning skills, but I have gone through a significant change in the person I am.*

*... this course gave me the opportunity to experience ‘bush life’ as well as to learn important survival skills, develop personal skills and to reflect on my life and learn about myself.*

We decided to analyse the perceptions/comments in the essays under the seven Graduate Qualities which are the underlying reasoning of the University to have a BUGE subject in each undergraduate degree. Robert Hogan (1994) in his unpublished paper *The Value of Outdoor Recreation*, summarised a range of literature in the field and identified seven factors which are generally considered as outcomes of outdoor education activities. We also used these factors in analysing the responses of the students.

These factors are:

1. Enjoyment
2. Physical fitness
3. Relaxation
4. Adventure and challenge

5. Contact with natural environments
6. Social interaction
7. Spiritual renewal

After getting permission from the students, each of the seventy essays which had been submitted electronically, was reread and if, in our opinion, one of the seven qualities or seven values was written about, it was scored and recorded. To check our methodology, we both separately “scored” the same five essays against the fourteen criteria, to check the validity of our scoring. By accident Wayne rescored two essays, 2 weeks after his first scoring, and was pleased to find that he was consistent.

The following table summarises the analysis

<b>Graduate Qualities</b>	Total 70 students	<b>Value of Outdoor Education (Hogan)</b>	Total 70 students
Body of knowledge	39	Enjoyment	30
Lifelong Learning	43	Physical fitness	34
Effective problem solving	28	Relaxation	24
Work autonomously and collaboratively	54	Adventure and Challenge	44
Ethical action and social responsibility	24	Contact with natural environments	41
Communicates effectively	43	Social interaction	49
International perspectives	26	Spiritual renewal	22

In addition to scoring the particular criteria mentioned, we selected quotations to illustrate the perceptual changes undergone by the students during the course.

Even though the students have given permission to use their thoughts in this paper we have chosen to present them anonymously to ensure confidentiality. These quotations will give the reader a feel for the material which was the basis of our scoring for this paper. Although we have categorised the responses under headings many examples fit more than one criteria.

### **Graduate Quality 1**

In relation to **Body of Knowledge** students referred to a range of expeditioning skills particularly planning and organisation. There were frequent references to group development theory.

*I have learnt many things, not only material things such as how to tie appropriate knots and how to orienteer, but also and probably far more importantly things about myself as a human being. .... evaluating the past two weeks I have found I have learnt a lot, not so much about the planning, preparation or the activity of bushwalking but about the human aspect of team work and leadership.*

*The experiential and practical knowledge I have gained through the expedition will be used to hopefully facilitate similar experiences for others and stir in them, the type of awakening that has occurred within myself.*

*Being sufficiently prepared as opposed to over prepared does have advantages and I intend to apply that concept to all aspects of my life.*

*I am very keen to do more research on the benefits and opportunities to include outdoor recreational activities into therapeutic practice*

*The skills I have learnt and improved through this experience will help me in future endeavours, particularly concerning group dynamics and management. I had not expected for this experience to be so rewarding.*

### **Graduate Quality 2**

There were a range of statements made relevant to **Lifelong Learning**. The following quotes illustrate the students' perceptions.

*.....lessons in camp will unquestionably be transferred to other aspects of my life.*

*.....I stepped out of my comfort zone and developed life skills that will become a part of my life from now onwards.*

*This course and camp has taught me many things about surviving not only in the bush, but also about getting through life.*

*This has implications to my life outside the course.....*

*The knowledge gained about myself can be transferred to other aspects of my life.*

*I have also learned numerous skills that I can apply to various areas of my life....*

### **Graduate Quality 3.**

Nearly half the students indicated that **Effective Problem Solving** was required on the expedition and that a variety of strategies were needed to address these problems.

*One student addressed the issue of effective problem solving by highlighting the effect of different abilities to meet the physical challenges which..... could have changed the overall morale of the whole group. We may have found that those who struggled could feel either alienation for being left behind or possibly even inferiority for not being able to keep up. This could quite easily have put a*

wedge in our group, that had been performing quite dynamically at the time. .... He acknowledged that effective problem solving overcame this difficulty.

Others made comments such as:-

*...along the way I learnt about .....how I deal with overcoming obstacles ....  
My group was very dedicated to the group goals and together we worked as a team to overcome the obstacles put forward to us.*

The group's choices of when to help, lead a future teacher to reflect on the problem of making.....  
*the choice of when to help ... to ensure ...self esteem is not affected. They went on to contemplate that .....by assisting a child too early could take away their independence and they may continually look for assistance without trying. Likewise if assistance is offered too late the child may feel inadequate, as their self-efficacy has been dwindled and they no longer are able to believe in their ability to complete any work.*

A problem arose for one group when their leader became quite ill, early on the morning of the second day.....*we had to work as a group and minimise potential trouble if .... became even more ill, and was unable to continue or carry his load. So we stuck to Fricks Fire Access Trail which meant we could get a vehicle in if needed in an emergency.*

#### **Graduate Quality4.**

##### **Work autonomously and collaboratively.**

Throughout the course the students worked individually and in groups of various sizes. The field trips, particularly the expedition, emphasized individual responsibility, consensus decision making and collaborative efforts. Comments which reflected on the team work and collaboration included:-

*.....one of the biggest lessons I learnt was that bushwalking doesn't work without group participation and team work on all aspects. .... It was also around this time that our group really started becoming coherent and worked together as a team, we had entered the 'Performing Phase'<sup>i</sup> of group development. We had all been together for over 24 hours now and friendships and trust really started to grow as we learnt more about each other and had worked our way through the 'Storming and Norming Phases'.*

*.....We worked as a team and I believe that the success of a company or business is when staff work together as a team.*

*.....An important aspect of motivation is that providing and receiving support within a team provides the drive needed for the continuation and completion of the task.*

*.....In a short period complete strangers became friends who cared about each other's wellbeing. Introducing a corporate group to this experience would improve cooperation and teamwork as well as providing an opportunity for employees to get to know each other on a personal level.*

Many students commented on the differences between being autonomous and collaborative for example:-

*Although I feel most comfortable working autonomously, this course has opened my eyes to the benefits and enjoyment that can be experienced when working as a group.....As a group we all developed friendship and trust amongst each other and despite my normal uneasiness within larger groups I found it really enjoyable to be a part of our bushwalking group.*

..... perhaps I need to be more open minded when approaching group situations.  
In these situations I need to be more accepting of other people's input and more open to suggestions that may even be in direct opposition to mine.

Through this course I have discovered that tackling things on my own definitely isn't the way to go and after experiencing how others' support and encouragement can help me get up a huge hill with a pack on my back and cross a running river I definitely plan to transfer this into my life and learn to trust and depend on others when I need help rather than trying to tackle issues solo.

Some student's comments about the strength they gained from the group were quite pronounced, e.g.:-

*I am unmotivated in situations, which I have no control over ....support from others is invaluable to me in terms of providing motivation.*

*I was able to effectively form a role in the group, assist in developing processes and rules, be respectful, encouraging and open with other group members.*

*.....being part of both a whole group and a small team .....provides a superb opportunity to practice group skills and help motivate and challenge people to achieving something beyond their 'normal' limits.*

*.....having strong and eager bushwalkers in the group encouraged me to get up and get going and forget about the heavy backpack and concentrate on achieving the hill climb or crossing the river. The positive attitude of the group also kept my spirits up and kept me motivated to get through the day.*

### **Graduate Quality 5.**

Examples of students' development of an awareness of **Ethical Action and Social Responsibility** are illustrated in the following.

*.....advantages can come from any situation, and to always look for the positives.*

*.....people who are unfocused on the basics, such as setting up camp and food, are very frustrating..... a reluctance to take responsibility for oneself is an unfortunate modern trend. **You** are responsible for your actions and people who choose to ignore this and attempt to blame someone else are incredibly frustrating.*

*All members of the group were genuinely interested in helping others out in order for the group to work more effectively. It was this attitude that led to such great teamwork and the development of such close relationships within the group (Toseland and Rivas 2001).*

*I have discovered and developed different communication and group skills that are necessary within my day to day life and in my future teaching career.*

*This experience has helped me to understand the importance of seeing the other person's perspective and to be less focussed on my own endeavours. Being able to understand the needs of your client is essential.....to ensure that you provide the service that is most beneficial to the client, not what I think will be best for the client.*

*I am very keen to do more research on the benefits and opportunities to include outdoor recreational activities into therapeutic practice.*

*Through this course I have discovered that tackling things on my own definitely isn't the way to go and after experiencing how others' support and encouragement can help me get up a huge hill with a pack on my back and cross a running river I definitely plan to transfer this into my life and learn to trust and depend on others when I need help rather than trying to tackle issues solo.*

*For future holidays I think I might consider pitching a tent in the great outdoors and ditching the hotel, television and snacks!*

*I have re-awakened a long discarded passion for the outdoors and physical activity which I find to be highly motivating and intend to capitalize upon in both my professional life as a teacher, and in my personal life as part of a more holistic lifestyle.*

*.....sort of attitude will be most important to ensure effective group work to achieve a goal but also to enable members of the group to not only help each other but to want to help each other. Forming such close relationships in future group situations will help members to have a greater interest in helping others and working together. I hope to continue to develop this skill in the future and hope to be able to teach my staff and .....instructors this skill so that as a staff group we can help each other achieve the best for the children we are teaching.*

*I also no longer take as many things for granted. Electricity (in the form of batteries), water and food were so important and limited at camp, that now, I always switch the light off and preserve water/food whenever possible. I also learnt that rubbish has such a large impact on the environment and will think twice before throwing an apple core away in the bush.*

*I have learnt that there are so many little things we could do to respect our environment in our everyday lives.*

*Furthermore, I feel that I became more aware of the need to be environmentally sound. I gained a new appreciation for the land and learnt the importance of respecting the environment. My ethics towards respecting the environment have changed greatly.*

*I was even so comfortable to the point that I did not put on makeup or worry about my hair!!!!*

*The natural environment provided me with a very different learning environment and the activities I undertook were much different and more valuable to me than simply learning the theory..... I believe that conservation of nature is just as important as industrialisation and urbanisation. It is quite ironic that while in the bush people pick up after other people's rubbish, back in civilisation people are more than happy to litter, although there are the rare exceptions to this.*

*I think that right now, I have become noticeably more caring about the environment. Coming back to urban life, I notice how our city is being treated compared to how carefully we treated the natural environment during the expedition. There is a great difference. I have learnt that there are so many little things we could do to respect our environment in our everyday lives.*

### **Graduate Quality 6. Communicates effectively**

The majority of students mentioned communication as integral to the course. These anecdotes illustrate a range of comments related to the importance of effective communication.

*(We) worked well together and communicated regularly both before and during the expedition to ensure we both had an enjoyable time.*

*I know there are ways around this through communication and checklists before you set out but I normally just find it easier to eliminate the problem by being selfish and looking after just number one. This trip has made me work within a small group with my walking partner, as well as a larger group the ten others students and two leaders on our expedition. It has changed my attitude towards group work and proven that there are more benefits to teamwork than doing the solo thing.*

*This is actually my first essay in a long time, for most of my industrial design study is computer modelling and making models. Reports I'm ok at but essays scare me, so I was a bit worried about sitting down and starting this one. But now I'm half way through it, I feel I'm constructing it ok so it has built my confidence in writing again, and this has to be a good thing in other aspects of my life.*

*This course I believe has allowed me to understand and reflect on the ways in which groups work and communicate effectively.*

*This gave me a chance to improve my ability to communicate effectively with people which is necessary in my future as a pharmacist.*

### **Graduate Quality 7.**

#### **International perspectives**

As mentioned earlier, this course attracts students from overseas and a range of ethnic backgrounds. Students frequently comment that as a result of working with students from different cultural backgrounds, particularly on the expedition, they have broadened their international perspectives.

*Bonding with the other members of my walking group was rewarding and I met people from other ethnic backgrounds. I would like to further develop my cultural awareness in the future.*

*All the people in the group, no matter what cultural background they were from became good friends, where we would exchange information about our university and personal lives, as well as just joke around. These relationships formed, changed my perceptions about other cultural groups, as I have never really had a friend from an Asian background before. This has implications to my life outside of the course, as I feel that there are no real barriers that separate me from people of other cultural backgrounds. I think that in the future I will be able to form better relationships, whether working or friendships with people from other cultural backgrounds.*

*Sharing the camp with twelve other people, most of which were complete strangers and of a different culture, was surprisingly quite a valuable experience..... While I usually encounter people of different cultural backgrounds, this gave me an opportunity to explore more deeply their behaviours and ideals and also impart some of mine to them.*

*I certainly learnt a lot about the Asian culture. There were five people from an Asian background in my group. They taught all of the Caucasian people, including myself, about the Asian lifestyle. They taught us about the cuisine, culture and languages, such as Mandarin.*

*I had the opportunity to make many new friends, and it was very interesting to learn about their cultures and backgrounds.*

*Through casual conversation and constant interaction I came to know team members from other countries, about their backgrounds and family, their social conventions and cultural observations. I found the exchange to be greatly interesting and rewarding, the open communication served to bring a warmth and familiarity amongst group members which truly strengthened our sense of companionship and commitment to the team.*

*But after a week of consecutive days at uni, and being with these people 24 hours a day for a three day bushwalking expedition, and doing everything together including orienteering, climbing hills and other obstacles, I found myself opening up to these strangers. It was an interesting journey getting to know these people, what their backgrounds are, and how they generally live their day to day lives.*

*I learnt that I can easily get along with people who may not be similar to me, and I actually found it interesting learning about the differences our group shared. We enjoyed sharing our personal experience stories such as our cultural differences, what we enjoy doing, and what things interest us.*

## **Value of Outdoor Recreation - Factors**

### **Factor 1. Enjoyment**

Many of the students expressed surprise that even though they were challenged in many ways in the course, they enjoyed the challenge. .... *a challenge is enjoyable*

*On the trip, I discovered that when I am having fun, my mind forgets about all the associated problems that my body endured from the rucksack, which in turn motivated me to walk that extra big step without realizing the pain.*

*As I began to enjoy the bushwalk I also became more motivated and actually excited about walking through the gorge and crossing the rivers which was so much fun!....on the trip despite the cold and dark I was motivated to get up and get going and I was in good spirits which surprised me. I actually looked forward to the walk each day, I especially enjoyed the walk through the gorge and realised that I can be motivated and even excited about physical activity!*

*I actually enjoyed the different atmosphere and the beauty and excitement of the outback.*

*Most importantly, I had FUN on the camp, and have enjoyed telling friends and family how the expedition went, and they seemed very proud of me.*

### **Factor 2. Physical Fitness**

Many students commented that due to other priorities physical activity was lacking in their life. They commented that they enjoyed the physical exertion of the course and were motivated to make it a priority for the future. Typical comments included:-

*While as a pharmacy student physical fitness is not of a major concern, this process has inspired me to improve my fitness level, if not for my future occupation, then to set an example for others and my own health.*

*As each day progressed, a sense of self-satisfaction brewed as I over-achieved fitness expectations.*

*Taking the bushwalking course was definitely a good chance and excuse to break out of the cycle and gain some fitness. After finishing the three day expedition, including all the walking and running from the day walk and the orienteering session, I was reminded that being physical is fun, and it feels good. I used to run around an oval nearby, but have stopped for a while. Now I have dusted off the old running shoes and have started running again.*

### **Factor 3. Relaxation**

Many students, particularly those on their first expedition, who did not expect to experience any relaxation because it was going to be so “stressful”, got a pleasant surprise.

*Adding to the enjoyment is the relaxation factor. I very much looked forward to getting away from the rat race for a little while. Relaxation to me does not mean sitting around without much to do. Looking back, I can say that the walking, which despite being quite demanding, was also relaxing. It is relaxing perhaps because there is nothing on the mind except walking through a beautiful, natural environment whilst at the same time eating some scroggin and having a bit of a chat about life or about nothing with whoever is nearby.*

*I can still visualise that view now when I close my eyes, and although it is hard to explain. I think that it really changes my perception of nature, and how it spiritually gives something back to me if I stop to appreciate it. This can be used throughout my life in times of stress, as I find just mentally visualising that view relaxes me.*

*Furthermore, being in the natural environment instead of the busy city life was an extremely relaxing experience. Simply stopping to look at the scenery, native animals and flora was well worth the hardships. Also, breathing in fresh air and seeing the stars at night was something that I enjoyed very much.*

*Life slows down and the pressures of work are left behind*

*One of the first things that I noticed during the expedition was a reduction in my stress levels. In the first day alone I really felt like the tension, which I think is mainly caused by studying, dissipating. Knowing this is of great benefit to me, as I think that I can change some of my day to day habits to reduce stress. I am already walking to the bus stop rather than driving my car most mornings, which I feel is reducing my stress levels.*

*.....I must admit that I prior to the expedition I did not expect to feel relaxed at any point but was pleasantly surprised to find that relaxation is more of a mental exercise than it is physical, in that I mean it is possible to walk for 10km with 14kg on your back and feel refreshed and rejuvenated during and at the end of the day. Probably the best way to explain this notion of peaceful rest is best analysed by referring to my sleep during the expedition. As someone who generally has great difficulty sleeping in ordinary urban life I did not expect having slept in clothes I had worn all day, a beanie, gloves, on the cold hard floor and on the first night sleeping on a 30 degree angle with my head facing downwards (due to my partner being a snorer) with only a thin piece of plastic between us and a temperature of about 3 or 4 degrees and yet were able to sleep peacefully for both nights. There was no bother with the television or phone calls but having eaten dinner it was relatively easy to switch off and rest.*

*.....with no major problems allowing an ideal time to relax, not think about the trappings of modern life and engage in meaningful conversation and interaction with the other members of the group.*

### **Factor 4. Adventure and a Challenge.**

For many of the students this activity was an adventure and a challenge. The excitement and apprehension evident in their approach to the course from day one through to the expedition was obvious to all the leaders. This was particularly evident in those who had not experienced these types of activities before.

*As I discovered, bushwalking is not just about walking in the bush. It is about doing something that is out of the norm, in a place where one is at the mercy of the environment. It is about getting away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and being one with nature. With no such distractions, one is forced to deal with problems head on. Unlike everyday life, there is such an emphasis on preparation, safety and care for yourself. It is pivotal that one takes responsibility for themselves and the group, and hence, deals with any problems that may arise in a quick and effective manner.*

*The theoretical and practical experiences undergone in this course challenged my previous perceptions about the environment, the importance of group cooperation, and how I respond to situations which I control, and situations which I do not control. These factors were interwoven into the physical and mental challenges that arise through bushwalking and camping. I think that personal development has occurred in many facets of my life throughout this course, especially during the expedition.*

*The bushwalking expedition to me was an opportunity to expand my horizons, develop new skills, and learn something new about myself and I took to this challenge with a positive attitude.*

*If there is one lesson that I have learnt in this course and want to apply to other aspects of my life – that is to possess an attitude of internal control, appreciation of challenge as an opportunity*

*The pressures placed upon you as an individual in this setting are much different from what I usually experience. Not only are you challenged physically, but also in your ability to work and function in a group. Bushwalking also presents a mental challenge as you are bombarded with many new experiences.*

*The first day was the most difficult with a steep incline facing me. In some ways, this is representative of life where getting started is seemingly always the hardest part. I was disheartened by simply seeing the steep climb especially after climbing for so long, looking up and seeing nothing but another steep hill to climb. Upon finally completing the seemingly never-ending climb to the top of the Bluff, looking down at the view and finally finding the time to catch my breath, a profound feeling of relief and pride came across me.*

*Taking that step and choosing to challenge myself by doing something like this expedition for the first time in my life is something I will never forget. Firstly, I stepped out of my comfort zone and developed life skills that will become a part of my life from now onwards.*

*Quite often I prefer the known to the unknown so the camping expedition really pushed my boundaries.*

*Because I had no choice but to climb the steep hill I was faced with a feeling of elation and self satisfaction for accomplishing a task that I thought was beyond me. This has made me question whether I have missed out on things in life because I thought they were too hard. How many times in life have I missed out on that feeling of achievement and satisfaction? This has made me realize that if faced with a difficult task it will be more beneficial to attempt it.*

*Another important fact that I have learnt from the bushwalking experience is about the concept of mind over matter. I was really surprised by the amount of stress that my body could take.*

*The course provided the opportunity to place myself outside my comfort zone, which allowed me to gauge an idea of how I function in new surroundings*

*If there is one lesson that I have learnt in this course and want to apply to other aspects of my life – that is to possess an attitude of internal control, appreciation of challenge as an opportunity. The*

wilderness has made me realise this by forcing me to confront challenge, hardship and uncertainty. It has made me develop in an immeasurable amount, an attitude that allows me to 'live and learn'; an attitude that is universal to all human beings.

....this has to be character building at least, if it does not kill me..... I showed myself that I possess an inner strength that if I can harness will serve me well in my future. .... I was relieved and felt on top of the world (the only way to explain the feeling) – I had made it!

I knew if I were to survive, I would have to be physically and mentally prepared for any challenges that would arise.

### **Factor 5. Contact with the Natural Environment**

Empathy with the natural environment is an important consideration for us as outdoor educators. More than half the students indicated that immersion in the natural environment was an important benefit of the course.

*It is about getting away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and being one with nature.*

*Firstly, I came to realise that I really love the outdoors. Choosing to do this course was undoubtedly one of the best decisions of my life! Being in the fresh air, away from all distractions, was amazing and liberating. Sometimes it is easy to forget that there is so much beauty in the world. I plan to explore other avenues of outdoor recreation and hopefully, at the same time, educate my family. So too, I now know that it is possible to live without mobile phones and television!*

*Part of the attraction was its simplicity, getting back to what it is us humans have done since we crawled out of the ocean; to be surrounded by nature and only concerned with having shelter and full stomachs.*

*One of the highlights of the trip was the view that filled my eyes when we got to the lookout at The Battery. I stood quietly and admired the vast space in front of me for minutes, taking in the lush green paddocks and the gulf in the distance. I can still visualise that view now*

*I was able to appreciate the natural wilderness, away from the busy city lights, and learn more about the environment.*

### **Factor 6. Social Interaction**

As Outdoor Educators would know, an expedition of 3 days with mostly strangers will have its social challenges. Sharing a tent with a total stranger, sharing cooking with people of different food likes and dislikes or beliefs, and making decisions with people who have an "unknown" quality presents many social challenges. The vast majority of the participants found the social interaction to be highly rewarding. Some stated that they had .....*formed lovely friendships.*

Others commented on the activities which facilitated the social interaction, e.g.:- *Each night, spending time together cooking eagerly anticipated meals while wearing fresh warm socks had a sense of 'camaraderie' that would be impossible to achieve even at McDonalds!*

*However, it was not until one of us fell, suffered injuries or became fatigued that I appreciated the supportive strengths of a whole group of strangers who have been thrust into the same circumstances.*

Some examples of the comments about social interaction possible because of the time together included:-

*..... people seemed to be warming to each other..... even the members that were harder to get to know were starting to talk more easily with others*

*.... it also allowed me time to remove myself from my usual life.....to get away and focus on learning and confirming things about myself. In addition, I met a wonderful group of people, with whom I am sure I will keep in contact for a very long time. I feel very grateful to have had this experience and proud of myself for making the most of every situation.*

*One of the most positive experiences of the expedition was the development of friendships. Many of the great people I met and got to know are people that under normal circumstances I would not have made an effort to become friends with. I had two friends also completing the course and would have been content to stay within my established group.*

*It certainly was from a personal growth perspective the most enriching experience I have had at University thus far. It reminded me of the camaraderie I once felt playing sport or playing silly buggers with friends at Year 9 camp.*

### **Factor 7. Spiritual Renewal**

The students who referred to a factor of Spiritual Renewal did so as an uplifting of the human spirit or peak experience, not necessarily as religion per se (Hogan 1994). Some examples of this were:-

*The whole experience was a feast to the senses and the soul.*

*I really enjoy walking or climbing to high places, the reward of sitting down at the top of a lookout, peak, mountain or cliff and just looking out taking in the expanse below and around me is so satisfying to my soul, I am closer to my gods when I am there.*

*The bushwalking expedition has been highly beneficial to my mental and emotional resolve and has restored some lost faith in the sincerity and integrity of strangers or new acquaintances.*

*One other thing that motivated me, which may seem small to others, was a stick from a native Blackboy tree (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) that I found at the base of the very steep hill preceding The Battery climb. Not only did it help me physically for the majority of the camp, but holding the stick at base camp on day three was, to me, a symbol of what I had actually gone through- worn out at some parts (being my shoulders and feet) like the base of the stick, but leaving a much better person (mentally as well as physically) like the smoothness of the stick handle.*

*One of the things that I did not expect prior to the expedition was any kind of spiritual rejuvenation. However, after the expedition I felt like I had just come back from an overseas trip to recharge the batteries. It felt a little bit like three days of meditation, feeling a bit closer to the things that are important, such as the world we live in, the people around us, and also ourselves.*

*Bushwalking gave me a chance to withdraw myself from the world and relatively hectic life that I lead. Although my life is not particularly demanding it was still great to get away from stresses and worries of everyday life. It is important that I have time to myself to simply exist and nothing more.*

*At first, I found it extremely difficult to lift and carry the pack, particularly when walking uphill at a relatively fast pace. This made me question the amount of emotional baggage that I carry and how that also weighs me down in life. In the future, I must learn to let go of my worries that hold me*

*down and keep me from doing some of the things I want to do. Reaching the lookouts and being able to have time to think and reflect motivated me to keep going and made me realise that the hard effort was all worthwhile.*

*The question regarding the purpose of the bushwalking camp was raised in this paper and ultimately there is an answer. Indeed, the expedition provided a unique medium for self growth and healing for me where I have either discovered or confirmed certain attributes about myself which may be nursed further or changed for the better.*

There were several observations made by the students which are relevant to people planning Outdoor Education programs.

Students often comment about needing time for relaxation when they can do their own thing, rather than have every waking hour committed to the group agenda. In this program, often the walking took up most of the day, leaving little time for personal reflection and informal social interaction. Much of the evening was spent on writing up the log book, which obviously helps their analysis of the day's activity, but can detract from the overall experience. We think that the shorter days and the cold nights (without a campfire because of park regulations,) which are experienced in July, limit the amount of "free time" available to the students. As leaders, accommodating the balance of challenge and reflection within the constraints of designated campsites, particularly in the winter months when day light is at a premium, can be a challenge.

As outdoor educators, we must be wary of underestimating the challenge of a student's first expedition. Matthew Cox in his article "Do you remember your first?" highlights the fears and excitement when one embarks on a new outdoor experience. The following extracts illustrate the perceptions of novices who are daring enough to voluntarily undertake an expedition into the unknown.

*The bushwalking experience has really opened my eyes and I have put a great deal of thought into this. I have already begun to be more courageous and willing to try things out for myself and see what happens as opposed to waiting for other people to take that initial first leap for me*

*.....during the camp, what I had thought were 'necessities' were not that at all. I still survived the camp without things such as the mobile phone, the computer, internet etc. Instead, I took notice of my surroundings more, and in a sense this made me aware that the 'necessities' I am so accustomed to simply distracted my view on life in general. Much deeper and meaningful thoughts emerged during the camp, especially at hard times of the camp. I realised how lucky I was compared to underprivileged people back in Adelaide and also in third world countries such as Vietnam (a country I have visited before and where I witnessed cultural hardships firsthand). The camp enlightened me on how amazing society can be when we work together which is evident on small and larger scales. Take for example, our cooking group .....Together, we worked efficiently (yet safely) in packing the tents up and cooking. This would be impossible to do if one were to do this by themselves. Compare this to a building firm erecting buildings. In effect this is the same concept- a group working as 'one' to create a more desirable product. In our case, we effectively cooked a meal, while in the case of the building firm, they created a city.*

One student's reflections and changed perceptions at the end of the expedition, emphasises the potential impact of outdoor education.

*I remember sitting on the small white bus at the entrance to Mount Remarkable – the start of the trip home. With my hat-hair brandished, resting my back against the window, I skimmed a glance down at my shoes. They looked years worn, when just a mere three days ago they were white as this page.*

*Imprinted on these shoes were weeks of what I had accomplished, learned and memories; symbolically invested into these shoes. The last lace reef knots I tied remained intact, still ever reliable. Some perceive they have decreased in value, since the camp their sentimental value augmented. Now they are much more than constructed rubber and leather; an image of a journey walked one step at a time. Do I think I will ever wash them? No. Will I ever forget the experience? I pray not.*



## **End Note**

(Student's quotes) When we notified the students that we would like to use some of their statements in a paper, we emphasised that they would be used anonymously to protect their identity. When we received permission, two students were happy to also have their names published. However, we decided to ensure anonymity to meet ethical standards, we have not given any identification re the source of a quote, to ensure that it is not possible to identify any particular student.

---

## **References**

Course Outline: Introduction to Outdoor Recreation, July 2006  
Directed Study IESP Environment ENVT 4009 Course ID 010147

Cox, Matthew, July 2006 "Do you remember your first?" Journeys, News-journal of the Victorian Outdoor Education Association

Hogan, Robert A. 1994 The Value of Outdoor Recreation [www.Unisa.edu.au/library](http://www.Unisa.edu.au/library) (electronic reserve)

Toseland, RW & Rivas, RF 2001, *Introduction to group work practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Web site of University of South Australia (UniSA)  
<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/buge/displaybuge.asp>