

SEER 2005 Abstract

Social Support Development and Wilderness Pre-Orientation Experiences

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The work of any life transition involves specific tasks, often including the re-establishment of social support in a variety of forms (Weiss, 1974). College students are particularly affected by transition, often disrupting established support systems while transitioning into adulthood. To assist with this transition, campuses offer a number of services (e.g., admissions/alumni programs, campus visits, pre-orientation programs, first-year orientation, first-year seminars). Such services are defined in this study as Comprehensive Transitional Programs (CTP). Little is known about how CTP impact social support. This study focused on adapting the Campus Focused Social Provisions Scale (CF-SPS) as an instrument to measure social support and investigated whether students in different pre-orientation experiences reported different levels of social provisions on the CF-SPS.

The study was conducted at Harvard and Princeton universities because of their similar pre-orientation programs (i.e., wilderness, service, and pre-season athletics) and similar population demographics. A sample ($n = 1,601$) of first-year and sophomore students was categorized by pre-orientation experiences and analyzed by numerous demographic variables (e.g., ease of making friends, number of roommates). A factor analysis resulted in a three-factor model for the CF-SPS, resulting in a high overall scale reliability ($\alpha = .94$). A t-test showed no significant differences between schools, but a MANOVA indicated participants on wilderness orientation programs reported significantly higher levels of overall social provision scores and significant differences in all six CF-SPS sub-factors. Pre-season athletes reported significant differences on the sub-factor social

integration (i.e., belonging to a group sharing your interest and values) ($p < .05$). Service programs reported no significant differences.

A multilinear regression indicated the variable “ease of making friends” explained the largest variance of any of the models (i.e., one for the overall measure of CF-SPS and one for each of the six sub-factors; R^2 values ranged from .14 to .20). Both women and sophomores were more likely to report higher levels of social provisions on campus, except with the variable of social integration. The study proposed new models for social provision development on campus (e.g., the primacy of social integration) and indicated areas for future research. The study was exploratory and limited by lack of specific controls for selection bias and inability to access a control/matched comparison group.

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References

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