

International College Student Perceptions of Access to Outdoor Recreation



Isabel Couture

Introduction

Involvement in outdoor recreation can play an important role in the well-being of students, especially international students who are making cross-cultural transitions (Brunette et al., 2019). Most colleges and universities have recreation centers where students can go to exercise and even get involved in intramurals. Studies have shown that outdoor recreation helps international students reduce stress and foster social connections (Brunette et al., 2019). This research study explores how international college students access outdoor recreation and/or intramurals and examines the obstacles they might encounter.

Literature Review

There is very little research on the recreational activities of international graduate students. Lee et al., (2020) suggest that to enrich the academic lives of these students, it is important that universities engage them in recreational activities as they are an important subgroup of the university population.

Methods

The study was conducted at a regional comprehensive university in the Southeastern United States. I had an exploratory Qualtrics survey sent out via email asking international students about ways in which they access outdoor recreation and/or intramurals and the obstacles they may encounter. The survey was sent to 136 international students both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. I had respondents from ten different countries, ranging from Germany to Pakistan. 15 of the 136 international students completed the survey (11%). Of those 15 respondents, 13% were freshmen, 13% were sophomores, 27% were juniors, 20% were seniors, and 20% of the students were graduate-level students. To analyze the survey results I used Qualtrics.

Analysis & Results

The survey showed that 53% of the respondents cited a lack of adequate information and transportation to access outdoor recreation. A third of the respondents said that they did not have enough time to participate in recreational activities due to work, school, or family obligations. Only 13% of the respondents reported that they had no barriers to accessing outdoor recreation. 7% cited financial constraints. The survey results also showed that 100% of participants answered “yes” to having an interest in becoming more involved in outdoor recreation on or off campus, yet 60% of the respondents did not feel like the university was doing a good job informing them or supporting their involvement in outdoor recreation. 100% of the respondents answered “yes” to the question, “If given more resources, information, and support would you be or consider to be more involved in outdoor recreation and or intramurals?”, while 73% of respondents did not know the process of joining intramural teams. Lastly, 73% shared that participating in intramurals, and/or outdoor recreation on and off WCU's campus contributed to their sense of belonging at the university. Some of the most frequent concerns of the participants were lack of information and support.

Survey Questions on Barriers to Outdoor Campus Recreation	
Questions	Percentage
I don't have access to transportation	53
I don't have time because of work, school, or family obligations	33
I don't have a parking pass	0
I don't know people to participate in programs with or go to the Rec. Center	27
I don't know where to go/not sure how to sign up	27
I can't afford to participate in outdoor programs my Rec. Center puts on	7
I never know what outdoor recreation programs are going on	53
I have not had any barriers	13

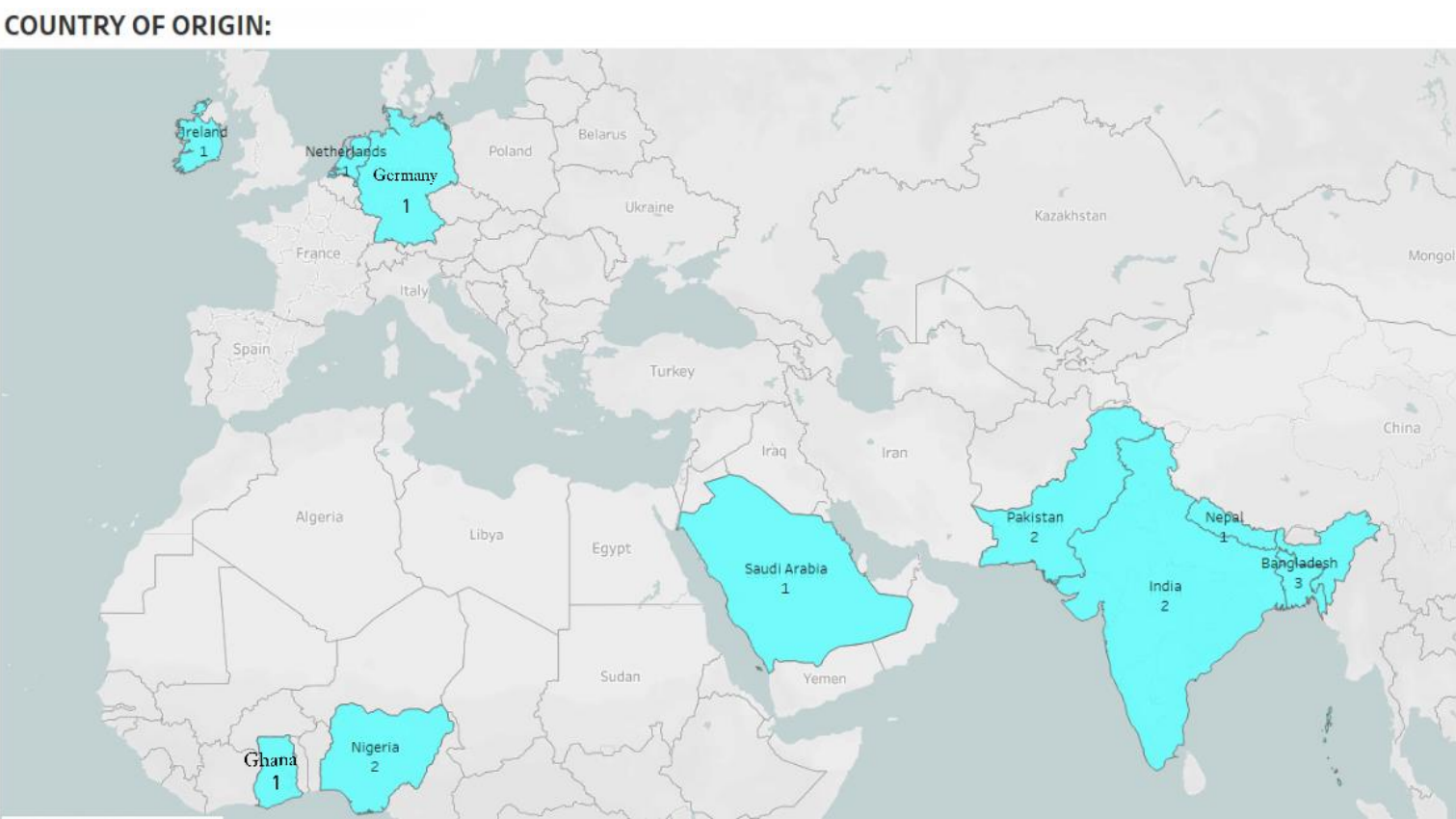
Discussion

International students appear to want to participate in outdoor recreation, but they do not seem to have the support and information needed to do so. This study and the research of Lee et al. (2020) all have similar findings in that a lack of information, transportation, and time all negatively impact the recreation of international college students.

Implications

This research study found that international students face several barriers to participating in outdoor recreation/intramurals. Though this study did not have a large sample size, the results of the study are very similar to the results of larger studies on this topic. **The three main barriers to participation identified were: lack of information, lack of transportation, and time constraints** are similar despite the study size.

This study is important because the results can be used by campus recreation personnel and other student affairs professionals to better understand why international students might not participate in outdoor recreation and intramurals and help reduce the barriers to their participation. This might include better coordination with offices for international students, providing transportation resources to these students, and decreasing the cost of participation in outdoor recreational programs and activities. If the results of this research can help international students get more involved in outdoor recreational activities, it would increase their sense of belonging, and personal well-being, while decreasing feelings of isolation and loneliness.



References

Brunette, M. K. (2019, September 21). "You can't be outside without being part of the culture": Recommendations for using outdoor recreation to support international student transitions. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3746689

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