



THE CORINTHIAN
The Journal of Student Research at Georgia College

The Corinthian

Volume 7

Article 7

2005

OPINIONS ABOUT CHALLENGE BY CHOICE HELD BY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AT GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY

Ryan L. Sharp

Georgia College & State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Outdoor Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sharp, Ryan L. (2005) "OPINIONS ABOUT CHALLENGE BY CHOICE HELD BY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AT GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY," *The Corinthian*: Vol. 7 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian/vol7/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at Knowledge Box. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Corinthian by an authorized editor of Knowledge Box.

**OPINIONS ABOUT CHALLENGE BY CHOICE HELD BY
UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN OUTDOOR
EDUCATION ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AT GEORGIA COLLEGE &
STATE UNIVERSITY**

Ryan L. Sharp

*Dr. Sharene Smoot
Faculty Sponsor*

Abstract

A primary concern when discussing the concept of Challenge by Choice (CxC) is defining it and identifying how it is used. This study is a survey of students in the outdoor education academic programs at Georgia College & State University. The primary objective of the study was to compare graduate and undergraduate student opinions about the meaning and use of CxC. It was hypothesized that graduate students would have different opinions about the concept than undergraduate students. Twenty students responded to an eight item online survey. Data was analyzed using a chi-square test. No statistical significance at the alpha .05 level was found; therefore the hypothesis was not supported. Analysis of the qualitative data produced several common themes that were used to describe an initial typology of CxC. Future research possibilities are discussed using this study as a potential basis for examining other academic programs that teach and use the concept.

**Opinions about Challenge by Choice held by Undergraduate
and Graduate Students in Outdoor Education Academic
Programs at Georgia College & State University**

Introduction

A primary concern when discussing the concept of Challenge by Choice (CxC) is how a leader understands its meaning and use. A presenter at a recent conference asked a outdoor education student what CxC means. His response was that CxC is a way out of doing an activity if they did not want to do it (Lissen, 1996). The range opinions about CxC include different meanings, uses, purposes and outcomes. In academic settings students are intended to learn how to be outdoor education facilitators, leaders, or administrators. Defining CxC becomes especially important in an outdoor education academic pro-

gram because professional outdoor educators may have to use it differently in particular situations and its use in professional education is normally intended to enhance participant growth and to achieve curriculum outcomes. By opting out of an experience students may be compromising both academic and technical training that is vital to professional success. Some academic faculty may believe that students enrolled in an outdoor education academic program have made an implicit choice about their level of participation in new and challenging learning experiences. Therefore, academic settings may operate differently in order to teach different ways of thinking about and using CxC. Most academic curriculum include teaching about CxC because it is generally thought to be central to the practice of outdoor education and should be taught to enable professional outdoor educators to use it for a range of applications. However, there exists very little information about how CxC is used and conveyed to students in academic settings. The purpose of this study is to examine opinions about CxC held by undergraduate and graduate students in outdoor education academic programs at Georgia College & State University. The hypothesis underlying the study is that graduate students would have a different opinion of the concept and its use from undergraduate students. An assumption underlying this study is that students will hold opinions about the concept that reflect what they have learned about it in academic programs.

Background

CxC means different things to different people and since the mid eighties when the concept was first written about (Islands of Healing, Schoel et al, 1988) it has been used differently by professionals in the field. Ronhke (1989) suggests that in an outdoor education setting participants are often encouraged to go beyond the old and push into new territory, allowing them to experience a meaningful challenge that can have tremendous rewards. Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines choice as the suggestion of opportunity or privilege of choosing freely. When participants are offered a choice about their level and type of engagement in an activity, it provides them with an opportunity for ownership of their learning and a stronger connection with what is to be learned (Henton, 1996).

An accepted definition of CxC is that participants know their own limits and challenges and that people grow as a result of choosing the challenge they have identified for themselves (Henton, 1996). Pegasus Training, Inc. (2004), however defines CxC in their training manual as providing a participant with a choice to take part or not to take part

in an activity. As examples of these two meanings of the concept in action, if the definition of CxC offered by Henton is implemented, then CxC becomes a powerful tool in many settings. Requiring students to establish their own learning and growth goals, and on this basis, choose a level of involvement that enhances these goals, leads to an empowering experience. If the definition of the Pegasus Training program is used, then students may miss essential experiences and information that is crucial to their personal growth or professional development.

Itin (1992) suggests that CxC is not about forcing someone to engage in an action against their will, rather it is leaving the responsibility with the participant to make what they will out of the experience. He states that the CxC concept and strategy grew out of adventure programs that forced participants to perform certain activities. It was thought that force would lead to resentment among the participants and that the value of a program would be compromised.

The vast majority of the literature that includes CxC addresses the concept as a component of a larger pedagogical concept related to experiential, adventure, or outdoor education. Often strategies for creating and implementing behavioral contracts, or introducing operating principles for the program are offered. In some cases, an author offers a brief philosophical perspective and a stipulated definition related to the setting, client group, or program purpose.

There is an absence of how to teach this complex concept to professional outdoor educators or students and organizations and schools that offer professional education seldom address CxC beyond its name as a component of curriculum. This study is intended to initiate thinking about how to help professional outdoor educators understand broader and deeper aspects of the concepts by examining what one group of outdoor education students think about its meaning and use.

Methods and Procedures

Participants

Participants in this study were students in outdoor education academic programs at Georgia College & State University. Eight participants were graduate students in the M.Ed. in Health and Physical Education with emphasis in Outdoor Education Administration. Four of these were first year graduate students and four were second year graduate students. Four were females and four were males. Twelve participants were undergraduate students in the B.S. in Outdoor Education. All were seniors. Ten were males and two were females.

Instrumentation

An eight-item survey was created using a five point Likert scale comprised of items that are common interpretations of the meaning and use of CxC. Respondents were asked to write about their understanding of the meaning and use of the concept at the conclusion of the survey. The survey was reviewed by outdoor education faculty and piloted in a graduate research class. Feedback was incorporated into the final instrument. (see appendix).

Procedures

IRB permission was obtained in advance of administering the survey. The survey was administered in outdoor education classes. Students were informed prior to seeing the survey of the purpose of the study and told that the submission to the researcher of the completed survey indicated willingness to participate. Confidentiality was explained at this time. The survey was administered October 27, 2004.

Data Analysis

Data was placed in an Excel file and SPSS was used to produce basic statistics and submit the data to chi-square tests. Qualitative data was analyzed using document analysis procedures for commonalities, exceptions, and themes among responses.

Results

The underlying hypothesis for this research was that there would be a difference in the opinion about CxC between graduate and undergraduate students. The data set was submitted to chi-square test. Several items were agreed upon by a most respondents. There was no statistical significance at the alpha .05 level of analysis. Sub groupings of the data were submitted to chi-squared tests. The chi-square test based on gender produced no statistical significance at the alpha .05 level of analysis. The chi-square test based on degree program produced no statistical significance at the alpha .05 level of analysis. The data were then analyzed using frequencies by combining the strongly agree with agree, and strongly disagree with disagree, leaving neutral as a separate category. Means and standard deviations produced indications of some similarities, exceptions, or ranges that might indi-

cate distinctions. For example, question eight (A program loses some of its value if all participants do not participate fully.) produced 80% agreement among both undergraduate students and graduates and question three (Since people chose to be Outdoor Education students, they should assume that Challenge by Choice does not apply to them.) produced 75% agreement between undergraduate and graduate students. Conversely, question four (Everyone participating in an outdoor education program should participate fully in everything.) produced only a 25% agreement between graduate and undergraduate students, and question one (Challenge by Choice means that participants can opt out of an activity.) produced only 25% agreement between graduate and undergraduate students.

Table 1
Results of Survey for Outdoor Education Graduate Students

	SA/A	N	SD/D
Question			
Can opt out	25%	0%	75%
Required to participate	62.5%	25%	12.5%
CxC does not apply	25%	12.5%	62.5%
Complete all tasks	87.5%	12.5%	0%
Lack of participation	62.5%	0%	37.5%
Participation card	87.5%	12.5%	0%
Loss of value	100%	0%	0%

Table 2
Results of Survey for Outdoor Education Undergraduate Students

	SA/A	N	SD/D
Question			
Can opt out	25%	25%	50%
Required to participate	33.3%	25%	41.6%
CxC does not apply	16.6%	16.6%	66.6%
Complete all tasks	66.6%	16.6%	16.6%
Lack of participation	58.3%	25%	16.6%
Participation card	58.3%	25%	16.6%
Loss of value	66.6%	16.6%	16.6%

Qualitative produces several themes held in common between both sets of students. For example, the majority of students indicated that CxC means that the participant negotiates or selects an appropriate level of challenge. Students made statements like; "participate the best you can", "participate in a different manner", "students perform to a level of challenge", and "participants have the option to challenge themselves in another way, not just quit." It is noteworthy that all of these responses were made by undergraduate students. This group of students also stated that CxC is; "a way to feel comfortable in activities that produce discomfort", and "it does not mean you don't have to complete an activity because you are scared", indicating potential over-concern for comfort rather than pushing through discomfort to transfer of learning and growth. It is clear that the majority of undergraduate responses indicated that Challenge by Choice means that

participants have the option to be involved in an activity in the manner best suited for them.

Graduate student responses produced different and similar insights about how outdoor education students understand the meaning and use of CxC. Some graduate students indicated that CxC means; "you can participate if you want to" and others indicated that it means that the participant may "chose their level of participation in any activity." Graduate students commented on how CxC is used in class. One student commented that; CxC means "in a class setting it means something much different than in a challenge course program where participants are there for fun." Another graduate student simply said, "it is not considered a black and white issue when it comes to an outdoor education student." It might be concluded from these comments that some graduate students have a limited view of the use of CxC when working with participants, and others function with a broader definition that suggests adaptation according to context and participant characteristics.

Discussion

Quantitative data does not suggest differences between graduate and undergraduate student opinions about CxC. This may be explained by a lack of sophistication in the instrument used or a high degree of consistency in curriculum and instruction across outdoor education courses. Quantitative data does suggest that the majority of students agree that their peers should be required to complete the full range of challenges and skill practice opportunities in the curriculum. Unfortunately respondents were not asked why, so it is only conjecture that these students understand the importance of this component in their professional preparation.

From a curriculum and instruction perspective, it appears that undergraduate students understand that CxC is an important strategy for challenging participants to take responsibility for negotiating some level of participation in most contexts. The data suggests that options do not include opting out of an experience. Some graduate students seem to think about the concept in greater depth and breadth, and others seem to be limited in their thinking to perspective that enables participants to withdraw from participating in an experience because the purpose of a program is to have fun. It should be noted that the undergraduate curriculum provides more opportunity to address the concept both in theory and through direct experience than does the graduate curriculum. This may indicate that the assumption that graduate students enter the program with more pro-

fessional experience or prior education in the field, and therefore do not need to fully examine basic concepts like CxC, make be in error.

That there was no statistical significance between the answers on the survey between undergraduate and graduate students may indicate that the survey lacked the power to distinguish adequately important components of opinion and/or the meaning and use of the concept of CxC. There does not appear to be an existing instrument for examining the concept of CxC from the perspective of opinion, meaning, and use. Therefore, future studies would benefit from a more thorough process for instrument development.

Future research about CxC should address validity and reliability issues such as the N size and the limitation of administering the survey to one academic program. Respondents were homogenous because they all had a similar or the same education background.

This researcher was taking an independent study course that is completed in one semester. Therefore time and level of commitment was less than would be expected from a thesis study or a funded research project. A more in depth process would enable pre and post testing and considerably more time to evolve a more coherent and focused perspective on the research problem.

It is also important to acknowledge the importance of what several graduate students indicated; "It not a black and white issue in an academic setting. Challenge by Choice means something different for a [group of participants] than it does to future outdoor professionals." In this regard, the process and responsibility for developing competent and effective outdoor education professionals would benefit greatly from further investigation of this and other complex concepts associated with the field.

Challenge by Choice Survey

Submission of this survey to the researcher indicates your willingness to participate in this research with the conditions explained by the researcher.

Please circle the letters that best represent your opinion of the meaning and use of challenge x choice in adventure programs

Program of Study: M.Ed. or B.S.

Gender: M or F

Statements about Challenge x Choice

SD=Strongly Disagree

D=Disagree

N=Neutral

A=Agree

SA=Strongly Agree

1. Challenge by Choice means that participants can opt out of an activity. SD D N A SA
2. Outdoor education students should be required to participate in all activities associated with classes. SD D N A SA
3. Since people chose to be Outdoor Education students, they should assume that Challenge by Choice does not apply to them. SD D N A SA
4. Everyone participating in an outdoor education program should participate fully in everything. SD D N A SA
5. Students who choose to exercise Challenge by Choice to get out of doing something compromise professional preparation. SD D N A SA
6. Students who do not participate fully in all components of a course should not receive satisfactory on a skills checklist. SD D N A SA
7. A program loses some of its value if all participants do not participate fully. SD D N A SA
8. What have you learned about the meaning and use of Challenge by Choice? Use the back of the page if necessary.

References

- Pegasus Training, Inc. *Challenge by Choice* (2004). <http://www.nlp-now.co.uk/challenge-by-choice.htm> Retrieved on February 13, 2004.
- Henton, M. (1996.) *Adventure in the Classroom*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Itin, C. (1992). Challenge by Choice as professional enabling. Insight: *Newsletter of the Therapeutic Adventure Professional Group of the Association for Experiential Education*, 1(1), 2.
- Itin, C. (1996). The impelling principle in Challenge by Choice. *Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Region of the Association for Experiential Education*, 4(3), 1, 6-7.
- Lisson, B. (1996). *Explorations: Is There Choice in Challenge by Choice?*
- Pathways: *The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education*. 8(1), 20-21.
- Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowtails and Cobras II*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Schoel, J., Prouty, D., & Radcliffe, P. (1988). *Islands of Healing: A Guide to Adventure Based Counseling*. Hamilton, MA: Project Adventure, Inc.