

Full Length Research Paper

Assessing the leisure travel behavior of foreign and domestic graduates in Central United States

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This study employed both quantitative and qualitative research design to identify how graduate students' travel behavior in the Central US varied in leisure behavior, based on comparing Taiwanese students to both other international foreign students and domestic Americans. The study found significant differences in what motivated students to seek travel and leisure during study breaks (push factors). Americans differed from Taiwanese regarding travel motivation, with Americans higher in preferences for being physically active, finding excitement and time with family and friends. Taiwanese and other international students sought time to be free and to find solitude and reflection.

Key words: Leisure and recreation tourism behavior, comparative culture recreation, international students.

INTRODUCTION

Graduate students committed to advancing their knowledge in the recreation and leisure field at the graduate program level need to be credible role models for their future students in order to be most effective. The leisure experiences these graduate students have during their academic studies will likely influence the recommendations these people will make to their future students. Although numbers of international students study at colleges and universities in the United States, there are only limited researches efforts to understand their leisure behavior (Li and Stodolska, 2006). These recreation leaders of tomorrow will be more convincing to their students when they discuss the value of leisure experiences if these graduate students have, themselves, been involved actively in living lives which balance time for study, reflection, and leisure.

Researchers should ask in what kind of leisure and recreation behavior have these graduate students engaged? As a Taiwanese faculty member in leisure studies, the researcher was interested in how Taiwanese students compared to other international and American students in their choices of leisure sites and activities.

How might Taiwanese differ from other international students or their American colleagues? This question may be of significant interest to other Taiwanese recreational leaders, as well as to other leaders aware of the increasing intersection of the East and West.

With a population of more than 603 million, and boasting of every conceivable climate and terrain, the United States not only experience a huge amount of domestic tourism, but also hosts the third greatest number of foreign tourists every year (UNWTO, 2007). Measuring and assessing the different segments of the travel and tourism market for Americans and international students in the U.S. allows industry professionals to construct marketing strategies. Additionally, such research can help marketers to enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination, "either through psychological, objective, or subjective means, or according to the class of users" (Field, 1999, p. 375).

Assessing what leisure, recreation, and tourism graduate students do with their leisure time during scheduled breaks in the academic calendar may be important in forecasting (Li and Stodolsk, 2006) whether recreation education is primarily an intellectual pursuit or a valued social pattern of behavior (Chen and Bright, 2007). In addition, Cai (2000) found that anxiety and depression are the greatest concerns of college students'

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mental health, and that such concerns greatly affect students' physical and emotional wellbeing, causing such consequences as poor interpersonal skills, motivational problems, lower grades, and thoughts of suicide. He also cited evidence that physical activity helps students improve and maintain physical and mental health. Therefore, students combining recreational activities with physical activity and mental stimulation would be better at physical and mental health (Cai, 2000).

Knowing where native and foreign students are visiting in the nation, where they are going, what they are doing, and how they are spending their money are key questions that the travel and tourism industry needs to research, especially in such a widespread, heterogeneous, and attractive tourist destination as the Central United States. Even through student travel is usually considered a small segment of the overall tourism industry in the U.S., it is beneficial to program planning in the leisure industry if precise and valuable information regarding the above mentioned points is provided.

This study focuses on how current graduate students in leisure studies in the Central US involved themselves in leisure activities and recreational sites. While many studies have been conducted regarding the leisure behavior of different populations across cultures, the literature has meager research regarding the comparative leisure and recreation behavior during academic breaks of recreation and leisure studies majors in graduate programs, or of how Taiwanese students attending university programs in the Central U.S. compare and contrast with other students. For recreation, leisure, and tourism educational and industrial professionals in Taiwan, this information may be valuable in program planning.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess and analyze the leisure and travel preferences and behaviors of three different cultural groups of graduate recreation and tourism majors living and studying in 13 states in the Central United States. The study focused on identifying the factors that influenced recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate student travel behaviors, travel preferences, and motivations to travel. The study was limited to the Central United States because a true nation-wide study was beyond the resources of the researcher and because the Central region is of particular interest to the researcher because of its diversity of geography and its range of indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities, in both urban and rural settings.

Research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What differences were there in the recreation travel of

American, Taiwanese, and other international students who were enrolled in graduate programs in recreation, leisure, and tourism in the Central United States during 2006?

2. What were selected American, Taiwanese, and international students' travel experiences, preferences, and motivations for travel in the Central United States?

3. What were respondents' perceptions of how specific characteristics of travel destinations and human motivational factors affected student travel decisions, behaviors, and preferences?

4. What were the commonalities and differences among the three interview groups?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students who are satisfied with their higher education experience in the United States report it to friends and family at home, who, in turn, often choose the same overseas schools and programs (Kim et al., 2009). Some tourism industries have been growing at a break-neck pace in foreign countries, and new tourism venues have not yet had the time, organization, or infrastructure to develop their own higher education programs. These industries have relied on American schools to fill the gap, according to Hsu (1996). She estimated that between 25 and 50% of students studying hospitality, travel, and tourism services in the United States are from abroad.

Encouraging student tourism in the rural, Central United States not only benefits the traveler, but the region as well. Byrd et al. (2008) stated that rural tourism generates secondary income to rural and agricultural households, reduces out-migration by providing job alternatives, encourages the exchange of ideas and commerce between rural and urban areas, diversifies the rural economy, and demands the creation of rural infrastructure. Byrd et al. (2008) continued to say that by segmenting, studying, and understanding the rural and outdoor tourism market and those who are attracted to it, tourism professionals can align all that outdoor and rural areas have to offer with visitors' wants and needs.

It is important for travel and tourism experts to understand the preferences of international students because international students do not usually have homes nearby to visit, and these students may have more free time to travel than do domestic students (Kim et al., 2009). Kim et al. maintained that since domestic students themselves generate a significant portion of the travel dollars spent in the United States, and since international student numbers have increased, the tourism industry cannot afford to ignore this market.

Additionally, with urban, suburban, and rural areas, a mix of vacation and tourism destinations is possible. However, the greatest benefits, particularly for those who are mentally and physically stressed, come from those trips that combine escapist, relaxing, and restorative leisure activities with destinations providing challenge,

adventure, and renewal (Iso-Ahola, 1983). Moreover, rural and outdoor tourism appeals to those people with above average education and to people with few financial resources - two mutually exclusive categories into which the vast majority of graduate students would dually fall (Oppermann, 1996).

Taiwanese travelers have similar opinions as a group about rural destinations. Miller and Hsu (2003) study of vacation farms in Taiwan, or working farms that gain additional income from periodic tourists or overnight visitors, showed that the main visitors were in their mid 20s to mid 30s, married, in a business-related occupation, in the lower-middle to middle economic classes, had visited a farm at least once before, and had attended at least a junior college. Additionally, the primary motivations were sightseeing, relaxation, and relaxation with children. Friends and co-workers were the dominant sources of information that led to the visit (72.7%). Similar motivations may apply to Taiwanese graduate students studying in the United States.

In 2007, travel expenditures of domestic and international travelers in the US was \$739 billion (U.S Travel Association, 2008). The United States earned \$127 billion annually from foreign tourists, with 56 million visiting in 2007 (United States of America Department of Commerce, 2008). It estimated that 17% of the total income of the American travel industry was generated by foreign tourism. In addition to overseas travelers coming for vacations and family visits, temporary, and semi-permanent residents all contribute heavily to foreign tourism. Meanwhile, the number of international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities increased roughly to 623,805 in academic year 2007 - 2008, a 7% increase from previous academic year (NACBUO, 2008). In addition, Field (1999) estimated that of the 14.5 million total college students in America, 10 million use travel services each year, and foreign students alone take 84,000 vacation trips annually in the United States.

Nevertheless, Field (1999) study found that foreign students are less likely to travel during spring or summer break than are domestic students, with 53.8% taking a trip in 1997, compared to 71.1% of American students. He also stated that Asian students had the lowest participation in vacation travel of all international student groups. Toppo (2004) listed the percentages of international student enrollments at U.S. colleges and universities in 2003 - 2004 at a total of 572,509, with students from Asia comprising more than half of all enrollments at 57%; students from Europe and Latin America were 13 and 12%, respectively; Africa, the Middle East, and Canada ranged from 7 to 5%; and Oceania totaled 1%. Because Asian students far outnumber other international ethnicities at American colleges, Field's sample was only 27.7% Asian, as half of the national average, Asian students can be considered a disproportionately large segment of the student travel market.

Lepp and Gibson (2008) pointed out that values and interest dictate recreation and tourism choices and can

explain why visitors are drawn to a variety of man-made and natural attractions. Many of the values also include outdoor activity concurrent with experiencing the values through recreation. Many people value seeing the exotic, unusual, or rare, such as visiting the Eiffel Tower or an erupting volcano. Those people wanting challenges like defying nature with human skill and endurance; the culturally and educationally interested are fascinated by museums, architecture, and minority cultures. Similarly, the cultural-historic value attracts those who believe old things have a story to tell, such as the redwood forests of California or ghost towns.

Crompton (1979) found that socio-psychological and push factors, can explain not only a vacationer's interest in going on holiday, but also the potential to work with pull factors in guiding a tourist to a potential location. Push factors identify why people choose to go on vacation, why people choose to leave their familiar surroundings to travel to a different place; travel package deals with "push factors," or what internal motives push them away from home. Schott (2004) described push factors as causing the initial motivation to travel, or the motivation to travel *per se*, and Meisel and Cottrell (2003) listed the desire for escape, rest and relaxation as common pushes.

"Pull factors" influence the traveler's choices of where to go. Pulls are destination-specific, tangible characteristics that refer to accommodations, activities, scenery, attractions, etc., and strengthen the tourist's desire to go on vacation (Schott, 2004). Uysal and Jurowski (1994) stated that the concept of push and pull factors on tourist motivation is a generally accepted theory in the field of recreation and tourism. But the two do not work in isolation.

Mayo (1975) stated that comparing images in tourists' minds to their "image of an 'ideal' destination area whether or not they think it really exists leads tourists to choose one destination or combination of destinations that promises to provide them with the greatest amount of satisfaction" (p. 14). Mayo went on to describe an "ideal destination" as providing scenery, uncongested with people or industry, and offering a comfortable climate. In terms similar to other researchers' work on push motivations, Mayo characterized America's national parks as offering peace, quiet and other attributes of an ideal destination.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This research focused on the use of both a survey and selected interviews to gather data to answer the research questions. Thus the data collection was both quantitative and qualitative in nature in order to delve beneath the surface of the motivations from which the subjects of the study became involved in leisure activity or to select a particular recreational site. The research questions focused on gathering information regarding the contexts of travel which were experienced by graduate student recreation and tourism majors in the Central United States. The study used interviews to gather information on subjective motivations toward, and perceptions of, recreational and leisure travel issues.

Table 1. Population and response rates.

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Population		630	100.0
Response	Return	296	47.0
	No return	334	53.0

N = 630.

This study included an electronically distributed quantitative survey and qualitative interviews conducted by email. The quantitative data provided a foundation of descriptive information about how the respondents' varied, including age and nationality. The four sections of the survey included items on recreational travel during the past year, best travel experience, motivations to travel, and travel destinations and activities. An eListen web-based survey was used for this quantitative aspect of the study. EListen web-based surveying enables the researcher to create, deploy, collect, and analyze data. Respondents completed the eListen questionnaires electronically, eliminating manual data entry, which can improve accuracy and reduce response time. In this study, the respondents were contacted by email. The foundation of factual and perceptual information was expanded during qualitative interviews.

Respondents to the quantitative survey were asked to indicate their willingness to be contacted by email for extended discussions, to enrich data gathered in the study survey, and for convenience in the research design. From 48 respondents who were willing to participate in email interviews, 10 people were selected at random across 38 institutions to participate in the qualitative aspect of this study.

The email interviews in this study provided the qualitative data and gave the opportunity to understand each respondent's travel experiences, motivations, and preferences more deeply. The email interviews also provide broader data than was possible in quantitative findings (Brunt, 1997). Because several parts of the quantitative survey asked about specific travel experiences and trips, the qualitative email interviews allowed the researcher to ask questions that did not fit into the study survey instrument's structure. Open-ended research questions elicited further details relevant to the topic. Qualitative responses provided rich and detailed descriptions of motivation factors. These interviews used as many exchanges of email between the subject and the researcher as were required to fully explore the subject.

Population

The population consisted of graduate students enrolled in the recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate programs (both master's and doctoral programs) of selected universities located in the Central United States. According to lists compiled separately by the National Recreation and Park Association and Educational Directories Unlimited, 38 public and private universities offering these programs were located in the 13 states of the Central United States—Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin. Based on the comprehensive results of the two lists, each school was contacted by the researcher to confirm the existence of its graduate programs and the inclusion of at least one Taiwanese graduate student in enrollment. Universities that had either ended their programs or did not have either any graduate students or at least one international graduate student currently enrolled were omitted from the final population. The total population of recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate students was 630 (with

the actual number being determined and revised as the research progressed), and the whole population was used. The researcher relied on the encouragement of program leaders to request all of their students to participate. Using the whole population allowed for a full representation of all three target populations based on nationality and provided the largest number of responses. Program leaders were informed that the researcher desired to focus on Taiwanese students as a selected subgroup of international students, given the researcher's interest in assessing Taiwanese students as an identifiable entity in the participating institutions in the Central US. Only institutions with Taiwanese students were invited to participate.

For the qualitative aspect of this research, a total of 10 respondents from all programs combined, comprised of seven Americans, one Taiwanese, and two international students were identified in the surveys to be interviewed by email. The number of 10 respondents was selected for convenience and to enable the researcher to conduct extended email interviews. The distribution of the nationalities of the selected 10 respondents was based on willingness to participate and random selection. All of these respondents had positions as teaching assistants or graduate research assistants. Six of the 10 interviewees were female.

Data collection

The director, chair, or faculty program leader from each participating school received by email a copy of the study cover letter. The leader was requested to refer students to the study survey e-Listen website through which responses were gathered. Two weeks into the data collection period, the director, chair, or faculty program leader was asked again by telephone and email to request student participation in the study to assure an increase in the response rate. The quantitative data collection period lasted a total of three weeks from when the program leaders agreed to have their institution's students participate.

Qualitative data collection occurred 20 days after the quantitative data collection from each school. The email interviews were conducted over the course of a week with an initial reply to questions and an average of two follow-up replies, where the initial data collected were deemed insufficient, underdeveloped, or unclear during analysis. Each member of the qualitative sample was assigned a pseudonym at the time of the email interview, which was the only means of participant identification for the duration of data collection and analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The response rate for the total student population of graduate leisure, recreation, and tourism majors in the Central United States and subgroups of population by age and nationality (American, Taiwanese, and other Internationals) is shown in Table 1. The total population of 630 students produced 296 (47.0%) returns. This number included 160 females (54.4%) and 136 males (45.6%) in the three age groups — 21 - 25 (38.5%), 26 - 30 (36.5%) and 31 and over (25.0%). Of the sample, 174 (58.8%) identified themselves as Americans, 44 (14.9%) as Taiwanese, and 78 (26.4%) as other Internationals, as displayed in Table 2.

Respondents were asked the frequency of their travel experiences during the past 12 months. The participants with four or more trips outnumbered the rest of the

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of students participants.

Characteristics	Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	160	54.05
	Male	136	45.95
Age	21 - 25	114	38.51
	26 - 30	108	36.49
	31 or Older	74	25.00
Nationality	United States citizen	174	58.78
	Taiwan citizen	44	14.86
	Other international citizens	78	26.35

N = 296.

participants with three trips or less. Respondents with four or more trips in the past 12 months had the largest (45.6%) frequency of travel experiences.

As for the reasons for taking a trip, 45.1% participants (of 102 responding to this section) identified self-reflection as the most important reason, followed by getting away (37.3%) and changing routine (23.5%). The second most important reason for travel was changing routine, which 102 people identified, followed by getting away and self reflection, with 59 and 33, respectively. The most frequent reasons for the participants to take a trip were changing routine, getting away, and self-reflection.

The types of trip destination included seeing famous sites (34 participants), country setting (32 participants) and big city shopping (31 participants) as the first three most attractive types of trip destinations among the types (herein) included in the survey. As for the second and third most attractive types of trip destinations, the above mentioned three types — country setting, big city shopping and seeing famous sites, were also identified by the participants. No participants considered seeing wild animals as the most important type of trip destination.

The most frequent number of the participants (180) chose city urban centers as their travel destination during the past one year, following by famous sites (176), outdoor recreation areas (126), national parks (97), state parks (79), and camp sites (64). Nature reserves or rural types of travel destinations were not popular with graduates having recreation-related majors.

Respondents reported a range of number of nights away for their travel, with the three most frequent and clustered responses including two nights, 74 participants (25.00%), five or more, 70 participants (23.65%), and three nights, 67 participants (22.64%). A large majority of respondents stayed longer than one night; with only 47 participants (15.88%) indicating their travel was overnight.

Those graduate students with recreation, leisure, and

tourism majors had frequent traveling experiences during the past year, either for recreational or other purposes. Respondents reported that country setting, shopping, and famous sites were most appealing to them, and the respondents preferred visiting city urban centers or famous sites with more advanced facilities over visiting rural and state or national parks. Primary motivations listed for travel related to motivations for changing life's routine, getting away, and self-reflection.

The data regarding the respondents' one best travel experience included the choices travel destination, breaks when the trip occurred, number of nights spent, the distance of the trip, and the number of people traveling in the trip. Research findings showed that 97 participants (32.77%) identified visiting famous sites as the destination of their one best trip during the past year, followed by 56 participants (18.92%) visiting city urban centers. Participants that identified summer break as the most common time that their best trip of the year occurred were 106 (35.81%), and the largest number of respondents stayed five nights or more (97, 32.77%). The most frequent distance for traveling was more than 300 miles inside the United States (89, 32.07%), and traveling companions of two to four people traveling (109, 36.82%) were most characteristic of respondents' one best travel experience.

Respondents preferred to take their trips during their longest break, such as summer break. Respondents preferred most to stay longer than overnight at the destination and to travel with two to four companions as far as they could inside the United States.

Primary qualitative research themes

The narrative responses of this group were reviewed for common and recurring themes. The following themes were identified by the researcher to describe the primary and sub-themes described in this section.

Qualitative response theme one: Desire for experiences during travel

The interview subjects were looking for things that were new and different to them in their travel — things that were outside their regular experiences. Even when doing outdoor activities that they could do close to home, they would rather travel and do them in new places. Most of the fantasy or exhilarating vacations focused on doing something like rafting or camping. The respondents sought opportunities to be physically engaged in new and challenging experiences. The following examples support the identification of this theme.

Question: How have your trips during your time in college in the United States affected you in terms of your travel preferences? I want to “focus on newness both for place and people,” from student 1. Student 5 said, “I like to take trips to get away from the stresses of going to college.” Student 8 said, “I prefer to travel to new places or to see friends.”

Question: What characteristics of different destinations make them attractive to you as vacation places? Student 4 said, “Opportunities to do new things are what attract me to locations. I grew up in a rural area in the flat lands of the Midwest, so I tend to prefer destinations that have oceans or mountains, or going to cities.” Student 5 said, “...changes of scenery.” Student 6 wrote, “...exotic, romantic. I always want to see something different when I travel.” Student 9 used the word uniqueness in responding.

Question: Do you prefer shorter trips near to home or longer trips far away? Student 1 wrote, “...nice to get away on a longer trip and leave all cares behind.” Student 3 said, “I much prefer longer trips because I can spend more time learning or exploring.” Student 7 contributed, “I like longer trips far away because I get to escape from life completely and try new things. When I go a few hours away for a weekend, I don’t feel as refreshed or that I’ve done anything different than I would have if I’d stayed at home.”

Three sub-themes emerged from the desire for experiences during travel (Primary theme one)

These sub-themes are described below:

Sub-theme 1: Flexibility in travel- Most interviewees planned the big elements of the trip, such as the airline and hotel reservations, but preferred to be flexible once they get to their destination. This idea of flexibility was evident in several parts of the interviews, particularly in the level of advanced planning. The respondents planned more when traveling larger distances, but only planning

major elements - airline tickets and hotel. Otherwise respondents wanted flexibility. They may have begun with specific ideas of things to do, but made on-scene decisions about whether to go ahead and do them.

Most respondents preferred not to be too heavily focused on planning their travel, indicating a value for spontaneous travel. The destination was usually determined by opportunity. Ten respondents indicated that they were not planners because their previous jobs required a lot of last-minute effort. Any plans that were made were usually broken because of unforeseen emergencies at work. Some indicated that they rarely bought plane tickets more than two weeks in advance.

Student 4 indicated, “I do not like to plan...I am just happy with whatever works out.” Student 5 wrote, “Usually, I just decide I want to see someone or something and go. I like ‘road trips’ because unlike real life, they don’t have to be really structured, which gives me freedom.” Student 9 said, “I usually don’t do much planning, just realize that I have the time and pack up. I have a list of places in my mind that I want to go and I just pick one. I don’t often just drive with no destination, but sometimes I will if I just need to get away and think.” Student 8 stated, “I plan out the big things like hotels (although when I do road trips I do not) and general transportation options. Everything else I leave to spontaneity.”

Student 9 concluded, “The only time I plan is if I’m going to a very unfamiliar area. Then I’ll look at a map, plan out a few places to stay, pick some main attractions, and work out the details once I’m there.” Finally, student 10 wrote, “I will book hotels, flight, rental car about one month before I go...since the room has been reserved then I have a basic idea about where I will be each day; I normally do not have detailed plan on what I will do for each day.”

Sub-theme 2: Travel time was not part of the travel experience- The interview narratives suggested that the experiences when traveling to and from a destination were conceptualized differently from those after arriving at the destination. The richness of the experiences at the destination outweighed good or bad experiences while traveling to and from the destination.

The actual travel time to and from a travel destination and the related planning and scheduling are often seen as a hassle. Having a good plan makes things easier, but the plan was not always seen as workable. The following comments provide illustration of narrative responses, but may contradict the perceived value of planning.

Student 2 said, “Planning ahead...makes it easy. Hassle...miss a flight or in a similar situation. I enjoy the most when I am getting out of the city. I enjoy least coming back to town.” Student 8 indicated, “The hassle is when plans don’t go smoothly. But usually this is due to travel delays or things having to do with transportation, which I generally consider to be outside of the trip experience.”

Student 4 commented, "Sometimes the actual travel there and back can be a hassle, but it can also be fun. Student 5 offered, "I dislike spending so much time in the car on a long trip; it's hard to sit still that long." Student 7 made the following conclusion: "I have a large backpack, and I only pack what I can fit in that bag; it has made travel so much faster, easier, and more worry-free having only one, carry-on type bag. I like to research where I am going, so I have an idea of what is available to me, and what I want to see while I am there. Layovers and traffic jams that delay my travel are very stressful, so leaving early and having something to do, such as crossword puzzles and magazines make it easier. I really enjoy going to new places".

Sub-theme 3: Desire for varied and stimulating experiences- These respondents were not so much looking for shopping and expensive entertainment at their destination as they were seeking outdoor activities that, by definition, did not cost as much.

Responses stressed social situations, such as being with family and friends, or meeting new people, and doing new things. Responses also contrasted quiet time, an opportunity for contemplation or learning, with active time exercise, shopping or going to events. Active times seemed to be defined as "fun" while quiet times were "relaxation."

Overall theme two: Expectation for social context of travel

Most of the subjects preferred to travel with, or to visit, friends or family. They particularly preferred to travel with small groups of people with whom they were closely connected. There was not much discussion of solitary travel, although respondents sometimes indicated they looked for quiet time for reflection. Some also expressed the desire to meet new people or to experience new cultures during their travel.

Student 4 summarized, "I enjoy trips of all kinds; however, if I travel alone, I am meeting up with friends at the destination." Student 2 indicated, travel "with one or two close friends. People are more important than the destination." Student 5 said, "If I need time to think, I like to travel alone, but otherwise I like to be with others whether one person or a group; the destination doesn't really matter." Student 6 responded, "Definitely with somebody else, if it's for vacation."

Student 8 stated, "I like small groups of no more than four but I prefer just two." Student 9 indicated, "Mostly just with my wife. I also like to travel in small groups if I know the people really well." Student 10 concluded, "Destination does not matter, I prefer to travel within a 4-person group." And, student 5 summarized, "Most of the time, I go whenever my friends and family are going, wherever they are, I know I'll have fun."

One of the aspects of the social experiences theme included expression of the value of social engagements on trips to allow time for reflection, finding a sense of peace, and becoming re-energized. Student 1 preferred "those experiences that involve natural settings and any time that can be spent with friends and family." Student 4 commented on travel with social benefits, saying, "They also allowed me to meet a variety of people who I am still friends with today." Student 5 stated, "My most valuable trips were the ones I took to see my family."

Student 6 reflected, "The other was a trip to Thailand with my girlfriend, which was very enjoyable." Student 8 concluded, "I love traveling, so trips tend to be helpful ways of reclaiming energy and enthusiasm for my school-work. I prefer to travel to new places or to see friends. I don't really count trips to family as 'travel.'"

Student 9 stated, "Trips are best where I see my family and friends or where I spend time in the outdoors."

Overall theme three: Pragmatic context of travel

The interviews contained repeated references to the requirement for time and money in order to be able to travel. Their scheduling, destinations, and activities when they arrived were all driven by having the money to spend and the time off from work or school. These items seemed to drive every other decision about recreational travel.

Student 1 listed factors including "money, time, distance, the setting of each choice, and if there are any friends/family in the area." Student 2 wrote, "When I have time and money, I will plan my trip just to get away and take a break." Student 4 also said, "Where I decide to go is influenced by time and money." However, student 5 said, "If I have time off from school, 'I miss my family', and "I want to take a road trip" are my usual reasons."

Summary of interview findings

Three themes emerged in the qualitative interviews of this study, including desire for experiences during travel, expectation for social context of travel, and pragmatic context of travel. The interview subjects collectively indicated that they sought new and different experiences in their travel. Even when doing outdoor activities they could do close to home, they would rather travel and do them in new places. The respondents sought opportunities to be physically engaged in new and challenging experiences.

Most of the subjects preferred to travel with, or to visit friends or family. But, while the Asian respondents may have desired to visit family, it was the Americans that primarily had the option, since the family members lived primarily in the country. Respondents indicated that they particularly preferred to travel with small groups of people

with whom they were closely connected.

The interviews contained repeated references to the requirement for time and money in order to be able to travel. Their scheduling, destinations, and activities when they arrived were all driven by having the money to spend and the time off from work or school. These items seemed to drive every other decision about recreational travel.

DISCUSSION

The human desire for variety, renewal, and stimulation, as reflected in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, suggest that educational institutions and society as a whole need to become aware of the importance of the basic needs (for variety) of graduate students and to build meaningful and continuous alternatives for fulfilling the need. The result of this study confirmed that these respondents sought visits to urban centers for changing their living contexts, including shopping, restaurants, hotels, and other urban travel experiences, as well as trips to rural sites for physically challenging activities or individual reflection. While national parks and formal recreation centers may have been designed for nature study, relaxation, and reflection, the respondents in this study seemed to perceive that some of these needs could be met in urban centers and in informal and inexpensive ways.

This study found that Taiwanese visit vacation farms to be close to nature, enjoy peace and quiet, lower stress levels, and enjoy time with family. But, the Taiwanese in this study also had a broad variety of interests, mostly associated with travel to urban centers, landmarks, and less for rural settings and national parks. However, both Taiwanese and other international students in this Central United States study did express continuing desire to study nature and to be freer from the constraints of their work and living pressures, mostly in university settings in larger cities. It is not surprising that international students have different travel priorities, because they have only a short "window" during their graduate program to travel in the United States before returning home to their native countries.

This study found differences in how both "push" and "pull" factors affect international, Taiwanese, and American graduate students in recreation, leisure, and tourism. This finding of differences is concurrent with a study by Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) who found differences in the travel activity preferences of Asian and American students. But, the researcher found statistically significant differences in push factors between Americans and Asians regarding travel, with Americans higher in preferences for being physically active, finding excitement, and time with family and friends, while Taiwanese Asians sought time to be free. Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) did not find statistically significant

differences between Americans and Asians, although suggested that American students were "more likely than Asians" to enjoy going to a beach, visit a state or national park, visit a museum, go nightclubbing, and attend a sporting event or participate in sports; while Asians are more highly rated touring a city, sightseeing, going to a resort, visiting an amusement park, visiting an historical site, shopping, attending a cultural or arts event, attending a convention, and gambling. Given the large number of statistically significant differences in push and pull factors by nationality and age groupings, the researcher agrees with earlier researchers in suggesting that tourism marketing requires extensive understanding of the wide variety of issues that both encourage people to travel, as well as pull them toward popular destinations.

Given international perception that Asians may be more family- and group-oriented than Americans, it was somewhat surprising to find that Americans in the study preferred to travel or visit family more than Taiwanese and other international students. However, the latter two groups probably had fewer opportunities to visit family members who lived in the United States, while American had this option. Americans seemed to be less interested than international students in formal planning of travel experiences. It should be obvious, however, that people who travel in their own country are likely to have more confidence than people who are studying in a foreign land.

As young adults mature, marry, and begin a family, both push and pull factors change. A difference of five or six years in age, as well as family living contexts, can make a difference in interests of young adults in such activities such as canoeing, four-wheeling, or rock-climbing, which have been traditionally individual physical fitness activities. As the recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate students in this study indicated, as they approach age 30, their interests in relaxation over excitement, or their interests in nature study or shopping in urban centers change.

Nationality may make a difference in both push and pull factors, probably since cultural differences affect norms and mores about preferred social activities. International students probably prefer seeking variety in either urban or rural settings with famous landmarks because they want to make the best of the travel time they have during their studies. Americans may have stronger interest in physically challenging outdoor excitement than, for instance in shopping or park or museum visits.

Mayo's (1975) psychographic study of the United States' national park system established that Americans seeking escape, solitude, peace and quiet atmosphere are drawn to the national parks. Numerous other researchers have noticed that the pull factors of rural areas, national parks, and destinations with unique outdoor activities or attractions most often satisfy the extremely common push factor of "escape."

Willits et al. (1990) found that rural was defined as being extremely positive, especially regarding woodlands, open spaces, and wilderness areas. This study, however, had less frequency of interest of respondents in rural settings or the park system than was found above. The increase in communication across the world and the awareness of life in urban centers from which broadcasting usually originates may be influencing even recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate students to value urban recreation over rural retreats.

Echtner and Ritchie (1991) stated that creating and managing a unique and appealing image of a destination is a key factor in positioning and marketing. They cited many studies that found that the destination locales that had positive imagery associated with them were both considered and chosen more often as travel destinations than those locales which did not have marketed imagery.

Fakeye and Crompton (1991) pointed out that promotion is especially important in the travel industry, because it is intangible: there is no product or item to be inspected before purchase. Therefore, the customer's rating of satisfaction depends entirely on how the experience stacks up to the preconceived image. They also stated that destination imagery holds up over a long period of time, meaning that even if a destination's attributes change significantly, tourists' expectations will not change at the same pace. Schott (2004) described push factors as causing the initial motivation to travel, or the motivation to travel *per se*, and Meisel and Cottrell (2003) listed the desire for escape and rest and relaxation as common pushes. Professional recreation, leisure, and tourism academic and business leaders who are interested in expanding the use of recreational programs and resources need to understand that culture and age both affect perceptions of travel destinations.

Educators need to recognize the importance of leisure and stress relief, even among students themselves engaged in the study of this field. This is equally important for students in other graduate programs who are expected to demonstrate high cognitive productivity. Educators need to consider that traditional graduate instructional courses may not provide enough mental relaxation nor provide creative outlets to meet the complex leisure and learning needs of their students, particularly if instruction is exclusively teacher-directed, based on passive listening, and memorization.

The importance of recreation, leisure, and tourism for the general population is no less important than for majors in graduate programs in the field. Faculty in this field, as well as other educators and social leaders, need to systematically educate society about the need to find balance between work and play, productivity and relaxation, and between achievement and leisure.

The researcher used a convenient sample to collect data due to the time and budget considerations; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to students whose graduate programs are in other parts of

the country, like those groups in the coastal regions. However, programs of graduate study in recreation, leisure, and tourism programs in universities in the center United States and across the world can gain important insights into the effects of nationality and age groups by researching the push and pull motivations of their students' travel behaviors. Because push and pull motivations vary significantly by nationality and age in this population, professional program planners and tourism marketers need a wide variety of destination types and recreational experiences to match the interests and needs of this group.

Conclusions

The study findings support the following conclusions:

1. Recreation, leisure, and tourism graduate students in the Central United States were actively involved in a wide variety of leisure travel activities during their academic program breaks. These professional future professors, who will serve to encourage society to find better lives through finding an appropriate balance between work and leisure, seem to be practicing what is taught in their programs, with self-reflection as perceived as the most important reason for travel, followed by getting away, and changing routine. This conclusion supports the research conducted by Iso-Ahola (1983) which focused on the importance of leisure activity as a break from the routine stresses of work and living.
2. A "pull factor" is a reason why tourism and recreation students are attracted to the tourism site. The most likely tourism sites include seeing famous sites, enjoying country settings, and big city shopping as the most attractive destinations. Next most likely are destinations offering city urban centers, famous sites, outdoor recreation areas, national parks, state parks, and camp sites were the sites of next most interest to these graduate students, with famous sites and city urban centers "pulling" this group most frequently as their "best site" in 2006. Summer breaks, staying five nights or more, and traveling more than 300 miles inside the United States with two to four traveling companions were factors involved in this groups' best travel experiences. These conclusions are congruent with the research of Gunn (1972) who pointed out that interests dictate recreation choices to a variety of man-made and natural famous sites which draw people to travel and leisure.
3. Respondents made more than two trips each year that took more than an overnight stay, and respondents included more women than men. Graduate students in tourism and recreations actually have a need for travel experiences during their educational program, both for a change of pace and for professional development. In summary, the quantitative data showed that this specialized respondent group of graduate students in

recreation, leisure, and tourism programs was actively involved in recreation during their academic program breaks.

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