

Perceptions of Lake Use

Riley Densmore; Stephanie M. S. Thomas, Ph.D; Christi Hu, Ph.D
Psychological Science Program, LaGrange College

Abstract

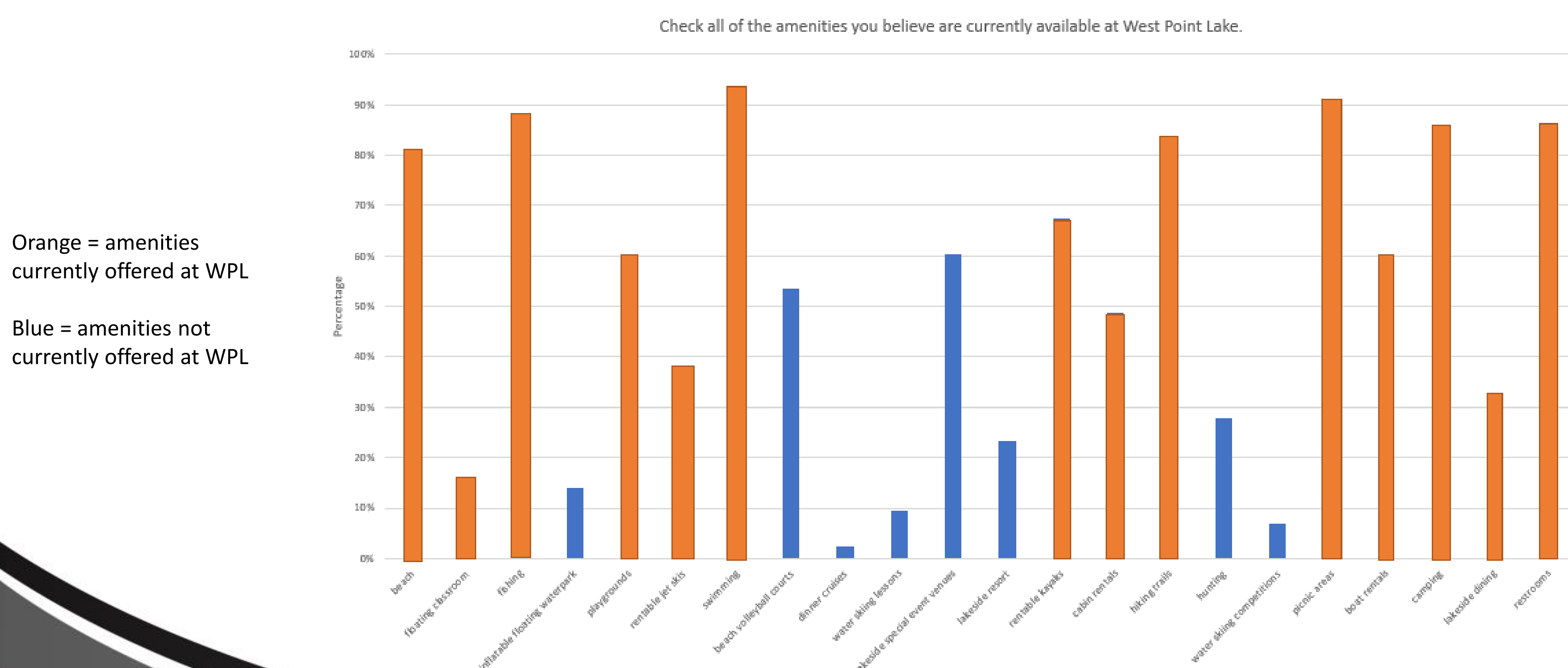
This study evaluates three main topics associated with West Point Lake in Troup County, Georgia. First, it looked at potential biases that students have about the lake. Second, it questions college students' knowledge on boating and lake safety. Third, it tests the knowledge of amenities offered at West Point Lake. A survey was developed after consulting with the Army Corps of Engineers and incorporated several questions replicated from previous research by Howland (1996) and Cheong (2006). While some of the questions were altered to fit the area (e.g. lake substituted for river) and some questions were removed to fit the research question (e.g drinking and driving questions), this project will replicate their results. Both studies were done in very different geographies and 23-13 years ago. There are obvious differences in geography and generation that are going to be interesting to analyze.

We hypothesized that students did not know a sufficient amount of information regarding boating laws and also were unaware of many of the amenities offered. We also thought that students might be interested in some of the amenities that West Point Lake currently doesn't have.

We hope this information helps groups in the area, including the Army Corps of Engineers, manage the use of the lake by college aged adults.

Introduction

- Previous research has been done on knowledge of boating safety, but none from the local area or within the past decade. No research has been done on the knowledge of amenities on West Point Lake or the bias of locals
- There has been several studies conducted on the benefits of lake community and outdoor activities
 - "Sense of community, or belonging to a group and attachment for communities or groups, can increase as a result of participation in outdoor pursuits (Halamova, 2001, p. 137)"
 - Leisure activities are beneficial to overall health (Weng, 2014).
 - Visiting an appealing natural environment can enable an individual to maintain or restore her or his direct attention. (Weng, 2014).
 - Interacting with nature can reduce stress (Weng, 2014).
 - Mental health of "those who walked in wilderness was better restored" compared to those walking in cities and engaging in passive leisure activities. (Weng, 2014).



Materials & Methods

Participants

- A total of 43 students participated for course credit using the Research & Experiment Participation System at LaGrange College
- Average age = 19.47 (range from 18-22)
- 23 females and 20 males
- 32 White; 8 African Americans; 1 Latino; 2 selected Other
- 22 first years, 9 second years, 7 third years, 5 fourth years

Methods

- Before beginning participants fill out informed consent to participate in study

Part 1

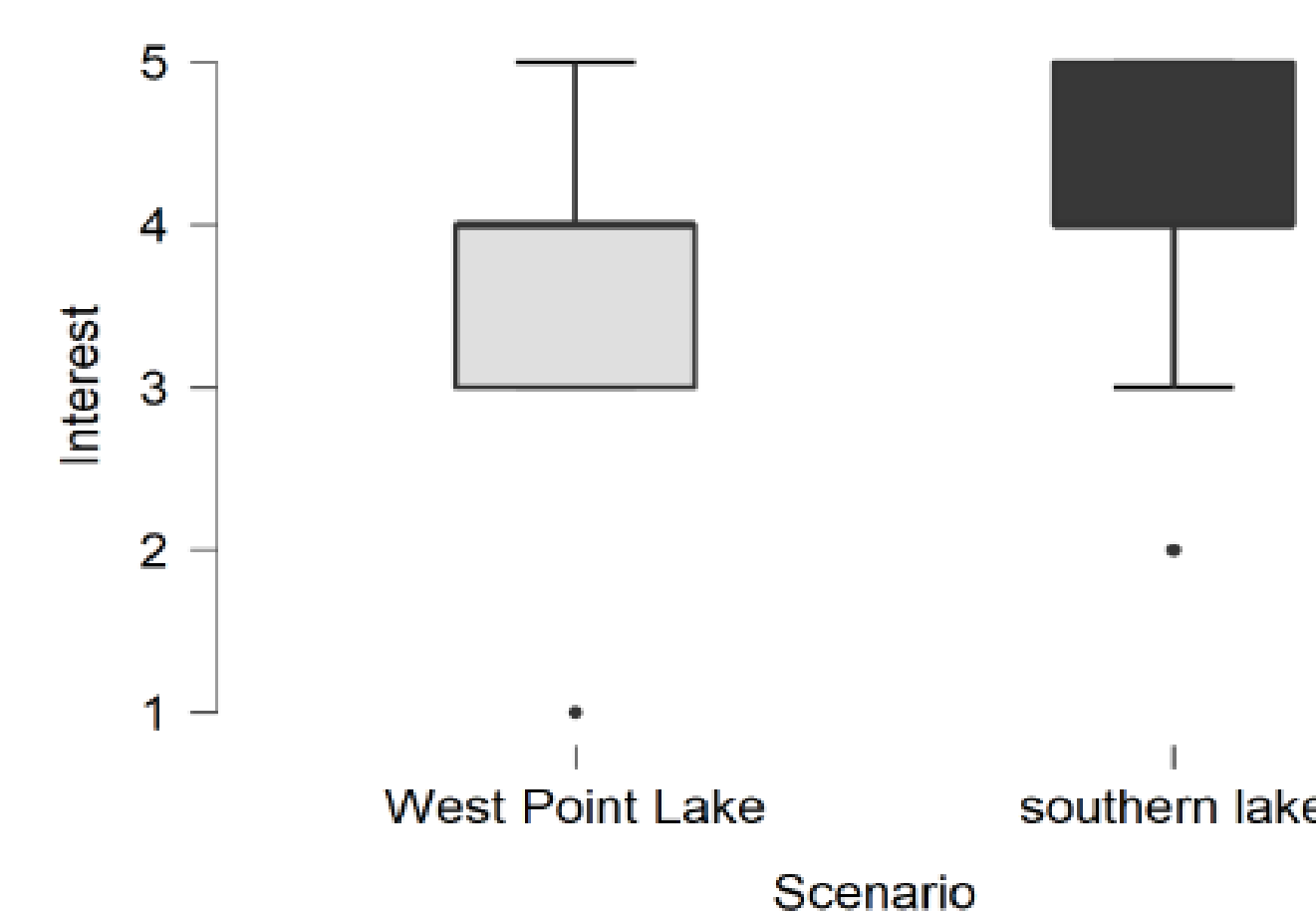
- Two scenarios were created based on existing descriptions of West Point Lake. All information was true. The first scenario specifically stated the name of the lake as West Point Lake. The second scenario simply said it was a southern lake. Besides the name of the lake, the two forms were formatted the same. Participant was asked to rate on a Likert scale from 1-5 whether they were interested in visiting that lake or not. If they gave a low rating, they were asked to state why they would not go to that lake described.

Part 2

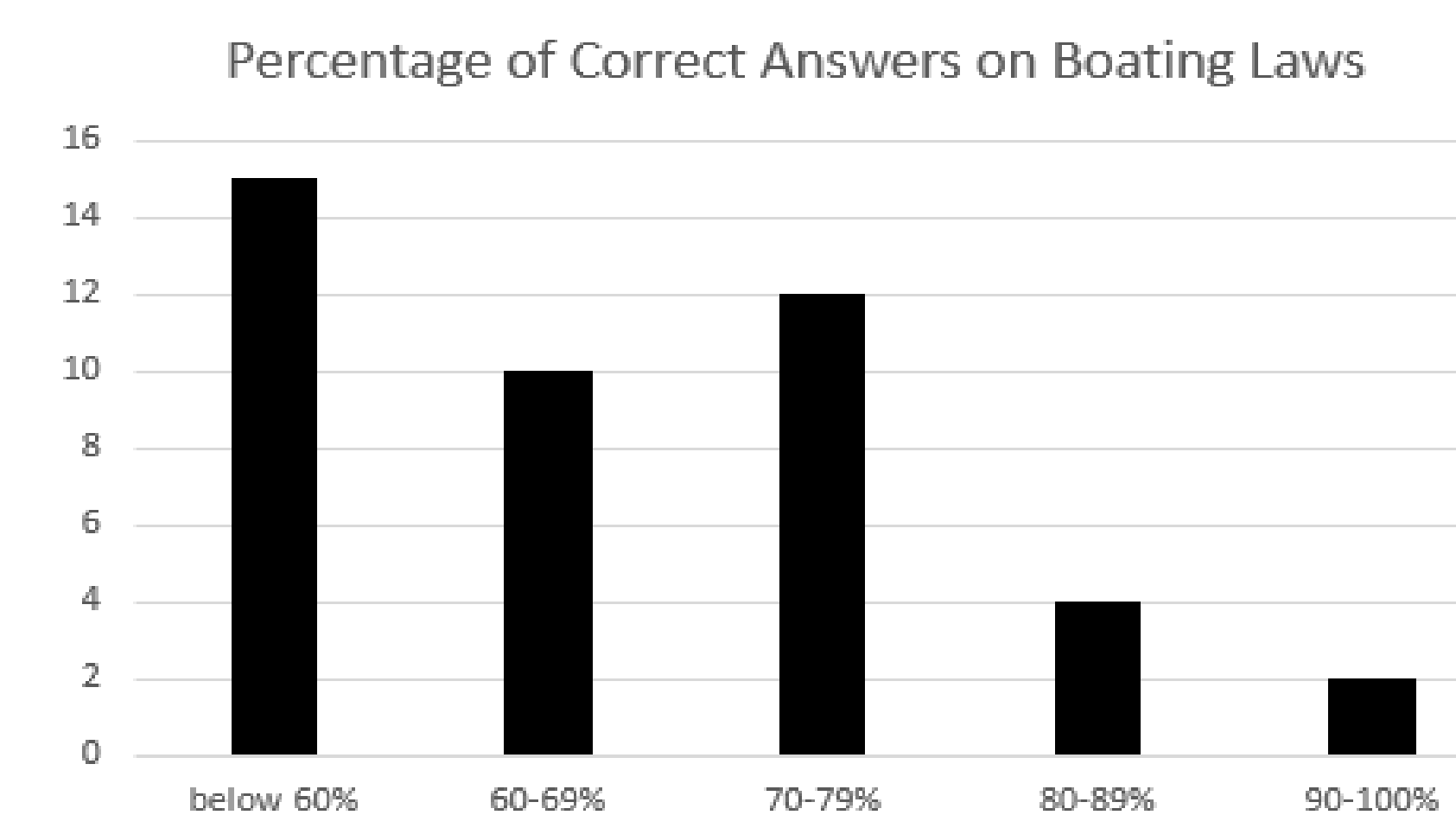
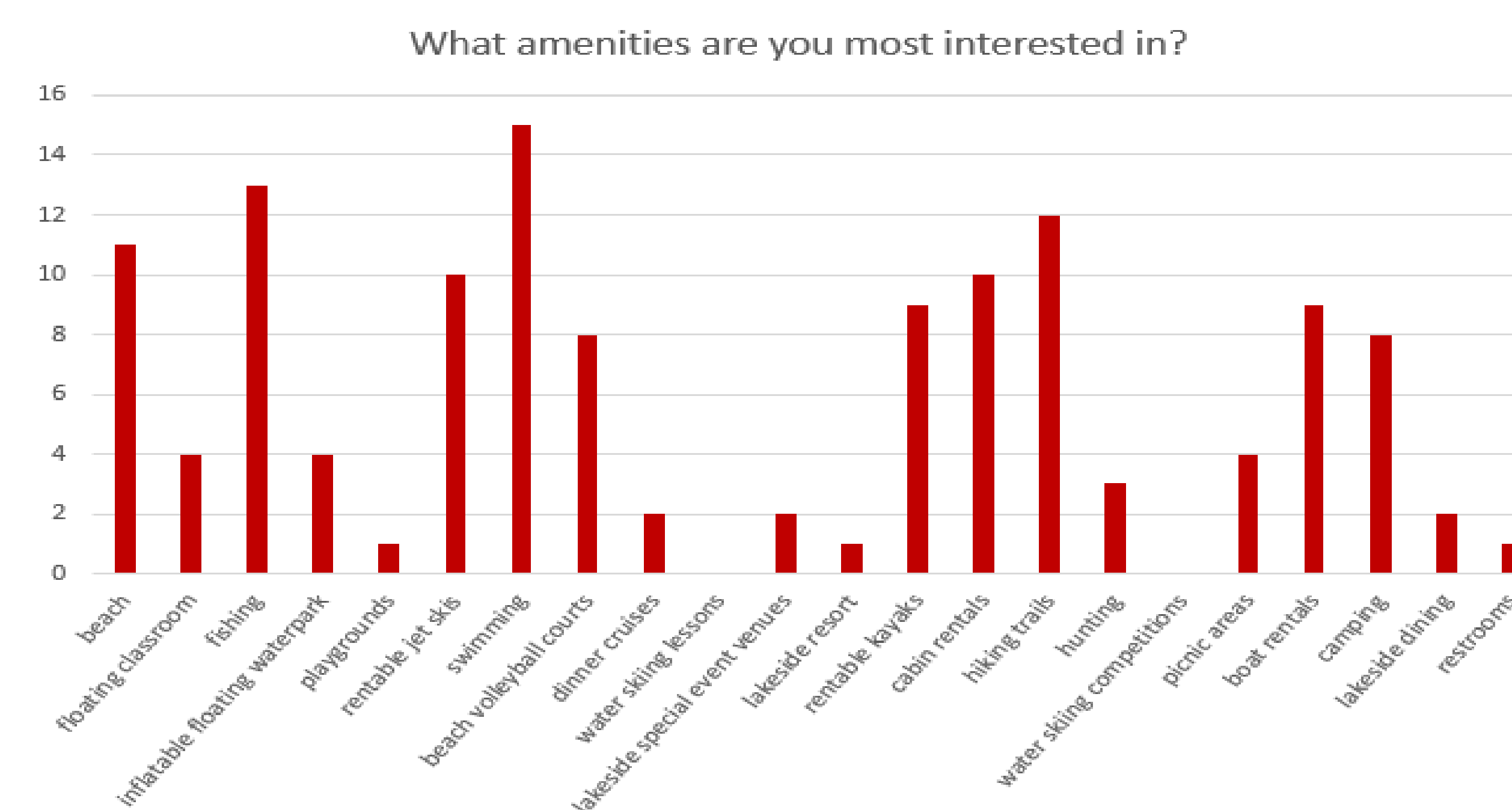
- After participants turned in Part 1, they received Part 2. The survey was split to remove any bias they might have had towards the first scenario question.
- Part 2 contained questions related to
 - their current use of the lake and likes/dislikes of lake related activities
 - their knowledge of boating laws
 - their knowledge of available amenities at West Point Lake
 - which amenities they were most interested in
 - demographic information

Results

Scenario	Interest					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
West Point Lake	1	0	9	6	5	21
southern lake	0	2	2	9	9	22
Total	1	2	11	15	14	43



- There was a quantitative trend towards participants rating their interest as lower if the lake was identified as WPL; however, this was not significant ($\chi^2=9.18$, $p = 0.057$)
- Participants who indicated they would be more likely to use WPL if it were advertised more also said they enjoyed enoing ($\chi^2=29$, $p = 0.02$), camping ($\chi^2=30.6$, $p = 0.015$), and being on the water ($\chi^2=38.39$, $p = 0.001$).



- Only 16% of students surveyed knew LaGrange College owned property that had lake access.
- Students who have access to a kayak or boat did not significantly differ from students without kayak or boat access in their knowledge of boating laws ($\chi^2=29.47$, $p = 0.20$).
- Even though many of our participants were local to Troup County, very few indicated that we had a Floating Classroom and the majority indicated that WPL was not clean.
- Students were most interested in Swimming, Fishing, and Hiking.



Conclusion

Part 1

There was a slight trend towards college students not being interested in the lake scenario when it was identified as West Point Lake, but this trend was not significant. Perhaps with a larger sample size, we would be able to determine more whether there was a real bias in the students.

Part 2

The majority of the students answered questions about boating laws incorrectly, indicating that they may not know how to legally handle boating situations. If we want college students to use the lake more, we need to do a better job of educating them on boating laws.

Part 3

Students reported more interest in swimming, fishing, and hiking trails. Participants were least interested in water skiing activities. The majority of students also scored enoing as an activity they often do. Also participants who like being on the water, enoing, and camping also indicated that they would use amenities more if they were advertised better.

Based on these surveys, the US Army Corps of Engineers and other groups hoping to get more college students using the lake should focus on swimming, camping, and enoing when creating advertisement campaigns. Based on Part 1 survey, there is almost a significant trend of participants being interested in West Point Lake and a southern lake.

Limitations

Difficulties in this study included the limitation of only using students from the Research & Experiment Participation System at LaGrange College. This decreased my population from all students attending LaGrange College. Another limitation was a global pandemic hitting towards the end of the study, COVID-19, halting my ability to gather data from participants.

Future Research

- Work more in conjunction with US Amry Corps of Engineers
- Extend participant pool to the whole college population
- Research what amenities are offered at other lakes that college students frequent

