



# Putting it into Action

Engendering social capital and  
civic engagement through  
summer camp programming

**Tracy Mainieri**  
*ACA National Conference*  
*February 17, 2010*

**CLEMSON**<sup>®</sup>  
PARKS, RECREATION AND  
TOURISM MANAGEMENT

# Background



- Social capital defined (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995)
- Researchers have identified organizations that foster civic engagement and social capital building in youth:
  - Recreation organizations
  - Extracurricular activities
  - Youth service programs
- Summer camp programs frequently involve these very same recreation, leadership, and service activities

# Research Purpose



The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of participation in a leadership and service program at a residential summer camp on the civic engagement of the campers once they returned to their home communities.

# Research Questions



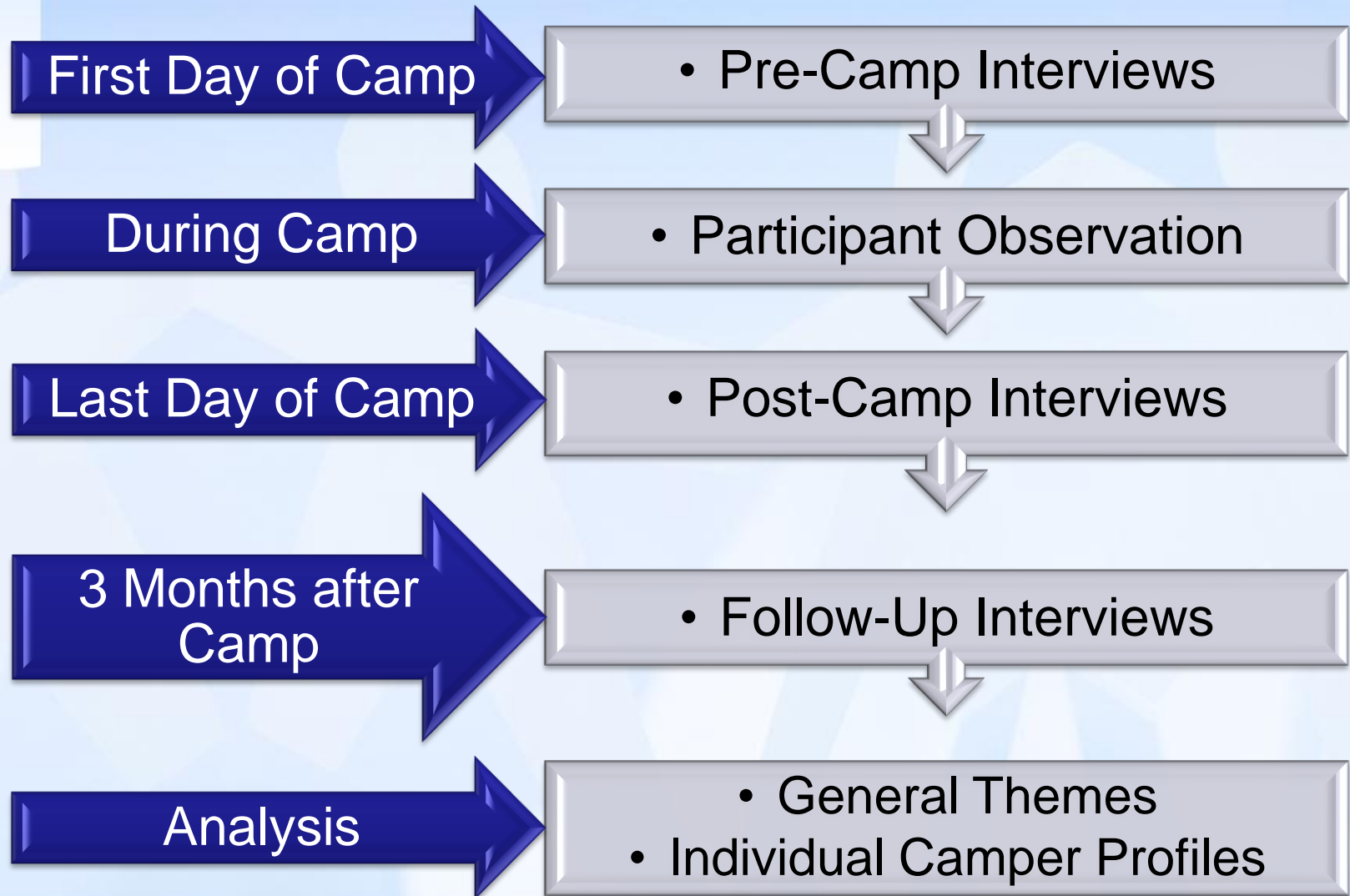
1. Do the **leadership activities** offered through the leadership and service program and the larger camp programming impact the campers' civic engagement once they return to their home communities?
2. Do the **service activities** offered through the leadership and service program and the larger camp programming impact the campers' civic engagement once they return to their home communities?

# Literature Review



- Social capital and civic engagement
  - Civic identity and adolescence (Youniss, McClellan, & Yates, 1997)
- Youth organizations and social capital
- Youth service and social capital
- Civic benefits of summer camp
  - Social capital & summer camp (Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005)
  - Camp outcomes and intentional programming (American Camp Association, 2005; 2006a; 2006b)

# Methodology



# Description of the Participants



Alex (6<sup>th</sup> Year)\*

- Private School
- Leadership (Yes)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Franklin (7<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Public School
- Leadership (No)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Alfonso (6<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Public School
- Leadership (No)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Marie (9<sup>th</sup> Year)\*

- Public School
- Leadership (Yes)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Bon Qui Qui (5<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Private School
- Leadership (No)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Robert (5<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Homeschooled
- Leadership (No)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Cha Cha (5<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Private School
- Leadership (Yes)
- Volunteer (Yes)



Ryan (10<sup>th</sup> Year)

- Public School
- Leadership (No)
- Volunteer (Yes)

# Findings: General Themes



- The **camp community** as a smaller, less complex community where campers could be themselves
- As **last year campers**, campers experienced higher status than they typically experienced in their home communities
- Campers had the opportunity to take the lessons they had learned at camp and **put them into action**

# Findings: General Themes



- **Camp community**
- **Last year campers status**
- Campers had the opportunity to take the lessons they had learned at camp and **put them into action**

“I think it’s pretty much the same message. But it’s just enforcing it in like a smaller setting. ‘Cause there’s less people. With Vespers and morning watch it’s like the whole camp and it’s usually when you’re really tired and they just tell a story and stuff. But like it...[the leadership and service program] I guess you put it into action” (Cha Cha, Post-camp).

# Findings: “Putting it into Action”



- Active leadership  
“Uh yeah. I’d say it was more helpful because...we actually went into...we led something...with the...we led like I did arts and crafts and helped some kids there, and we helped in the cabins. We were just...we were the campers. We were more the ones being led in years before” (Robert, Follow-up).
- Reciprocal service

# Findings: “Putting it into Action”



- Active leadership
- Reciprocal service

“Cause like just like giving back to camp ‘cause we’ve been here for so many years and to know that you gave back something and that’s always gonna be until it like breaks apart it’s gonna be here. Like I can come back and be like ‘I painted that sign.’ To know that we contributed” (Bon Qui Qui, Post-camp).

# Findings: Participant Profile Patterns



- Leadership confidence  
“I guess I think more highly of them or highly of my [leadership] abilities. Umm I mean I’ve definitely...I’ve probably accomplished more after coming back from camp than I have in a while” (Alfonso, Follow-up).
- Reciprocal service
- Perception of camp as a learning environment

# Findings: Participant Profile Patterns



- Leadership confidence
- Reciprocal service

“Umm like contributing back to the camp and like what they’ve done for you it’s just like giving back to them....Yeah ‘cause it’s kinda like thanking them for all that they’ve done for you and everything” (Franklin, Post-camp).

- Perception of camp as a learning environment

# Findings: Participant Profile Patterns



- Leadership confidence
- Reciprocal service
- Perception of camp as a learning environment

“I think you should have more and better opportunities to learn at camp so it is easier because it’s all there. It’s not something that you have to come across or go to in your community” (Robert, Follow-up).

# Discussion



- Leadership and service program as opportunity to try out civic identity
- Skill transfer more difficult than skill acquisition
  - Applicability of skills
  - Separate community
  - Temporary community
- Some overcame barriers and increased their community involvement

# Implications



- Intentional civic programming produces desired leadership and service program outcomes
- Transfer barriers could be addressed by:
  - Enhancing progression in the years prior to the leadership and service program
  - Emphasizing the connection between camp activities and the “real world”
  - Decreasing the temporary nature of the camp community
- Further research is necessary



Thank You!  
Questions?