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Another national championship

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Quad 136

Another National Championship

[◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#)

Another National Championship



The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University often receive national attention for our athletic success, as well as recognition for the **academic successes** of our **students** and faculty, but we recently were recognized for this community’s deep engagement with the natural world.

“**Outdoor Nation** is a national initiative of the Outdoor Foundation launched in 2010 that empowers millennials to champion the outdoors – as athletes, artists, advocates and ambassadors.” This organization recently ran a contest to encourage individuals to get outside. Ten colleges were selected from around the country and, over a two month

period, students, faculty and staff at those institutions were **encouraged to get outside** and engage in everything from hiking to water activities to winter fun.

As the table below shows, CSB and SJU won the competition hands down, leading from the first hours of the contest and more than tripling the points earned by the second place school, Michigan Tech. CSB and SJU also had the largest number of participants with 1906 students, staff, faculty and friends signed up to participate, roughly 40% of our community. This victory came despite being the second smallest institution in the group (only Spelman College is smaller) and the second furthest north (Michigan Tech in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was furthest) in a competition that went into mid-November.

School	Activity Points
1 College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University	162880
2 Michigan Technological University	49010
3 California State University, Long Beach	48400
4 George Mason University	33490
5 James Madison University	29770
6 University of Central Florida	27330
7 University of Iowa	27140
8 Appalachian State University	17740
9 University of Wisconsin-Madison	17600

I think this outcome reminds us of three things we know about our community:

1. **Great location.** While Minnesota gets maybe a little too much (negative) press on the Weather Channel, central Minnesota is an easy place to be outdoors, even during the winter. Our two campuses are beautiful places, with nearly 3000 acres of both natural beauty and human created architectural beauty. Many of us came here to get a little more space and sense of grace than one might normally find in more built up environments. And for many of our alumni, these campuses remain important touchstones throughout their lives, regardless of where they live. I encourage students to remember this, even as most leave the area once they graduate. The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University will always be a part of you and you should return often to this place of beauty to be refreshed and renewed.
2. **The kinds of people we attract.** It is probably no surprise that CSB and SJU attract students, faculty and staff who care about the environment and enjoy the natural world. Our location is an obvious draw as our two campuses are truly unlike any other college or university setting that I know of, even famously beautiful places like UC-Santa Cruz or UVA or Kenyon College or West Point. But more than that, I think we draw people who seek a balance in their lives—intellectual, spiritual, social and natural. Winning this competition with such a high number of community participants suggests that many of our students, staff and faculty are at the very least getting their necessary fix of nature on a regular basis, even in the midst of their professional and academic obligations.
3. **Our commitment to community.** Finally, to win a community-based competition like this requires individuals who think about their role in the community, in addition to their own personal interests. Individuals can certainly go outside on their own and enjoy the beauty of the natural environment, but the members of this community also committed to showing the rest of the world what kind of place and community we have here. It took a bit of effort to record each outdoor activity, yet literally thousands of us did so because we cared about those around us, the CSB and SJU Benedictine Community.

Congratulations to all who participated and, in doing so, reminded the world what exceptional places the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University are—both because of the people and our natural environment.



Special thanks to [Saint John's Outdoor University](#) staff, particularly Jenny Kutter and Tanner Rayman '15, for providing the motivation, inspiration and organization to help CSB and SJU claim this national championship, which is so consistent with our mission, character and sense of place.

[Michael Hemesath](#) | December 1st, 2014 | Categories: [Kudos](#) | [1 Comment](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).