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Leaders Unplugged: An Outdoor Leadership Experience

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Our Route

Engages in Critical Thinking
Reflection
Assess Problems
Problem Solving
Interviews (if necessary)
Fosters Constructive Team Climate

As an avid backpacker, I know the personal growth that can occur through disconnecting from society and pushing one’s physical limits for backpacking can give the opportunity to a hiker to turn off his/her electronic devices, disengage from distractions and challenge oneself in ways that aren’t normally encountered in day-to-day life. Additionally, several of our programs have components that physically challenge students – whether through a low or high ropes or leadership reaction course. These components are frequently cited as the most memorable and impactful parts of the event for participants.

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Student Co-facilitator:

All of the programs that are part of Student Activities and Leadership Programs Leadership Curriculum have student input on some level. I wanted Leaders Unplugged to be no different, so when a student approached me about wanting to do an “outdoor leadership experience,” I was thrilled. That student was Cameron Segard. Cam is a junior studying aeronautical engineering.

When asked about why he was interested in being a part of facilitating this program he said, “Each time I have gone to a leadership retreat over the past two years, I found myself feeling very comfortable and relaxed during outdoor activities and wishing there were more. I have also noticed that I have made stronger connections with others in these settings...I was interested in creating an outdoor leadership experience to expose students to a less controlled setting such as the wilderness.”

Step 1: Research

Gauging students’ interest in such a trip was also an important part of the research. When the trip was explained, the majority of the responses showed the vein of, “How and when can I sign up?” In fact, the responses were so positive, we are preparing to have more interested parties than available spots.

Step 2: Financial Support

Step 3: Logistics

Location
Based on the timing of the trip, Michigan became an option. After discussion around the desired length and mileage of the trip, several trails were explored. The trail that was determined is a loop of 23 miles along the Manistee River in the Manistee National Forest. The loop is made up of the Manistee River Trail and a portion of the North Country Trail. I have hiked this particular loop many times so am familiar with the area.

Liability Issues

In meetings leading up to the trip, we will be reviewing with participants what is appropriate gear for the trip, how to cook on camp stoves, how to treat water, and cover “what to expect” items. This should help prepare participants appropriately to prevent foreseeable risks.

Additionally, we are in the process of working with Legal Affairs to get an appropriate waiver for participants to reduce WMU’s liability.

The trip will be a combination of backpacking, leadership activities and basic wilderness survival skills. We will be hiking 3-5 miles each day, which should leave significant amounts of time to set up camp for the day and to engage in activities in the evenings.

Each participant will have the opportunity to be one of the “Leaders of the Day” to make decisions throughout the day including, but not limited to: making and breaking camp, when to take breaks, which direction to go, etc.

Leaders of the Day will be provided support from the co-facilitators.

Evening activities will focus on reflection on the day’s events, as well as personal leadership issues.

2012-2013 Program Timeline

October/November
Promotion of Program Registration Open
November 12
Registration Closes
November 26-December 7
Interviews (if necessary)
December 10
Participants Announced
January
Introductory Meeting
February
Second Meeting
Late March/Early April
Teambuilding Day
April 28-May 2
Actual Trip

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