



Brevard College

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“THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS”

Diving Into Their Education: Immersion Students at BC

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For the past four years, the spring semester at BC has found 14 students willing to face the elements for four months of rigorous outdoor experience. This year's brave students are Steve Witek, Brian Theroux, Chris Terrell, April Shamel, Ryan Sartor, Justin Peterson, Justin Moman, Gavin McCormack, Bistra Hristova, Bryan Hillis, Greg Griffin, Josh Fussell, Ryan Chasse and Sarah Carpenter.

This 18-credit hour program known as the “Immersion Semester” integrates six courses. All of these courses are “taught in an ongoing and integrated fashion” to create not only well-rounded, educated students, but also experienced outdoors-people. Some of the immersion semester activities are caving, sea kayaking, white-water paddling, mountain biking, rock climbing, orienteering and backpacking.

Clyde Carter, Director of the School for Wilderness Education, sees the immersion semester as the “cornerstone to a four-year degree” in this field. Because students are encouraged to take the course during their sophomore year, they are apt to have a better understanding of the more theoretical courses taken during their junior and senior years. Carter feels that this sets apart the Brevard College degree in Wilderness Leadership/Experiential Education from equivalent programs of other schools around the country.

To begin the semester, the immersion students spent 80



The 1999 Wilderness leadership immersions group holds a class at the Camp Rockbrook tower.

hours in January in a Wilderness First Responder course instructed by Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities (SOLO), a nationally recognized organization which teaches Wilderness and Emergency Medicine. The classrooms for this course were “remote areas,” sections NOT 911 accessible. The objectives were effective decision making in wilderness emergencies, improvising first aid supplies from outdoor equipment, patient, and evacuation. By completing this course, students are candidates to receive Wilderness First Responder certification, which is standard for any career in the wilderness leadership/experiential education field. These students performed many simulations of real-life circumstances in the local Pisgah National Forest. Some of these scenarios included concussions,

possible head traumas, spinal injuries, and hypothermia victims. All of these injuries are not merely potential harms, but common misfortunes in an area such as Transylvania County with many waterfalls and outdoor sports enthusiasts. Immersion student Sarah Carpenter described these events as “intense,” especially given that rescue simulations were true-to-form, lasting well into the night.

During February, the group will plan, undertake, and then evaluate a five-day canoeing trip to Capers Island, SC. Additionally, they will attend a three-day nature conference held by the Wilderness Education Association. Between projects, the immersion students will take a Wilderness Literature and Philosophy class taught by Brevard College's Dr. Susan Schmidt. This course is designed to improve critical thinking, group collaboration, and personal and group acceptance of constructive criticism. The work is a combination of both individual and group written and oral presentations. The curriculum includes American explorers and naturalists, wilderness in the Bible, and natural history. As Dr. Schmidt reflects, “It is wonderful for me to see how competent these students are.” Dr. Schmidt also comments on how many leaders are brought forth in each group that goes through the program.

Also this month, immersion students are visiting area camps for a variety of activities including attending guest lectures on related topics. Speakers include representatives of NC Outward Bound, Nathan Ballinger of BC, Jerry Stone of Camp Rockbrook, David Trufant of Camps Kahdalea & Chosatonga, and Pat Lancaster of the US Forest Service, just to

name a few.

As part of a Leadership and Group Dynamics course, BC immersion students work with 6th graders at Brevard Middle School by playing games and partaking in group activities with youngsters. The benefits of this interaction are twofold: BMS adolescents get a chance to break out of their ordinary routine, and immersion students receive fundamental experience in leadership skills, group roles and problem solving, decision making, and effective communication skills. Another aspect of this course examines legal issues of outdoor use and leadership and regulations of land governing agencies.

The first week of March will bring a three-day caving trip in Northern Georgia with teaching styles and methods and techniques for both outdoor land and water pursuits being studied. The end of March and half of April will be spent on a 21-day expedition. The trip will be student-planned and executed from start to finish. This gives students an opportunity to learn about hiking permits and other facets of the executive side of outings. The remainder of April will bring various canoeing, kayaking, and rafting trips. These will begin in the BC pool, then move to lakes, and finally end in the French Broad, Tuckaseegee, and North Toe rivers. Additionally, Brevard College's Windy Gordon (Voice of the Rivers leader) will teach students River Rescue.

The month of May brings final exams and an end to the Immersion Semester. Some of these students will use the skills acquired during the spring semester in their everyday jobs as Wilderness Leadership/

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