

Clearing misconceptions about immersion

PERSPECTIVE

By Jana Eilermann
Contributor

Every semester, a group of 10 students and one professor assemble at Ross Hall to embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

While the Immersion semester is something most students in the Wilderness Leadership and Experiential Education (WLEE) major look forward to, it is hard for students, both WLEE and otherwise, to understand what the Immersion Semester is or what it does until you are living it.

The Immersion semester is a requirement for the WLEE major that consists of six interrelated courses that are integrated throughout the semester. The mission of the semester is “to develop and enhance abilities to teach and lead in the outdoors.”

While many students know Immersion for the 21 day expedition the group embarks on, the semester is much more than that. The Immersion semester focuses on leadership and group dynamics, wilderness first aid, environmental skills and ethics, teaching and leading outdoor activities, both land and water based, and planning and executing a 21 day expedition.

The adventure begins on the first day of classes with piles of forms and waivers which students read carefully and sign recognizing the risks involved in the semester and activities.

From there the class turns the focus to building group strength with group games, initiatives, trust building activities and quizzes to assess personalities and tendencies.

These quizzes are designed to highlight strengths and weaknesses as well as open minds to others’ strengths and weaknesses to facilitate harmoniously and be an efficient, productive group.

A big part of the Immersion semester is earning certifications. Every student in the Immersion semester takes a nine day intensive course in Wilderness First Aid offered by Wilderness Medical Associates (WMA) and Landmark Learning.

After nine days of classes, students are tested (written and practical) to receive their WFR or certification as a Wilderness First Responder. After becoming WFRs, the group embarks on an overnight camping trip focused entirely around Leave No Trace and developing a land ethic. Each student teaches a lesson on one of the seven Leave No Trace Principles and writes an action plan for how they can implement Leave No Trace at an organization for which they hope to work. After completing this, students earn

their certification as a Leave No Trace trainer allowing them to teach others about Leave No Trace and its importance in the outdoors.

After gaining these certifications, the classes are split between trip planning and learning to teach in the outdoors. Students teach a variety of lessons from canoe strokes and basic backcountry living skills, to natural history lessons like River Ecology and the History of the Forest Service.

The semester is wrapped up by living out the motto of Brevard College: “Learn in order to serve”. The group devotes two days to giving back by helping with trail maintenance, stream restoration, and invasive species removal among other things. The service days are a good way for students to give thanks and appreciate the work that goes into managing the outdoors.

As a student of the Immersion semester you can expect long class days often exceeding eight hours per day, severe lack of social interaction with students outside the Immersion semester, lack of personal hygiene, physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, relationships stronger than any other, the most unique classroom setting, and the urge to shout from a mountain

top “I’m in class right now!”

Immersion students have the opportunity to travel all over the Carolinas, into Georgia and Tennessee to learn how to facilitate canoeing, kayaking, backpacking, rock climbing, and caving. While most trips stay local, paddling the French Broad, climbing in Pisgah and mountain biking in Dupont, each semester students travel to the coast to learn coastal kayaking and trips to Congaree Swamp, Lake Jocassee, and into nearby caves (dependent on the progression of White Nose Bat Syndrome) are not uncommon.

The Immersion semester forces students to use what they learn in the field on a daily basis where the consequences for failure are far more significant than that of failing a test. Students learn to keep a positive attitude and to get through even the roughest days while still remaining professional.

Immersion students are not only learning material valuable to the industry of Wilderness Leadership and Experiential Education, but also acquiring people skills, life skills, and skills that are key to being a good professional.

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with a boyfriend because “we didn’t have time to hang out as much as we wanted to. We were both swimmers and the majority of the time we saw each other was at practice.”

She is on the junior board for Robert Crown Center for Health Education, a nonprofit organization that teaches sex ed to students in the Chicago area.

She sees sex, alcohol, smoking and drugs as distractions to her goal of getting a college scholarship in swimming, she said.

“This generation is very focused on their future and not necessarily getting laid,” agreed Washington, D.C.-based sex educator Yvonne Fulbright.

But she also suggested that some young men aren’t making time for relationships.

“Some guys, at the end of the day, they’d rather channel their energy into music, playing their guitar or playing computer games,” Fulbright said. “That’s immediate gratification. People forget it takes work to woo somebody and keep her happy.”

The study showed that 27 percent of young men and 29 percent of young women reported no sexual contact.

It looked at older adults, too. It was based on in-person interviews of about 13,500 men and women ages 15 to 44, conducted in the years

2006 through 2008. The results were compared with those of a similar survey done in 2002.

Participants were offered \$40 for sitting for the interview, which usually lasted an hour and included answering very specific questions on a computer about oral sex, anal sex and other sexual activities.

The explanation for that finding seems to be that women are much more willing to describe themselves as bisexual, or to at least acknowledge they find others of their gender attractive.

That may have a lot to do with television shows and other pop culture, which at times seems to celebrate woman-on-woman sexual contact, but not the same kind of behavior among men, said Michael Reece, director of Indiana University’s Center for Sexual Health Promotion.

“My guess is women are just more likely to feel that’s OK,” he added.

There is an assumption that sex between females is more common among more educated women, perhaps experimenting with their sexuality during their college years. But the CDC study found that such behavior was more common among less educated women, Chandra said.