

Immersion students continue on

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Wilderness First Responder exercise a success

Did you happen to notice the random people lying motionless on the lawn throughout campus? Or see students being carried around on backboards, but then magically stand up again? Two weeks ago, the students on immersion received their Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certifications.

The course lasted eight days and during those days, we learned how to treat wilderness related injuries such as broken bones and dislocated shoulders. The scenarios (the moments when you saw random students laying on the ground being treated) ranged from goofy to intense, and during these scenarios we learned how to properly evaluate a patient and how to prepare them for evacuation. The entire process of receiving the certification was exhausting; I can definitely say that I was emotionally and physically drained after every day.

This past week we have been working on white water kayaking and the Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles. LNT is, the most widely accepted outdoor ethics program used on public lands and teaches people of all ages how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. By the end of the Immersion semester we will be certified as Leave No Trace Master Instructors.

White water kayaking is amazing! I can definitely say that I was both nervous and ridiculously excited to begin this section of the immersion semester. I have never been white water kayaking before, so I was definitely a bit nervous, especially when we had to preform wet exits. For those of you who do not know, a wet exit is how you get out of the kayak after it rolls over. Program protocol (for any outdoor program) is that the client must be able to perform a successful wet exit.

It's a bit scary when you first get yourself adjusted in the kayak. I didn't feel out of my element because I sea kayak so I am used to wearing the skirts (the piece of fabric that covers the top of the kayak to prevent both water from entering and you from falling out.), and the idea of rolling a kayak. However, since I had never been in a white water kayak before, I definitely had that anxious feeling.

A wet exit is actually really simple; you bend forward, roll over, pull the skirt off your kayak, slide/fall out of the kayak, and then swim to the surface. A second aspect of white water kayaking that managed to make me uneasy was doing T Rescues, which are preparations for rolls later on. This was the aspect that most challenged me, I ended up getting briefly stuck underwater when I panicked and could not find the loop to release my skirt. My partner, Brandan Pelfrey (aka Uncle Chainsaw) helped me get my bearings enough to release the skirt and allow me to fall in the water.

Yesterday, we paddled down the French Broad River just as a warm up for us to be able to paddle rapids and preform kayaking maneuvers. The French Broad is definitely not a difficult river to run, but it is certainly a great place for novices like me to learn how to avoid a rapid and catch an eddy. I had some serious challenges trying to keep my kayak from turning in the wrong direction, for some reason the kayak would not consistently travel in a straight line, instead it would veer too far to the right of the left, and obviously it's an operator error.

A really fun, precious, and distracting event that occurred during the week was a meeting with a dog. Before we get on the

river we practiced paddling on a lake at a summer camp called High Rock. At this camp is a dog, the dog's name is Barely Gentle, and she is the loveliest dog ever! She has long, soft blond fur, and is a sweetheart. She is so sweet, in fact, that she swam around the lake with us the entire time that we paddled. For example, Jay White was swimming in the lake after a roll attempt and Barely Gentle swam up to him and circled around. Jay actually ended up having to put her on his boat and paddle her to shore.

The rest of the group is doing fantastic as well. Jake Parker and Devin Rudnick both mastered the Eskimo Roll, a goal that the entire immersion team is trying to reach before the end of the session. Brandan Pelfrey has been the leader of the paddling events and he has been a very effective educator, and leader of this session. Elyse Santos and Lawton Jeffords are within hours of being able to perform an Eskimo roll. Rihanna Barrerro, M.K Webb, Monica Gibson, and I have all made a lot of progress and are definitely becoming more and more confident as time goes by.

These first two weeks of Immersion have been amazing, exhausting but amazing and we are learning so much!



Shown above: Rihanna Barrerro and Lawton Jeffords are beside Jay White who is tied to a backboard in a scenario in which he had a spinal injury.