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Save the Date!
Decemberfest is Saturday, December 4th from 2 pm-5 pm in MGC 200.
leadership@american.edu

Civil War Unites Class of 2014

Holly Hagerty

Staff Writer

August 27th marked the first day of the famed freshman retreat for the SPA Leadership Program’s Class of 2014. Leaving behind their hectic first week of classes, roommates, friends outside of Leadership and technology, all 42 first-year students stole away for a weekend of fun and bonding with their classmates.

Their TAs chose to return to the long traditional location for the first year retreat, Antietam Battlefield, to support the students’ initial study of the many valued leadership lessons in Donald Philips’ *Lincoln on Leadership*.

The new class engaged in icebreakers, leadership exercises and name games to become better acquainted with each other and to build their own unique community. Reflecting on their tour of the battlefield, and building on the study of Lincoln from their first class, the first years discussed how leaders should strive to reconcile radically opposing views.

As the adage says, “leadership is relationship,” a primary goal of the re-



The Class of 2014 strikes a pose.

treat is to build lasting relationships among classmates. Sophomore Kathryn Braisted spoke for all the TAs when she said, “Because this class is slightly larger than the Class of 2013, we wanted not only to make sure everyone got to know everyone else, but that everyone was friends with everyone else.”

Another goal the TAs set for themselves while planning retreat was “to ensure everything the students did was valuable and engaging,” explained Braisted.

Along with his peers in the class of 2014, Zachary Cady thought they did an excellent job. Describing the retreat as a “really rewarding experience,” Cady said he “valued getting to

know such a diverse group of individuals” during the time spent away from campus. “I feel like I grew a lot as a person in those few days. Plus,” he added, “it was a lot of fun!”

On Sunday, students enjoyed tubing down the Shenandoah River or unwinding at the river’s edge. “Tubing was another great experience,” said Cady. “It was a nice way to get to know everyone even more and just relax.” On the same note, Cheria Funches said, “I really enjoyed river tubing. On the water, I made valuable connections with incredible people.”

When asked what they felt was the most significant element of their experience, students

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Leadership Learns to Trust

Tyler Sadonis

Staff Writer

Being an effective leader means facing many challenges, and the ropes course at the University of Maryland provided a wide range of challenges for leadership students to tackle.

The day began on October 2nd by breaking up into small groups and participating in a series of team-building activities. These activities ranged from balancing as a group on a platform teeter-totter, to moving each other across an imaginary field of lava on a few small bits of wood.

The goal of these activities was to teach leadership lessons of communication, trust and teamwork. Students enjoyed having the opportunity to learn about leadership in a fun, challenging way that brought them out of the classroom and into a hands-on environment.

"The activities we did focused on a wide variety of leadership components that all had applicable lessons," said freshman Peter Goelz.

The level of difficulty of the activities increased in certain instances when some group members were either blindfolded, or prohibited from

speaking. This extra challenge demonstrated the value of working as a team and communicating in creative ways that went beyond the usual audio and visual communication.

It was a meaningful lesson for sophomore Rachel White who said, "I learned how crucial good communication skills are for achieving a goal as a team. In order for anyone to be an effective leader, one must be able to communicate a message well. Otherwise nothing will get done." The challenges presented in the team-building activities will serve to enrich discussions about leadership in class this year.

After the great fun in small-group teambuilding activities, it was time to start climbing. "This was a challenge of physical strength and perseverance," said freshman Ken Whitley who was able to reach the top of the fifty-five foot tower.

"The most difficult part for me was finding my way up and not getting the rope tangled in the obstacles," he recalled.

Freshman Joe Payne shared the same senti-

ment, saying that, "the fact that I couldn't grasp onto some of the ledges or couldn't reach certain parts was a struggle for me." Joe was able to overcome this struggle with the support of his peers. "The support from my group and seeing other leaders do it before me gave me the confidence to keep going," he said.

Leadership students also had to overcome their fear of heights. At fifty feet up in the air the view of the ground far below can be quite frightening. Climbers had to push their own personal limits to overcome fears and encourage fellow students to do the same. They also had to rely on the other members of their group to hold the rope keeping them from falling to the ground.

While the challenges of the ropes course presented a struggle, leadership students rose to the occasion to make the most of

the experience. For junior Phil Cardarella, the ropes course was an enjoyable way to bring members from all the classes together. "It was definitely a high point of the year," he recounted.

Any lack of acquaintance that might have existed between freshmen and upperclassmen prior to the event was bridged with a better understanding of each other. Freshman Daniel Raymer took away a valuable lesson, saying that, "the ropes course not only gave me the opportunity to explore my own boundaries, it also gave me the opportunity to help others explore theirs."

As the year goes forward, leadership students are prepared to face many more challenges that will test their leadership skills. The lessons they learned and the connections they made at the ropes course will serve to help them handle those future challenges.



SPALeaders cross a field of lava.

Sophomores Choose Their Projects at the Beach

Sylvia Brookoff

Guest Writer

On September 10th, the sophomore leadership class eagerly boarded the bus to St. George Island in Maryland. Upon arriving, groggy faces turned to smiles as students explored the two large houses where they'd be spending the next two days. Immediately dubbed, "The Real World: Leadership Retreat 2010," everyone knew it would be a weekend of fun, friends and productivity.

On a beautiful Saturday morning, each student presented a societal problem they wanted to work to improve in the coming year. All of them were wildly diverse. Issues ranged from Islamophobia to veteran support, from reproductive education in Guatemala to bring the locavore move-

ment to AU. It was impressive and humbling to hear everyone's concern and their plans to fix them.

Senior TA for the class Kathryn Baxter said, "To be in a room while these students explained their problems and their project ideas was to be inspired. As I sat there I knew that this retreat was the beginning of some truly excellent work."

Everyone was clearly committed to making a positive impact and each on a very different facet of life.

After individual presentations, students were split into small groups to give each other feedback and to discuss potential improvements. People found this to be one of the most helpful activi-



"Penny River," consisting of Tommy Hunt and Sarah Robinson, perform. [Photo courtesy of Sylvia Brookoff]

ties of the weekend, hearing great suggestions and ideas from their peers.

Later that day, everyone came together for a special activity to remember 9/11. People talked about where they were on that day nine years ago, listening and discussing their different experiences.

Throughout the day recreational activities such as beach volleyball, kayaking and lounging on the dock were interspersed, providing a relaxing break from the busyness of campus life. It was one of the rare times when everyone was together outside the classroom.

The retreat was also an opportunity to showcase people's various talents. Leadership's very own folk band, Penny River, composed of Tommy Hunt on the mandolin

and Sarah Robinson on vocals, performed a few numbers for a wildly appreciative crowd before people called it a night.

Others were outside making s'mores at the fire pit or playing chess on the dock or trying their hands at lightening fast rounds of cards in the kitchen. Laughter and talking could be heard from all quarters.

"The social aspects of the weekend were great for the sophomores to reconnect and for the TAs, especially for those of us who were abroad last year," Baxter reflected. Throughout the weekend, people wrote something they liked about each person in the class and slipped it into various small brown bags. Sunday morning, people expressed their gratitude for the weekend, collected their small brown bags and

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Sophomores arrive at St. George Island [Photo courtesy of Sylvia Brookoff]

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Class of 2013 Meets Its Mentors

Erin Cady

Guest Writer

SPA Leadership kicked off its mentorship program this year with two receptions on Oct. 1 and Oct. 13.

The mentorship program pairs leadership sophomores with local professionals who work in the students' fields of interest. For the first time, almost half of the mentors are Leadership alumni.

The students benefit from advice of people in their shoes 5-30 years ago and enjoy the opportunity to shadow their mentor. The mentors enjoy the chance to help guide high-achieving students through the transformative college experience as well as help them to explore future internships and career possibilities.

At the first reception students and mentors met each other in eight rounds of speed-dating style introductions. Students had the opportunity to practice "elevator speeches" as well as meet with a variety of mentors from diverse backgrounds and professions.

At the second reception students met with their paired mentor. Students and mentors participated in a group activity that emphasized group dynamics and decision making.

Overall, both receptions were great successes. Ac-



Sophomores discuss group decision making.

[Photo courtesy of Sylvia Brookoff]

ording to sophomore mentee Ian Toller-Clark, "I enjoyed the mentorship receptions! Having the opportunity to meet with my mentor and get to learn about one another was important."

The mentorship program is coordinated by mentorship chair, Todd Carney, himself a sophomore and participant in the program. Todd worked tirelessly beginning in April to find interested DC professionals and AU alumni to serve as mentors. He

from "2014"

had different answers. "The most significant element of retreat...was how close and connected the students seemed to be at the end of the weekend," said Braisted. Surely the Class of 2014 will agree that retreat was successful in bringing them together and creating lasting memories in the process.

also compiled biographies and interests in order to successfully pair mentors with his fellow students.

Todd coordinated the details of both receptions with the guidance and assistance of Program Director Margaret Marr and Student Director Amanda Merkwae. Todd commented on execution of two successful events. "The receptions were great. Both mentors and students enjoyed themselves and I learned a lot from coordinating the events."

from "Beach"

luggage and loaded onto the bus for a return trip to AU. As people read their comments on the bus, they remembered how lucky they are to be in such a distinguished and committed group. The Class of 2013 is an impressive bunch. The sophomore retreat acted as an important time to reflect and a special opportunity to commit to the goal to work consistently to make a positive difference.