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Summer 2015
Sewanee Internship Report

Episcopal Diocese of West Texas Internship: Camp Capers

Growing up in the Greater Boston area would not sound interesting to many people. However, attending college in Tennessee caught many of the people I knew from back home off guard. It was not that they were disappointed, but the fact of the matter is most people who grow up in the “north” tend to stay in the north and people that grew up in the “south” tend to stay in the south. People want to be a driving distance away from home to add a level of security in an otherwise exciting and new adventure in their lives.

I have learned a lot from my first two years at the University of the South, not only in the classrooms but outside of them as well. It turns out that I am a “Yankee” and that almost everyone outside of New England absolutely hates the Patriots. Regardless, I now enjoy stepping out of my comfort zone.

While I was applying for a summer internship, opportunities close to home were difficult to come by. I used TigerNetcom to look for internships away from home, most of which were in the South. I was able to get a Skype interview with the staff at Camp Capers near San Antonio Texas and saw it as an exciting experience.

Camp Capers is a part of the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas and encompasses 188 acres deep within the Texas Hill Country. My job as a land management intern was to help plan and execute services to improve the sustainability and overall environmental well-being of the property, to educate campers about the importance of practicing sustainable living, and to maintain and improve upon a large garden at the camp.

Another project that the other Sewanee intern and I accomplished was organizing and building work tables for a shed by the garden used to house tools and seeds needed for the garden. We also implemented a composting procedure to make sure that the kitchen did not throw away unused fruit and vegetables that could be used again to grow more food. In addition, we thought it was a good idea to build a rain catchment system. The area of southern Texas where we were located historically does not receive much rainfall in the typical year. We built gutters for a barn adjacent to the garden and used it to feed our rain barrels which, at full capacity, could hold 110 gallons of usable water.

The other intern and I also used stones, many of which we were able to find on the property, to help with erosion control and maintenance around the camp. These projects most directly correlated to my major of environment and sustainability at Sewanee. In recent years, Camp Capers has been receiving significant donations for improvements. One of these additions included three new buildings to house summer staff employees. However, these buildings were built on an incline, leaving a fairly barren hill behind them apart from some grass. In the past few years, some of the soil has already begun to move down the incline. In order to combat this, and with guiding advice from Sewanee Professor Scott Torreano, we built a short wall of stone behind the building where the most significant erosion is taking place as a way to slow the movement of the soil. The wall also directed the flow of water from one of the downspouts of the building into an area where we have told the Camp to plant trees. In addition to placing stones there, there is also a chapel building that needed help. Underneath a tree by the opening of the chapel, there was a large patch of dirt that had formed as a result of water running off of a stone walkway. To help this, we built a large flower bed lined with flat stones that were leftover from

projects in past years. In this way, we were able to disguise an erosion control method as an aesthetically pleasing flower bed for a minimal cost.

The other aspect of our job dealt with campers each week. Every camp session ran from Sunday at 3 pm until the following Saturday at 11 am. Every morning, the other Sewanee intern and I would have about 20 to 30 minutes to show thirty of the campers around the garden, including what we were growing, how we maintained the garden, what we were planning on growing in the future, and how they themselves can practice similar methods if they had a garden at home or wanted to start one. We also used the garden to provide food for the dining hall that the kitchen staff would in turn use for meals. Examples of this included tomatoes for spaghetti sauce and okra for fried okra. We also had to assist with camp when necessary. This means that we lifeguarded, helped with the high ropes course, and watched over cabins of campers when needed.

Growing up, my family never had a garden in which we grew food. Coming to Camp Capers and discovering the level of awareness and patience necessary to maintain a garden was new. Plants can be very temperamental; some need more water than others and some need more sunlight than others. While growing aloe vera, I learned that they preferred more dry and rocky soil compared to the other plants around them. Most of all, no matter how much you try to keep your garden weed free, there will always be weeds.

This internship has taught me a lot about how plants and trees cooperate with the land to prevent erosion along a river. Due to the fact that Camp Capers is directly next to the Guadalupe River, the other intern and I were able to directly study the effects of erosion on the river. In

addition, the amount of rain and flooding that occurred during June in relation to the dryness of July and August gave us an incredible spectrum of erosion speed.

I also learned that I can work harder in over 100 degree heat with less than five hours of sleep than I thought I could. The projects that we undertook required a lot of physical labor during the heat of the day. Our projects were also only part of our job at camp, the part of our job description that states “other duties as needed” has you in charge of a range of other responsibilities in addition to the one that you signed up for. Being outside so much, I realized it is best not to count the hours without air conditioning but instead enjoy the moment when a simple breeze cools you off for a moment, because sometimes that is the best that you are going to get.

In the Hill Country of Texas, the near desert environment seems alien compared to the deciduous, cold forest I grew up in. I understand now that if I want to work with land-use policy and sustainable development, it is important to be outside and well acquainted with the environment you are dealing with.