ACE Internship 2016

Camp Capers Land Management and Environmental Education

This summer I had the privilege of interning at Camp Capers, a summer camp associated with the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. I am from San Antonio so it was such a great experience to learn more about the environment in which I grew up. The other intern, Virginia Barry, and I learned much about not only about the natural world around us but also about ourselves as people, our ambitions, and our goals.

Virginia and I were known as the “Land Management Team.” Some of our internship responsibilities included coming up with our own list of projects around camp, tending to the garden every day, preparing food and campsites for the campouts every week, teaching campers about the environment, and organizing a Camp Capers Farmers Market every Saturday. Even though we were very busy we also had counselor responsibilities. If a counselor wanted a free afternoon because they were exhausted, we would step in. We also helped with lifeguarding and running the high and low ropes course.

As a part of the Land Management Team our job was to survey the 188 acres of Camp Capers and identify areas we could improve and make more sustainable. Because we did not get much direction as to our exact responsibilities, a huge project that Virginia and I took on was creating a master Environmental Education handbook specific for Camp Capers. With 140 pages organized into 5 chapters, the book will surely help Sewanee interns, camp staff, and the Diocese of West Texas as a whole become a more
sustainable, aware community. The book is complete with helpful suggestions for future interns on gardening and landscaping, contact information for important individuals in the area, interactive activities for the campers when they come to the garden, composting tips, and specific sustainability methods that work for Camp Capers. We wanted to make sure our handbook was practical and would actually help the summer camp become a better place for campers and the environment alike.

In order to write this book, we needed to research the Texas Hill Country. Along with David Griffin, Camp Capers Director, we organized field trips to the San Antonio Botanical Gardens, Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center, and many visits to the Hill Country African Violets and Nursery to purchase new plants and seeds. While visiting the San Antonio Botanical Gardens we had the opportunity to meet with the director and their lead horticulturists who taught us all about their Children’s Vegetable Garden, providing us with suggestions for our own garden and specific plant varieties that were more heat resistant. Additionally, we had scheduled field trips organized by the internship program to the C. L. Browning ranch where we met with the land manager who taught us all about what he does. That trip was particularly interesting to me because I did not have too much prior knowledge on prescribed burning, mowing techniques, rainwater collection and purification, and tree maintenance.

The other major project Virginia and I took on was redesigning the front entrance to the camp. We wanted to do a little beautification and enhance the experience of entering camp. We had so many colorful plants in the garden that were drought and deer resistant that required little watering so we wanted to plant those in the front to enhance
the overall experience of entering the camp. After some research, we decided it would be helpful for us to get some guidance from local landscape architects. We met with the original landscape designer of the garden who suggested the most ideal type of flowerbeds that we should install; however, it was our responsibility to decide which plants we wanted and their arrangements. It was so great to have the opportunity to learn from the experts and have them teach us about local plants and design methods along the way. Now, the Camp Capers front entrance has completely transformed and showcases many of the beautiful native plants of the Texas Hill Country.

From how to make the perfect pesto from the sweet basil in our garden to how to responsibly burn cedar trees, I learned so much more than I could have imagined. This internship provided me the opportunity to learn more about where I live, why it is so unique and how to protect and preserve it. The time we spent with the children during our counselor duties, whether on the ropes course, in the garden, or at the swimming pool, solidified my desire to work with children in the future. Watching the campers truly enjoy learning about how to prune tomatoes or how to determine when a watermelon is completely ripe was such a rewarding experience. I am so thankful to everyone in the Diocese of West Texas community for helping teach me more about my faith and the joy teaching young kids brings to me. I could not have had a better experience this summer.