

Episcopal Diocese of West Texas at Mustang Island Family Camp.

My ACE internship involved working for the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas at Mustang Island Family Camp. This camp offers families a beach vacation-camp experience that runs Thursday to Friday to help families escape from the stresses of daily life to help reconnect and strengthen family bonds. This camp is unlike any I had seen before: rooms are condo-style on the Gulf of Mexico, the food is better than the restaurants in town, and the activities and amenities offered to families make Mustang Island Family Camp a no-brainer vacation for the families of Texas. However, it was not the rooms, the beach, the food, or the surfboards that convinced me to return to Family Camp for my second summer. The best thing about this place is the happy, helpful, supportive, and fun atmosphere that surrounds you from the moment you arrive to the moment you leave.

As the environmental education intern at Mustang Island Family Camp, I was responsible for all of the typical roles played by the other staff members as well as programming environmental education activities during camp. Camp staff duties were many and varied: I offered morning yoga classes to campers; helped with meal clean-ups and washed dishes; set up beach with umbrellas, chairs, and toys; led beach activities with campers including dressing up as a pirate and leading campers on a treasure hunt; provided surf lessons to campers; interacted with families during mealtimes; helped lead music worship; took photographs throughout camp sessions for families; planned and participated in activities for youth night, talent show, and dance party; helped set-up of Sunday morning eucharist (sometimes held on beach). As environmental education specialist,

I also led nature activities throughout camp sessions and encouraged campers to be curious about their surroundings and to pay attention to the beauty of the coast. Campers often came to me with questions about coastal ecology and found items on the beach, and it was very gratifying to solve nature mysteries with the campers. Additionally, I was responsible for researching and creating a sustainability report for the camp property, in which I (and the other ACE intern, Caitlin) assessed the consumption and other actions of the conference center and recommended sustainable alternatives to provide a plan for Mustang Island Family Camp to grow responsibly.

Interning at Mustang Island Family Camp, I gained skills in interacting with people and teamwork above all else. Family camp is all about forming community, and I feel it was my job as a staff member to facilitate that community all day, every day. From playing with kids, introducing kids to each other, convincing a shy child to join the dance party, helping a family plan a talent show act, to just eating a meal with a new family every day, I acquired skills interacting with children and strangers that I could not have gained anywhere else (or at least, I am glad I did not learn them anywhere else). With a staff of eight who lived, worked, and played together every day for three months, it would have been impossible not to learn great teamwork skills. We communicated, supported each other, and worked hard to ensure no problems arose for the families or for us. Through my specific work with environmental education and sustainability reporting, I feel I have

helped Mustang Island Family Camp take its first steps to progressing toward sustainability, which is a commitment that the whole Episcopal church strives for. While this is just the beginning of a strong environmental presence at camp, I know that working towards sustainability and appreciation for the beautiful natural surroundings will make Mustang Island Family Camp grow stronger and better. Also, as an Environmental Policy major with a minor in Religion and the Environment, this internship allowed me to share my passion for environmental stewardship. I strongly believe that we must take responsibility for our consumption and work towards sustainability because nature is precious and complex beyond our comprehension, and it is simply not right to consume resources without concern for the bigger picture. Through this internship, I was able to see the big picture right outside my door by watching families commune in nature. I was also able to provide Mustang Island Family Camp a plan to function in consideration of this big picture, to conserve in order to allow families to enjoy beaches and other nature for longer.

I still have a deep interest in a career teaching nature education to children. While my internship at Mustang Island Family Camp did not allow much time for nature education, I was given plenty of freedom to find and teach activities that I thought pertinent, allowing good experience for understanding how children engage with nature. I know my two summers of experience at Mustang Island Family Camp will give me a huge advantage when I begin applying for careers in environmental education, and I thank the Diocese of West Texas, Sewanee's truly amazing Career Services, Gregg Robertson, and many more instrumental people for providing me this opportunity.