

Maryville Outdoor Outreach Service Experience (MOOSE)

by Jennifer West, Bonner Scholars Coordinator

Purpose

- Immerses students for three-and-a-half weeks during the summer in a service-learning study tour of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.
- Involves students in community service by giving them a chance to work as volunteers with the National Park Service.
- Provides student leaders with an opportunity to exercise their organizational and outdoor education skills by helping prepare for the trip.

Background

MOOSE originated with Dr. Tom Coates, East Tennessee State University professor of health, physical education, and outdoor recreation, who has led a similar trip for 20 years at several schools. His original mission for MOOSE, to provide students with an opportunity to learn and serve in the national parks, continues to guide the program today.

How It Works

Fund-raising

In order to keep the cost of the program low, students participate in fund-raising activities before the trip. They have raised money by creating a stockholder program, where donors are rewarded with different levels of “stock” based on the amount they give to the program. Stockholders receive postcards from the students while they are on the trip thanking them for the donation and telling them about their service projects.

Selection

The program is open to all Maryville students. MOOSE also holds three to five of the fifteen available slots for Bonners from other schools. Students complete an application in the fall, after which interviews are held. Students from Maryville are notified before Christmas break of their selection allowing request gear or money towards the trip from family members. Information is sent to other Bonner schools in January, after the exact number of available slots is known.

Preparation

Students must participate in fund-raisers and a pre-MOOSE trip during spring semester, usually to a state park to test out equipment, build group cohesiveness, and complete a service project. Students from other Bonner schools usually participate in this pre-service trip. The group meets several times during the spring semester to discuss logistics and expectations.

The Trip

Students facilitate group reflection activities during the trip, and work groups are responsible for loading vans, cooking, and cleaning. Each year, a student leader from the previous year’s trip attends in order to assist the staff.

Service Projects

MOOSE service projects have included setting up gear boxes, creating tent pads, trail maintenance, creating new trails, painting signs, restoring historic cabins, outhouse installation, removing lake signs and buoys, removing the wolf pens from the wolf restoration project, dock maintenance, and building a horse corral.

Reflection

Another large part of the learning experience is the reflection sessions, which vary each night according to the students who lead them. During the spring semester before the trip, all MOOSE participants from Maryville must attend a workshop on leading reflection sessions. All students must lead the nightly session at least once during the trip. Participants also keep a group journal, and everyone is encouraged to read and share in that journal. A library of books, carried in the vans, provide material for discussion and reflection.

Insurance

Liability is always taken into account, and the vice president overseeing human resources creates waivers, secures sufficient insurance coverage, and sees that vehicles are safe. Leaders are also trained in safety, first aid, and outdoor skills.

What Makes The Project Unique

The learning component of this program results from total involvement in the experience as well as interaction with the natural environment and interaction with park service personnel as assigned projects are completed. Students learn firsthand about environmental issues, land management, government policy-making, flora and fauna, westward expansion, native American history and current issues, art, culture, and a multitude of other subjects as they travel, work, and learn together. Using the portable library, students make presentations and lead discussions on their book(s) of choice throughout the trip.

Benefits

Many students have had little opportunity to travel, and this project provides a meaningful context for service and learning. Maryville values experiential learning and personal interactions with faculty and staff outside the classroom, and MOOSE has been one of the most powerful ways to create those opportunities. Students on the trip learn to live and work together because they share the responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, and unloading. Students learn to collaborate in order to accomplish difficult tasks. The reflection sessions provide structure for exploring changes in perspective, opinion, and group dynamics. Students are often reminded through "roughing it" that they are a part of a larger cosmos. They gain an understanding of the need for environmental preservation and wilderness. They begin to understand how national park systems work, how resources are allocated, and how they can affect policy. Furthermore, the National Parks staff and visitors need and appreciate the service that the students provide.

Timeline

September

Get clearance from the College (academic credit, vans, etc.), determine dates for trip, finalize staff, faculty, and student leader sponsors and define roles for each. Begin work on logo, brochure, and posters. Make presentations to various campus/community/service constituencies. Create a preliminary budget. Determine meeting dates and final selection dates.

October

Finalize dates for the trip and create a tentative itinerary. Contact Yellowstone and Teton parks with dates for campground reservations and make reservations at KOAs. Review evaluations from previous summer's participants. Revise forms and information sheets. Begin work on the equipment list and research into the trailer, including insurance and funding sources.

November

Advertise and hold interest meetings. Review applications and hold interviews. Continue work on equipment, lodging, and budget.

December

Notify the selected applicants and hold Q&A meeting if necessary.

January

Work on details, including creating the menu and food budget, ordering equipment, and reserving tickets to events such as rodeo and rafting. Flesh out the final itinerary.

February-March

Deadline for the nonrefundable deposit and waiver forms. Begin organizing the preliminary service project and perhaps an overnight campout. Continue with food and equipment details. Settle transportation issue.

April

Do a service project as a group. Finalize equipment.

May

Hold a final Q&A session. Give tent and work crew assignments and order T-shirts.

June

Balance of trip fees is due. Purchase food.

July

Go on trip.

Resources And Partners

Faculty Sponsors and Leaders

- They assist students receiving academic credit.

National Parks

- The staff secures reservations and accommodations, as well as service projects and logistics.

In-kind Donations or Sponsors

- This includes local food companies, campus staff members who assist in acquiring and maintaining equipment, including tents, pull-behind trailer, and cooking equipment.

Maryville College

- The College provides staff from the Community Service Office to organize and lead the program. Maryville also supplies space on campus for storing the trailer.

Overcoming Challenges

Logistical details are a challenge, and for this reason, it is critical to begin work a year in advance. Often campgrounds in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National parks are full by the end of January. Also, many of the rangers are seasonal workers and need to be contacted by September or earlier.

Evidence of Success

This trip is one of Maryville's most successful and popular trips. Students have stated that it changes their lives, their perspectives, and sometimes even their choice of careers.

How to Make it Grow

There is always the possibility of organizing two trips per summer should student interest create the need. A trip of this sort could also involve a number of participants from different Bonner schools.