

Outdoor Experiences at Coker University

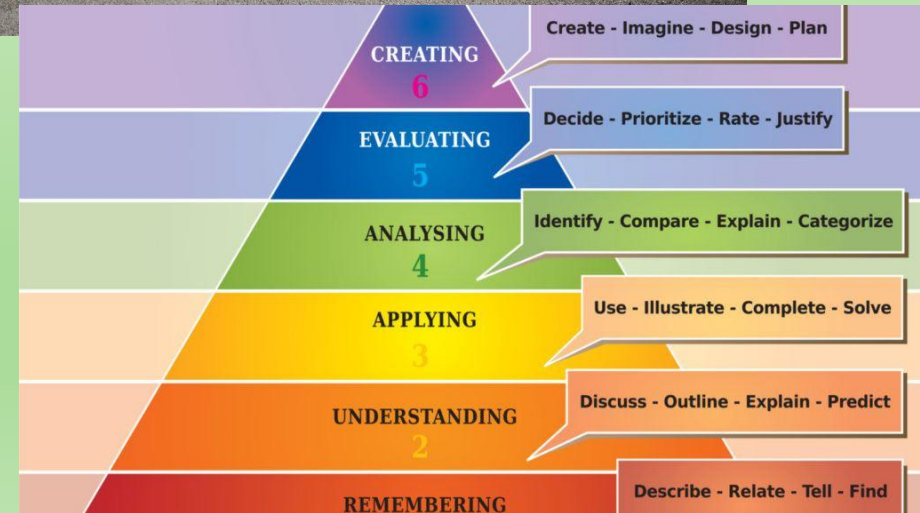
“National Parks in Contexts”

Interdisciplinary Studies 380 (in-seat class + park visits) – semester course (3 credits)

“Outdoor Research Project”

Interdisciplinary Studies 180 (prep / camping) – short course (1 credit)

(Prequel to IS380: parks/virtual parks visit course during pandemic year: online course, park visit reports, final project)



Coker University: private, small (900-1100 students), rural South Carolina

70% student athletes

50% Pell Grant recipients

48% first generation students

Struggling with retention



Recent crisis: cut ENG, COM, MAT, CHE, PHY, HIS, CS, etc. majors, added Nursing, more Business, scaled back General Education requirements (CAP300 course, Study Away)

Interdisciplinary Studies (Program since 2016) – combining coursework from two areas, flexibility, bookended by Intro (IS200) and Capstone (IS400) courses: 80%+ retention/graduation rate, 8-15 graduates/year (Dec & May), internships, career prep.

Outdoor experiences: Educational benefits

- **Working across disciplinary boundaries** (student groups: collaboration)
- **Building cross-disciplinary competencies**, seeing relationships between different fields of study (interdisciplinary studies) – skills for career preparation.
- **Bridge classroom learning** (textbooks, slides, tests/exams) to “**real world**” **application**: observations & experiences provide new contexts. Bloom’s taxonomy of learning: (memorize, understand) to higher order skills (apply, analyze, evaluate, create).
- **Outdoors / natural spaces as (intentionally chosen) learning environments** – academic, but not academic. Value of outdoor experience: Outward Bound, Knowles, etc. – not affordable/known to our student population. PE outdoor trips: sports focused, self-selective, more expensive. BIO: efficiency.
- **Contextualize current events/impending crises**: climate change, water/resource scarcity, land ownership/use, etc.

Outdoor activities: Expand research interest and experience; create paths for individualized learning

- Learning: **exploration and application** of concepts
- no set “material” to master.
- Focus on **planning, executing, trouble-shooting** in relatively low-stakes activities.
- Importance of **reflection time** – spend time to find a place in a group, a new environment, a new activity. Permission to be absent from campus; permission to not be engaged in explicitly academic or athletic activity.
- Fosters **team work, communication, respect, creativity, confidence, problem solving.**
- Fosters **appreciation of the outdoors/natural environment**, sense of ownership/responsibility
- Creates a sense of **competence, accomplishment.**
- **Memorable** experiences.



Parks course (IS380): park visits (two local state parks, Congaree National Park)



Interdisciplinary studies course on parks: history, business, sociology, psychology, biology, literature, art – in-seat, 3 credits, upper-level, capstone to general education requirements.

Materials used: documentary clips, lectures on art (painting, photo), readings from John Muir and Carolyn Finney (*Black Faces, White Spaces*, 2014), youtube clips, web pages, maps, advertising, guest lectures, etc.

On-campus/in-class outdoor activities: photos of pastoral/sublime landscapes, walk to a local park together

Assessments: short responses to homework assignments, weekly blog pages, research presentation, reflection essay.

Three required independent park visits – guided with park-specific questions, aligned with course content.



Outcomes: blog pages (“something I saw, something I learned, a connection I made”) – individual responses

PARKS IN CONTEXT SEARCH

← Rebecca - Parks in Context

Week 5, Post 4

February 03, 2023


ALFRED BIERSTADT, JOHN MUIR, AND MORE!



One thing I saw this week was Alfred Bierstadt's paintings in class. After seeing these images, I was amazed by the amount of detail and skill that went into each one. I have heard of Bierstadt briefly before; however, I have never looked into his work. I found it interesting to think about the fact that this was the main form of viewing things, since photography did not exist at this point. This, along with the work it would take to carry all of those art supplies!


Carson Onoszko

brings a negative effect on the surrounding areas. For example, the more people that come the more infrastructure that has to be built like roads, bathrooms, hotels, restaurants, etc. The building of infrastructure has effects on the land itself. Also, entrepreneurs may see these advertisements and go out west to start a business near the parks to generate a profit off of the park dwellers. So advertising the parks is a win-lose situation because you expose more people to our country's beauty but also ruin it with the exposure as well.



I saw this week that National Parks are for everyone. For example, in 1939, Marian Anderson was denied the chance to sing at Constitution Hall because of her race. With the help of Eleanor Roosevelt, Anderson was able to sing at the Lincoln Memorial in front of 75,000. The Lincoln Memorial is a part of the National Park system. Even in times of racial segregation, National Parks did not see color and they never will. National Parks gave Anderson the chance to perform in front of tens of thousands of people while Constitution Hall is only about four thousand people. Some may say that the National Parks gave her more exposure and popularity. The National Parks Service mentions in its mission statement that parks are for here for the "enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." Meaning that parks are for everyone regardless of their shape, size, color, or anything.

...s week, we observed nature through the lens of photography. I noticed the differences between pastoral and sublime paintings and photographs, and experimented with taking some of my own. Sublime artworks aim to make a landscape seem larger than life. They use high contrast to create breathtaking images that take all sense of control away from the viewer. Pastoral photos are peaceful, innocent, and idyllic. They display nonthreatening landscapes suitable for farming and often display grazing animals like sheep. Of the photos I took on campus, my favorite was the pastoral image shown below. It features a calm area with lots of space between the trees. I find the sharp building shadow in the foreground visually interesting.



Outdoor Research course (IS180)

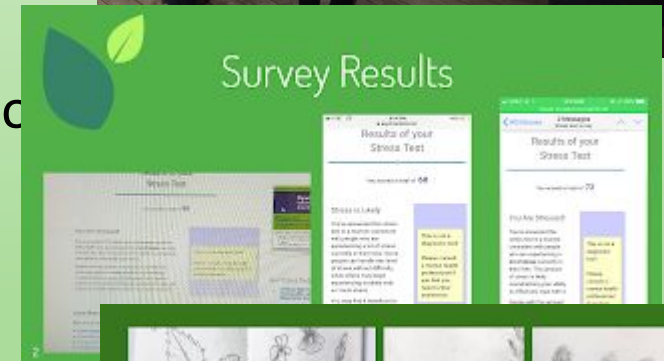
Experiential Learning focus – Kolb (learning cycle), Knowles courses, Outward Bound organization. Evergreen learning experience.

Planning stage:

- camping (location, group, equipment, food, weather, etc.) – learning curve
- research project: workshop (required); scaffolding timeline; review of research methods in different disciplines – “research” defined loosely: can be performance, activity-based, project, etc.

Flexibility for research: use coursework, usually in major field (but: open to first-years!) – individualized, student need/interest-based. Examples: outdoor activities course make-up option; film/art technique exploration, improv workshop, fitness workshop, personality-based scavenger hunt, stress-study (via app questions), etc.

Short slide **presentation** at the end – awareness of discipline-specific assumptions, focus, research; responsibility for designing small project from start to finish. (And Reflection essay!)



Using forms to set up expectations/get info

Project Proposal workshop

My project is based on coursework in _____ discipline; specifically, what I have learned in _____

Project Proposal:

Please describe the project you are hoping to pursue during the trip (about 250 words). Keep in mind that the Congaree National Park, its history and/or natural environment, should in some way be part of the project. Be clear about the way you will incorporate the site itself into your project (this will require some research: webpage of the park to learn about it; look at images, maps, and learn about the history of the park). (Total hours spent on project/preparation: 45 = 1 semester credit hour.)

(please type and upload separate document)

What skills/knowledge will you need to complete this project (research, art, writing, observations, knowledge recognition of insects/animals/plants, etc.), and where have you acquired these? Link your project to specific (200-level or above) you have completed and whose content or methods you can apply.

Briefly list the components of the project and when/how they will be accomplished:

In preparation for the trip, I will:	
At the site, I will:	
After return from the site, I will:	

my minor (see above)

a different class/field of expertise

Other: _____

Who is your advisor (academic)? *

Your answer _____

How much of a plan do you have of what outdoor project you wish to accomplish * on this trip/in this class?

pretty set, already have something in mind.

still trying to figure it out - I have a general idea, but it needs a lot of focus.

pretty unsure. Help me out here.

I don't know what you are talking about. Help me out a little here.

Back

Next

Clear form



On-site – year 1



Bear Island – Hammocks Beach State Park, NC

- Beach camping (sand!)
- Uncertain weather
- Remote (intentional)
- Fairly long drive (4 hrs +)



On-site – year 2 and 3

Congaree National Park

- Closer (1.5 hrs drive)
- Less remote, still private
- Tree canopy (weather)
- National park features (boardwalk, visitors center, rangers, etc.)

Year 4: Insights and learning curve: higher expectations, more prep, more “value”

RESEARCH

- ✓ Add scaffolding: workshop, drafts, feedback
- ✓ Add information: how does research differ among disciplines?
- ✓ Follow up on projects/progress on site
- ✓ Lay out expectations, facilitate meetings with discipline-specific faculty to advise on projects

CAMPING

- ✓ Buy better tents, packs, sleeping bags (donation from BOT member, fees)
- ✓ Supply emergency food rations
- ✓ Add scaffolding – forms, follow-up emails
- ✓ Know in advance who has experience; organize camping groups accordingly

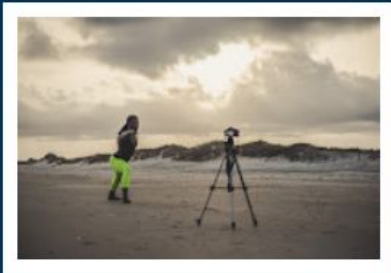


Education should change lives.

Why I will keep doing it:

- Student experiences (reflections)
- Sense of wonder, beauty, access

I feel like I gained a vast amount of knowledge from this trip. From the state park, I learned about the local ecosystem, species endangerment, and the importance of reducing our footprint. I thought it was great that the island is a trash-free zone. This adds to emphasizing the importance of becoming more sustainable.
(from a student who used the course to plan a Spanish-language elementary school lesson on sea turtles)



This morning I finally got the chance to attempt meditating activities. I never thought that there was so much to be learned and interpreted about nature and redefining the way my life is looked at. I found myself at times questioning my existence and asking open questions about what my purpose here is.
(from a photo student who is incorporating nature into their art work)

There were some insights into how we manage when confronted with Nature: *It also showed me that there's certain things in life you can't rush nor change, and doing those things one must be willing to accept, withstand, and most importantly, persevere. As far as my research went, I was proud of myself for being able to change my perspective [response to the weather] and still manage to incorporate fitness.*

There were some lessons about the community we wish to see: *What impacted me the most was the ability for ten students, two professors, and one Finn to come together as mostly complete strangers and have ten projects come out of that. We really did rely on each other when adversity such as the weather struck and it was pretty amazing to me that people who I had never spoke to before this trip were offering help and food and clothes it really did give me a little hope for the world.*

