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Environmental Writing

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The Value of Wilderness

When I first came across the advertisement for Semester in the Wild, I have never heard of a wilderness before. I thought wilderness was just a descriptive word for a remote rugged landscape. It wasn't until I arrived at Taylor Ranch, I realized what wilderness truly was. I have really begun to appreciate the wilderness and value what it has to offer. Through my courses here at Taylor I have learned a lot about the history, management, and ecology of the wilderness. I was also able to develop more advanced leadership and environmental writing skills. With the help of all of my professors, classmates, and wanderlust personality, I believe I have figured out the true value of wilderness today.

My first step onto the rugged land of the Frank Church wilderness was breathtaking. I have never been dropped off so deep into the mountains before. The last time I visited the mountains was quite a few years ago. I was pretty young, and I barely remember the experience. When the plane flew away, I felt abandoned and helpless. My only way back to the front country just left me and eleven other people on the foreign airstrip. Though, as I started to look around and take everything in, I felt a sense of peace and tranquility that I have never felt before. This was the start of my amazing journey of living in middle of the wilderness.

The first class I had here was outdoor leadership instructed by Meg Gäg. This class has taught me a lot since I have been here. It is the reason why a group of twelve can get along so well in close quarters. This class has taught me how to become a better leader as well as survival

skills I can use on trail. These skills include water filtration, first aid, bush crafting, cordage, and a few others. I believe that these skills are important to have, and I will now know what to do if a situation comes up while I'm out in the wild. These skills make me more comfortable about being out on trail either by myself or with less experienced people. I am now able to enjoy my time on trail rather than worry about what if something goes wrong.

Another class I took here was Wilderness Management taught by Ed Krumpe. This class allowed me to see what all goes into keeping the wilderness wild. Managers work hard to make sure all the visitors are happy, as well as following the rules. Leave no trace is a slogan wilderness managers use to communicate the rules and ethics of using the backcountry. They want the public that use tactics, so it seems as if no one has walked or camped in the wilderness. I thought it was interesting how many strategies there were to manage a wilderness. Managers are an important part within wilderness, without them you would find trash, and vandalism all over the natural land.

Then there is Environmental Writing with Jenn Ladino. This class has taught me to focus on the natural beauty of the landscape. We were challenged to be very descriptive in our writing, to describe what we feel and see in the landscape around us. I have started to really take in the all of the little details around me and now realize how lucky I am to be in the middle of such beauty. As I continue to write about being in the wilderness, I find more of an appreciation for it and what it all has to offer.

History class, with Adam Sowards, was also another eye-opening course. The first thing you think about wilderness is usually the ruggedness or beauty of the place you are going to. However, this class has taught me there is so much more too it. This land was inhabited by Native Americans, there was war, and natural disasters. I knew none of this before I stepped foot

on this wilderness. Now every time I run past the pit houses, see the sign to pointing to soldier bar, or the mysterious pictographs at the gorge it reminds me that so much has happened in this wilderness. I feel very lucky to be able to walk the same paths as many people did centuries before me.

Then there is Ed Galindo, he came to Taylor with a purpose of bringing our tribe together as one. He talked a lot about the history of the Native Americans that lived right where I live today. He talked about they treated the land and how everything is here to make a living. We had a ceremony where we thanked the plants for letting us tromp around on them, and use them for our needs. He taught us to have compassion for the people, plants and animals around us. Ed has taught me to have the upmost respect for the wilderness I am living in, and treat the land just as the people who have lived here centuries before me.

Lastly there is Pete Gäg, our Ecology professor. We spend a lot of time studying the ecosystems and making observations to why certain species act the way they do. However, I learned way more than just ecology in this course. He took us on many backpacking excursions where we had to carry different surveying gear along with all of our food, clothing, and tents. He always wanted to challenge us and have us experience the true ruggedness of the landscape. I came to realize that the wilderness is way more than just a pretty place, but it is a place that isn't afraid to beat you up and push you down. It is a place that needs to be taken seriously, yet a place to challenge yourself mentally and physically.

To me, the true value of wilderness is what you make of it. You can look at it as a scary place where you feel like you don't belong, or you can look at it as if you are going back to where you came from. Just like Ed Krumpe always says, when you are going to the wilderness you are going home. All of my faculty and classmates have taught me how to value my time in

this amazing place. I have begun to see all of the different sides of the wild, and it has brought out the wild in me.