LEADing the Pride at Collin College

Program Uses Fun to Teach About Leadership

by Kirk DICKEY



Students participate in the boat races at the Leading the Pride Leadership Camp, a signature event of the LEAD program at Collin College.

The water roiled as the two teams rounded the final turn, their "boats" propelled by students panting with effort. Teammates and vanquished competitors at the sides of the pool yelled encouragement as the three-person crews fought to hold their crafts together and cross the finish line first.

Comprised of pool noodles, beach balls, plastic tarps, water wings, bungie cords, kite string and a few other lighter-than-water items picked out by game organizers, the boats were designed by teams of six or seven people in less than an hour. Some teams had focused on a streamlined design for speed and others on maximum buoyancy.

No matter the design, being pulled around a pool as fast as two swimmers could drag them tended to cause structural problems and by the final race, the boats were being held together as much by good will as bungie cords.

Roars of triumph and wails of loss went up as the teams crossed the finish line—their boats mostly intact and everyone smiling or laughing at the challenge.

From a distance it might look like a group of children goofing off in a pool. It was more than that, however. The students had confronted a problem, worked together to solve it and relied on each other to get the best result possible. A race in a pool is relatively low stakes as far as teamwork and leadership goes, sure, but both were needed to keep their team afloat.

The game was just one of more than a dozen played at the Leading the Pride Leadership Camp at the Prothro Center on Lake Texoma in August, all with the purpose of reinforcing leadership and teamwork ideals in fun ways. The one-day camp is a centerpiece event for LEAD (Leadership Empowerment and Development), a co-curricular program at Collin College designed to teach students the properties of good leadership and allow them to develop those skills in ways that entertain as well as educate.

LEAD activities include the camp, various student-led leadership workshops, a ropes course team building exercise, Strengths Quest leadership potential assessments, field trips to watch government bodies in action and Leadership in the Movies, a program that takes popular films and examines the way characters demonstrate leadership, both good and bad. These experiential and interactive events draw students who might otherwise be turned off by a series of drowsiness-inducing lectures on leadership traits.

"Our students are here for such a short time, and during that time, we want to give them as many opportunities as we can to engage in leadership development," Dr. Terry Hockenbrough, the director of the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement which oversees LEAD, said. "It changes them. It makes them better for whatever lies before them."

Hockenbrough said there are dozens of instances where the program brought students out of their shell and they began to see themselves as potential leaders. That was the case for Jacob Schorr, a second-year student at Collin College.

Schorr said he only went to his first LEAD seminar because a professor offered him extra credit to attend. Soon, though, he saw how participation in the program could be a real benefit. By the time last year's camp rolled around, he was fully invested. He and other students were brought in to help plan the camp, which revolved around a *Lord of the Rings* theme.

"That was one of the most challenging and amazing things I've ever done, trying to figure out what we are going to do for camp, how we are going to run activities, how to coordinate the talks and things like that," Schorr said. "(The program administrators) believe in teaching leadership by doing as well as teaching. Having a chance to be hands-on with it was great."

Experiences like that have made a mark on Schorr, who now calls positive leadership "the most necessary part of society."

"It's a different way of looking at things and it changes the way you relate to people," he said. "You realize it is not about bossing somebody around. It is about understanding the people you are working with and how to get the best out of them. It is about figuring out how to help them reach their full potential."

Designing a fun environment to learn leadership concepts, apply those concepts through interaction, and develop new skills is an integral part of the program, according to Dr. Hockenbrough.

"Our goal is to provide a positive learning environment for all of our students and part of that is making the program student friendly," she said.

Within that structure, students are exposed to a holistic program approach to leadership training that includes leadership character and integrity, effective leadership characteristics, leadership abilities and skills, and leadership styles. Students learn as much from each other as they do from faculty and staff.

"Students make connections with other students and the college community," Dr. Hockenbrough said. "They learn leadership concepts that they may have never known about and are given an opportunity to apply those concepts through the different events and projects.. Students are empowered as people with creativity and are inspired with the hope that they have something to offer."



Jacob Schorr

To learn more about the LEAD program and its events or about the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement, visit http://www.collin.edu/academics/csce/ .

This article is the first of a two-part series exploring the leadership training opportunities at Collin College. The next article will focus on the college's Leadership Development Institute (LDI), which brings an academic focus to leadership education. ❖

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Photos by Nick Young, Collin College photographer