



## Shippensburg University: InTeGrate Report Fall 2016

### Impact 7 Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge

Funded partly by an external grant through Outdoor Nation, Shippensburg participated in the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge. Shippensburg University went head-to-head against 89 other colleges and universities across the country to earn points for outdoor activities and to win prizes donated by corporations that value sustainability through corporate social responsibility initiatives that protect the environment, encourage sustainable supply chains, and whom enact social justice campaigns. The first time participating in the competition, Ship ended up placing 8<sup>th</sup> overall (see: <http://www.uncampuschallenge.org/organizations/2176>)! Over 460 participants (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members) logged over 3100 individual activities to help Ship improve each week from an initial place near the bottom tier and climb to surpass the efforts of some very large schools with notable outdoor programs. Please note, Ship does not have an “outdoor program” so the majority of advertisement for the competition was through the InTeGrate network of faculty, the Center for Land Use and Sustainability, and the “green” student organizations. The main premise behind Shippensburg’s participation was to participate in stewardship and service-learning experiences (trail maintenance, stream clean-ups, graffiti removal activities, etc.), and to raise awareness of local resources, programs, and organizations (i.e. Appalachian Trail Conservancy, South Mountain Partnership, Cumberland Valley Rail Trail, PA Parks and Forests Foundation, etc.) whose missions are to engage the public in awareness initiatives that promote conservation efforts. We also wanted to encourage students and campus community at large to engage in healthy activities for personal health and which simultaneously promote development of a more sustainable mindset that inspires support to maintain the vitality, if not improve, of our region’s natural resources and public lands for the future.

Organized around a custom-designed social media app, participants in the Campus Challenge were able to share what they did outdoors with others online through annotated photo posts that were scored and verified by an external reviewer. This created an entirely new community of people that inspired others to get outside each week to discover new areas – mostly local, and encouraged friends and family members to get active outside as well. Especially important was to encourage faculty to utilize course-embedded activities (i.e. field trips, field-based research, independent exploration activities, etc.) that would be meaningful for their particular course and which would also earn points toward the university-wide competition. In this way both voluntary and course-inspired activities were completed. For example, through the online app, Ship students organized a cooperative outing with students from another university and spent a weekend in the Delaware Water Gap hiking, exploring and camping in the national park. This experience gave them opportunities for informal discussion about the watershed its history, its ecology, and to view some cool geology. Perhaps most importantly it connected students from diverse majors at two different universities, and in the process helped students learn first-hand how important national parks are for preserving public access and ensuring protection of natural places.

In addition to informal voluntary participation such as through co-curricular club activities, a number of “InTeGrated” faculty and “non-InTeGrated” faculty encouraged student participation either for specific for-credit assignments or for extra credit. For example, students in Intro to Geology were required to do 2 independent field trips to find local rock exposures, streams, public-access caves, rock pinnacles, etc.



where they could explore, observe, and describe the geologic context of their selected sites and relate them in some way to course content. Although most students visited local sites, quite a few visited localities more regionally. All were required to report their activities and observations to the attention of all students and shared their perspectives in online discussion boards (on the class CMS). A number of these were brought into the classroom during face-to-face discussions as well. This enriched the course content with local examples of topics discussed in the class, and after the competition was over a mapping lab required them to identify their field trip locations in more detail. Students had to locate their sites on a geologic map and determine the relative and absolute age of the rock exposures and structural geologic features (i.e. anticlines, synclines, faults, etc.) located nearby. In another example, another faculty member required students to utilize local rail trails, parks, and other sites to enrich discussions and illustrate key topics about land use in both urban and more rural geographic settings. She even encouraged them to try and beat her in points for additional credit. Students talked about how dedicated she was in her outdoor activities, and this inspired at least some of them to try to match her outdoor ethic. No student was able to outcompete her in the end, although a few came close.

As a final example, another faculty member (non-InTeGrate) from the Math Department offered math students the option of replacing a quiz grade if they logged a specific number of points on the app. This particular professor reported that recent research indicated that study breaks with outdoor activities were shown to improve learning outcomes (i.e. healthy body-healthy mind) and felt that the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge would be a great way to encourage students to do so in a fun and interesting way. Although no direct connection was made to sustainability in her course, a number of her 160 students participated in InTeGrate-organized events (i.e. Outdoor Film Festival, and various club events, including the North Face Challenge Scavenger Hunt) to earn some of their points. It is not yet known if participation led to higher tests scores in her class; however, it did help the professor learn more about her students and this was valuable. She indicated that she was able to connect with them personally and helped them become more comfortable with coming to her for help on class problem sets. It also led to an important but unintended learning outcome. She had students with mobility and anxiety impairments who expressed concerns about their participation in the outdoor challenge. She not only helped them come up with viable options to participate and score points, but she asked other students in the class to be supportive and encouraging of each other to ensure everyone felt included, even if some activities were legitimately out-of-reach for some students. This feedback has been shared with Outdoor Nation for next year so that scoring systems can be modified so that all members of our communities regardless of their abilities or neurological diversity can be more readily included. This clearly is an example of inclusion which is critical to community-level sustainability and is worthy of note.

Unfortunately the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge was only 6 weeks long and was over quickly, and for some faculty the opportunity to participate came too late for them to incorporate course-embedded projects. For example, two faculty members (one from the English Department and one from the Political Science Department) had not yet participated in any InTeGrate activity and learned through social media (primarily Facebook) and their students about the Campus Challenge after it was already started. Their participation this year was primarily at the personal level. However, both commented independently that they were going to miss their daily check-ins on the app. They liked to see the newest posts and the positive activities made possible during this competition and both are considering



ways to include course-embedded activities in next year's competition. The English professor in particular, is considering the possible use of nature journaling and introspective reflection in her Writing Intensive First Year Seminar classes which is a general education class. The other has mentioned the potential for incorporating campus challenge activities to support social justice initiatives that she has been involved in previously. Based on these outcomes, Shippensburg University faculty and students will look forward to participating in future Campus Challenge programs and will continue to work to help students, faculty, administrators, and community members at large connect to local resources, identify local problems and link them to developing plans of action to help solve both local and global geoenvironmental challenges that face society today and in the coming decades.