NIK MADSEN MEMORIAL ENDOWMENT FOR WHOLE HEART LEADERSHIP

At the Rec End of Year Celebration on May 29, we announced the student recipients of awards from the Nik Madsen Memorial Endowment for Whole Heart Leadership. These three students - Nicolette Hodgson, Ruben Perez and Evan Somma - received funds to expand their leadership capacity and to further the spirit and joy embodied by Nik Madsen. Below are reflections from Ruben and Nicolette following their leadership development opportunities made possible thanks to the dozens of contributions that have grown the endowment.

Ruben Perez

Ruben is a Rec Leader, third-year student and an all around adventure enthusiast. Ruben received $790 towards a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) course, which he completed in June. Reflecting on the WFR course and his leadership at the Rec, Ruben writes:

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Taking the Wilderness First Responder course was an enriching experience for my career as a recreational leader. The ten days I spent with my instructors and classmates were filled with lessons covering all ranges of injuries, scenarios that included all types of terrain, and procedures that were practiced every day. We practiced doing physical assessments and providing clear reports of patients so often that by the end of the class it was all muscle memory.

One of the instructors, had a catchphrase that I really liked. Before we would practice any type of scenario, he would make us, “crack open a can of calm”. In other words, approaching any type of injury, illness, or whatever problem it may be, requires that you keep a level head. The ability to stay calm is both reassuring to the patient and can help you grasp the severity of the situation.

I found a newfound confidence by taking the Wilderness First Responder course. I was lucky enough to receive the Nik Madsen Memorial Endowment award and because of it, I was able to take this course. I now feel more confident than ever when it comes to taking others out into the backcountry.
Nicolette Hodgson

Nicolette, also a third-year student and Rec Leader, beams with joy when sharing her love for birds, wild spaces and seeing others’ shine when introduced to a piece of our natural world. Nicolette used her $1,345 award to enroll in a National Outdoor Leadership School Pacific Northwest Trip Leader course. Following her course in August, Nicolette shared these reflections:

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NOLS’ Trip Leader Seminar (TLS) stands out because it is their only course designed as professional development for aspiring or currently employed outdoor leaders and educators. I applied for the award with this opportunity in mind because I knew it would present me with tremendous challenge and growth. I would be exploring an unfamiliar mountain range, the Northern Cascades, alongside eleven new faces, learning a curriculum I did not know much about. The amount of newness I faced was intimidating, but along with the butterflies, I felt a glowing confidence towards the experiences awaiting me.

Quickly, our participant group shaped into a balanced community. Coming from drastically diverse walks of life, everyone was simultaneously a teacher and learner in this space. It was a fact greatly embraced. In any instance, if someone lacked expertise, another was there to share theirs and show support. It was nothing short of magical to feel continuously inspired by those around me.

NOLS curriculum began with lessons around basic backpacking skills and risk management. A sense of pride welled up within me as content being discussed in many NOLS lessons and lined up with the information I have taught students as a Rec Leader and WO Staff. The self-awareness, expedition behavior, and competence in hard skills I practiced at the Rec allowed me to support less experienced classmates and add depth to lessons being taught.

It was empowering to feel sturdy in my foundation, but invigorating when I was presented with opportunities to build on top of it. Lessons elaborating NOLS’ leadership-based curriculum left me at square one. I felt like a sponge when my class talked about how leadership takes different forms and ways to best represent them. Here, I was able to identify strengths in my current leadership style, and as a result, focus my time on and off the trail to growing leadership qualities which may not come naturally to me.

Personal learning took place constantly. Hard skills were fun to learn, and exciting to practice. Never again will a trip I lead worry about broken zippers, tent repairs, or malfunctioning stoves. Even handling river crossings, map navigation, tricky terrain travel, and bear safety are difficult skills I’ve grown in. Soft skills, like creating a positive learning environment, overcoming adversity between participants or co-leads, and curating one’s leadership style to best fit the situation, are far harder to practice in a structured setting. Regardless, through the TLS I was given resources to approach these topics and feel confident in my ability to remain open-minded, patient, and thoughtful in future scenarios.

Between discussing leadership roles and swimming in alpine lakes, I often thought about why I was there. Throughout the day I would ask myself: “How can I best embody what UCSC’s Recreation Department and Nik Madsen stand for? What will I learn today to embody it more completely?” I believe it was this intentional tone which set the tone for my whole trip.

In nine days, I started to grow comfortable in the unfamiliar terrain of the Northern Cascades, appreciating it’s gifts and challenges. My mind and heart were opened to learn as much as I could from my experiences. Now, I look back and am able to see how pivotal this trip was in shaping how I live and lead whole-heartedly.

Even these words hardly encompass the gratitude I feel towards Nik’s friends and family and those in the Rec community who helped to make this experience happen. This endowment is a gift which will continue to shape the lives of future leaders in unthinkable ways.

(To conclude, here is an) excerpt from (my) personal journal entry (second day of NOLS TLS course):

“Isn’t the afternoon light so beautiful?
I am sat just a little outside the social rim of tonight’s kitchen. My feet are drying from the river crossing. My heart and head are warmed by inner glee and simplicity. I feel utterly in love. I hear a wren.

I think I go backpacking for exactly these moments. It’s rare to find times bounding with so much joy. There are so many levels of learning. It fills me. I sit among teachers, learners - each person sage and novice in their own way. There are many things I will continue to absorb...

I look forward to hitting the trail tomorrow. Breathing. Being on my feet. Being with others. Being out in this nature because of you. Thank you.”
Wilderness Orientation, 2019

WO lives on! Now in its 35th year, WO continues to deliver grand adventures, lifelong friendships and potent preparation for students’ lives at UCSC. From August 2-September 20, 132 students joined one of 12 groups traveling through the Sierra and paddling across Tomales Bay. Having had the chance to join the five-day field training in the Sierra, I am left feeling absolutely inspired by the staff’s deep qualities of compassion, openness and selflessness. And of course, their technical prowess allowed WO groups to nimbly navigate through the array of conditions they encountered this year, including snowfall at 12,000’! We’re grateful to be able to continue to serve incoming students through Wilderness Orientation.

Sea Kayaking WO, Tomales Bay, 2019

Rec Campus Campout - 2nd annual

On October 16, dozens of students will once again convene on the East Field for a night of s’mores and campfire splendor, star talks, and sleeping under the stars. The purpose of this Campout is to encourage students who have never otherwise had outdoor rec opportunities or have been uneasy about camping to say “yes” in a low barrier, low commitment and easily accessible setting. We are challenging students who are comfortable outdoors to find at least one friend who may be reticent to camp and get them to join the Campus Campout. Last year we had nearly 70 students join, and we hope to double that involvement this year.

WO Staff Training, Sierra National Forest, 2019

Afterward:

“The earth is precious and at the same time insignificant. The recognition that ‘This too, will pass’ brings detachment and with detachment another dimension comes into your life - inner space. Through detachment, as well as nonjudgment and inner nonresistance, you gain access to that dimension.”

- Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth

In seeking to contribute to student health, building capacity for inner space feels critical. We’re committed to our eyes remaining wide open, crafting Rec adventures with a vision for health, wholeness, and belonging. As described by our recently reframed Rec mission statement:

Our mission is to provide the UCSC community with outdoor, recreational and hands-on learning experiences that enhance community belonging, student leadership, personal confidence and one’s sense of adventure. Recreation programs are united by common threads of openness and acceptance, adventure and discovery, challenge and accomplishment, and gratitude and joy.

That’s it for this edition of The Rec Register. Again, if you have ideas for including additional content, please let me know. Be well.

- Dustin

October 16: Rec Campus Campout, 2nd annual. East Field. No RSVP required.
January 7: Winter quarter Rec registration opens
January 17-19: Western Regional Outdoor Leadership Conference, UC Riverside
February 20-23: Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour, Santa Cruz
April 4-5: Alumni Weekend. Stay tuned for details on a Rec event.