



Press Release

MC offering “Great Smokies Experience” for high-school students

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 22, 2013

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Starting this year, rising high-school juniors and seniors can enroll in a one-of-a-kind Maryville College summer course and receive three credit hours from the private liberal arts college located in East Tennessee.

The first-ever “Great Smokies Experience” will take place July 18 until July 31 on the College’s campus and at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, a residential environmental learning center located on the Tennessee side of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP).

The two-week course is divided into three sections and includes activities and topics that range from hikes to history, ecosystems to nationalism. Students will spend about half of this class camping at Tremont, and the other half living on campus at MC. Although the GSMNP is the cornerstone of this experience, students will take trips to parts of the Cherokee National Forest, the Maryville College Woods, to a hydroelectric dam and other significant sites.

They also will participate in Mountain Challenge, a unique on-campus program that provides high-quality, safe outdoor experiences that are designed to build teamwork, enhance communication and teach problem-solving skills.

“Why just sit around in a classroom to learn about the environment when you can have a profound experience in a natural American treasure?” asked Dr. Doug Sofer, associate professor of history at Maryville College and coordinator of the Great Smokies

Experience. “We believe that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has more to teach about the environment than the best-written textbook on the subject.

“Maryville College, the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont and the Mountain Challenge program all value the process of learning through direct experience and, while there is some formal instruction time as part of this class, we believe the majority of students' experience should take place outdoors.”

In addition to the once-in-a-lifetime experience, students who complete the course will earn college credit hours in Environmental Issues (ENV 101).

Sofer said that the “Great Smokies Experience” was not an environmental science course but would instead show how various disciplines – history, political science and social psychology, for example – connect deeply to the environment.

“Central to this class is the theme that a connection to our natural environment is fundamental to who we are; it is a core component of our very identity,” he explained. “Societies organize around our connections to nature. Whether we compete for natural resources or cooperate to obtain them, civilizations are more than a collection of laws and lofty ideals. Political policies, wars, social movements, and the way we interact personally with one another all make more sense when we better understand our relationships to food, water, energy, and other products of nature. In short, we believe that studying nature helps us to better understand our own world.”

In addition to Sofer, instructors include John DiDiego, education director at Tremont; Dr. Mark O’Gorman, associate professor of political science and coordinator of the College’s environmental studies program; and Bruce Guillaume, director of Mountain Challenge.

“The opportunity to allow high school students to be active in the outdoors while supporting and illustrating the educational concepts from these two educational places appealed to us at all levels,” Guillaume said of Mountain Challenge’s participation in the program.

The entire per-student cost of this program and class is \$1,495, which includes tuition, room, board, all special events and transportation for the duration of the class. Space is limited during the 2013 inaugural year, so interested students should register now at maryvillecollege.edu/gse.

For more information, contact Sofer at doug.sofer@maryvillecollege.edu.

College-Tremont history goes back 45 years

Collaborating with Tremont for environmental education is nothing new to Maryville College, but the partnership between the two entities is being renewed in light of a new emphasis at the College to join its liberal arts curriculum with professional preparation, utilizing individuals, businesses, educational institutions, organizations, churches and other groups.

In 1968, Maryville College joined the National Park Service (NPS) and local schools to establish environmental studies areas through the National Environmental Education Development program. A year later, the College began operating the Tremont Environmental Education Center located at the former Tremont Job Corps Center site. Maryville College faculty members served as directors, and students assisted.

During the school year, Tremont was open for elementary school students, primarily 5th and 6th graders, and their teachers. On weekends, holidays and during the summer, the center was available for secondary-level environmental education, college- and university-level courses and graduate work in natural science and other areas related to the problems of the environment.

The College's operation of Tremont ended in 1979, but faculty and students continued to use it as a resource in research.

DiDiego said the learning center shares with the College a belief in the impact of real-world experiences and the importance of connecting with students in meaningful ways.

“We know we can provide powerful educational experiences in the natural world,” he said. “Partnering with the College brings us expertise from a variety of disciplines, as well as the prestige of working hand-in-hand with top-notch professors and motivated students.

“Through this partnership, we are hoping to combine our strengths to raise the bar for education and offer students a world-class course in a world-class national park.”

Ken Voorhis, executive director of Tremont, said programs like “Great Smokies Experience” can change people's lives.

“High school students can be powerfully affected by outdoor experiences but especially so if they have the opportunity to do so with an adult who can communicate with them, model enthusiasm and lead them to a deeper experience and understanding of the natural systems at work in that place,” he said. “Providing experiences in wild places are important in developing environmental literacy in young people but that, along with the guidance of a caring, more mature ‘mentor,’ can be remarkably transformative.”

Maryville College is ideally situated in Maryville, Tenn., between the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Knoxville, the state's third largest city. Founded in 1819, it is the 12th oldest institution of higher learning in the South and maintains an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Known for its academic rigor and its focus on the liberal arts, Maryville is where students come to stretch their minds, stretch themselves and learn how to make a difference in the world. Total enrollment for the fall 2012 semester was 1,093.