Environmental Philosophy – Trails

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Overview

One of the biggest problems many college students face is the lack of time they have to exercise during the week. All of a student’s free time is typically set aside for partying or doing something he or she enjoys. The majority of students would not consider exercise a fun way to spend extra time; however, sharing information on the trails around Decorah could have a big impact on motivating students to get outdoors more. For many people, exercising means running on a treadmill for a half hour which is extremely boring. If students were aware of all the trails surrounding the Luther campus, they might find exercising more entertaining if they made the effort to explore these fun routes.

Treadmills are one of the many unnecessary aerobic exercise machines that people use on a regular basis. The only time these devices should be used if used at all is during the winter months because they consume a large amount of electricity. If more students decided to exercise on the trails around Decorah rather than watching TV while working out, the consumption of electricity in the Legends Center would decrease dramatically. Students must realize that going for a walk or run through the woods is much more entertaining than attempting to watch television while exercising.

While exploring the trails of Decorah gives students the opportunity to exercise and save electricity, it also allows them to connect with nature. Spending too much time in the dorms is bad for an individual’s health and can increase his or her level of stress. Relaxation is extremely important, especially for college students. Being outside gives them the chance to feel free, and hiking the trails is the perfect way to feel this connection.

We came up with a large list of ideas on ways we could advertise the trails of Decorah. However, we realized we would have better luck if we concentrated more on first year students. Upperclassmen are already aware of the trails around campus and have the choice to explore them. For those students who never spend time on the trails, it would be difficult to persuade them to do so because they are not willing to change the college lifestyle they have become accustomed to. Because the area would be new to the first years, we thought it would be important to let them know about the trails right from the start. By introducing them to the land when they arrive at Luther, we believe the trails would become a big part of their college experience.

Advertising Trails for First Years

To get our message across to first year students, we came up with an idea to have the freshmen RA’s take the first years on a hike through a few of the trails when they first arrive on campus. This would be a good way for the new students to meet each other and explore the trails together. Students are more likely to hike trails in numbers rather than going alone so we thought this would be more effective. Maps would be handed out to the students and they
would have the choice on which route they wanted to take. Also, the hike would only last about thirty minutes. This would allow first years enough time to get a taste of what the land has to offer. We wanted to make the trip short so the students would have plenty of time to do other activities as well. We have talked to Kris Franzen, the director of ResLife, and she is willing to forward the idea to the first year RA’s, so they have the option to take their floors for a little trail adventure or to just advertise the trails to their floors, too. Also, we are going to forward the link of a website we improved in the next section below, so the first years have a good website of area trails right from their dorm room.

Trail Maps

Going into the project one of our main goals was to create a map of the surrounding trails in Decorah, but as we quickly learned and found out that there are plenty of maps out there for students and others to use. There are links to maps on the Luther website and in the BWP section of the website. There are also links for other sites displaying maps of trails in the area. So instead of wasting time in creating yet another map we searched to see if we could make any of the maps already constructed any better. We did come across a link from the BWP section in the Luther web page, where it showed a map that could use some improvement. The map was a Google map created by Brad Crawford and it had a lot of the surrounding trails around Decorah, but we noticed the map didn’t have any of the trails around campus. We thought it was important to add the trails around campus to the map because we felt those were the trails that were going to be used the most by the students because of the ease of accessibility from campus. What we did like about that map was that it had a lot of trails mapped all over Decorah, so as people go to the site they not only see the trails around Luther, but they see trails around the city of Decorah. Hopefully, as people go to the site and see the Luther trails and the trails around Decorah they will see that these trails really aren’t that far from campus.

Link to the website of the trails: http://www.exploreddecorah.com/ (May take a few days before the Luther trails are on the map. The trails are sent to Brad Crawford for him to upload on the website.)

Future

One thing we have noticed is that these trails seemed to be advertised each year and maps are all over the web, but yet it seems that there are always more people in the gym using the elliptical machines than using the trails. I’m not saying the groups before us haven’t done a good job advertising the trails, but rather it is a constant reminder that advertising trails is a year to year basis. So for future advertising we would hope that groups could build the relationship with the first year RA’s in promoting the trails to the first years, so they get out and experience the trails right away. Along with that, try and help provide creative ideas in ways to use the trails such as making up trail games or even a trail scavenger hunt of some kind. We feel finding creative ways to use the trails may lure people in going on the trails. Also, BWP has done a great job of providing information of the surrounding trails and holding outdoor
equipment. Another idea for future groups could be to help promote BWP and to help advertise events, particular events using the trails that they host.