



GSW: LEADERSHIP UNLEASHED

There aren't many university campuses where students can stroll the pathways of a former U.S. President and First Lady.



PHOTOS COURTESY PAT BONZ

Digging In—Andrew Worth and Steven Hornyak sift sand to be used in making cement for the new Habitat homes.

Across its nearly 100-year history, the institution has graduated thousands of leaders who have worked within their communities to change the world for the better. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter are two highly visible examples of the scores of individuals who have studied at GSW, and gone on to contribute in meaningful ways through dedicated leadership.

Leadership is at the core of GSW's philosophy of education. The University's programs and its people are working to help GSW students meet their full leadership potential. What follows is a look at just two ways Georgia Southwestern is preparing tomorrow's leaders today.

The Costa Rica Connection

Lacey Pitts wasn't sure what to expect. An English education major from Cordele, the GSW junior had never before left U.S. soil.

The 20-year-old had one overriding fear as her international flight touched down in Costa Rica: "My first thought was, 'I can't call Momma to help me if I get in trouble,'" she said.

Pitts was one of 40 Georgia Southwestern students and faculty to spend 12 days at the end of the Spring Semester helping others and broadening horizons. The annual service learning expedition was part of the University 4000 course, a GSW tradition since 1998.

"Our students have the opportunity to learn firsthand about new peoples and cultures," said Peggy Ellington, Ph.D., assistant professor of English and team leader. "They always come back with new perspectives."

This was Ellington's third year accompanying students to Costa Rica, where they built homes for needy

families in cooperation with Habitat for Humanity International. On this trip, the GSW team collaborated to construct nine houses in the Costa Rican central valley community of Grecia.

Team members worked together to do everything from digging foundations to mixing cement, Ellington said.

But before they ever touched a trowel, enrolled students first spent the Spring Semester in GSW classrooms exploring the culture, language and geography of the country they would visit. Students paid course tuition and had to pay or raise an additional \$200, but support from the GSW Foundation, Inc., covered the remaining cost of the capstone trip, which totaled approximately \$55,000, Ellington said.

"Combining service learning with international study is an unparalleled way to enhance learning experiences for our students," said President

Michael L. Hanes, Ph.D., who joined the Costa Rica team this year. "By immersing students in new cultures and giving them worthwhile ways to contribute to the needs of others, we are fostering life changing education."

Pitts said it was an experience she'll never forget.

"Staying in Grecia felt like home. We were very comfortable there, and so welcomed by the families that hosted us," she said.

But it wasn't all work. The experience included the opportunity to explore the rain forest, go white water rafting, climb to the top of an active volcano, and even ride horses on a beach bordering the Pacific Ocean.

Pitts said that when the time came to fly home, her initial fears had long since faded, and been replaced by a fulfilling sense of service.

"I just helped to change people's lives, and did something that mattered," she said. "I helped to give them a home."

Ocean Escape— GSW team member Fabienne Valmond (right) rides a horse along the idyllic Costa Rican shore, under the watchful eye of her guide.



SERVICE LEARNING



TEAM WORK

Getting into the Swing

The University's evolving Challenge Course is helping future leaders learn teamwork. This innovative approach to teambuilding has been designed to strengthen group cohesiveness, team spirit and cooperation, said Clay Caswell, director of Campus Recreation.

"The reason the ropes course has been so successful is that it is an experiential teambuilding program which provides organizations and groups with exciting and challenging experiences," Caswell said.

According to Caswell, the program has already provided local organizations and groups with teambuilding and high ropes course experiences. Specially trained facilitators utilize state-of-the-art adventure learning techniques to deliver powerful and effective experiences to groups of all kinds.

The Challenge Course has thrived since its implementation in 2002, Caswell said. More than 1,000 people have participated in the course, many of them students.

The course is open to the campus and the community as well as surrounding communities of Sumter County. Caswell said that many local businesses and groups have enjoyed participating in this teambuilding experience, noting that they have seen increased group collaboration and performance among the participants. Groups of eight to 25 are preferred.

Caswell explained that a day at the Challenge Course consists of a carefully designed series of activities selected specifically to meet the needs of a group. Exercises range from ball tossing activities to more complex challenges involving larger props. Some activities are considered physically challenging, while others are designed to provide a mental and emotional challenge. Each activity is chosen and sequenced specifically to assist groups in meeting their goals.

Caswell said that the Challenge Course consists of nine low elements and nine high elements, with two to three variations on each element. A low element is an element that is within three feet of the ground. A high element is an activity that is 30 to 40 feet from the ground. Various icebreakers, initiatives and problem solving techniques are also taught in an attempt to enhance communication, increase self-confidence and self-awareness and to develop an atmosphere of mutual support among group members.

The Challenge Course is located on the south side of the campus, across from the James Earl Carter Library.

