



News Release

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WESTERN STUDENTS ENJOY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

St. Joseph, Mo. — Oct. 2, 2003 — Several students who participated in Missouri Western State College's Leadership Challenge in September expected to engage in lengthy discussions about leadership and listen to speeches. Instead they spent a weekend rappelling, balancing on logs, squeezing into a cement tube and participating in several more hands-on leadership and team-building activities.

"The purpose of the retreat is to make participants step outside the box," said LaShaundra Randolph, one of the students who planned and led the Challenge. "People seemed scared at first – they didn't know what to expect. But at the end, everyone said they had fun."

Freshman Erica Neier said she was excited about attending the Leadership Challenge. "I wanted to work on my communication skills," said Neier. "I learned a lot; I learned you have to look out for each other and listen to each other."

Neier, from New Bloomfield, Mo., said she decided to participate to meet people and to learn more about herself. "This is college – you're supposed to discover more about yourself."

Over 70 Western students gathered for the annual event on Friday evening at Camp Geiger Boy Scout Camp. They were divided into groups, and that evening participated in a number of activities, including naming their group, making a team flag, assigning nicknames for each member and creating a team chant.

On Saturday, students participated in the camp's COPE course, which required teamwork and physical skills. Groups tested their abilities at stations such as the "Tunnel of Love," "The Meat Grinder," and in a "Tangled Knot" activity. Participants were also offered the opportunity to rappel off the camp's tower.

"I liked the rappelling," said Neier. "I am afraid of heights so I feel like I kind of conquered my fears. After I did that I know I can do anything."

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Dan Cox, assistant professor of government who attended the Challenge, saw his invitation to attend as an opportunity to interact with students outside of the classroom. “It’s great. No matter how much you try to do in the classroom, certain things can only be taught outside the classroom.”

Cox said he also liked the way the Challenge brought different groups of students together, and forced them to work cooperatively with each other. “We did a lot of work Friday evening, and it took massive amounts of cooperation.”

Dr. James Scanlon, Western’s president, visited with students on Saturday, also, speaking of the importance of leadership skills.

Randolph said helping to plan and facilitate the weekend turned out to be a personal leadership challenge for her. “That was the hardest thing I ever did in my life. It’s hard to accommodate 80 people and to make sure they are satisfied and enjoying themselves,” she said. “The process wasn’t easy, but once I saw people having a good time, it was worthwhile.”

“More students would benefit from being involved in activities like this,” said Cox. “It’s tough, but in the end they can be proud for having gone through this leadership retreat.”

Neier agreed. “I didn’t want to go at first but I am so glad I did. I wish everyone had a chance to go.”

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.