

Program Goal 1: Graduates are technically proficient in a variety of outdoor activities.

1. Students will demonstrate competency in challenge course activities.
2. Students will demonstrate competency in land- and water-based activities.
3. Students will demonstrate mastery in activity-specific skills.

Throughout the Outdoor Education program, the outdoors and activity specific skills were used as a tool for education and changing behaviors and attitudes; that is why it is crucial that in addition to understanding program planning, risk management, and education, you must demonstrate competency with outdoor skills. During my time in the program, I had the opportunity to take instructional strategy courses for rock climbing and canoeing, as well as the challenge course class. These classes helped me develop proficiency with the activity specific skills, but also challenged me to teach others the skills. Formal skills assessments served as indicators for when I knew I had developed competency, as well as developing and delivering lesson plans and programs. I found it is difficult to teach others the skills if you do not know them yourself.

In the Challenge Course class, we started off in the low elements. Our instructor emphasized skills progression in programs so you have a chance to assess the group and determine if there is anything that needs to be addressed, and this was true with our class. Starting off with harness and helmet instructions and then spotting techniques gives the participants an opportunity to become comfortable with the equipment and each other before moving on to higher risk activities. When we were finished with the spotting techniques and low elements, I had to teach back an activity before moving on to the higher elements. Having to lead an activity on one of the low elements revealed my strengths and weaknesses for the low challenge course which is important to know so that I can improve in the future. For example, I give instructions out of order, and have the tendency to over explain, but I also received feedback that my risk management was exemplary. When facilitating spotting sequences, I made sure to walk around to each pair and group to observe them. After facilitating an activity, I took the feedback I received and applied in when developing a low challenge course program. Being able to appropriately sequence activities and tailor a program to meet a group's needs reveals my competency in low challenge course. Please view the artifact "Low Challenge Course Program" to examine the program further.

After completing the low elements, we moved on to the high elements on the dynamic and static courses. This required equipment assessment of ropes, knowledge of appropriate knots and the ability to perform a rescue on the static course. While I did not have to lead a specific activity on the high elements, I spent a significant amount of time learning the elements of the course and learning how to check my peers as an assistant facilitator would during a program. Practicing weekly on the challenge course assessing equipment, tying the knots, double checking my peers, and collectively leading ourselves through the high challenge course as a class helped me develop proficiency in the skills. At the end of the course, I was assessed on my ability to perform a timely rescue, please refer to the artifact "Challenge Course Rescue" to view my time. Performing the rescue was something that I was uncomfortable with before I was in the class; however, after going over each step multiple times, I was able to complete a rescue within the appropriate amount of time as outlined by industry standards.

In addition to challenge course, I developed climbing skills through the Instructional Strategies of Rock Climbing class. The class went on multiple climbing excursions to places such as Mount Yonah, Lake Juliette and Currahee Mountain to learn and practice skills, as well

as teach fundamental theories and skills to rock climbing. These trips were an opportunity for me to take the skills and theories we learned in class and at the rock wall and apply them in a novel environment. There were rock cliffs where we had to practice edge safety, scrambles where we had to help one another and difficult climbing routes where we were responsible for tying the appropriate knots and belaying. In order to develop competency with these skills, practicing them was not enough; it was when I was developing and implementing my lesson plans to teach my peers about Fall Factors and Natural anchors that I knew I understood the material. Please view these artifact “Rock Climbing Lesson Plans” to examine these documents in more detail. A year a half after the climbing course, I had the opportunity to help with the Outdoor Center’s Spring Break trip which included bouldering and top rope climbing. While I was in the Instructional Strategies class, I knew I had developed competency from my ability to teach my peers and safely climb on our expeditions, but I was unsure how much of that information had stayed with me. I gave myself time before the Outdoor Center trip to practice the skills again: I set up a natural anchor and belay system on the ground, I practiced all of the figure eight knots, I reviewed commands and gear assessment. Practicing these skills helped me realize where I needed more practice and where I was proficient; I had retained the information and skills necessary to lead a trip. I also realized the importance of refreshing your skills if you do not use them for an extended period of time. When it came time to set up the anchor on the trip, I felt confident in my ability to protect myself at the cliff edge and to set up an anchor that followed LEADSTER guidelines: Limited extension, Angles, Direction, Strong, Timely, Equalized, Redundant.

Along with the challenge course and climbing classes, I took the Instructional Strategies of Canoeing course where I developed flatwater and whitewater paddling skills. In this class, we had three expeditions where we applied the skills we had been learning in class. The expedition that stands out the most to me was the final whitewater trip, where we helped lead Georgia College students down a section of the Broad River as part of their experience in the Quest for Adventure course. My peers and I were responsible for fitting PFD’s (personal floatation devices) and paddles, teaching them basic strokes and managing risk once on the water. It was when I had to lead this group of students down the river that I knew I had developed competency specifically with whitewater canoeing. There were a few participants who fell out of their boats and we had to rescue them, and I felt confident when doing so. We had to instruct them where to go, how to turn their boats, how to re-enter when they fell out and how to exit when we stopped for lunch. We received feedback at the end of the trip that they not only enjoyed themselves but had learned a lot as well!

At the end of the canoeing class, I was assessed on my skills and had the opportunity to go for the American Canoe Association Level One Instructor certification. Being assessed on my skills revealed to me the competency that I had developed throughout the course by practicing and leading others. While I did not go for the certification at that time, I will be testing off for the certification in May this year. I have had the opportunity to refresh my skills to ensure I can meet the requirements to receive the certification, and similar to my climbing skills, I have recognized my competency by how easily these skills come back to me. Working towards this instructor certification has helped me realize areas that need improvement, specifically in teaching these skills to others. I need to make sure I am using the correct terminology and demonstrating the strokes perfectly for participants to have a good model to imitate. I will attach the certification once I receive it.