Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Teaching and Learning Processes

Jennifer R. Fruend

M.Ed. in Secondary Education, May, 2007, University of Missouri-St. Louis
B.Ed. in Secondary Science Education, December, 2000, Concordia University Wisconsin
B.A. in Biology, May, 2000, Concordia University Wisconsin

Evolving an Ecological Way of Thinking: Social Interactions and the Construction of Environmentally Sustainable Behaviors in Adolescents During Expeditionary Learning

Date: April 18, 2019
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Place: TLC Conference Room 1

Abstract
The people around us - as well as the methodical progression of education through content - often shape our relationship to the world. Currently, Earth is at a crossroads, which requires humans to act and live more sustainably with an intentional environmental ethos, whether for literal survival or for slowing Earth’s resource degradation. Situated within the models of ecological contributors such as Aldo Leopold, transformational experiences, particularly when processed with self-reflection, writing, and social interaction, can change behaviors and priorities in individuals. Additionally, by recognizing the place of social learning components in expeditionary, informal, or adventure-based education settings, the potential for environmental education to meet the transformational goals needed to address a planet being quickly altered by humans can be met. This study uses High Mountain Institute, an adventure-based expeditionary semester high school in Leadville, Colorado, as a model for observation and basic interpretive qualitative analysis to determine how social interactions work together with experience to change or further develop environmental behaviors and ecological thinking. The participants were 15-17-year-old high school students attending a five-week immersion experience into expeditionary backpacking and place-inspired education topics. As a result of this experience, students created a sense of community and empowerment as individuals to plan for a healthier future, increase contact with nature, and inspire others upon return to their homes and traditional schools—indicating potential for behavioral change. These changes were influenced by the peer-driven modeling and relationships with college-age intern staff, teachers who also lived the behaviors, and intentional trust-based community building curriculum design. Observations of these changes over an intensive five weeks give hope that intentional social and nature planning can authenticate transformational environmental education.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
William C. Kyle, Jr., Ph.D. (Chairperson)
Theresa Coble, Ph.D.
Charles Granger, Ph.D.
James Wilson, Ph.D.