

Health and Youth Development through Community Engagement

WCU & the HIGHTS Program: Learning Adventure-Based Approaches with Real-World Results

Faculty member Jennifer Hinton (jlhinton@email.wcu.edu) and Marcus Metcalf (mmetcalf@jcpsmail.org) Director of the HIGHTS program have connected the Adventure-Based Recreational Therapy course and the HIGHTS Program for the last three years. HIGHTS uses adventure, service, and goal-driven activities to empower youth in our community. Many of these youth have behavioral health diagnoses, are involved in the juvenile justice system, or have other distinct challenges due to poverty and lack of resources. Each fall and spring semester, students in the Adventure-Based Recreation Therapy course learn more about the Recreation Therapy treatment process through small group work with HIGHTS participants from Jackson and Haywood counties. Under the supervision of licensed faculty, Western Carolina University Recreation Therapy students complete standardized assessments, create detailed leadership plans for 8 weekly sessions, facilitate both nature- and adventure-based interventions based on social empowerment and trust, and complete formative and summative evaluation. HIGHTS students grow in partnership with the university students on campus, building hope and resiliency.

About this collaborative project as an example of community engagement, Professor Hinton said, I cannot emphasize enough the positive role that our service learning partners play in the Adventure-Based Recreational Therapy course. Each semester, Marcus Metcalf works with me in course planning before the semester – and in course delivery throughout – so that we can provide learning opportunities that are mutually beneficial to our respective students and community. I could not deliver the experience my students gain in this course without the cooperation of the staff and students in the HIGHTS program. Marcus is similarly grateful for our collaboration; the professional-level, supervised experiences our students can provide each fall and spring would otherwise not be financially attainable for the young people in this community-based program.”

If you would like your community engagement work recognized through the STAR Engagement Projects program, please submit your proposals through the [Community-based Activities Faculty Survey](#) administered annually in the spring semester from early April – late May.

Website: <http://www.hights.org/compass-program.html>

