

What drew you to Parks and Recreation Management at WCU?

"I had spent three summers working at a camp in eastern North Carolina and eventually, I ended up working at Goose Creek State Park. While my position was technically maintenance, they let me try everything, including interpretive programming. I knew then I wanted to keep learning, and I missed school. I looked at several programs, but WCU stood out. I loved the small class sizes, the NC Promise tuition, and the diversity of focus areas within the PRM program. I'd heard amazing things about the professors and knew I wanted to be in the mountains again. The program felt like a private school experience at a public school price."

What was the most meaningful part of your PRM experience?

"Tanya Poole was my mentor, and every moment I spent in her classes was meaningful. She had this way of drawing people in, of making them care—and that's exactly what interpretation is. It's what I do now in my job. I also remember a specific moment in Outdoor Pursuits with Professor Rebekah Henderson. We were on the Tuckasegee, and I didn't even realize I wasn't putting my paddle in the water. Rebekah said, 'You're not going to get anywhere if you don't put your paddle in the water.' After class, she pulled me aside and said 'Kinley, I just know you can be better.' That moment really stuck with me. All of the professors in PRM saw my potential before I ever did."

How are you applying what you learned in PRM in your life today?

"I use PRM skills every day as a park ranger. Things I once thought I'd never need—like grant writing—are now part of my daily work. I also lead programs, give field trips, run our visitor center and social media, and help introduce people to public lands—often for the very first time. I learned how to work with people from all walks of life. That's essential here. PRM's values—like inclusion and access—became my values, and they shape the way I do my job every day."



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“I was drawn to how many different course options and career pathways the PRM program offered. I felt like there was room to explore and grow without being boxed into one thing. The built-in internship opportunities were also a huge factor for me. I really wanted hands-on experience in different areas of the field, and PRM at WCU made that a priority. The campus’s proximity to beautiful natural spaces was the cherry on top.”

What was the most meaningful part of your PRM experience?

“The most meaningful parts of my PRM experience were the overnight component courses. Whether it was exploring Costa Rica, bikepacking alongside the New River or traversing mountain trails with llamas, those trips brought everything I love about the program into focus—personal challenge and growth, deep community, and a strong sense of adventure.”

How are you applying what you learned in PRM in your life today?

“Currently, I have the privilege of working directly with PRM students across a variety of classes. In this role, I support everything from lesson planning and course development to faculty research and projects. The foundation I built during my time in the PRM program has been essential. It not only gave me strong outdoor skills and professional confidence, but also fostered critical thinking and communication skills that I use every day—whether I’m collaborating with faculty or supporting student learning.”



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“I was looking for a rural school and WCU stood out, especially with the trail system right here on campus. I got into mountain biking, hiking, and running during COVID, and the fact that I could bike without needing to drive somewhere was a huge draw. Early on, I was considering a different academic path, but once I got to campus, I realized how much the community and the terrain mattered to me. That’s when I found Parks and Recreation Management. I’d always enjoyed helping others through volunteer work, and PRM felt like a program that really focused on relationship-building and networking”

What was the most meaningful part of your PRM experience?

“There were a lot of great moments, but the most meaningful ones came through learning group facilitation. In these classes, for example, we’d lead energizer games with kids and practice how to guide a group through a full reflection using the experiential learning cycle. Seeing it all from both the student and instructor perspective—figuring out how to help a group connect and communicate—was incredibly valuable. That emphasis on connection really stuck with me, and each professor had their own unique way of modeling it.”

How are you applying what you learned in PRM in your life today?

“I graduated and started working at Project Discovery here at WCU three months later. A lot of what I’m using now came straight from PRM—especially facilitation and communication. I’m using everything from planning and risk management to actually going out, serving people, and making those real-world connections. I got connected to this role because I helped facilitate a PRM class where Project Discovery joined us on a bikepacking trip. That led to conversations, and now here I am.”



What drew you to Parks and Recreation Management at WCU?

“Originally, I entered WCU intending to become an occupational therapist. I wanted to work with individuals with learning and physical differences. Then, by chance, I enrolled in Rebekah Henderson’s PRM 254 class — and it completely opened my eyes to a whole new world. Growing up, I hadn’t been an outdoorsy person. But between my first backpacking trip with my brother and the experiences I had in that class, I discovered a passion for outdoor recreation that I never knew I had. Parks and Rec felt like a family within the bigger WCU community — a close-knit group where I truly found a sense of belonging.”

What was the most meaningful part of your PRM experience?

“Of course, the trips, the faculty, and the friendships stand out — the sense of family in PRM is something truly special. But for me, the leadership opportunities were the most meaningful. Some of the biggest moments of growth came from challenges — even when things didn’t go according to plan.” For example, during a backpacking trip in Professor Henderson’s PRM 354 class, we dealt with minor hypothermia, and it tested all of us. That experience taught me more about leadership, resilience, and maintaining group morale in tough situations than any classroom lecture could have.”

How are you applying what you learned in PRM in your life today?

“Today, I work for an organization called SOAR as a Gap Year Mentor, working with individuals ages 18-25 with learning differences like ADHD and ASD. During the summers, I also serve as a Course Director for SOAR’s summer camps for youth ages 10-18. Every day, I apply what I learned at WCU. PRM equipped me with both technical outdoor leadership skills and interpersonal skills — and both are essential in my work. I lead expeditions, teach outdoor living skills, and mentor participants on life skills, problem-solving, and communication.”

