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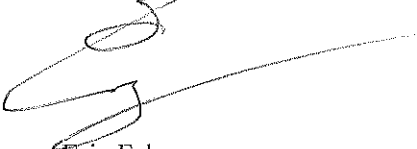
This past summer I was fortunate enough to present an unrivaled service learning experience to my high school students thanks to Ecology Project International (EPI). Thirteen students and two chaperones (including myself) traveled to southwest Montana to complete ecology-based community service working with the US Forest Service and a private educational cattle ranch. From the moment I contacted EPI a year prior to our trip, I encountered nothing but professionalism and an eagerness to assist me in affording this opportunity to my high school students thanks to Joshua Klaus. Although this wasn't my first time coordinating an educational trip during the summer, this was the first time I had worked with EPI. In addition, this was the first time that my high school had offered a program of this nature. As our school was moving towards a service-learning based model instead of the traditional "community-service hours" I was excited about the experience EPI could provide my students.

EPI is a non-profit educational organization based in Missoula, Montana. They have been engaging local residents, scientists, and students in field research since 2000. The company places an emphasis on service, value and relationships, which are the main reasons I chose to work with EPI. EPI's mission is to provide a safe, fun and educational experience for students. Well before we were greeted at the airport in Montana, EPI's staff contacted me to discuss trip logistics and medical concerns. The program coordinator, Jean Placko, was very receptive to my curriculum requests to best suit the goals of the program offered to my high school students. While on the trip, Ms. Placko and the other instructors frequently inquired of the program's progress. Not only was Ms. Placko and her staff open to constructive feedback, but also the program was flexible enough to meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of my students.

In addition to teaching science in the classroom for the last nine years in both middle school and high school, I have been leading experiential education summer trips for the last five years and have over nine years of varied experience in experiential education as a program coordinator and camp director. In fact, I pioneered a weeklong southwest trip for 8th graders at my previous two schools that still continue today at both schools. Based on this prior experience, I am quite confident in recommending EPI to any school looking for something more than "just a school trip."

The possibility of working with EPI has tremendous educational value for high school students and I would highly recommend any of their programs, not just their Montana program. We are continuing our relationship with EPI and are in the midst of planning another trip for this coming school year. In addition to the important character-building aspects of student travel, students are exposed to a constant stream of interactive lessons in ecology and environmental science. The opportunity for students to collaborate with scientists in the field provides for more in-depth learning outside of the classroom to occur. EPI's programs allows my students to see direct "evidence" of science, as well as providing alternative "perspectives" to life outside of Los Angeles. It is the true form of experiential education.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.



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