Youth Leadership and Equity in the Outdoors

Presented by:
Austin Parks & Recreation Department - Park Ranger Cadet Program
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are gathered on Native Land. Long before it came to be known as Waterloo or Austin, this land was home to many native and indigenous peoples, including the Tonkawa, the Comanche, the Apache, and the Coahuiltecs, among other native and indigenous peoples, past and present. Some of the stories we tell about the land erase the first caretakers of this land, as well as the people who were enslaved and forcibly brought here to work the land. We honor with gratitude the land itself and recognize the peoples who have stewarded the land throughout the generations.
Introductions

Kerstin Johansson
Cadet Program Coordinator
Park Ranger Education & Outreach
City of Austin Parks & Recreation

Ellyssa Saldivar
Park Ranger
Park Ranger Education & Outreach
City of Austin Parks & Recreation
Introductions

Desarae Ybarra
Peer Mentor
Cadet Class of 2019
Park Ranger Education & Outreach
City of Austin Parks & Recreation

Brandon Contreras
Peer Mentor
Cadet Class of 2019
Park Ranger Education & Outreach
City of Austin Parks & Recreation

Victor Hugo Monzon
Peer Mentor
Cadet Class of 2019
Park Ranger Education & Outreach
City of Austin Parks & Recreation
Natural Connections: Building Bridges…for people who have been historically excluded

- From this APG Education Symposium: “Increasing research points to the power of nature for healthy living and the importance of all ages connecting with the natural world. As educators, we provide transformative experiences that lead to lasting understanding of and connection with nature. Accomplishing these goals requires understanding our various audiences, from “K through Grey,” and what motivates them. Assessing new audiences, trends, and content for new programs helps us better facilitate effective connections with nature.”…..Yes!
  - Racial equity work is essential for us to build these bridges, intersectionality
  - Listening to youth voices as we create our programs, garden spaces, teaching lessons, connect people to nature
- We want to share the racial equity focused work we do and encourage you to see how you can bring a focus to racial equity in your work
Outline of Presentation

• What we mean by equity
• Why we focus on racial equity
• Overview of Cadet Program
• Listen to personal stories with this work
• Call to Action
• Questions
For this conversation we request...

- Listen with an open mind.
- Experience Discomfort: Embrace being uncomfortable, this is where growth happens.
- Expect/Accept Non-closure: Be ok with not having clear answers or solutions at the end of this short conversation. We are having such a short talk about this today!
- All in this together. We are not singling anyone out rather working collectively to improve things for everyone.

Can we all agree to that?
**Equality = SAMENESS**

Equality is about SAMENESS, it promotes fairness and justice by giving everyone the same thing. BUT it can only work IF everyone starts from the SAME place, in this example equality only works if everyone is the same height.

**Equity = FAIRNESS**

EQUITY is about FAIRNESS, it’s about making sure people get access to the same opportunities. Sometimes our differences and/or history, can create barriers to participation, so we must FIRST ensure EQUITY before we can enjoy equality.

[https://medium.com/@CRA1G/the-evolution-of-an-accidental-meme-ddc4e139e0e4](https://medium.com/@CRA1G/the-evolution-of-an-accidental-meme-ddc4e139e0e4)
Why Racial Equity?

- Race is the biggest predictor of life outcomes - housing, employment, education, life expectancy, health
  - Austin: 15 year life expectancy difference between West / East Austin
  - View information for other cities: [https://www.texashealthmaps.com/lfex](https://www.texashealthmaps.com/lfex)
- Vision for racial equity, per the City’s Equity Office: Racial equity will have been achieved when **race is no longer the biggest predictor of life outcomes.**
- The City of Austin recognizes historical and structural disparities and a need for alleviation of these wrongs by critically transforming its institutions and creating a culture of equity. The City recognizes that race is the primary determinant of social equity.
Why Racial Equity in the Outdoors?

- Legacy of colonization and slavery - separated people from the land & each other
  - Land taken from Native & Indigenous peoples, who stewarded the land
  - Black people enslaved and forced to work the land
- Time outdoors in remote areas seen as unsafe (fear of violence)
- Multiple barriers still exist: time, money, know-how, safety, education/lack of education
- Dominant story of who the outdoors is for
Why Racial Equity in the Outdoors?

We work collaboratively with other groups to address racial equity within our outdoor and environmental organizations in order to attract and retain staff, volunteers, and participants who reflect the communities we serve.

“Nothing about us without us is for us.”
Reflect on Your Network

What does your network look like?

• Current diversity of teachers, environmental educators, or docents?
• Current diversity of organizational staff?
• Current diversity of leaders & decisions makers, boards of directors?
• Who do you serve? What do your participants look like? How do they identify?
So then, back to the cadet program!

- The City of Austin recognizes historical and structural disparities and a need for alleviation of these wrongs by critically transforming its institutions and creating a culture of equity. **Racism is real & prevalent.**

- Some years ago, Park Rangers observed lack of diversity on the team.

- Our unit should be representative of the communities we serve.

- They asked, for those have been historically excluded, how can we increase access to our career field?

- The cadet program was formed as an opportunity to gain experience and a pathway to jobs particularly for students of color. **Reduce some of the inequity in our career field.**
Park Ranger Cadet Program
Park Ranger Cadet Mission

We work alongside youth participants to help them move into their power as leaders and environmental stewards in order to collectively create a more sustainable and equitable park system.
What is the Cadet Program?

• Yearlong practicum course with Austin Independent School District at Akins High School
• Paid summer internship
• Peer Mentor leadership model
Curriculum

- Outdoor Safety & Risk Management
- Park Rules & Ranging

PARK RULES

- Full list of Park Rules cityofaustinparks.com
- Read and obey the signs.
- If you are making money, zip lining, or stringing up a hammock or slackline, you need a permit. Contact 512-974-6797.
- No smoking or vaping.
- No motorized vehicles of any kind on trails.
- Bicycles yield to runners and runners yield to walkers.
- No criminal activities.
- Keep your noise in check, parks are peaceful.
- The use of any firearm or projectile device is prohibited.
- Don’t park on the grass.
- All pets required to be on leash, always, unless you are in one of the 12 off-leash parks.
- Barton Creek Greenbelt is not an off-lease area.
- No pets allowed in preserves.
- Pick up after your pet, and don’t set it back down. Leaving your poop bag on the trail is just lazy.
- No metal detecting or digging for gold.
- Don’t build fires outside of grills.
- You can only camp at Emma Long, for a fee. Reserve your space: 512-974-6797.
- Show some respect for the people, plants, and animals that share this land with you.
Curriculum
Environmental Studies & Natural Resource Management
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Natural Resource Management
Curriculum
Outdoor Recreation
Curriculum
Service-Learning & volunteer projects

Habitat Restoration
Tree identification, measurement, & tracking
Air quality monitoring
Wildlife Camera installation, maintenance & data review
Curriculum

- Leadership & Leading Programs
- Cultural Competency, Inclusion & Equity
Curriculum

- Professionalism: College & Career Support
Curriculum

- Enjoying nature! Building that connection
Curriculum: Certifications

• Leave No Trace
• American Red Cross: Adult, Child & Infant First Aid, CPR, & AED
• Texas Parks and Wildlife Angler Education
• USA Archery: Level 1 Archery Instructor Certification
• Project WILD Educator: Association of Fish and Wildlife
• Certified Interpretive Guide from National Association for Interpretation
The Summer Internship

- Cadets apply & interview
- Paid $15.00
- Returning interns serve as team leads
Intern Roles

- Lead recreation programs
- Lead Spanish Class for Rangers
The Summer Internship

- Gain field experience with rangers & explore the parks while educating the public
- Support with conservation projects (native plants, rain garden installation, prescribed burns)
Intern Next Steps Planning

• Paid to continue find next steps for career
• Develop professional skills: computer, communication, workplace relationships
Results & Outcomes of Internship

- Job placements outside our summer internship and outside Peer Mentorship
  - 33% of all cadet students
  - ~50% of all interns have found jobs
  - 3 full time rangers are past cadets (15% of all rangers)
Peer Mentorship

- 2-3 Cadet Interns selected to serve as paid ($15) coordinators and facilitators of the next generation of cadet students in the practicum during the school year
- Positions funded through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy
Being a Peer Mentor

• What are some things you do in this mentor role?
• Why is it important to have Peer Mentors instead of just rangers?
Peer Mentorship: Elevating Youth Voices…and paying them!

• Professional Speaking Opportunities

Peer Mentors Ellyssa & Torii with renowned author and leader in the environmental movement: Richard Louv. Louv is an author and co-founder of the Children & Nature Network. After writing Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, Louv helped spark a national conversation around connecting children, families and communities to nature.
Peer Mentorship: Elevating Youth Voices…and paying them!

- Participate on committees
- Create & carry out individual community projects
- Attend summits, conferences, trainings, workshops
Peer Mentorship

• Strengthen professional network
• Paid to continue find next steps for career
• What are you all currently applying to/working on for your “Next Steps”?
So... Why the cadet program?

- Increase representation of people of color in the outdoors
- Help create a pipeline for young people interested in pursuing a career in the outdoor/environmental field
- Undoing Racism trainings & racial equity discussions help create a shift in our institutions
Our Stories

• Name
• Why you do this work
• Q&A w/cadet program leaders
  • How has participating in the cadet program changed the way you see the outdoors? (Dez, Brandon)
  • How has the cadet program influenced or changed the way you see yourself? (Dez, Brandon)
  • What was it like having conversations about race in the program? Why is racial equity important to you? (Victor, Ellyssa)
Call to Action for Courageous Leadership

- Learn: Attend workshops, read articles, have difficult conversations, experience discomfort, learn about the history of the land you’re on, understand the role that race plays in the work you’re doing
- Gatekeeping: Open doors - always ask who is, is not in the room
- Funding: Racial equity work needs a specific part of the budget
- Hiring & Staff: hire people who come from and/or represent the communities we serve & offer opportunities for growth and advancement
- Create opportunities for young people to be part of the decision making process
- Have professional speaking opportunities for youth
- Pay young people for their time & ideas
# Contact Information

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Contreras</td>
<td></td>
<td>Austin Parks &amp; Recreation Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:brandon.contreras@austintexas.gov">brandon.contreras@austintexas.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desarae Ybarra</td>
<td></td>
<td>Austin Parks &amp; Recreation Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:desarae.ybarra@austintexas.gov">desarae.ybarra@austintexas.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellyssa Saldivar</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
<td>Austin Parks &amp; Recreation Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ellyssa.saldivar@austintexas.gov">ellyssa.saldivar@austintexas.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VictorHugo Monzon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Austin Parks &amp; Recreation Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:victor.monzon@austintexas.gov">victor.monzon@austintexas.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerstin Johansson</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
<td>Austin Parks &amp; Recreation Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Kerstin.johansson@austintexas.gov">Kerstin.johansson@austintexas.gov</a></td>
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## Resources

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<td>City of Austin Equity Office</td>
<td>People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond</td>
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<tr>
<td>CiNCA Recommended Resources</td>
<td>TPWD Community Outdoor Outreach Program Grants</td>
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