

College of Education News

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Georgia Southern University

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At Risk High Schoolers Get a Unique Look at Georgia Southern

April 16, 2014

Riding a zip-line through a remote forested area of Georgia Southern University's campus is not a traditional path to a college education, but for a group of 14 year-old boys it may have been just what they needed.

"Just providing the experience sometimes is enough to open their eyes to life's possibilities," said Assistant Professor Eric Landers, co-director of the College of Education's National Youth-At-Risk Center (NYAR), which sponsored the group. The students, 9th-grade boys from Richmond Hill High School in Richmond Hill, GA, were on campus earlier this month completing the Challenge Course offered by Campus Recreation & Intramurals, touring the campus and enjoying a meal at a dining hall. The students had been identified by school counselors as at-risk, said Assistant Principal Cleave Bivins Miller.

"The ability to combine both the ropes course with the university campus experience was certainly eye opening for all students involved," Miller said. The students began their day on the Challenge Course, encouraging each other on the 40 ft. high pole climb and the pine forest zip line. "Our hope was to encourage the camaraderie amongst peers while involving them in an activity that would promote team building," Miller said.

The NYAR Center, which opened last year, develops, coordinates, and extends further the ongoing efforts of the College of Education to foster the intellectual, social, emotional and physical well-being of youth placed at risk by providing professional development, research support, and resource assistance for educators serving these youth within the geographical service region of Georgia Southern and beyond.

For the Richmond Hill group, their day at Georgia Southern may have been life-changing. "The ability to tour the campus and have lunch in the dining hall allowed our students the opportunity to truly experience the campus life and envision themselves in a similar position less than four years down the road," Miller noted.

Landers concurred. "The students had a wonderful time. They enjoyed the Challenge Course but more importantly they started asking questions about how they could come to Georgia Southern. Some asked about performing arts, ROTC, and even participating in fraternities," he said.

Landers explained that youth-at-risk are not defined by a characteristic like ethnicity, gender or social class. Any youth can be placed at risk depending on the circumstances around them. "Our job is to identify the circumstances that are placing these kids at risk and provide support," he added.

For some at risk students, just having the opportunity to experience a university in this unique way may be enough to spur them on to pursue college.

Miller agrees: "We look forward to the continued partnerships with Dr. Landers and Georgia Southern in offering our students opportunities to learn and reach their potential through activities such as these," he said.



High schoolers went through Southern's Challenge Course before touring the campus.