

Constructing an Arena



Alex B.

A couple of weekends ago, eight other students and I had the incredible opportunity to work on a significant construction project: assembling a cover over the large arena where our equine activities take place. I greatly appreciated this opportunity, and gained empathy for real construction workers. Learning the basics of construction was a priceless opportunity that allowed me a glimpse into the value of a strong work-ethic.

I learned some real-world skills, opening yet another door for a possible job opportunity after graduation. I learned many basics of construction, as well professional leadership skills that can translate to whatever career I choose.



I learned how to use a sledgehammer and a jackhammer, and the hard but rewarding work required to use them. I learned how to work as a team. Most of all, I learned how to work under pressure, and keep a cool head under stress.



I developed a true connection with my peers while putting up the arena. As I struggled with a heavy beam, I flashed a quick glance to one of my friends and two people rushed to help me pin it to the main support. During the breaks, we all laughed and talked about the excitement we shared. It was obvious we all shared the same connection of hard work, excitement, and a rewarding exhaustion at the end of the day:

The food tasted better, the sleep deeper, my life richer and more meaningful. Two weeks

later, I still have a sense of achievement from the work.

Overall, this experience will stay with me past the ranch. The feeling of accomplishment that came along with the hard work was the best I have ever had in my life, and this is by far the largest project I have ever done in my life. Working with Tommy and my peers was a great experience, and the bonding that happened was wonderful. My shared legacy at the ranch will be on display for all for decades to come.



LIFE AT SCHOOL

Banned Novels



Brian W.

Mr. Black's second hour Banned Books class was an in depth study of novels which have been deemed as "unacceptable" or "inappropriate" by organizations, governments, or school districts. Books such as George Orwell's Animal Farm, that have been banned by schools and institutions alike, question the morals and ideas of our society. For this very reason, many books have been banned for reading.

In our class, the first book we read was Lord of the Flies by William Golding. Our class discussion about this book often led toward ethics and human nature due to the themes in the book. The discussion quickly turns into a debate as students exchange key points for their arguments. The class will split into two or three philosophical camps and the discussion will go back and forth. It teaches the students how to express their thoughts and ideas in a way that is not offensive or demeaning to others. Personally, I enjoyed this aspect of the class the most. The debates resembled those of

the political debates between office candidates today except there was more directness and less propaganda.

In essence, this class taught us why freedom of speech and freedom of press are important. If we didn't have either of these, we wouldn't be able to read books that question the ways we live our lives and the way our society functions. Without these types of books, our culture would not progress at all philosophically or morally. We would be stuck in the Stone Age! But luckily, these freedoms are preserved and shared amongst all people in our country. The thing I've taken most from Mr. Black's Banned Books class is that exact point. I'm glad that I have the ability to read these books and especially that I can read them in a classroom setting.



Comparative Religion



Shravan C.

Our Comparative Religion course exposed me to elements of the world's major religions I was previously unaware of. I am better able to form an educated opinion about the diverse religious views around the world.

The class viewed religion holistically, examining the social, cultural, and spiritual components of Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity. By examining the structural philosophy of each worldview, I gained insight into the vibrant, *living* spirituality behind each religion's traditions and mundane practices.

Furthermore, the individual research projects afforded me the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the Ancient Egyptian religion. Through my own exploration, I gained further appreciation of the cultural complexities of religion. My fellow students poured themselves into their own projects, and later

educated the class about their research. As a group, I felt we benefited from these through introductions.

Comparative Religions helped prepare the class for the diverse people and ideas they may encounter in the workforce or higher education. In this global society, it is important to practice tolerance and acceptance. I feel that many of my classmates have grown to be more tolerant of religious views that differ from their own. Perhaps this nurtured world-consciousness will expand our job opportunities as well, providing a foundation for cultural understanding.

Perhaps the most crucial idea garnered in the class was how all religions identify, and seek to answer, a crucial element of the human condition: namely, that of suffering. Despite the aesthetic differences between religions, they all strive to provide room for the individual to grow spiritually, to move beyond the current limitations the ego seeks to employ.

I feel that I can now appreciate the many similarities among religions, instead of focusing on their obvious differences.



Chemistry Lab



Kevin T.

For the past ten weeks, every Thursday, a class of about 12 students has met with our new, wonderful teacher, Mr. Rounds, to do chemistry labs which are necessary to complete the high school chemistry course from the Keystone National High School here at In Balance Ranch Academy.

The layout for the course was four weeks of different labs involving different chemistry topics and then a mid-exam on week five. Each class started out with an hour lecture either by video or from Mr. Rounds on a particular topic for Chemistry. We would then have an hour or so long lab pertaining to that topic whether it would be on the computer or in the classroom..

The topics ranged anywhere from radioactive decay to densities, masses, and volumes. One of our labs was called a virtual lab and was on the computer. It contained a virtual Chemistry workbench with virtual glassware and chemicals to work with. The labs were usually pretty exciting and were quite a joy to be involved in. In my opinion, the class really enjoyed this course and learned a lot from it.

Mr. Rounds has a unique talent and gift to make possibly uninteresting and boring material into a fun and enjoyable experience for all. The labs he created for us were always very exciting and creative which made learning chemistry a great time for us.

My personal opinion is that Mr. Rounds helped me find an interest in, and a passion for, science in a fun, intriguing way. For all you parents out there do not worry because your sons are having a blast learning new things every day.

PPC Weekend



Rob M.

We set out on our Positive Peer Culture weekend as a group of strangers not aware of what PPC was really all about and ended up a knowledgeable fellowship of friends. The group consisted of ten kids from all different milieus who rarely talked to each other. Already on the car ride up jokes were being exchanged and the group became more acquainted. Upon arriving, our fearless leader, Steve, stuck a post-it note on our backs, each with three words that embodied the PPC. These were virtues such as Caring, Spirituality, and Accountability. The tricky part was we had to explain to each member what the words on their backs were,

without using the actual words themselves. Some people decided to work out in the gym while others chose to go on a 4 hour hot tub marathon. Sensei Steve brought back Papa John's pizza. What a delicious treat! We would gather around the campfire later to discuss our goals and ambitions for the weekend and sleep well because the next day would be demanding. Starting at 10 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m. the group began to learn about the concept of the PPC and how to apply it. As time went on, the group realized the true nature of the PPC. The PPC is all about the community taking care of each other and empowering the youth through giving them the responsibility to look after their fellow mates. We learned how to properly redirect students and how to help the struggling members. More importantly we learned this was a group of kids who really care about each other and were willing to bring the PPC back to the community. After a day of mental struggles the group headed out to a night of bowling and concluded their weekend. We arrived back at the campus as friends.



The Half-Marathon Experience



Ben F.

I had never run in a half-marathon before, but I was ecstatic about trying the experience for the first time on December 14th in the Oro Valley region of Tucson. The day began with a slow rise out of bed at three o'clock in the morning. The team and I had exactly half an hour to eat a protein-rich breakfast before we hit the road, so it wasn't a surprise to find our team captain Ryan McMahon already in the kitchen scrambling up eggs for all of us.

Fellow students and I packed into the fan as we darted off for Tucson. We were to meet In Balance therapist/avid runner Ugo Uche at the starting line before the race started. I was looking forward to experiencing the fruit of our training. After registration and getting shuttled over to the beginning of the starting line, we and the thousands of other people were counting down the minutes until the race was to begin, and all of a sudden we were off!

I was running alongside Seth for the first seven mile long stretch of road that extended towards the mountains, but once it began sloping uphill I simply couldn't keep up with him at his pace. After I picked more speed back up, the course

had left us into a bit of a commercial region of the road and eventually further uphill into a quiet, suburban sprawl. At this point we were thirteen miles deep, with only one-tenth of a mile to go. (Half marathons are 13.1 miles long.) My calves were metaphorically screaming bloody murder and my eyes were stinging from the constant flow of sweat streaming from my eyebrows, but I could hear the loud cheering from the crowd formed around the finish line and used the motivation to wipe out the final stretch.

I finished the race and enjoyed the free food and drinks, feeling as proud of myself as when I graduated from my wilderness program. I'm sure the others felt the same. My time was two hours and twenty-two minutes, which isn't that good at all, but that's not what mattered to me. What mattered to me more than anything was the fact that I had accomplished something the likes of which I never could have seen myself accomplishing before I went into treatment. For once in my life, I actually set a goal for myself, worked towards it and invested everything I had in it, and achieved it with honor. Who cares if the medal I won was bronze? At least I earned it for myself through the powers of willingness and determination.

The Legacy Wall



When you enter the new school building, one of the first things you notice is a collection of plaques honoring some of our extraordinary program graduates. To grace this wall is no light achievement, and the beaming smiles emanating from the faces of the individuals on the plaques invite all who see them to reach deep within themselves and make a greater impact.

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, than you are a leader.”

Appropriately summing up the essence of the wall’s members, the quote reflects the character of the Legacy Wall’s inductees. It is a requirement that every candidate gives back to their community and influence it towards positive change.

Recently, new members were added to the display, and one shares his thoughts about the honor:

The Legacy award was given to me a couple of weeks ago and words cannot appropriately convey my gratitude for In Balance. During the past few weeks, I have been reminiscent of the

past and how my life was before I came to the ranch: in shambles, on the wrong path. In fact, there was no path to speak of—I was lost.

All of that has changed. I recently celebrated 3 years of sobriety. If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t be standing here today. There is nothing I would change in my life today.

The legacy award unearthed a current of strong feelings, but that current both started and ended with gratitude.

Three years ago, even thinking about being happy seemed impossible. Sure enough, it happened along with every other miracle I have today.

--Norman

One other inductee to the wall no longer graces us with his physical presence, but his spirit strongly lives at the ranch. Appropriately hanging above the younger members, his placement on the wall is almost symbolic to the leadership and guidance given to young men. Skip dedicated his life to sharing the priceless gift of sobriety to countless people during his years on this Earth.

I think his favorite quote sums it up best:

“The longest journey a man must make is the eighteen inches from his head to his heart”

Alumni Reunion



This year's Alumni Weekend was the best yet. The size of the trip has tripled since last year, a testament to the outstanding work that everyone at In Balance Ranch does, allowing for permanent sobriety, freedom, and an overall change in lifestyle for the young men that we work with each and every day. We truly are saving lives on a daily basis. Eighteen of our alumni made the trip this year, each and every one of them attributing their success to the teachings of In Balance Ranch. Some of the alumni shared their stories, before, during, and after In Balance Ranch Academy to the current community. One thing was made clear, recovery does not guarantee that life will be perfect, but it does guarantee that the tools we have to deal with life are perfect.

Clear and sunny skies both days on the mountain allowed for some great skiing and snowboarding. The conditions could not have been better. A 12-step meeting was run, going to a deep, gut-level place that only recovering addicts dare go in order to continue healing. Bowling, nerf-gun wars, movies, and good food all helped contribute to a really special weekend. We are privileged to work with some remarkable young men, even more privileged to help shape who they will become. Though they sometimes complain during the process of being challenged, they thank us later.