

# OFF THE GRID:

## THE WILDERNESS TRIP CELEBRATES ITS 41ST YEAR



This year marks the 41st anniversary of the Wilderness Trip and associated class, an experience many students and alumni hold near and dear to their hearts. When Dr. Steve Kramer, semi-retired professor of psychology, first developed the trip in 1976, it focused heavily on how groups function within specific contexts and how students could apply the real-life experiences they encounter to their work in the classroom. Most importantly, Kramer wanted to provide his students with situations that would challenge them.

“I think we all need ‘stretching’ experiences, things that take us out of our comfort zones,” he explained. “These experiences challenge us and strengthen our courage in ways that simply reading and discussing these ideas cannot.”

The trip always takes place in early to mid-August so that students can apply what they learned on the trip to their work in the classroom during the fall semester. Before the trip, they meet on Mount’s campus to engage in a variety of team-building activities. Students learn to rock climb, master a ropes course, and perform other group exercises that are designed to develop connections and get them working together effectively before they ever leave Ohio.

The 10-day trip in the Adirondack Mountains primarily consists of hiking, but also incorporates rock climbing, swimming, canoeing, and service projects. Students work with park rangers to repair trails, bridges, dams, and outhouses.

Amy (Hutchman ’89) Miller, who majored in biology, has experienced the trip as a student and an alumni group leader. She minored in education and is now teaching at Alliance High School.

“Through the Wilderness Trip and Steve Kramer, I learned life is not about the busy-ness, but rather, the quietness,” Miller said. “Only when you strip away the distractions of life can you listen to your inner self, reflect, and learn.”

Since Kramer’s partial retirement in 2009, Dr. Paul Tidman, professor of philosophy and religious studies at Mount Union, has taken over the course and trip. As a result, the focus of both the class and trip have shifted from group dynamics to environmental ethics.

“Studying environmental ethics is about looking beyond human beings and focusing on our obligations to the other living beings with which we share the planet,” he said.

Tidman stresses the importance of the preservation and ethical treatment of the natural world and encourages his students to notice the effects that climate change has had on the environments in which they travel. At the end of his course, students write an essay that pulls together their real-life experiences and the theory they study in the classroom.

Tidman’s first trip with students in 2010 included just a handful of individuals. Now, the program gets more applicants than Tidman can take.

“Many students, when the trip is over, tell me that it has been the best thing they’ve ever done, not only at Mount, but in their lives,” Tidman said. “It’s very rewarding to be a part of that.”

As the Wilderness Trip enters another decade, it remains as popular as ever. Kramer hopes that the experience will continue to inspire students and alumni alike. With the level of interest it continues to garner on campus and beyond, the tradition of the trip should be able to continue far into the future. ■

