Name of applicant: Luis Angel Ramirez Date: March 15, 2019

Graduation Year: 2021

Major: Environmental Studies, Anthropology ( w/ Spanish minor)

Research Advisor: Suellyn Henke Advisor’s Department: Education

Title of Project: Leadership Development with an Environmental Perspective

Through the summer of 2019, I got the opportunity to implement my FURSCA research project Leadership Development with an Environmental Perspective into an already existing program called Teenagers Exploring Nature (T.E.N.) Program the Whitehouse Nature Center (WNC). As part of my research, the goals set for my program were to promote environmental awareness and youth leadership and positively facilitate discussions, activities, and trainings in order to build an inclusive and supportive community.

In order for me to track the group’s understanding and growth, I developed an entrance and exit questionnaire to see the change, if any, in the group’s environmental awareness and community building understanding prior and after the program in order to design the curriculum and review the data once the program concluded. Before starting the program, I had to develop and submit all Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms needed to conduct research on human subjects and also go through a background check and the Protecting Children on Campus: Preventing Sexual Abuse Training since I was working with minors. This process positively affected my understanding and accountability to the participants to ensure the creation of a safe and inclusive program.

The data generated through the questionnaires was only from 8 surveys out of 22 participants. Because of challenges like consent-forms submissions and participant continuity, I had to disregard certain surveys and also not implement an exit questionnaire since certain participants did not consistently attend the sessions. From the results, when asked about prior experience and awareness of summer programs and also knowledge of the WNC: 4 participants never participated in a summer program (50%) and 3 participants never visited the WNC (38%). When asking about the participant’s experience with environmental action and/or participation:7 have experience participating in school, 6 participated in their community, and 8 participated at home or do individual action. In addition to the questionnaires, I maintained a reflective journal for the purpose of expanding ideas outside of the program to reflect on my personal experience in the classroom and as the facilitator. Based on the results of the questions and reflection of the program, the participants were able to examine different perspectives, accept the differences, and successfully conclude every session together.

The reason behind my interest to continue the program for its fourth consecutive summer was my personal passion to teach and facilitate environmental discussions and trainings. Being an active environmental organizer, I recognized the importance continuing the legacy of Teenagers Exploring Nature and Albion’s mission of inclusivity. I had the privilege to work with community partners in recruiting teens for the program but also the chance to further my relation through other opportunities like facilitating environmental activities at the Albion Recreational Center program-Peapods, which was a group of about 30 children ranging from ages 5-10.

This program has taught me that summer programs in communities like Albion are essential for youth groups to further their understanding of leadership and ability to find opportunities where both college and community can work together to empower and encourage each other to be more inclusive and aware of unjust systems and alternatives to solve those disparities. I plan to continue this relationship throughout my remaining years of college and also facilitate the T.E.N Program for the summer of 2020. I would also like to present at the annual Elkin Isaac Research Symposium Presentation.

The Teenagers Exploring Nature Program has a long history, but the program would not reach its potential without the constant support of local leaders and organizations that ensure that participants will be provided with a meal at every session, have materials needed for it to run efficiently, and for facilitators to be welcomed and feel at home when staying through the summer. Support and grants from The Albion Community Foundation have assure the continuity of the program and the goal to keep it complimentary to all participants and volunteers. I want to acknowledge the Whitehouse Nature Center interim co-directors Jason Raddatz and Ellen Wilch for ensuring that all programs continued for the summer and for giving me access to two more mentors that pushed me and remind me that my identity as an environmentalist and educator is a life journey. The program would not have been possible without my academic and research advisor Dr. Suellyn Henke for all her support and commitment to ensure that I felt comfortable throughout the summer and also for holding me accountable to the mission and legacy of the program in relation to the college and community. As a dreamer, I value my education and I recognized the glass ceiling I am unable to surpass for carrying that identity, but I also believe in accountability from institutions that value diversity and the efforts to retain such vibrant and empowered communities. The FURSCA department’s support and guidance was essential for my research. In addition, The Board of Trustees’ donation and support and Albion College’s commitment to inclusivity gave me the opportunity to do research as an undergraduate and also be compensated for doing so.