

Ropes and Challenge Course

Part 1: Overview

We are very excited to submit this proposal for a Ropes and Challenge Course, as we believe there is a lot a Challenge Course has to offer UMBC. There is always a lot of energy surrounding the idea and concepts of activities that occur through participation of Challenge Courses and also the benefits that come with them. We would like to utilize the area just north of Harbor Hall (across the loop) and east of the dam for an increased recreational area with the construction and implementation of a Ropes and Challenge Course. These courses are well known for team-building and leadership training for people of all ages, and could benefit the UMBC community in many ways. Students, faculty/staff, scholars, commuters, and many more populations would be able to go through a very beneficial experiential learning experience.

Part 2: Benefit to UMBC

“Experiential learning, such as a ropes course, can increase a college student’s ability to solve problems in a socially acceptable manner, build and teach a person how to appropriately trust others, empower a person about the skills necessary to be a part of a healthy community, and increase a college student’s interpersonal skills, social skills, and physical abilities” (Sottile, 10). The above quote was taken from a research project conducted in the late 1990’s (see attached) on experiential learning and the use of challenge courses to enhance the college experience.

With the design and implementation, new and returning students alike could have the opportunity to take advantage of this amazing resource to build peer relationships in and outside the classroom. There has also been information relating higher retention rates to increased positive peer relationships, as it encourages students to remain around each other, because their relationships were built on demanding needs for trust, communication, and problem solving skills to support each other through challenging tasks.

There can also be benefit to the faculty, staff, and administration of the university. Studies have shown that staffs that go through experiential learning continue work, but with improved work ethics and higher group performances when tasks required collaboration and increased cross communication. Even for administration, it has been shown that experiential learning can help lift spirits and reconnect with the students they help lead every day.

Finally, after experiencing success, the Challenge Course could become a potential revenue source and opened up for use by the greater Baltimore area and businesses and organizations that seek such experiential learning to enhance their own success. This could become a way of saving money as well for many offices, as several of them go off campus for retreats just for a ropes/challenge course. Having a challenge course on campus would greatly reduce the costs of offices wanting to have that experiential learning for their students and/or staff.

Part 3: Implementation Plan

In December 2007, Sandy Parker, Chairman of Geography and Environmental Systems and also member of the CERA steering committee was approached regarding the use of CERA as a prime location for a challenge course. Mr. Parker stated he was supportive of the idea and is also supportive of protecting the integrity of the environment for UMBC and its surrounding communities

After discussing with Joe Rexing about the use of resources from planning and construction, and also land, he supported the idea, as it could improve certain aspects of this campus, physically, and also the atmosphere.

For implementation of this process, upon receiving notification of the Challenge Course winning the imProve It campaign, there will need to be a few phases to go through before construction starts.

Phase one should consist of several members of the UMBC community, faculty and students alike. Faculty should come from areas of Student Life (Erin Hundley, Corin Gioia, Nick Lennon), Residential Life (Kim Leisey, David Clurman), Athletics, and various administrative offices to help support a vision through consultation from companies that specialize in Challenge Course Technology. Students should be residents, transfers, commuters, athletes, and anyone else who would be interested in creating a platform from presentations of the companies. There are 3 companies (The Adventure Network – Chalfont PA, EdVenture Builders – Bloomsburg PA, and Griffin Adventures – Boonsboro MD) in the Mid-Atlantic region that are approved and certified vendors endorsed by the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT), all who could attend meetings for planning a challenge course suitable for the needs of UMBC.

Phase two, after the choice of the company that has the best products to offer for UMBC's new challenge course, would consist of specialized meetings with people, such as Joe Rexing (Campus Planning and Architecture), the campus Landscape and Stewardship Committee, Julian Simpson (Facilities Management), Mary Rivkin (Director of Education), Patricia La Noue (Interdisciplinary Studies), Dr. Nick Lennon (Asst. Director for Leadership), Lee Calizo (Acting Director, Student Life), Nancy Young (Interim Vice President of Student Affairs), Kim Leisey (Director of Residential Life) and Valerie Thomas (AVP – Human Resources) – all who will help guide creation and construction of the challenge course, as it will be able to benefit all of these areas in terms students and the staff at UMBC. Student Leaders, who have been involved with experiential learning, such as SGA

members, Leadershape alumni, Greek Organization leaders, members of the Residential Life Paraprofessional Staff, should be able to work with group of faculty and staff mentioned above to work together to make the right choices for what tasks or challenges should be chosen to create the best experiential learning experience anyone could get.

Phase three will consist of two parts. The committee from phase two will be split in half, and each half will have a new task. The first new task would be to develop a curriculum and/or programs to go along with the course and tasks that have been chosen for construction. They should focus on tasks that can mentally and sometimes physically challenge individuals and groups as a whole, which help encourage the best experiential learning – geared towards students and faculty/staff. The second half will be responsible for the oversight and support of the construction that takes place for the chosen challenge course project.

Phase four will consist of recruiting facilitators. Starting out, this will need to be a volunteer position, as there will be no 'seed' money to start paying people to work. Dr. Nick Lennon and his leadership consultants (LC's) have stated that they can be the first group to be trained to facilitate

the challenge course. Other students should be recruited as well.

Those who are not extremely involved, but have shown leadership in certain areas, are somewhat extroverted, and interested and willing to learn about group facilitation and communication skills and encourage groups to continue through challenging tasks would be the best candidates. This should be advertised through student announcements, certain listprocs, and also through The Retriever Weekly.

Phase five will consist of the making of long term decisions. The committee from phase two will need to re-convene to discuss which office this should ultimately fall under for control and management. The Office of Student Life may be the best umbrella for this challenge course, as they have the resources to connect with all students and advertise such an opportunity to the student body at UMBC. Orientation works closely with student life programming, and having OSL in control would also help to bring faculty/administration and students closer together in a better relationship for a more overall positive atmosphere at the university due to that connection. Once the umbrella office is chosen, the committee needs to discuss options of having the challenge course become a revenue source for the university and how the money would be appropriated. A percentage of the money should go directly back to the Office of Student Life, SGA, and/or SEB for more money to continue to put on stellar programming for the student body. The other part of the money should be put away, and when enough has been saved, there should be paid positions for facilitators, to encourage a greater applicant pool from students who are interested and qualified to facilitate the new challenge course. In order to create that revenue source, the committee will need to create reasonable and competitive rates for student organizations, faculty/staff, and university offices to be able to afford and still benefit from the positive aspects of a challenge course. The last part of this phase will consist of the committee discussing with Commons Administration on how to incorporate the Challenge Course into campus scheduling and the R25 calendar system. This could be a challenge in itself, as it would need to be only available according to the facilitator's class schedules and when they are available, but the challenge course should have a constant offering of times from week to week.

Phase six will also be a two part phase – one consisting of training of the facilitators and the other will consist of the University Counsel Office developing a liability form and possible waiver for all participants who use the challenge course. The training is a service provided through the company chosen to design and construct the challenge course. The training is also certified through the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT). David Gleason and the University Counsel Staff will also need to work together with the company chosen to help develop

the best liability policies for the new challenge course. This will need to be in place before it used by anyone.

Phase four, five, and six can all take place during the construction, unless otherwise noted by the design company and whether they can train while constructing the challenge course.

Phase seven will consist of the Landscape Stewardship Committee discussing how to keep the access to the challenge course restricted and contained within a perimeter pleasing to the eye, and also able to keep out unwanted visitors they may happen to wander in and choose to possibly destroy any property (people and animals alike).

Part 4: Timeline

March 2008 (pre-phase one): Prove It! Winner announced.

April 2008 (phase one): Members of committee are determined, informed, and gathered for first meeting to review proposals and options from companies regarding challenge course design.

May 2008 (phase one): Committee has chosen which options and company to use for the design and construction of the new challenge course.

June – August 2008 (phase two, three & five): Phases two, three, and five will take precedence, and the only way these can occur in the 3 month time frame is if everything is completed in a timely manner, and time is used to the fullest advantage, as over the summer, things are not as busy for many of the offices and people listed to be in the committee. If more time is needed to complete the phases involving curriculum and program design, as well as appropriation of money, that can be given.

September – November 2008 (phase four): Recruitment for facilitators with the use of heavy advertising.

December – January 2008 (phase six & seven): Training of newly recruited facilitators and also the incorporation of scheduling with the challenge course, with consideration taken to the facilitator's class schedules for time availability. Also, Phase six and seven will need to take place, if phase six has not really started on its own already.

February 2009 – Grand opening for the Spring semester

Part 5: Budget

Advertising (TRW)	\$600
Challenge Course Company Fees	\$~30,000
Training	\$~5,000
***Done by the same company that designed and constructed the Challenge Course)	
Grand Opening	\$2000
T-shirts	\$1000
Total Estimated Cost	\$38,600

***The fees associated with the company for construction and training are all rough estimates. Calls have been made, and quotes with line item estimations have been requested – but will differ with what choices the design committee chooses when creating the Challenge Course after the proposal meetings with each company.

Part 6: Letters of Support

Dr. Nancy Young – Interim Vice President of Student Affairs

Lee Calizo – Acting Director of Student Life

Dr. Kim Leisey – Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs, Director of Residential Life

Joe Regier – Director, the Commons

Mary Rivkin – Chair, Education

Rebekah Porter – Assistant Director, Undergraduate Admissions and Orientation

Valerie Thomas – Assistant Vice President for Administration, Director of Human Resources

Dr. Eugene S. Parker - Chair, Geography and Environmental Systems

Joe Rexing – Director, Office of Planning and Architecture

Patricia La Noue – Chair, Interdisciplinary Studies

Dr. Nick Lennon – Assistant Director of Student Life for Leadership

Corin Gioia – Greek Coordinator

Chris Tkacik – University Counsel