



# Student Affairs Update

## TAKING LEARNING OUTDOORS

An enriching component of student learning is personal development and group dynamics in non-traditional learning environments. The Department of Recreational Sports is committed to enhancing student engagement and learning through experiential recreational programs and activities that go beyond the classroom. The Challenge Course with Alpine Tower at Lake Wauburg is an example of an experiential learning program that has positively impacted students.

### Challenge Course with Alpine Tower

The Challenge Course at Lake Wauburg is an outdoor personal development and team building activity that consists of low elements and an Alpine Climbing Tower. Low elements take place on, or a few feet above, the ground. The Alpine Climbing Tower is constructed of utility poles and requires a belay for safety.



In the fall of 1999, Student Government allocated \$250,000 for the construction of the 40-foot Alpine Tower and Low Challenge Course. These projects were completed May 2001, and the 50-foot Climbing Wall was added November 2001. Spring 2007, two new elements to the Low Challenge Course, The Whale Watch and The Zig Zag, were added to provide groups alternative and diverse challenges. Participation in these activities has grown to 1,279 in 2006-2007.

### Services Offered

The Challenge Course is designed for student groups of 12 or more who would like a unique approach to building group communication skills and group cohesion. Reservation policies and contact information is available on line: [www.recsports.ufl.edu/ropes\\_policies.aspx](http://www.recsports.ufl.edu/ropes_policies.aspx)

Challenge Course Participants 2003 - 2007	
2006 - 2007 .....	1,279
2005 - 2006 .....	692
2004 - 2005 .....	709
2003 - 2004 .....	958

After a reservation has been made, group leaders meet with a Recreational Sports Department Challenge Course Representative prior to participation to develop a unique curriculum designed specifically to the needs of the group. This collaboration ensures that both the chosen activities and the sequencing of events best fit the dynamics of the group and the desired group experience.



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*The Challenge Course was a lot of fun to do -- the encouragement, teamwork, and cooperation. It encouraged us to think as a group.*

*Sigma Lambda Beta Participant*

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\*This publication is available in alternative print format upon request.



The Low Challenge Course is used for exploring team building principles. Participants are able to identify and practice team building skills such as listening, leadership, planning, and communication while embarking on an adventurous and challenging mission. The action and learnings that occur represent some of the most intriguing group dynamics. The “ah ha” moments are plentiful.

The Alpine Tower is the ideal setting for fostering team building, communication, and self-esteem. This is a great way for individuals to challenge themselves within their group. Not only do participants have to work on trusting themselves to rise to the occasion, but they need to put trust

in their group members who are their safety supporters. This element is designed to address the various levels of participant comfort within a group, and there is a role for everyone in the group. The Alpine Tower not only challenges the novice but provides routes with alternative dynamics for those with minimal fear of heights who would like to challenge themselves in unconventional ways.

## Benefits to Students

The benefits of participating in the Challenge Course are endless from personal growth to group development and beyond. Many students share two of the greatest benefits: getting to know one another beyond the surface and interacting with each other. Common personal benefits include identifying the roles a participant takes in a group, behavior tendencies, commonalities shared with others, recognizing personal strengths, acknowledging personal areas to grow and more. Common group development themes include getting to know one another, building cohesion, working together to problem solve, building trust and collaboration, and recognizing group strengths. One of the great benefits to the Challenge Course is that it serves as a model of how to have fun while working together.

## Looking Ahead

To enhance the services offered to students and provide more opportunities for students to get involved, the Department of Recreational Sports is planning to expand the Challenge Course offerings through the addition of low course elements and adding a high ropes component. Recreational Sports also offers indoor challenge course programming and mobile activities at off-site locations.

