

Greetings from snowy, beautiful White Sulphur Springs!

We are celebrating the 75th Anniversary of Officer's Christian Fellowship!



EXSEL at the 2019 March for Life in Washington, DC

Thank you for your prayers and interest in the well-being of our EXSEL interns, who work hard to help make WSS such an amazing place! It is a privilege for all of us here to serve those who have served our country and to be a blessing to those who defend and keep America strong. Indeed, none of our guests, military or civilian, could experience their much-needed rest and recreation in this beautiful place if not for the willingness, hard work, enthusiasm, and energy of our dedicated EXSEL interns. Our prayer is that the words of Jesus will prove true to each intern: "Give, and it shall be given to you..." (Luke 6:38).

Since life here at The Springs was so busy during our Winter Retreats with new students on board for Winter Staff and with serving many guests back-to-back through Christmas and New Year's, we are just now catching up with our communication to you about the many exciting things happening here.

Discipleship here at WSS is not just a "program"; it is part of our core identity as a ministry.

Using EXSEL's acronym (Experience, Serve, Lead) let's unpack some of the ways these things are happening here:



Experience:

- Morning devotions to start our day in the right frame of mind
- Weekly apologetics and biblical worldview studies to grow in confidence in the trustworthiness of the Lord and His Holy Scripture. Our faith is not built on shifting sand but on the rock-solid reliability of Truth as expressed in God's revealed and written Word.
- Living and working with others in close community
- Living apart from the familiar comforts of home with parents and siblings
- Balancing recreation, responsibility, and rest
- Both giving and receiving grace, admonition, encouragement, and assistance
- Taking responsibility for the care, cleaning and maintenance of a shared residence
- Discovering that old "scripts" for acting and reacting are not always adequate
- Gratitude increases joy
- Genuine godly love is what makes one mature (See 1 Cor 13: 11 in context)
- Learning contingency operations and gaining confidence in new skills
- Conversing with older brothers and sisters in Christ for godly advice and mature perspective on many life issues through our mentor program. We are so grateful to the Ministry Team members for being such a blessing to each intern in this way. The Tuesday night Ministry Team home dinners are another valuable opportunity for these interactions.

This semester we are so thankful to have Mr. David Spoede, a retired lawyer and dedicated Christian, teaching the afternoon portion of class on Tuesdays using Lee Stroebel's *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for a Creator*. David is an excellent communicator and discussion leader. During the morning portion of class, we are going through *The Truth Project* with Dr. Del Tackett. Every day we are reading a specific chapter of the Bible; every week we are memorizing Bible verses related to the apologetics and worldview studies.

These diverse and important experiences would be a challenge to re-create anywhere else. Include in this a home-like apartment or dormitory (utilities included), a responsive and caring landlord, beautiful surroundings, 24/7 coffee and tea service, access to a workout room, and personal mentors. Being so busy and having limited free time presses home the lessons of good time-management. The discipleship and oversight aspect of EXSEL limits exposure to some of the typical and too-often self-destructive choices more often associated with being away at your first year of college or single life away from home in the labor market – unrestricted entertainment, parties, neglecting responsibilities, all-nighters, etc. Rather, the choices here at WSS typically include choosing between what is good, what is better, and what is best. An EXSEL Intern or Fellow will be exhausted from hard work, but by God's grace, is not likely to be exhausted due to irresponsible conduct.

Serve:

- Building a footbridge, digitally mapping the WSS trails, clearing paths, and creating Bible verse plaques for trail maintenance and beautification
- Making reservations for guests, skillfully answering questions guests have about WSS, completing purchasing transactions, and assisting retreat groups with audio-visual assistance
- Keeping WSS clean, neat, safe, and retreat-ready
- Making WSS fun for others just because of who they are with all their joyful enthusiasm and energy

Lead:

- Taking turns leading the morning devotions
- Leading worship in song
- Taking turns leading the weekly OCF community Bible studies
- As the semester progresses, we pray their confidence and capacity for leadership will soar!
- When summer comes and we see an influx of new college-aged young people coming to serve, hopefully it will be the EXSEL interns who shine as the leaders since they will know how things are done properly around here! That will be a fun time meeting new friends and serving side-by-side with them in this exciting ministry!

We are grateful to be part of OCF, serving alongside the White Sulphur Springs Ministry Team and EXSEL gang!

In Christ's Love,

Jim and Claudia Marrs

