



Pacific Leadership Institute

Challenge Course • Team Events • Leadership Training • FamCamp • Youth Lead!

History and Background

May 2006

The Pacific Leadership Institute (PLI) is an umbrella organization for five community programs promoting learn-by-doing experiences and training opportunities using (1) challenge, (2) the outdoors, and (3) play as teaching tools for self-esteem, team-work, leadership, and life skills. Housed within the San Francisco State University (SFSU) Recreation and Leisure Studies (RLS) Department, the PLI is administered as a special project of the SFSU Foundation, Incorporated which has a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit status. The PLI has grown and developed from a merger between two leadership-based programs occurring under the RLS department, Ft. Miley Adventure Ropes Course, and TRUE (Training Resources for Recreation in Urban Environments). These unique programs were developed by numerous people in the early years and went through a series of transitions to become what the PLI is today.

Fort Miley and TRUE ~ The Early Years

Fort Miley is located on public lands managed by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Fort Miley adventure ropes course was established in 1980 by a number of leaders of Bay Area outdoor recreation organizations to provide adventure programs for inner-city youth. Jim Brenner, 4-H Youth Development Program (4-H YDP) Coordinator with the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) and Wayne MacDonald, Director/Instructor for the Urban Pioneer program at McAteer High School were two of the main forces behind the development and building of this ropes course. In fact, much of the original ropes course was built by inner-city youth enrolled in these two programs. There were numerous individuals and groups involved in the initial planning, construction and first leader training session for Ft. Miley. This collection includes, but is not limited to, groups like Camp Fire USA, San Francisco Unified School District's Urban Pioneer Program, Sierra Club's Inner City Outings, and Adventure Games. The GGNRA provided some of the funding for initial construction through an "urban initiative grant".

Dr. Don Taylor, an Assistant Professor in the RLS department at that time and who became Department Chair in 1995, was in the first group of leaders trained to facilitate on the ropes course. He started bringing SFSU classes out to the ropes course in 1980, beginning a long tradition and valued relationship between SFSU and Ft. Miley. Diane Nichols and Keith Miller, SFSU Recreation and Leisure Studies Students, were the first two Directors of "The Urban Outdoor Adventure Center" which was the non-profit organization charged with managing this fledgling association of adventure enthusiasts. This status lasted four or five years; the program then became a 4-H project sponsored by the UCCE 4-H YDP in San Francisco. All the leaders received 4-H leader pins and the insurance was covered by UCCE. The Ft. Miley ropes course activities, including leader training and maintenance, were managed by a volunteer steering committee under the guidance of UCCE 4-H YDP academics. Dr. Taylor was a member of this steering committee for several years. In the mid-1990s, UCCE released the project from their insurance and the Fort Miley ropes course came to SFSU where management and leadership moved under the RLS department.

The Training Resources for Recreation in Urban Environments was established in 1991-'92 by Jim Murphy, RLS Department Chair. (The acronym of "TRUE" omits the second "R" to keep this simple and concise). TRUE originated as a concept paper to develop leadership training that evolved into a proposal to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in response to a Request for Proposals for program opportunities at the Presidio. This RFP process had no further action by GGNRA, hence rather than allow this great idea to slip away, Jim brought the project to life directly within the department of RLS at SFSU and Ginny Jaquith, RLS faculty, became its first project director.

Enter FamCamp

In providing a brief overview of FamCamp (i.e., family camping) this is one of the current partner programs within the PLI. This admirable program is the innovation of the California Department of Parks and Recreation and began in 1994. It is a statewide program that introduces camping and the natural and cultural resources of parks to diverse, low-income communities. Ginny Jaquith, RLS faculty and former department chair worked closely with former directors of the CSP Office of Community Involvement, Carol Nelson and Jack Shu to also develop a new curriculum ("Community Policing") designed to train community leaders to lead FamCamp experiences. Drew McAdams, PLI's current director, was an intern with CA State Parks at this time and assisted with development of the FamCamp project.

In 1999, Jane Sedonan, former RLS graduate student, was hired as the director and she served in this position for 2-3 years. As part of the program offerings incorporated into TRUE are "Cornerstone" and "Game Builders". These were created by two RLS undergraduate students. Both of these program entities are mobile initiative-type programs consisting of a variety of training programs designed for community-based recreation organizations. The FamCamp curriculum, previously mentioned, was placed under the auspice of TRUE where the primary role for staff was to conduct the training for the Community Policing program led by Ginny, Carol and Jack. Hence, primary projects of TRUE were Cornerstone, Game Builders, FamCamp, and leadership development training.

Recreation & Leisure Studies Department Takes the Reigns

Fort Miley was eventually in need of a new director and a new home. Laura Plaut was hired as this director to provide strategic path in managing the transition of Fort Miley from an independent program following its administration under the 4-H to an RLS program at SFSU. Kim D'Arcy (SFSU Counseling student) was instrumental in assisting with the transition and continued on to help smooth things out after the initial transition. Kim then took the helm as director and continued to manage the program for a brief time to assist with stabilization.

Ft. Miley and TRUE, now both within the department of RLS, were initially two separate and independent programs with their own directors. Steve Siskin, former RLS undergraduate student, then became the next director of the Ft. Miley Ropes Course and, again Ginny directed TRUE followed by Jane. Steve played a significant leadership role in establishing the programs at Ft. Miley and solidified the internal management structure once transferred to RLS. A grant was received by the Stulstaff Foundation to rebuild the ropes course to meet industry standards of the newly formed Association for Challenge Course Technology (this organization was established by opportunities built by professional members of the Association for Experiential Education).

Ginny provided direct oversight for both of these programs as Project Director under Don Taylor, then department Chair. Each independent program also had its own advisory group. The Ft. Miley steering committee was activated early on in the life of the program and consisted of team leaders and volunteers at the course. TRUE developed an advisory board when it was first created around 1990 (lasting approximately eight years) was composed of a variety of community-based parks and recreation organizations and government agencies.

Let the Merger Begin

Ezra Holland, former RLS student and current lecturer, started at Fort Miley in 1992 as an undergraduate student and volunteer and later became Director, after Steve, from 2000 to 2004. When Ezra began to provide new structure for management and leadership, he worked closely with Ginny and Marcela Arregui-Reyes. Marcela, also a former RLS graduate student who took the lead position as director of TRUE after Jane moved on. Dr. Jaquith became department Chair following Don's term in this position in 2000. Ginny, remained on as Project Director for these two separate programs and brought the staff together to understand the scope of programs and to explore effective ways of working together under one umbrella organization. The collective efforts of this team visualized and imagined several ideas for a new name. This title for the new entity of collective programs was eventually coined by Ezra as *The Pacific Leadership Institute (PLI)* and was agreed upon by the leadership team. In 2000, the programs merged and this name change was approved by the RLS department as this program title more accurately reflected the scope of activity being conducted and the PLI became the “parent” organization for all programs as an aggregate.

The PLI programs were expanded to a medley of program offerings to five domains: Fort Miley Adventure Challenge Course; Mobile Team-Building Events; Workshops and Training Series; FamCamp® Camping Trips, and Youth Development (today called *Youth Lead!* the leadership initiative for teenagers). During this first year of the newly designed PLI in 2000, approximately 1,800 people were served and the annual operating budget was nearly \$95,000.

The later years to present day PLI

Drew McAdams, current director and RLS alumni, first got involved with the PLI in 1993. Drew was initially engaged through the volunteer training program and stayed connected in varying capacities for the next five years. Drew graduated from the RLS Department in 1996 as an undergraduate. In one of his classes, REC 550 (Planning and Evaluation of Recreation and Leisure Services) a group project was one of his assignments. This Master Plan Project for the course was the idea that Fort Miley should become a project of SFSU. Drew then became the Program Coordinator for the ropes course in 2001 and began working closely with Ezra and Dr. Jim Murphy who became department Chair once again. Moreover, Ezra spent a significant amount of time working with a local advertising firm, *Wonderman Advertising*, to create a new logo for the PLI. This was completed through the generous in-kind contribution of this firm in 2001.

In 2000, two major FamCamp projects occurred that are worth noting. The PLI received an \$85k interagency contract from CA State Parks to operate FamCamp in collaboration with their ranger corps. This funding was provided to operate FamCamp throughout the entire state. Staff led 90 FamCamp trips including 60 in Southern California and 30 in Northern California and a coordinator was hired for each region. Over 1,400 participants in these trips were served. Similarly, the FamCamp project was also sponsored by the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) and the CA State Parks Foundation. This was a project where 30 family

camping trips were organized over a three-year period. This particular FamCamp project, sponsored by MCF at the time, was only during the summer months for Marin County-based community organizations.

In early 2005 Drew (who received his M.S. also in RLS later that fall), was promoted to director where he worked closely with Ezra during this transition. Based on planning decisions made by Kim, Laura, Steve and Ezra, a growth of the programs began to occur through fee-for-service and direction was provided for Drew to take this surge of success to the next level. As part of the groundwork accomplished by these former directors, the program also proliferated from a mostly volunteer-driven entity to a few paid adult staff (part-time and seasonal). And, under Drew's leadership, the PLI has shifted program emphasis to primarily (but not exclusively) youth development and now employs up to 20 teenage youth per year.

During his transition phase out period as director, Ezra Holland—working in consultation with Jim Murphy, RLS Dept. Chair—formalized and unveiled the PLI "*Collaborative Leadership Model*" where ongoing partnerships (e.g., SF Unified School District, SFPD, CA State Parks) are the catalyst to helping produce key outcomes for participants such as providing holistic benefits embraced by outdoor recreation, education, socio-cultural development, environmental awareness and challenge and adventure. This collaborative model of the PLI provides opportunities for participants to experience psychological well-being, spiritual renewal, physical fitness, and social camaraderie. Ezra, Drew, and Jim brought this innovative model to the attention of outdoor education, recreation, and experiential education leaders at a number of state, regional and national conferences between 2004 and 2005.

Solid influence, strong early developments, and a great deal of constructive progress were made by RLS faculty, students, advisory boards, and community leaders. As of the writing of this anthology, the PLI continues to be strong under the guidance of Drew McAdams. The program currently serves almost 5,500 participants at Fort Miley on the ropes course, another 500 at Camp Arroyo's challenge course with the summer and special school year courses, approximately 2,000 participants are reached through the PLI's mobile team building programs every year and another estimated 750 in workshops and conferences for an average of over 9,000 clients per year. These programs and opportunities are provided with a current budget of \$250,000, numerous dedicated volunteers and valuable in-kind donations. Additionally, numerous undergraduate interns and graduate students from across campus have worked with the PLI and the Recreation and Leisure Studies program has recently set aside a Graduate Research Assistant position to help PLI evaluate and assess the impact of its services on participant outcomes.

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