

Korissa Straub

### **Honors Award Reflection- Wilderness First Responder Course**

For my honors enrichment opportunity I took part in the wilderness first responder course held at Colorado State University (CSU) from January 5-16<sup>th</sup>. This class has benefited my undergraduate education at both CSU and Red Rocks Community College, and it will continue to serve me in the graduate studies and future career. Beyond educational benefits, it has given me a chance to learn more about myself, meet role models and friends, and develop strategies to help me in stressful situations.

As a student concurrently enrolled at CSU and Red Rocks Community College (RRCC), it is important to me to find educational opportunities that will benefit and diversify my learning for both my Bachelor and Associate degree. At RRCC, obtaining a WFR certification is one of the core requirements of the Outdoor Education Leadership Associates as it puts more tools in your toolbox as an educator and facilitator. With people looking up to you for advice in the backcountry setting, it is important to know how to treat minor wounds, and when to evacuate someone if they are/will be at serious risk. Completing my WFR gave me the knowledge to identify signs and symptoms of stroke, what to do when someone goes into shock, and how to reduce a dislocated shoulder back into place! This course has given me the confidence to safely lead people into the back country with the knowledge that the patient care system that they have taught us will help me responsibly help people.

As a Pulliam Scholar at CSU, one of the requirements of our program is that we become CPR certified during the time of our scholarship so that we are prepared for emergencies when we teach and mentor elementary and high school students. This course gave me both my CPR and AED training, and it helped me understand the vital timing and delegation of tasks in the process of saving the life of someone whose heart has stopped beating. While the places that I teach youth through the Pulliam program do not fit NOLS' description of wilderness, thus preventing me from providing more serious forms of care when professional health is accessible by a quick car ride, I now have basic care knowledge for many medical conditions that my students, chaperones and teachers might have. I can distinguish between and treat hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia in someone with diabetes, I can provide the Heimlich maneuver to everyone from infants to pregnant women, and I can stabilize an injury so that further damage is prevented during transport. This experience has also helped me address my anxiety surrounding having someone's wellbeing in my hands. I often get overwhelmed in stressful situations, so practicing approaching and caring for patients in this course has helped calm my nerves and give me a structure to follow so that I don't forget a single key step in the patient care process!

Obtaining my WFR has also given me a competitive edge as I pursue my masters in ecology here at CSU. I am hopeful that I will be accepted into this program next Spring under the advisement of Dr. Jill Baron. When I met with her to discuss research opportunities through her program in the Loch Vale watershed recently, she told me that those engaged in back country research are required to have first aid training. She embellished this requirement by telling a story of a researcher at CSU who had accidentally skewered her eye with her ski pole while performing data collection on a glacier. Upon hearing that a helicopter would take up to eight hours to arrive and evacuate her out, she decided to ski herself out with one eye! While this story provides an example in which wilderness first aid was not performed appropriately, sharing the same qualifications as students already in Jill's lab will hopefully give me a leg up as a candidate!

One of the most important lessons I learned in this course was how to treat and identify a stress injury. Repeated, prolonged, or intense stress can lead to a stress injury that can impact a patient's quality of life. In extreme cases this injury can result in post-traumatic stress, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and/or physical reactions. While this course does not teach or encourage its students to act as therapists, it does arm us with tools to help us take care of the mental health of ourselves and those around us. As academia is very stressful, these lessons were important for me to learn as I did not grasp the health implications of stress prior to this course. Allowing myself to become stressed over and over again could cause a stress injury without proper treatment. Creating calm, inspiring hope, and involving the patients in their own treatment are ways to help reduce their stress. These are tools I can utilize as a student by taking breaks, leaning on my friends and family when I need them, and setting achievable goals that I can work towards every day.

This course has benefitted almost all aspects of my educational career. I am so thankful to have had this opportunity, and I am so grateful to the honors program for enabling my participation in this expensive course! I have included a picture of one of our first aid scenarios in which I played a frantic patient in an ATV crash that eventually went unconscious from the trauma to my brain from a (fake) head wound, and a picture of a splint that we fashioned for Sam Evans' (a CSU career center employee) "broken femur" out of clothing, ski poles, a sleeping pad and many medical cravats! This course has ensured that I will use my knowledge and tools resourcefully in any situation, whether it be a medical emergency or otherwise.



