



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Yosemite National Park

P.O. Box 577

Yosemite National Park, California 95389

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in affirmation of the Yosemite Leadership Program as an innovative program. After some testing of component pieces, this program was introduced in its completed form in the fall of 2009. Since then we have further refined the program to highlight both the social change leadership theory expertise of UC Merced and the wilderness based, experiential leadership development components delivered by the National Park Service. Currently, we have 25 students in two cohorts, and have accepted 14 interns for summer 2012.

YLP's innovative design includes leadership seminars, speakers, crystallizing wilderness experiences, and exciting team-building activities in the first year, an immersive, park based, summer internship program, and a capstone legacy project and cross-peer mentoring opportunities in the second year. The first year elements combine to increase participant's belief in their own abilities and inspire them to see their own potential. The summer internship creates meaningful connections to the environment and provides intensive professional development and mentorship for students. Perhaps the greatest benefit of the immersive summer program is to take students out of the context where they "know" themselves and connect them to a larger world of opportunities. Capstone legacy projects and peer mentorship opportunities allow students to apply their skills and knowledge to create the social and environmental change they want to see. In each of its components, YLP links didactic learning to practical, field based experiences creating personal transformations and empowering students to move from theory to action.

The development of this program has been a wonderful collaborative experience. From idea to implementation, each of the partners contributed based on their expertise, and challenged the others to grow through the interactions. The program is jointly managed by UC Merced and Yosemite National Park. Our partners include Adventure Risk Challenge, Delaware North Companies Parks and Resorts, the Yosemite Conservancy, the Sierra Nevada Research Institute, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, WildLink, and California State Parks. Support for this program has been provided by the Yosemite Conservancy, The Toyota USA Foundation, the Youth Partnership Program and the Mitsubishi Corporation Foundation for the Americas.

The impacts of this program are profound, and are best heard through the voice of the participants.

"For me the Yosemite Leadership Program, is in fact a life-changing opportunity, it allows you to find the leader within yourself, to find your own passion and be passionate, to be you, yourself, to find your own limit and stretch it, to not dream but be the dream." – Bee Xiong

"I realized that this internship meant much more than a resume addition or an experience to improve my skills for the working world, and that in one summer, I had developed an immense appreciation and concern for our planet, which has led me to pursue a career in environmental management." – Mitch DeLeon

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jesse Chakrin
Director, UC Merced Wilderness Education Center
Park Ranger