

Orientation activities promote community and class bonding

Gregory Doyle, Sep 8 2009

New and returning students plunged headfirst into community engagement on Monday, September 7, as orientation activities commenced on campus and on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. The day was spent making and renewing friendships, thinking deeply about the culture of St. Andrew's and learning to solve challenges in group settings.

Students in the III and IV Form spent the day at Echo Hill Outdoor School in Worton, Maryland, where guides led small groups of students through a range of physical and group strategy activities that were both challenging and fun. Fourth Form students spent the day climbing and swinging in the forest, while the Third Form students suited up in old sneakers for the infamous swamp walk. While some had reservations about wading chest-deep through the malodorous mud, all were shouting with glee within minutes of entering. For each group of swamp walkers, the highlight of the day came when they reached the muck pit at the end of the course. Some could not resist flinging themselves back into the mud one last time before rinsing off in the cool waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

A final round of activities brought St. Andrew's students, faculty and Echo Hill staff together before the buses departed for campus. In addition to the wonderful experiences with the new students, faculty members also got a chance to catch up with St. Andrew's alumnus Brad Hirsh '98, who works as a guide at the school.

On campus, members of the V Form worked with Rev. Dave DeSalvo and other members of the faculty to explore what it means to be a responsible student and future leader of the school. Much like the work done by the VI Form in the week prior to the opening of the school year, the students identified their own measures of leadership and discussed their experiences in the St. Andrew's community over the last few years. DeSalvo and the faculty leaders encouraged students to identify the core values of St. Andrew's, and explore how best to create and protect a culture of respect for each member of the community.

Assistant Headmaster Peter Caldwell reminded the V Form students how easily a community can be torn apart by the erosion of values, violations of codes of conduct and honor, and a general failure to stop and think before acting. Thoughtless misuse of language, lack of respect for property, wasting food and other resources undermine the health of the community. Caldwell emphasized the need for trust, responsibility, optimism, motivation, and the basic care of our selves and those with whom we share the campus.

In small groups, the V Formers spent several sessions discussing the social structure and health of the school, as well as exploring gender issues. At the end of the day, each of groups performed a skit or song to illustrated one of the top eight core values identified and ranked by the class. As the stage of Engelhard Hall resounded with musical and comic insights, each of the students and faculty emerged with a new perspective on St. Andrew's community traditions.