If you’ve ever thought that you enjoy the outdoors, there is no time like now to prove it. Last spring Outdoor U told the people at Outdoor Nation that we have the ideal students, staff, alumni and community at CSB/SJU and in Minnesota to compete in and win a national competition among a select group of universities across the U.S. They believed us.

Now CSB/SJU and our surrounding community has the opportunity to become National Champions during an 8-week challenge this fall and it’s up to you to help make it happen.

The CSB/SJU community, which actively includes Outdoor U members, is the prime population to compete in a challenge of this nature. We believe our network of alumni, community members, and affiliates is unparalleled among the nine other schools competing in the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge. We are a community that is diverse, far-reaching and innately passionate about supporting both the campus community we associate with and the alluring natural Minnesota setting that our campuses are situated upon.

We individuals who go to school, live, work or grew up in Minnesota are some of the hardest and most passionate explorers of outdoor life anywhere in the U.S. Outdoor U will host many incredible events this fall, but we need to appeal to our extended networks, that’s you, to truly have a chance of becoming National Outdoor Champions. If you want to see the campuses, outdoor programming, and educational programs that you support receive the national spotlight you know they deserve then it is time to gear up and begin planning your daily outdoor activities now.

Tired feet muster up one last burst of adrenaline to reach the crest of the hiking trail. Breaths are ripped away mid-inhale as the incline proves to be the last; the Grand Canyon lays sprawled out before their entranced eyes. The mist continues to descend on the travel-worn explorers of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Their socks are soaked, their morale dips low. A fire is struck and a guitar chord is sounded in preparation. The crew converges and a pure inner warmth is kindled in each individual as voices are raised. Birds and small critters flee in shock. A gaggle of young children come tramping through the woods. The children are identifying bugs, trees and picking their noses in an excited ball. They learn about the forest and begin to cherish it.

The possibilities for outdoor activities are endless. Outdoor Nation has offered this grant and competition in the hopes that we can begin a national grassroots culture shift towards healthier outdoor living that brings nature back into the forefront of humanity’s gaze. I have been yearning for a chance to strike back at the Millennial Generation’s creeping slide toward a sedentary, indoor lifestyle ever since I came to college and saw how apparent the decay truly was. This is our chance...
to make a profound difference in the lives of my classmates and surrounding community. We will need a large body of support from Outdoor U members to help bolster our ranks and be a driving force to get community involvement occurring everywhere across Minnesota, the nation and for our long-distance members, the world!

_The light of the day begins to gradually fade as everything around us becomes encapsulated in the glowing ember-lights of sunset. The quaking aspen whisper to the dying wind. The moon emerges to claim its throne while I peacefully return my paddle to the glassed water for another stroke. We glide forward. More like dragonflies skimming across the surface than the human intruders we claim to be. We become a part of the procession; the natural transition of nature. We have become cogs in the great machine._

Though winning this competition for the obvious reasons – bragging rights, national spotlight, extensive new gear library, and campus celebrations – is a top priority and motivation, I appeal for your participation on a more personal level. I love nature. I love being outdoors. I love climbing trees, talking to plants, and feeling a part of something larger than myself. And you do too.

We, as supporters of Outdoor U, all have an inherent inclination towards outdoor living that brings us raw enjoyment and fulfillment that we can’t always find elsewhere. I invite you, nay, I implore you to share these passions and loves with the community around you so that everyone can find the peaceful bliss of outdoor life in their own way.

You can even take it one step further: grab your children, family members and neighbors and invite them to share in your activities. Forge new adventures. Explore new limits. Or just get out for a walk at sunset. Renew your desires while becoming a fighter for outdoor activities on a national scale as well. Now is your chance. Get outdoors and LIVE!

_A Bennie and a Johnnie kick up dirt with their shoes in casual synchrony as they traverse a trail together. Their destination could be manifold: A seat in Lake Sarah’s gazebo, a trip past the monastic gardens to jump in Lake Sagatagan, or an adventure to find the best climbing tree in the Abbey Arboretum. Regardless of their final destination, there is a certain pull that inevitably attracts them towards the rich natural landscape that our schools offer. The landscape is the beating heart of our campuses. It is a gift to be treasured. The riches of the outdoors are countless; it’s time we got out and discovered them together._

We live in the heartland of some of the most majestic and beautiful landscapes anywhere in the world. We are the lucky individuals who have come to appreciate this ecological harmony and truly enjoy spending time basking in its overwhelming glory. It’s time we shared these feelings with the rest of our community and ignite a passion for the outdoors that will burn for eons to come. We need to take on the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge with a rigorous veracity and prove that we have what it takes to spark a national culture shift. Victory is ours if we reach out and take it!

_Tanner Rayman_ is a junior nursing major at Saint John’s University, an office assistant for Outdoor U and a Peer Resource Program facilitator. The lead student coordinator for the campus challenge, he may not sleep much this fall as he does his best to inspire us all to win, and win big!

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_Those Kids are Darn Lucky_ **Jenny Kutter**

_After four years at Saint John’s, we could no longer keep our secret: JOHN O’REILLY, environmental educator for CSB/SJU and community programming, is a born teacher._

_This summer, with a dose of sadness and another of hope and excitement, John accepted a new job teaching eighth grade science in St. Cloud. He will be sorely missed here at Outdoor U – both personally and professionally. But his skills, passion and ability to connect with students is sorely needed in the classroom._

_Now, with a dose of sadness and another of hope and excitement, we look forward to working with John in a new way. Those kids are darn lucky._
There are certain kinds of kids in every class, no matter if you are teaching third graders in Portland, Oregon or eleventh graders in Mozambique. There’s the ‘Okay, that was actually pretty funny, but now is not the time’ kid, the one who for some unfathomable reason always wants to be as close to the teacher as possible, the one who already knows everything and needs to share that with everyone, and the kid who doesn’t seem to be paying any attention but at the end of the day has had the best time.

I’ve usually landed in that last category. I became very familiar with any trees outside my classroom windows, would get hopelessly distracted by books, and have caused my parents no small amount of stress by being the child who wandered off after anything that seemed interesting. This explorative tendency has led me to many interesting (and different) places. I grew up in Minneapolis and when it came time to choose a college I looked well past Minnesota. I decided on Reed College and four years in the Pacific Northwest. While at Reed I learned what academic rigor really means, realized that liking to read was not a good enough reason to be an English major, and discovered that once textbooks were swapped for research papers and I spent more time in labs than lectures, science was fantastically interesting. Luckily I had that realization early on and quickly changed my major to biology. I spent the next few years conducting experiments, searching for salamanders, volunteering at a local grade school and preparing for my senior thesis.

I spent my summers working at a YMCA camp in Northern Minnesota. Camp always kept me on my toes. I’ve worked as a counselor as well as in the kitchen, craft shop, beach, corral and nature center. Camp was my first experience working with kids and working with them outdoors. I was amazed, summer after summer, at the effect a week outside had on the campers.

I graduated with a B.A. in biology, along with a surprising tolerance for near constant rain and incessant mosquitoes, and a strong interest in graduate school – after a good, long break from academics. I decided to get out of the country for a while, so I volunteered to spend thirteen months with the Peace Corps in Mozambique teaching biology to secondary school students. Living and working in a different country was one of the most amazing experiences I’ve ever had.

Teaching in a Mozambican classroom was very different than working with the camp kids and I found myself in a school system whose priorities did not match the ones I was familiar with from Reed. In addition to teaching, I worked with a girls’ group (called REDES: Girls in Development, Education, and Health) that worked to educate girls on reproductive health and give them the tools to make strong life choices. I also had many opportunities to travel around Mozambique and experience the wide variety of cultures and languages within the country.

After I closed out my service, I decided to return to Minnesota (my parents would be happy to have their wandering child home). As I worked through the reintegration process (refrigeration and running water are fantastic, fifty types of toothpaste I have to choose between, not so much) and job searching, I only knew that I wanted to do something with science and/or nature, that I didn’t want to be inside a classroom, and that I still wanted to pursue graduate school...after I’d had a chance to settle back into America. When I found the environmental education fellowship at Outdoor U, my first thought was “well, that sounds perfect!”

After my first few months, I can say that I was absolutely right. I’ve loved working with children outside again. I cannot think of a better place to spend this next year – teaching amazing kids and learning about environmental education. I am especially excited to get kids interested in nature and science and to see if those “certain kinds of kids” I’ve seen in the classroom are the same once you take them outside.

Ella Gray is a 2012 graduate of Reed College and is the 2014-15 environmental education fellow for Outdoor U. Having taken a crash course in Portuguese in order to teach biology to the Mozambican students, we have no doubt Ella will quickly learn the local language and customs here at CSB/SJU.
John Kamman and I had plans to meet on Lake Sag’s beach at 10:30 p.m. Frogs croaked, crickets creaked and if you were listening carefully enough you could hear the bats whoosh over the lake, still as glass. The night was thick, sticky and as dark as the bottom side of a canoe on a midnight glide. A night for making memories.

The plan was simple. Canoe across the lake and camp on a small peninsula John had set up earlier in the week. I left to pack my bag with some trepidation. Reports around Collegeville township: murmurings of a beast on the loose. The unlikelihood of the rumors pushed me onward, however. As a summer employee in the Arboretum, I knew we’d be fine.

We cast off the beach relatively empty-handed onto the Sag’s still and reflective waters. The frogs and crickets faded, leaving only our intermittent conversation, the bats above our heads, and the sound of the water beneath us. As we soared across the star encrusted waters we stopped to breathe in the stillness of the night only to be shocked back to reality by the WHACK of a beaver’s tail shattering the silence and sending concentric ripples across the surface of the lake.

Our canoe cut silently through the dark waters and slid closer to the peninsula. Then it began. Sounds of branches snapping. Chaotic rustling through the thick bushes near the shore. And more sounds of branches ominously cracking.

I stopped paddling, looking to the dark trees ahead. “What was that?” I whispered.

“I don’t know. A deer?” John said.

Doubt filled my mind. Could the rumors have been true? To appease me or perhaps due to his own second thoughts, John stopped paddling too. We coasted towards the shore. Sudden silence, darker than the night enveloped the moment. Still.

We are fine, the logical side of my brain told me as we reached the shore. My primal side whispered nothing. Perhaps it was listening or waiting; giving my ancient instincts a chance to react. Still. My body was tense. My senses heightened. I could hear the blood rushing through my ears with each beat of my heart. A minute on the shore felt like hours.

Still. No more noise.

We unloaded our limited supplies and hid the canoe. “Do you have a flashlight?” I asked.

“Nope,” he said. “My cell phone lights up though.”

A cell phone, a device I would not own for another four years. The phone would give us a five foot beam of light to work with that needed to be reset every twenty seconds or so by the push of a button.

To reach our campsite we had to travel to through thick bushes up a small knoll before reaching a flat opening. John led, cell phone light in hand up through the bushes into the stillness of the knoll top. John stopped to reset the light. I slammed into him from behind and stumbled.

“Dan,” he whispered, “what’s that?”

I recovered my footing and saw the yellowish gray outline of a feline to my left sitting three and a half feet tall and close enough to touch. Its pointed ears were alert, and its eyes glowed coldly upon us. John’s orange tent was to our right, just on the edge of the cell’s beam of light, while the shadows of the surrounding trees reinforced the night. My mind began to race.

Words stuttered but finally came, “I...I...think it’s...it’s...there have...have been reports...reports...of a cougar!”

The cat’s alertness did not abate, eyes glowing through us as it sat as still as the two of us. “Dan, we need to walk backwards, facing the cougar to the canoe,” John said.

I gave John an approving grunt and was off. Whether I followed his instructions or not has been lost in the moment, but the next thing I recall is being in the canoe, floating away from the peninsula, star struck at what we had seen!
We were elated to have escaped and at the same time were lucky enough to witness a cougar in Collegeville. Joy at the encounter mixed with a primal fear of death crossed both our minds and lips as we wondered what the chances were that the cougar might follow us back to Saint John’s.

We put the canoe away still in disbelief. On edge and in no mood for sleep we decided to drive to Perkins almost simultaneously. We reached the Saint John’s Abbey Bell Banner and suddenly heard a thundering crash! “Oh my goodness,” I screamed, looking for the beast only to discover a family of raccoons and a cement trash can on its side. Four in the morning, coffee in hand and breakfast on our plates, the realization that a legend had been born struck us both as we continued to shake our heads and laugh.

**Epilogue:** The next day John and I brought fellow Arboretum coworkers Kyhl Lyndgaard and Marian Studor out to look for evidence on the peninsula only to find none.

Minnesota averages approximately fifty reported cougar sightings a year according the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), but the majority of these sightings turn out to be large dogs or cats. John and I did not report the sighting to the DNR as we felt the evidence of our encounter was insufficient. That afternoon however during an outdoor education class near the oak savanna, I collected some scat, hairy and big. Using the powers of the internet, I identified it unmistakably as cougar scat.

No other evidence was ever collected, save this memory, ripe and ever present in my mind, even after ten years.

**Dan Dooher** is a 2006 graduate of Saint John’s University. Ten years after the summer of this story, student employees at Outdoor U and the Abbey Arboretum still discuss the legend (and probability) of siting the Collegeville cougar. Many thanks to Dan for telling the story where it all began.
I used to think I was pretty familiar with the Abbey Arboretum. I came on multiple field trips throughout my childhood, I’ve volunteered and have spent countless hours walking and skiing the trails. After a summer working for Outdoor U, if I’ve learned one thing it’s that I’ve got a long way to go.

Part of my work this summer was working to catalog the hundreds of digital photographs in the Outdoor U collection. This gave me an opportunity to see the land through a wider lens – of seasons, of history, of nature. As I became more familiar with the Abbey Arboretum in pictures, I was anxious to spend more time on the trails to see how my view had changed.

One mid-July morning, camera in hand, I stopped for a hike through the prairie on the way to the office. The glowing morning light was beckoning me to explore with a clear blue sky and a few picturesque clouds slowly crossing the sky. Taking a cue from those clouds, I began tracing the boardwalk loop, a trail I’ve considered myself familiar with over the years.

From a distance, the prairie appears to be composed of variations on green, a general mish-mash of vegetation. This summer I learned to take a closer look and what I saw took me one giant step closer to this land. That morning the purple prairie clover and prairie rose were barely peeking over the tall grass, bright pops of color among the green, a plea for curious visitors to examine their flowers more closely. While the wildflowers were dressed in their full regalia, the wildlife seemed also to be on parade.

A swan slowly paddled around in the wetlands, occasionally dipping its head into the water. Though it’s not uncommon to see the swans in the wetlands, their majestic calm yet alert manner is enchanting and inspiring each time I see them. Stepping onto the boardwalk, I startled a bald eagle and two great blue herons in the marsh, and they quickly soared into the distance.

Back on the prairie I decided to search for the prickly pear cactus that is ever-elusive but present (if you know where to look). Stepping onto my path, I narrowly avoided stepping on a nearly three-foot long snake coiled up in the sun. Most likely a garter snake, it slithered away into the grass before I could react or get a photo.

About five paces up the path, I heard very audible chirping and scuttling through the grass. Proceeding with caution I came upon a small, probably juvenile, thirteen-lined ground squirrel. It froze when it noticed me, and stayed still in the grass as I commenced an impromptu photo shoot. After I circled it a few times, it scurried off to take cover in the long grass.

Even though I’ve long considered myself a nature-lover, this summer I became even more so. Getting outside often, learning more about the history and nature of the Abbey Arboretum and being more connected to the land in new ways has given me a greater degree of awe and curiosity of the natural world, reminiscent of my childhood. It’s as if I have stepped into Narnia, as if I’ve come into a world that I am a stranger to, but a world where I belong.

Taylor Scheele is a junior environmental studies major at the College of Saint Benedict, a student naturalist for Outdoor U and a Peer Resource Program facilitator. With great skill and good humor, Taylor crawled in and out of our cavernous photo database this summer, improving and adding to our visual record of this place.
Get Involved

**Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge**


Help Outdoor U make CSB/SJU national outdoor champions this fall! As you do your favorite outdoor activities during the 8-week challenge this fall - on your own or as part of a class or event - document them with photos and log the activities online. Read more about the challenge on page 1-2 and online.

**Mini-BioBlitz**

Monday, Sept. 29

$5 - Outdoor U Member Adults | $5 - Youth (ages 5-17)
$8 - Nonmember Adults | $5 - Nonmember Youth (ages 5-17)
$10 - All walk-in participants

Preregister by 10 a.m. on Sept. 29 for discounted prices.

A BioBlitz is an intensive 24-hour survey of all the plants, animals and organisms in a given area. For our “mini” BioBlitz, choose a group (plants, fungi, butterflies, birds, mammals, etc.) when you register, then spend an hour and a half outside with an expert working to identify everything in your category in your area. All groups will come together from 7-8 p.m. for dinner and tallying of species. Learn the process now, then join us in summer 2015 for a full 24-hour BioBlitz! BYO supper or purchase one when you register.

**Minnesota Natural History Lecture Series**

Monthly


We’re taking the lectures outdoors for the fall series! Interested in learning more about Minnesota’s natural world? Join us each month during the school year for a lecture and discussion on a variety of natural history topics. Check our website to see past topics or for updates to the 2014-15 lecture schedule.

**Collegeville Colors**

Sunday, October 5

$10 - Adults | $5 - Youth (ages 4-17) | FREE - Child (ages 3 & under)
$1 off per person if you pre-register by October 1

Enjoy art, theater, music and nature activities as you hike amongst the beautiful fall colors. Nestled along the shores of Lake Sagatagan along the Chapel Trail, you don’t want to miss this annual family event! Bouja and other treats will be served all afternoon.

**Annual Outdoor U Photo Contest**

Entries due Nov. 11

Submit your photos from your adventures in the woods! Five photos can be submitted in each of three categories. Plants & Critters; Earth, Lake & Sky; and People at CSB/SJU. A panel of judges will pick the best photos from each category in three age groups: Under 18; 18-22; 23 & Up. Best in Show will be voted for on Facebook and at the Volunteer/Member Appreciation Open House in December.

**Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour**

Thursday, Nov. 20

Journey to exotic locations, paddle the wildest waters and climb the highest peaks. The Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour begins immediately after the Film Festival held every November in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The diverse topics and stunning site locations in the films are unforgettable. Don’t miss out!

**Volunteer/Member Appreciation Open House**

New Date! Friday, Dec. 12

New Location! Great Hall, SJU

Celebrate the holiday season with good food, entertainment and conversation with friends, new and old. Silent auction, photo contest and the “best party of the season!” Invitations will be mailed in early Nov.

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**Saint John’s Outdoor University Staff:**

**Thomas Kroll**

Saint John’s Outdoor U Director

**Abbey Arboretum Land Manager**

**Sarah Gainey**

Assistant Director

Envr. Education Coordinator

**Jenny Kutter**

Department Coordinator

Editor, Sagatagan Seasons

**Ella Gray**

Environmental Education Fellow

**Dan Vogel**

Abbey Arboretum Forest Technician

**Student Staff:**

1 Office Assistant

2 Land Laborers

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10 Naturalists

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**Stephen Saupe**

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**Saint John’s Outdoor University**

P.O. Box 3000

2346 Science Drive

Collegeville, MN 56321-3000

Main Office:

104 New Science Center

320.363.3163

OutdoorU@csbsju.edu

www.csbsju.edu/OutdoorU

@stjohnsoutdooru

@stjohnsoutdooru

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Sept. 27 - Nov. 22

oncampuschallenge.org


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