

Interview with Vicki McGarvey, Vice Provost for University College

At a recent Faculty Senate meeting, Provost Epps mentioned that she had only just learned that Temple has a joint program with the National Park Service called the ProRanger Program. Since I had never heard of this either, I reached out to Vicki McGarvey, Vice Provost for University College to discuss the ProRanger Program.



Vicki McGarvey

Paul LaFollette (PL): So how long have we had this program?

Vicki McGarvey (VM): Well the program started in 2010. It went on hiatus for about 2 years. We just re-started it in 2015.

PL: How did it come about?

VM: I was not involved at the very beginning, but as I understand it, it was started as a partnership between the Criminal Justice Training Programs at Temple and the National Park Service. They created the ProRanger program. After the students came back from their first summer internship, we needed to create an academy. This required a capital investment to start this new academy. For many reasons, the CLA and the Criminal Justice Department declined to make that investment. Dick Englert, who was the Provost at the time, thought this would be a good fit for University College. So I made the capital investment to get the academy started and took over the program, and here we are.

PL: So how exactly does it work? Do you borrow existing courses from the college?

VM: Sort of. The certificate is a 15 credit certificate requiring 6 classes. Two of the classes are University College classes. One is a one credit course that I teach. One is a summer distance learning class that they take during their summer internship. Dr. Cheryl Irons from Criminal Justice has been teaching that for us. Of the other four courses, two are taught by the History Department and so I worked with History to create the courses. They have agreed to run them on the schedule that the students need. If the enrollment does not meet a minimum, then the program guarantees to subsidize them. The Criminal Justice Department has created a course that works the same way. The fourth course is still a bit of a work in progress. Once again, we are working with Criminal Justice to get a really special course for the fourth course. I imagine we will run it in the same way.

PL: Who are the students that become interested in this program?

VM: We will take a student from any major, because we are looking for rangers, not police officers. Rangers do a range of things. They do fire fighting, EMS, search and rescue, and many other different things. So we are not just looking for traditional criminal justice students. About half the students do come from Criminal Justice. Another 25% to 30% come from other CLA majors. For the rest, we have had three Horticulture students, we had an education major, a painter, a social worker, and we have an engineer in the program right now.

PL: And there all people who are looking for employment in the Park Ranger Service?

VM: Yes.

PL: Now, when I think of Park Rangers, I think of the rangers standing around the historic buildings near Independence Hall, and riding horses out west in our national parks. Am I thinking about the right things?

VM: Yes. The word ranger applies both to the interpretation rangers and the law enforcement rangers. The interpretation rangers are teaching visitors about our historic sites. The law enforcement so some of that as well, but they have three additional missions: to protect the resources from the people, the people from the resources, and the people from each other.

PL: How many people go through this program every year?

VM: We take in twelve. The number we graduate depends on how many come in as sophomores and how many as juniors. We have 34 alumni right now out working in parks.

PL: One of the things that Provost Epps mentioned was that you not only run these courses, but you also are involved in evaluation of other parts of the program.

VM: Yes. The program is in really close partnership with the National Park Service. We operate under a cooperative agreement. They select the parks our students train in. Once a park enters the program, we want to make sure it is actually giving the students the experience that we want it to. So, in the contract, one of our responsibilities is to evaluate the parks and the experiences. We do site visits, meet with the students and with the student supervisors to make sure that the students are actually having worthwhile experiences.

PL: This sounds like a really neat program. What questions have I forgotten to ask?

VM: The program consists both of the six courses I mentioned above, and a series of required weekend activities. One weekend a month, we do practical training that will help prepare them for being a ranger. We do a leadership camp every May at which they get practical certifications. Last year they did search and rescue. We are really trying to prepare them academically, but also to give them the practical skills they will need.

Our program right now is set up so that we have a direct hiring authority with the National Park Service. When our students graduate they are not guaranteed a job, the fact is that as of now, we have a 100% placement rate for everyone who has successfully completed the program.

PL: What kind of recognition of completing the program do they receive?

VM: They have a certificate on their transcript.

PL: I love doing stories about this kind of thing – programs that we have that I have never heard about. What other secrets do you have in your portfolio?

VM: I think that this program is a natural to expand? I have been working with the History Department and Seth Bruggeman. He is developing a parallel program that he is calling I-Ranger. This is a program to train interpretation rangers. To move into a career as an interpreter requires a master's degree. So we are looking at this as a five plus one program. We are also considering programs in landscape restoration and architectural restoration through Tyler. So, now that the program is back up and running, we will be talking to the Park Service about expanding the program.

PL: Thank you so much for telling us about this program.