

FIRE Builds Bonds

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“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” —African proverb

Many first-year students are coming from high schools that had rather small graduating class sizes and for them to step into a university population of 15,000 students can be somewhat overwhelming. As a Paul College freshman, I have been fortunate to be a part of the FIRE Program that allows for smaller group discussion. It is relaxing to know that while we have the overall UNH class of 2019, we also have the freshmen class in Paul College of 650, which again gets narrowed down into our FIRE groups of 20-25 students.

The benefits one gains from being part of a team change over time. It is important to start with a strong foundation and the FIRE program at Paul College is here to provide a stable starting place. My FIRE team’s name is District Twelve and is made up primarily of hospitality management majors. Our peer advisor is Jessica Hill, who is minoring in hospitality management. She is the backbone of the team and provides leadership and a central guide. There are only two FIRE teams made up of hospitality students which allows us for more connections and recognizable faces. There are around 20 people in

my fire group and we all have almost identical schedules. To most, this is definitely a benefit. While we have classes



with other business students it is always nice to see a familiar face sprinkled in, or someone to relate to. It is nice to be able to meet with the small group once a week to vent or ask questions. Students in my group frequently discuss common assignments, frustration with a teacher, or confusion regarding upcoming events. The small group atmosphere allows students who are shy, or like the majority are insecure about talking into a microphone in a class of 200 people, to ask clarifying questions and speak up.

I have friends in other colleges, such as liberal arts, here at UNH who feel disconnected from their peers by not meeting people in their classes or major. They were not provided with the unique opportunity to connect with students with common interests, thus left feeling disassociated from others in their program of study. The primary thing that ties us all together is our major which allows for a variety of personalities, interest, and stories.



In my FIRE team we have a frequently used group chat, we have hosted study groups together, and I have enjoyed meeting for coffee with various people from my FIRE

group. I feel more confident knowing I have friends within my major, and can rely on them for support. The point of the FIRE group is not to force us together and make everyone best friends, but if each individual gains the ability to say hi to one more person, or even make a friend, on campus the social goal of FIRE has been met. Since the selection process was random rather than hand selected the teams are not all perfect. Some teams get along and truly clicked, inspiring other teams, while others have chosen to not embrace the team aspect FIRE provides.

For many students, as well as myself, the FIRE teams have made the transition into college more secure allowing for greater self-assurance. Being both an Igniter and a member of a FIRE team has allowed me to do so much networking right from the start. I am already gaining and practicing the essentials skills I will need to present myself professionally in the future. I have connected with several people in my particular field of study, event management, and have been able to hear about their experiences and pick their brains to uncover the secrets of the industry. Personally, these opportunities excite me and give me the drive to work harder and keep my eyes open to all the possibilities coming my way. I did not think it was possible to be noticed or to stand out in a school of 15,000 students, especially as a freshman. However, FIRE has allowed just that. If you truly apply yourself and keep an open mind it is possible to establish yourself early and make some profound connections right out of the gate. The FIRE Program has opened many doors that were once not available to freshmen in the past, allowing the freshman of Paul College to strive for the utmost academic and professional success.

—Ruth Smith '19

About Ruth Smith '19:



Ruth Smith is an enthusiastic first year, hospitality management and ego-gastronomy dual-major student at the University of New Hampshire. She grew up in Franklin, TN and moved to Maine when she was 12. Ruth completed her education at Falmouth High School located in Falmouth, ME. There she was an involved member of the executive board for the National Honors Society, received a fine arts endorsement upon graduation, participated in varsity field hockey for three years, and 4-H for a total of 7 years. Throughout high school she was very involved, volunteering much of her time to her church and community.

Currently, Ruth is truly dedicated to her studies and is fully immersing herself in the culture here at UNH. Ruth is a member of Project Sunshine, PCMA (Professional Convention Management Associations), and was selected to be in Paul's FIRE Igniters group. She is very excited to explore the opportunities here at Paul College, including the opportunities to go abroad. She attributes the majority of her success to her family and all of their encouragement.



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