



**Rocky Mountain National Park
Continental Divide Research Learning Center**

Visions of You—Picture Your NPS

Background



Visions of You—Picture Your NPS is part of the professional development curriculum for the Rocky Mountain National Park Eagle Rock Internship Program. *Visions of You* is a way for students to visually explore, reflect, and interact with the National Park Service. The project takes advantage of students' comfort levels by using familiar technology (digital cameras and computers) to personally connect them with the unfamiliar—national parks.



Visions of You is inspired by freshmen orientation projects and assignments at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and Texas A & M University. These projects were used in first-year programs to help students be aware of and better adjust to transitioning to the university environment new to them.



The Project

Visions of You was developed as an opportunity for students to visually document their internship with the NPS. This project provides a way for students to meaningfully explore and learn about their transition from an academic environment to a professional experience with the NPS. For most Eagle Rock interns, this is the students' first substantial interaction with the NPS.



Four Main Project Goals:

1. Encourage interns to actively see, experience, and connect to the park—not just their work related tasks
2. Provide professional development that accommodates a diverse suite of learning styles
3. Provide interns with opportunities to express their creativity and observations of the park
4. Provide feedback to the park about the students' perceptions related to their internship

Interns are provided a digital camera and direction in the form of weekly themes. The first year's themes were: "First Impressions," "Who Are You?," "Professional Development," and "Show Your Rocky Mountain National Park." The directions are short and simple: Take pictures that represent the weekly theme to you. Interns are advised to take honest pictures that express something meaningful to them. There are no expectations, right answers, or assessments of the photos. Each intern is required to pick photos they are willing to display, share them with the other interns and staff, and explain why they took the picture and what it meant to them. Interns took over 500 photos documenting their NPS during the Eagle Rock Internship Program in 2009.

A Thousand Words ...

The interns' photos are beautiful, inspiring, and surprising.



INTERNS' PERSPECTIVES SHIFTED FROM BROAD SCALE TO AN INTIMATE VIEW AS THE QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS AND TIME IN THE PARK INCREASED (PICTURES 1 & 2).



WE BEGAN TO SEE THE UNIQUE PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER OF THE INDIVIDUAL, NOT JUST THE "INTERN" (PICTURES 3 & 4).



INTERNS DEVELOPED A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEMSELVES, THE PARK'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, AND FELLOW INTERNS AND PARK STAFF. FOR EXAMPLE, WE RECEIVED NO PICTURES OF BUILDINGS, PAPERWORK, OR PAYCHECKS. (PICTURES 5 & 6).

Melissa Gutierrez, from inner city Los Angeles, California, explains one of her *Visions of You* photographs (picture 7): "Starts at the top – Clouds are really in your face then it slowly progresses down and opens up. This is how I feel about the park and my opportunities. This opportunity was presented into my face ... But by doing this I slowly realized all the millions of different opportunities that I have here. And I cherish that incredibly. I come from a neighborhood where I don't have these opportunities; I would have never worked at a park."

INTERNS BEGAN TO SEE THE PARK AS AN ANALOGY FOR LEARNING AND LIFE (PICTURE 7).



While *Visions of You*—Picture Your NPS was intended to help the interns get the most from their experience, the interns' photos provided snapshots of the NPS through new eyes and remind veteran NPS employees to slow down and take a moment to appreciate the places we are lucky enough to work in.