



1) Name: **Paige Odom**

2) Graduation year: **2017**

3) Favorite outdoor activities and favorite places to play at UTC and Chattanooga:

My favorite outdoor activity is a tossup between SUP boarding, hiking, and camping. I love going to Signal Point, Laurel Snow Falls, and Virgin Falls. I have recently spent a lot of time at Greenway Farms on the water with my campers. I also like South Chickamauga Creek.

4) Job Title:

I am the Education Programs Coordinator/Camp Director

at the Chattanooga Zoo

5) Briefly explain what you actually do for your job:

I get the joy of doing a little bit of everything in our Education Department. My main job is the Camp Director of our camps. I plan, budget, staff, and more with our camps. When I'm not working hard at planning what lessons, activities, experiments, excursions, and animals we will meet during camp, I am taking animals to preschools, schools, and daycares. Have you ever been to the Zoo and saw a guest in an exhibit feeding or touching an animal? I'm the person in there taking pictures and sometimes talking about the animals. I have had the joy of developing two new programs at the Zoo, *Sensory Safari* and *Kits & Cubs*. *Sensory Safari* is a program for our special needs community to come enjoy the Zoo with no distractions, and *Kits & Cubs* is our toddler program, where they get to meet and learn about our different animals. Being an educator, I am able to train with some of our bigger animals such as African Servals and African Crested Porcupine.

6) What made you choose Outdoor Recreation as a degree program?

I have always wanted to be an educator, but I'm not the type of person to be inside all day. I wanted to be able to teach and enjoy the outdoors. Outdoor Recreation does that! I also get the joy of working with some wonderful animals too.

7) What experiences helped shape you while you were at UTC (personally and professionally)?

I am a very hands-on learner and if not every one of my classes, then the majority of my classes allowed me to do that. Every time anyone asks me about my time at UTC, I always mention how my Outdoor Recreation classes and professors broke me out of my shell, and helped me



to succeed to where I am now. If Drew Bailey had not pushed me like he had, I honestly don't know where I would be, probably still in school.

8) What do you wish you had known/done while you were at UTC to prepare for the profession?

I wish that I would have known about this degree going into my freshman year, but I also wish that I had been a little more confident in myself, as an older student, to join in and be more involved with campus life. Joining a club related to your profession or interests is the best thing you can do. Granite, I didn't think I would ever be working in a zoo, but I have always loved animals, and there were a few clubs I could have joined but didn't. They would have helped me completely in my career. I wish I would have taken few more biology classes or zoology classes. I wish I would have gone on more of the outdoor trips the ARC allowed students to go on, especially the Spring Break Camping/Canoeing trip. These trips are good for an experience and to see the local wildlife.

9) What kinds of things should someone do if they wanted to get your job? (Be honest about where they should invest their time-- getting certifications, making connections, volunteering, academic achievement, etc.).

In order to get into the Zoological field, it is not easy. I had a unique opportunity, and just happen to have a lot of good experience in education. It takes most people at least one to two years of volunteering and interning, usually unpaid, in the area or multiple areas of the Zoo. Most Zoos' prefer a Biology degree, but it is possible with other degrees. Outdoor Recreation is probably the next best degree for the Education Department. Education in Zoos are different the Education degree. You must have knowledge of curriculum, conservation, and biology to succeed. I already had a background in education, so this gave me a huge advantage. I have also had over 8 years' experience working with children, and classroom management which was able to help me to get a job working with our camps. The best advice I can give are work hard and keep working hard. It will pay off, if it is meant to be. Sometimes trying something new will lead you to a career you didn't think would be possible.

10) What are the challenges and blessings of being in this profession? What frustrates you and what keeps you there?



Challenges? There are many. Whether it be the long crazy hours and shorter break times to the miscommunication between departments that might happen, like any job, it is worth all the lose of sleep and having to deal with parents who lost track of time and didn't sign their children up for camp. I've had many early mornings and late night emails and messages from co-workers of what needs to be done, or parents are emailing about issues, needing to register, or their child left something at camp. Some challenges are within me of not thinking I'll be able to throw together a budget report together, plan for the next camp, and help with the craziness of Field Trip season at the same time. Field Trip season in itself is a

challenge. I tend to get frustrated at times with my job. There are times where my off days aren't really off days. There are times where I don't see my family for a while because we are so busy with big events. Most big events mean I have to work really long days, and then more than likely work the following day too, which means I'm not going to get much sleep. I have had countless parents show up the Monday of camp and want to sign their kids up, when registration closed the Wednesday before. It is a very high stress career, but for me it is worth it, and there are way more good than bad.

Blessings are more than I can ever imagine. I get to see campers, guests, and students and teachers come in everyday and experience the Zoo. My favorites are when guests walk by our American Crow, General Lee, and not knowing he says "Hello" to them, or when our chimpanzees interact with guests wanting to play. But it is when our campers who really want to learn and care for animals come to camp. We had one camper, who when on an excursion to the Creative Discovery Museum, built his own hydroponics system. He wants to be a marine biologist and SCUBA instructor when he grows up. I always enjoy talking with guests and children about our animals. They each have their own personality. I have also had the opportunity to expose our campers to being outdoors and being on the water. I was able to set up with a local company to take our Kindergarten through 8th graders canoeing. Most of these kids haven't had the opportunities to try it. Even with our counselors, one conquered his fear of water; he even tried a kayak and SUP board. These are what keeps me here, and why I love my job. I love being able to train with our animals, and learning everyday about these wonderful creatures that live beside us. Teaching the next generation to love the outdoors and to help keep these wonderful animals alive is a great opportunity.