Greetings FOP Family! Steering Committee 2010 stepped into our role during an unlikely set of events this fall. Our turnover meeting coincided with news that one of our dear leaders, Ariel Shaker, was in critical condition following a polo accident. Over the course of the week that followed, we cared for our leaders and for our FOPpers while we watched Ariel’s condition deteriorate. When we organized a community gathering to mourn the end of Ariel’s life and to celebrate the gifts she brought to our community, the largest take-away message was how open and supportive the FOP community can be—in times of tragedy, in times of celebration, and in times of transition. This community spirit has invigorated us as we step forward into our year of leadership with the program and towards the success of next fall’s trips.

Though backpacking remains the largest aspect of our program, 11 of our 35 trips that went out this fall also included canoeing or service work. We have been brainstorming ways to reach out to the larger Harvard community and make everyone feel as though they can be at home within FOP, and developing these programs seems to be a great way to do this. Including people with these interests, who also love the outdoors, will bring new talents and new vivacity to our FOP family.

One new perspective in our midst this past summer was Christa Ricker, a UNH Outdoor Education graduate, who served as our Summer Staff Coordinator. Our Director, Jess Ross, spent the summer working for North Carolina Outward Bound, the organization with which our very first Director, Cate Huisman, worked in the 1970’s! Though many of us were somewhat worried what we were going to do without our fearless Director, Christa’s leadership brought FOP new processes and ideas that helped streamline our program.

Transferring into this fall, we have yet another fresh face with us. Jess Colwell, a graduate student in college student development and counseling at Northeastern, is participating in a volunteer practicum with FOP this academic year. She will be spearheading the planning of our 30th anniversary celebration, a weekend of fun, adventures, reunion, and FOPLove! This anniversary celebration will allow us to bring together our FOP Family members (that’s you!!) all the way back to our beginnings in 1979. It is always wonderful to be reminded of how many people FOP truly affects, and to be at once proud of the progress we have made and humbled by the people who have made so many steps before us.

Between now and then, we, as Steering Committee 2010, will be focused on diversifying our leader community, developing our service and switch curriculum and raising money to allow us to buy more gear and support more FOPpers by providing financial aid. We hope to pay tribute to the many steps before us, to make our 30th Reunion a weekend to remember, and to work towards making the next thirty years as powerful as the ones that have come before us.

Finally, we would like to say thank you to each and every one of you. Whether you went on a trip, sent your child on a trip, led a trip, or helped make those trips successful through your generous donations, FOP would not be the same without you.

Rise free from care, before the dawn and seek adventure!

Love, Steering Committee 2010

Steering Committee 2010: Jess Colwell, Lilla Cosgrove, Jess Ross, Emma Franklin, Louise Hindal, John Sedlacek, Emily Orlins, Edward Traver, Max Storto

The Magic of FOP- Lauren Schwartze ...............4
From the Director - Jessica Ross .........................5
Remembering Ariel Shaker- Robby Kirkham ...........5
The Staying Power of FOP- Dean Thomas Dingman ....6
FOP Leaders in the Frontcountry- Katie Steele ..........6
FOP’s 2009 Annual Report ................................7
2009 Donors ..............................................8
About: FOP

The Week:
3 States • 5 Nights Under the Stars • 35 Trips • 73 Leaders, 1 Director •
298 Freshmen • 4032 Tortillas • Countless Memories

The History:
FOP was developed in 1979 by the Dean to provide students with a stronger support network upon entrance to college. FOP is the oldest and largest pre-orientation program for freshmen at Harvard. Every year, FOP sends approximately 18% of the incoming first-years on six-day backpacking, canoeing, and camping trips at the beginning of the school year. Since 1979, over 6000 students have begun their Harvard experience by living with 8-10 peers in the backcountry, under the leadership of 2-3 trained upperclassmen leaders. FOP is one of only 46 AEE-Accredited Programs in North America, such as the National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound.

The Mission:
To provide group adventure-based experiences that promote the development of social support and self-awareness for first-year students and leadership development for members of the Harvard community.

The Values:
- Compassion
- Responsibility to community
- Care and responsibility to the environment
- The equality and intrinsic worth of all people regardless of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, religion, ethnic or socio-economic background

The Research:
1. FOP is the most successful Harvard pre-orientation program in providing social support networks to first-year students.1
2. The first 6 weeks of college are highly significant in adjusting to college life.2
3. Students indicate that involvement in a pre-orientation program significantly improved their introductions to Harvard.3
4. College outdoor pre-orientation experiences are correlated with higher academic achievement throughout college.4

Why We Fundraise:
The First-Year Outdoor Program endeavors to provide financial aid and gear to anyone who needs it in an effort to minimize and ultimately to eliminate any financial barriers that might prevent students from participating in the program. Your donation will help us reach this goal.

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FROM OUR FPPERS


Despite the abundance of my awful anagrams, these three-word phrases have hardly begun to describe my FOP experience. I went into FOP expecting to have fun - and, though slightly dampened by the torrential rains of my first few nights in the wild, my expectations were only exceeded. I found in FOP 20 (aka “Spice Cabinet”) my first group of loving, brilliant, hilarious, honest, and brave friends at this school.

I have often wondered why participating in FOP had such a positive effect on my transition to Harvard. Surely the other pre-orientation programs create similarly welcoming first “families” forging similarly lasting bonds of friendship. But really, what can be more connection-promoting than handing a person you’ve known for five minutes an orange plastic trowel as they return to the earth (at least partially) what it gave to them?

I do not know how to conclude this reflection on an experience that, joyfully, is not yet a memory. I can only say that I am forever indebted to the First-Year Outdoor Program, so Fortunately Omni-Present in my life.

--Xanthia Tucker, FOPper 2009

In the beginning, when we were hesitant about getting one toe, one sock thread wet, my leader, a very good hiker, purposely stepped in mud, so by the time we did the same thing, it was perfectly ok.

I’VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY PEOPLE SO OKAY WITH GETTING WET!

The first day, almost everyone got soaking wet, but by the third day, we could handle the toughest rivers with ease.

-- Khadijah Williams, FOPper 2009

Upon arriving on campus, a screaming Australian, clad as a lifeguard and banging kitchen supplies greeted me. With such an introduction, I naturally anticipated a phenomenal experience. As expected, FOP delivered. Every FOP leader radiated with excitement to lead an adventure, answer questions, and get to know each FOPper. Within a few hours of meeting the freshman in my FOP group, we bonded by singing a few choice songs like “Don’t Stop Believing,” “See You Again,” and “I Want You Back.” But once we hit the refrain of “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” and everyone loudly joined in, I knew my group would fill the upcoming days with laughter and forge tight friendships.

Our sometimes ill-fated team became practiced hands at outdoor work and smoothly made it to campus. Leaving the carefree wilderness of FOP behind, we carried a thick smell and thicker dirt into the shockingly clean world of wide-eyed freshmen, but we didn’t care about our appearance. We already belonged.”

“A Parent’s Perspective

By HaiBin & Marius Wechsler

One of the highlights of this year’s freshman moving-in day was watching the return of FOP participants to Harvard yard: all of them chanting or shouting their favorite slogans, and all of them dragging behind enormous black trash bags that held all of their belongings. After a week of nameless worries, it was such a heart-warming moment to see our daughter and her fellow FOPers, standing in front of us with big smiles on their faces, physically intact and apparently healthy. There were some jaw-dropping reactions from us when our daughter recounted stories from her adventure: sleeping in the downpour, drinking water of dubious colors, stumbling through brambles and mud holes, and fighting impossible battles against the mosquitoes and the bees. Although she was physically fit before the trip, FOP brought a new level of challenges for our daughter, mentally and physically. She admitted the trip was one of hardest things she has ever done, but she was rewarded with a greater sense of self-confidence, and more importantly, she made some great friends who helped her transition as a freshman at Harvard so much easier. We strongly agree that the program fosters a sense of independence, self-reliance and self-confidence, while providing participants with a valuable set of close relationships that will outlast their college years.
A Past Director’s Perspective
Jeff Smith, FOP Director 1980

In my pre-FOP life, I collected fossils in Egypt and studied primates in Africa and Madagascar, and then led a wilderness school in Maine. When I became FOP’s second director, I was at the Ed School, spending too much time indoors. I was glad to work with Hank Moses – one of the wisest and kindest people I knew – and grateful to get back to the woods.

At that point, the organization was informal. Some of us did most of the work, others just parachuted in for the main event, but everyone was energized by the prospect of leading and caring for other people.

FOP has grown in numbers and professionalism so far beyond its origins that I hardly recognize it. FOP’s quality and growth is a tribute to now thousands of people, a really remarkable accomplishment.

What doesn’t seem to have changed is that FOP is kept vibrant by the commitment of its leaders, and that at its heart it is a community of students, deans, directors, alumni/ae and parents, inspired by one another, and worthy of everyone’s continuing support.

De-Issue Day ‘09
Jo Doblecki Marks ’02, SC ’01

Is that chanting I hear in the distance? The faint call and response grows louder as a troop of creatively dressed backpackers turns the corner into Littauer Quad. Beaming faces, lighter packs, a funny, unique odor, and one heck of a shared experience. Within minutes the annual madness of unpacking, cleaning, and returning gear ensues. “De-Issue Day 2009” is officially in full swing.

Call me crazy, but I believe there’s something special about De-Issue Day. No, it’s not my love for cleaning margarine tubs or scrubbing tarps—it’s something deeper than that. Incoming freshman have had their time in the woods, dancing crazy dances, climbing challenging routes, pushing their comfort zones and ultimately forming deep connections with each other. Arriving at Harvard, they are ready to transition to something completely new. This transition is what FOP lives for! Watching the vibrant spirit of the leaders and their groups broadcasting their arrival on campus, I feel an excitement, unlike anything I have found elsewhere. This special energy amongst the leaders, a shared passion for the program and its purpose, brings everything to another level. It was a privilege to return this year, and selfishly it felt good to be reenergized by that unique FOP spirit.

“I WORKED WITH SOME OF THE MOST WONDERFUL PEOPLE I HAVE EVER MET, LEARNED A LOT ABOUT EDUCATION, RESPONSIBILITY AND EVEN MORE ABOUT MYSELF.”

Since leaving Harvard and transitioning into the regular working world, I often find myself reflecting upon my FOP experience. As a leader and Steering Committee member, I worked with some of the most wonderful people I have ever met, learned a lot about education, responsibility and even more about myself. I love my career in teaching, but to this day, I have yet to find an environment as warm, creative, supportive, and fun as FOP. Thank you FOP – I love you!

The Magic of FOP
Lauren Schwartze ’09, SC ’07, SC ’08

As a new teacher in a new setting, FOP shows up in unexpected ways in my life today. This challenges me to see FOP not as an isolated experience, but as an ongoing process of growth and development. FOP as a mindset allows magic and practicality to coexist. As I reflect on teaching and hiking, several lessons remain especially poignant:

Know where you are going. Then, go there. While FOP cannot provide me a route plan for all of my life’s experiences, it has helped me develop the self-awareness to direct the process. FOP has also encouraged the recognition of the magic inherent in the struggles and triumphs of the journey.

You don’t have to go it alone. But sometimes, you have to make relationships happen. FOP gave me my first Harvard family and most of my closest friends. These relationships may seem effortless, but many have resulted from forced interactions—and that is not a bad thing. Perhaps the true magic of the FOP relationship is in its ability to persevere and to thrive despite differences.

“FOP HAS ALSO ENCOURAGED THE RECOGNITION OF THE MAGIC INHERENT IN THE STRUGGLES AND TRiumPHS OF THE JOURNEY.”

Nature is everywhere and it is awesome. I have been changed in both subtle and profound ways by New England’s woods, rocky peaks, babbling brooks, and fall crisp. The ability to recognize the beauty in human nature, even in times of bitter trial or failure, has been an unexpected gift of the FOP experience and one that applies to life in any geographic location. Magic and awe are everywhere around us, and a FOP-trained eye has been granted the tools and the environment to recognize and process such beauty.

To close, I hope that you are enjoying the journey. I hope you that you are still in touch with the members of the FOP community that brought magic into your life. I hope that some aspect of nature strikes you each day with a feeling of peace, contentment, and magic.
FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear FOP Family,

Every Autumn marks an exciting, emotional transition in the world of FOP. The trips that we have been preparing for all year have happened, and we have a moment to bask in the success of our hard work. We meet as a community for meals, Town Meetings, slide shows, and reunions. We share stories, pictures, hugs, laughter, and support for a new year at Harvard. “FOPLove” might be the word of the season...

The picture of the Fall from a Steering Committee perspective is more bittersweet. For one full year, this group of seven to eight students and I have dreamed, and managed, and trained, and now we partake in a deep month-long reflection process. We celebrate what we have achieved to together, and we consider what we can pass on as improvements to the next caregivers of FOP. And then something magical happens. We pass the torch to a new Steering Committee, a group who has the energy and fire to light the way for yet another year. It is in this transition, more than any other time in the year, when I recognize how much the small steps that each Steering Committee takes to improve FOP add up to huge impacts over time.

In preparation for writing this article, I began by brainstorming what I have seen FOP achieve since I was first introduced to the program in 1999. As I pieced together various improvements we have experienced in the last decade—AEE Accreditation, a marked increase in rental gear, the increase in and retention of students on Harvard Financial Aid, the change in the Directorship from 1/2- to 3/4- Time, the creation of a Director of Freshman Programming position, an expansion of the diversity and inclusion curriculum, and the doubling of donations to name a few—I felt a sense of real empowerment. I felt a sense that small individual actions of generations of Directors and students can add up to big changes.

In that spirit, I am going to humbly dedicate this article to our shared FOP history. In the history of our program, we have had 10 Directors, 22 Steering Committees, 100 Steering Committee Members, 1,000 leaders, and 6,000 participants. In the celebration of our 30th Anniversary this spring, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible sense of gratitude I feel toward everyone who has participated in designing, maintaining, and growing the program that exists here today. It would be an unbelievable pleasure to discover the ripples of self-awareness, social support, and leadership that you are all making in the world at large.

I hope that the 30th Anniversary Celebration will be a beautiful gathering of one of the most compassionate communities I have known, as well as a chance to view the greater impacts of the FOP community within and beyond the Harvard walls. In hopes of seeing you very soon...

Humbly,
Jessica L. Ross
FOP Director

REMEMBERING ARIEL SHAKER
Beloved FOP Leader
Robby Kirkham ’10

The summer after our freshman year, Ariel and I found ourselves in similar situations, with one year of knowledge under our belts and our lives in flux. As we transitioned from rowers to FOP leaders, we found ourselves excited for our new group, but outside of FOP, still questioning the immense pressure of a highly competitive Harvard environment. That summer, Ariel considered taking a year off. She wrote in an email, “I have been having a lot of troubled thoughts about Harvard and the environment there and have come to the conclusion that it is a very difficult place, at least for me, to really feel great.” Believing she could overcome the mindset of considering yourself only in terms of traditional measures of success, Ariel switched her concentration twice, and joined both the polo team and the FOP community, finally finding true happiness.

Why was FOP one of the things that made Ariel so happy? She recognized that FOP was not only a super-fun group of people, but also an inclusive and supportive community. In a school that can leave its students feeling alone and under intense pressure, FOP fills a unique niche by providing social support. FOP leaders help not only their FOPpers, but also one another. FOP was one of the ways Ariel tried her “best to be kind and positive” to the other members of her community, something that she believed Harvard needed more of.

The fun, inclusive, and supportive aspects of the FOP community allowed Ariel to be happy, and as a result successful, at Harvard. Her passing has confirmed for me how right she was about the FOP community. The outpouring of support FOP leaders provide not only each other, but also to Ariel’s other friends and family is amazing. A constant stream of letters, cookies, flowers, and love continues to this day. In a college community that can often let students feel alone, FOP leaders have ensured that not a day goes by that I am without someone to talk to. Thank you, FOP.
THE STAYING POWER OF FOP
Dean Thomas Dingman

Recently I was talking with a colleague about an upperclassman who was about to get disappointing news. My colleague seemed focused on the student’s resilience and his capacity to surmount difficulties, and then she dropped into the conversation: “After all, he did FOP at the start of his Harvard experience.” An interesting observation, I thought. It made me wonder about what I will call “the staying power of FOP.” We know that freshmen in returning from their wilderness trips give high marks to the program. They are a happy bunch, seemingly well-adjusted and ready to begin their first term in college. But what impact, if any, does the program have beyond those early days?

“I AFTER COMPLETING THE TRIP, THERE IS A REALIZATION THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER COUNT YOURSELF OUT AND THAT THERE IS NO LIMIT TO HOW MUCH YOU CAN SURPRISE YOURSELF.”

I reached out to a few seniors to get their thoughts about my question. Not a large “n,” I know, but their responses were heartening. John Riley replied:

As I sat in the science center for the welcome meeting - before we were divided into our groups - I met the first people of my college career. Three years later, I still consider them my friends. They were the first people with whom I shook hands, the first people I talked with about my hopes and fears about the upcoming trip and year, and the first people I shared stories of the trail with after I got back to campus. We never camped together, and yet we share the common experience of a FOP trip, and that connection endures today.

I also learned the following from Jackie Hairston, also in the Class of 2010:

Once freshmen have departed from the Yard and their trip leaders have graduated, the FOP impression remains. After completing the trip, there is a realization that you should never count yourself out and that there is no limit to how much you can surprise yourself, in a good way, of course. Retaining the can-do attitude gives former FOP participants the edge to be inquisitive in academia, courageous in athletics and a leader in the future.

While someday we may have developed a more sophisticated assessment tool of the value-added of FOP, these brief self-reports give a hint of the impact beyond the “immediate satisfaction” we all have witnessed. As a long-time ardent fan of FOP, I cannot say that I am surprised. But I am cheered to no end, and I look forward in four years’ time to reports from the remarkable Class of 2013.

FOP LEADERS IN THE FRONTCOUNTRY
Katie Steele
Director of Freshman Programming

“Class of 2013 – let me hear you make some noise!” was the jubilant exclamation from FOP leader Walter Klyce ’10, the official student speaker at Harvard’s first ever Freshman Convocation. FOP leaders like Walter have many important roles on campus, utilizing the leadership skills learned from FOP to benefit other organizations and programs. This year, perhaps more than ever before, FOP leaders used their expertise to greatly improve Opening Days, the College’s orientation for first-year students, which takes place immediately following FOP trips.

In fact, on the day that trips returned from the wilderness, FOP Leader Luke Sperduto ’11 had to literally run from De-Issue Day to Adams House to change his clothes (and take his first shower in probably seven days) so that he could be one of two student panelists at the primary parent orientation event for families of the Class of 2013. Other FOP leaders switched out their FOP leader t-shirts for those of a Peer Advising Fellow, a carefully selected group who serve as advisers to freshmen. It was a FOP leader, Taylor Lane ’11, who organized a special Climbing Bash at the climbing wall, and a FOP leader, Sarah Rosenberg-Wohl ’12, who helped to set up the Freshman Square Dance which is quickly becoming an Opening Days tradition. All of these people spent their first few days back from the woods socializing with freshmen, answering their questions, and welcoming them, helping to make this large University feel just a little bit more fun and friendly.

As I mentioned earlier, Walter Klyce served as the student speaker for the Freshman Convocation, which offered the Class of 2013 a hearty welcome to the College. In his remarks about his own experiences and passions at Harvard, Walter’s advice was genuine, his enthusiasm was high, and his anecdotes were personal, offering the freshmen a real person they might be able to relate to as they settled into life in the Yard.

“...HELPING TO MAKE THIS LARGE UNIVERSITY FEEL JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE FUN AND FRIENDLY.”

To share that dynamism with the freshmen, we invited all of this year’s FOP leaders to help us welcome the Class of 2013 as they processed by dorm into Tercentenary Theater for the Convocation. Donning their FOP t-shirts, the leaders lined the sidewalks of the Theater, cheering and clapping as the freshmen passed through them two-by-two. It was perhaps my favorite moment of the day -- to hear such a rousing welcome from the FOP leaders and other upperclassmen who were gathered to formally say hello to the freshmen.

FOP teaches our students to be great leaders. The program gives them significant responsibility and trusts that they will use their best judgment in every situation they face in the backcountry and in Cambridge. Consequently, it’s no surprise to me, though I am quite proud, to see so many FOP leaders applying their experience and knowledge to all the other roles that they fulfill on our campus.
Last year, we set the goal of bringing in 165 donations. Thanks to your incredible support of FOP, we raised just over $25,000 through 199 donations! This year, our goal is to raise over 200 donations and to make it up to $30,000 in Fundraising Income!

How you can help:

If you have yet to donate to FOP: Make our 30th Anniversary Year the year you donate!
If you have given to FOP before: Give again! Every donation helps bring us closer to our goal of 200 gifts this season!

If you have the ability to offer from $150 to $1000: The average donation from our donors who gave less than $1000 was a record amount of $139 this year! If you gave less than $139, consider raising your donation to $150! Every dollar brings us closer to our goal of $30,000.

If you have the ability to donate $1000 or more: Last year, we received double the amount of money from our $1000 and over donors. In our 30th Anniversary Year, please help us double that amount again by giving in the range of $1000 to $5000 this fundraising season!

If you would rather give in-kind donations: Our wish list…
*150 Backpacks (Of an equivalent carrying capacity to Gregory Palisades)
*25 Sleeping Bags (Synthetic, Rated to 0-20 degrees Farenheit)
*25 Sleeping Pads (Any variety)
*50 Headlamps (Any variety)
*Synthetic or Wool Garments (hats, gloves, mittens, fleeces, sweaters, long underwear)
*GoreTex Rain Gear (Any variety)

“If it’s possible to have an ideal beginning of college, our daughter experienced it through FOP. She said what she liked most was the fuzzy cheesecake experience, which “sounded corny until you did it,” and thinking more deeply about how quickly you can learn to rely on others as they rely on you.” -- Ken Lafler and Selena Tan
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"FOP leaders help a group of individuals achieve goals they would not have otherwise achieved. They encourage, facilitate, and inspire. They ask the right questions. Their groups become so cohesive and efficient that they accomplish their goals seemingly without the leaders’ help.” --Patrick Zimmerman ‘09, SC ’08

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