

The Fuzzy Cheesecake

FOP's Annual Report & Community Newsletter

Volume XIV, December 2017



fop.fas.harvard.edu

"It is impossible to fully appreciate the value of a trail until you have been forced to walk through the wilderness without one."

-Robert Moor, "On Trails"

ABOUT FOP

THE WEEK:

4 States • 5 Nights Under the Stars • 39 Trips
78 Leaders • 383 First-Years
5474 Tortillas • Countless Memories

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.

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GREETINGS FROM STEERING COMMITTEE 2018



NOAH FANOUS '19, BEN KRUTECK '19,
WILLIAM MADDOCK '19, AKWELEY "Q" OKINE '19,
KENTON SHIMOZAKI '19, JEANINE ZHENG '20,
AND COZ TEPLITZ

LETTER FROM STEERING COMMITTEE

Thank you for reading Fuzzy Cheesecake, FOP's annual report and community newsletter. Each year, the Steering Committee (SC) prepares this publication to update our many program alumni, leader alumni, and friends about our progress on several initiatives and to give a preview of the exciting new plans for the coming semesters.

For the third year, FOP is proud to have been able to award program fee scholarships to all first-year participants that matches their financial aid package from Harvard. This commitment to making FOP financially accessible for all interested students would not have been possible without the generous support of our many donors. Thus, our ability to continue making FOP financially accessible for all interested first-years, will continue to depend on our alumni and friends. We hope you will consider supporting us in this important endeavor.

Keeping with previous years, one of our key priorities is to improve accessibility and inclusivity for prospective participants and leaders. We believe that a critical step in our long-term vision to enhance the diversity of our FOPpers is to create a community of leaders that reflects the diversity within Harvard College. We are in the process of reaching out to new affinity groups on campus to assist us in these efforts and look forward to strengthening our existing relationships with campus partners.

Each spring, one of our largest tasks is



to prepare a new cohort of leaders to guide successful trips in the fall. This year, we will again be training over 50 new upperclassmen to lead trips in August 2018. But a strong cadre of leaders is not created by simply training them in a set of technical and interpersonal skills. Our success as a program is influenced by the sense of community that leaders feel among one another, both during and after the program. Therefore, our second priority is to foster opportunities for leaders to create meaningful connections among one another with the goal of improving the long-term retention and involvement of our FOP leaders.

Our third priority is to empower FOP leaders to influence the direction of our

program by giving them more opportunities to get involved and more avenues to provide input. We have already developed a new recruitment subcommittee and will host additional town halls to collect feedback and discuss future initiatives. We plan on working with our talented and passionate community of leaders to address the many strategies that will make our program even stronger moving forward. Leadership development is a central tenant of FOP's mission statement, and SC takes seriously its role in creating those opportunities for participants and leaders.

We would like to express our gratitude for your interest in our program and hope that we can count on your support. Please reach out if you have any questions or are looking to get involved in furthering our mission.

– Noah, Ben, Will, Q, Kenton, and Jeanine

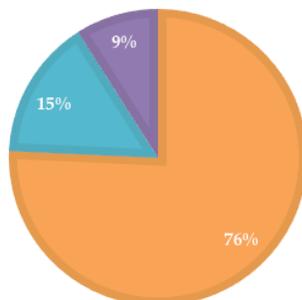
ANNUAL GIVING REPORT

In fiscal year 2017, FOP awarded a total of \$60,743 in financial aid scholarships to FOP participants in the Class of 2021.

In total, roughly 76 percent of donations received in FY17 were allocated to financial aid, 15 percent to purchases for rental equipment, and 9 percent to new programming.

HOW DONATIONS WERE SPENT – FY17

Financial Aid Rental Equipment New Programming



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Coz Teplitz

This past August was the 39th time that FOP trips have left campus for a weeklong adventure in the woods. For 39 years, FOPpers and leaders have hiked the trails and paddled the waters of New England; for 39 years, FOPpers and leaders have found that personal connections form the backbone of a smooth transition to college; for 39 years, FOPpers and leaders have together explored their hopes, fears, and expectations about what Harvard might be like.

Some years ago, in a filing cabinet tucked in the corner of our equipment room, we found the “final report” written about the FOP in 1980, its second year. The author, believed to be then-director Jeff Smith, started the report this way:

“The trip is history. Living history. The sort I think will evolve in the months and years ahead. Friendships which formed in Maine will continue to develop and grow... It went very well. People were affected by the spirit and dynamic of the group. Small groups formed their own identities...[while] all of us were given a running start at Harvard. Some have said that roommates are jealous of their participation. Leaders have said it will be months before others are able to find the same fast friends that FOP students have managed to make.”

I have long been struck by the similarity between the experiences described in this 1980 report and what we hear from FOPpers today. Below is a comment written on this year’s FOP evaluation:



“My FOP experience was an excellent way to get to know a few members of my class and smooth the transition into college. Both of my leaders stood out in

their ability to answer questions about the Harvard experience and generate authentic bonding experience with students.”

It is clear that we are now helping - and have for most of our history helped - our participants to build the social support we list as a desired outcome in our mission statement.

As I look back into our history, I find myself driven to explore where we are going. If we believe in the value of our programming—and I can assure you that I do—then we must continue to expand or deepen our impact. For many years, we have tried to welcome more students by removing financial barriers. Thanks to the outstanding generosity of parents and alumni, we have been able to dramatically expand our financial aid in recent years. We have been steadily increasing the quantity and quality of our rental equipment, which we often provide at no cost. If you have been part of this effort, thank you for your support—FOP wouldn’t be the program it is today without you.

While we still have financial challenges ahead, I believe our most fundamental struggle centers on examining—and maybe expanding—the methods we use to deliver those “authentic bonding experiences.” What, then, is the core of FOP? Recently, I feel more and more conviction that the recipe is simple: (a) small group experiences in (b) new settings that (c) provide shared challenges. This seems similar to what former Dean of Freshmen Henry Moses described thinking when he greenlighted FOP in 1979.

In a Crimson article describing FOP’s 25th anniversary, Dean Moses said, “I wanted to combat an idea of Harvard that was broad at the time that people were hyper competitive...and put people in situations where they had no choice but to cooperate.”

For the last few years, we have experimented with how we can combine those core ingredients. We have been working with the Harvard Forest to provide a cabin-based experience for students who might otherwise choose not to participate. The Forest has been a wonderful partner, and the “Cabin Trip” is considered a strong success. As one of this year’s cabin trip participants wrote in their evaluation:

“As Dean Khurana always says, we should try to have a transformative experience. FOP truly was one. I met amazing people who I still hang out with all the time, and I feel like it prepared me for college when I wasn’t ready for it beforehand. I was scared

to do FOP, but I am so happy that I did!”

So our pilot has been a success, and now, I wonder where we will go next.

If you’d like to help us find new avenues for exploration, we invite you to be in touch—and join us at our 40th anniversary celebration next year! More details will follow, but we intend to celebrate the “living history” that is now, and has been, so central to FOP.



PEOPLE FINDING PEOPLE

Jack Deschler '19, FOP Leader

FOP isn’t about the leaders. Sure, we have to be there. We have to go through the training, the snow covered training trips, and the week-long intensity that immediately precedes FOP, but it’s not about us, nor is it for us. FOP is about the FOPpers, and Anna (my co-leader) and I wanted to keep that in the forefront of our minds for the entire trip this year. Early during pre-FOP, we decided that our goal for the trip would be three words: “people finding people”. We wanted everyone on our trip to find someone they could talk to after the trip was over.

Our goal mirrored what I still feel is the most important part of my own experience as a FOPper, and what I found to be perhaps the most valuable piece of FOP. Throughout my first and second years of college, my FOP trip stayed close. Every time I walked into Annenberg Hall, I had someone that I could sit with. I walked onto campus with a close-knit group of ten friends, and as we met their roommates and their roommates’ FOP groups, I found a community that would support me through the transition to college. Three members of my trip, FOP 16, blocked together, as did two other pairs from our trip. I found one of my block-

mates and closest friends on FOP. My junior year of college started with a reunion of the group, and I would still consider all of them my friends.

Creating that experience for a new group of freshmen seemed like a daunting task. How would Anna and I even know if we were achieving our goal? When checking in with each FOPper on "Aloha Day," we were encouraged when a few said that the group was already coming together, until one remarked that everyone was sitting in the room silently. When the trip kicked off, helping our FOPpers find their people was at the forefront of our minds.

As it turned out, we didn't have anything to worry about. The constant laughter coming from camp while we cooked dinner was proof it was happening, but if we were unsure, FOP 13's utter refusal to go to sleep on time and insistence that they stay up chatting in the tent drove the point home. Before long, the activities Anna and I had planned were being overrun with stories from each FOPper's hometown, the conversations getting deeper and more meaningful than we had hoped.

After dropping the group off on campus and saying our goodbyes, the FOPpers all walked back to the Yard together (it's really not a long walk from the Quad). After Anna and I had picked up our own gear, our phones buzzed: a picture of FOP 13, together at Johnston Gate. Anna and I bumped fists. People had found people.

The group text the FOPpers started still jumps to life occasionally. One has a dance show, one an a capella performance, and one a Shakespeare recital. Every time a message

appears, or I see any of our FOPpers walking or sitting together, a smile creeps onto my face. My job, or at least the first part of it, was a success. Each FOPper has of course made new friends, expanding from the group of 12. Some spend more time with each other than others. But I believe Anna and I made that transition to college at least a little bit easier for all of them, that, at least for a little while, we helped them find their people. That's all we ever wanted.

WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE HAVE BECOME

Liz Roux '19, FOP Leader

When I tell people back home that I'm a FOP leader they often respond with a mix of confusion and bemusement. "FOP— what a silly name." Then comes my explanation of what the First-Year Outdoor Program is and my part in it, and they assume that every FOP leader is a super ripped and slightly outrageous mountain climber extraordinaire. This series of ideas and clarifications on the essence and philosophy of FOP goes on for several more minutes. By the end of it, I too am bemused, but I am also content, because something as wonderful and complex as FOP shouldn't be contained to a simple explanation.

FOP is silly, of course. And it is also incredibly challenging and rewarding in its use of the outdoors as a conduit for vulnerability during a most vulnerable time for all involved. Naturally, the FOPpers are vulnerable as they conclude their high school selves and seek not only to enter the dominion of

college, but also the complex culture of Harvard. FOP leaders, perhaps less expectedly, are also vulnerable. More than a semester of rigorous training has led up to the moment in which we don our leader-ness. We must be charismatic, energetic, a little silly/crazy, and competent enough to do what has to be done safely. But we must also be genuine. We evolve into a role that is both peer and superior, supporter and driver, a source of silliness and seriousness both on and off the trail.

I romanticize FOP, and I think that's ok. I love waking up cocooned in my sleeping bag and watching the light filter through the New England trees. It is mesmerizing to feel the world, so raw and crisp, beneath my boots as FOPpers shout increasingly convoluted words for games like "Contact." There is a magic to the WhisperLite stove flame upon which nighttime morale is fueled, a camaraderie to the necessary evil of "sumping," and a majesty to the wilderness that we get to embrace for the handful of days before the frontcountry world reclaims our hearts and minds. From trail conversations to wandering thoughts before bed, FOP never fails to help me realize what matters most to me in the life that I am so lucky to lead.

I knew it from the day I stepped onto campus during "Aloha Day" freshman year. I knew it when I responded to my first "med sim" on my training trip. I knew it as I led my FOPpers across a windswept ridge thousands of feet above reality. FOP makes me a better me. And when people ask what FOP is and why it has such a silly name, I am thankful that I get a chance to portray even a sliver of its importance. I hope, with all of my eager heart, that FOP has been meaningful to you too.

With FOP we have braved sun, rain, bugs, hunger and snow

And most importantly we have learned how to lead and how to grow

When we look back on our FOPtimes and life carries on

Remember who we were and who we have become

We are FOPpers and FOP leaders, and ain't it the truth

That FOP love lasts forever, and forever lives on in you





UNPLUGGING

Thomas Dingman, Dean of Freshmen

I am glad once again to be contributing to this newsletter. For years I have been an ardent fan of FOP, and aware from extensive surveying of the enormous impact it has on both first-year participants and the carefully selected and trained leaders. The aspects I most celebrate are: the chance for everyone to feel involved, the appreciation of teamwork, the powerful lessons regarding leading, and the awe that comes with being in the natural world. To this list, I would now add the value of “unplugging.”

At Convocation this fall, I mentioned an interesting Op-Ed column in *The New York Times* describing George Shultz’s habit of carving out an hour of solitude each week during the time he served as Secretary of State in the 1980s. Not a lot of time, but the quiet reflection it allowed led to some moments of great creativity and insight, and kept the Secretary feeling both sane and balanced. I worry that in this super wired world of ours, we are losing the capacity to concentrate and to be truly present; and, in our reliance on things like Facebook, we are developing greater feelings of envy, loneliness, and fear of missing out. It is no wonder that the incidence of anxiety amongst adolescents is rising. One mental health provider on a college campus has even called it an epidemic of our age.

Curious to know more, I asked a number of this year’s FOP participants what it was like for them to be in the wilderness

without their devices. Not the same solitude as that experienced by George Shultz, but the similarities are clearly there. Many said they had no idea how reliant they had become on technology and how the experience of being unplugged turned out to be amazingly liberating. No one had regrets. Excerpts from their remarks follow:

“I remember canoeing all day with this boy as he told me about his half sibling and narrated the scenery around us in the voices of famous writers including Hemingway, Dickinson, and Steinbeck. He is now one of my best friends, and I owe this in part to the authenticity and phone-free nature of all of our interactions on FOP. In that environment, I felt like I appreciated new details in nature, dreamt vividly, and even laughed more.”

– *Te Palandjian '21*

“When we had unstructured time to relax on FOP, we would talk to each other and play games, but I can easily imagine that if we had kept our phones, it could be very easy to just become absorbed in reading an article online without actually interacting with anyone else. It’s also relieving to be disconnected from social media and the news—you can spend a week just hiking with friends without worrying about anything else going on in the world...”

– *Zachary Yedidia '21*

“Not being aware of the time allowed us all to be more present. People often preach about the benefits of not being connected to your phone or laptop to be more present, but I found that not being guided during my day by the time allowed me to be fully focused on the people and experiences around me. When we came back to campus, I almost wished they wouldn’t give our watches back.”

– *Elizabeth Lively '21*

“If we run into a problem we can’t solve, we can discuss it as a group. An otherwise individual experience—a quick, five second interaction between finger and touch screen—becomes a team effort when the crutch of the electronic world has been removed. The result is a gold mine of amazing stories about the streams we crossed, the mountains we summited, the pouring, pouring rain we endured, and of course the incredible bond we forged as trip-mates.”

– *Sam Lincoln '21*

That’s powerful testimony. Of course, separating from technology during term-time is more challenging, but I hope FOPpers will not forget the experience of feeling very connected and, at times, very calm. Maybe, it is worthwhile to power down for a period each day or a period each week to restore the soul, experience authentically what is in front of you, and tap into one’s own creativity and imagination.

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