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The Fuzzy Cheesecake

FOP's Annual Report & Community Newsletter

Volume XVI, December 2019



"Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable."

-Mary Oliver

ABOUT FOP

THE WEEK:

6 States • 5 Nights Under the Stars • 50 Trips
106 Leaders • 454 First-Years
5418 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 2020



HANNAH BARBASH-TAYLOR, SPENCER CARTER, SONIA CHEN,
SARAH FLYNN, CHRIS JOHNSON-HARWITZ, COOPER TRETTER
AND JACKSON WALKER

LETTER FROM STEERING COMMITTEE

Hello lucky reader! Welcome to this year's edition of Fuzzy Cheesecake, FOP's annual newsletter and report. As an SC, we're excited to use Fuzzy as an opportunity to keep everyone—FOP alumn, current leader, Harvard College alumn or otherwise—privy to what's going on in the world of FOP! After a somewhat temperate fall, we've finally started breaking out our fuzzy sweaters and scarves as winter begins to descend on Cambridge.

This upcoming year marks a lot of transitions for FOP, both physical ones and those related to FOP's mission. We've recently moved our equipment room from its long-time home in the FYE (First-Year Experience Office, formerly the FDO) to our new state of the art (and extra-organized) location in the SOCH! [include image]. This shift will lead to a bright new beginning for how we organize logistics for all of our future trips and we're excited to make the SOCH a new FOP-y place.

In addition, we're thrilled to plan FOP '20 with our new (and wonderful) director, Emily Quigley (more commonly known as Quigs)! At our SCodyssey retreat this year, we came together and developed a set of strategic priorities to dictate how we're going to approach making FOP a better program for first-years and communities for its leaders. To summarize some of those points, we want to underscore FOP's com-

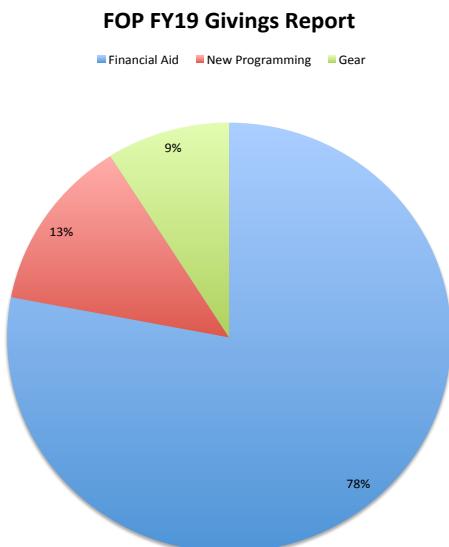


-mitment to being a diverse and welcoming community for all. The concept of the outdoors as the "great equalizer" is one that unfortunately ignores some of the larger structural barriers for many first-years and leaders alike in accessing the outdoors. As such, we strive to continue in the footsteps of SCs before us to increase financial aid for FOPpers, but also to improve our outreach strategy for both leaders and FOPpers to make sure that students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds know that FOP is a community that is accessible to them. We acknowledge,

however, that accruing diversity is only one facet of the battle; building robust support networks that foster belonging and inclusion are pivotal in then ensuring we can continue to make the FOP community one where everyone feels safe and that they truly belong. We strongly encourage you to take a look at the full list of objectives above, as there's much more we'd like to accomplish this year than can fit in a letter.

As always, we are open to hearing ways in which you all think FOP can continue to grow and become stronger as a program. As such, we encourage you to reach out to us either in person, via email, at office hours, or by whatever method is suitable for you. To the donors and alumni, we are truly indebted to you for your gratitude in allowing us to create the best FOP for everyone. We're all united by the incredible community that is FOP and we want to continue weaving a web to bring more and more people into our community for years to come, and we're truly excited for you all to come on this trip with us.

—Hannah, Spencer, Sonia, Sarah, Chris, Cooper and Jackson



THE LAUGHTER OF FOP

Emily Quigley

Dear FOP Community,

First off, I want to thank you all for welcoming me into what has already proven to be an incredibly warm, vibrant, and caring community of students, parents, alumni, and staff. In the first 6 months as FOP Director, I have been amazed at the level of intentionality put into every action and decision from trainee evaluation to call-down skits.

In reflecting on what I have seen of FOP so far, the thing that stands out to me most is the laughter that permeates every space inhabited by the FOP community. Whether it is the weekly FOP leader lunch (to which admittedly I have only been once), leader pairs and trios scattered across the Yard during pre-FOP, SC meetings in Matthews basement that have gone wildly off the planned agenda, FOPpers simultaneously trying to clean their group gear while also reminiscing on inside jokes from the previous 6 days, or the ever-invaluable basecamp team furiously packing thousands of tortillas at 2am, there is a certain joy that emanates from people when they are in FOP mode. It is a kind of delirium that reminds me of sleepover parties where endless snacks and candy inevitably resulted in stomach-cramping giggles that had no definitive source and seemed to only intensify the more they were stifled.

In my mind, the laughter of FOP signifies something much deeper than just sounds of happiness. I see it, instead, as the moments of true authenticity FOP fosters in individuals that has perhaps been dormant since the days of late-night giggle fits. It is a glimpse at feeling indescribably connected to each other when we are inspired to bring our full selves into a space, and are not only accepted but celebrated for it. And I believe it is the same thing inside of us that, when we're standing on top of a mountain staring across endless sky, makes us want to yell or shout or just say SOMETHING because all of that beauty is TOO MUCH to just look at!

At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that not everyone feels this freedom in FOP. As mentioned many times in this newsletter, the outdoors has and continues to be unwelcome to many people of non-dom-

inant identities and backgrounds. In last week's SC meeting, we reflected on a reading in the FOP Leader Handbook by Scott Woods that discusses anti-racist work as an ongoing, constant action, akin to emptying a quickly filling boat while at sea. As FOP seeks to do the work of emptying our boat, we recognize that we have a long way to go before everyone has access to the freedom of feeling fully comfortable in this community. We seek to continuously re-shape our program in a way that opens up new channels for inviting, supporting, and strengthening a diverse group of leaders and participants. As Director, I strive to guide FOP in creating space year after year that inspires more laughter for more people.

In order to do this, we will need to continue to rely on YOU! Your contributions through volunteering with us on big days, financial support that is put towards scholarships and new gear, or actual gear donations all help us move toward making FOP a more inclusive program for everyone. This past year, we had over 35 incredible FOP alumni and friends help out during Training Trips and FOP trips, and we gave over \$100,000 for first-years to participate in FOP as part of our continued effort to match the percentage of financial aid given to students by the College. Next year, we are hoping to continue to match the College's financial aid percentages in addition to replacing around 60 of our backpacks that are nearing the end of their service. We are also always appreciative of alums and friends who work tirelessly to support the preparation, emergency response, and wrap-up of our trips.

So, as we embark on building FOP 2020, this is a reminder to keep laughing, and keep finding ways to spread laughter. Who knows, you might even find that you haven't truly laughed in a while.

With joy,
Emily Quigley ("Quigs")

Contact me with questions or ideas anytime! emilyquigley@fas.harvard.edu

LETTERS FROM OUR LEADERS

Martha Kabele '20

In all the lightheartedness of the adventures I've had in the context of FOP or alongside other members of the FOP community, it's easy to forget just how powerful of an impact FOP has had on my life. I was once asked to describe a perfect day, and I said something along the lines of wanting it to be outside, with friends I loved, doing something physically taxing but not necessarily grueling. It dawned on me that I was describing a typical day on a FOP trip. I find myself suddenly smiling as I walk to class or in the middle of a conversation when I remember moments from my trips or training. And while FOP has brought me so much joy, it's also brought some of the most challenging and unfamiliar experiences I've faced since coming to Harvard. I had never gone camping before my FOP trip as a first-year, and for the next two years after my trip, didn't think myself capable of leading my own trip because I hadn't been camping since. Amazingly, I was still welcomed into the leader community with open arms, and taught everything I needed to know (and probably more) in order to lead a fantastic FOP trip of my own. FOP is the kind of community it takes to nurture someone like myself to become confident in a sphere they've barely entered. At a place like Harvard, it's pretty rare to feel like you can become as good at something as others who are much more experienced than you; it's even more rare for those who are leagues ahead of you to turn back and offer you a hand to help you up. But that's what FOP has been for me, and it can be that for you, too.

Gabby Schultz '21

I'm often asked why I- or anyone- would want to lead FOP. What could possibly be so fun about spending a week in the wilderness with ten first years? The easy answer is mumbling something along the lines of a desire to welcome first years to Harvard, to ease the transition between the comfortable and the unknown. For a few days, we get to be stewards of both Harvard and the outdoors and we have rolls of film to prove it.

But why do FOP leaders choose to lead? It's certainly not the pay that keeps us here. We do FOP not because we love using outhouses or cooking over broken stoves in the

rain or teaching blister care on day two. We do FOP because the mountains call us; their siren songs beckoning us forward with the promise of friendship and fresh gado gado. In teaching first years how to tie a bowline knot or find the golden ratio of GORP, we rediscover ourselves. Feelings foreign to us now- uncertainty, fear, loneliness- rush back as if it was us, not them, standing on the cusp of a breathtakingly new adventure. Because what they don't tell you about FOP is that the relationship between leaders and participants is reciprocal. We teach our FOPpers as much as we learn from them- this program blurs the lines between what once was and what is to come. And as we lead first years through forests and over mountains, we remind ourselves that it is not the destination we search for, but what greets us along the way.

Packs on, we say, and then we charge.

FOP REFLECTIONS

*Katie O'Dair Ph.D., Harvard College Dean
of Students*

I really wish that I had the opportunity to participate in a program like the First Year Outdoor Program when I was in college, but no such program existed! FOP is a special program, from the mission of helping students learn about themselves through ad-venture activities to the leadership opportu-nities for trip leaders. When students return to campus, they use terms like "life changing"

to describe the experience, often citing moments when they were cold, tired, hungry, or otherwise out of their comfort zones. Yet the beauty of FOP is that these moments take place within a shared community, so while students can't control the weather, or blisters, or an unexpected cold plunge into a river, they can process the experience and what they learned together with other students. The closest I came to a FOP-like experience was as a camp counselor during college, when I took a group of 10-year old kids on an overnight hike, where it poured, we couldn't get a fire going, kids went hungry, and I woke up with a slug on my face. It wasn't fun, but in retrospect (and once we returned to camp) it was funny and memorable. I suspect the FOP leaders - who commit countless hours to learn how to tie knots and keep everyone dry (among other things!) - have their own share of stories and memories that they will recall thirty years from now.

As I have said before, I believe every incoming student should have the opportunity to participate in a pre-orientation experience as the sense of community, shared purpose, and focused time together reaps benefits that are long lasting. FOP gives students all of that and more. One of my First-Year advisees last year was on FOP and they told me that it was one of the best experiences of their life. Of their life! There is something special about a program that provides such a monumental experience for students before they start their Harvard career. The College is expanding options for

pre-orientation programs because they are so important, including a new leadership program in 2020.

FOP has the all the elements that contribute to this life-changing experience including risk, adventure, learning new things, meet-



ing new people, challenge by choice, and fun. The most interesting parts of my conversations with students upon their return aren't typically about the hiking or canoeing, but about facing some unexpected challenge, whether it be that they did not pack the right gear, they disagreed with someone who they were sharing a tent with, or they scaled a mountain that looked daunting from below. This self-awareness is such an important part of FOP, because when you join a community like Harvard College you will be living with and going to class with people from different backgrounds, identities, ideologies, and ways of being in the world. You can't just step off the path on a FOP hike if things get tough (or you can, you just might get lost) - you must stay, engage, and work through it. The part about sticking with it when it gets tough is one of the most valuable parts of a FOP experience. Another student, upon their return, told me that the trip was harder and less fun than they anticipated - but the entire experience exceeded their expectations beyond measure. How can both be true? Real learning lies in the unexpected, in the challenge, in the expansion of your sense of who you are with yourself and others. I also see the tangible benefits that these relationships bring, as students arrive on campus with more confi-





dence, with a set of new friends, and an experience that will stay with them throughout their life. I am grateful to the student leaders, alumni, advisors, and participants for helping welcome new students in such an important way.

"WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM FOP?"

First-Year Outdoor Program Participants 2019

"Going into college, I was terrified about how I was going to find friends and find a place here. FOP made this feeling go away entirely—I met friends who I'm still close with to this day, and the program made me even more excited about my college experiences to come."

"As a standalone trip, FOP was amazing. Being immersed in that type of nature and having that experience was invaluable. But what I gained from FOP that I think I will benefit the most from is the incredible friends I made, both with my fellow FOPpers and my leaders. I still see this group regularly, in my classes, social events, or simply when I run into them at Annenberg.

We still meet up as a group frequently, with the leaders, and there are very strong bonds that I did not know could be made in such a short time. It is an incredible gift, and one that would not be possible without FOP."

"I gained from my FOP experience the realization that even the most unlikely of friendships can form through common experiences. Everyone in my FOP group was quite different in terms of our backgrounds and opinions, but we became incredibly close and still are. This realization has encouraged me to not be afraid of approaching people and to always keep an open mind - you never know who will be your next best friend."

"The most obvious (and perhaps most influential) answer is meeting a diverse and amazing group of friends who knew me on a deep level going into the craziness of the first few weeks of Harvard. FOP exposed to a subset of Harvard people who I knew I could rely on when I needed it, while at the same time reassuring me that I would be able to fit in and make friends with the rest of Harvard, as there are inevitably a

number of worries and misconceptions I had of Harvard at large before attending. More generally, FOP was a challenging and intense experience that pushed me to my limits while simultaneously refreshing me. I had never done anything like FOP before and it was well outside my comfort zone, reminding me that I am more capable than I believe."



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