

Steering Committee

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FOP Leader Cover Letter & Application 2019

Dear FOP Leader Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in the First-Year Outdoor Program, the oldest and largest pre-orientation program at Harvard College. Since its inception in 1979, FOP has worked hard to provide fun, inspiring, and safe pre-orientation trips for incoming students. The program owes much of its success to the wonderful leader community, and the Steering Committee hopes that this letter will answer some of your questions about applying to become a FOP leader.

What is FOP?

The First-Year Outdoor Program (FOP) is an introduction to Harvard that takes places across the lakes, mountains, and trails of New England. In 2018, 422 incoming freshmen participated in FOP on 46 trips led by 95 upperclassmen all over Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Vermont. While on campus, FOP participants and leaders continue to learn from each other and support one another, creating spaces for reflection and growth throughout the year.

The mission of FOP is to provide group, adventure-based activities that promote the development of social support and self-awareness for first-year students and leadership development for members of the Harvard community. The central values of FOP are compassion, the equality and intrinsic worth of all people regardless of identity, responsibility to community, and care and responsibility for the environment.

Next year, FOP trips will run from Tuesday, August 20, 2019 to Monday, August 26, 2019. Commitment as a leader begins on **Thursday, August 15, 2019** and runs through **Monday, August 26, 2019**.

What kinds of trips are there?

- **Backpacking Trips** are six-day treks through the forests and mountains of New England.
- **Switch-Canoe Trips** include canoeing and backpacking. Leading a switch-canoe trip requires additional lifeguard certification training.
- **Service Trips** are backpacking treks with one to two days of trail work. Service work ranges from onsite construction to the clearing of trail debris.
- **Cabin Trips** will spend the week learning about one location from a variety of perspectives. Students will stay in cabins and use different methods to develop a deeper understanding of the place they are staying. Previous trips have included site exploration of the Harvard Forest.
- **Site-Based Service Trips** camp in one location and spend their trip doing service projects and day hikes.

What makes a good leader?

FOP leaders take on a serious responsibility guiding a group of 8 to 12 first-year students and must have the capacity to learn both outdoors and interpersonal skills. Applicants must be able to learn and demonstrate the following skills by the end of training:

- Communicate and work effectively with co-leader(s)
- Discuss views on the Harvard experience with an open-minded perspective
- Navigate potential conflicts between group members while maintaining group safety and balancing individual and group needs
- Engage with difference in a thoughtful and respectful manner
- Demonstrate comfort and confidence with technical skills necessary for backcountry travel
- Effectively handle emergency and unexpected situations

FOP leaders promote the development of social support and self-awareness for first-years. FOP is looking for applicants who convey strong interpersonal skills and who are able to foster a positive environment for group bonding and self-exploration, drawing on their own experiences as well as the comprehensive spring training. FOP leaders are dedicated to acting as a resource for students throughout the fall trip and following their return to campus.

Since FOP is conducted in a backcountry setting, leaders are faced with particular challenges regarding the safety and comfort level of participants on their trips. With this in mind, FOP looks for applicants with a sound decision-making capacity and a readiness to improve their outdoor skills. Potential leaders should have the desire to become comfortable in the outdoors, but **no prior experience is necessary!**

The strength of FOP depends on the involvement, support, and breadth of experiences of its leaders. FOP values having leaders of different ages, backgrounds, interests, identities, and perspectives.

Applicants should also view the experience of leading a FOP trip as an opportunity to develop their leadership skills, explore different styles of leadership, and engage with different perspectives. FOP takes feedback and growth seriously in the continued development of leaders.

Things you do NOT need to be a FOP leader

- Applicants do **NOT need to have participated in FOP** to be a leader! Many of our leaders did not participate in FOP as first-years.
- Applicants do **NOT need to have outdoors experience**. FOP accepts trainees of all levels of experience and will teach trainees the necessary outdoor skills to lead a successful trip. Applicants must be interested in learning about backcountry safety and spending time outdoors.
- Applicants do **NOT need to own equipment or pay for training**. FOP will cover all of the necessary costs and allows leaders to rent equipment at no cost.

How do I become a leader?

Applicants must complete two stages prior to their confirmation as leaders. The first, Trainee Selection, constitutes the application and interview processes. The trainees selected following

the interview must then complete a comprehensive training process throughout the spring semester, culminating in a nine-day training trip. Upon successful completion and evaluation, trainees are confirmed as leaders.

Sometimes, trainees whose skills need significant improvement may be required to complete additional training over the summer or after leading in the fall. Additionally, a trainee may be asked not to lead a FOP trip if the trainee's skills are significantly lacking after the training trip.

With that said, once trainees have been selected, FOP is committed to doing everything in order to help trainees successfully complete training. In exchange, FOP asks for a significant commitment of time and effort on the part of trainees.

Trainee Selection Process

- (1) Submit FOP leader application response form with two letters of evaluation.
- (2) Applicants will be informed if they are selected for an interview.
- (3) Interviews are scheduled to take place during the first few weeks of the spring 2019 term.

If past years are any indication, trainee selection will be a highly competitive process. In a typical year, FOP receives over 130 applications and will select a cohort of approximately 55 trainees. The Steering Committee will notify applicants about final decisions by email on or before February 18, 2019.

Letters of evaluation should be completed by people who have observed the applicant in a position of leadership or responsibility such as a high school teacher, extracurricular leader, teammate, advisor, or employer.

Generally, it is discouraged to submit an evaluation from a roommate or close friend. Likewise, it is often helpful to submit evaluations from individuals who have seen the applicant in different contexts. Please look at the letter of evaluation questions in advance and choose an appropriate individual.

Provide evaluators with the following information:

1. Full name and email (Ensure that the same name and email are entered on the response form.)
2. Whether the applicant has waived their right of access to the letters of evaluation under FERPA. The waiver is included in the application response form.

The link to the letter of evaluation form can be found at fop.fas.harvard.edu/apply-lead.

Spring Training

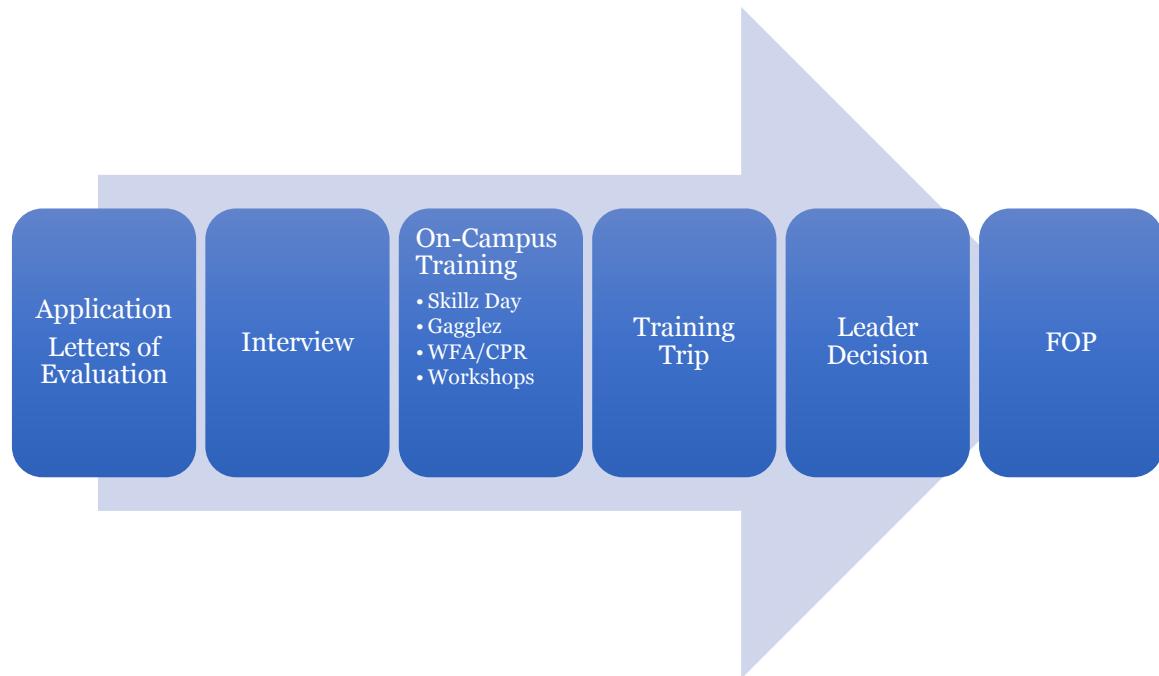
Final selection as a trainee is dependent on the completion of the comprehensive training process detailed in the "Training Requirements" section, including successful evaluation following the training trip.

FOP takes training requirements seriously and every year there are individuals who do not complete training as a result of absences and scheduling conflicts. FOP expects trainees to be present for all required trainings, but realizes that conflicts arise. Although Steering Committee cannot make allowances for individuals who are not available for training trips or FOP trips,

exceptions to other requirements can be made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of Steering Committee.

By alerting Steering Committee to conflicts early, there is a higher likelihood that trainees will be provided alternative training options. Failure to inform Steering Committee in advance of conflicts will reflect poorly on the trainee during spring training and may result in the trainee being asked not to lead.

If an applicant foresees a **significant and unavoidable conflict** with any of the training requirements, please describe the exact nature and timing of the conflict in the designated section of the application. If the applicant is selected for an interview, Steering Committee will discuss any clarifications regarding the applicant's conflicts at that time.



Training Requirements

IMPORTANT DATES

- (1) Welcome Meeting: Thursday, February 21, 2019, 7 p.m.–8 p.m.
- (2) Skillz Day Kickoff: Saturday, March 9, 2019, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
- (3) Wilderness First Aid and CPR certification: one full weekend, either March 30–31 or April 13–14, 2019 (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- (4) Skillz Day Review and TT Reveal: Saturday, April 27, 2019, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.
- (5) Training Trips: Sunday, May 19, 2019–Monday, May 27, 2019
- (6) Pre-FOP: Thursday, August 15, 2019–Monday, August 19, 2019
- (7) FOP Trips: Tuesday, August 20, 2019–Monday, August 26, 2019

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Weekly Training Meetings** (TBD): 2-hour session each week, timing varied based on trainee availability

- Office Hours: 5 volunteer hours during spring term (minimum of 2 hours in Equipment Room)
- Additional Workshops (TBD): Up to two additional workshops on weekday evenings
- Lifeguard Certification classes (TBD — Switch only)
- Canoe Skillz Day (TBD — Switch only)

Anything else applicants should know?

- All current freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are eligible to apply.
- Students who will be on leave for either the spring 2019 or fall 2019 terms are **not eligible** to apply.
- The cost of leader training is paid for by FOP. Equipment (including backpacks, clothing, and sleeping bags) can be borrowed from FOP at **no cost**.

Applicants who have submitted applications in previous years are encouraged to consider applying again. Many leaders were not selected the previous times they applied, and have since become an integral part of the leader community. Extra time is often beneficial to the applicant because of the additional leadership opportunities and opportunities for growth that exist in that timeframe.

What comes next?

FOP will be hosting **information sessions and open houses** to talk about the program and the process for becoming a leader. Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. Current leaders will also be in attendance to discuss their experiences in the program.

Information Sessions: learn more about applying and training to be a FOP leader. Each hour-long information session will be followed by a meet and greet with current leaders.

- Thursday, November 15, 2018, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Science Center Hall E
- Monday, November 29, 2018, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Fong Auditorium
- Thursday, November 29, 2018, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Fong Auditorium

Open House: meet current leaders and hear about their FOP experiences.

- Sunday, December 2, 2018, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Ticknor Lounge

Additionally, application mentors are available to provide advice to applicants about the written application or speak more about the program. Contact information and bios of application mentors are available at fop.fas.harvard.edu/people/role/application-mentor.

Inquiries about logistics, especially training dates, the selection process, or requirements, should be directed to the Steering Committee.

The application deadline is **Tuesday, December 11, 2018 at 11:59 p.m.**

Letters of evaluation are due by **Thursday, December 20, 2018**. Application and letter of evaluation submission instructions are posted at fop.fas.harvard.edu/apply-lead.

We look forward to reading your application. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

Sincerely,
Steering Committee of the First-Year Outdoor Program

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Phone: (617) 495-7935

Office: Matthews South Basement o3

NOTE: PLEASE KEEP THIS LETTER IN YOUR RECORDS AS A REFERENCE FOR FUTURE DATES

FOP 2018-19 Leader Application

FOP applications will be collected via submission to a form found at fop.fas.harvard.edu/apply-lead. Please use the following document to think about your response. Once you have composed your answers, you should copy and paste them into a template available for download on our website.

Section F(ree Response) of FOP

Please answer the following questions. Due to the large volume of applications we receive, we kindly ask you to limit each response to no more than 150 words. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be specific in your answers and illustrate using concrete examples.

Question 1

Tell us something about you that you think we should know. Several optional prompts are below. We emphasize that you are not restricted to these.

- Tell us about an aspect of your life that you consider a fundamental part of your identity.
- If you had to pick one person in the world to describe you, who would it be, and why?
- Discuss a community that you're a part of and why it's important to you.

Question 2

Reflect on your own first year at Harvard. What is one lesson you learned and think would be important to share with a group of FOPpers before they start their first year of college? Please be specific.

Question 3

You need not have all of the skills required to lead FOP when you apply, but you're expected to learn them throughout the training process. Describe an experience of personal growth. What challenged you to grow, and how did you respond?

Section O(utdoors and leading experience) of FOP

Question 4

Co-leading is a large part of the FOP leader experience, where groups of two to three leaders work together to plan and run each trip.

Describe a time that you worked closely with another person (it does not have to be in a formal leadership role). What were your strengths and the challenges you faced in the context of this relationship? How did this relationship inform the way you approach working with other people?

Question 5

In FOP, we are constantly working toward making our trips and community as inclusive as possible, though we recognize that we still have significant room for growth and programmatic development.

What does the idea of inclusion mean to you in the context of helping FOPpers make their transition to college life? What steps would you take to create an inclusive space on your trip? Please try to be specific and concrete.

Question 6

What role does the outdoors have in the context of FOP? What about the outdoors makes FOP unique as a program? Don't worry about having no outdoors experience or having a "correct" answer. Many FOP leaders come into training with no previous outdoors experience and often offer valuable perspectives on this.

Section P(ut your feet in their boots) of FOP

Imagine that the following scenario describes a day on a FOP trip you are leading. After reading it, please list three of your concerns, elaborating about why they are concerns for you, and how you would react to them. There are no right or wrong answers, but you should try to pick the three concerns that you feel are the most pressing. Please note that, while leading FOP can be a demanding experience, the situation described below is not typical and has not happened on an actual FOP trip. Any resemblance to friends is purely coincidental. (450 word limit)

You are about to eat lunch on the third day of your FOP trip with 8 FOPpers and 1 co-leader. So far, your trip has gone smoothly except for the first night: it was raining and you couldn't get one of your stoves to work, so you had a late dinner and a short night of sleep. Also, Dennis and Rafael's sleeping bags got damp, and they are still drying out. Lunch is later than usual today because the terrain in the morning was steep with a lot of elevation change. Neha, your most fit FOPper, thought the morning was really easy and was voicing her frustration that the group had been moving so slowly. Brynne hiked in the back the whole morning and could barely keep up. She told you that she was worried about holding up the group, but that this was the hardest thing she'd ever done before.

At lunchtime, the whole group sits down and you start to pull out the salami and cheese. One of your FOPpers, Jacob, keeps Kosher and does not eat salami, which you knew beforehand, so you pull out the peanut butter for him. Another one of your FOPpers, Greg, says he's never met a Jewish person before and asks Jacob why he's not eating salami. Neha turns to you and asks if she can have peanut butter instead because she's sick of salami. You know if you pass the peanut butter around today, there probably would not be enough peanut butter to last for the next two lunches. You are about to ask Neha to hold off when your co-leader, Ted, says "sure!" and passes it to her. You try to signal to him but he doesn't see you, and lunch goes on. You notice that Dennis is sitting separate from the group and not participating in the conversation.

Joanna, one of your most outgoing FOPpers who went to boarding school in Massachusetts, has been talking about her two older brothers who also went to Harvard. She announces to the group that she wants to go to medical school, and that she wants to write for the Crimson. One of your quieter FOPpers, Catherine, is from a rural town in Idaho and is the eldest of five siblings. She is listening intently to Joanna, and asks her what the Crimson is. Joanna explains to her that it is Harvard's daily newspaper, one of the top college papers in the country, and that it looks really good on a resume. Joanna goes on to tell Catherine how she and her mother have already planned out all of the courses that she will take over the next four years. Catherine looks

worried and continues to ask Joanna about her college plans. As you're eating lunch, Ted takes out the map and shows everyone the route for the afternoon. He says that we still have two miles over challenging terrain, and that we're going to have to pick up the pace if we want to get to camp before dark.

Dennis is still sitting away from the group, and you realize that he has been separate at meals for the past two lunches. You decide to go check in with him, and when you ask him how he's doing, he tells you that he's fine, just tired. You ask him if he wants to come over and join the group and he shrugs his shoulders and says maybe later.

As you pack up lunch you wonder what to do next. As a leader of the group you want to make sure everyone gets the most out of this FOP trip. You wonder how best to prepare everyone for the rest of the day and the remainder of the trip.