

# THE FUZZY CHEESECAKE

DECEMBER 2024 | VOLUME XIX

## HELLO LUCKY READER!

Welcome to the Fuzzy Cheesecake, FOP's annual report and community newsletter. We're excited to share a piece of FOP with you, wherever you may be now. Steering Committee '25 welcomes you to learn about our hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the upcoming year. In this edition we have greetings from SC'25 and FOP director, Kent Ratliff, a look back at FOP 2024, FOPper and leader testimonials, the spirit of giving, and staying connected. We have a lot to catch you up on, so settle down and get cozy.



## FOP BY THE NUMBERS

In 2024 we had the great honor of sending out 39 FOP trips across Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, serving 306 incoming first-years. Thanks in part to generous donations from FOP friends and alumni, we were able to offer financial aid to 45% of FOP's participants, many of whom would not have had the opportunity to participate without some form of assistance. Financial aid is crucial to FOP's mission of inclusion and accessibility of our programming for all.

## FOP'S MISSION

FOP's mission is 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. We strive to cultivate a strong sense of place and belonging through a radically inclusive supportive community.





*From left to right: Michelle Zhang '27, Kaia Thomas '27, Annika Dellinger '27, Katie Robinson '27, Sheerea Yu '27, Emmanuel Edwards '27, Hannah McLaughlin '27, Kent Ratliff (Director), and Andrew Choe '26*

## GREETINGS FROM STEERING COMMITTEE '25

Steering Committee '25 comes to you at a time of growth for the program. With lots of change last year- getting a new FOP director for one- FOP has found its footing and is ready to take the program to new heights. Still, the goals of the past remain: to offer FOP to all first-years who want to participate for free and continue to push for a diverse and inclusive community. With our SC term, we bring a renewed energy and determination to making this happen and continuing to build a stable foundation for FOP for years to come.

Over the past few years, FOP has been aiming to engage more critically and thoughtfully with DEI practices in order to diversify both our leader and participant pools. Our current vision is to broaden the parameters of what constitutes a FOP trip to ensure a more accessible and inclusive community. We are making a concrete effort to diversify FOP and to welcome leaders into our community from all areas of campus. In order to do so, we are working on identifying barriers of entry and working to lower them, and using these to inform the creation of a structured DEI framework for this and future SCs.

We hope this newsletter has brought a slice of FOP love to wherever you may be. We love to hear from our alums and friends, so please reach out!

As we reassess what it means to create accessible communities in the outdoors, FOP aims to shift its trip types to reflect the needs and interests of its leaders and participants. This entails a wider availability of site based and cabin trips to keep up with FOPper demand. Last year, such trip types saw unprecedented demand. In accordance with our new approach to DEI, we are working on modifying our training to meet the needs of our community. We hope that in doing so, FOP expands its leader reach to a broader group of people, thus falling in line with its goal of increasing accessibility.

Another exciting development to FOP's programming is the coordination with other pre-orientation programs and campus groups as well as partnering with local outdoor and indigenous communities. FOP is looking forward to working with a variety of different existing organizations to offer a variety of outdoor experiences for pre-orientation and throughout the year.

SC'25 is also committed to fostering joy and spontaneous fun throughout the LC and wider FOP community. As we reflect on another successful year of FOP and recruit a new class of trainees, we are filled with excitement for the year to come.

With FOP love,  
Andrew, Annika, Emmanuel, Hannah, Kaia, Katie, Michelle, and Sheerea



# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR: KENT RATLIFF

Dear FOP Community,

As we embark on another First-Year Outdoor Program (FOP), I'm thrilled to celebrate the success of my first FOP and look ahead to what we can accomplish together. This past year, FOP launched 39 trips across New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine, and has once again brought students closer through shared experiences in nature, creating bonds that go far beyond the trails and fostering a strong sense of community that welcomes new students and builds long-lasting bonds. It's been inspiring to witness the impact of this program and to imagine the possibilities for our continued growth.

Our success would not be possible without the dedication of FOP's leaders, alumni, and the Steering Committee, who contribute to the spirit and mission of FOP. To our leaders and volunteers—thank you for the countless hours you've poured into guiding, mentoring, and supporting our students. You are the heart of this program. And to the alumni who continue to advocate for and uplift FOP, your commitment to this community allows us to build on the strong foundation of the past as we move forward. To the Steering Committee, your work is integral to the growth and success of this program and I'm so excited to get to work with another incredible group of student leaders this upcoming year. Together, we are creating something truly special.

Looking ahead, we're excited to expand our programming to reach even more students. Our goals for the coming year include broadening access to FOP, introducing new activities, and maintaining the joy and inclusivity that define this experience. With each step, we aim to bring the fulfillment, confidence, and friendships fostered by FOP to even more of our campus community.

I'm grateful to be part of this journey with all of you and look forward to another incredible year. Here's to new adventures, lasting connections, and a thriving FOP!

Cheers,

Kent Ratliff

Harvard Outdoor Recreation Manager and Director of First-Year Outdoor Programs

# A LOOK BACK AT FOP 2024

In 2024 we had the great honor of sending out **39 FOP trips** for **306 incoming first-years!** This included:

- **26 wilderness backpacking** trips across Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire
- **3 switch trips** across New Hampshire and Maine
- **5 site-based trips** in New Hampshire and Vermont
- **4 site-based service trips** (2 at Merck Forest & Farmland Center in Vermont, 1 at Farm & Wilderness in Vermont, and 1 with the Native Land Conservancy in Massachusetts)
- **1 wilderness service trip** dedicated to building a privy in the Green Mountains

We hope you enjoy all of these warm and fuzzy photos from our FOP 2024 trips!



# FOPPER AND LEADER TESTIMONIALS

## FOPPER TESTIMONIALS:

"Coming into college, I was nervous about adjusting to life at Harvard. Thanks to the encouragement I received from my FOP leaders, both during the trip and throughout my first year, **I now feel more confident than ever to take on the challenges here.**

FOP truly helped me find my place at Harvard."

"At first, I was very hesitant about going on an outdoor trip, especially since I didn't have much outdoor experience. But with my leaders' unwavering support and positive affirmation, **I quickly felt an immense sense of belonging and comfort.** I hope to become a FOP leader myself, so I can help others find the same sense of community and confidence."

**"FOP was truly a magical and transformative experience** for me. I loved the adventure of it all from singing trail songs about a moose drinking juice, hilarious chows at meals, and tons of inside jokes with new friends. FOP was an absolutely joyous experience."

**"Going on FOP helped me make some of my best friends at Harvard.** At first, I was nervous about making connections, but through shared experiences and lots of laughs on the trip, I met so many incredible people who are now some of my closest friends. Even today, we still hang out and I'm so grateful that FOP brought us together."

"I can't think of a better way to start college than with FOP. **It truly was one of the best experiences of my life!**"

## LEADER TESTIMONIALS:

"I've been incredibly lucky to lead FOP, and every trip has brought me an overwhelming sense of pure joy. Guiding others through this experience, from the laughs on the trail to the deep connections made, has filled my heart in ways I can't fully express. Every time I run into fellow leaders or FOPpers on campus, **I'm flooded with warm, fuzzy memories that make me so grateful to be part of such a magical community.**"

"Being part of the FOP community has been an absolute privilege. It's filled with some of the most genuine, intentional, kind, and delightfully silly people I've ever met. **FOP has provided me with a support network like no other, and I'm forever grateful for this warm, loving community.** Joining FOP has truly been the best decision I've made at Harvard."

"Nowhere else have I found as much fulfillment as I have in leading a FOP trip. There's something incredibly rewarding about bringing together a group of complete strangers, guiding them up a mountain, and then witnessing the friendships that blossom and continue throughout the year. **It's a truly unique and meaningful experience that stays with you.**"

"I never considered myself 'outdoorsy,' and the thought of leading first-years through the woods felt incredibly daunting. But FOP pushed me beyond my comfort zone, helping me build confidence and become a stronger leader. **The lessons I've learned have shaped me in ways that go far beyond the trail—they're skills I carry with me in all areas of my life.**"

# THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

We're work towards reducing, and hopefully eliminating, the FOPper participation fee as well as serving an increasing number of students. We are determined to ensure that no student is denied this incredible opportunity due to capacity and/or financial constraints. To show our appreciation for your generosity, we're thrilled to offer a range of opportunities to get more involved in all things FOP.

## 2025 FOP FUNDRAISING TIERS

The following tiers are suggestions. Feel free to donate what you can.  
All donations are tax-deductible.

**Every donation, no matter the size, makes a difference.**

**CREATE FOP MAGIC - \$50,000**  
Fund all FOPpers participation for a year

**SAFETY FIRST - \$25,000**  
Fund new FOP gear for a year

**LEAD THE WAY - \$10,000**  
Fund a scholarship to train FOP leaders

**HIT THE TRAIL - \$5,000**  
Fund a FOP trip

**SET THE PATH - \$1,000**  
Fund a scholarship to sponsor FOPpers

Donate today by **scanning the QR code** or visiting  
<https://fop.fas.harvard.edu/donate>

In order for FOP to receive your gift, please make sure that you:

1. Under the "Select a Fund" dropdown menu, choose "OTHER - Harvard College"
2. In the "Other Fund Name" box that appears, enter "Harvard First-Year Outdoor Program"

If you have questions about your donation, please reach out to [haa\\_collegealumniprograms@harvard.edu](mailto:haa_collegealumniprograms@harvard.edu) and copy [fop@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:fop@fas.harvard.edu)



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