

The Fuzzy Cheesecake

FOP's Annual Report & Community Newsletter



Vol11: December MMXIV

www.harvardfop.com

“So into the woods you go again,
You have to every now and then.
Into the woods, no telling when,
Be ready for the journey.”

- Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*



Welcome to the *Fuzzy Cheesecake*, FOP's annual newsletter. Steering Committee '15 welcomes you to take a peek inside to hear a little more about this year's trips and some reflections about the program. As this year's Steering Committee, we are thrilled to share this year's edition with you, as its content is a reflection of both our goals for the year ahead and the successes of the past year.

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GREETINGS FROM STEERING COMMITTEE 2015



- FOP STEERING COMMITTEE '15:
JACOB BARTON, INDRANI GUZMÁN DAS, MILES GRAHAM,
TIM McNAMARA, LYNN MIAO, TOLA OMILANA,
JESSIE WYATT, AND COZ TEPLITZ

About FOP

THE WEEK:

3 States • 5 Nights Under the Stars • 34 Trips • 73 Leaders • 1 Director
291 Freshmen • 3080 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 six weeks of college are highly significant in adjusting to college life.²
3. Students indicate that involvement in a pre-orientation program significantly improved introductions to Harvard.³
4. College outdoor pre-orientation experiences are correlated with higher academic achievement throughout college.

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 go directly towards providing financial aid for a student.

1. Bell, Brent J. (2006). "Wilderness Orientation: Exploring the Relationship Between College Preorientation Programs and Social Support." *Journal of Experiential Education*, 29(2), 145-167.
2. Baker, R.W., & Siryk, B. (1984). "Measuring adjustment to college." *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. 31, 179-189
3. Report of the Freshman Orientation Advisory Committee. (June 2005). P. 7 & Appendix C.
4. Gass, M.A. (1987). "The Effects of a Wilderness Orientation Program on College Students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 10(2), 30-33.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF A FOPPER:

#tbt: Finding New Family in the Forests
Alice Hu '18

A year ago, I would've scrolled past a program like Harvard's First-Year Outdoor Program with no hesitation. The description alone was enough to ward me off: no showering for a week, no running water, no bathrooms, and daylong hikes, all while carrying a gigantic 40-pound backpack. Yet, as I approached the end of my senior year of high school, I decided to give FOP a chance. After all, college was starting in only a few months, and perhaps it was time to try something I hadn't considered!

After visiting just about every outdoor gear store in Philadelphia, I finally gathered my FOP equipment and headed toward the place that will be my home for the next four years.

My nervousness about my complete lack of backpacking experience was forgotten after I checked in with FOP on the morning of August 18th. I spent the day exploring Cambridge, and as the evening fell, I joined nearly four hundred other incoming FOPpers on the steps of Widener Library. After watching the FOP leaders introduce themselves and provide an unforgettable crash course on the traditions of FOP, I was finally collected by my group — FOP 42. So far, so good.

Fast forward to Day 1: We have arrived at our first campsite amidst the forestry of New Hampshire! After setting up our tarp (I hadn't know the plastic sheets in our backpacks were going to be our shelter) and having lunch, we decided to go on our first hike, packs off. "This isn't that bad," I thought as our feet crunched on the already autumn-hued leaves. I spoke too soon.

Five minutes later, I found myself at the very back of the group. Everyone else was forging ahead while I was struggling to catch my breath. Though my FOP leader was kind enough to stay behind and keep me company, I was worried. By the end



of our brief hike, two questions loomed on my mind: "What will this hike be like carrying an additional 40 pounds?" and "Is it too late



to catch a ride back to Cambridge?"

Given that all of our electronics and technical devices, including watches, were left at Harvard, the answer to the second question was clear. And as I would discover a few days later, the answer to the first question was also clear: life-changing.

Yes, I struggled to even put on my backpack without falling backward myself. But there was always a FOPper right behind me, waiting to hold the backpack while I adjusted to the weight — by the second day our group had developed a routine, where we knew when to help each other put on backpacks without needing verbal communication. Yes, I often woke up wondering why I was sleeping on wet leaves, with last night's rain dripping on my face from tree branches.

But the stories and inside jokes that came out of sleeping under the same tarp as my fellow FOPpers are the ones that will make me smile for years to come.

And yes, I more often than not felt like giving up and wondered why I voluntarily signed up for FOP. But I would raise my head and look at the others, who struggled just as much as I did with this new

experience but never faltered in their steps. So instead of giving up, we improvised sing-alongs, told tales of elementary school,

called for more water breaks than necessary, and feasted on pita bread and powder hummus (sometimes retrieved from the ground, because we "leave no trace"). Along the way, we also learned to tie a different knot for every occasion, consume the unexpectedly delicious meals made by our FOPers without questioning, and laugh at the challenging inclines that lay ahead. Getting to the top of the mountains became much easier this way.

On the night before returning to campus, we sat around a pan of "fuzzy cheesecake" and a flashlight, and shared our favorite things about each other. I was surprised to find how much I've discovered and remembered about ten individuals who were strangers a week ago. From our eating quirks to our favorite places to how much we talk in our sleep, the things we learned about each other came from conversations that held no expectations. We were not possible Government concentrators or programmers or violinists or even to-be Harvard students; we were just people, together on an adventure.

On those seemingly endless trails, I learned who I am when I don't have to be anyone. I also gained a family before even moving in at Harvard, and felt prepared for what lies ahead in a way I couldn't have before. I know FOP was created for reasons like these, and I could write a book about how incredible the program is. But for now, I'll just say that I am glad that I didn't scroll past FOP.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF A FOP LEADER:

A Beginning

Mike Casson '15

Reading through the notes in my journal from the night before my trip I'm reminded of

how unsure I was. I suppose I was nervous, although my words don't reflect that. Like so many of those eager new faces around me, I had heard a great deal about what was to come: the bonds we would form, a nebulous but not unreasonable feeling of belonging, a shared experience that would be extremely personal.

"How can five days do all that?," a younger Me thought. And indeed it is a question that I still ask.

I experienced these thoughts not as a wide eyed first-year, but rather as my supposedly more mature sophomore self before starting my training trip to become a FOP leader. It's not uncommon for FOP leaders to have not been FOPpers themselves. In this way, learning to lead is split between trying to understand the unique curriculum FOP provides and experiencing the impact of that same curriculum.

I didn't know how things would play out; I had no idea the degree to which my FOPpers would shape our trip. As we created inside jokes, shared stories, and considered what it meant to enter college, I often placed my younger self in their shoes. How would I, as a first-year, have responded to the questions my co-leader and I were asking, what concerns were foremost in my mind only two years earlier? That feeling of empathy has become a hallmark of my time with FOP. Coming to the program late allowed me to feel it more acutely on my own trips and see it reflected in the experiences of my FOPpers. We are forced on these trips to relate to the immediate experiences of those around us and hopefully to the unique stories each participant brings into the wilderness.

Stepping back into the Yard, I saw our arrival through their eyes. The brilliant summer green of the elm trees and the bustling canopy of the welcome tent overseen by

John Harvard's steady gaze seemed a little less daunting and a little more inviting.

Bolstered by the experiences we had shared and the hopes that were just starting to take shape, I was glad to be returning to Harvard. But even more so, I was glad that I had helped craft that same

sentiment in the first-years I had met a week earlier.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN ALUMNA:

Fuzzy Cheesecake for FOP

Annie DeAngelo '12

Although it would be difficult to pinpoint the best part of FOP, I am fairly confident in saying that the tradition of Fuzzy Cheesecake, which happens at the conclusion of each trip, is a highlight for most. I won't spoil the whole surprise for those who have yet to experience one, but simply put, it involves reflecting on the trip and giving heartfelt, genuine compliments to others, something we don't do enough when we're not wearing polypro and fleece. With that said, I'd love to present a Fuzzy Cheesecake...for FOP.

FOP, you're a blast. I didn't know that carrying around pounds of cheese on my back with a bunch of strangers could be so fun. Despite the fact that the weather can be cold and wet, I am always having a great time when I'm with you. You helped

me meet so many new people, many of whom are now some of my closest friends. When we're with you, we are always laugh-

ing about something funny. Like the time that we rewrote a bunch of Justin Timberlake songs about our trip's adventures or that time that we used a tampon to stop a nosebleed. Don't forget the time that Jeff chugged a pot full of ramen noodles! FOP, you're pretty hysterical.

FOP, you have taught me so much. I've learned everything from how to

fix a stove and use stale pitas to make cheese 'pitadillas,' to how to work with someone who thinks differently than I do and how to facilitate difficult conversations. I use the skills you taught me all the time and know that they'll never cease being useful. Even as our relationship changed—from being a FOPper to a leader to a training trip leader to a basecamper—you taught me so much about you and even more about myself.

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Thomas Dingman, Dean of Freshmen

We have had an invigorating fall this year, led by our new dean, Rakesh Khurana, who has emphasized, time and again, the transformative power of a liberal arts and sciences education. If we do our job right, we will be creating the conditions for students to grow intellectually, socially, and personally. It will not be enough for student to simply meet requirements and check all the boxes, but to engage fully and begin to define authentically their roles in society.

Often when we talk about transformation, we have in mind interactions with faculty in classrooms, labs, libraries, studios, and museums. These matter tremendously, but we also should not overlook the power of mixing it up with peers. I was reminded of this when I encountered a freshman, Mahesh Ramakrishnan, picking up his keys at the welcome tent the night before move-in. He was just returning from his FOP trip and enthusiastically

relayed what it had been like to have substantive conversations with his trip leaders in his week in the wilderness. I was so moved that I asked him to write about his experience. The following picks up pieces of Mahesh's thoughtful account:

"It was a great time to slow things down and contemplate the immense, intimidating changes ahead of me in an atmosphere with others who could relate."



"I spent the weeks before FOP worrying more about whether I should insert a secret compartment filled with various body lotions and shower wipes than I did thinking about what the experience of living with 10 strangers in the woods would be like. My narrow mindset going into FOP stemmed from the fact that I was coming to Harvard with a clear vision of what the next fifty years of my life would be. I wanted to do graduate work in economics, go into the private sector for 10 years, and then work at the Reserve Bank of India making economic policy. Both my nuclear and extended family always believed in the efficiency of a "practical" education and as a result, I had always held that those who didn't have a sense of how their lives were going to turn out were "lost." I wasn't as focused on the insights I could draw out of my more experienced upperclassman leaders and peers as I was on seeing FOP as another obstacle on my journey to the future I had planned. I can now look back and say that my interactions with my fellow FOPpers have convinced me to scrap the preconceived path I had set out and have pushed me to think and act in new and bold ways.

My most transformative and thought provoking conversations on the trip almost always involved my upperclassman leaders. One of them, a senior, had chosen

to take a path through college that had honestly bewildered me at first. When he told me that he was writing his thesis on a seemingly obscure characteristic of a famous series of books, I was completely bewildered. His experiences directly conflicted with what my perception of college was: where you go to learn in order to get a job. I had many conversations with him and my other FOP leader about their experiences in college and beyond, their regrets and disappointments, and how each had chosen to navigate their respective Harvard careers. From these conversations I drew a conclusion that would have baffled me before FOP: that the primary goal of a Harvard education is to create a well-rounded individual who is versatile in conversation and forthright in leadership rather than a parrot who can do no more than what it is told. "

"It made me realize how complex people can really be. My trip succeeded as a weeklong appreciation of in-the-moment joy: an exuberant period of discovering happiness and reflection in other people and not thinking about the future."

Wow. I have always been an admirer of the upperclassmen selected and trained to lead FOP trips, but this was a new, powerful statement of their impact. And how interesting to see the awareness of one freshman that college would be (should be) more than preparation to get a job, to get on the first rung of a pre-ordained ladder, but would be a broadening journey, made richer with reflection and the embrace of serendipity. The beginning, in my mind, of real transformation!



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Coz Teplitz

For the last several years, there has been an increasing focus within FOP and on Harvard's campus on the value of reflection. On FOP, leaders have begun asking incoming students to think about their personal identity, their expectations of college, and how the two might interact while they are here. "Reflecting on Your

Life", a seminar series for first-year students run by the Freshman Dean's Office, continues to be broadly popular. Two student-initiated reflective programs have sprung out of collaborations between FOP and other organizations like the Harvard Outing Club and the Senior Class Committee: the Wilderness Ongoing Orientation Program (WOOP) and Senior Outdoor Reflection Trips (SORT). The new Dean of the College, Rakesh Khurana, is sponsoring four new Wintersession programs designed to encourage student reflection. The response to

all of these initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive; clearly, reflective activities are filling an unmet student desire.

I have been musing on what is driving this desire for opportunities for reflection. One popular explanation revolves around how today's technologically connected world makes it challenging to escape work commitments; every minute of the day can be spent writing email or drafting your next paper (or browsing Facebook while you procrastinate from working on that paper). The lack of regular disengagement, the story goes, makes people hungry for time to turn off their phones and engage with those around them about bigger questions.

While I agree that many people could benefit from more intentional awareness of the time they spend on their phones (myself included), I think this explanation doesn't capture the entirety of the current drive toward reflection on campus. Personally, I can remember feeling like I had to make meaning out of every experience I had at Harvard, and that was before everyone had a cell phone and when we still used a DOS program to check our email.

Going to college is loaded with cultural meaning, and this meaning works itself into the expectations that students bring to campus about what their "college" experience is supposed to be. "College" is a period of reckless abandon, full of beer and parties. "College" is when you find lifelong friends, and sometimes life partners. "College" is when you find your passion, and often choose a career based on that passion. "College" is football games and rooting for your alma mater. Most importantly, "college" is when one becomes an adult.

As with any set of expectations, there is both value and challenge in these expectations of "college". The value is that many students em-



brace exploration during their time here – they sign up for new extracurriculars, take new and interesting courses, get excited about meeting new people. When I served as a first-year adviser, I usually didn't have to work too hard to encourage students to try new things; they were often primed to do so by their parents, peers, and cultural messages.

The challenge is that real life rarely meets all of our expectations. Not everyone enjoys boozy, sweaty, cramped parties. Time on campus often includes loneliness, even when surrounded by peers. Rare is the student who enjoys every class she takes, and some choose concentrations for reasons other than passion – career interests, familial desires, or just habit. Many students leave college far more uncertain about their career paths than when they entered.

I believe one reason students are drawn to reflective programming because of the inevitable mismatch between expectations of “college” and the reality of being here. Reflective activities give them the chance for some normalization: to hear whether others are experiencing similar discord and to share what sense they themselves make of these differences.

The second reason I believe reflective activities are attractive is the symbolic weight of “college” I mentioned earlier. “College” has become a cultural ritual, with the expectation that students emerge somehow profoundly changed by the experience. This expectation of profound transformation leads to uncertainty – “Am I doing this right?”, “Am I changing in ways I want to?”, “Am I capitalizing on the value of this experience?”, and so on. Students are thinking about these questions, and feel a lack of avenues through which to explore them.

The programming that has emerged, both official and student-driven, has been providing a space for these reflections to happen. And, of course, I am delighted that we are making spaces for important conversations. Yet I also believe that questions of identity and purpose are fundamental and on-going – they are questions with which each of us will grapple at many points in our lives. Learning strategies through which to engage with these questions is an essential part of becoming an adult. Rather than encouraging students to seek out reflective programming, I am coming to believe we should be teaching them how to find reflective spaces in their daily lives. In other words, rather than encouraging the mindset that “I need to find a space to help me think these things through” we should be encouraging the mindset that “I will craft for myself a space to engage

with these questions”. In the literature of student development, we should be encouraging “self-authorship”.

I am delighted that Dean Khurana has been outspoken about his belief that one's collegiate experience should be “personally, socially, and intellectually transformational”. I agree – and I think that we have not been thinking big enough about what that might mean. Let's do more than help students make meaning of college. Let's transform their understanding of what it means to make meaning itself.

-- Coz

MORE FROM OUR FOPPERS:

“FOP affected my transition in the best way imaginable. It gave me the perfect respite before being thrown into the chaos of opening days. It gave me a loving group of people and made me feel so at home. There's something about being in the outdoors that connects people unlike anything else.”

-- Josiah Corbus

“FOP helped me convince myself that I was ready for college. It was a great way to clear my mind before orientation and both our formal group discussions and informal conversations about college life helped me transition.”

-- Saranya Vijayakumar

“What stands out most to me is the post-FOP experience -- in other words, the community that I've gotten to enjoy after getting back from the woods. Spending time in the backcountry is fun, but even better is waking up on move in day with a core group of eight kids that you can trust to be there for you. We've had weekly FOP reunion breakfasts, and those are always highlights of my day. Whether it is walking into Annenberg and knowing someone or feeling more at home in a huge lecture in Sanders or just going to a club's intro meeting and seeing someone you know, I've had dozens of moments where I've been incredibly glad I did FOP.”

-- Derek Choi

“It was a really unique experience. I was espe-

cially in love with the view at night; the million stars shining right above your head with no artificial light to disrupt the beautiful vista were definitely something to witness.”

-- Gyu Young Chang

“I felt like pushing my limits physically helped me come into school more calm, centered, and confident in myself.”

-- Eva Monroe

“Wonderful, nothing better. This should be required for all incoming freshman.”

-- Maxwell Levenson

“The late night talks were definitely eye opening to me. During the trip, without the distractions of luxuries, I was really able to look at myself and examine the type of person I wanted to be and how I wanted to approach college. Even at my lowest points, I discovered new things about myself I didn't know existed.”

-- Allie Walsh

“My FOP leaders were invaluable resources. They gave me recommendations for study spaces, study strategies, info about specific classes.”

-- Michael Chen

“FOP was wonderful because it provided me with what I was most anxious about not having when I arrived at school: friends. And not just any friends, but the closest of friends with which I'd conquered mountains and shared secrets...the days seemed to fly by and returning to Harvard was very bitter sweet.”

-- Emily Woolway

“I think FOP is sort of irrelevant to a college transition, I think of it as more of a transformative experience in and of itself.”

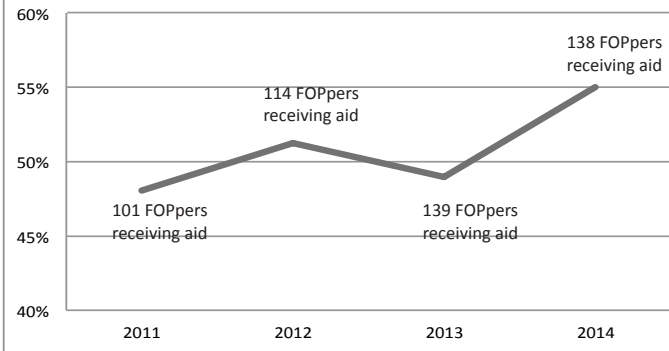
-- Grace Lin

“I learned how to be a better friend, a better listener, and a better leader.”

-- Samuel Goldman Reiss



Average FOP Aid Award as Percentage of FOP Fee

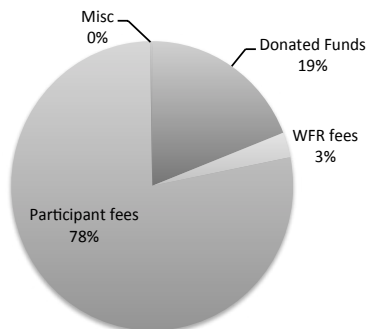


In 2014, we were pleased to be able to offer aid to significantly more FOPpers. This year, we were also able to boost the amount of money we were able to offer each FOPper. We are tantalizing close to our goal from the last several years - **to match the percentage of aid offered by the College.** We need your help to make that happen!

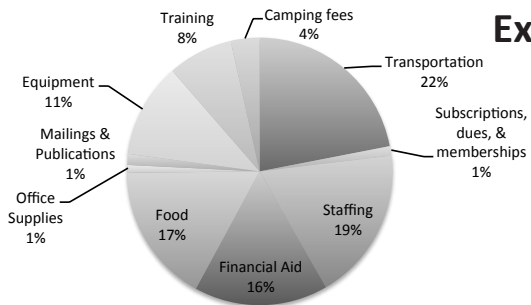
We use 100% of donations to reduce the financial burden of FOP.

FOP Financials FY14

Income



Expenses



Fiscal year runs 7/01/2013 - 6/30/2014

FOP Supporters FY14

Thank You to all of our Donors!

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