

THE FUZZY CHEESECAKE

FOP's Annual Report & Community Newsletter



About Virtu-FOP:

The Week:

307 FOPpers, 76 Leaders, 39 Trips, 6 Curricula,
1 Pandemic, and a Whole Lot of 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.



FOP took place virtually in 2020. Despite new challenges, we still found a lot to love!

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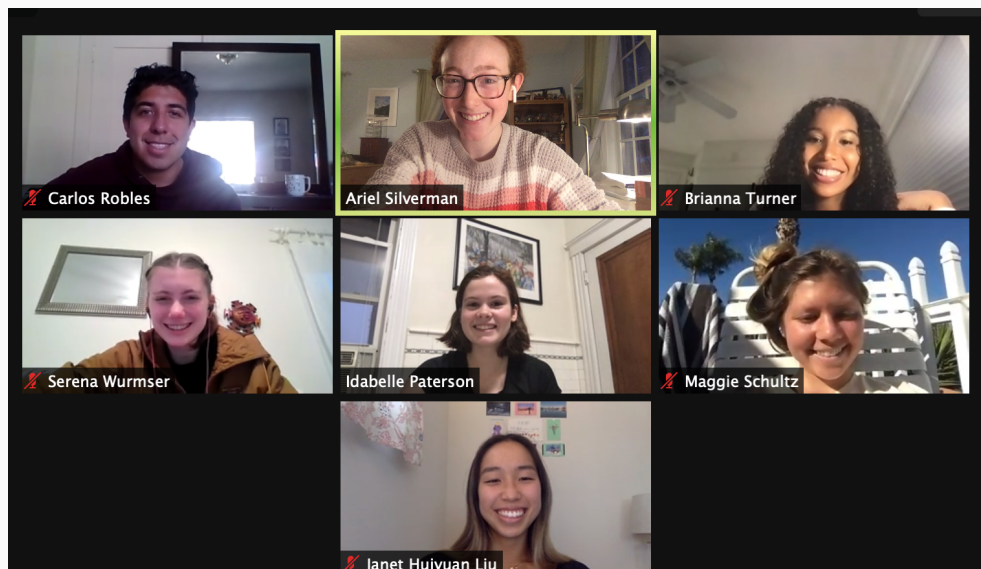
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Greetings from Steering Committee '21



“It’s not really about having the ability to climb. It’s about this ability to say, ‘I can do it really well.’”

- SOPHIA DANENBERG,
THE FIRST AFRICAN
AMERICAN WOMAN TO
SUMMIT MT. EVEREST.

SC '21: Ariel Silverman '23, Brianna Turner '23, Carlos Robles '21, Idabelle Paterson '22, Janet Liu '23, Maggie Shultz '22, Serena Wurmser '23

Hello lucky reader! Welcome to this year’s edition of Fuzzy Cheesecake. As an SC, we’re excited to use Fuzzy as an opportunity to keep everyone—FOP alumni, current leader, Harvard College alumni or otherwise—updated on FOP’s developments over the last year and plans for 2021.

2020 introduced a slew of unprecedented challenges for FOP. Due to the spread of COVID-19, spring leader training and FOP orientation programming had to be moved online. SC '20 instituted major changes to FOP to accommodate these new restrictions. Last year, FOP groups of 8-12 students met with leaders three times a week for two weeks over Zoom. Leaders facilitated traditional processing activities, described life and learning at Harvard, and also led activities related to one of six curriculum topics: Flora & Fauna, Responsible Outdoor Recreation, History of Harvard, Climate & Environmental Justice, Food Sustainability, and Land History & Use.

FOP also acknowledges the enormous loss of Black lives and livelihoods to police violence and the program’s part in perpetuating systemic racism outdoors. Racism manifested in the program through a lack of diversity among our leaders and participants, decades-long silence and apathy toward social justice in our curriculum, and training that does not adequately educate leaders about how systemic racism impacts the outdoors. To combat systemic racism at Harvard, in the outdoors, and beyond, SC is committed to: instituting implicit bias training as a new core component of leader training, embedding discussions of race, equity, and diversity in the outdoors and at Harvard into each trip, and collaborating with Harvard pre-orientation programs and outdoor-education groups at peer institutions to make change within the broader outdoor community.

Virtu-FOP was a success because of endless enthusiasm from 307 FOPpers, flexibility from 76 dedicated leaders, and support from hundreds of parents and donors.

Virtu-FOP also created many amazing opportunities for the program. The online format attracted FOPpers from more diverse backgrounds and with less experience in the outdoors. We also had the time and resources to introduce new curricula to our leader training. For example, the Venture Out Program led a training discussing ways leaders can make the outdoors more accessible and inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community.

As we move into a new and hopefully less turbulent year, SC remains committed to making FOP more accessible and meaningful for all FOPpers. We are also working to adapt the program to rapidly changing circumstances. Spring leader training will take place online. While we are preparing for in-person programming, leader training trips and FOP 2021 may still need to be virtual. In a virtu-FOP scenario, SC will likely take inspiration from the curriculum-model used in 2020 while innovating ways to make the program more fun and connected! Regardless of the circumstances, SC will also improve the program by collaborating with other Harvard pre-orientation programs and student organizations and innovating fun creative ways to connect members of the FOP community.

As always, we are open to hearing ways in which you all think FOP can continue to grow and become stronger as a program. 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 journey with us.

—Ariel, Brianna, Carlos, Idabelle, Janet, Maggie and Serena

The Essence of FOP – Emily Quigley, Former FOP Director

Dear FOP Community,

This letter is nothing if not a tribute to every single one of you, your families, your friends, and your communities who made FOP 2020 a reality. It is an ode to the USPS workers who delivered almost 300 care packages to FOPpers, and the cats and dogs who we pretend to shoo away on Zoom screens but secretly love having on our laps. And it is, most importantly, a celebration of the incredible Steering Committee and leaders who poured their hearts into making sure the class of 2024 would be able to have a meaningful FOP experience upon starting their lives at Harvard.

COVID-19 cleared out campus at a relatively crucial time in the FOP yearly progression: a new leader class had been selected and training had begun, but training trips had not happened yet; Steering Committee had wrapped up fundraising but was in the middle of determining how to allocate some of our funds to new equipment; and many returning leaders were eager to get back into FOP-mode via Gaggles, Skillz Days, TTs, and summer staff opportunities. What we were left with was a half-trained leader class, boxes of brand new backpacks yet to be opened, a saddened yet caring group of leaders, and a seemingly unsolvable problem of how to bring an outdoors program into a virtual platform. With unparalleled grace, SC '20 immediately got to work.

If I had to pick a word for what this work looked like, it would be “ideas”. Millions of ideas pitched, investigated, exchanged, refined, thrown out, revived, thrown out again. At one point I was determined to have every FOP trip look like a game of Dungeons & Dragons (and you're welcome for not pushing it!). In the midst of a pandemic where hope is scarce, it was within these ideas that I truly saw the essence of FOP come to life. Community-building, self-reflection, sense of place, sense of belonging - our goal was to create a program that could capture these pillars of FOP's mission, and we were going to need all of the ideas we could get. For the first time, all of the Pre-O student leadership teams collaborated, and FOP leader input was given in more ways than ever before.

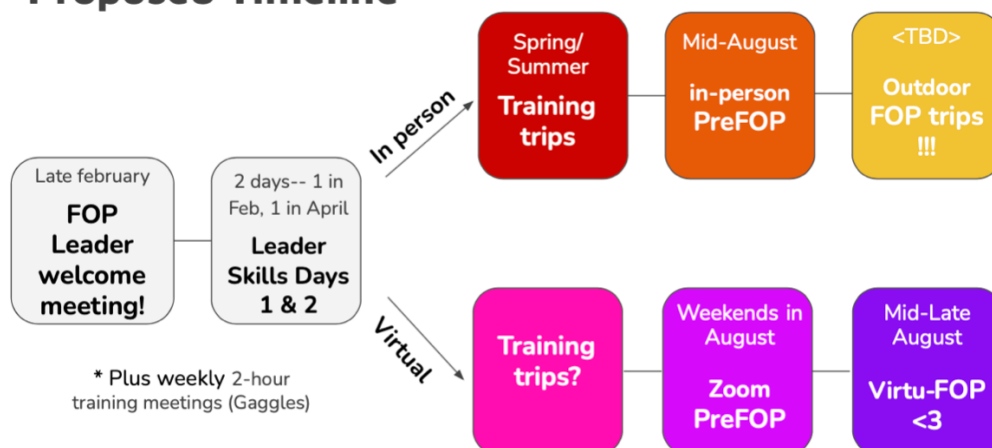
External trainings and guest speakers opened our perspectives about what virtu-FOP could look like, and leaders came together to build experiences for FOPpers that would hopefully allow them the same feeling of support and connection FOP has always facilitated.

Some trusted elements of virtu-FOP stayed the same: co-leading pairs, processing activities, buddy trips, and a focus on accessibility for all identities and backgrounds. We also added some new elements, like trip themes and FOP-wide panels (and, my personal favorite, Trainee Graduation), that allowed the program to adapt to a virtual format while maintaining the importance of place in creating meaning. Ultimately, we succeeded in some areas, and learned how we could have done better in others, but what I mostly saw was a culture of adaptability and compassion in every part of the FOP community. And for that I want to say thank you.

Looking forward, we still don't know what FOP 2021 will look like. We don't know if groups will meet on Zoom or on trail, and we don't know if Fuzzy Cheesecake ingredients will be packed individually or for groups of 10. What we do know is that FOP will continue to build meaningful connections for first-years no matter what the circumstances, all because of our amazing network of participants, leaders, alums, parents, friends, and everyone in between. If you want to continue to support our efforts in making sure every student who wants to participate in FOP is financially able to do so, or help us to keep running trips with up-to-date, safe equipment, or to help us be able to create new, accessible programming, please consider making a donation. And, if what you can donate right now is a smile or a cookie to your closest FOPmate, that's wonderful too.

Once again, we couldn't have made FOP 2020 happen without all of you. The people make the program, and this program certainly has some amazing people.

Proposed Timeline



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

Wishing you and your loved ones peace and safety,

Emily Quigley (“Quigs”)
Former FOP Director

REFLECTIONS ON ACCESS – ELLA FRIGYIK '20

On the southern side of Mauritius, a jagged mountain shrouds the nearby forest in shadows. A bulwark against the sea, Le Morne peak was once home to a network of caverns and tunnels where enslaved people from continental Africa, Madagascar, and South-East Asia—my father's ancestors—sought refuge from the persecution of French colonists. The mountain is a quiet place, its stones still carrying the blood of those who leapt to their deaths to avoid capture. The peak is now closed off with an iron gate, a stark reminder of the scars white supremacy leaves on the land and its people.

I had not hiked in America prior to FOP, but as I learned about the forests and mountains of New England, I couldn't help but hear the echoes of my ancestors who fought on those rocky cliffs in the Indian Ocean generations ago. I thought of the Abenaki and the Massachusett, driven off their land and subjected to genocide, and of the enslaved Black people who built the Northeast. When we walk in the woods there is often silence, and sometimes that silence wraps me up in quiet reflection. Other times I feel the heaviness of the past around me, as if the silence itself carries with it the violence, the exploitation, the oppression faced by Indigenous people, Black people, and people of color the world over.

As someone whose home was colonized, believe me when I say America feels like a settler colonial nation. I see it in the Confederate flag stickers brazenly slapped on cars at the trailhead, in the fact that sacred peaks are called by their conquerors' names, in the bloodied past and present of non-white people walking through the outdoors at night. The American outdoors feels like a space of exclusion and privilege. I feel it when I avert my eyes and move to the side of the path as experienced, wealthy hikers pass me without a word, when I feel that twinge of shame as someone tells me I need to buy a better pair of boots, and in the blatant, hateful acts that abound on the trail. People often don't discuss these things in the outdoor community, choosing instead to focus on the good moments—the safe moments—and to push those darker truths away. When we take a group of FOPpers into the woods, though, or into a Zoom space laden with outdoor themes, their concerns, their truths, and their safety become ours, regardless of our identity.



FOPpers help restore a trail on a FOP service trip

FOP's strength lies in its ability to create trips that are emotionally safe (a phrase I learned from one of my TT leaders). As we guide first-years through a liminal space between their past and future, so too are we guiding the weight of their past, whether or not we can see it or they choose to reveal it. There are so many threads of our identities and past experiences that connect us to others, and as a FOP leader you get to watch those threads weave together in real time, guiding the connections you might already be able to see and watching other, beautiful, unexpected connections flourish. FOP trips are special not because entering the woods or a Zoom call strips us of our layers of identity or privilege, but rather because, for a brief period of time, we explore those layers together.

Having not done FOP as a first-year, I was terrified that I didn't have the necessary experience to lead. The belief of my co and FOPpers did more for my confidence than another year of training could have. I saw myself in some of my FOPpers, in our rented gear and quiet smiles as we listened to others trade their intense hiking stories. I realized that if I could lead a trip, then the core of this program must not lie in the hardened strength of an outdoorsperson, but rather in the powerful empathy we experience when we share with others, be it food, shelter, trail, computer screens, stories, or warmth. When I returned from FOP, I searched in vain for spaces that gave me that same feeling. It wasn't until a friend and fellow FOP leader talked to me about expanding FOP's offerings that I realized I had the ability to create that space.

It has been such a gift to start work this year with a group of leaders interested in working with FOP so that more members of Harvard's intersecting community—affinity groups, people with less outdoor experience, House communities, people with disabilities, staff members who have carried so much weight in this pandemic, low-income students from the Boston area—can have access both to the outdoors and to the emotional safety that is at the very core of FOP's program. If this is something you're passionate about, please do reach out. Our strength lies in fostering a community of care.

FOP has given me one more gift, in the form of relationships. To my co-leaders Siavash, Sarah, Tom, Natalia, and Conlan: from the start of my TT to the end of my first FOP trip, from the unknown expanses of Zoom programming to imagining a new future for the outdoors community—thank you for your unwavering support. To my FOPpers: you have changed my life, and I carry your stories with me always. And to the FOP community: as we move into this unknown time, know that your passion and desire to push FOP forward makes it one of the brightest spots on campus.

With love and care and hope for you all,
Ella Frigyk '20

THE RIGHT TOOLS – RICK LI '20

“The pants have to be made out of fleece? How do you come up with these lists, anyway?”

It's a refrain familiar to leaders checking in gear the afternoon before trips typically depart. For many FOPpers—and many leaders, too—outdoor pre-orientation is the first glimpse into a world of quick-drying fabrics. So indebted are we to the tools which make FOP happen that I've never seen a leader who didn't eagerly field curiosities about the things we pack.

The truth is that we always pack too much; this is purposeful. Sure, certain unnamed members of our community take pride in wearing a single set of undergarments for five straight days, but for the most part our leaders pack extensively for the challenges we face in the woods. Our FOPpers are leaving home, the majority for the first time. We make big asks of them to be open and thoughtful about their lives, to trust themselves and their leaders, to embrace discomfort but be honest about their needs and their limits. There's no question that a lighter pack would get us to the summit faster, but that's not what we're really trying to do out here on FOP—growing and learning about others are hard enough without having to worry about wet socks for a half week. The heart of a trip lives in moments below treeline, and to this end, each ounce carried is insurance.

The truth is that we never pack enough; this is inevitable. FOP makes tinkerers out of its college students, and the most cutting-edge innovation grows out of necessity. I've seen leaders patch up broken packs with MacGyered coat zippers. Frisbees make fine substitutes for missing plates, and extra tortillas work as dishes of last resort when the plastic melts. Out in the woods, we see ourselves and the things we've packed with new eyes, and our circumstances demand new roles from them. We exercise humility and willingness to change because the woods require you leave with different tools than you came in with.



A virtual Climate & Environmental Justice FOP trip enjoys Gado Gado, a classic FOP meal



Current SC Member Brianna Turner enjoys a spoonful of fuzzy cheesecake on the last night of FOP 2019

The truth is that the most important things we pack don't weigh anything at all; this is what makes us FOP leaders. There's no style guide for making a judgment call to sit out in a field and watch the stars or learn to build space for a FOPper who has shared something about themselves they've never said aloud. We as leaders are constantly thinking about how we might better make people feel safe and listened to, to feel held with care, to be frank about where we and the communities around us need to grow. To this end, there is a real reciprocity in what we do: we need tools in order to enter the woods, but we also need our trips in order to craft the tools necessary for community.

Finally, ask any current leader and you'll learn the truth is that some of the most meaningful FOP trips don't require packing at all. This past year, amid immeasurable crisis, we transitioned to remote trips with the understanding that for all its value, the outdoors is simply one tool among many with which we can build community. FOP today looks different than it did a year ago, and for good reason: the world is changing, and we as a leader community are excited to change along with it. As for the tools that we've used for so long—preparation, adaptation, the faith that FOP leaders put into being with other people (and yes of course, fleece pants)—well, we have a feeling those will stick around for a good while longer.

"WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM FOP?"

QUOTES FROM FOP LEADERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN 2020

"The FOP community is the most inclusive, supportive, fun-loving community I've ever been a part of. Interacting with other FOP leaders has always been a very energizing experience for me because there's a shared level of buy-in and kindness that I've found to be unparalleled on campus." - Spencer Carter '22

"The FOP community is the community on campus that I am most proud to be a part of. Everyone is constantly invested in creating a welcoming, inclusive environment where people are supported in venturing beyond their comfort zone and challenging themselves in whichever way that means for them." - Matt Mardo '21

"FOP has taught me about the disparities in our food distribution systems, about food deserts, and about the significance that our consumer choices and activist voices have on changing these food industries." - Anonymous

"After completing a trip that I genuinely doubted I'd survive past Day 1, I felt invincible and finally recognized that my own mental barriers were the only thing stopping me from becoming whoever I wanted to be in life. Those lessons carry over to so many other parts of my college experience, and I'm so grateful that FOP was my first exposure to Harvard for this reason." - Jimmy Lin '22

"Interacting with other FOP leaders has always been a very energizing experience for me, because there's a shared level of buy-in and kindness that I've found to be unparalleled on campus. FOP has also allowed me to meet some wonderful people that I would have never otherwise met, and for that I am eternally grateful." - Gabby Shultz '21



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THANK YOU TO ALL THE DONORS THAT MAKE FOP POSSIBLE!



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