

# The Fuzzy Cheesecake

FOP's Annual Report & Community Newsletter

Vol 12: December MMXV



www.harvardfop.com



Welcome to the *Fuzzy Cheesecake*, FOP's annual newsletter. Steering Committee '16 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 2016



**- FOP STEERING COMMITTEE '16:**  
JACOB BARTON, WILLIAM BLOXHAM, CAMERON CLARKE,  
CHARLIE GIBSON, LIZ HUBER, LAYLA JOUDEH,  
ANDY LEE, AND COZ TEPLITZ

# About FOP

## THE WEEK:

3 States • 5 Nights Under the Stars • 43 Trips • 87 Leaders • 1 Director  
393 Freshmen • 3824 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.<sup>1</sup>
2. The first six weeks of college are highly significant in adjusting to college life.<sup>2</sup>
3. Students indicate that involvement in a pre-orientation program significantly improved introductions to Harvard.<sup>3</sup>
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 FOP LEADER:

*Julia Becerra '16*

I've never been as cold as I've been on FOP.

To be fair, it was my spring training trip, and the weather was really just unreasonably bad for that time of year, and my crew was on a trail regular trips don't usually use (to learn more, check out the King's Ravine Trail on the list of top ten trails never to go on ever). In the end we had to take a layover day by taking a detour into a three-sided shelter when, while all of us were complaining of semi-hypothermia, one of us was suffering from actual-hypothermia. Needless to say, between all of our gear getting soaked in a small flash flood the first night, dealing with a hearty mix of snow, rain, and hail throughout our ten day venture, and finally having members of basecamp hike in to save the day, it was quite a time to be out in the woods.

The thing is, it really was. It always is quite a time to be in the woods—this is, I think, is true, and something reinforced by the idea that “whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination.” As you might be able tell by the quotation marks, I didn't make up that last part (my poet guru Mary Oliver did), but another thing I've learned in the wilderness—besides the fact that no matter how cold you are, if someone else is just as cold and laughs with you about it, you'll feel a little better—is the fact that Mary Oliver is always right. Because the world, in this case meaning the New England wilderness, does offer itself to your imagination; it's a Rorschach test. Whoever goes there experiences their own woods, their own shade and flavor of the outdoors. It is there for you, but it's not for you. It's before us, but it's not ours. But we are the ones who get to enjoy it, and that's the point.

On a hike recently when the trail went, as the kids say, from zero to sixty real quick (or, as the adults might



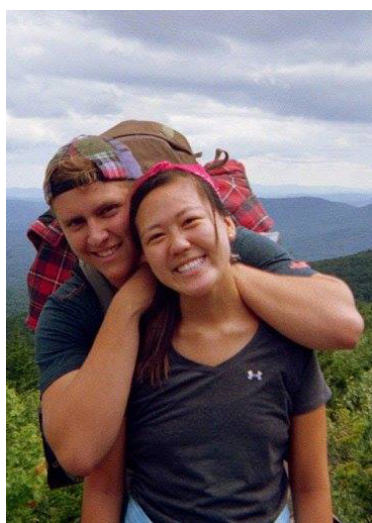
explain in plain words, the incline increased spontaneously), I was beginning to doubt my legs. I hadn't previously exercised in, well, recent memory, and I was genuinely beginning to worry the hike was too much for me. But, as always happens on any hike, no matter how horrendously hard and “undoable,” it got done. I did it. We, all of us mid-semester and puffing and wheezing (“Brutal...just brutal.” “That, uh...that was a hike”), had put the miles behind us. Alone, and together.

Later that day, a great friend of mine mentioned in passing what seemed to be a deep-seated and understatedly beautiful philosophy she held about hiking. She did so not to give me a profound piece of wisdom, but just as context for a story she was

telling. “Yeah, we were going up this insane ridge and [insert-name] didn't think he could do it but, you know, really, anyone can hike anything—” and she went on. But I held the idea in my mind for a while, sifted it over. Anyone can hike anything. The more I thought about it, the more it held true. All the trips I'd led on FOP where the kids were absolutely positive they couldn't keep going. That they would never make it up this rough patch of mountain. That they just couldn't keep up. That they were sorry, but they just couldn't do this.

They all did in the end, and they all—we all—made it to the same destinations, the same summits. We as leaders did everything we could to facilitate the “how”: classic tricks like putting the slowest person in the front so the group stayed together, constantly mandating hydration for everyone (“Waahhhrrr!” This is not just a sound effect I'm making, but a serious method), stopping for as many breaks as necessary to get the group to the end. But it's everyone who contributes to the “why.” Why do we push through at all? Heck, why do we even go out of the comfort of our own homes in the first place? We have wi-fi. Why purposely be uncomfortable and struggle when you could lay in bed and Netflix?

And the answer, always, is each other. Well, ourselves, and each other. When you sign up for FOP you are, as a rule, incredibly nervous. You want friends. You want to be liked. You want not to be scared of the place you're going, and you want somehow to have support by the time you get there. And so you throw yourself into another place you don't know—the woods, with strangers, who will also presumably not know the woods (I know, I know, we're ignoring NOLS right now). You sign up simply to meet new people but quickly find out that your leaders have been working all year round like young outdoorsy Santas to craft this special ideal moment for you. They focus everything on bonding all of you together at the highest natural-feeling rate in the shortest amount of time possible. You find they do everything in their compassionate intentional power to



draw you out of yourself, to let you be authentic, to make you known; and hopefully, if all goes well, loved. They want to empower you to have a genuine connection to others, and a better understanding of yourself. You find you signed up for you, and you're doing this for you, but now you're doing this for them, too. All of them. And that's why you sign up to be a leader, and go on to lead three unique, treacherous, wonderful trips, and try to convey how important it was to you in every way. How even the thought of it reminds you of how many miles you've pushed through, and with whom, and why—and it makes you happy, and feel warm.

I've never been as warm as I've been on FOP.

### FROM THE FOP ARCHIVES:

*A letter written by Laurie Gardner '89 after her FOP trip*

GIARDIA. Webster's dictionary defines it as "an infestation with or disease caused by a flagellate protozoan." I define it, quite literally, as a pain in the ass. You thought Moody Mountain sucked? Try getting giardiasis. Imagine if you will twelve FOPpers sitting around in a circle, discussing their greatest fears of camping. "I heard you can get sick from drinking stream water," one freshman remarks. "We can put iodine pills into our water bottles," a leader suggests. The idea is received with a chorus of adamant rejections: "Nah, we're tough; we don't need it"... "That doesn't seem natural somehow"... "Forget chemicals – I wanted to get a taste of the REAL outdoors"... "I really want to dig into this camping experience"...

Fools. Idealistic, inexperienced, ignorant, suburban fools. We got a taste of the outdoors, all right... a mouthful of worm-infested water. Dig in, sure; there are probably twelve invisible parasites digging into the core of our large intestines right now. If you too have gone to UHS to give samples (you thought urinalysis was gross...) and discovered that an organism whose digestion system you studied in 10th grade bio is now digesting yours, you know what I'm talking about. If, however, you haven't yet ventured to Harvard's revered medical labs, the symptoms are easy to recognize. "Sorry to eat and run" suddenly takes on a new meaning. You begin to lose friends in the lunch line.

People walking with you in the square keep you downwind. Your bunkmate politely (but emphatically) insists you take the top bunk (hot air rises). These are just a few of the early signs.

The first suggestion UHS makes is to change your diet for a couple of weeks. If the thought of cottage cheese, saltines, and jello doesn't stimulate your palate, your gourmandise



urges must wait. You can't stuff your face until the worm is through stuffing his. The next part of the prescription is medication. You don't like taking pills? Tough shit. (At least it will be once you take the drugs for awhile. Take heart, fellow FOPpers; your gastronomy may return to normal in as brief a period as ten days.

Looking back, I remember sitting on the stairs of Widener listening to the program director tell us that the effects of FOP last a long time after you return from the mountains. He remarked that FOPpers seem to share a special bond. Looks like we found our bond, gang. Although we're no longer squatting in the woods, we're all still "potty partners." Never mind designating a toilet paper tree; now we'd need a whole freakin' forest. Still searching for dropbears? Try looking in the john. I never realized how many connotations the phrase "FOP 'til you drop" could take on. As advice for handling this giardia epidemic, I can only suggest that you "deal with it." You'll have to excuse me now... I have to go see a man about a dog.

HANG IN THERE, GROUP 8!!!!

### SERVICE

*Thomas Dingman, Dean of Freshmen*

Freshman year at Harvard starts slowly. We offer a number of pre-orientation programs (of which, FOP is the oldest and largest), then launch Opening Days for a week, followed by the Course Selection Period (lovingly referred to as "shopping week"). The slow start is very intentional, and we make

adjustments from year to year based on student feedback provided the winter before.

This year a new feature of Opening Days was the Freshman Day of Service, held on the Saturday of Labor Day Weekend. We had

been hoping to include such an offering to introduce freshmen to their new extended community, to get them to see the opportunity they have to make a real difference, and to provide another

class-bonding event. Gene Corbin, Assistant Dean of Student Life for Public Service, miraculously made it all happen.

When I led my group of twenty to help clean up the grounds of an Allston elementary school, I was struck by the number of participants who had also done FOP. I had my own ideas for the cross-over, but I decided to ask if the students themselves saw any connection. Several said they were attracted by the spirit of adventure, the chance to materially leave things better, and the opportunity afforded to think about their own good fortune.

One participant, Rachel Clemens, who did a switch-service trip, elaborated: "FOP reinforced the idea that service isn't drudgery but meaningful work, especially when you fully devote your present to bettering others' futures." Another, Connor Richardson, wrote: "... Cleaning up a local high school that first week of college gave us the chance to get out of the Harvard bubble, to challenge our levels of empathy and stamina, and to foster a greater understanding of our place in both the Boston community and the world. Spending a week in the woods with a bunch of strangers from around the world, deprived of technology for a week, changes your perspective on life. You gain a greater appreciation for nature and the commonalities that make all of us human, no matter what our background. The Day of Service was not nearly as long, but the takeaways are astonishingly similar. Both programs left me, and presumably others, with a lasting impression that we are not alone in this world; there are many more types of people and ideas and

lifestyles than you can possibly imagine, yet these differences don't have to be divisive. We each have unique talents and experiences that, when shared, leave everyone with a greater understanding of the world and can be the catalysts that spark global peace and prosperity."

I cannot say I was surprised by the cross-over, but I am so grateful for the sparks ignited once again by FOP and the resulting high-energy and spirited embrace of our first Freshman Day of Service. With FOP's continuing commitment to help students get outside of themselves and reflect on the impact one can make as part of a coordinated, principled team, I expect even greater involvement in what, I hope, will be our second-ever Freshman Day of Service in 2016.

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### FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Coz Teplitz*

I am writing these remarks over the Thanksgiving holiday, and I am feeling truly grateful for the incredible support showed by the FOP community last year. Thanks to your help, we hit a new fundraising high, which allowed us to achieve a long-standing accessibility goal: matching University aid percentages. If a student was receiving aid to cover 75% of the costs of the College, we were able to cover the same percentage of the FOP fee. Indeed, we had such strong support that we were able to also purchase a supply of high-quality new backpacks for our inventory; in doing so we were able to keep 35 additional students from having to purchase a pack of their own. These efforts bore fruit - we had more FOPpers on trips in August than ever before.

These achievements are worth lauding, and I am incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to the effort. We hope to be able to match University aid packages each year going forward, and to do so we will need to harness our current momentum. If you are able to help ensure the future of financial accessibility for FOP, we need your support.

As we applaud these successes, the next avenue to improve FOP has become clear in recent weeks. In an end-of-term communication to College staff, Dean of Student Life Stephen Lassonde described the last few weeks as "at once upsetting and breath-

taking". The protests at Yale, Mizzou and elsewhere have reminded us that many students, although present at these institutions, continue to feel unwelcome there. We know that students here in Cambridge have had similar experiences. Over the last few years a prominent, student-created art installation entitled, "I, Too, Am Harvard" has catalyzed many conversations; the installation features images of students of color holding signs bearing messages about their experiences here. More recently, the lack of welcome manifested itself in pieces of tape placed across the portraits of black professors at the Law School. As a program whose express purpose is to make students feel welcome on campus, it is upsetting to hear so many descriptions of negative experiences. At the same time, watching students speak up for themselves and their peers has been breathtaking in its power and its underlying hope.

In his message Dean Lassonde went on to note that one factor underlying the negative experiences of students of color has been institutional focus on accessibility in the admissions process over providing support to minority students once they arrive. The lack of support, he writes, has made it hard for students "to build bridges across racial, gender, and social divides." I found this message to be compelling for two reasons. First, FOP's recent focus has also been on accessibility. Making - and now keeping - FOP financially accessible was and is a necessary and important step. With a program that is growing, with a wider breadth of backgrounds represented within FOPpers and within leaders, the time has come to invest deeply in ensuring that our community is truly welcoming. Our programming already encourages students to grapple with how they define their personal identity. This year's Steering Committee has chosen to extend that exploration by "empower[ing]...community members...to engage one another regarding issues of identity, inclusion, and allyship". I applaud the students for setting this as a priority this year, and I look forward to exploring with them how we can better ensure positive experiences for all members of our community - FOPpers, leaders, and families.

The second reason I found Dean Lassonde's message compelling is that I believe FOP is in a unique position to build the sort of bridges we all hope for. Conversations about emotionally-charged topics like identity,

personal experiences, and areas of differences can be truly open and productive only when all participants believe in the goodwill of the others in the conversation. FOP, with its small groups, potential for close relationships, and intentionally crafted norms, seems a perfect venue for such discussions. Just as trips have been productive places to explore personal identity and hopes for college, I believe trips are productive places for conversations about navigating life on a diverse campus. Moreover, I believe that with our increasing scale we have a chance to influence campus climate. These days, a quarter of the first-year class participates in FOP, and if we are able to maintain our access goals, we hope that percentage will continue to grow. If we can help lay some groundwork for how later conversations should occur, we could have a real impact on campus culture. Dean Khurana likes to remind students that Harvard, even with all its history, is made up of people, and those people can shape this institution with some intention and care. Perhaps this is one way FOP can help with that shaping.

As always, I am humbled by the level of energy and enthusiasm students and leaders invest into FOP. I hope we can continue to find ways to use that energy to make the Harvard experience as positive as possible.

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### FROM OUR FOPPERS

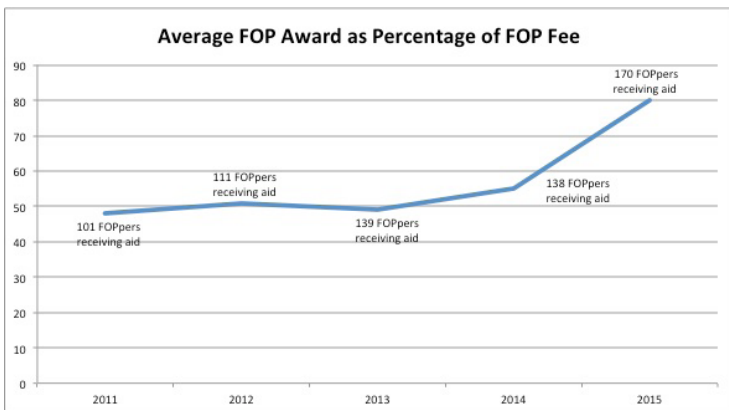
*Class of 2019*

"It was almost like having a group of family/high school friends going to school with you, which was very comforting."

"My FOP experience was just full of great memories. I really enjoyed sleeping under the stars, learning how to canoe, Fiesta night and fuzzy cheesecake, sharing stories and experiences around the campfire, making friends before Opening Days, the list goes on and on."

"In the back country I gained perspective on how our fast paced city lifestyles sometimes hindered our ability to stop and appreciate everything, and I decided on FOP in the midst of nature that I wanted to integrate this appreciation more in my every day life."

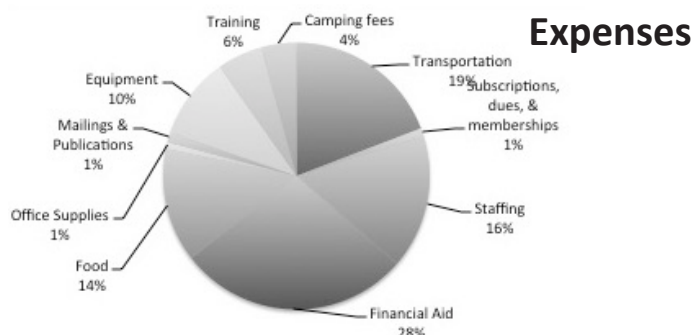
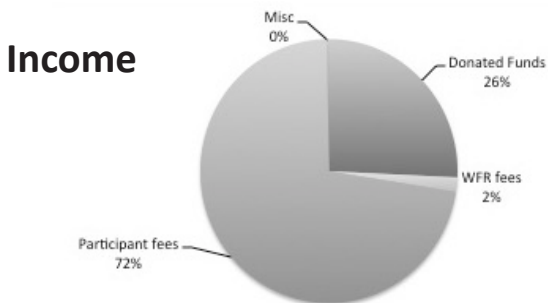
"The VIEWS!!!!"



In 2015, we were finally able to **match the percentage of aid offered by the College**, thanks to the hard work of Steering Committee 15 and the generosity of donors. This has been a longstanding goal for FOP, but we nonetheless hope to continue to make the program more accessible each year.

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

## FOP Financials FY15



Fiscal year runs 7/01/2014 - 6/30/2015

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## Thank You to all of our Donors!

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 John Whang M.D. & Lauren T.  
 Block  
 Andrew Howland Auchincloss  
 White

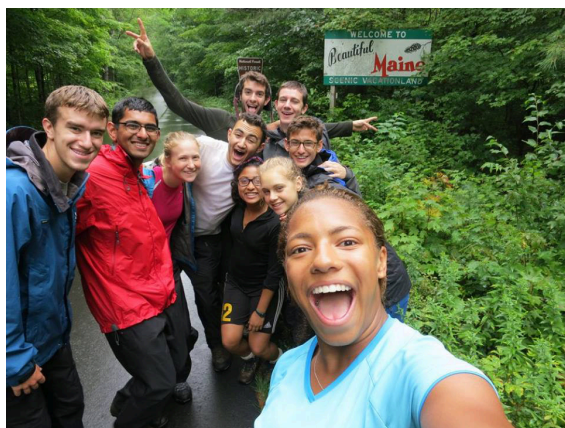
Lacey R. Whitmire  
 Thomas S. Wooten  
 Khalid M. Yasin  
 Nancy Chang Yue, MD  
 George Zisiadis  
 Bradley A. Zlotnick M.D.

## IN-KIND DONATIONS

Elizabeth Ulmer & Jonathan  
 Graham

## CORPORATE SUPPORT

OTTO Pizza  
 Hi-Rise Bread Company



**"It was an extremely trusting environment where I felt like I could grow and learn with the support of other people who wanted similar things from their FOP trip."**