

THE FUZZY CHEESECAKE

APRIL 2024 | VOLUME XVIII



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 '24 welcomes you to learn about our hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the upcoming year, and to reflect upon our past 3 cycles of FOP trips. Since you last heard from us by way of Fuzzy Cheesecake in February 2021, FOP ran its final virtual FOP in August 2021, then two successful years of in-person trips in 2022 and 2023. We have a lot to catch you up on, so settle down and get cozy.

IN THIS EDITION:

- Greetings from SC '24
- Reflection from Kent Ratliff, FOP Director
- Senior Testimonials
- The Spirit of Giving



FOP BY THE NUMBERS

In 2023 we had the great honor of sending out 35 FOP trips across Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, serving 315 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.



WWW.FOP.FAS.HARVARD.EDU



From left: Ellyssa Jeong '26, Colette Tesoro '26, Kent Ratliff (Director), Elodie Sinclair '26, Julia Mansfield '25, Serena Jampel '25, Andrew Zhao '26, Zion Dixon '26, Anaya Zachery '26

GREETINGS FROM STEERING COMMITTEE '24

Steering Committee '24 comes to you at a time of transition for the program. While SC still meets in the old, lime green FOPpice in the basement of Matthews Hall, there is a new energy to FOP. SC turnover occurred just a week before our new Director, Kent Ratliff, began their position. Together, we are a group of nine individuals new to their positions. Rather than looking at our newness as a daunting challenge, we are using it as a means of propelling FOP toward long-term growth. In future years, we hope to be able to offer FOP to all first-years who want to participate. While our SC term is only one calendar year, we want to devote our energy to laying stable groundwork for years and years of FOP 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. FOP, and other outdoor spaces, have historically excluded or tokenized people who are not white, wealthy, or otherwise privileged. As such, 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.

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 potential coordination/collaboration with other pre-orientation programs and campus groups. FOP is looking forward to working with a variety of different existing organizations on campus to offer a variety of outdoor experiences to first-years for pre-orientation and throughout the year.

SC'24 is also committed to fostering joy and spontaneous fun throughout the LC and wider FOP community. As the trees bloom outside Matthews Hall and campus prepares for the coming summer, we are filled with excitement for the year to come. The new year has already brought a new class of trainees and new initiatives to bring our community closer together. This SC will bring radical vision and ample energy towards making FOP the best it can be.

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!

With FOP love,
Anaya, Andrew, Colette, Ellyssa, Elodie, Julia, Serena, and Zion

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR : KENT RATLIFF



Dear FOP Community,

It has been a whirlwind of new faces and places, old traditions, and the nuts and bolts of FOP. Each person I've met has displayed the values FOP holds while welcoming First-Years and solidified my confidence in this community's impact.

Transitioning to college for the first time is a daunting experience, but one made all the easier when you get to share common experiences in beautiful places with a small group of strangers-soon-to-be-friends. I am so excited to help foster that sense of place and radically inclusive community building that makes FOP so special.

My first student experience at Middlebury College was a backpacking trip very similar to FOP which formed a core group of friends and values that set me on my current path, as the new FOP Director for Harvard! I worked as a student leader, trip coordinator, then graduated and worked as Assistant Director of Outdoor Programming. After Middlebury, I pursued a position at Adventure Treks, an outdoor education company that runs high-adventure expedition trips for folks from age 12 to 21, where I spent seven years working with students, building incredible communities in amazing places as well as working behind the scenes to create these magical experiences every year. Working with Harvard students excited me to be able to continue spreading the growth of outdoor leadership and the beauty and wonder that our world has to offer.

Normally, the Director's letter includes an overview of the past year, celebrating the successes of everyone who chipped in to make FOP happen. I so appreciate the hard work that the leaders, basecampers, summer staff, and the SC put into this past FOP! The interim director, Conlan has helped immensely in the passage of knowledge, smoothing my transition to Harvard. I know they did an awesome job running last year's programming and feel so thankful to have their experiences to draw on. Additionally, Conlan has connected me with years of past directors and I find it so unique and powerful that even after leaving FOP, directors and alumni continue to reach out to future generations of FOP to offer advice and assistance. It speaks to the powerful impact of this program.

Additionally, the past and current Steering Committee have been crucial in welcoming me into this space. Thank you so much to SC '23 for the hours of effort and passion you have poured into this program. To SC '24, thank you for sharing FOP traditions and being so excited to work together creating excellent programming.

The mission statement from our SCODyssey retreat is to "Cultivate a strong sense of place and belonging through a radically inclusive, supportive community to create fulfillment and wonder for all who interact with FOP." Within this mission, we came up with three guiding visions: 1. Increase the diversity of participants and leaders. 2. Grow our programming to do more activities in more places and reach more people. 3. Maintain the joy and downright fun that FOP has always shared. I know that we will run safe, fun programming that will help bring students closer together and impart that fulfillment and wonder that makes FOP so special.

As I learn more about this program, I would love to hear from any FOP community members, current students and alumni alike. So I will leave you all with this reflection: "How has FOP shaped the path your life has taken, the values you hold dear, and the people who you surround yourself with." Take the time to consider this impact, and if you feel like sharing, or have any questions, ideas, and feelings you'd like to express, please don't hesitate to reach out to KentonRatliff@fas.harvard.edu

SENIOR TESTIMONIALS

"As a graduating senior, looking back at my time at Harvard, I don't know who I'd be without FOP. Being a leader has been the most meaningful part of my time here and I'm so proud to call this community my home. I'm so grateful for the friends I've made in FOP and beyond this, my time in this group has ratified my interest to become a high school teacher <3"

"Nowhere else have I found such a welcoming, thoughtful, intelligent group of people. Fostering such deep connection so quickly is extremely rewarding."

"FOP has been the single most influential community I've been a part of on this campus; I joined after a rough, COVID-filled freshman year during Zoom FOP and was lucky enough to watch it grow into what it is today over the past two years."

"My co sophomore year is now one of my best friends in the world and resultantly I think that joining FOP is literally the decision that most changed the trajectory of my time at Harvard."

"FOP has been the one community where I can reliably come and be my most organic self, every time. I have met some of my lifelong friends through FOP, and I am forever grateful to have been a part of this warm and loving community :)"

"Since I joined FOP, it has consistently been my favorite extracurricular on campus. FOP is the most welcoming, intentional, and uplifting group I have ever been a part of. "It's the people, not the mountains" can sometimes feel a bit cheesy, but, like most things with FOP, the more I bought into the program the more I realized how true it was. I have formed and strengthened so many amazing friendships through FOP, and I have gone on adventures that I never would have dreamed of."

"Becoming a FOP leader as a first-semester senior was one of the very best decisions I made at Harvard....I am so proud to be a FOP leader, so grateful for the FOP community, and so sad to be saying this goodbye."

"I didn't believe in magic until I joined FOP. All of the rain, the shine, the motivation checks, the AMAZING people, and so much more in FOP have made my college experience so incredible. It's been such a privilege to be a part of such a wonderful community of people, and I'm grateful to every single person in FOP who made my time at Harvard so special."



THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

Harvard FOP is not just an outdoor orientation program; it's a transformative experience that sets the stage for a lifetime of leadership, resilience, and camaraderie. Our mission for 2024 is to "cultivate a strong sense of place and belonging through a radically inclusive supportive community to create fulfillment and wonder for all FOPpers, Leaders, and SC members." Our commitment to fostering personal growth and building a sense of community among incoming students remains unwavering, but we need your help to make it accessible to everyone.

This year, we are facing unprecedented challenges, with an increasing number of students seeking financial aid to participate in FOP. The demand for support has never been higher, and we are determined to ensure that no student is denied this incredible opportunity due to financial constraints.

By contributing to our fundraising efforts, you're directly supporting students who might otherwise miss out on the chance to embark on this life-changing adventure. Your donation will provide financial aid to cover essential costs, as well as allow FOP to purchase new equipment and to expand our reach to serve more of the Harvard community.

Here's how you can make a difference:

1. Make a Donation: Every dollar counts, and your contribution, no matter the size, will bring us one step closer to our goal of making FOP accessible to all.
2. Spread the Word: Share our fundraising campaign with your network. Your voice is a powerful tool, and by amplifying our message, you help us reach more potential supporters.

Your support is crucial in ensuring that the Harvard FOP remains a beacon of inclusivity and personal growth. Together, we can empower the next generation of leaders to navigate challenges, embrace diversity, and forge lifelong connections.

Visit <https://fop.fas.harvard.edu/donate> to make your contribution today.

Thank you for being a vital part of the Harvard community and for helping us create a more inclusive and enriching experience for all our students.

Warm regards,
Super Compassionate (FOP Steering Committee)