

Outdoor Action Leave No Trace Feather Foundation Grant Report



Rick Curtis, Director
Outdoor Action
5/24/20132
rcurtis@princeton.edu

Executive Summary

The Feather Foundation funding of the Outdoor Action Leave No Trace Master Educator Program has transformed the way that OA Leaders learn about, understand, and implement Leave No Trace practices within OA programs. We are exceedingly grateful to the foundation for its support. Prior to the implementation of this program OA Leaders received only cursory instruction about basic Leave No Trace practices. Now all OA Leaders complete a two-hour Leave No Trace Awareness course and receive additional instruction during their Leader Training Trips.



Outcomes

The impact and reach of the Leave No Trace Master Educator program over the past year has been incredible.

The first group of Master Educators was trained in March 2012 over spring break on a trip to the Galiuros Mountains in Arizona. Immediately upon returning to campus the new Master Educators began teaching the LNT Awareness Course to trainees in the OA Leader Training Program. A total of 110 Leaders-in-Training participated in spring 2012.

Since students who had already completed Leader Training had not received specific training in Leave No Trace technique and philosophy, in August 2012 all 247 OA Frosh Trip Leaders received a special refresher program before leading in September 2012. The September 2012 Frosh Trip Program was the largest ever which means that 825 incoming Princeton freshmen were presented with material about Leave No Trace during their trip with an emphasis on how they can continue to implement sustainable choices when they return to campus.

Period	Leaders Trained
Spring 2012 Leader Training	110
Frosh Trip 2012	247
Fall 2012 Leader Training	38
Spring 2013 Leader Training	59
Total Students Trained	454

The overall quality and sophistication of our Leave No Trace instruction has grown exponentially, in large part due to the incredible commitment that the student Leave No Trace Master Educators have shown on their return to campus. The opportunity to explore this topic in such depth with the experienced instructors from the National Outdoor Leadership School has clearly had a significant impact on the students and inspired them to pursue teaching these skills from a values orientation, not simply as a set of techniques and practices. I think some of

the newest Master Educators can best speak to the impact that Master Educator course and the opportunity to teach these skills has had on them and on their philosophy of outdoor education.

Student Reports

Miranda Bernard '14

The Leave No Trace Master Educator's Course was an amazing experience. It really transformed my views on what LNT actually it is. LNT is not just a set of rules and regulations that people follow in order to preserve the environment – it is an ethic that once engrained in one's values guides his or her actions. Thinking of LNT as an ethic has integrated the beliefs into my everyday life and caused me to view things differently. One night in Arizona, as we were all getting ready for bed, a few of us climbed up a rock and saw one of the most incredible views I had ever seen. Down below us lay all of Tucson, and its seemingly endless amount of lights and buildings. This view was incredible because it really forced me to see the connections between LNT in the backcountry and frontcountry. We were able to see all of the light pollution emitting from the city, giving me the uneasy feeling that it was leaching into the backcountry.

LNT practices are not just what one does in the backcountry because the way we treat our environment in the frontcountry affects the pristine natural environment. The amount of people on the planet and the large numbers who trek into the woods has displayed Earth's fragility and inspired me to further my interests in the environment, and its conservation.

This past semester on campus I took a course titled American Environmental History in which we read works by John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau and many other classical and modern environmental writers. The trip out to Arizona over Spring Break provided me with different insight to these readings, and vice versa. The opportunity to teach what I have learned from these great environmentalists and the NOLS instructors has helped me formulate my own opinions on the environment and the LNT ethic.

Teaching to a group of people is a new experience for me and so far I have really enjoyed it. It has been rewarding for me in that I get the opportunity to learn about other people's experiences and interpretations of leave no trace as an ethic. Going on the trip and teaching to new Outdoor Action leaders, I have seen the positive shift of LNT as a set of rules that people must follow so they do not get in trouble to an ethic with practices that come natural.



Dawn Wang, Miranda Bernard, Brian Reed, Joe Bolling, Holt Dwyer, Renata Diaz

Joe Bolling '15

My experiences on this year's LNT Master Educator training trip were overwhelmingly positive. I had the chance to explore beautiful Saguaro wilderness with a group of thoughtful and engaged fellow students, all with a conscious focus on the motivation and practice of outdoor ethics. The environment which we hiked through by day stimulated our discussions in the afternoon and at night, when we covered the principles of LNT in depth and brainstormed ways to apply them back on campus. We thought about what OA does currently to promote LNT ethics and the current role of LNT master educators on campus, then thought about ways that this could be improved. Amongst the solutions we discussed were the possibility of an LNT-focused Frosh trip, LNT trainer trips for leaders, and increasing the LNT presence amongst leader trainers on the leader training trip.

One aspect of the class that I found most interesting was the focus on teaching. We weren't just learning the LNT principles; we were learning how to pass them on to others. I perform a variety of roles on campus that involve teaching in some capacity, within and without OA, but had not received the sort of in-depth look at teaching and classroom charisma that we took on the LNT Master Educator trip. We discussed how best to prepare for teaching exercises and the importance of enthusiasm and sincerity in teaching. The chance to teach a section of the LNT curriculum and receive real-time feedback from my fellow hikers was particularly educational. This focus on educational technique is something I don't think I would have found otherwise as an Electrical Engineer at Princeton.

Since returning to campus, I've found myself using what I learned on the LNT Master Educator trip to teach more effectively and to stay more in touch with the nature around campus. I've taught LNT awareness courses as well as technical skills courses to incoming leaders this spring, and I've found myself going back to my notes from Arizona beforehand, not just to review the seven principles but also to remind myself to keep a good vocal cadence as I teach. I've found that my daily interactions from nature, from biking through Prospect Gardens to get to class to studying on the grassy quads, have been enhanced by my understanding of the natural balances we discussed on the trip.

In the coming months I hope to work with the other Master Educators to bring this awareness to other students on campus. We've begun by working with this year's leader trainers to bring a greater focus on LNT to OA's leader training trips and by exploring the possibility of an LNT-focused frosh trip, as we discussed on the trail. In the fall, I'm excited to begin promoting LNT trainer opportunities to leaders and to expand the LNT trainer presence on campus. I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to make LNT such a strong part of my outlook.

Renata Diaz '15

On the Master Educator course in Saguaro National Park, my five groupmates and I were all strangers in a strange ecosystem; our days in the desert were like extended scavenger hunts for glimpses of a new and stunning world. My personal knowledge of Arizona was a collection of vague impressions of aridity and heat, silent expanses of cacti, and long, lonely roads. I never expected the air to smell sweet and sharp, or the higher altitudes of Saguaro National Park to

house the Ponderosa pines I remembered from a childhood hike in Colorado. The thrill of these constant discoveries energized our group in the early days; by the end of the trip, our stability with each other complemented our stability with this no-longer-so-strange, but still wonderful, place.

For me, the Master Educator course was about becoming part of a group marked by sense of respect and landfulness - a land ethic - that developed alongside our sense of belonging with each other. This land ethic was at its most explicitly apparent in our starlit conversations about environmentalism and collectively workshopped lessons, but it wove its way into our jokes, our goals, our quiet tired spaces. One memorable morning, after we straggled our way up to the ridge we'd gazed at all trip, we stood at literally our high point. We scampered off the trail (it was, of course, a dispersed scamper) and took our various routes to the top of a boulder, placing ourselves at just over 8,000 feet. For most of the group, it was an elevation record; even for a Colorado native, it was the highest I had ever climbed of my own accord. The accomplishment was a marvel, but it was most marvelous because of the particular relationship it struck between us and this dry, distant ridge. Here was a focal point, a symbol for all of the quieter moments we had shared through the days – scooping our water from the chilly, brilliantly lit stream that flowed behind our tentsite; sitting and reading our course materials in the strange and welcome Arizona sun; breaking camp in the frigid desert dawn.

This, I believe, was the core of Leave No Trace as I experienced it on the Master Educator course. Of course, Leave No Trace depends on actions; it depends on certain skills and choices about how to behave as outdoor leaders and enthusiasts. But its true vitality lies in the richness of experience it encourages – for example, the experiences that just so happen to come when a group of alert, curious, thoughtful people decide to explore the land around them while they explore new friendships with each other.

As a Master Educator, I'm lucky to have the opportunity to encourage more leaders to bring their groups down similar paths. So far I have co-delivered two Leave No Trace Awareness workshops, and both times I was struck by the participants' willingness to accept Leave No Trace principles and their speedy understanding of the skills and judgment calls we teach. I'm confident that our newest leaders will have the knowledge and the skills to make responsible decisions on the trail next September. However, I feel that I have more to share, more "lessons" I could deliver after my – our – experiences in Arizona.

These are lessons that live in the places where they're taught and learned; they're lessons about developing friendships and developing landfulness with complementary measures of joy and respect. As a leader, my ambition is to create opportunities for the groups I lead make these to discoveries for themselves. I don't know yet quite how I'll do it, but I believe there's a beginning to be found in a curious and joyful attitude towards the land, and an equally welcoming and thoughtful space within a group – the qualities that defined my experiences on the Master Educator course.

Next Steps

In late August the six new Master Educators along with the seven Master Educators from 2012 will once again be teaching refresher courses to all of the 221 returning OA Leaders just prior to Frosh Trip. Over the summer they will be working on developing the training curriculum. One of the new goals for this summer is to develop a “landfulness history” of the various areas that OA Trips will be traveling to so that leaders have a greater sense of the land and its history and can teach that to freshmen during the trips. In addition the new Master Educators have planned the first Wilderness & Civilization Frosh Trip which will explore the complex ways humans interact with, impact, and preserve remote and delicate wilderness areas. Over the course of the trip the freshmen will be trained at the Leave No Trace Trainer level which will allow them to teach the 2-hour Leave No Trace Awareness course back on campus. Of course all of the OA Leaders will be teaching Leave No Trace philosophy and skills to the over 700 incoming freshmen who will be part of this fall’s Frosh Trip Program.

Over Fall Break in October we plan to offer another Master Educator Course with NOLS, this time to the Grand Canyon to train the next group of Master Educators.

Expenses

The expenses for this year’s program were for the Master Educator course with NOLS over spring break 2013. The Feather Foundation grant covered most of the cost of tuition for students and OA covered the remainder and all of the transportation costs.

Item	Amount
NOLS Tuition (6 students)	\$6,500.00
Airfare (6 students)	\$3,098.60
Hotel (6 students)	\$279.93
Airport Shuttle - NJ	\$346.91
Airport Shuttle - AZ	\$55.00
Meals (6 students)	\$496.56
TOTAL	\$10,777.00