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Since there is no regular budget allocation for the Climbing Wall we rely on alumni donations to provide our annual funding to pay Wall Staff during Open Hours, for setting routes and to maintain the gear that keeps the wall safe and accessible to all recreational climbers. Please consider donating to the OA Climbing Program to help keep all of these wonderful programs operating—it means a lot to so many people.

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In my sophomore fall, I started the Princeton University Climbing Team, which is now a university club sport that took 5th in our region last spring. In the spring of my freshman year I began volunteering with Peak Potential, which brings children with disabilities to the climbing wall weekly and uses the power of climbing to empower them “with what they can do rather than what they can’t.” The children get stronger and more confident as they return each week and many of their parents say that the kids talk all week about climbing. For the volunteers it’s an incredible experience to climb alongside one of these courageous children.

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A student leader is the one that OA places in the role of OA Leader. Leaders have won major prizes and fellowships, and are good examples of the impact that OA has on transforming the lives of Princeton students and those around them. We need your support to ensure that OA can continue to develop this next generation of great leaders.

Notes from the Trailhead

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You heard from three amazing Leaders

These three leaders are superb examples of the impact that OA has on transforming the lives of Princeton students and those around them. We need your support to ensure that OA can continue to build this next generation of great leaders.

Please make a donation to the Friends of OA.
How Can You Help?

During our first forty Years OA has accomplished amazing things. It’s time to look ahead. These are some of the goals for OA and the funding we will need to secure OA for the future:

- Create permanent funding to support the OA Climbing Program and Climbing Wall. ($50,000 needed)
- Ensure that Outdoor Action has the necessary annual funding to continue to deliver program excellence for the next forty years.

You can help us reach these goals by giving to OA. Like the impact of OA on campus, your gift will ripple out through the program and across the campus.

Why Outdoor Action?

Caroline Stone ’14
OA’s New Program Coordinator

Four years ago, when I arrived at Dillon Gym ready for my own Frosh Trip, I didn’t quite know what to expect. I liked being outside and I wasn’t afraid of dirt, but I had never been back-packing before. Though I had never before heard of the Laurel Highlands (a 70-mile trail in Western Pennsylvania), I soon developed a love/hate relationship with its copper-tinted water and our freezing swimming excursions on windy mountain-tops. By the second day, I knew I wanted to become a leader, but I was concerned that my lack of prior experience would make me ineligible to continue with the program. Much to the contrary, OA is willing to train anyone dedicated to becoming a leader, and guides them through continued growth and preparation throughout their time at Princeton. Despite my lack of previous experience, OA has supported me to overcome hesitations and challenges in order to help me fulfill my potential as a leader.

I have met hundreds of interesting people at Princeton. But on my OA trips over the past 4 years, I’ve had the opportunity to actually develop relationships with a broader spectrum of people than I’ve encountered through any other student group. I have connected with peers that I can easily relate to, but also embraced to recognize new relationships because of—not in spite of—our differences. Largely because of my experiences through OA, I’ve stopped trying to define an individual’s diversity based on a single supposedly-all-encompassing aspect of his or her personality (e.g. “the Olympic fencer frosh” or “the architecture kid”), instead, I’ve learned to focus on the numerous factors that make each individual a complete person. In exploring my interactions with others on OA, I haven’t compiled a list of interesting or impressive facts about my peers. Instead, I have had countless memorable conversations in which we discussed our personal views on world religions or the role of our families in shaping our childhoods.

Graduating from Princeton this past June, I emerged a more confident and self-aware individual. I have real experience standing firm for what I believe to be the appropriate decision for the safety of a group, and directly challenging the decision of a more experienced leader, but I also have learned to do so with a focus on the group’s common goal rather than with aggression. I’ve developed problem-solving skills and have learned to trust my ability to be resilient and adapt to the situations at hand (e.g. creatively persevering through 4 nights in November despite missing half our tent). In teaching these skills to leaders-in-training, I have gained an even deeper understanding of the inner-workings of my own leadership.

Through my involvement with OA, I have been challenged to try new things and push the limits of my comfort zone. But I have always been supported in this endeavor, in a way that leads to productive growth and development; apparent “failures” are transformed into teachable moments, rather than being left as merely negative outcomes.

Back when I was in kindergarten, my dad would remind me to “eat some green eggs and ham” every day on the way to school, encouraging me to explore new things and not be afraid of pushing myself into the unknown. Now, working for OA, I continue to “eat green eggs and ham” on a daily basis, and make it my constant goal to encourage students to do so as well.

Katie Bauman ’15 - Leader Trainer

Being a part of the Outdoor Action program has impacted my Princeton experience in so many ways from the moment I stepped foot on campus as a freshman to my final year as a senior looking forward to my last OA trips training new leaders. As a participant during the (infamous) hurricane year, I returned to campus seeing my leaders as superheroes. Anyone who could navigate brand new trails, set up camp in the pouring rain, cook some of the most delicious mac and cheese I have had to date in that downspour and still manage to make the entire experience exciting and fun had my respect and admiration.

Looking back at my first experience with OA, I can see that it was my first encounter with the possibilities and growth possible in the Outdoor Action program.

As I completed leader training, I entered a community that focused on each individual’s leadership development with personalized and detailed oriented approach that I have not seen in other programs I have been a part of. In addition to technical skills like bearbagging and medical skills, leader training taught me to always look at my leadership holisti-cally—recognizing my strengths as well as my weaknesses and offering the environment to work on both. As a leader, I was given the opportunity to see myself grow through experiences that was facilitated by OA through individual reflec-tions following each trip I was a part of that allowed me not only to reflect on what happened but also to understand and learn from different situations so my experiences contributed to moving forward as a leader. OA’s emphasis on reflection and sutures together the technical and leadership development as a central part of my approach to work on the Student Volunteer Council Board. OA gave me the foundation for engaging in reflection to enact future change and implemented a similar approach in my conversations with Community Partners, Princeton projects, and volunteers. These conversations have led to new partnerships, growth and innovation in different civic engagement areas involving Princeton students and the surrounding community.

As a leader trainer, I have been able to challenge myself not only in continuing to develop my own leadership skills but also in teaching others. I applied to be a leader trainer because I wanted to further immerse myself in the program and community that had already played such an important part in my growth in college. Training leaders required that I engaged with the skills and foundations OA has presented with at a higher level to help new leaders recognize their own potential. Working as a leader trainer has also given me the opportunity to engage in the ideological questions about the program and its goals to empower leaders as leaders and also establish a respect and appreciation for the outdoors. My independent work this year will continue the exploration of the “wild” that my experiences with OA began. I am looking into how people characterize the wilderness and their experiences there through literature and what kind of role the wilderness and personal narratives in play in American culture and identity.

My experience with Outdoor Action opened a door to practical skills, self-awareness and intellectual interests that have played a significant role in my time at Princeton and in shaping me as a Princetonian over the last four years.

Elly Czajkowski ’15
Climbing Wall Coordinator

The journey into rock climbing at Princeton sometimes begins with a climbing Frosh Trip. Or it could begin with late-night Thursday climbing and pizza as part of University sponsored alcohol-free events. Or a friend that drags you to Open Hours at the wall. Or you have an interest in volunteering with children and work with Peak Potential Princeton. Or maybe you take an intro to rock climbing course.

I consider myself extremely lucky that I had the chance to start climbing when I was thirteen. When I arrived at Princeton, the climbing community was the first place where I felt at home in Princeton, and it has been the place where I have made many of my closest friends. It has also been a place for me to learn to be a leader, a coach, a teacher, and a volunteer. The climbing community at Princeton was a continuation of a passion I had for several years before college, and I honestly have no idea what my time at Princeton would have looked like without the climbing community.
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(continued on page 4)
Open Hours, where all members of the University can come and climb, are completely free and are the backbone of the OA Climbing Program. It is a place for climbers to climb in a relaxed setting, an opportunity to teach people how to belay and to give them the experience they need to enhance their skills and enthusiasm for the sport of climbing. Open Hours are also a great ‘melting pot’ where undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff all come together around their love of the sport—one of the few places where everyone is on the same plane—vertical.

My freshman fall, I started the Princeton University Climbing Team, which is now a university club sport that took 3rd in our region last spring. In the spring of my freshman year I began volunteering with Peak Potential, which brings children with disabilities to the climbing wall weekly and uses the power of climbing to empower them “with what they can do rather than what they can’t.” The children get stronger and more confident as they return each week and many of their parents say that the kids talk all week about climbing. For the volunteers it’s an incredible experience to climb alongside one of these courageous children.

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Why a Climbing Wall?

In October, after the breakneck pace of getting Fresh Trip out the door, and the furious push to get Leader Training started for Fall Break is done, I get a brief respite to look back on what we have accomplished so far this year and ask an important question: Why Outdoor Action? In this issue of Tiger Trails we’ll explore that question through some excerpts from the 40th Anniversary Report on the Status of OA and from current students, expressing in their own words what OA means to them. During its forty-year history, Outdoor Action (OA) has achieved incredible success. It has virtually transformed the orientation process for incoming students at Princeton. OA has built a unique learning laboratory where students have the opportunity to practice real leadership in service to others. OA Leaders are some of Princeton’s most successful and influential leaders across the campus. The overall Outdoor Action Program is also one of Princeton’s greatest untapped resources. Expanding the program is clearly one of the best investments Princeton can make in student leadership development over the next decade.

The impact of Outdoor Action over the past forty years is both broad and deep. It can be seen not only through the relationships built on the trail through working together, but also in the leadership skills that OA Leaders inject into all of their academics and campus activities. The list of OA Leaders who have won major prizes and fellowships is just one benchmark of the impact OA has on campus. Ask any student who has participated, an alumna who was a leader, or parent whose child went on Fresh Trip, and you will hear just how important Outdoor Action is to the Princeton experience.

Frosh Trip

The Outdoor Action Frosh Trip is the largest single outdoor orientation program in the U.S. Over fifty-five percent of the incoming freshmen class begin their Princeton experience with a six-day outdoor trip through activities like backpacking, biking, canoeing, farming, and rock climbing. With the help of a dedicated group of outdoor activity leaders, freshmen learn not only about campus life, but also about themselves and their new classmates by learning to work together as part of a team. There is something unique about traveling on the trail with ten other people, bearing their life stories, working hard together as well as ‘unphugging’ from cell phones and the Internet for six days that creates such a cohesive, engaged and interdependent group. Fresh Trip serves as a great ‘mixing bowl’ of the Princeton experience. It exposes freshmen to the rich diversity of their class, allows them to connect with students in their residential college and students in other colleges, and builds relationships with upperclass students. The success of this unique formula over the past four decades cannot be disputed. The program has grown almost every year for the past forty years.

Here is your Answer!

What attracts so many students to the Fresh Trip each year is the unique emphasis that Outdoor Action places on how to create a successful student experience at Princeton. OA Leaders, as role models and mentors, teach incoming students about values like community and diversity and provide information about campus social life and academics that help reduce the anxiety that many students have about starting college. Princeton’s Frosh Trip is the most emulated of any college outdoor orientation program.

Leader Training Program

I am proud to report that OA’s student leaders are the most diverse of any Ivy League outdoor program. OA is unique in the Ivy League in that we encourage and accept every student who wants to train as an OA Leader. Our peer institutions limit the number of students who can become leaders. We believe that all students can benefit from the Leader Training program and that we should have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills through the training that OA offers. The principle that “anyone can become a leader” is a cornerstone of the program.

Student Leadership Development

One of the unique aspects of OA is the role that OA Leaders play in every aspect of delivering the program. Training new student leaders is done almost entirely by other students and this peer-to-peer teaching is one of OA’s most valuable learning experiences for the instructors. Students are trained in a variety of roles—CPR instructor, First Aid instructor, Technical Skills Trainer, Leave No Trace instructor, and Leader Trainer. These students design and manage curriculum, teach classes, grade and evaluate other students and provide them with feedback on their learning. In addition students operate the OA Climbing Wall and Equipment Room and the summer Frosh Trip Coordinators help plan the entire Frosh Trip. They aren’t just leaders on the trail; leadership and teaching is something OA builds into every aspect of the program. Thanks for your support!

Notes from the Trailhead

For more Notes from the Trailhead and to post, visit: outdooraction.princeton.edu/alumni/trailhead

Heather Liston ’83 reports “I did a 3-week hiking trip in Patagonia. Adventures like this would not be part of my life if it were not for my OA experience, which was one of the most transformative parts of my whole Princeton experience.”

Naomi Darling ’96 started a position as Assistant Professor of Sustainable Architecture at the Five Colleges in western Mass. We took our sons on their first climb up Mt. Bare in the Holyoke ridge.

Alexandra Deprez ’12 participated in Climate Ride, a 5-day, 300 mile bike ride from NYC to DC to raise money and awareness for climate change and bike advocacy issues. She shares, “there were 180 other riders and we saw all the most scenic sights of summer camps. The colloquial atmosphere reminded me and made me miss OA”