Capital Fund Raising for Outdoor Action

Over the past twenty-five years Outdoor Action—the University’s outdoor education program, which operates as part of the Princeton Blairstown Center—has become a unique resource at Princeton. Outdoor Action has introduced thousands of students to the wilderness and to the importance of preserving our environment. We accomplish this special personal growth experience through small-group wilderness trips where groups of students, under the supervision of OA leaders, become a community—self-reliant yet interdependent. We stress values of communication, respect for others, and service.

For many students, Outdoor Action is their first experience living in the outdoors, and many come away from a trip with a new respect not only for the wilderness but also for the environment as a whole. Students learn confidence and self-reliance by completing challenging activities with the support of the group. This learning process is facilitated by other students—OA leaders who have been trained in outdoor, first aid and safety, and group dynamics skills. These leaders find OA one of the most important parts of their experience at Princeton. Learning to lead and teach one’s peers is an invaluable skill.

Since joining with the Princeton Blairstown Center in the fall of 1996, Outdoor Action has expanded its educational mission to include offering experiential and adventure education programs to urban youth and their families particularly in the Mercer County area. This new community service initiative offers Princeton students a unique opportunity to use their wilderness and leadership skills in the service of others.

The Outdoor Action Program has established itself as a leader in the field of University outdoor education programs providing leadership to a number of other institutions that have developed similar programs, including Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, and Yale. Program Director Rick Curtis ’79 regularly presents at international conferences on outdoor education and is frequently called upon to act as a consultant for colleges starting wilderness orientation or other outdoor programs. The Outdoor Action Leader’s Manual, considered to be the best publication of its kind, was published in March 1998 by Random House as The Backpacker’s Field Manual. The Outdoor Action Web Site (www.princeton.edu/~oa) has established itself as one of the premiere sources for information about outdoor education.

Our goals for the Climbing to New Heights Campaign include expanding the numbers of students who participate as well as developing more opportunities for the entire University community (students, faculty, staff, and alumni) to explore the wilderness together. Thus, we are seeking new ways to make the program accessible to all students regardless of their financial means. We hope to develop new and innovative programs while maintaining excellence in the activities already in place. Continuing the development of the OA Leader Training Program remains an essential part of the program mission. Princeton’s Outdoor Action strives be the leading university outdoor education program in the country. In order to ensure the long-term growth of the program, we need to secure funding from an endowment that can continue to grow.
Outdoor Action has been able to sustain this level of programming through the dedicated volunteer work of many OA Leaders and through the one paid position of the Program Director. The Board of the Friends of Outdoor Action has identified a number of areas of the program which will need increased support over the next five years in order to maintain the established excellence in program and continue to make the program accessible for all members of the University. In an effort to obtain these funds a five-year capital fund raising drive for Outdoor Action is underway.

**General Endowment: $500,000** is sought to provide the basic level of resources for maintaining and extending existing activities.

**Outdoor Education Internship: $500,000** an Internship Program to offer graduating OA leaders the opportunity to stay on at Princeton for a one-year term to hone his or her leadership, outdoor, and management skills to pursue a career in environmental or outdoor education. This position provides essential assistance to the Program Director to continue the excellence of the OA Program.

**Leadership Training: $250,000** is sought to finance specialized wilderness skills and first aid training that is essential for OA student leaders.

**Trip Scholarships: $100,000** is sought to finance scholarships for student participants. OA trip prices are subsidized as much as possible to make trips affordable to all interested students. Rising costs are making trips increasingly expensive, creating a greater funding need.

**Equipment: $250,000** is sought to support regular replacement of OA’s aging equipment inventory such as backpacks, sleeping bags, canoes, etc. A one-time allocation of **$125,000** is also desired to purchase equipment that participants currently are required to buy in order to participate such as boots and specialized clothing.
The Outdoor Action Program at Princeton University

Frosh Trip Program

Each fall, OA offers a special program for entering students. The Outdoor Action Frosh Trip is a six-day wilderness camping trip offered the week prior to Orientation Week and involves either backpacking, canoeing, or bike touring. Participants travel in groups of 10 with two upperclass leaders in wilderness areas in Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Since its inception in 1974, more than 8,200 entering students have participated. It has served as an important introduction to Princeton, has eased the transition from home to college, and has offered an enjoyable time in the outdoors. Lasting friendships develop on the Frosh Trip. Many students find the trip so gratifying that they continue their involvement with Outdoor Action throughout the year, and many choose to become OA Leaders.

Activities

In addition to backpacking, and hiking, Outdoor Action trips include activities such as caving, cross-country skiing, kayaking, rock climbing, and winter camping open to the entire University community. Throughout the semester OA leaders run numerous day trips on weekends ranging from a beginners rock climbing trip to a weekend kayaking course. During semester breaks Outdoor Action sponsors a range of multi-day trips that include backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, cross-country skiing and winter camping. OA offers trips at various levels from beginner to intermediate and advanced trips. The breadth of the program provides opportunities for everyone to explore the outdoors, learn new skills, and make new friends. The Outdoor Action Climbing Wall, one of the first climbing walls built at a University, is an indoor rock climbing facility open all year for climbing instruction and training. The OA Low Ropes course offers groups on campus from varsity sports teams to RA groups an opportunity to develop teamwork skills.

In addition to all the trips, OA offers an extensive array of seminars, training workshops, speakers, and films on various outdoor and wilderness topics—all designed to enhance leadership and wilderness skills.

Community Service

Outdoor Action in conjunction with the Princeton-Blairstown Center has developed a community service program that utilizes Princeton Outdoor Action leaders to provide adventure-based experiential learning activities for urban youth in New Jersey, especially in Mercer County. Using such facilities as the OA Climbing Wall and the Adventure Course, OA Leaders are working with a range of populations, primarily people of color. For many of the area youth this is their first exposure to the outdoors. Ongoing programs such as Families in Training with the Imani Church in Trenton and Leadership Among Multicultural People at the Princeton High School have been extremely successful. Outdoor Action is also regularly brought in to do special
activities with youth for other community service groups on campus such as the Student Volunteers Council and Community House.

**Leader Training Program**

Outdoor Action is one of the few programs on campus that focuses specifically on leadership development. OA trips are led by students who have completed an extensive program in outdoor leadership. This Leader Training Program provides invaluable learning experience as it generates new leaders. Each year more than 100 Princeton students participate in the Leader Training Program. The OA Leader’s Manual, a 350-page book, has been used as a reference text by outdoor programs across the country and is being published nationally by Random House in the spring of 1998 as *The Backpacker’s Field Manual*. Colleges across the country have adopted the OA Leader Training model.

Working with a group is valuable beyond Outdoor Action and many OA Leaders find that sharing the wilderness with their peers is one of the most special parts of their time at Princeton. Many leaders use their skills to work in outdoor education during the summer and after Princeton, and OA leaders have been instructors at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), at Outward Bound Schools, and other professional outdoor and experiential education programs across the country. Whatever their career path, students report that the OA leadership experience has been invaluable. Currently OA leaders complete the following trainings:

- **Wilderness First Aid Course**: a sixteen-hour Wilderness First Aid course developed by Outdoor Action. The course teaches the basic methods of examining and treating ill or injured persons, patient assessment, splinting, bandaging, treating specific injuries, and medical and environmental emergencies.
- **Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)**: students learn the skills of basic life support and CPR.
- **Facilitator’s Workshop**: an eight-hour course focusing on specific areas of leading multi-day wilderness trips including challenge by choice, activity sequencing, and debriefing and processing.
- **Leadership & Group Facilitators Workshop**: an eight-hour course focusing on basic leadership skills including the setting group goals, listening and communication skills, situational leadership, conflict resolution, and the stages of group development.
- **Safety Management Workshop**: a two-hour seminar designed to familiarize OA leaders with the causes and prevention of accidents in the wilderness.
- **Leader Training Trip**: a five-week course that teaches basic wilderness skills necessary to lead OA three-season backpacking trips. As part of the learning process, trip participants plan and organize all aspects of the trip including route, food, and equipment. Each student is required to research and teach a particular topic to the other participants. The course culminates in a five-day backpacking trip focusing on learning the practical skills.

In addition to the work Outdoor Action does to train its own leaders, the program also offers training services in group dynamics, facilitation, and leadership skills to other campus organizations including community service groups such as the Student Volunteers Council and Community House. Outdoor Action runs an annual training for Urban Action Leaders for the Student Volunteers council and is now co-sponsoring training on volunteering with urban youth in conjunction with Community House and the Student Volunteers Council.
Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship is a fundamental value in all Outdoor Action activities. Students who experience directly living in and with the outdoors come to recognize the need for preservation of the wilderness. On every trip, leaders teach Leave No Trace camping practices, stressing how each person’s actions can have a positive or negative effect on the environment. On many trips, groups perform special service projects such as trail clean-ups. With this new understanding of the environment, students grow more sensitive to issues of conservation on campus. OA has made a difference in the number of Princeton students who choose to pursue both academic subjects relating to the environment and environmental careers. As a result a high percentage of OA leaders choose service-related careers like teaching, environmental education, and outdoor education.

The OA Alumni/Environmental Career Network is a resource for current students interested in careers in the environment. Princeton alumni working in the environmental field serve as contacts for students and return to campus to share their experiences with interested individuals and groups.

Alumni Activities

Since 1985, Outdoor Action has offered special trips and programs for Princeton alumnae. These activities bring alumni from different classes and current Princeton students together in an exploration of the wilderness. The Mount Princeton Anniversary Climb is one example of the type of program that is offered. Trips have included Sea Kayaking the Maine Coast, Whitewater Rafting on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, Caribbean Oceanography and Sailing research Expedition, and Trekking in Nepal.

Outdoor Action’s Impact on Campus

Over the past 25 years the Outdoor Action Program has come to play an important role on campus for student leadership development, enhancing group interaction, bringing diverse populations together, and now community service through innovative outreach programs to urban youth. Since it’s inception in 1974 over 40,000 Princeton students have participated in OA activities.

- OA promotes friendship and positive social interaction between classes and throughout the University community. It is one of the few programs that can bring together students, graduate students, faculty and staff. This is especially important since fragmentation is a problem cited by both students and administrators.
- OA facilitates the development of personal growth through individual and group challenges in a supportive group environment.
- OA provides a healthy and non-alcoholic social alternative for students.
- Participation in the program results in increased understanding of the dynamics of groups and the need for effective communication, sharing, and the interdependent nature of interpersonal interaction.
- OA activities facilitate the breaking down of stereotypes.
- Participants and leaders show improved communication and listening skills and group interaction skills.
- OA provides as an excellent format for the development of leadership and teaching skills. It is one of the few programs on campus that has a specific leadership development program.
- OA activities are effective methods for reduction of stress from academic pressure.
- OA provides educational opportunities that have influenced and directed the lives of many students both at Princeton and afterwards.
- The OA Frosh Trip program has demonstrated its effectiveness in easing the transition of incoming students to college life and has helped to reduce the number of adjustment problems.
- OA provides an opportunity to participants to “test” and challenge themselves in a safe and supportive group structure. This provides a valuable avenue for personal growth for students who are not traditional athletes.
- OA provides opportunities for students to become involved at various levels and to achieve personal satisfaction and enhanced self-esteem.
- OA promotes increased awareness and sensitivity to environmental issues.
- OA provides the opportunity for the learning of lifetime skills.
- OA is a positive aspect of Princeton University that attracts prospective students.
Outdoor Action Program Mission Statement

The Outdoor Action Program utilizes the small group wilderness experience and other experiential learning activities as a vehicle for encouraging individual growth through personal discovery, community discovery, and discovery of the wilderness environment.

1. Personal Discovery

The Outdoor Action Program provides participants the opportunity to learn about themselves through challenging group wilderness experiences. Participants experience

- facing and dealing with challenges with the help of others
- working together to accomplish group goals
- learning new skills, sharing personal feelings and values
- having the opportunity to express individual talents
- learning to be interdependent
- personal introspection and facilitated processing of the experience
- developing sensitivity to their own needs and the needs of others in the group
- experiencing the majesty of the wilderness

leading to the development of

- greater self confidence
- respect for self and others
- mutual trust
- a sense of personal and group accomplishment
- a sense of personal and group responsibility
- a sense of the self as part of a larger whole both in a community and in the natural world

2. Wilderness Discovery

The wilderness setting serves as a foundation for personal and group discovery. Through the small group wilderness setting, the Outdoor Action Program provides a positive foundation for personal and group discovery. Individuals learn how to travel comfortably and safely through the wilderness and become competent wilderness users. The wilderness provides an educational environment that allows participants to develop a personal awareness and respect for the natural world and to become effective stewards of our wilderness heritage.

3. Community Discovery

Through a variety of experiential learning activities, Outdoor Action provides the focus for creating new communities and enhancing existing communities. Both on campus, in the greater Princeton area, and in the wilderness, the Outdoor Action experience allows people to experience what a community is at its fullest potential—trust, friendship, cooperation, self-sacrifice, mutual
respect, leadership and followership, learning and teaching. The unique context of Outdoor Action enables participants to rely upon others and in turn be relied upon building trusting relationships that often last long beyond the program. The shared responsibility fostered by the Outdoor Action experience allows for accomplishments beyond what can be attained by an individual. The mutual interdependency created especially in the wilderness environment, leads to the development of a strong, supportive community.

4. Service

Outdoor Action enhances the lives of urban youth in the new Jersey area through innovative experiential and adventure-based activities that instill self-confidence and build self-esteem. Utilizing the leadership and outdoor skills of trained Outdoor Action Leaders, the program provides a unique opportunity for Princeton University students to volunteer in meaningful ways that impact the lives of children.
Outdoor Action Program Needs

As we approach our 25th anniversary, the Board of the Friends of Outdoor Action is examining the needs of the program over the next 10 years. We plan to address these through expansion of OA's endowment funds and through term gifts. Our long-term goal is to provide sufficient money for OA to maintain is position as a leader in collegiate outdoor education programs with continued innovation and broader participation. Funding needs are broken down into the following categories.

General Endowment

The Outdoor Action Program currently receives only $11,000 per year from the University to cover all operating expenses. A general endowment fund of $1,000,000 or annual funding of $50,000 will provide the basic level of resources for maintaining and extending the excellence of the program.

Outdoor Education Internship

An outdoor education internship program has been developed to offer graduating OA leaders the opportunity to stay on at Princeton for a one-year term to hone his or her leadership, outdoor, and management skills to pursue a career in environmental or outdoor education. This position provides essential assistance to the Program Director to continue the excellence of the OA Program. A general endowment fund of $500,000 or annual funding of $22,000 will be needed.

Leadership Training

OA leaders are the backbone of the program. In order to provide the highest caliber leaders, specialized wilderness first aid training is essential. This is available only through certain professional organizations. A general endowment fund of $500,000 or annual funding of $22,000 will be needed to continue to provide excellence in our leader training program.

Trip Scholarships

Outdoor Action trips and programs are heavily subsidized by general program funds in order to keep the price low enough for all students to participate. However, with costs rising, some students cannot afford to pay. A general endowment fund of $250,000 or annual funding of $11,000 will be needed to allow all interested students to participate in OA activities including alumni/student activities.

Equipment Fund

Proper equipment is essential for the ongoing operation of Outdoor Action. In order for all students to be able to participate in Outdoor Action, the program must be able to provide the necessary outdoor equipment. Currently OA is able to provide only some of the necessary gear and students must purchase many of the items they need. Thus students without the necessary financial resources may not be able to participate. Also Outdoor Action needs funds to replace older equipment. A general endowment fund of $250,000 or annual funding of $11,000 will be needed to maintain an up to date equipment inventory.
**Future Needs**
As the Outdoor Action Program has expanded, the need for improved facilities has become increasingly important. Currently OA has 2,000 square feet of storage space in the basement of 48 University Place. This space is inadequate for the amount of equipment currently owned. The development of a new **Equipment Facility & Climbing Wall** (5,000 square feet) presumably as a renovation of part of an existing structure would provide a state-of-the-art facility to enhance programming and education.

**The Climbing to New Heights Campaign**

The Climbing to New Heights Campaign is the next important step to making Outdoor Action the leading outdoor education program in the country. As we look to the next decade of the program, your contribution will help solidify this excellent part of the Princeton educational experience.
## Outdoor Action Program Table of Needs

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<th>Activities</th>
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† New facilities are currently not approved.
Thoughts about the Outdoor Action Program

Outdoor Action continues to be an important learning experience for many students at Princeton. Its wilderness activities offer a unique opportunity for building a sense of community across the campus. The Climbing to New Heights Campaign will consolidate the growth that has made Outdoor Action a meaningful part of extracurricular life at Princeton.

— President Harold Shapiro

Outdoor Action provides a critical balance to undergraduate life, which is too frequently out of touch with the natural world. The opportunity to experience a closeness with the great outdoors is a crucial restorative.

— Josh Miner ’43, Founding Trustee of Outward Bound USA

Among the many good things that Outdoor Action does is to bring groups of first-year students together in various terrains for canoe trips, backpacking, and the like, before they start school—a fine way to begin four years at Princeton.

— John McPhee ’52, author, Ferris Professor of Journalism and Public Relations

OA’s real success lies in the quality of its activities. OA programs promote friendship and understanding among races, socioeconomic groups, age groups and nationalities, in a way that no academic program could ever parallel, and in a way which social life on the Princeton Campus rarely, if ever, provides. The values of social responsibility, and the quality of our environment, of leadership, sensitivity, humility, and restraint in the face of adverse conditions and a plurality of views, are issues that surface on every OA trip, at every stage of its planning and execution. In other words, outdoor recreation, as practiced by OA at Princeton, is part of what education is all about.

— Dimitri Gondicas ’78, Director, Hellenic Studies Program

The Outdoor Action program has established itself as a rich contributor to the total Princeton experience. One of the University’s historic sources of strength has been the diversity of its offerings. That diversity also characterizes Outdoor Action: incoming freshmen are offered energizing outdoor travel and adventure experiences that develop friendships, strengthen community, teach skills, and offer new fields of challenge. All students (and now alumni and staff) are offered opportunities for outdoor activity and learning, skills training, opportunities for leadership development, and simply healthy, enjoyable, shared activities.

I work in the field of experiential education and know many Princeton graduates who have parlayed their Outdoor Action experiences into career directions. I know of many more who have simply enjoyed a more balanced and energized Princeton experience thanks to Outdoor Action. The commitment and drive of Outdoor Action’s leadership is impressive. Outdoor Action is clearly here to stay, and the Princeton experience is richer for its existence.

— Tino O’Brien ’65, former staffing director, Hurricane Island Outward Bound School
From OA Participants:

I think the trip was the best thing that could have happened to me. I learned more about myself and Princeton and got to know 10 terrific people. It made the transition to college a whole lot easier.

My first experience at Princeton University was an Outdoor Action Freshman Trip. I can see now, more than a year later, that it was one of my most valuable experiences at the University. Outdoor Action did far more than introduce me to ten of my future classmates. It has provided the opportunity for me to interact with fellow students outside of the academic environment. Encountering the beauty and challenges of nature with an OA group provides for an intense and meaningful sense of camaraderie that is difficult to find during the pressures of classes. I have also learned numerous skills from Outdoor Action—first aid, hiking, minimal impact camping, cross-country skiing and kayaking are examples. I was changed from a city dweller with no outdoor experience to a camper with a greater sense of respect for the environment. I don’t think I would have learned this without Outdoor Action.

No other activity at Princeton has offered me the camaraderie and the opportunity to make close friendships as quickly as OA. In a place whose atmosphere is all too often characterized by pressure and anxiety, Princeton could use an even larger Outdoor Action Program.

Quite simply, the Outdoor Action Program provides one of the most positive experiences for students at Princeton. On my Freshman Trip, my leaders told me that the trip would be one of the best times I had at the University or at least with Princeton students. They were right. And with every OA trip I have taken since, their words remain true. The greatest strength of the Outdoor Action Program arises from the fact that it offers the opportunity for Princeton students to get to know each other outside of the often tense and busy University environment.

OA is one of the most organized programs I have ever taken part in. Also its selection and training of leaders is excellent as the leaders are as supportive and caring as is possible to be. Personally, the trip was a great challenge that I overcame with tremendous support. If this is representative of the way in which Princeton thrives, I know that the next four years will be the very best ones of my life.

I loved the experience—the group awareness and bonding ultimately caused individual growth for every group member, I’m sure. The last night, when our group spent three or more hours discussing each individual, it was so spectacular to be able to view oneself through the mirrors held up by others. The group was helpful to me in that it lessened my fears about the social scene at Princeton—getting to know nine wonderfully interesting and caring people.

I believe that the trip was the best possible way for me to begin my time at Princeton. I had the most wonderful time and I know I will stay close to the friends I made. The planning was incredible and I am so thankful to everyone who made this possible.

[OA] outdid all of my expectations. I had a fabulous time. My group was great and we really hit it off. I think I made some great friends, a few of whom I expect will become very close friends. The Outdoor Action program was an extremely valuable experience and one I will not soon forget. The trip surpassed all of my expectations. It was an extremely positive experience. It was
also a great introduction to a small portion of the Princeton community, which is incredible in its talent, diversity, and perspective. I made some friendships that I expect will last through my four years here and possibly longer.

The trip was a wonderful experience. My group was a conglomerate of very diverse people. Had we all not been thrown together in the wilderness for six days I probably wouldn’t have met and become friends with most of them. Every member of my group contributed to the trip’s greatness in a different way. I think it was a great way to begin Princeton because not only do you meet a bunch of people, but the trip also allowed me a lot of time to think and become in touch with myself.

OA was fantastically organized with a meticulous approach to safety and fun. I am an urbanite. Though I still am a victim of time and cement, I have gained a new respect for wilderness and group cooperation. I am thrilled to have had this experience with eleven others whom I now recognize as close friends. I a word, thanks!!