

OUTDOOR CENTER

TRIP LEADER TRAINING GRANT

MAY 20TH, 2019

CREATION OF AN INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Proposed motion: to allocate \$35,000 per year for three years for Outdoor Center Trip Leader Training Programs.

TO THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS EXECUTIVE BOARD

As we are coming into the final months of our 3-year Trip Leader Training Grant we write with optimism and hope that the value of the program is not looked over and dismissed as an undue expense to the Associated Students Executive Board and greater student body. The investment into the student leaders within the Outdoor Center Excursions & WOOT Programs has been instrumental in addressing foundational barriers to outdoor leadership at Western Washington University.

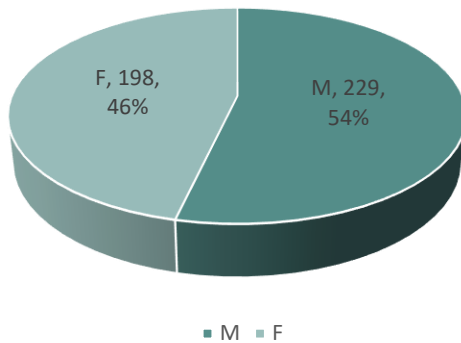
At the core of the Associated Students we have the responsibility to provide the best co-curricular experience to the students regardless of any financial or social barriers that they may be faced with. In order to see where this is true, we can follow the money to see where our values lay within the organization. Until the creation of this pilot program, there was little in the means of funds for professional development for the leadership team in the Excursions program. The investment in the leaders within the Outdoor Center should not be viewed as a new burden on the budget but rather from the evolving reality that the program has largely been under invested and under developed over the years.

This is not any single persons' fault. It is through time and evolving importance of our institutional values including our ethical responsibility to ensure equitable access for any student with the desire to take part in opportunities that may not have otherwise been afforded to them. That is what we have been working on over the last 3 years, broadening leadership opportunities in outdoor contexts that have historically been exclusive to a small group of socially and economically advantaged demographic. While the desired changes have not fully come to fruition, we are optimistic that the continued financial support will only strengthen the Outdoor Center leadership team and continue to challenge the outdoor industry as a whole proving that leadership is not defined by your socioeconomic status, race, gender, or perceived abilities.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

EMERGING TRENDS

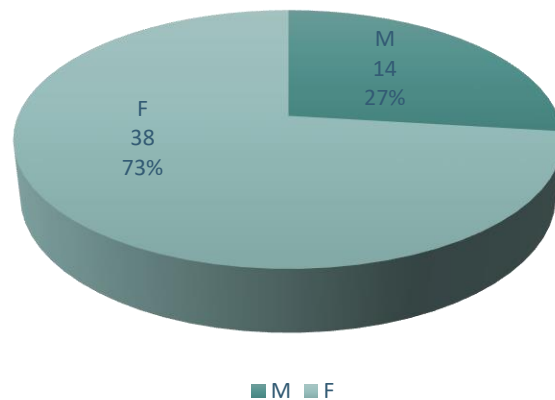
Gender Ratio 1998-2016



When looking back at the people who have worked over the last 20 years for the Outdoor Center, what we see is that there has historically been more representation from males within the Excursions leadership team. This is most common in the outdoor industry as a whole when it comes to leadership roles.

Since the implementation of new hiring practices and development of the training program, we have seen much greater interest in outdoor leadership from females in the application process, as well as those who are successfully making through the screening, interviewing and training program, moving on to fulfill leadership roles at all levels within Excursions and WOOT.

Gender Ratio 2017-2019



This is a very positive correlation with the implementation of the Trip Leader Training Grant. While the exact reason for this is not known, this trend has continued over all three years when looking at applicants as well as those making through the hiring process. Historically, at other institutions, this trend has also led to continued racial and ethnic diversity within outdoor programs.

CREATION OF PATHWAYS

A CLEAR ROAD TO OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP, BUILDING COMMUNITY, AND SHARED VISION

Through the process of continued assessment and evaluation of our training program something that became apparent early on as we began to shift the initial focus on prospective trip leaders away from technical skills, and on to interpersonal skills, was that people were not sure how to translate their own knowledge and experiences to a role as a leader in an outdoor context. We have continued to develop and define this for all of the primary disciplines of recreation that we generally offer which has greatly increased the foundational understanding of working their way through the program.

This has directly translated into the primary trainings that we offer providing a clear path of progression for someone with little to no actual experience in the defined activity to becoming competent in the mastery of the activity to be able to lead their peers.

Over the past few years with the implementation of the training grant we have been able build a strong community driven by our vision, mission, and values. This is in large part thanks to the grant as it has afforded us the ability to conduct a number of annual meetings and sessions around building knowledge and setting strategic vision on how we can best meet the needs of our students.

We have also see greater retention year to year of our trip leaders through our intentional hiring and routine training program. Staff members have a greater sense of place and impact knowing that there is a clear path to leadership opportunities and their contributions are highly valued to the organization by providing meaningful programming for their fellow students.

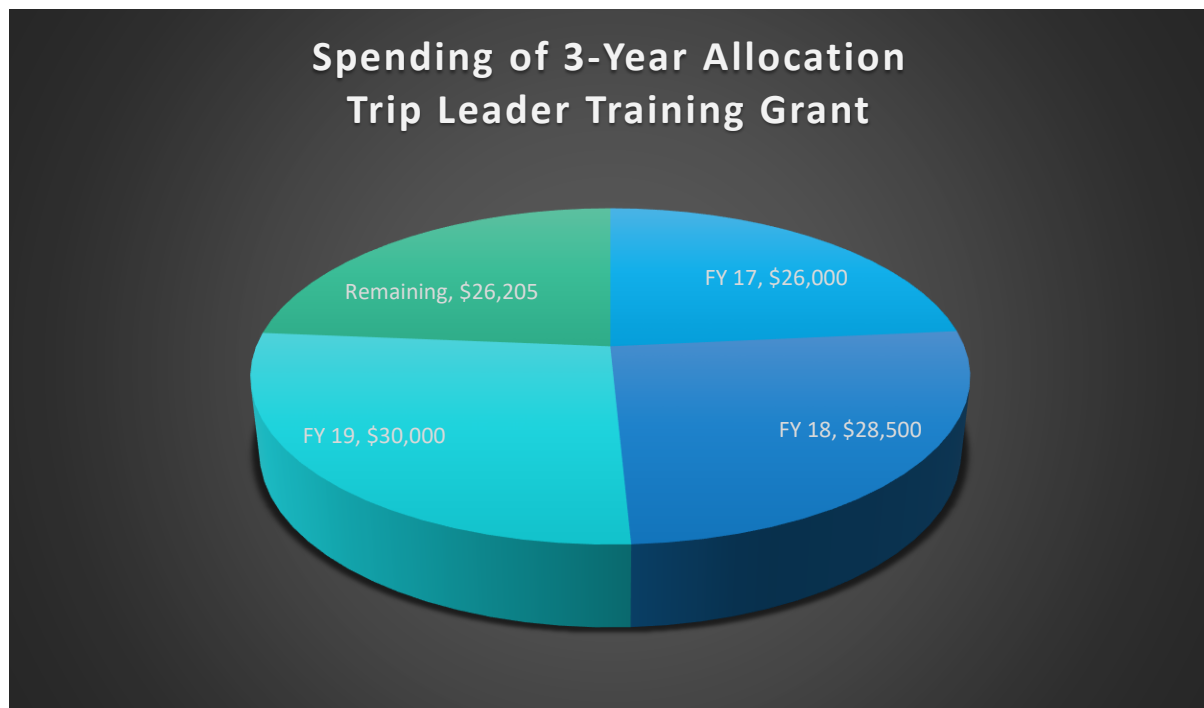
INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

CONTINUATION OF FUNDING

The greatest investment we have as the Associated Students are our employees. Unfortunately, the Excursions & WOOT programs have been severely under invested in for prospective students over the last decades due to the traditional dependence on students who were coming in with a high level of technical competence creating an exclusive program for those privileged enough to have prior access to the equipment and knowledge. As we continue to align with our values of education and diversifying the image of an outdoor leader, there is a necessity to continue funding for this program. It is our duty as an educational institution to provide students with opportunities that they may have otherwise never been exposed to leadership and personal development in the outdoors.



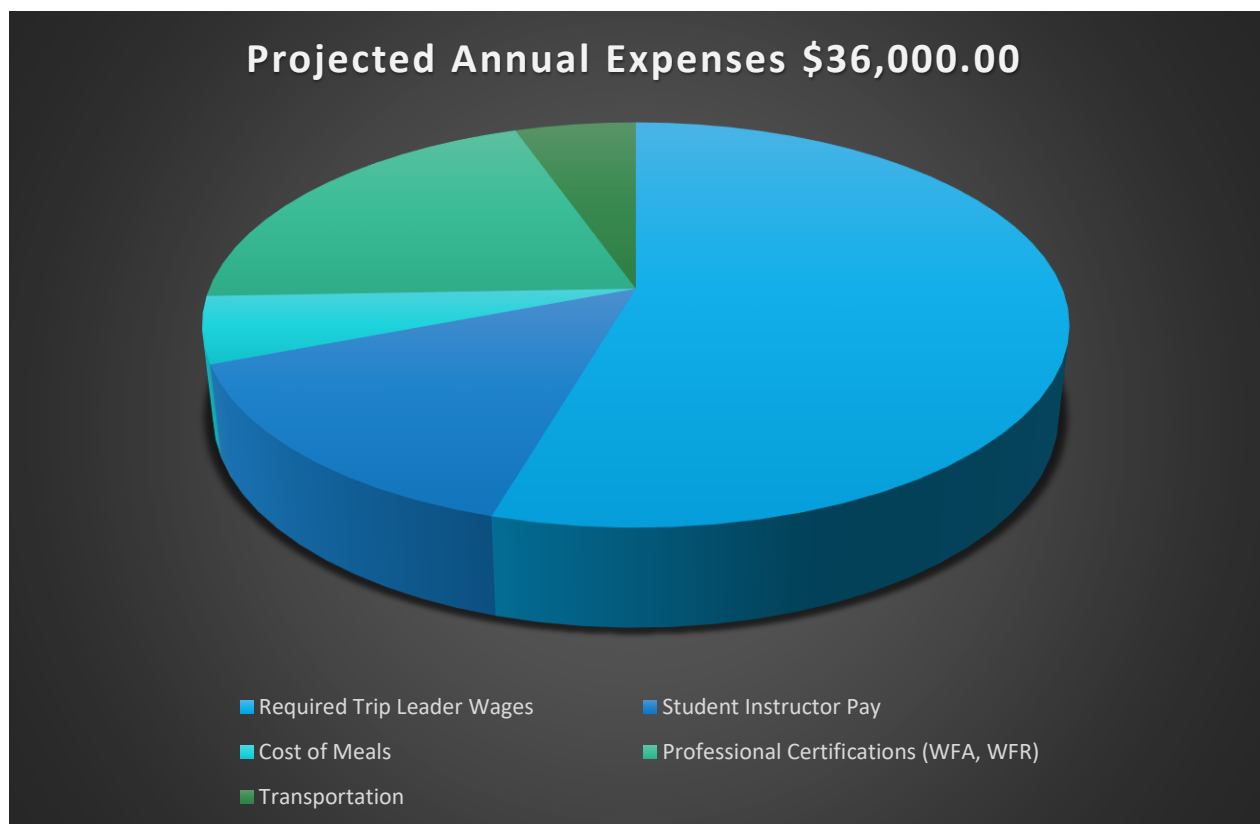
Our initial 3-year grant approved on October 5th, 2016 was in the sum of \$110,705.50 from the discretionary reserves. This broke down to roughly \$36,900 annually to operate the program. We had originally anticipated running more trainings on an annual basis but over the past couple years, we have come to reality that time is of the essence making it challenging to run the program as robustly as we had originally anticipated. Additionally, something that is important to note is that a number of the professional certifications including Wilderness First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, and AIARE Level 1 courses have been subsidized through formal and informal agreements with contracted organizations bringing the total cost of them down from what we had originally anticipated. However, these agreements are under review as the new Viking Union space fees have greatly impacted the feasibility of operating these courses as we have in the past. Therefore we will need to be mindful that these costs may no longer be subsidized through these agreements in the years to come.



On average, since beginning the program, we have spent \$26,000-\$30,000 annually. This will leave roughly \$26,000 unspent from the original grant. Moving

forward, we initially offered 7 funding options to the Budget Committee (Appendix A). The option that we believe will be most beneficial based on our assessment over the last three years of piloting the program is offered on the follow pages.

The continued request for funding is roughly the same as the original grant decreasing by about \$900 annually. The reason for this is largely due to the calculations taking into consideration minimum wage plateauing at \$13.50 per hour in the coming year. This is also due to the fact that where we have been able to subsidize some of the certification costs over the last three years with our own funds or agreements with other organizations, with the Viking Union building fees now in place, we may no longer be able to subsidize the cost and will be paying the full expense for required professional certifications for the Trip Leaders.



The following trainings and certifications below are all within the purview of the Projected Annual Expenses (Appendix B).

New Hire Night

- All staff are required to attend new hire night. We welcome all new trip leaders and participate in a few group activities to welcome in the new staff members and get them orientated to the group and Outdoor Center.

Trip Leader Training Weekend 1

- Weekend 1 is the only weekend annually that all trip leaders are paid and required to be in attendance. The first day is focused on community development, celebration, and all staff agenda items that need to be addressed in depth.
- Annually we do a large Mission, Vision, & Values exercise to encourage the trip leaders to think critically about their leadership and how they can create the most inclusive environment possible while aiming to meet our desired outcomes for participants
- Additionally, we will do some large group leadership development activities. This year we worked with LeaderCorps and jointly facilitated “Courageous Conversations” & “Situational Leadership”
- Lastly, we will focus on large scale risk management concerns for the upcoming year. This year we have adapted our Wilderness Medical provider’s Emergency classification system and molded it into our model which was essential for all trip leaders to learn how to use in case of emergency in the field.

Trip Leader Training Weekend 2

- This weekend is for new hires only and addresses the following categories
 - Unconscious bias workshop
 - Outdoor Center & Viking Union Orientation
 - Vehicle & Trailer Orientation
 - Discussing Trip leader classifications
 - Outdoor leadership skills logs

- Contract classifications
- Policies and procedures for required pre trip and post trip meetings
- Framing the Outdoor Leadership Field Experience
- Trip Leader evaluation processes
- Setting individual and group goals
- Splitting up lessons and leadership teams for the field experience
- Creating lesson plans

Outdoor Leadership Field Experience

- The Outdoor Leadership Field Experience is for new hires only as well and acts as the foundational training for all of our leaders. This is required for all members and helps develop a strong foundation in outdoor leadership. While in the field students spend each day rotating as leaders of the day, leading individual lessons, engaging in critical dialog, practicing giving and receiving constructive feedback, learning all our trip specific policies and procedures and so on. Please see (Appendix C for this year's schedule).

Sea Kayak 1

- This training is designed for students who have little to no experience sea kayaking. It specifically teaches all the necessary skills to lead our single day sea kayak courses. Over the course of 3 days including classroom sessions students learn foundational information about sea kayak anatomy, tides, currents, sea features, loading and unloading trailers, risk management on the ocean, self-rescues, group rescues, and emergency procedures.

Sea Kayak 2

- This is the follow up training that occurs the following spring. In SK2 the primary difference is transitioning from coastal paddling for 1 day or less to multiday sea kayak touring. Over the course of three days we extensively cover creating passage plans, discussing large open water crossings, learn how to forecast weather patterns, and students create the itinerary for our own multiday tour in the region preparing them for our extended sea kayak trips that we offer.

Rock 1

- In Rock 1, similar to sea kayak 1, it is designed for students who are coming in with little to no experience climbing outdoors. We teach all of the foundational principles and equip them with the skills and knowledge to successfully climb in a sport climbing context.

Rock 2

- Rock 2 builds off of those foundational principles and goes into advanced topics such as top site management, setting traditional gear and building trad anchors. This training allows students advanced progression and leaders and sets them up to be competent head trip leaders for our rock trips.

Backcountry Travel

- One of the most technical environments that we recreate in is backcountry terrain in winter conditions. These trips are also some of our most popular ones as they expose students to a unique environment. In this course we extensively review trip planning and terrain identification. We also cover emergency procedures including group management and companion rescues in case of avalanches.

Wilderness First Aid

- Per requirements for all areas that we operate in on federal lands, our leaders must possess at minimum a WFA certification. This is a 2-3 day course that teaches foundational wilderness medicine skills.

Wilderness First Responder

- The 9-day WFR course is the standard for all Head Trip Leaders. This course provides extensive training in emergency management in wilderness settings. This is an industry standard for all lead guides for any wilderness based organization.

THE LIVED IMPACT

TESTIMONIALS FROM THE STUDENTS

I am a senior graduating this spring. I have been a part of the outdoor center both as a participant and a leader for all 4 of my years here. The training opportunities that the outdoor center has provided me as a trip leader have been absolutely essential to my work with participants and the development of my general leadership skills. I came into the OC with the ability to work well with people, the skills to teach. However, I lacked some of the more technical skills required to confidently lead safe outdoor excursions for other people. The specific trainings such as sea kayak and rock training that the OC provided allowed me to develop the skills necessary to feel more confident in my ability to keep people safe. I learned to understand tide charts, read currents, and to safely help people get back into their boats if they tip. Without the OC training, I would not have had the practice doing this and would not have been prepared to plan or to help participants even though I have been through both the wilderness first aid and wilderness first responder training.

Though I entered the OC with more soft skills than technical, the all staff leadership trainings and week-long new hire training guided me in my approach to connecting with participants and providing participants with structure that allows them to connect with each other. Additionally, these trainings were essential in the development of my relationships with my co-leaders. If we did not have this time to learn and connect with each other, we would often end up meeting each other for the first or second time on the day of the trip we were leading together. The staff trainings allowed me to connect with my co-leaders, to develop an understanding of their teaching styles, their leadership skills, and what they need to be effective in planning. I felt much more confident going into trips knowing that my co-leaders understand who I am and my approach to leading.

I believe that without these trainings, the quality of trips would greatly decrease and would completely counter all the work put in over the past 3 years and the work the OC is continuing to do to build a more diverse leadership group, to reach more people, to build relationships across campus communities, and to provide safe, fun, and positive trips.

I believe that both trip leaders and the people that participate in OC trips benefit from the leadership and technical skills learned in the trainings. I strongly encourage continued funding for these opportunities.

-Elise Pierce

Hello,

My name is Alice Michaelson. I am a current trip leader through the OC and wanted to share my thoughts on the trip leader training program. The Sea Kayak 1 and 2 trainings have particularly impacted my experience at Western. Starting this year as a new hire, I had some sea kayaking experience but was nowhere near prepared to lead a trip safely myself. Through the kayak trainings, I learned essential skills on how to read charts, tides, and currents, and rescue participants. This knowledge has provided me incredible opportunities to put my knowledge to work as an assistant kayak instructor at Lakewood and co leader of WOOT trips at ViQueen. This summer I have also been hired to lead sea kayak trips through a YMCA camp on Orcas Island. Without the initial Sea Kayak 1 and 2 trainings I do not believe that I would have had these opportunities. Trip leaders, like myself, are able to confidently take students out on sunset sea paddles and overnight kayak trips because these trainings exist.

Trip leader trainings are also an important part of the Outdoor Center community. Something that the Excursions program prides themselves on and is working towards is mentorship among senior and freshman trip leaders. Two out of the three trip leader trainings I have participated in have been partially or completely trip leader run. It has been an empowering experience for myself and peer trip leader mentors to share outdoor skills in this way. If the trip leader trainings were to go away, I think this tradition would be harder to keep. Without compensating these senior trip leaders or having a formalized training process, it would be more difficult for leaders to prioritize this work over all the other college student commitments.

One last thing that the trip leader trainings enables is inclusion. With the current trip leader program, a student can be hired as a trip leader with little technical knowledge. This is an exceptional quality of the outdoor center as technical outdoor experiences are often only for people who have the time, money, resources, and privilege to take part in. As the Outdoor Center continues to

struggle and work towards being accessible for all students, it is essential that these trainings exist to include students of all outdoor backgrounds and experiences.

Alice

Hello,

My name is Katie King, I'm a senior at WWU majoring in Outdoor Recreation. I'm also a professional whitewater raft guide, instructor of Wilderness Medicine, volunteer ski patroller at Mt. Baker Ski Area, and Outdoor Center trip leader. In the past year and a half, I've been fortunate enough to be involved in and benefit from the Outdoor Center at WWU as a Trip Leader. I've been able to witness the value in training trip leaders to a high standard not just in wilderness medicine but in technical skills, risk management, and community building and I know there are tremendous benefits to continuing the funding for the outdoor center's trip leaders not just for them but also for the school and the surrounding community.

To reiterate what Stephen already mentioned in his email, in the field of wilderness medicine, the training itself is only beneficial to medical emergencies and something we talk about a lot in those WFA and WFR courses is the risk management skills and technical safety skills we should be using to prevent said emergencies. Without those technical skills the number of medical emergencies will increase. While there is value in having medical training, outside sport-specific training is *necessary* to ensuring the safety of participants and leaders in the field.

I also know from working in the professional field of guiding how important it is for the safety of participants and the continuation of the field to develop personal and communication skills as a guide. The WWU outdoor center is one of the few that puts an emphasis on hiring on the basis of those skills and it can afford to do so only due to the training grant that allows people with strong social skills to gain the technical skills with the outdoor center.

Furthermore, to expect college students to pay for that training themselves is not only opening the door for young college students to put themselves at risk due to not being able to afford that training, it is also creating an exclusive environment that targets marginalized populations.

Throughout the recreation courses I've taken at WWU as a recreation major, a common theme is the element of social justice and how very white and very male and very privileged the outdoor community tends to be. As an Asian-American, female who was fortunate enough to have opportunities in high school to become involved in the outdoors, diversity is hugely important to me and important—I know—to this school and the WWU community as a whole.

The grant that allows technical trainings to be covered for trip leaders at the outdoor center is a major draw for students who come from diverse and less economically fortunate backgrounds. And from what we know about institutionalized racism, poverty, and outdoor statistics this grant is actively working to change the status quo. For me, I would not have been able to afford to lead trips at the safety level that is an industry standard for the rest of the outdoor community without this grant. And I would have been afforded a lot less opportunities to gain knowledge in different sports and advance on my chosen career path as an outdoor professional.

I am thankful to the school and to the outdoor center for having created a community that is so welcoming and working harder to become inclusive to all and a place of opportunity for everyone. I strongly believe that continuing to fund the training of trip leaders is necessary for the safety and the vitality of the outdoor recreation field, the school, the outdoor center, and the students.

Thank you,

Katie King

My experience as a trip leader at the Outdoor Center goes far beyond what I have learned through medical certifications. The program has helped me develop my interpersonal, leadership, and risk management skills just to name a few. The trainings provided by the OC emphasize and teach "soft" skills which are crucial to the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of students who participate in WOOT as well as excursions. Without these trainings, I would be unequipped to safely handle some of the situations that I have encountered as a trip leader. Additionally, the trainings function to build trust and communication among all trip leaders. Co-leading with people who I trust and feel comfortable with drastically increases the comfort and safety of students on outdoor trips. While the medical certifications that I have received through the OC have been helpful, the trainings provided by the OC have been the most valuable in my development and success as a trip leader.

Sincerely,

Lucy

To Whoever it May Concern:

My name is Jenny Harding and I'm a current junior at Western Washington University. I am writing on behalf of the WWU Outdoor Center and the organization's efforts for continued funding to provide trip leaders with necessary training. Working for the Outdoor Center has been one of the most transformative experiences of my college career. In my early college experience I had very little community and felt pretty lost at Western. I had participated in the WOOT program before entering my freshman year, so I was aware of the Outdoor Center and what it was all about. I knew that working for the Outdoor Center was a dream of mine, and after applying twice, I got hired last spring as a trip leader.

After getting hired, new staff of the Outdoor Center (OC) embarks on several trainings. We had two weekends in Bellingham focused on developing soft skills and becoming familiar with the program. These weekends were filled with learning (and fun), and were followed by a three-day Wilderness First Aid course. WFA is the lowest level of medical training required for leading trips at the OC. Medical training is obviously important in our field, and to the outsider it very easily may seem like the only training necessary to effectively and safely lead trips. However, soft skill and leadership development is just as important, if not more so. Before working at the Outdoor Center I was a trip leader at a summer camp in New Hampshire. We were leading trips pretty similar to the ones we offer at the OC. I had taken a WFA course prior but I'd had no leadership or job training, and my experience as a trip leader at that camp reflected it. Although I'd completed the same medical certification required to lead trips at the OC, my leadership abilities were vastly inferior to those I've developed working at the Outdoor Center. This difference is largely due to leadership and skill development trainings offered at the OC. An outdoor leader can have all the knowledge in the world about how to respond in a medical emergency, but if they are unable to effectively communicate and address group dynamics trips can quickly become unsafe, un-inclusive, and unruly. Participants can become uncontrollable, trips can get out of hand, and in turn more unsafe situations arise. Outdoor Center trip

leaders must have the skills necessary to assert themselves and facilitate group dynamics in order for the OC excursions program to continue being effective and helpful to the student body.

After the three initial training weekends in May, new hires attend a week-long experiential training in the field. During the trip we learned how to teach lessons to participants about important outdoor skills. Topics ranged from map and compass navigation, to outdoor hygiene, to gear maintenance, to backcountry cooking. Many newly hired trip leaders, including myself, did not have knowledge in one or many of these areas. The lessons facilitated our teaching abilities, and our learning of these more "technical" outdoor skills. We use this knowledge on a variety of trips, most notably on WOOT trips in the summer. Teaching folks how to be comfortable and have a blast in the backcountry is one of my passions as a trip leader. Not only was the field experience an opportunity to learn outdoor skills, it was also a test of our mental and physical strength. I went into the week with a bit of a superiority complex about my outdoor skills, but was quite humbled by the experience. I discovered a lot about myself that week and it sparked much reflection in me over the summer that has made me a better leader and human. I am eternally grateful for all the valuable lessons I learned that week.

The Outdoor Center also offers hard skill trainings which are invaluable to technical skill development, translating directly to trip leading. I participated in a rock climbing and a sea kayaking training in the fall. The rock climbing training was especially impactful for me. We learned about gear and anchor building, basics in belaying and lead climbing. The training culminated with a field weekend in Vantage, WA. I had so much fun learning about climbing and it sparked an interest in me for the sport. One of the most important aspects of hard skill trainings at the OC is that they help to create a ubiquitous, standardized system of requirements to lead trips. This system creates clarity of expectations for leaders. The level of training one has completed correlates to the trips they are prepared for and allowed to lead. For example, if someone has completed the first rock

climbing training, they are eligible to be an assistant leader on a rock climbing excursion. After completing the second rock climbing training, they are permitted to be head trip leader. The trainings are imperative for this clear system to continue. Without the trainings, the program's integrity would be challenged and a new system would have to be designed to ensure trip standards.

Without provided trainings, trip leaders will be expected to gain technical skills on their own without support, a proposition that seems rather impossible for many folks. Outdoor skill development takes time and money, both of which are limited resources in a college student's life. Without provided trainings, I question how the program would accommodate for trip leaders who do not have the means to teach themselves skills. The quality of technical skills would become endangered and difficult to regulate, and it would be much harder to keep trip leading standards clear. I believe that the quality of trips at the Outdoor Center would plummet, and trip leader hiring would be more based on technical skills than soft skills or leadership ability. This would offer little room for trip leader growth and would be an upsetting shift in the program. We need folks involved in the program who make others feel safe and included, not those who contribute to the already often intimidating nature of the outdoor community.

We need funding to make these various trainings happen. It would be a huge step backwards to take this money away from the Outdoor Center. The OC has made great strides in recent years, largely due to trainings made possible by this funding. Please reconsider pulling the plug on our program, I cannot stress enough the impact it makes on the OC, and the campus community at large.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Jenny Harding

To the AS board,

I've been working at the Outdoor Center for the past two years as both a trip leader and excursions coordinator. Over these past years I've been both professionally and personally impacted by the trip leader training grant and am hopeful that it can become institutionalized so that trip leaders years ahead of me will be given the same opportunities I've had. I've participated in almost every training offered through the Outdoor Center as a trip leader, through these trainings I've been able to lead excursions in technical areas that I previously had no experience with before being hired. From leading sea kayaking trips to having involvement in rock climbing trainings, I would have never pictured myself in these technical positions before getting hired.

I came into the Outdoor Center with limited technical outdoor knowledge, I had hiking and backpacking experience but never had access to more technical sports. I found the Outdoor Center my freshman year when I signed up for a snowshoeing trip, I was so impressed by the level of community my trip leaders created on the trip and was motivated to apply to be a trip leader because of it. It was especially impactful to find out that no technical experience was needed to apply, I would not have even considered applying if that wasn't the case.

Through my two years working for the Outdoor Center I have developed the technical and leadership skills through trainings to feel comfortable leading in a head trip leader position. I've been able to get myself outside and most importantly help others get outside, striving to give them an experience that they can learn from. Being able to have open access to the outdoors is something that the excursion program strives for, I feel that the trip leader training grant exemplifies this by giving anyone with a passion for leading the opportunity to step into the leadership role of a trip leader. Having this grant be continued for the future will keep us moving towards making the Outdoor Center as accessible a place as possible.

Being a part of the Outdoor Center has been the most impactful part of my time at Western. This community has been so welcoming and has changed how I think about outdoor recreation, who recreates and why. I highly support the trip leader training program and all it has done for students.

Vivien McNett

OC Excursions Coordinator