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**Overview**

**Title:** Trip Leader Training Program

**Contact:** Stephen Magnuson- Outdoor Center Programs Coordinator

**Summary of proposal:** Throughout the past 4 years we have been developing a comprehensive recruitment, hiring, and training program for the Outdoor Center Trip Leaders. Initially we received a 3-year grant to develop and implement a new leadership development program for our Trip Leaders. Last year we received a one year extension from the Executive Board with conditional terms that are in the document below. Our hope is to institutionalize the funding to ensure continued progress in providing equitable access to leadership opportunities through the Outdoor Center.

**Total fiscal impact:** The request to fund the Outdoor Center Trip Leader Training Program is in the sum of $36,000.00 annually.

**Information**

As we shifted the focus on prospective trip leaders from technical skills to interpersonal skills, it became apparent through assessment and evaluation of our training program that trainees were unsure how to translate their knowledge and experiences to leadership roles in an outdoor context. We continue to develop trainings that facilitate utilization of interpersonal skills in all of the disciplines of recreation that we offer. In this development, trip leaders find a smoother transition from traditional on campus leadership environments to outdoor contexts through what we now call the Pathways Program.

This has directly translated into the primary trainings that we offer that provide a clear path of progression for someone with little to no actual experience in the defined activity to become competent in the mastery of the activity such that they can confidently lead their peers.

Over the past few years with the implementation of the training grant we have been able to 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 a strategic vision on how we can best meet the needs of our students.

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

The Associated Students’ greatest investment is our employees. Unfortunately, Excursions & WOOT programs have been severely under invested-in for prospective students over the last decades due to the traditional dependence on students who came in with a high level of technical competence, which created 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 diversify 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 for personal and professional development in the outdoors that they may have otherwise never been exposed to.

**Changing Demographics-Emerging Trends**

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 of cisgender males within the Excursions leadership team. This is most common in the outdoor industry as a whole regarding leadership roles.

Since the implementation of new hiring practices and the development of our training program, we have seen much greater interest in outdoor leadership from students who identify as female and/or non-binary in the application process, as well as greater representation of those individuals in applicants who successfully make it through the screening, interviewing and training program, moving on to fulfill leadership roles at all levels within Excursions and WOOT.

This is in 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 4 years when looking at applicants as well as those making through the hiring process. Historically, this trend has also led to continued racial and ethnic diversity within outdoor programs at other institutions.

**Fiscal Impact**

Our initial 3-year grant approved on October 5th, 2016 was in the sum of $110,705.50 from the discretionary reserves. This breaks down to roughly $36,900 annually to operate the program. We had originally anticipated running more training on an annual basis but over the past couple years, we have come to realize that time is of the essence, making it challenging to run the program as robustly as we had originally anticipated. Additionally, it is important to note that a number of 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, giving people the impression that the requested funds are being underutilized. However, these agreements are under review and the new Viking Union space fees have greatly impacted the feasibility of operating these courses as we have in the past. Therefore it will be necessary to be mindful that these costs may no longer be subsidized through these agreements in the years to come. Therefore when looking at the utilization of the grant funds overall we can anticipate that they will rely on the projections outlined for the annual expenditures.

(See Appendix A for breakdown of costs)

**Justification**

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

New Hire Night

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

Trip Leader Training Weekend 1

* Weekend 1 is the only weekend annually where 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 including sessions relating to cultural competence development
* 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 do some large group leadership development activities.
* This year we worked with LeaderCorps and jointly facilitated “Courageous Conversations” & “Situational Leadership”
* Additionally, we added in Unconscious Bias & Instructor Bias Self-Assessment adopted and revised from Avarna Group. More details below.
* Lastly, we 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
	+ 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 B for past 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 multi-day sea kayak touring. Over the course of three days we extensively cover creation of passage plans, discussions on large open water crossings, learn how to forecast weather patterns, and students create an itinerary for our own multi-day tour in the region, preparing them for our extended sea kayak trips that the Excursions program offers.

Rock 1

* Rock 1, similar to sea kayak 1, 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.

**2019 Executive Board Conditional Terms**



During the May 24th 2019 Executive Board meeting Stephen Magnuson presented a request for the extension of the Trip Leader Training Grant as an informational item. During this meeting there were questions relating to what the Outdoor Center is doing to attract more people of color. There were Executive Board Members that did not feel the Outdoor Center is doing an adequate job of reaching students of color in their recruitment. There were also questions regarding whether substantial trainings have been offered that address gender inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility.

During the preceding week on May 31st, 2019 motion ASB-19-S45 Approval of grant of Outdoor Center Trip Leader Training failed. ASB-19-S-47 was approved of $9,000 for OC Trip Leader Training in addition to carrying forward any funds remaining in the current grant. In this motion the following minutes were recorded by the Executive Board of Directors. In proceeding, response the following summaries will be addressed.

1. Mejia-Statement about not serving all students at Western Washington University
2. Solomon-it does not seem like the plan to increase diversity is formed enough to ensure continuation throughout years
3. Mejia-Trainings we have are not enough and they need multiple trainings throughout the year including gender diversity, racial diversity, and disability awareness to show that they are putting a priority on diversity
4. Hessami- Outreach has been really minimal, and they need more targeted advertisements for recruitment of diverse excursions leaders.
5. Eckman- next year’s executive board be more engaged in the process to ensure diversity efforts happen well
6. Monkah-board amenable to one more year to ensure process goes well
7. Jo-gives them chance to slowly operationalize oc trip leader trainings
8. Eckman-collecting data form each quarter would allow them to compartmentalize the data informational and tangible data points to show for next year.
9. Mejia-Statement about not serving all students at Western Washington University

Stephen pulled the existing data since the initiation of the Outdoor Center Trip Leader Training Grant. The following demographic data has been collected. Taking in consideration of Mejia’s statement, Magnuson wanted to examine how the actual participant demographic data compared the enrollment data of WWU. The most recent data published by the institution at the time this report was generated was through fall of 2018. Therefore, that is the data set that was run. What we see is that the percentage of participation in the Excursions program is closely aligned with that of the enrollment at WWU. For statistical significance the time range for Excursions Participants is measured over the course of Sept 2014-Sept 2018. The comparison is with the fall 2018 institutional data. In brief, 70.9% of enrolled students at WWU identify as White while the remaining 29.1% students identify as Students of Color. When compared to students who participated in the Excursions program, we see that 69.6% of participants identified as White while 30.4% identified as Students of Color. This data was encouraging for the Outdoor Center as the parallels in the data show participation is largely representative of the campus body.



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After the board meeting the Outdoor Center continued to assess and integrate more training in relation to diversity, access, and equity in the outdoors. The following are the steps that have been taken in the past months to increase the suggested trainings.

 **Unconscious Bias & Instructor Bias Self-Assessment Adopted and Revised from** [**Avarna Group**](https://theavarnagroup.com/about/)**.**

Unconscious Bias - This session is delivered as a narrative where members listen to three separate stories. Stories are of 25th Infantry Buffalo Soldiers, early inventors of bike technology, and the journey of the Ice Maidens. These stories are told in a way that removes any cues to race, ethnicity, sex, or gender. The image of the characters that generally manifests in people’s minds are stereotypical assumptions based on the type of story told. After, we unpack our unconscious bias and facilitate discussions relating to perceptions of who participates in outdoor activities, focusing on the way that media and society facilitates the creation of false representations that inform our vision of those that are interested in outdoor recreation. We then focus on ways to de-clique the perception of who we serve, focusing on broader efforts for encouraging participation and how to create inclusive experiences for our students since nearly all students utilize the outdoors for leisure in one way or another. Following, we complete an Instructor Bias Self-Assessment. This checklist is great for outdoor, experiential, and environmental educators to assess how bias might manifest in their teaching and to mitigate bias in any classroom, indoor and outside.

**Incorporation of Tribal Lands Statement into Excursions**

Along with one of our stated outcomes of “acquiring cultural and environmental awareness”, we have also implemented the use of WWU’s Tribal Lands Statement into our Excursions. On all outings, Trip Leaders are required to share our Tribal Lands Statement prior to the start of their activities. More than most programs, we spend time recreating and enjoying time on the ancestral homelands of the Coast Salish Peoples. We see this as a great privilege and wish to spark conversation relating to responsible use of space and encourage students to be good stewards while recognizing that colonial settlement continues to impact all Coast Salish Communities today.

**Field Training Social Justice Series**

Within the Field Training Social Justice series we facilitate 3 primary sessions. The first session is Land Use and Ownership. This discussion is centered on Traditional Coast Salish Communities, White Colonialism, and contemporary issues relating to land ownership. We then discuss ways in which we can best educate ourselves and be the best stewards possible while leading trips and visiting sites that are sacred in the Puget Sound and North Cascades region.

The second session is Ableism. Discussion is centered on the concept of ableism relating to the participation in outdoor activities. Often media portraits stereotypical images of “fit” and “active” participants. These images contribute to the continued discrimination against people of all abilities and how they may choose to recreate. We discuss ways in which we can create the most inclusive experience possible by focusing on individuals’ first languages and language limitations in discussions around highly technical terms, reducing levels of challenge, and adapting activities based on our participants actual needs.

The third session is on Race in the Outdoors. This discussion is centered on race and representation in the outdoors. Much of these discussions are based on the work of Dr. Carolyn Finney who focuses her work on representation, participation, and history of African Americans in the outdoors. We discuss racialized spaces and how this may impact participation in the Outdoor Center programs. We also focus on ways in which we can continue to evolve the representation and programs that we offer to the greater Western community to encourage the greatest level of participation from all our community members.

**Beyond integration within current Trip Leader Training Program**

Additionally, we worked with Dr Joanne Demark during the fall 2019 quarter to ensure that Trip Leaders would be able to participate in Dr. Tara Yasso’s visit to campus regarding Community Cultural Wealth. As we move forward it is imperative that all of our leaders are invited to and included in the guest lecture and speaker series that they have not traditionally been included in. We will continue to advocate for the inclusion of Trip Leaders in all professional development opportunities as it relates to Cultural Competency that AS Student Employees are invited to.

1. Hessami- Outreach has been really minimal, and they need more targeted advertisements for recruitment of diverse excursions leaders.

With regard to Hessami’s statement, we have re-conceptualized our recruitment efforts. Over the last three years we have run a full publicity campaign with table tents for the dining halls, posters for AS publicity sites, digital marketing on all AS displays, as well as brochures that have been distributed around campus. Additionally we have publicized the position via our social media outlets. However, there was a general feeling among board members that all students are still not hearing about the Trip Leader position.

This year we have developed the information that clearly outlines the full process of becoming a Trip Leader. This information will be incorporated into our web page under “Becoming an Outdoor Center Trip Leader”. Details of this site content are at the end of this document (Appendix C). Additionally we will be presenting at this year’s Building Unity Conference. The presentation and discussion with participants will strongly be focused on how clubs and organizations can partner with the Outdoor Center Excursions program, how we can support their ideas, and ways in which we can build community among our clubs, offices, and members.

Along with our traditional marketing campaign we will also be hosting open sessions in various locations across campus for prospective leaders to drop in and learn all about the process to become a Trip Leader. The areas we plan to host drop-in information sessions include the Multi-Cultural Center, Residence Hall common areas, and the Viking Union. We will also run tabling in the entry of the Viking Union for students passing by in the weeks preceding closure of the Trip Leader application.

1. Eckman- next year’s executive board be more engaged in the process to ensure diversity efforts happen well
2. Monkah-board amenable to one more year to ensure process goes well

Thus far relating to the Executive board’s “engagement with the process to ensure diversity efforts happen well”, we have hosted a number of meetings with administrative and student staff.

During the fall 2019 quarter Stephen met with a constituent of current professional staff members including Frederick Collins, Jeff Davis, Leti Romo, Alberto Rodriguez-Escobedo, and Moya Lojewski, to discuss the formation of the Outdoor Recreation Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. This meeting took place on October 1st, 2019. The concept of this committee is to include members of our student and professional staff. Below is the message that was sent out:

Thank you for your willingness to offer insight and perspective as we move into setting up formalized committee focusing on diversity equity and inclusion in outdoor recreation. For now one of my thoughts with this group is assisting in conducting a focus group with students at large. As mentioned, we have several of our own students as well as students in the AS who are interested in contributing in one way or another. For this meeting I would like to propose my initial thoughts around a focus group and bounce ideas off of one another for what may be most useful and productive moving forward.

Initial points of interest include:

* Leadership
* Cultural change
* Creating inclusive spaces in/outdoors
* Recruitment and hiring practices
* Training and onboarding

The following are brief annotated comments from attendees:

* Suggestion of scaffolding programs based on type and intensity of outings
* The duration of trips can often be intimidating
* Creating more low intensity offerings
* General discomfort in unfamiliar spaces must be recognized
* Students coming from urban areas have cultural differences and may not see outdoor recreation activities as of value to them.
* Creating targeted programming for marginalized students
* Centering and scaffolding experience through collaborations
* Bringing in things that students are already doing and creating outdoor language to support
* Establishing tenants of what we do annually
* Development of micro-adventures
* Embedding programming into leadership with Dr. Joanne Demark
* Create survey for students that could be distributed in the Multi-Cultural Center and ESC
* Gathering SAIRC staff input

Having generated excellent conversational topics there was strong synergy to move forward. Stephen had established relationships the previous year at the AORE conference with UW Bothell Outdoor Wellness Program which emulates a great range of diversity within their programming and staff. On October 28th, 2019 Stephen Magnuson, Frederick Collins, & Jeff Davis traveled to conduct a site visit with a regional program that is taking an alternative approach to outdoor recreation. UW Bothell has an incredibly diverse student body and their outdoor recreation program has adapted to the needs of their campus community. During our site visit we met with their program director and several trip leaders who are largely representative of their campus community. We had enlightening conversations about how they have been able to successfully engage students who do not necessarily see themselves as “outdoorsy”. The conversations from our meeting with AS administrative staff wove common threads with what their program offers. Some unique elements from their program include free or highly subsidized experiences, scaffolding exposure to outdoor activities, offering culturally relevant trips, focusing conversations while on trips around diversity and inclusion, and meeting their students where they are at.

These conversations led us to a new concept in terms of the outings that we will be offering through the Outdoor Center Excursions Program. In order to initiate change as quick as possible we hosted a planning meeting with our student trip leaders and coordinators to discuss a new format for winter quarter and beyond.

The new format that our quarterly calendar will be constructed on focuses on the incorporation of “Wellness Trips” into our overall programming. These trips are free to students and offered every other Saturday. For planning, Coordinators and Trip Leaders are encouraged to develop outings considering:

* Promotes student wellness and community development
* Time required 1 day or less
* Accessible by walking, public transportation, or riding a bike from campus
* Does not require specialized technical equipment
* Encourages community engagement

During the Building Unity Conference we also plan to solicit ideas from students regarding what they would like to see added to the offerings for spring quarter and beyond.

To build off of the idea of partnerships and collaboration we also hosted a meeting with constituents from the Counseling Center, Men’s Resiliency, and Prevention and Wellness Services. During Fall Quarter these offices promoted Wellness Wednesdays which focused on open conversations around topics such as mental health, well-being, and learning to cope. We aim to team up with these campus partners for spring quarter to incorporate outdoor wellness activities into these critical conversations.

The latest meeting addressing Eckman’s and Monkah’s comments included an update for AS VP for Activities and AS VP for Diversity. While Yesugen Battsengel was unable to attend, Selome Zerai and Stephen sat down and discussed all of the aforementioned progress. Stephen shared ideas regarding continued integration of more programming with students of color and discussed ways to encourage greater levels of engagement overall. Through these conversations, Zerai recommended our office participate in the Building Unity Conference. Additionally, they felt that the progress was in the right direction and they were eager to see continued progress. Stephen also shared insight into a larger study that he proposed as a part of his Master’s program (See Appendix D).

1. Jo-“continuance” gives them chance to slowly operationalize oc trip leader trainings
2. Eckman-collecting data form each quarter would allow them to compartmentalize the data informational and tangible data points to show for next year.

As our program continues to develop we hope to improve engagement with the Western community such that the Outdoor Center is inclusive to and representative of all students in our leadership and programming. This has been our priority over the last four years. We continue to be responsive to the needs of our students, the AS Executive Board, and members of the greater community in our effort to provide the best outdoor recreation programming possible.

**For this I once again leave testimonials from our student leaders regarding the impact of our program:**

Dear Budget Committee,

 I am unable to make the meeting about the Outdoor Center’s training budget today, but I wanted to pass my thoughts along since I have been incredibly impacted by the Outdoor Center and the training budget. My name is Gus Wimberger and I’m currently a fourth-year student here at WWU. I came to WWU as a non-traditional student and was fortunate enough to be hired as a Trip Leader my first-year back in the spring of 2016. Since being hired three years ago, I have participated in nearly all of the trainings available to Trip Leaders: the new-hire weeklong field training, sea kayak training, rafting training, mountaineering training, avalanche awareness training, and medical training. Additionally, I was one of the AS Outdoor Center Excursions Coordinators last year, so I am very familiar with the program’s needs and the ways to improve the safety, experiences, and outreach of the Outdoor Center to more students overall, and to students who are underserved by the Outdoor Center and outdoor recreation more generally. The coordinating job entailed planning every excursion, facilitating every excursion’s safe happening, and working with over thirty student Trip Leaders to help the Outdoor Center grow and develop in a more just direction. With this being said, I strongly encourage that you all renew the Outdoor Center’s training budget (with support for more than just medical trainings) for future years if you believe in the programming and community that the Outdoor Center brings to Western. Without a budget that includes financial support for all trainings, not just the medical trainings, it would be difficult to continue developing the Outdoor Center’s excursions in a more just, equitable manner. There are three main reasons that I think the training budget is crucial:

1. Outdoor Center Community—Throughout my four years at Western, I can confidently say that my deepest friendships and connections that I have made with other students were facilitated through the OC training budget. The initial weeklong backpacking training trip was instrumental to allowing me and my Trip Leader cohort to develop strong relationships based on trust and support in the outdoors. A strong community of Trip Leaders is very important to developing an atmosphere of involvement and support to the program. All of the trainings have helped me learn different ways to lead and facilitate my peers also. Being able to be in an instructor role (instructing other Trip Leaders as a peer) for the sea kayak was a big step for me in my personal growth. That’s why hiring a single full-time instructor who is not a student would limit the ability of actual students and Trip Leaders to benefit from student fees. All of this would not have been possible without the training budget.
2. Trip Leader Skill Acquisition & Development—Coming into the Outdoor Center, I had backpacked quite a bit, but had limited experience in other forms of outdoor recreation. Through the training grant, I am now able to lead other students on sea kayaking, rafting, mountaineering, and ski trips. This grant enables the Trip Leader hiring committees to look at students’ leadership and personality strengths and characteristics during the hiring process rather than falling back on students’ outdoor experiences. This is important since relying on only past experience during prior hiring processes has led to valuing the experiences of whiter, wealthier, able-bodied male students. It is imperative to be able to offer free professional development to trip leaders in all areas of outdoor recreation to ensure that we are moving in a more just direction to reduce the impacts of the overlapping systemic barriers that exist in our world and on our campus.
3. Safety & Excursions’ Existence—As a past coordinator of the excursions program, I have thought about risk management on our trips for countless hours. It is irresponsible to send participants out on an excursion with Trip Leaders who do not have adequate experience at the time, so we do not do that. That being said, if we are unable to support the professional development of our Trip Leaders, that will start to put the future coordinators in a bind where they will find themselves deciding between risking the safety of participants and Trip Leaders because Trip Leaders have not had support in developing new skills, or they will have to cancel programming. Speaking from my experience of planning trips and assigning Trip Leaders to trips last year, I would not be surprised to see rafting, mountaineering, and potentially sea kayaking trips ceasing to be offered in the future if the budget is reduced to medical training only. This is why the training budget is so important to continue to offer a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities.

While there are certainly more reasons why I think the training budget is important to the health and growth of an equitable Outdoor Center, these three reasons are really key to me. Feel free to email me if you have any questions, thoughts, or concerns: wimbera@wwu.edu. I appreciate the time that you all are taking to discuss this and the work that you all do to ensure the AS is best serving all of us students. Thank you.

Best,

Gus Wimberger

Hello,

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

My freshman year I had the opportunity to go on several excursions with the outdoor center. I was a “outdoorsy” person, but as an out of state student I didn’t know a lot of the spaces and protocol for exploring those spaces here in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

Within my first weeks on campus I signed up for and participated in the Sea Kayaking weekend to The Viqueen lodge. I was a bit uncomfortable with sea kayaking, especially with a long traverse, but knowing that the leaders on the trip had been trained in kayak guiding I felt comfortable going on the trip. Later that year I went up in a trip to Heather Meadows with a winter ecology class, guided by the OC leaders. We learned avalanche Beacon safety and snow navigation and some basic snow safety. Those basic skills of reading snow and how to use a Beacon are lifesaving and should never be skimped on.

Finally my last month as a freshman on campus I participated in the Mt Baker excursion, one of the highlights of that year. Glacier travel is something that should only be done with competent guides, and the trainings that the OC trip leaders had been through was important for the groups safety on that trip, as well as on other excursions the members would go on after that experience.

I am so glad that I have had the outdoor center as a resource for developing my own skills in the outdoors, and I know that alot of that has to do with the trainings that are available to the trip leaders. These students come with various technical skills, but because of these trainings they can provide the highest level of facilitation to the Students of western. The trainings have made the OC the program it is and continues to be, and I just wanted to express my value to those trainings as a student, and as a community member.

-Sage