A Message from the Director: Benjamin G. Oliver

As the academic year draws to a close, it is incredible to think that my first year as director of the program is coming to a close. In reflecting back on the last 12 months, I am struck, once again, by how remarkable of a community we have.

The other two full-time staff, Roxanne Benson and Josh Solomon ’14 have been phenomenal in their dedication to the program and their support of me in my first year. Roxanne (who has been at Colgate for over 40 years!) is an invaluable member of the OE team, and her institutional knowledge and the rapport she has with our students is unparalleled. Josh, in his first year as Assistant Director, has demonstrated not only the excitement and dedication that one would expect from an alum, but also an eagerness and ability to think critically about the program and how to change it for the better.

The students, and especially this year’s seniors, have also been remarkable in their dedication to the program and seeing it through this year of transition. From Wilderness Adventure back in August, through dozens of PE classes serving hundreds of students, two excellent staff extravaganzas, and all the small trips and interactions throughout the year, all of our student leaders have demonstrated incredibly competent leadership, teaching ability, and care and concern for their participants and for one another. In a year that was full of challenges, the student staff rose to the occasion each and every time. The seniors, most of whom are pictured here at our end of the year celebration, have been excellent role models and stewards of the program. They will be sorely missed next year, but I wish them all the best as they step into the next phase of their lives. I also want to take this opportunity to recognize, and congratulate, senior Ben Harris, who was awarded the Christopher Oberheim Memorial Award at the Awards Convocation last week!

This year’s trainees have just returned from their capstone trip to the Adirondacks, and we are incredibly excited to have them to come back to lead their first WA in August. WA is experiencing one of the best enrollment years in recent memory. While enrollment is still on-going, we are on track to have the largest WA in the program’s 29-year history!

With reunion coming up at the end of the month, I am excited to reconnect with the class of 2012. It seems oddly fitting to end my first year as Director by welcoming back the first class of students I saw graduate. I look forward to hearing about their recent adventures, but also the paths they’ve taken these last five years and how they’ve utilized the skills they gained through Outdoor Education in a wide variety of pursuits and vocations.

With summer nearly upon us, I am looking forward to the relative quiet and calm that these months bring, and the beautiful weather and lush green hillsides that are all too fleeting in central New York. If you are passing through the area this summer, I hope you will stop in or if you’re adventures take you elsewhere, I hope you’ll send us an update.

Sincerely,
Ben Oliver

Reunion 2017: Outdoor Education/Outing Club Open House

If you will be returning to campus for reunion this year, we hope you will join current Outdoor Education students and staff at our inaugural Outdoor Education/Outing Club Open House from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday June 3rd at Basecamp. We will have light refreshments for you to enjoy and hope that you will come and hear about the current state of Outdoor Education, share stories from your time as part of the Outing Club or Outdoor Education, and regale us with tales of your adventures since you left Colgate.
After a winter in New York that saw temperatures reach the 60s, and ice climbing trips in short sleeves, the overarching theme of this year’s spring break trip to the Red River Gorge, KY was: “It was too cold!” Twelve Colgate climbers led by Zack Cleary ’17, Trevor Kreznar ’10, and Assistant Director Josh Solomon ’14, headed down to the hills and “hollers” of Kentucky in search of warm spring weather, beautiful southern sandstone, and Miguel’s pizza. We found two of the three. Despite the occasional snowfall and temperatures hovering in the 30s for most of the week, our students got in six solid days of rock climbing. Newer climbers were able to get on real rock for the first time, practice rappelling, and learn the basics of sport climbing. Meanwhile, our more experienced climbers pushed their limits on the Red’s notoriously overhanging and gymnastic sport routes. We even found some trad routes amongst the sea of bolts. I was impressed by the group’s ability to maintain “stoke,” even when they couldn’t feel their fingers on the rock. Needless to say, we all came back with new skills, calloused hands, and an appreciation for space heaters.

Alumni Updates

Jana Bauerova ‘09
Jana just got back from a week of ski touring in Chamonix, France, and on the other side of the Mont Blanc massif in Gran Paradiso, Italy. Unfortunately, the changing weather was too risky for the originally planned Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt, but it’s already a plan for next year. Since September 2009, Jana has been living her two passions in Geneva, Switzerland: mountains and international affairs. For the past three years, she’s been working at the United Nations Office in creative, much of which focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Latest projects include an airport campaign #YouNeedtoKnow (that we have 13 years to achieve the SDGs), a storybook for children (fully available online) and the recently launched “SDG Studio Geneva,” publishing regular video interviews with leaders, experts and practitioners, who advance the Goals, on related challenges and solutions. In her free time, Jana hikes, mainly in the French Alps conveniently close to Geneva, and occasionally does yoga or goes stand-up paddle boarding or wake surfing on the Lake of Geneva. In the winter, she takes full advantage of the “playground” surrounding Geneva, spending a lot of time skiing, including on the telemark skis brought from the OE times, and as a ski instructor for the Ski Club International de Genève and the University of Geneva.

Sean Bjornson ’14
I’ve always wanted to go back to Red Rock Canyon, NV, ever since my OE spring break trip there in 2013. Fortunately enough for me, last winter I found out that Alex Coffin ’14 and a few of the other Boston OE alumni were scheming up plans to head back this past February. The final group to make the trek was myself, Fran Hodgin’s ’13, Corey Fitzgerald ’13, Alex Coffin ’14, Alec Hyde ’14, Kevin Trippe ’15, and Celia Sherry ’15. It was cold, with more rain than you’d like on a sandstone climbing trip (or any climbing trip, for that matter), and windy enough to crumple tents, but we still had a great time. The desert sun was nice and warm during the day as we explored the many sport crags scattered throughout the first and second pullouts of the loop road, and we had our fill of climbing and desert hiking. A few of us also managed to venture deeper in to the canyons to tick off some classic moderate multi-pitch traditional routes. The fantastic climbing, the unique and beautiful desert landscape, and of course, the good times shared with friends, made it great trip!

Mikhaila Redovian ’15
How time flies! It seems like just yesterday the Class of 2015 was waving “see you later” to Base Camp, the Loj, and Colgate. After graduation, I returned to my home state of Colorado. A summer of couch surfing with family came to a close when employment brought me west to the front range of Boulder. Being welcomed by fellow alum Jacky Baughman ’13 and Michelle Van Veen ’14 was the perfect way to be introduced to my new home! There are many stereotypes about the fitness of Boulder residents, and given OE’s training on how stereotypes are often untrue, I thought that they might be exaggerated. Many hikes, trail runs, crag days, and bike rides later, I came to appreciate that in Boulder’s case, that stereotype was true. There are few better places to enjoy the Colorado sunshine, and ways (and excuses!) to get outdoors are abundant year round. Shameless plug, there is always couch space available for visitors (Josh Solomon ’14 and Tara Salisbury ’14 can confirm). While I continue to work at Adventure Projects (the company behind popular websites/app like the Mountain Project), I will begin working towards a Master’s in English, here in Boulder this fall.
Alumni Updates Continued: Hannah Akre ’16

Those who know me well know I’m a planner. “Plan ahead and prepare” is not only my favorite Leave No Trace Principle, its kind of my principle for life. However, upon graduating I went without a plan. I knew big picture I was going to apply to medical school, but small scale I didn’t quite know what I was going to do with my gap year. I had a couple ideas for summer employment, but when I was given an opportunity to work for Outdoor Ed that summer, I took it. With insight from having been a trainer, I worked to edit, organize, and rewrite parts of the training curriculum. The idea was to help make the transition to one less full-time staff member as easy as possible for OE. This project was extremely fulfilling for me because I was able to leave a lasting impact on the organization that has done so much for me throughout my experience at Colgate. A job with OE would not be complete without weekend adventures; highlights included sea kayaking in The Thousand Islands of Ontario and rock climbing in the Adirondacks. I could not have imagined a better post-graduate summer, which I have since deemed “my slow fade out.”

My next job was entirely inspired by a short film I had seen at the Banff Mountain Film Festival, called Unbranded, where a group of Texas A&M graduates horse pack from the Mexico-U.S. border to the Canadian-U.S. border. I found myself applying to work at the most remote outfitter in Wyoming, the most remote state in the lower 48. My new work uniform would include cowboy boots, blue jeans, a belt, and a cowboy hat. The official job title was “Wrangler,” but it could have been guide, cook, builder, or irrigator because I did all of those things as well. I discovered that working on a ranch meant contributing to every task, no matter the difficulty or your level of exhaustion. I quickly learned how to pack balanced panniers (for horses not bikes), lead a string of six horses, and sit in a saddle for 10 hours straight. This job was hard work, but it also allowed me to take clients into the Wind River Mountain Range on some of the most beautiful trails I have ever seen. On the back of a horse I would ride, wide-eyed, in awe of the massive granite that towered over me, momentarily forgetting that I had woken up that morning at three a.m., with only five hours of sleep, and still eight more hours on horseback to go. I continued to work in the mountains well into the winter, re-rationing NOLS semester courses and managing horses at the elk hunting outposts once the tourist season was over. I soon found myself looking forward to warmer weather and my next employment that I knew was going to be in Panama.

On a whim, over the summer I had accepted an offer to volunteer for the non-profit organization Floating Doctors. I only knew as much about it as I could gather from their website and I had no idea what use I would be since I have no medical certifications. Nevertheless, they interested me because they are a young organization, started just six years ago, that provides free healthcare services and donated medical supplies to remote Ngäbe indigenous communities in the Caribbean. I was soon heading off to mobile clinics every week in the cayuco, a traditional 40-foot boat carved from a single tree. The communities are so remote they can only be accessed by boat and some took as long as seven hours to reach. I started out at the Administration table, checking patients in and managing the crowds. As my Spanish started coming back to me, I was given the responsibility of running an Intake Station. I would see the patients before the doctor and take all of their vitals, chief complaint, patient history, and run tests such as blood glucose, hemoglobin, and urinalysis. Running Intake seemed manageable enough, but add the challenge of speaking Spanish, chickens running underfoot, the noise level in the open rancho, and the urgency felt by the line of 80 people waiting, and the job was quite hectic. Yet, each person there was dedicated to providing the best level of care possible, even if it meant multiple interpretations in Spanish until the symptoms made sense and the diagnosis was possible. The most exhausting, multi-day clinics were my favorite because living in the communities and spending time with the Ngäbe was a welcome reminder that life can be full in the absence of the creature comforts and consumer excesses we’ve all gotten so used to. Before my time with Floating Doctors was up, I was fortunate to be included in the team constructing cultural competency lessons that, once completed, would be taught to all incoming volunteers. I was genuinely sad to leave Panama but felt invigorated for my future in medicine having witnessed how a few dedicated people and some key resources could make a difference in the lives of others.

The freedom of having no plan allowed me so many other wonderful opportunities this year too, like a spontaneous climbing trip to Joshua Tree National Park with Brendan Sheehan ’16 and Anna Heil ’16, and living at the Zahn’s Farm in Hamilton to study and take the MCAT. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I loved not having a plan. I realized there are so many awesome seasonal jobs, amazing organizations in need of dedicated volunteers, and willing friends to go on trips with. I have since gotten myself back into the planning mode with medical school applications, but am filled with wonderful memories from this past year. If you are still a student, I urge you to spend a summer on Colgate’s campus and challenge yourself to enjoy Hamilton in a new light. Next time you watch Banff, let yourself become inspired and actually go on a similar adventure of your own. And don’t be afraid to become a part of something new and help enact change. I definitely still believe in having a plan, but there now exists a part inside of me that deeply loves the thrill of not having one.
Reflections from a Trainee: Patrick Matulka ’20

There is so much that I could write about the second semester of training, let alone the entire training year. Even in a semester, we have grown as a training class. The first semester acquainted us with the concepts of Outdoor Education and exposed us to many activities. Following this, the second semester allows everyone to choose an area in which to specialize. In part, this begins with the winter extravaganza where there is a showcase of all of the winter activities that OE leads. Throughout the remainder of the semester, there are opportunities to apprentice PE classes in activities of your choice. This process is intentional, to provide the necessary experience for new leaders. Although this is immensely helpful, I found the support network that OE is for its members to be an even greater positive. From both my training class and the organization as a whole, I have been embraced and encouraged. Ultimately, I believe it is this experience that is responsible for the success of OE. Students are brought into a group of people with genuine interest in the outdoors as well as creating meaningful relationships. Without this, I do not believe OE could provide all of the opportunities it does. Over the course of the second half of training, I have begun to fully understand all that OE entails beyond the individual courses. There is more beneath the surface that makes OE what it is and the second semester of training is essential for learning all of these aspects. Overall, this second semester has been highly influential on me and while I would not be prepared to lead trips without the first semester, the second semester provides the assurance and confidence to succeed while leading trips. I hope to provide the similar encouragement for future training classes to continue building a positive community.