Greetings from Hamilton, New York. I am writing this on the heels of Thanksgiving while there is still a hush over Hamilton and campus. The landscape is a collection of shades of brown, the deer have moved back to the village for asylum during hunting season, the chickadees are gearing up to eat their way through winter, and Colgate staff, faculty, and students are accessing their energy reserves for the final three weeks of the fall semester. Outdoor Education staff members are also waiting, rather impatiently I must admit, for winter to arrive. Thankfully, we are also on the heels of a GREAT semester at Outdoor Ed! We are continuing to offer programming on par with our record-high summer and fall numbers from 2014. The high and low ropes course is still buzzing, our annual climbing competition was a huge success, PE courses remain as popular as ever, and we have been graced with another excellent staff training class! We have also had some success with newer initiatives including a successful “Farming Adventure” trip for Wilderness Adventure, a diverse and popular collection of skills seminars, and a visit from guest speaker Kitty Calhoun, a premier American alpinist, who used alpinism as a message for climate change awareness.

We are continuing to work toward the goal of an Adirondack cabin that will serve as a hub for Outdoor Ed activities during the school year. We have partnered with Colgate’s Upstate Institute and faculty members from environmental studies and biology to build a facility in the central Adirondacks that will enrich Colgate offerings year-round. In addition to the funds raised by Outdoor Ed, the Upstate Institute has identified a generous donor who is interested in supporting this project. We are still awaiting Colgate approval to move forward with a feasibility study for the cabin. It’s been a long road working toward an Adirondack facility, but I am optimistic that this collaborative effort will be successful! If it is, I think OE will be able to reduce several existing barriers to participation and will, as a result, serve a larger percentage of the Colgate population.

In January, we will be hosting our first student/alumni ice climbing trip in Ouray, Colorado. Assistant Directors Trevor Kreznar ’10 and Ben Oliver will be leading this trip along with support from AMGA guide Adam Butterfield. Adam has guided on two other Colgate trips in recent years as well. Participants will bring a mix of climbing experiences ranging from single-pitch climbs in Ouray’s famous ice park to up to six-pitch climbs in the surrounding area. Alumni and students on the trip represent a class range of 2012-2018.

I must also admit that I have bittersweet news to share: May 25th, 2016, will be my last day as the director of Outdoor Education at Colgate. As you all can imagine, this decision has not been an easy one. Come May, I will have served Colgate for 13 years: 10 years as a director and 3 years as an assistant in the Outdoor Ed program. In that time, I have been inspired by a never-ending pool of intelligent, creative, compassionate, and dedicated Outdoor Ed student staff members who have made Colgate a better community for themselves and others. While I will dearly miss being a part of Colgate Outdoor Ed, I am eager to return to the Coast of Maine (where I lived prior to coming to Colgate) and look forward to identifying a next career that will hopefully allow for a bit more creativity and, ironically, more time outside.

Assistant Director Trevor Kreznar ’10 has also announced that this is his final year at Colgate, so we are beginning the search process early with the intent of having the program fully staffed by summer. I am confident that OE will continue to thrive with new staffing, and I look forward to supporting the program from afar. Updates will be posted on the OE web page once hires are made.

Thanks to all of you for supporting OE — and me — during my tenure here. I am looking forward to finishing strong during the remainder of this academic year. I wish you all a wonderful winter season, and I look forward to sending an update in May.

Happy Holidays,

Abby
The idea was to put ourselves out there, to challenge ourselves by making plans that might not even be possible. The only real way to start a trip like this is choosing to fly the discount Spirit Airlines with all the needed gear for a two-month, thousand-mile bike tour combined with some high altitude mountaineering through Peru and Ecuador. For our flight to Lima, we encountered an unexpected airline weight restriction on the boxes containing our bikes. Since we could not check our clothes due to weight restrictions or get past security with our overloaded carry-ons, the only option was to don all our high altitude climbing gear, including clunky mountaineering boots, and waddle our way through security — sweating profusely. Feeling like the trip could only get easier after battling our way through the Fort Lauderdale airport, I landed in Lima with my close friend Pyper Dixon.

Pyper and I have known each other for three years and we hatched our plan for this joint bike and mountaineering trip as a celebration of graduating from college. The goal was to start in Lima, bike north to Huaraz to climb in the Cordillera Blanca range in Peru, and then continue north to Quito, Ecuador. We could find no evidence on the internet of anyone else combining these two sports in this way. The total biking would be a little over 1,000 miles, and we hoped to climb peaks that would take us above 18,000 feet. We gave ourselves three months to complete the journey. Our third team member, Nathan Ilitis, was a friend of Pyper’s from their days skipping classes to ski together while attending Montana State University. He also happened to be a bike mechanic. This was essential, as I knew almost nothing about bike repair. In fact, I wouldn’t consider myself a biker at all and had only gone on one long road bike ride two weeks before we departed. It wouldn't have hurt to train more since our bike route through the Andes was on neglected dirt roads that punished us with daily climbs and descents averaging 3,500 feet. Because we picked a route based on roads that seemed rideable on Google Earth, and because Google Earth can be deceiving, we sometimes were forced to push our loaded bikes. One memorable day had us pushing bikes for almost three hours in punishing heat to a plateau at 15,000 feet. When we got on our bikes to ride again, it started to hail, which continued for rest of the night, resulting in a thoroughly soggy camping experience. Needless to say, choosing a trip with the goal of putting ourselves out into the unknown led to fun in the most masochistic sense of the word.

When we arrived in Huaraz after 10 days of biking, we chose modest climbing objectives. It was the off-season for climbing. Combine this with our relative inexperience in larger mountains, and we chose to attempt less technical routes on Urus Estes, Ishinca, and Yanapaccha. After meeting up with three friends, including fellow alumni Josh Solomon ’14, we set out to climb. We managed Urus Estes and Ishinca, although we were made wary of late season conditions after I triggered a series of shallow slab avalanches on Ishinca that threatened to yank our rope team off of an exposed ridge. Yanapaccha turned us back during the technical climbing section as visibility dropped rapidly. Navigating a heavily crevassed glacier in a whiteout turned out to be our limit on acceptable risk. Although it was frustrating to turn back, the Cordillera Blanca was a place to learn safe alpine climbing practices as well as decision making in big groups and dangerous environments. We considered our month there a success.
Reflections of a Trainee

Jesse Allen ’19

While it seems like just yesterday that acceptance letters were distributed to the new members of this year’s training class, the semester has flown by. After introducing ourselves to the group of trainees, trainers, and full-time staff, we embarked on a whirlwind of firsts — first training session, first weekend trip, and first Monday staff meeting. Since then, trainees have been on two trips to work on leadership, backcountry skills such as navigation and cooking, weeknight training sessions, and developing new skills through PE classes and seminars — all with plenty of time for pursuing personal interests. Training has been time consuming to say the least, but through it all, I realize it has been one of the most rewarding endeavors I have undertaken. Training has challenged me constantly, forcing me to operate outside my comfort zone. Then, at the point where something is comfortable, identifying another aspect to improve or working on a new skill.

Having grown up drawn to the mountains and the ocean, the time I have spent in the outdoors has played a significant role in my life and has led me to new places and views and skills. The marquee memories and lasting impacts of these adventures, however, are of the people I’ve encountered and the relationships I’ve built. Although brief, my time in Outdoor Ed has been no different. Entering Colgate and navigating all the new facets of college life was daunting to say the least but, in many ways, Outdoor Ed offered me the perfect community during this period of uncertainty. Being a part of a community that is built on meaningful relationships and caring people has made me feel like I have begun to establish my place on campus and have a platform to branch out of in the future. Beginning with the trainees and trainers and growing to include the upper staff, I have met some of my closest friends and mentors, building relationships I hope will only grow over the coming years.

Reflecting on the first months of training and closing in on our winter trip and the end of the fall training, I will definitely miss the constant excitement and even the structure of training. My excitement is only growing at the prospect of taking the reins and leading, teaching, and giving others the opportunities to enjoy, explore, and learn from the outdoors the same way I have.

When you embark on a trip that is entirely meant to push your comfort zone, you are constantly faced with questions. There are the ones you would expect to have to answer during the trip: Should we push for the summit in bad conditions? Can we bike to the next town today, or should we plan to camp overnight? (We got that wrong a lot, and needless to say, we all lost some weight.) The reason I loved my trip was because of the questions that we could never plan to answer. Is hitchhiking down from Yanapaccha on top of the tank of a gas truck down steep switchbacks a good idea? How many more straight meals of chicken and rice can I possibly eat? How many people have laughed as we biked in the wrong direction after misunderstanding their Spanish instructions? Although they were the most challenging three months of my life, they were also some of the most rewarding. In fact, with some time to numb the pain, I might even be convinced to do a trip like this again.

I think next time, though, I would skip the part where I biked with food poisoning.
Snapshots of Fall Break

**Lightweight Backpacking**

Faith Hamlin ’18

Salem, Sierra, and Faith, oh my! Yes, Sierra, Salem and I led a lightweight backpacking trip to the Adirondacks over fall break this year and it was a huge success in many ways. The day before we left Hamilton, it had poured rain all day. However, we awoke to head to the Adirondacks under blue skies. First, we were surprised to hit peak fall foliage, highlighted by the absolutely perfect weather for all four days. We had a day where we lounged in the sun and had our last chance to improve those watch tan lines. Second, we had an impressively lightweight group of participants. Quite frankly, they inspired me and I am motivated to pack even lighter for my next trip. We started weighing the participants packs and each one was progressively lighter. We had the heaviest of the packs coming in at 19 pounds and the lightest was 15 pounds! Finally, our group just rocked in general! Our participants ranged from first years to seniors, hailing from Texas to Canada. They were a blast to be with but also to learn from. Sierra, Salem, and I were so impressed and interested with all the knowledge and experience in geology, physics, international affairs, etc. that our participants brought to the table.

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**Thousand Island Sea Kayaking**

Kaitlin Abrams ’18 and Ben Oliver, Assistant Director

The Thousand Islands National Park, located in Ontario, Canada, is one of the greatest wilderness classrooms available to Outdoor Ed. The granite islands, relative solitude, and sweet campsites are well worth the drive. This year’s trip was led by Assistant Director Ben Oliver and Kaitlin Abrams ’18 and included eight other students, four of whom were outdoor Ed staff members. As we approached our put-in spot in Gananoque (blasting Mariah Carey’s “All I Want For Christmas Is You,” of course), we were met with stunning views of gorgeous Canadian fall colors. The weather proved to be outstanding and the winds were friendly, but just strong enough to make the paddling interesting. We arrived at our campsite that afternoon, just in time to crash a wedding and spice up their family photos. Coincidentally, the groom was the owner of a local kayak outfitter, so our boats added the perfect element to the photos. On day two, we discovered that we had been following a group of Cornell students, so we decided to visit them on their island and make some new friends. We shared baby carrots and laughed the day away.

Our last full day of paddling was also our windiest. Despite two exposed channel crossings, the group was stellar, paddling in 10–15-knot winds and 1–2-foot seas, all the while singing and becoming the best of friends. Toward the end of the day, we spotted Deathdealer and Bloodletter islands, however, “no trespassing” signs stopped us from discovering what kind of interesting secrets these two islands held. The final day was filled with nostalgia as we paddled back to shore and packed up the boats. We crossed the border with success and, as we made our way back to Colgate, the sounds of Mariah Carey filled the air once again.
It's the most wonderful time of the year. But instead of holiday carols, decorated cookies, and snow, we ring it in with handfuls of GORP and blue Adirondack skies. During Wilderness Adventure (WA), there truly is magic in the air. As leaders, we return to campus excited to reunite and brush up on our skills. During three days of prep at Base Camp, we cover the gamut from decorating name tags for our participants and fostering a positive learning environment, to reviewing first aid. My favorite lesson is Co-Leader Chemistry. Basically, we get together with our co-leader for the trip and talk about our leadership and teaching styles, our backcountry strengths and weaknesses, and our goals for the trip. For me, this exercise usually involves lying on the grass and getting to know someone a little differently. It could be one of my best friends or someone with whom I have never led, but either way, we're bound to get to know each other a little more deeply and become better prepared to lead together.

On arrival day, we pair up with our co-leader and grab a spot on the lawn outside Base Camp. Sprawled about are tree signs (shout out to Hickory and Moosewood!) marking the different trips and inflated question balls to facilitate getting to know each other as the first-year students arrive. After a night at Beattie Reserve, we pile into our van and drive to the trailhead. Now the fun really begins. Once we’re in the woods together as a group, without cell phones or reminders of our other obligations, we can really get to know each other. My favorite game for doing so is called hot seat, where one person volunteers to answer questions posed by the group. Think: “Would you rather have a dragon or be a dragon?” and “What will you miss most about home next year?”

At first, WA means something different for everyone who takes part. For some, it's about getting to know a few people before getting to campus. Others sign up to get another camping experience under their belt. Whatever the motives, you're bound to get to know others, challenge yourself, and connect in a new way with the outdoors.

My first WA was big for me. WA was my first true camping experience — before then, the only time I’d slept in a tent was in my backyard. Despite my nerves, I felt welcome at Colgate on arrival day. The seven other Colgate students who led or participated in Session 1 Hemlock 2012 turned out to be friendly faces on campus, my trainer in OE, and one of my best friends. For me, WA was a formative experience that set just the right tone for my four years here. That’s why I feel so lucky to be able to facilitate this experience for others. As a past leader and past co-coordinator of the WA program, I am certain that WA is among one of the best ways to kick off a Colgate career!
Due to concerns about data security, we will no longer be printing the names of our generous donors. Donations subsidize PE courses (ensuring they are accessible to a large percentage of the Colgate population), break trips, equipment purchases, occasional guided training opportunities for OE staff members, and Wilderness Adventure scholarships.

We deeply appreciate the generosity of all the donors whose contributions help make OE a wonderful experience for so many Colgate students.

Thank you!