

Around the O ⁽¹⁾

Outdoor Program redefines 'outdoorsy' to increase diversity



(<https://around.uoregon.edu/sites/around2.uoregon.edu/files/field/image/redefine-outdoorsy.jpg>)

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What began as virtual events has grown to live recreational excursions and a full-day conference as a UO program works to empower often underrepresented communities to create more equitable access to the outdoors.

The Erb Memorial Union Outdoor Program (<https://outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu/>)'s concept for Redefining Outdoorsy (<https://outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu/redefining-outdoorsy>) began during the 2020-21 school year with a series on Zoom that featured a variety of nontraditional adventurers. Guests included adaptive athlete Vasu Sojitra, women's climbing advocate Shelma Jun and cyclist and Paralympian Leo Rodgers.

For 2021-22 the program expanded.

"Last year we had some great conversations about the importance of making the outdoors more accessible and getting people outside," said Matthew Katz, collaborative programming coordinator for the Outdoor Program. "This year we decided, 'Hey, let's stop only talking about making them accessible and actually get people outside!' We needed to make the financial commitment to get students outdoors."

To meet that goal, Katz said the Outdoor Program committed \$20,000 to fund inclusive affinity trips for underrepresented student groups during 2021-22.

Trips have included an Indigenous student hike on Amanda's Trail on the Oregon Coast, a hike and hot springs trip in the Willamette National Forest for students of color, and an adaptive bike ride on the Row River Trail. Gear and transportation were provided.

"These trips aim to offer a financial barrier-free environment for students to get outside, as well as a safe space for students to experience the outdoors with others who might share similar identities," Katz said. "The high cost of entry for most outdoor activities is often a deterrent for historically excluded students to access the outdoors."

The educational aspect of Redefining Outdoorsy — giving students and community members the chance to learn and discuss the inequities people face when recreating outside — is one of the original pillars of the project. As such, the Outdoor Program will host the Redefining Outdoorsy Summit (<https://outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu/redefining-outdoorsy>) on Saturday, Feb. 12, at the EMU.

Scheduled guests and speakers include Wyn Wiley, aka Pattie Gonia (<https://www.instagram.com/pattiegonia/?hl=en>), a prominent queer environmentalist and outdoor drag queen; Mercy M'fon, founder of the Portland-based nonprofit Wild Diversity.

(<https://www.wilddiversity.org/>); and Chicano/Latino conservationist [José G. González](http://www.josegagonzalez.com/) (<http://www.josegagonzalez.com/>).

Students also will present workshops based on areas of interest and research. Topics will range from the history of racial exclusion on public lands to the history of Black horsemanship.

Preregistration is required (<https://outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu/redefining-outdoorsy>) for the conference as space is limited. Students can attend free. A donation of \$100, on a sliding scale, is recommended for UO staff and members of the community; all donations will directly fund more affinity trips for students.

“We have never done anything like this before and we’re really excited to be expanding our offerings to better serve the ever-evolving student body,” said Outdoor Program director Margaret Hoff. “Our staff have been working hard to make sure all this and more is feasible for students as we transition back to in-person activities.”

Anyone interested in getting involved with Redefining Outdoorsy or donating to the project can reach out to Katz at opcpc@uoregon.edu (<mailto:opcpc@uoregon.edu>).

—By Colleen Schlunga, Student Services and Enrollment Management

Student Life (</news/Student-Life>)

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