Rather than dwelling on why too many men don't succeed in college, trekker Karen Arnold examines the features of an experience in which many men do excel: the long hike from Georgia to Maine. Educators can learn why accomplishing this feat may be more rewarding than college.

BY KAREN D. ARNOLD

Education on the Appalachian Trail: What 2,000 Miles Can Teach Us About Learning

TRENDS dating from the 1970s show that males are significantly less likely than females to attend college and to remain in higher education once enrolled. Although this gender imbalance is undisputed, there is little agreement about the causes of the disparity and even less solid research to guide policy. In a 2000 About Campus article, Judy Jolley Mohraz notes, "Since this trend was first noted, educators across the nation have wondered why more and more young men are jumping directly from high school into the workforce" (p. 30). Seven years later, educators continue to ask, "Why do young men underachieve educationally in comparison with women?" In this article, I suggest the benefits of turning that question upside down and recommend leaving education altogether to answer it. It might be more fruitful to ask, "Why do college-age men succeed at difficult achievement tasks?" A natural laboratory for understanding successful goal achievement of young men is readily available in the Appalachian Trail thru-hiking community.

Every year, between 1,500 and 2,000 men and women leave Springer Mountain, Georgia, intending to hike 2,175 miles to Mount Katahdin, Maine. According to Appalachian Trail Conference statistics, 65 percent of this group qualify as thru-hikers, who are defined as backpackers who hike the entire Appalachian Trail in one continuous journey of four to six months. Eighty percent of thru-hikers are male, with the largest group comprising eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-old male high school graduates. Not only does this sample resemble the underrepresented college male population, but the Appalachian Trail also is an apt analogue to the higher education setting. A thru-hike is voluntary, lengthy, difficult, and psychologically demanding. "It's easy to understand why people quit," writes Bo Emerson, a relay hiker for Appalachian Adventure, of the mountainous trek. "What's harder to understand is why they persevere" (p. 4). So why do thru-hikers succeed at this self-imposed task, agreeing with thru-hiker "Kirby," who called his grueling journey "the time of my life"? Learning what motivates college-age men to undertake a thru-hike and what conditions lead to success holds strong implications for the design of higher education settings that will attract and retain greater numbers of male students than current settings.

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The ideas in this article come from several sources. First, I relied on my own long experience on the Appalachian Trail; I completed the entire trail in sections between 1991 and 2004. In periods of a week to two and a half months over a span of thirteen years, I hiked and camped with hundreds of thru-hikers, using my trail name, Walkabout. Second, in addition to reading discussion threads on three major online communities on thru-hiking (Whiteblaze.net, Trailplace.com, and Thruhiker.com), I posted these queries: "What kept you on the trail?" "What does it take to succeed in a thru-hike?" I posed these questions on each of the three online lists in February 2007, along with a request for respondents' gender and age at the time of thru-hiking. Otherwise unattributed hiker quotations are from these three Web sites. Third, I used published and unpublished statistics from the Appalachian Trail Conference. Finally, I drew from the small body of published research on thru-hikers, from books, and from Internet accounts of individual thru-hikes.

What does a thru-hike entail? Thru-hikers follow the white-blazed Appalachian Trail on foot, carrying thirty to fifty pounds of food, clothing, and shelter on their back through changing weather, steep elevation, and challenging terrain. They walk eight to twelve hours a day, usually in solitude, with many short breaks for rest, food, map reading, and views. Each evening, hikers gather around water sources to camp in three-sided shelters or in their own tents. Before climbing into their sleeping bag when the sun goes down, hikers swap trail news, tell stories, and make entries in shelter registers. Chores fill most nonwalking time, as an unnamed thru-hiker describes: "Hiking, getting ready to hike, eating, purifying water, setting up camp, cooking, etc. took up most of my time. Usually there were other stopping points for pictures, bathroom breaks, getting water etc. And I slept a lot more while hiking than I do normally. That seemed to be the hiking norm." Every five to ten days, thru-hikers walk or hitch-hike to rural towns, where they shower, do laundry, and resupply. Then it's back to the woods.

Karen D. Arnold is Associate Professor of Higher Education at Boston College. Her scholarship considers talent development among groups such as high school valedictorians, Rhodes Scholars, and urban high school graduates.

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Preparing for the Journey

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE ATTAINMENT and successful thru-hiking share important commonalities. In each case, retention is boosted by motivation to achieve the end goal. The further importance of commitment to a particular college is echoed in the positive effects of "place attachment" that Gerard Kyle, Alan Graefe, and Robert Manning found in a study of Appalachian Trail (AT) hikers. Declaring one's ambitions publicly can reinforce motivation to succeed, as "MaxNarthy" wrote shortly before beginning a thru-hike: "Pretty determined. I start April 1st. I am throwing myself a huge going away party about a week before that. I have such a big mouth about hiking it that not finishing isn't much of an option for me."

Another commonality is that finances determine whether a young man can begin the AT or enroll in a specific college and whether he can remain there. Money affects the experience itself—for example, money dictates the extent to which undergraduates must seek paid employment and mediates thru-hikers' access to expensive ultra-light backpacking gear.

Successful socialization of first-year students starts well ahead of orientation, just as socialization of thru-hikers starts well before they reach Springer Mountain. Traditional-age students headed to residential colleges have typically spent considerable time on choosing a particular college on the basis of their anticipated experience there. They have gathered information about the college; corresponded with staff and future roommates; and amassed clothes, supplies, and electronics to bring. Similarly, most (though not all) thru-hikers have spent time dreaming about the AT; they have talked to experienced hikers, read about the trail, and bought equipment and provisions. Before their major life transition, both groups begin identifying with their future setting and imagining what it will be like to be there. Like most thru-hikers facing the definitive moment of beginning the AT, "J Link" was consumed with his imminent

adventure: "All day every day I think and talk about the trail. I'm sad to leave my life, sad to leave my friends, but overjoyed with the thought of what my life will be in a few months and excited as hell to get out there. If this isn't Springer fever, I don't know what is."

The first significant difference between undergraduate and thru-hiking experiences emerges in this period before initial entry. For many students, the goal of achieving a college degree stems primarily from the external goals of societal and parental expectations and the instrumental goal of preparation for a professional career. In sharp contrast, empirical studies indicate that young people hike the Appalachian Trail for internal, self-expressive reasons. Sixty percent of respondents to Roland Mueser's extensive 1989 survey of thru-hikers said that their primary motivation was "challenge and adventure"; another 20 percent cited "love of nature"; and the remaining 20 percent were motivated by "escape and simplicity." External motivations such as competition, prestige, measuring self against others, and "showing others I can do it" rated very low across all studies. However, internal motivation is important for learning as well as hiking, as a review by Ryan and Deci reiterates, because of its positive influence on involvement, persistence, and willingness to undertake difficult tasks.

Like undergraduate students, backpackers come to the trail with different levels of relevant skills, knowledge, and individual motivations. Having read the guides of legendary AT authority Dan "Wingfoot" Bruce, one successful thru-hiker claimed that "heeding the voice of experience and planning ahead can count for a lot." However, he went on: "I was so naïve about what I was getting myself into and had only been backpacking a handful of times with my university outdoor club. . . . I was so clueless! But it should speak volumes that despite my extreme lack of experience, I was able to complete a successful thru-hike. I guess it goes to show that physical preparation and having lots of backpacking under your belt does not necessarily guarantee a successful thru-hike." Mueser's study of thru-hikers found that around 20 percent had little to no backpacking experience before starting the Appalachian Trail, 40 percent reported being out of shape or average in fitness, and 40 percent did no special physical training or preparation to get ready for the hike. Surprisingly, initial experience and physical fitness did not affect the likelihood of completing a thru-hike, of injury, or of hiking speed (after the first month). Nor did equipment affect retention. In Walking the Appalachian Trail, Larry Luxenberg explains, "Much of the useful backpacking knowledge can be acquired en route, for the AT *is like a university of hiking*" (p. 16, emphasis added). Unlike hikers, undergraduates who come to college lacking core skills are less likely to graduate than their better prepared peers. Research-based institutional efforts to help underprepared students, along with improvements linked to a trend toward viewing education as a single K-20 system, offer promise for improving student preparation and postsecondary success.

Starting the Journey

ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE between undergraduate and thru-hiking experiences emerges during the initiation and socialization phase, when students and thru-hikers begin to separate from past identities and develop peer communities. Colleges and universities provide students with some degree of separation from the past and a new setting in which to try new roles and identities, but not to the same extent that the Appalachian Trail does.

Both college students and AT hikers face an intense initial transition. Just as a student's first few weeks of college are crucial in deciding whether to drop out, the early weeks on the trail can make or break a hopeful thru-hiker. According to statistics from the Appalachian Trail Conference, 20 percent of intended thru-hikers drop out along the first thirty miles of the trail! Certainly many would-be 2,000-milers get a rude awakening as they struggle up the steep AT approach trail in late winter with more than fifty pounds on their back. Similarly, college students face new challenges as they struggle to balance a heavy course load with a vast array of cocurricular opportunities. The major challenge of the transition to each setting has to do with orienting oneself and demonstrating basic competence. As Vincent Tinto, Lee Upcraft,

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and John Gardner pointed out two decades ago, dropping out is primarily voluntary; a spike in drop-out decisions occurs during the initial transition. Peers and mentors are important agents in teaching necessary skills and knowledge. The immediate environment shapes the experience: just as a friendly roommate and an engaging faculty shape academic and social integration into college, conditions of weather, terrain, and companionship affect integration into thru-hiking. Rituals and traditions bond college students and thru-hikers to their respective settings. On the Appalachian Trail, for instance, it is customary to carry a stone from Springer to Katahdin; hitchhike to Damascus, Virginia, for the annual Trail Days festival; and eat a half gallon of ice cream at the halfway point.

The practice of taking an alias—a trail name—is an important means of separating from one's pre-AT identity and bonding with the thru-hiking community. As in traditional quests, many backpackers seek to discover their "true" trail name as they hike. Many are christened by fellow hikers. For instance, my own trail name, Walkabout, comes from the Australian aboriginal custom of periodic long walking journeys. "Kid's Meal," the 2006 thru-hiker whose photograph is on the cover of this issue, earned his name during a search for late-night vegetarian options in rural Atkins, Virginia. Not only do 2,000-milers begin the trail with a new name, but thru-hiking norms also discourage sharing information about one's life outside of the trail. It is common to know neither the real name nor standard status information about a fellow thru-hiker. Thru-hikers' appearances are useless in decoding social status: a filthy, bearded high school drop-out is indistinguishable from a filthy, bearded Ph.D.

Trail names represent the completeness of immersion in the thru-hiking experience. The Appalachian Trail is an example of what sociologist Erving Goffman termed a "total institution" because it shapes both behavior and identity by encompassing and regulating every aspect of members' lives and daily routines. In contrast, at colleges and universities, immersion in campus identity remains incomplete; undergraduates retain their outside contacts and the social markers of dress, possessions, and lifestyle. Although colleges and universities are not total institutions, they do provide students with some degree of separation from the past and a new setting in which to try novel roles and identities. It is no accident that some of the most powerful college experiences take place when students are separated from their past self—for example, in study abroad, a retreat, or a fraternity initiation.

One consequence of separation from one's previous society is the opportunity to try different roles and new forms of self-expression. "Most hikers are introverts," writes "Tinker," "and as such have spent most of their/our lives playing little games in their heads. When they get out on the trail, they feel free to let loose, and everyone else gets to see their inner self, which is usually goofy as heck." Another consequence of separation from one's past is a highly egalitarian peer ethos. Friendships across gender, age, regional origin, and social class are the rule on the Appalachian Trail. (Racial diversity on the AT is limited; the overwhelming majority of thru-hikers are white.) Male thru-hikers exemplify higher education's values of self-exploration and peer relationships across difference. Young men appear to reach these goals most effectively when they are separated from previous identifications, immersed in an absorbing common experience, and exposed to an egalitarian culture.

From the starting point of separation from the past, the total institution of the Appalachian Trail shapes and is shaped by the collective society of thru-hikers. Social connections are at the core of successful thru-hiking as well as the undergraduate experience, even though most thru-hikers begin the Appalachian Trail alone. At the 160-mile mark, journalist Scott Huler, a journalist for Appalachian Adventure, reflected on the unexpected social aspects of the AT: "The biggest surprise has been the discovery of the Appalachian Trail's traveling society, a culture of modern-day hoboes who have their own language, clothing, rituals, and diet. They hike not just for 'fellowship with the wilderness' as the plaque on Spring Mountain claims, but to reaffirm their connection with each other. . . . Groups coalesce at night around the fire rings, where members exchange stories and songs, and log entries in the shelter registers. It's like a party that moves up the Appalachians" (p. 11).

For most thru-hikers, friendships are central to the experience. "Fannypack" "met many great persons on the trail. These friendships, many times, have been formed with persons who I would have probably never become friends with in the off trail world. . . . When I am asked why I hike, I say: 'the people, the people, the people, on and off the trail.'"

Norms of the thru-hiking "traveling society" reflect the conditions of the total institution. Tolerance for fellow hikers at shelters and in town stops is a necessity in light of enforced togetherness in close quarters. Low population density dictates at least a brief conversation with anyone encountered on the trail. Whether held while hiking, camping, or meeting in trail towns, thru-hiker conversations center on the shared experience of hiking, commonly termed trail talk. Mutual respect arises from tacit acknowledgment of other thru-hikers as engaged in the same difficult task as oneself. Both affinity and awareness of vulnerability cause thru-hikers to share information and to assist each other in cases of injury, financial distress, and other difficulties.

Peer groups are fluid, as well as egalitarian, tolerant, mutually respectful, and helpful. Huler aptly characterized thru-hiker social culture when he noted: "Groups of compatible hikers form, shift, break apart, and reform daily on the trail, like cliques at a six-month cocktail party" (p. 32). Hiking your own hike means that most thru-hikers end up separating from a friend with whom they have spent anywhere from a day to several weeks or even longer. Sometimes friends reunite; more often, they find new friends and groups.

In both backpacking and undergraduate settings, social relations are central to the experience and make a difference in members' satisfaction and retention. Both college students and thru-hikers can be sidetracked by joining peer groups that are not serious about having the discipline to succeed. Dissimilarities are notable, however. A college student can achieve the ultimate goal of graduating despite a half-hearted effort or frequent substance abuse. Thru-hikers who join a party group or fail to keep a reasonable pace will simply not succeed; the requirements of the trail force healthy habits and persistent achievement. College student cultures generally lack thru-hikers' heterogeneous, constantly changing peer groups and peer focus on the institution's core activity. Egalitarianism, tolerance, and mutual assistance are less necessary in college, where young adults can congregate with like-minded friends from similar backgrounds and rely on adults for help. Technology, high population density, off-campus involvement, and the separation between academics and out-of-classroom life dilute the coherence of undergraduate peer culture and community. Coherence increases when higher education experiences connect students through common learning activities, reduce separation between academics and student life, and provide relief from stress and overwhelming stimuli. Learning communities, mixed-age housing, residential colleges, and technology-free activities offer a few examples of community structures that echo thru-hiking norms.

Experiencing the Journey

THE CENTRALITY of experiential learning dramatically distinguishes thru-hiking from higher education. In addition, thru-hiking calls on a much greater range of what Howard Gardner has identified as "multiple intelligences." College academics draw almost exclusively on verbal-logical and mathematical intelligences. Thru-hiking requires these forms of intelligence as well, according Leslie Rush's study of multiliteracies among the Appalachian Trail thru-hiking community. Thru-hikers calculate mileage, quantities, and altitude; read books; write in journals and trail registers; tell stories; and memorize poetry and song lyrics. In addition, however, long-distance backpackers engage in "spatial, gestural, visual, auditory, and ecological" literacies, according to Rush. In particular, thru-hikers read and interpret their physical environment and use awareness of body movement and physical connection with surroundings.

Body awareness and kinesthetic intelligence come as lessons from trail experience. As a novice backpacker, I found myself wobbling on two feet as I perched on a tippy rock in the middle of a rushing trout stream. I fell into the water, closely followed by my loosely secured tent. A few thousand miles of experience later, I now approach streams with an assessment strategy and technique. I scout for the best crossing place, predict which rocks are likely to be tippy, and know when fording is most practical. I even have a philosophy of stepping stones, learned from "Long Haul," in which I plan two steps ahead, always remaining in motion toward the next stone in case the current one is unstable or slippery.

Experience is at the center of cocurricular activities but is too often absent from academic learning. In the college context, internships, service learning, study abroad, field-based courses, and project learning offer kinesthetic activity and provide powerful experiential elements that approximate the optimal learning environment of male thru-hikers.

In addition to using multiple forms of intelligence and experiential learning, backpacking life is much more individualized than the undergraduate experience. Most thru-hikers walk alone for most of the day. They choose their own pace, routines, rhythms, and equipment. One of Mueser's study respondents, twenty-year-old "Long Legs," reveled in this freedom to structure the path to achieving his self-chosen goal: "For the first time in my short life, I was actually living! I ate because I was hungry, drank because I was thirsty, slept because I was tired, and every day I had a goal to achieve" (p. 152). In addition to the

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mantra "Hike your own hike!" thru-hikers preach the virtues of resisting submission to any external force, even your own expectations. Jack Tarlin posted a caution to a sixteen-year-old who was about to start hiking the AT: "Take your 'itinerary/schedule' (you know what I mean, it's that piece of paper that tells you where you're gonna be at four-thirty in the afternoon of your 139th day): take that piece of paper and start a fire with it!" "Shades of Gray" echoed this advice on the same discussion thread:

"If you want to sit on a rock and enjoy the view for two hours, well do it. If you wanna go swimming three times in one day, well do it. If you camp at a place that's so fine you don't want to leave, well stay there all day the next day."

The unequivocal goal is to make it to Mt. Katahdin before October 15, when Maine's Baxter State Park closes for the winter. How one gets to that goal is completely up to each individual hiker, and each hiker does it differently. Contrast this personal freedom with college's institutionally determined tasks, schedules, deadlines, and evaluations. Undergraduate success requires discipline, time management, and compliance with authority. Thru-hiking requires flexibility, openness, and the use of personal strengths to balance changeable environmental conditions and personal preferences. The Appalachian Trail experience suggests that young men learn best when education is organized around personal interests, real-world competencies, and physical challenges. Thus, opportunities that allow students to design their own major or undertake independent research are likely to appeal to young men and to actively engage them in the learning process.

At the heart of thru-hiking, those who make the journey find a final notable quality: time for reflection. The primary means of ensuring reflection are simplicity and solitude. Recall that a fifth of thru-hikers said that they hiked the trail for "escape and simplicity." Virtually every thru-hiker comes to prize the purity of paring down life to its essentials, like "Peace Pilgrim," who wrote, "Since you carry your food, sleeping equipment, etc., on your back, you learn quickly that unnecessary possessions are unnecessary burdens. You soon realize what the essentials of life are—such as warmth when you are cold, a dry spot on a rainy day, the simplest food when you are hungry, pure cool water when you are thirsty. You soon put material things in their proper place, realizing that they are there for use, but relinquishing them when they are not useful. You soon experience and learn to appreciate the great freedom of simplicity" (p. 54).

Escaping the demands of her everyday life motivated a twenty-six-year-old backpacker who answered my query on Trailplace.com, "What does it take to succeed in hiking the whole AT?": "A combination of loving the woods and hating life. For most of the trail, I was just happy to be out in the woods, away from life. For the last 1/4 of it or so, it was just knowing that when I was done, I would have to go home, finish school, get a job, etc. Anything to put THAT off." Backpacking in the mountains is extremely difficult, but its demands are clear and its life uncluttered by technology, consumer choices, or demands for multitasking. Hikers live in the woods without phones, the Internet, cars, or stores. Thru-hiking also enables young men to postpone taking up adult responsibilities that they might view as unattractive or overwhelming.

Thru-hikers commonly claim that succeeding at a thru-hike is 80-percent mental. Certainly, this means that it is important to have a positive attitude, make good decisions, and keep up your spirits. More centrally, though, it relates to the ability to be by yourself in nature and keep company only with your thoughts. Although backpackers might gather with others to camp at night, they generally spend most daylight hours walking alone. "You have to be with yourself," "Bojo" told an Appalachian Adventure reporter. "You probably see a little more of yourself than you'd like" (p. 47). Successful thru-hikers relish this time for self-reflection, says Don Hopey, another Appalachian Adventure journalist: "Out here where hikers carry their houses on their backs, they can simplify things, strip away distractions, listen to inner voices, think without being interrupted. That's how Anthony Dus ('Sir Renity') of Pittsfield MA says he used the first 1,079 miles. 'For me, the trip is more mental housekeeping than mileage. The miles don't mean that much,' he said. 'Over the last month I've done a lot of thinking and I've been able to get the living room and bedroom clean. Now I'm working on the bathroom. That's the worst.'" (p. 90).

Reaching a mental stance in which you are open to your surroundings and in tune with your thoughts is

not only a necessity for backpacking 2,000 miles but also a reward in itself. Flow, a term coined by cognitive psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, is a state of mind in which self-consciousness and awareness of time fall away and one feels intensely focused and alive. Allan Mills and Thomas Butler found that the majority of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers in 1997 experienced a state of flow during their trek. Most thru-hikers who reported a flow state described it as a daily experience that occurred while walking alone.

The abundance of simplicity, solitary reflection time, and flow states of mind experienced in thru-hiking contrasts sharply with contemporary undergraduate experience. Life in college passes in a blur of multiple commitments, choices, messages, and voices. College students fit Kenneth Gergen's definition of the "saturated self"; they experience connections, ideas, and voices coming rapidly from all directions via multiple media. Men's success in thru-hiking suggests that colleges and universities should provide more extensive opportunities for reflection, unrushed conversation, and absorbing activities that facilitate flow states.

Learning from the Journey

WHAT LESSONS can backpacking the Appalachian Trail offer for the higher education of men? Thru-hiking draws young men to challenge, adventure, freedom, and escape. As a male-dominated activity calling on physical strength, endurance, and courage, thru-hiking is stereotypically masculine. This initial set of attributes might explain the lure of the trail for young men but seems largely irreproducible in higher education. In addition, the credentialing function of higher education means that external, instrumental reasons will continue to motivate most students to attend college.

Fortunately, other aspects of the comparison between college and thru-hiking appear to offer useful guides for improving undergraduate male retention, including the incorporation of more experiential learning, multiple intelligences, and independent and individualized educational pathways. The comparison between the Appalachian Trail and college experience also indicates that successful transitions require separation from past identities and rapid socialization into the new higher education setting. Thru-hiking suggests benefits from fluid, heterogeneous, activity-based peer cultures and greater social coherence around core educational purposes. Time to reflect, relief from overwhelming stimuli, and integral rewards for healthy practices are other transferable models from the Appalachian Trail.

Such lessons resonate with prominent theories of higher education. For instance, conditions for thru-hiking success reflect calls for students' active involvement in learning and sustained engagement with diversity. Most strikingly, Sharon Parks's concept of mentoring communities closely parallels the long-distance backpacking experience. In her influential book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* Parks identifies three collective practices that foster human wholeness and connection. First, the practice of the table involves gatherings and rituals "that in very practical terms recognize that the body, the heart, and the intellect are intimately interrelated and [that] the whole [needs to be] nourished" (p. 156). Second, the practice of the hearth describes a community that invites pause, reflection, and meaningful conversation. Finally, the practice of the commons has to do with interdependence in community; the commons is "a place where people meet by happenstance and intention and have a sense of a shared, interdependent life within a manageable frame" (p. 157). The connection of body, mind, and spirit; space for reflection; and meaningful interdependence lie at the center of thru-hiking. In contrast, higher education includes these conditions for successful learning only in bits and pieces or in isolated places.

Perhaps the lessons of Appalachian Trail thru-hiking are too radical for traditional undergraduate education. It could be that the goals of intensive involvement in learning; focused, self-motivated effort; and optimal human experience are incompatible with institutional group learning by late adolescents. Perhaps particular sorts of non-academic adventures are better suited to young men's self-exploration, skill development, and confidence building. If this is the case, Americans might experiment with making "gap year" experiences more widely available. We might build normative pathways to later college entrance. Or we might simply help young men find meaningful adventure outside and inside the academy. Study abroad and service immersion are common instances of transformative experiential learning. In

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addition to foreign study, some institutions offer courses that involve students in long-distance biking, sailing, or historical reenactment. Wilderness orientations are perhaps the most widespread example of undergraduate community building through physical adventure. Goal-oriented exploration takes place in real-world team projects like building robots or competing to place an experiment on a NASA space flight. Higher education models already exist in which would-be entrepreneurs run their own businesses, aspiring musicians establish performing groups, and maturing writers publish their work. Project-based institutions like Hampshire College and The Evergreen State College offer students individualized and experiential curricula based on students' own goals. A few colleges, such as Deep Springs College and Berea College, incorporate manual labor as a core student experience. All of these models provide experiences that correspond to young men's ways of learning and relating on the Appalachian Trail.

Ultimately, those in higher education can learn from communities like thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail to think creatively about postsecondary pathways that lead to transformative learning, productive community, and the summit of the degree.

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