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Exploring UREC's Outdoors Program on an Unexpected Hike to Lodge Lake

Noelle Lee, Volunteer Reporter and Photographer

Students gather at the University Recreation (UREC) center at 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday, preparing to embark on a scenic journey to Snow Lake. After quick introductions and gear rental checkouts, we hit the road for a one-hour car ride to Snoqualmie Pass with the promise of stunning lake views framed with fall colors.

During a quick pit stop at a gas station to grab snacks and fill up on gas, we were informed that trail conditions took an unexpected turn. Icy paths, rain and snow made the route too risky to take on, so we made the call to switch plans. Instead of Snow Lake, the trip leaders decided on Lodge Lake, a trail that stayed within the scenic area but offered lower elevation and fewer hazards.

When we arrived at the Lodge Lake trailhead, we were greeted with gentle snowfall covering the parking lot. Instead of feeling disappointed by the sudden change of plans, most of us were thrilled to start the hike. The landscape featured a mix of autumn's last traces and winter's early arrival, with colorful leaves peeking through delicate layers of snow.

Savvy Mau, a third-year public affairs major, mentioned her favorite part of the hike was the mix of autumn and winter.

"I think my favorite part was just watching the fall foliage," Mau said. "Since it was snowing, basically fall turned into winter. It was so beautiful."



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Trees reflecting on the water of Lodge Lake

A key appeal of the UREC Outdoors program is the chance to explore the outdoors safely. By providing transportation, gear and experienced trail leaders, UREC makes it easy for students to access nature, even if they don't have the experience, equipment or confidence to hike alone. The setup of the hiking groups creates a supportive environment, allowing students to get outside and experience the Pacific Northwest to its fullest.

For Nancy Nguyen, a first-year graduate student in computer science, the trip's setup was ideal.

"I really like hiking, but I also really hate driving," she said. "It was so nice that someone else could drive me out here, especially in the snow and rain."

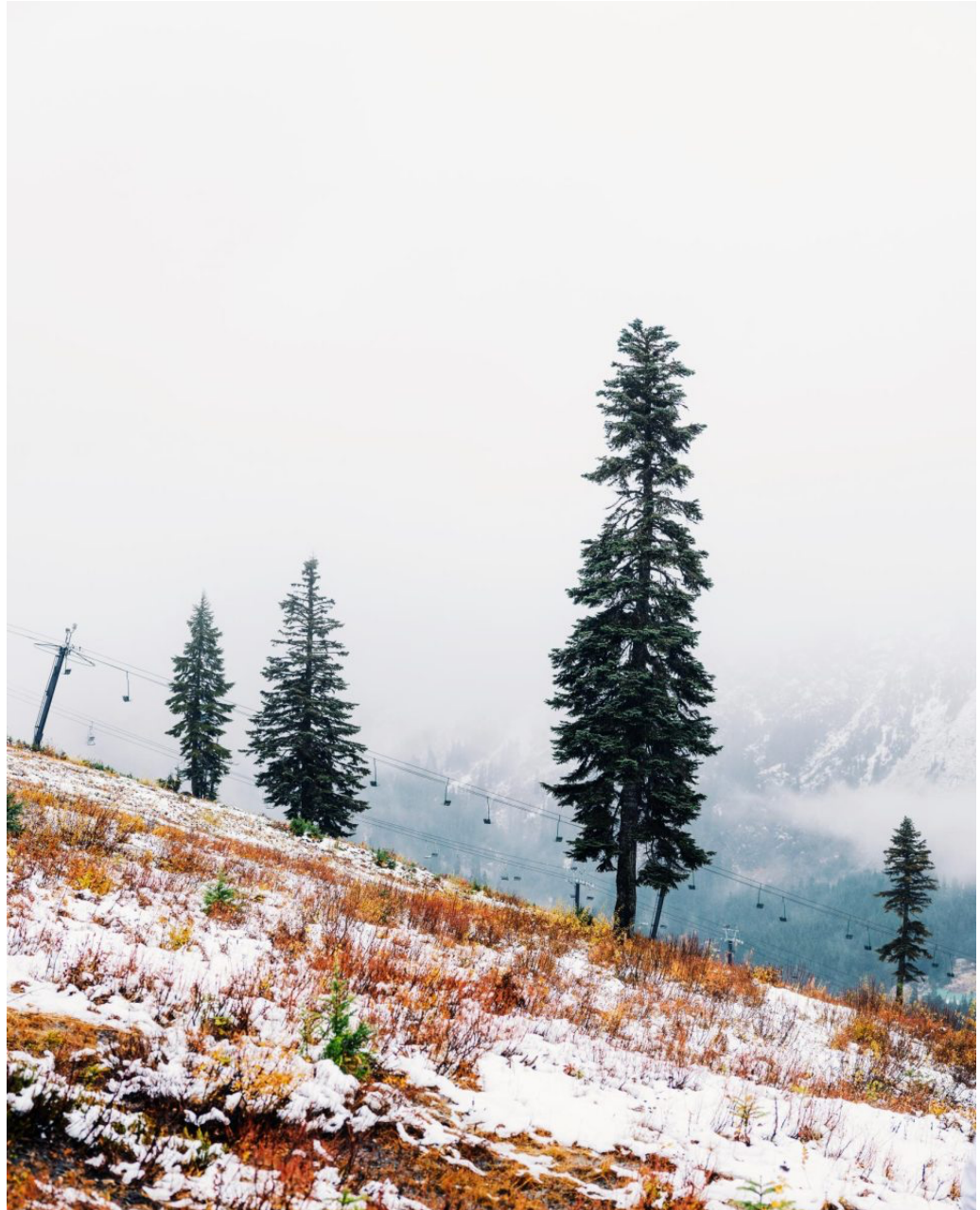
Moreover, UREC provides opportunities for participants who really enjoy outdoor trips to take a step up as leaders.

Coral Shafer, a fourth-year nursing major and UREC Outdoors trip leader, shared how she went from being a participant on these trips to leading them.

"I was a participant in UREC Outdoors trips for a while, and I was like, I could get paid to do the thing I love doing most. And what better way to make money is that?" Shafer said. "It was going to be a Snow Lake trip and now we're at a whole different lake. And I love that these trips pushed me to new places I've never been before."

This flexibility is not just about adapting to weather changes, but a reminder that exploration doesn't always go as planned, often making the trip more memorable. Shafer also talked about how UREC Outdoors offers experiences that meet everyone's skill level.

"We have trips that are super beginner-friendly, more



Ski lifts pictured on the mountain (Noelle Lee)

advanced ones, and

everything in between,” Shafer explained. “My advice is to try everything once, in general in life. I think one of the best things in life you can do is to do things that make you uncomfortable.”

The UREC Outdoors program encourages students to explore beyond their comfort zones, offering different trips such as hiking, rock climbing, kayaking or snowshoeing. Through this wide range of activities, the program ensures adventure for everyone, regardless of skill level and experience.

With midterms arriving and courseload picking up, I definitely felt the calming presence of the hike as well. During the hike, the thought of my upcoming math midterm and the essay I needed to write disappeared as I fully immersed myself in the scene, a refresher I did not know I needed.

Trekking back from the lake, the snowfall lightened, and conversation filled the air. Our group, which was initially a mix of strangers, had grown into a community of friendship. We hiked back through the snow-covered forests and streaming trails and headed back to the university.

For any students considering a UREC Outdoors trip, this experience offers more than just a chance to visit beautiful scenes; it is an invitation to join a fun community, face challenges and discover amazing Pacific Northwest landscapes.

Our journey to Lodge Lake was a reminder that a lot of our memorable moments stem from unexpected plans. For those who seek a break from school or just want an adventure, UREC Outdoors has a trip waiting for you on their website.