

**Paddling for Physical Education Points**  
**By Jennifer Pustz | MIT Health and Wellness Intern**

Watch the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riXcGydewmk>

Tucked in between Kendall Square's cluster of office and commercial buildings is a secret passage. Stacks of canoes and kayaks and the staff of Charles River Canoe and Kayak sit at the end of Broad Canal, just a short paddle from the Charles River. Even for regular visitors to Kendall Square, finding this hidden locale comes as a surprise. For MIT students enrolled in Kayak, it's also an unexpected adventure.

Kayak is offered as part of the Freshman Pre-Orientation Program through Outward Bound and as part of Physical Education's "Extreme PE" series through Charles River Canoe and Kayak. Thanks to New England's four seasons, Kayak is offered only in Quarters 1 and 4. Both the orientation program and class offer students skill and team building experiences and opportunities to see the cities of Boston and Cambridge from a unique vantage point.

Participants in the Freshman Pre-Orientation Program (FPOP) have the chance to dive right into their MIT experience. These students are brand new to campus but willing to spend these first days learning wilderness skills, how to pilot a kayak, and rescue procedures with a small group of complete strangers. But they aren't strangers for long and students quickly learn to work together as a team. Participating in individual sports was not unusual for Kye Burchard, but working out with others and paddling in two-person kayaks was something new. He learned "how much fun it can be to participate in activities with friends, even if they are hard physically." Liam Herdon also started the program preferring to work solo, but in the FPOP, "it was absolutely necessary to work as part of a group. It has thus encouraged me to become better at teamwork." This five-day immersion and exposure to new activities and people is often a powerful introduction to MIT. Grant Fuhr reflected, "I had never kayaked before this trip and I knew no one in the group. I learned to work together, motivate, and lead a group through arduous tasks. I had the time of my life on this trip. I never wanted it to end. It was the perfect end to my summer."

Only 20 students a year participate in the FPOP, but many more can experience similar magic on local waterways. The "Extreme PE" Kayak class is also something of an immersion experience. The class meets only three times, for three hours each session, but offers students a powerful dose of stress relief. Senior Skirmante Survilaitė chose to take Kayak because it is a hobby she is passionate about but finds hard to find time for while at MIT. She recalled, "It was something I genuinely looked forward to every week, and wished I could do every day. The class was a great way to do something fun and relaxing in a guilt-free way; that is, I could tell myself that I wasn't just going out to kayak for fun, but it was a class that I needed to graduate." Skirmante's enjoyment of the class translated into effective stress management and reminded her to take time to appreciate the world around her during other quiet moments, such as on her walk home.

Skirmante and the freshmen who kayaked during the FPOP all credit the class with teaching them lessons beyond those they may have anticipated. They all valued the physical activity and opportunity for fitness but also found the added bonus of teamwork experiences and stress management opportunities. All can be found at the end of a canal hidden in the urban landscape of Kendall Square.

**To learn more about Physical Education and "Extreme PE" at MIT, visit our website: [mitpe.mit.edu](http://mitpe.mit.edu).**