

# NOLS Instructor Course Information

The National Outdoor Leadership School's Instructor Courses are designed to train experienced outdoors people to be instructors at NOLS and at other wilderness-based outdoor education programs. This information sheet covers a range of topics relating to the instructor course: brief descriptions of our Instructor Courses, qualifications for applicants, the application and review process and timetable, and employment at NOLS. This information is meant to give a clear picture of the process and expectations involved in applying for and taking a NOLS instructor course. In addition we recommend that you review a current course catalog (or check out our web site) to gain an understanding of our overall mission and programs. If you have any questions after reading this information, please contact our admission office.

## A Profile of NOLS

NOLS is a private non-profit school focusing on experiential education in a wilderness setting. Our international headquarters is in Lander, Wyoming, with nine branch schools located in Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Yukon Territory, Washington, Wyoming, Mexico (Baja), Australia/New Zealand, and Chile (Patagonia.) We also have programs in Utah, India, Brazil, British Columbia, and Scandinavia. NOLS offers 70+ course types in wilderness areas worldwide for students from ages 14 to over 50. On our courses, instructors take groups of novices into remote wilderness settings for extended periods of time. In addition to student courses, we run trips for alumni, conferences and seminars on wilderness related educational topics, sponsor an extensive staff training program, conduct research and produce publications on environmental conservation, wilderness skills, risk management and leadership.

Yearly we enroll 3,000+ students and employ approximately 500 instructors and 150+ full-time and part-time administrative and support service staff. We have more than 75,000 graduates and have certified almost 2000 instructors since our founding in 1965. We are actively seeking to diversify our students, instructors, and administration, and we have a scholarship program for women and minorities to directly support this goal.

## What is the Instructor Course?

The Instructor Course (IC) is specifically designed for people interested in working as field instructors for NOLS. Other outdoor programs value employment applications from IC graduates. (Please note: the IC is not designed for novices; it is designed to teach people with extensive experience how to teach to novices in a wilderness expedition setting.) ICs are intensive training experiences in outdoor education, and all of them include an in-depth review and expansion of our "core curriculum" in five fundamental areas: Risk Management and Judgment, Leadership and Expedition Behavior, Outdoor Skills, Environmental Ethics, and Wilderness Education Skills. The various ICs differ in the technical skills addressed, location, and environment. What follows is a brief summary of each IC. More detailed course descriptions for each are available from our admission department.

### **Mountain Instructor Courses (SIC, ICS, PNIC, AKIC)**

Run in Wyoming, Arizona, Washington and Alaska, this five-week IC emphasizes multi-week wilderness mountain backpacking and technical climbing skills. The packs are heavy, and the days are long. This is the IC to take in order to begin working our Wilderness (backpacking) courses. In addition, the Instructor Courses in Wyoming and Arizona include focused rock climbing training, while the Alaska and Pacific Northwest courses include extensive glacier mountaineering travel.

### **River Instructor Course (RICU)**

Based out of Vernal, Utah, this IC is scheduled for April and May and goes on several multi-day river trips in canoes, kayaks, and paddle and oar rafts. The RIC floats sections of the Green, White and Yampa Rivers in Colorado and Utah; the watercraft skills focus is roughly 20% canoe, 40% raft, and 40% kayak. The RIC includes canoe, kayak, and raft curriculums, river rescue training, and the NOLS core curriculum.

### **Yukon Instructor Course (YIC)**

This course will be based out of Whitehorse and take place in the Alpine Mountains and Rivers of the Yukon Territory of Canada. This course will balance NOLS core curriculum with rugged mountain travel and whitewater canoeing. Refining whitewater canoeing, swift-water rescue skills, mountain travel skills and teaching skills will be a focus of this 35-day course.

### **Sea Kayak Instructor Course (KIC)**

Starting in mid-April and based out of Conway, Washington this course will sea kayak amongst the waterways surrounding Campbell and Calvert Islands before crossing Fitz Hugh Sound. This course will train and evaluate teaching, risk management and sea kayak skills.

### **Sailing Instructor Course (BSIC)**

Our Mexico Branch near Mulege on the Gulf of California, Baja California Sur, hosts this IC in late November. The program uses 20-foot Drascombe longboats. This 35-day course is designed to help competent sailors refine their risk management, sailing and teaching skills to fit into the NOLS educational philosophy.



### **Instructor Course For Experienced Professionals (PIC)**

Each May and September, we run this course in Wyoming. We use this course to train staff with extensive wilderness-based experience from other outdoor programs to work for NOLS. It emphasizes wilderness backpacking and climbing/mountaineering skills. The minimum requirements are that you are 25 years of age, have a WFR or EMT certification, have significant personal experience, and have *worked at least 30 weeks on extended wilderness trips as a professional educator*. There is a separate application packet for the PIC, so please be sure to request it if you meet these qualifications. Contact the NOLS admission office for more information.

### **Instructor Course for Experienced River Professionals (PICR)**

This course is based out of Vernal, Utah and will travel in kayaks and rafts through Desolation and Lodore canyons on the Green River. Running in August and September, it is designed for river professionals with strong kayak and raft experience. The minimum requirements are that you are 25 years of age, have a WFR or EMT certification, and have 5 seasons (a season being 3 months) of commercial river guiding experience.

## **Qualifications for Applicants**

NOLS was founded to develop expedition leaders and responsible wilderness users. Our faculty lies at the very heart of this mission. We attract enthusiastic women and men who are not only technically skilled, but whose focus is on teaching wilderness skills and leadership to our students. Admission to the Instructor Course is a selective process. We look at an applicant's overall experience, skills and past performance in making our selections for the Instructor Courses.

**Age:** Minimum is 21 at the start of your course. (IC participants average 27 years old, and NOLS field staff average 32.)

### **Medical Training:**

- **You must possess current CPR and Wilderness Medicine certification** meeting our minimum standard (see below.)
- Both **certifications must expire after August 31** of the year in which you take the IC. If your certifications will expire before then, a letter confirming enrollment in a recertification course is required with your application.
- **If you are not certified** at our minimum standard, a letter confirming enrollment in such a course, to be completed (and certification received) prior to the start of the IC to which you are applying, is required with your application.
- **Our minimum standard:** a **wilderness** medicine certification for at least **72** hours of instruction.
- We **prefer** Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certification or Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician (W-EMT) certification from the Wilderness Medicine Institute.
- **The Wilderness Medicine Institute (WMI) is an institute of NOLS.** We offer courses throughout the Rockies and Western U.S., and in several other countries. If you are in need of a wilderness medicine course, please check our schedule at <http://www.nols.edu/wmi>.
- Urban emergency response or first responder certification are not sufficient for working as a NOLS instructor, as they do not train you to implement the NOLS Field Treatment Protocol. WMI does provide a Wilderness Upgrade for the Medical Professional course (54 hours), which converts an EMT certification to W-EMT and an Urban First Responder to WFR.
- Contact the NOLS admission office if you have questions, at 800-710-6657.

### **Teaching, Leadership, and Communication:**

Instructor candidates must possess and model maturity and effective group interaction skills with peers and students alike. You must be both conversant in and able to write effectively in English. You must have a strong desire to teach and lead novices, who make up the majority of students in outdoor education. We are looking for demonstrated teaching and leadership experience - most applicants have previous experience (one or more seasons) in positions where they have professionally coordinated, taught, and/or led outdoor trips. The more this experience involves being on extended wilderness trips, the more relevant and valuable that it is.

### **Risk Management and Judgment:**

Our instructors take groups of novices into remote wilderness settings for extended periods of time. You must have experience in the recognition and evaluation of potential hazards and in making sound judgments based on safety priorities. You also must have experience in managing individuals and groups and in understanding their abilities and limitations as well as your own. You need to be in excellent physical condition and have enough skill and energy to help others during travel through difficult terrain, in challenging weather, over long tiring days.

### **Personal Expeditioning:**

Personal trips and expeditions give you the experience to plan, organize and successfully carry out trips without institutional support and guidance. They also reflect a personal commitment to exploring and enjoying the wilderness on your own. Experience on trips of two weeks or longer is desirable because it begins to approach the duration and feel of long expeditionary NOLS courses.

### **Travel and Camping:**

You must have solid backcountry navigation, travel, and camping skills. These should be based on extensive wilderness experience in varied environments. Conservation and Leave No Trace habits must be impeccable.



## Technical Skills Required/ Desired

### **Mountain ICs:**

- You **must** have extensive off-trail/wilderness/mountain backpacking and camping experience. Some of this experience should be in very remote places, some should be at high altitude (above treeline/10,000+ ft), and ideally some should be in the mountains of the western U.S.
- The ability to set-up and supervise a top rope climbing situation **is desired**.
- The ability to lead and supervise novice climbers in 4th and 5th class terrain **is desired**: technical rope and protection system skills to set up fixed ropes, running belays, and other technical aids to travel are desired. Lead climbing at about a 5.6 (or above) level **is desired**.
- Technical mountaineering experience **is desired**.
- *Glacier experience is **highly desired** for the AK IC.*

### **River IC:**

- You **must** have extensive canoe, raft and/or kayak instruction or guiding experience.
- You **must** be a solid Class III kayaker and rafter, and Class IV kayaking and rafting experience is **desired**.
- You **must** be a solid Class II tandem open canoe boater (OC2), and Class III OC2 skills are **desired**.
- You **must** have some multi-day wilderness river experience, and extensive experience is **highly desired**.
- Swiftwater/Whitewater Rescue training and certification is **desired**.

### **Sea Kayak IC:**

- You **must** be personally experienced in conditions up to 15-knot winds and 3-ft waves on all points of paddle.
- You **must** have extensive sea kayak instruction or guiding experience; cold- water and or open coast paddling experience is **desired**.
- You **must** have some multi-day sea kayak experience, and extensive multi-day experience is **highly desired**.
- Familiarity with surf landing procedures and the ability to negotiate mild surf landings (<2 ft.) is **highly desired**.
- The ability to perform single and double self- and assisted- rescues in 15-knot winds and 3 ft. waves is **highly desired**.

## Other Skills/Experience:

Besides all the above mentioned skill areas, we are also interested in other skills you may have which are not part of most instructor courses such as sailing, caving, backcountry skiing, winter camping, and wilderness horse-packing.

## **The Application Process:**

### 1) Self-screening:

Review the above qualification information as well as the extensive application and decide whether your skill and experience meet the guidelines stated. Decide whether your experience sets you up to excel on a NOLS IC. If not, before applying to the IC, consider either taking a different NOLS course or taking other opportunities to gain more experience and training.

### 2) Obtain an Application Packet from the NOLS admission office. Either:

- Download the application from our website [www.nols.edu](http://www.nols.edu)
- Call in your IC application request: **800-710-6657**
- Email your IC application request: [admissions@nols.edu](mailto:admissions@nols.edu)

### 3) NOLS reviews your completed application:

	<u>Application Deadline</u>	<u>Notification Date</u>
Main Review For All ICs:	January 4, 2010	Early To Mid-February
Sailing IC Only: Completion.	Rolling (Recommended to apply by Sept.)	Within 1 Month Of Your Application's

### 4) Scholarship Information:

Our scholarship program is designed to assist those who show potential to forward the mission of the school and who, without financial assistance, would be unable to attend. It also assists us in our goal to diversify our students and staff. For 2008, awards ranged from \$500 to full tuition (though a full tuition scholarship is rare.) Approximately 60% of Instructor Course students received a scholarship. The scholarship application comes with the application packet.



## Common Questions:

### • What if I'm just starting out in outdoor education?

The information provided in this letter is designed to aid you in evaluating your own qualifications for the Instructor Course. If you are interested in becoming a NOLS instructor as your first step in pursuing work in outdoor education, chances are your skills and experience are inadequate for selection. You might first consider a NOLS Outdoor Educator course or one of our more technical skill courses such as mountaineering. If you are interested in a NOLS course in order to pursue an outdoor education career elsewhere, we recommend you consider our Outdoor Educator or Trip Leader courses.

### • Are NOLS graduates favored over non-grads?

No. Although about 50% of our IC participants are NOLS graduates, anyone with a solid outdoor resume and excellent references is invited to apply. It is important to note that graduation from a NOLS course alone is not adequate background for an instructor course, and graduates accepted on an IC have additional experience.

### • What determines whether I pass the Instructor Course and am recommended for hire at NOLS?

Your performance and evaluation. Your instructors, senior NOLS field staff, evaluate your performance throughout the course. Feedback is ongoing and focuses on your ability to perform technical skills to acceptable standards, your ability to function as a group member and effectively lead your peers, your teaching skills, and your overall competence as an outdoor educator. You receive an extensive written evaluation covering all areas at the conclusion of the IC.

### • What are my opportunities for work after completing the Instructor Course?

Over the 2007 and 2008 seasons, all IC graduates who had open availability were offered summertime work for NOLS. There are typically opportunities for graduates of the April, May, and June ICs to work during the same summer as their IC, although many graduates wait to begin their NOLS careers until the following summer season (one year after their IC). 2009 was a more challenging year for work due to the economy. As a result only about half of the IC graduates were able to work immediately after their IC in the same summer. The rest of those IC graduates will likely begin working for the school in the summer of 2010.

“Off-season” work in the fall, winter, and spring seasons is offered to our more senior instructors first. Most new instructors work two summer seasons prior to receiving regular “off-season” work. Individuals with outstanding experience or potential may have the opportunity to start “off-season” work sooner. Sometimes new staff members who have flexible schedules are able to accept late-notice field work opportunities that come up during the off-season. Additionally, some field staff combine in-town support work with field instruction.

### • Is it possible to work for NOLS in the summer only?

Yes. Because the majority of our courses occur in June, July, and August, there is a strong need for experienced instructors in that season. Many NOLS instructors are professionals in other jobs and are only able to work one or two courses a year in their specialty area. Some instructors are students in the off-season. Instructors with summer-only schedules are an important part of our faculty.

### • Can I apply for the Instructor Course without paying the \$65 registration fee? I intend on applying for a scholarship and would probably need one to attend.

Due to the extremely large number of applicants we have, we require that applicants pay when applying in order to demonstrate their commitment and intent to attend if selected. When an IC applicant is notified of acceptance to the IC, he or she is also offered a scholarship, if applicable. The scholarship reduces the amount of tuition due.

### • What are the wages and benefits for instructors?

Wages are based on seniority and position. Most new staff will work their first course in a training position earning \$65/day although some IC graduates may qualify to start at \$74/day. As staff move through the initial training role and gain experience, wages quickly increase. Field staff wages are typically raised across the board each year, and an individual instructor's wages changes at regular seniority intervals. Extensive experience with other organizations typically bumps your starting wages as well, especially for graduates of the Professional Instructor Course (PIC). Our most senior faculty earn about \$175/day when they work as the head instructor on a course. Health insurance benefits are offered for those working 15 weeks or more per year. In addition, travel allowances, subsidized training opportunities, equipment pro-purchase benefits, and family discounts for courses are all available.

### • What are the career opportunities at NOLS?

The employment possibilities offered by NOLS allow tremendous flexibility. A number of our instructors have maintained professional non-NOLS careers while working for NOLS as their schedule allows. Others have been at the school for years and work year-round in the field. Still others have taken opportunities for advancement to full-time salaried positions that combine administrative and field work, while others have developed an administrative career. Seventy-five percent of NOLS managers and branch directors are instructors, and over half of the full-time, in-town staff are instructors. As you develop seniority as a field instructor, more options become available.



**To Receive An Instructor Course Application Packet Please Return The Following Form To NOLS**

I have read the information on Instructor Courses and believe I'm a qualified applicant.

Please send me an Instructor Course application packet.

Please send me a PIC application packet

I don't have a current copy of the NOLS catalog - please send me one.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

NOLS Graduate?  Yes  No If yes, course and date: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about NOLS? \_\_\_\_\_

**NOLS**

Admissions Office

**284 Lincoln Street**

**Lander, WY 82520**

Phone: 800 710 6657

[admissions@nols.edu](mailto:admissions@nols.edu)

