

NOLS Professional Instructor Course Information (PIC)

The National Outdoor Leadership School's Instructor Courses are designed to train experienced outdoor adventurers to be instructors at NOLS and other wilderness based outdoor education programs. While focusing on the PIC, this information sheet covers a range of topics relating to NOLS, all the instructor courses, the application and review process, and employment at NOLS. It is meant to give a clear picture of the process and expectations involved in applying for and taking the NOLS PIC. In addition we recommend that you review a current course catalog to gain an understanding of our overall mission and programs.

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, swiftwater 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 occasionally in August, 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 remote 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.

A More Detailed Description Of The PIC

- 16 days long. There are one and a half days in-town at both the beginning and end, and 13 days of backpacking and climbing in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming or 13 days on the rivers.
- The course will meet with several administrative staff during the initial in-town time to cover NOLS history, our mission, staffing office structure and methods, expectations that you can have as an employee, further staff training programs and other benefits, what NOLS is doing to promote a positive learning environment on courses, and how risk is managed institutionally at NOLS, along with other topics. You will also get an introduction to the various facilities and departments that comprise the NOLS operations in Lander.
- The PIC typically has a short base camp (4 days) at a climbing crag near the edge of the mountains at the start or end of the course. At minimum, you will cover and practice all the skills and topics involved in teaching and supervising novice students in top-rope climbing and rappelling in a backcountry setting. Ideally, there will be time to cover further climbing topics during this time, and you should expect some 3rd and 4th class climbing and snow climbing opportunities during the course. If you have a strong experience base in high angle rock climbing you will have the opportunity to have your skills assessed and time/weather permitting may be recommended for work in this course type at NOLS.
- Your pack will be heavy for several travel days: odds are that the group will not be re-rationed in the mountains, which means you will be carrying 10+ days of food when the course leaves for the field.
- Your instructors will review NOLS standards and practices in a many areas: Leave No Trace practices, river crossings, climbing, medical protocols, evacuations, bear camping, student leadership progressions, course paperwork, and feedback and evaluation concerns, etc.
- You and your fellow students will present several classes each on topics from fishing to knots to natural history to leadership and communication. We want to see you teach, and we want each student to participate in making the course content and curriculum full.
- Each student will have several leadership opportunities during daily travel or activities. We want to see you in a leadership role, and we want each student to have the chance to shape some aspect of the course.
- Many discussions started by the instructors covering NOLS practices will evolve into students sharing their perspectives and backgrounds on the same topics.
- Early on, the instructors will check in with the group and individually with each student regarding expectations, goals, anxieties, and prior experience. Individual feedback will be ongoing, and the instructors will check in various times with participants regarding how the course is progressing, and how each student is doing, etc. Each student will get a thorough oral and written evaluation at the end of the course.
- During the one and a half days in-town at the end of the course, you will clean and de-issue gear, meet as a group with an administrator to debrief the PIC, and meet individually with a Staffing Coordinator.
- Your meals are covered from breakfast on the first day through lunch on the final day. You will get a bunk in the student dorm the night of the orientation meeting, the next night, and the night the course ends.
- Group equipment (stoves, tents, cook gear, ropes, etc) are covered by your tuition. If you choose to use other NOLS gear, rather than your own, you will not be charged for items which can be rented by "regular" students - we want to encourage you to use the gear (packs, sleeping bags, wind pants, etc) we issue to our students if you are unfamiliar with it. You are welcome to purchase gear (water bottles, sun glasses, long underwear, etc) from our outfitting department that is not available for rent.



- The whole idea is that the PIC prepares you to work for NOLS. You and your fellow students will come with extensive prior professional outdoor education experience. We want all students to have a great PIC, and begin working for NOLS. We expect you to be able to begin working with NOLS at a much higher level than regular IC grads.

Qualifications for Applicants

Because we expect applicants to be professional outdoor educators, admission criteria are strict.

The qualifications we look for in applicants include:

- Extensive time in the field as an instructor/leader/guide with multi-day *wilderness based* outdoor education programs. By “extensive” we mean a minimum of 30+ field weeks (7 field days = 1 field week), although most candidates have significantly more than 30 professional weeks, and/or have extensive personal experience as well. Since the prerequisite has recently been changed from 60 weeks to 30 weeks, we will only count work that has been at least one week of backcountry travel towards the required 30 weeks. (A support or administrative position with an outdoor program does not add to your field weeks, although it may add depth in other areas of your resume.) We ask that these weeks be verified by a supervisor at the program(s) where you worked via a letter of recommendation.
- A broad base of proven expertise in general outdoor skills utilized at NOLS (backpacking, mountain travel, wilderness camping, etc.), plus at least one additional field (utilized at NOLS) or skill in which you have extensive experience (e.g., natural history, mountaineering, rock climbing, sea kayaking, sailing, river running, etc.)
- The ability to set-up and supervise a backcountry top-rope climbing site (sites to which you have not been before, at which you will need to check the cliff for appropriate routes and possible hazards, and at which you will need to build the anchors with artificial protection.)
- Significant personal experience in outdoor pursuits (i.e. non-work, non-training related private wilderness trips, expeditions, outings, etc.) NOLS wants sailing staff who are avid sailors, climbing staff who are avid climbers, paddling staff who are avid paddlers, winter program staff who are avid backcountry skiers, etc.
- Outstanding risk management record as an instructor.
- Demonstrated excellence in leadership, teaching and group dynamics.
- Experience supervising other instructors.
- Excellent physical health: most NOLS courses are out for extended periods in remote locations. Our staff need to be able to carry heavy loads, deal with strenuous travel, and be able to look after tired students during hard and long days in harsh weather.
- Current first aid certification: WFR or WEMT and CPR (the application has more detailed information.)
- Minimum age: 25

When we review your application and resume, we will also be trying to determine whether or not you are a good match for the different programs and operating areas at NOLS. Here are questions we'll consider:

- Why do you want to work for NOLS?
- Does your resume show you to be consistently moving into new skills areas, new responsibilities, new challenges? We want staff that are constantly learning and growing.
- Where have you worked and played and how does this match with our areas of operation? (For example, if you've only backpacked in the southeast US - even for 100+ weeks - you will not necessarily be a good match for NOLS programs in the mountains of the western US.)
- If you are a climber, do you spend most of your personal climbing time doing multi-pitch routes with traditional gear protection, or sport climbing? We want staff that do the former.
- If you are a river boater (canoe, kayak or raft), how much of your experience is on day-trips vs. multi-day trips? The more multi-day river experience you have, the better.
- If the majority of your professional resume is guiding, we want to see that there was a strong educational component to your work as a guide.



Common Questions

- **What determines whether I pass the PIC and am recommended for hire at NOLS?**

Your participation, performance, and evaluation. Your instructors, some of NOLS' most senior field instructors, will evaluate your performance throughout the course. Feedback is ongoing, and focuses on your ability to function as a group member and effectively lead your peers, your teaching skills, your ability to perform technical skills to acceptable standards, and your overall competence as an outdoor educator. You will receive a written evaluation covering all areas. We expect everyone who attends the PIC to pass, although this unfortunately is not always the case.

- **What are my opportunities for work after completing the PIC?**

Most who work usually begin the following summer season, although there are some opportunities for “off-season” work immediately after the PIC for those with applicable skills and experience. Further staff training opportunities may also be available in the fall, winter and spring that could lead to work in other programs areas (skiing, sea kayaking, sailing, rivers, etc.) in the “off-season.”

- **Can I apply for the PIC without paying the \$65 application fee?**

No. Due to the time involved in reviewing PIC applications, we require that applicants pay the application fee to demonstrate their commitment and intent to attend if selected.

- **Can I get a reduction in the price of the PIC?**

No. The tuition of \$300 is as low as we can afford. The PIC is heavily subsidized by NOLS, and the revenues generated cover only about 25% of the direct overhead.

- **What are the wages and benefits for instructors?**

Wages are based on seniority and position. Base wages for the 2009 summer season ranged from \$65.00/day (training role) to \$178.00/day for our most senior staff. During the off-season base wages are slightly lower. We are slated to have another wage increase in 2010 and wage increases occur at least every other year. NOLS has a mechanism for recognizing professional experience from other schools, called “ROPE” (Recognition of Professional Experience.) Using ROPE, most PIC grads enter the NOLS pay scale at either the Intermediate level (30-59 weeks) or as Level I Senior Staff (60-99 weeks). Most PIC grads should expect to begin working at the “patrol leader” (PL) position, which has a higher level of responsibility than our entry level “instructor” (I) position. In 2009, a patrol leader (PL) with 30 weeks made \$80 a day and a PL with 60 weeks made \$88/day. Each NOLS course is supervised by a Course Leader (CL), with one or more co-leaders working under them. As you gain experience and begin to CL—which typically does not take too long for PIC grads—your wages would increase by about \$25/day. Your wages will also increase at regular seniority intervals (Level II at 100 weeks, Level III at 150 weeks, etc.) Additionally certain course types receive pay bumps such as sailing courses, some mountaineering courses, and our adventure courses (14-15 years old). Health insurance benefits are offered for those working a minimum of 15 weeks per year. In addition, training opportunities, equipment benefits, and family discounts for courses are all available.

- **Is it possible to work for NOLS in the summer only?**

Yes. Because the majority of our courses occur in the summer, 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. Others are college or graduate students. Instructors with summer only schedules are an important part of our faculty.

- **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 at NOLS to full-time salaried positions that combine administrative and field work, while others have developed an administrative career. Many NOLS managers and branch directors are former instructors, and over half of the full-time, in-town staff are former instructors. As you develop seniority as a field instructor, more options become available.



The Application Process:

Obtain a PIC application packet by contacting admissions. Complete and return it to NOLS along with a non-refundable \$65 application fee.

- 1) The application packet contains the following:
 - a) PIC Application Form (2 pages)
 - b) A detailed questionnaire, which we ask that you answer on separate paper. We also ask that you send us an outdoor resume.
 - c) Three Letters of Recommendation for you to distribute. One must be from your primary supervisor at the program where the majority of your work in outdoor education has taken place, one from any other supervisor of yours in outdoor education, and one from a co-worker. We encourage you to follow up on these letters with their writers; it is your responsibility to make sure they have been sent to us.
- 2) You must also send in a photocopy of your first aid and CPR certifications before we will review your application.
- 3) We then review your application and notify you of our decision. Based on this process, we decide who is offered enrollment, and who is offered a spot on the wait list. If we feel that you are not qualified for the PIC, we will discuss the possibility of you taking a regular IC, as well as the possibility of receiving a scholarship to participate in that course.
- 4) Once you have been offered enrollment, you will be mailed an enrollment packet. The tuition of \$300 is due 14 days after you receive your enrollment packet. After receiving your tuition, we will send you a comprehensive PIC information packet that includes NOLS textbooks and field staff notebooks.
- 5) Once paid, your tuition of \$300 will be subject to the regular NOLS cancellation policies for tuition: for cancellation between 15 and 29 days prior to the course start date NOLS will retain 25%; for cancellation between 8 and 14 days prior NOLS will retain 50%; for cancellation less than 8 days prior to the course start date there will be no refund.

PIC Timeline For 2010

PIC	May 21 – June 5
PIC - (Fall)	August PIC cancelled for 2010
PICR - (River)	River PIC cancelled for 2010

Applications for the PIC are reviewed on a rolling basis. Applicants will be notified by mail within a month of their complete application being received by NOLS.

Questions?

For general info about NOLS, the various ICs, the PIC, catalog requests, etc:

NOLS Admission Office
284 Lincoln Street
Lander, WY 82520
800.710.6657
Fax: 307.332.1220
admissions@nols.edu

For specific questions regarding the PIC qualifications or application process contact the NOLS Training Manager at:

1.800.622.6686
training@nols.edu

The PIC Application packet can also be downloaded from our web site at this address:
http://www.nols.edu/courses/pdf/admissionforms/pic_app.pdf



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

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

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

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