

Course Description

Semester On The Borders

Features of This Course:

- Average Group Size: 10 Students / 2-4 Instructors
- Typical Male/Female Ratio: 50/50
- Elevations From Sea Level To 10,000 ft.
- Minimum Age: 17
- Average Age: 20
- Average Pack Weight: 45-50 pounds
- Wide diversity of environments
- Wilderness First Aid (16 hrs) from the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS
- Hiking section in the Galiuro or Gila Wilderness
- Rock climbing at Cochise Stronghold
- Sea kayaking the central coast of British Columbia
- Sailing in Strait of Georgia, British Columbia

The Expedition

The Semester on the Borders is split between the NOLS Southwest and NOLS Pacific Northwest program areas. It's a diverse semester involving 86 days outdoors exploring two distinct environments—the desert Southwest and the lush coast of the Northwest. Your adventures will take you from the canyons and peaks of Arizona to British Columbia's spectacular steep fjords and offshore islands. You may find yourself jamming your hands and feet into granite cracks or gazing at whales breaching the surface of an isolated bay. You'll watch the rain from under a fly, sleep out under the stars, explore ruins of prehistoric civilizations and wander along expanses of isolated beaches. You'll be challenged hiking with a heavy pack in steep, rocky terrain, but you'll also enjoy the untouched nature of remote wild areas. This semester is an action-packed, educational expedition that provides the diverse skills and experience necessary to travel in a variety of remote places long after the end of your course.

The semester is comprised of five different sections. These sections, which last from a few days up to three weeks, include; Wilderness First Aid, backpacking, rock climbing, sea kayaking, and keelboat sailing. Between each section, the course will reorganize and prepare for the next section at either a campground or one of the NOLS locations. You'll end each semester section with a comprehensive student evaluation.

The transitions between sections are organized efficiently to allow us to maximize our time in skill development in remote settings. A minimum of time will be spent in town reorganizing gear, meeting new instructors, and doing personal laundry or other errands. This is also the time when mail is received, telephones and the internet are accessible, and you may even bask in a little free time.

You'll have different instructors working each section in order to have the most qualified NOLS staff for each particular skill area. In an effort to provide consistency we will endeavor to staff at least one instructor on multiple sections to provide a key link with the NOLS community.

While you are camping, you'll live with two or three other students in a cook group. These small groups help disperse the impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor, then—once you know the necessities of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation—students will hike in small groups on their own.

Semester On the Borders Sections

Wilderness First Aid

The first two and a half days of your semester will be spent participating in a Wilderness First Aid course taught by the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS. Fast paced and hands-on, this course covers a wide range of wilderness medicine topics for people who travel and work in the outdoors. This course is pre-approved by such organizations as the American Camping Association, the United States Forest Service, and other governmental agencies. Those with previous training may



also use it for wilderness medicine recertification. We recertify current cards from the following organizations only: WMI-NOLS, SOLO, and WMA.

Galiuro or Gila Wilderness

This hiking section will take place in the Galiuro Wilderness of Arizona or the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico. During this section you'll practice outdoor living skills, wilderness travel techniques, minimum-impact camping, leadership, and teamwork.

If you head to the Galiuro, you will hike through one of the many mountain ranges called "sky islands." This name comes from the fact that these ranges are isolated pockets of alpine vegetation and lush forests surrounded by desert basins. Here you will hike through ponderosa pine, oak, and manzanita while looking out over beautiful deserts below. Water can be scarce and it may be necessary to carry it from camp to camp.

If you are heading to the Gila Wilderness you will be embarking on an exciting adventure spent exploring the first federally designated wilderness area in the United States. This is home to an unusual diversity of plants and animals that range from desert-adapted species to those more commonly found in northern latitudes. The human history of the Gila dates back thousands of years, to the time when it was the home of the Mogollon civilization. Evidence of these prehistoric cultures can be found while traveling through the area. The Gila also served as a refuge for Geronimo and his band of Apaches.

Rock Climbing

The climbing section will be spent exploring either Cochise Stronghold or Joshua Tree National Park, two of the best climbing areas in the country. The focus of the section is on developing, competent and confident climbers. You'll concentrate on a series of skills that begin with basic risk management and movement on rock, rope handling, and knot tying and then progresses to belaying, top roping, multi-pitch climbing, rappelling, anchors, and protection placement. Each student has the opportunity to progress at his or her own speed. The instructors emphasize developing a positive attitude toward climbing that will help you build upon your own natural abilities. If students are ready, there may be opportunities to practice lead climbing. NOLS has set standards by which we evaluate each student's readiness and ability before allowing them to lead climb.

The emphasis on leadership will continue on this section in the form of personal leadership. You'll be encouraged to set appropriate goals and to work hard to accomplish those goals whether it's to learn how to place protection, set up a top rope anchor or even learn to lead climb. Your efforts will help dictate whether you accomplish these goals.

During non-climbing days you might be resting your muscles, but you'll likely stay active. Whether it's learning cliff rescue techniques around base camp, bird watching or going for a hike among the many granite domes, there is always something to do.

Other popular activities on this section either before or after climbing are stretching, yoga, jogging with other students or instructors, and learning to base camp in style so when you're ready to go on that climbing road trip after your course, you have all the skills you need to live comfortably.

Mid-Course Shuttle Flight

After the completion of your rock climbing section, you'll return to NOLS Southwest to clean and de-issue gear. The next day you'll board a plane destined for NOLS Pacific Northwest in Washington State. A NOLS staff member will accompany your group during the trip to NOLS Pacific Northwest.

Sea Kayaking

This section of your semester takes you north to the waters of British Columbia's central coast, visiting pristine sandy beaches and tidal lagoons. We use single and double sea kayaks, usually in equal numbers on a section. On travel days we get up before dawn, travel a few hours, then have sit-down or practical classes on kayaking, natural history, leadership, and expedition skills. On windy days we'll practice rough water kayak skills if conditions allow and/or we'll shift landward and explore tide-pools and shorelines.

The weather plays a big role here and can range from calm and sunny to wet and windy. You'll learn the patterns of climate changes and plan your travel accordingly. In addition, tides and currents dictate when we travel and where we choose to camp. Watching the weather, judging wind and wave conditions, and learning about the ability and strength of your group are what seamanship is all about.



The course will paddle through the ancestral home to many First Nation peoples of British Columbia. This island archipelago has seen travel and trade routes for many centuries. It is home to wolves, sea lions, whales and a plethora of flora and fauna associated with a temperate coastal environment.

Sailing

British Columbia's Gulf Islands at the northern reaches of the Strait of Georgia will be your classroom on this section. A full curriculum of new skills beginning with terminology, rigging, knots, sail trim, helmsmanship, tacks and jibes, builds on skills from the previous section. You will learn anchoring techniques and considerations, marine radio use, and how to deal with fog and stormy weather. Periods of calm offer opportunity to learn and practice boat handling under engine power. Prudent sailing practices and drills in crew overboard procedures will minimize the risks of sailing in these cold waters. Your land map and navigation experience will be the starting point for developing coastal piloting skills.

There will be a NOLS Instructor and five students on each of the three cruising sailboats (approximately 36' in length). You'll bring to this section a wealth of experience developed in the mountains. Teamwork and "expedition behavior" skills are as crucial in the boat as they are in a storm-bound tent. You'll continue to refine your leadership and decision making-ability as "First Mate" of the day.

Life and travel on the sea will lend another perspective to tidal phenomena as we work with the strong tidal currents often found among the islands. In the evening you will plot a passage and see it become reality. The ship's logbook, maintained by the crew of each vessel, will record navigation and weather data and serve as a workbook to enhance the learning process.

NOLS reserves the right to make changes to course area locations due to unforeseen circumstances such as forest fires, permit restrictions and/or other unusual circumstances.

Weather and Other Challenges

The Southwest is host to extremes in temperature and weather conditions. Though warm mild weather is more typical, students should expect anything from monsoon rains and extreme heat, to snow, wind and subfreezing temperatures. During the months of March and April, subfreezing temperatures are common in the mountains, especially at night. Sometimes these weather changes occur in a matter of minutes, other times storms or cold temperatures can last for days. There will be times when you are cold, wet and tired, but you'll learn to thrive in these situations. You might even find yourself smiling while you do. In time, your personal adaptation to varied conditions will help you understand and appreciate the remarkable flora and fauna that make the Southwest such a special environment.

The Pacific Northwest also has a wide range of weather, everything from fog and drizzle to hot and sunny. On the Pacific Ocean our weather patterns are dictated mostly by the presence of El Nino or La Nina, the warm and cold-water masses that relocate in the Pacific Ocean periodically. El Nino brings stormy weather to the west coast and La Nina sends a milder weather pattern.

Physical challenges of the semester include backpacking both on and off trail in steep rugged terrain. Spring courses in the Galiuros or Gila might find themselves periodically hiking in snow. Rock climbing is taught on vertical cliffs and the approaches are often over steep rocky terrain. In all the areas traveled in the Southwest during the semester, numerous species of sharp spiny plants are common. Rattlesnakes and scorpions are some of the potentially harmful animals that students will learn to recognize and avoid. In the Northwest, mountain lions, bears, slippery rocks and cold-water immersion can be encountered. These hazards and challenges are not meant to intimidate you, but they are the reality of living and traveling in the wilderness.

Identifying and managing hazards—whether we're talking about ocean currents, falling rocks, avoiding contact with the sailboat boom, stormy weather, surf zones, animals, moving water or steep terrain—will be a constant theme in our instruction. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful places healthy and fun.

One challenge that is difficult to imagine, but is perhaps the most important, is the challenge of learning, working and living with the same people day in and day out. You'll become very close to your fellow expedition members and most likely you'll form some long lasting friendships. Expedition Behavior, the ability to get along with all members of the group and function



as a team, is a vital component of the NOLS curriculum and the semester experience. This aspect of the course will be a continuing theme throughout the semester.

Personal Electronics

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal locator beacons (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) to handle any emergencies that may arise

Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (that is unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores and instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. When not in the backcountry, students have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts or between sections of semesters.

Independent Student Group Travel

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially, travel groups of four to six students will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you hike from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.

This course may have an Independent Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually three to six students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency locator beacon that when activated in the event of a serious emergency will initiate a response from local search and rescue agencies. The instructors with a satellite phone may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the student expedition (or optional solo, if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities the students may chose to fast during the student expedition (or optional solo). Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Solos

On this course, you may have an opportunity to do a solo when you spend a day and night alone. There is no hiking during the solo. Many people find this experience a good way to reflect on the course and immerse themselves in the environment.

Semester Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent to see each student accomplish the following outcomes:

Risk Management, Judgment and Decision Making

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate a developing knowledge of the hazards in mountain, desert, river, and ocean environments.
- Recognize and minimize risk to self and others.
- Understand emergency procedures for the environment.
- Demonstrate competent first aid skills.



- Use developing experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork and expedition behavior. At NOLS expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, a positive attitude and cooperation to achieve goals. Objectives include the ability to:

- Influence the group in a positive way and support a positive learning environment.
- Work effectively as a member of a team.
- Communicate clearly, actively listen and state personal opinions with clarity.
- Accurately identify personal strengths, skills and areas for growth in developing outdoor leadership styles.
- Take responsibility for learning through setting and attaining personal goals.
- Appropriately manage conflict.
- Use abilities and initiative in a leadership role with peers.
- Use appropriate situational decision making skills.

Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal health and well being and care of the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live comfortably in mountain, desert, and marine environments, including the ability to camp, cook, and dress for varied conditions with minimum impact.
- Travel competently in mountainous, desert or marine environments using off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, backpacking and river-crossing techniques.
- Experience hiking, basic rock climbing, sea kayaking and sailing techniques.
- Demonstrate ability to be organized and efficient with gear.
- Consistently arrive prepared for daily events.
- Demonstrate responsible use and care of personal and group equipment.

Environmental Studies

Students develop awareness of how to apply minimum-impact ideas to their lives after the course. Objectives include the ability to:

- Practice sound Leave No Trace camping skills.
- Use basic observation and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding and respect for the natural world.
- Understand the history, facts and potential solutions to relevant environmental issues.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local and ancient southwest and first nation cultures.
- Understand basic organization and responsibilities of land management agencies.

As a result of the course, we expect our students to be competent and responsible wilderness travelers and leaders.