

Course Description
Semester in Patagonia
National Outdoor Leadership School

Features Of This Course:

- Four sections: Wilderness First Aid (3 days), Mountain Travel (31 days), Sea Kayaking (31 days) and Student Expedition (10 days). In-town and section transition time (5 days).
- Certifications: Wilderness First Aid, CPR and Leave No Trace Trainer
- Potential opportunities for snow and glacier travel, Patagonian cultural interaction, coastal sea kayaking and navigation, viewing condors, dolphins, sea lions
- Minimum age: 18
- Average age: 21
- Group Size: 16-17 students and 3-4 instructors per section

Patagonia

Welcome to the mythical land of fire and ice. Here you'll explore a landscape far off the beaten track of most world travelers—a landscape of ice-capped peaks, volcanoes, temperate rain forests, tundra, pampas, coastal fjords, and vast glaciers. Patagonia is not a country but the remote southern regions of both Chile and Argentina. Patagonia is located as far south as British Columbia is north and is closer to Antarctica than it is to Santiago, the capital of Chile. The Patagonia region is sparsely populated and is an ideal location for a remote wilderness experience.

The Expedition

A semester in Patagonia is an exciting opportunity to learn and expand your horizons. For over 60 days, you'll travel by kayak and foot through some of the wildest country on Earth. Semesters in Patagonia are exploratory in nature. You'll likely find that there are no trails or that the area you're traveling is not mapped. You may be turned back by unexpected situations or impassable terrain. You may sit for days waiting for a river to go down or the weather to calm so you can move. You'll come to understand that living and traveling in a remote land can be at once fulfilling and challenging. The unknowns can be frustrating, and the work hard but there are ample rewards. You'll be exploring a raw, remote and beautiful wilderness that few, if any, have ever seen. You'll learn about different ways of life—both the Chilean culture and the expedition culture—and in the process, learn a lot about yourself and your own culture.

There are other challenges as well. For some, it might be keeping a smile on your face while bushwhacking through bamboo in the rain. For others, the group dynamic may be the most difficult aspect of the course. Living and sharing with a small group of people for so long can be more demanding than the hardest day with a pack on your back. This is why the group depends on the strengths of all the individual members. There is a saying that “the group is only as strong as its weakest member,” yet it can also be stronger than the sum of its parts.

A NOLS course is both academic and experiential in its approach to learning. A combination of formal classes, interactive learning, and experiential education is used to teach the skills necessary for outdoor travel and expedition living. Leadership will be taught by example and experience. As the semester progresses, students take on greater responsibility for managing the expedition. Once a good base of leadership, decision-making and communication skills has been developed, you will practice leading your peers during daily travel and facilitating risk management decisions within your group. A consistent attitude of mutual support, sharing, flexibility and learning are encouraged and promoted. The skills you learn will vary depending on the particular route, weather conditions and the evolution of the expedition team of which you'll be an integral part. After experiencing expedition-style travel in Patagonia, you'll be prepared to live and travel in a wide variety of conditions—environmental and societal.

Semester Progression

The first 5 days of your course will be spent at the NOLS base, completing your Wilderness First Aid course and preparing for the expedition. After this the rest of your course is done in an expedition format. Once the semester starts, you may not return to the NOLS base until the very end. This provides a unique experience—almost 75 days spent traveling in the wilderness with a small group of people. Your group will become a family, complete with close connections and family feuds.



Wilderness First Aid

- 24-hour course taught by staff of the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS (WMI). Upon successful completion of practical and written exams, you'll receive a two-year WFA certification.
- This course may also be used for wilderness medicine recertification by those with previous training.

Fast paced and hands-on, this three-day course covers a wide range of wilderness medicine topics for people who travel and work in the outdoors. Scenarios and practice sessions will take place both inside and outside. Attendance is required at all scheduled classes.

Mountain Travel

- Potential opportunities for snow and glacier travel, peak ascents, river crossings, technical mountaineering and/or wilderness travel skills.

The crest of the Patagonian Andes contains peaks of spectacular beauty. As you travel through this land, you will encounter thickly vegetated slopes, intricate river systems and wide green valleys. You'll find yourself bushwhacking for days, possibly spending time with a local who hasn't seen visitors in months, fording icy rivers, or baking bread. You may work hard for a week or longer to experience five days on a glacier. There may be no trails. Or you may use trails cut through the forest by sheep and cattle ranchers. The fact that people live in these remote places does nothing to take the "wild" out of "wilderness." Much of this land hasn't seen anyone with the inclination, tenacity and skill level needed to reach its higher slopes.

During the approximately 31-day mountain section, you will hike through one of the many remote and beautiful mountain ranges in southern Chile. These rugged ranges, when the clouds clear, will provide breathtaking vistas of sharp unclimbed spires and mountain massifs with hanging glaciers. In this classroom, you'll learn backcountry living and mountain travel skills. Leave No Trace camping and travel techniques will be emphasized. Although traveling on glaciers and technical mountaineering are goals, unforeseen circumstances preclude any guarantees.

Diversity is an important theme for this section. While you may hike in a flat, grassy valley one day, you'll likely sweat uphill with a heavy pack and have to melt snow for water the next. The opportunity to experience this land as few people have is a satisfying reward.

Sea Kayaking

- Potential opportunities for practicing coastal navigation, paddle strokes and self-rescue.

The coast of southern Patagonia has a series of island chains that provide amazing sea kayaking. Since before recorded time, people have used these waterways to move along the coast, but while they make perfect travel corridors when the weather is calm, the weather is often stormy. The Patagonian coast has the second highest rainfall in the world and its position between the Andes and the infamous latitudes named the Roaring Forties, make its weather capricious and unpredictable. When conditions are favorable for paddling, nothing can be more serene than gliding along a flat calm sea at daybreak or floating quietly listening to a pod of dolphins blowing in the distance. But when conditions are unfavorable, you may find yourself holding down your tent in a battering wind, or watching the waves break on the shore while you wait for calmer seas. You'll soon find that learning when not to paddle is as important as learning how to paddle.

The kayak section sometimes starts on one of the big rivers that pour out of the Andes. You may have to portage or carry your kayaks to avoid difficult rapids. At such times, the group works together to move the boats and equipment to where paddling can be continued. Once on the sea, learning to read the weather, the ocean, and the group's strengths are keys to sea travel. Classes will include weather interpretation, boat handling, and tidal currents.



Rendezvous

Between the kayak and mountain sections of your semester, you'll "rendezvous" with your sister semester in a remote location to exchange gear, swap stories, and meet your new instructors for the second section. You'll have the opportunity before the course to pack a small bag of re-supplies (sunscreen, toothpaste, chocolate bars or other treats that you bring with you from home, fresh long underwear, etc) that will be brought to you at rendezvous. At the beginning of the course, your instructors will give you and the expedition a lot of direction. By the end of the first section, you and your student group should be ready to organize and run the "Rendezvous." Re-rations of food, fuel, gear, and first aid supplies will need to be organized for your second section.

Independent Student Group Travel

- Opportunity for practical application of expedition planning skills.

This is the last section of the semester. After two months of learning, living, and traveling, you'll put into practice what you've learned. This is a 7-11 day section that you'll plan with 4-7 other students and the guidance of your instructors. A day is spent planning the route, arranging pickup and drop off locations, preparing your food and equipment, discussing emergency plans, and talking about your group goals. This section is often a highlight for students, a time to discover all that you have learned, and a time to reflect on the past and the future. Whether this last section includes an instructor in the group or not depends on the competence and skill level attained by individuals and the group as a whole.

Each Independent Student Group will carry a satellite telephone for use in case of emergency or if they have to change their route due to unforeseen circumstances. Due to the limitations of the phone and travel times students may still be up to 24 hours from outside help. The student groups will be aware of other groups traveling in close proximity that would be able to offer help in case of emergency. Our students often say the student expedition was the best part of their course.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the student expedition. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities, students may choose to fast during the student expedition. Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Weather and Other Challenges

The weather in Patagonia is a mixture of wind, rain, snow and sun. Be ready for just about any type of weather condition. For a country no more than 120 miles wide, the variety of climates is astounding. On your course you could end up living camped on a windy glacier in whiteout conditions or cooking in a heavy downpour. But, at times, you might find yourself traveling in the hot sun longing for the next stream. The wind can howl, the snow can pile high, the rain can come in sheets- sometimes for days at a time. Expect rain and cold regardless of what other weather conditions you may encounter. One of the greatest rewards to living in the Patagonian weather is the opportunity to visit, travel and experience a magical place that few other people ever see. Your instructors will help you learn how to live comfortably in the challenging conditions you will encounter on your semester. Discussion of the rough weather you'll experience is not meant to intimidate you, but you should understand the reality of living in the Patagonian backcountry.

"It may be said that it suits the majestic temple of savage and virgin nature to hide from the eyes of the profane its treasures of beauty behind a thick curtain of wind and storm-tossed clouds. At rare times, it shakes off the clouds and then it is as if a magic curtain parts and there appears, resplendent in the light, ice sphinxes and spires and pinnacles bordered by a fire lace of snow, and alters with precious stones beneath a cobalt sky."
Alberto Maria de Agostini- Italian mountaineer, explorer, and geographer

Another challenge of Patagonia courses is the exploratory nature and learning to live with the unknown of what you might find around the next corner. Though exciting at times, this can also be frustrating. The unknown provides a unique challenge to your NOLS Patagonia experience that can be difficult to articulate. A former NOLS Patagonia student described her experience this way: *"The exploratory nature of this course was the best part when it worked and the hardest part when it didn't."*

Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may occasionally allow students to travel unsupervised away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course begins or between sections of semesters.

Attitude

Being a guest in a foreign country poses some special considerations for us all. There are few things more annoying than guests who are oblivious to the fact that their viewpoint and way of living may not be desirable or available to others. Politeness and the cultivation of a sincere interest in other cultures is the first step in surpassing regional and economic differences and is a much appreciated sign of respect.

The same kind of cultural sensitivity and awareness of how others live can be applied to getting along with your expedition members. We try to have at least one Chilean student with each group and several Chilean instructors. This adds a unique perspective to the course. Openness and a willingness to share are the two most important skills that you can bring to your group. You should come to your course with enthusiasm and a desire to learn. You need to be flexible and willing to do things in a style that may be different from your own. Be excited to face the unknown, to adapt to situations and schedules at a moment's notice, and to help others do the same. Finally, **learning some basic Spanish will enhance your experience.**

Risk Management

Carefully managing the risks of remote wilderness travel is a priority at NOLS. Our curriculum emphasizes the development of judgment and hazard awareness, as well as the skill and experience base necessary to manage wilderness hazards. Students are expected to take personal responsibility for following risk management guidelines that are presented to them. Failure to do so will result in dismissal from the course.

During your semester you may often be up to seven days away from the nearest medical facility. Weather, terrain and distance can impede communication and transportation efforts. In the event of an injury or illness, there is no guarantee that you can be evacuated from the backcountry immediately.

College Credit

You may opt to earn a **maximum of 16 hours of college credit** from the University of Utah's departments of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Biology, and Health Education for successfully completing the Patagonia semester. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and instructor input throughout the semester with written performance summaries at the end of each section. The feedback takes place whether you are registered for college credit or not.



Course Objectives:

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. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate a developing knowledge of the hazards in mountain and cold water environments
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Describe an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Be able to perform basic first aid skills to support a patient until help arrives
- 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. Each student is expected to:

- **Expedition Behavior:** Demonstrate teamwork, respect for others and commitment to group decisions.
- **Vision and Action:** Demonstrate the ability to plan and implement course activities.
- **Communication:** Effectively communicate on interpersonal and group levels.
- **Judgment and Decision-Making:** Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.
- **Self-Awareness:** Understand personal tendencies, strengths and weakness as a leader.
- **Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty:** Maintain a positive attitude and tolerance for adverse and uncertain conditions.
- **Competence:** Work towards becoming competent with the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

Technical and Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal responsibility while caring for the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain and maritime environment, including the ability to camp, cook, and dress for varied conditions with minimum impact skills
- Travel competently in mountainous terrain using off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, backpacking and river-crossing techniques
- Experience basic mountaineering including peak ascents, technical rock and/or snow climbing and rappelling
- Travel competently in a coastal cold water environment practicing the principles of basic seamanship
- Demonstrate an understanding of coastal kayaking , including technical paddling skills, rescue techniques, coastal navigation, hazard evaluation and use of equipment
- Demonstrate a respect for and care of all personal and expedition equipment
- Develop basic natural history observation and interpretive skills

Environmental Ethics

Students develop awareness of how to apply minimum-impact ideas to their lives after the course. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate sound minimum-impact living and travel 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 some environmental issues and demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local cultures

