

Course Description

Semester For Outdoor Educators

Features of this Course

- Backcountry hiking, climbing, and skiing expeditions, which emphasize teaching and management of backpacking, technical rock climbing, winter camping, and wilderness skills
- Average Pack Weight: 50-65 lbs.
- Minimum Age: 21
- Opportunities for technical and non-technical peak ascents, rock climbing, teaching, leadership, backcountry skiing, and natural history.
- On and off trail hiking
- Trip duration: 94 days
- 12-15 students / 3-5 instructors per section depending on skill area
- Approximately 15 days of classroom time, including a Wilderness First Responder and meeting with NOLS administrators

The Expedition

Imagine attending a semester where the end goal is to build your skills, competence, and self-awareness so you can feel confident to work as a professional in the outdoor education field. The National Outdoor Leadership School Semester for Outdoor Educators is designed for current professionals in the outdoor industry and for those who are currently in a university experiential or outdoor education program. The four wilderness sections—Backpacking, Climbing, Canyon and Winter—combined with a Level 1 Avalanche certification, a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certification, a Leave No Trace Masters certification, and an optional Defensive Driving certification will develop your skills, as well as your value, to outdoor programs throughout the world. In addition, administrative classes in risk management; managing challenging students, group management, expedition planning, and harassment prevention are some of the topics that may be covered.

This semester spent in the outdoors entails camping out, exploring the West, and developing technical, management, teaching, leadership, and administrative skills. You'll meet people, push yourself, and have fun while doing it. The course will take you from the high peaks of Wyoming to the red canyons of Utah. You may find yourself jamming your hands and feet into granite cracks, learning how to manage a top-rope climbing site or carving sweet turns through untracked powder. You'll work hard traveling through knee-deep snow, or keeping yourself and others warm and well fed in a mountain storm. You may also spend time climbing a challenging crag, identifying plants and wildlife, climbing a peak, sleeping out under the stars, watching the rain from under an overhang, or reading by candlelight in a cozy snow shelter. On this semester, you'll develop and refine the teaching and leadership skills needed to prepare you for professional positions at wilderness programs throughout the world.

In the field, you will be responsible for teaching many of the basic classes. Wilderness living skills, natural history, environmental ethics, expedition behavior, and communication/evaluation skills are all-important parts of the curriculum. You will be challenged to experiment with different teaching styles while polishing your skills, judgment, leadership, and supervisory abilities. Peer and staff feedback on class content, teaching techniques, and effectiveness are essential parts of the learning process. Hazard awareness in wilderness situations is a critical element of outdoor leadership. Your instructors will teach most of the risk management-related classes including river crossings, emergency procedures, and rock and snow climbing. Hazard evaluation, accident prevention, group management and evacuation procedures are thoroughly discussed and practiced throughout the semester.

Your semester may begin with a wilderness backpacking section or a WFR course. Read below for information on all of your sections.



Backpacking Section

- Trip duration: 10 Days
- Average pack weight: 50-60 lbs.
- Hiking route: 40-80 miles
- Average group size: 12-15 students / 3 instructors

Environment

Our wilderness backpacking sections travel through either the Wind River or the Absaroka mountain ranges of Wyoming. Varied mountainous terrain—snow-capped peaks, glittering alpine lakes, deep valleys and high alpine plateaus—will be encountered during this section. Altitudes range from 8,000 feet to greater than 13,000 feet, with tree line being near 11,000 feet. Elk, deer, moose, bear and bighorn sheep all inhabit the high country of these ranges. The mountains are magical in the autumn. You'll hear elk bugling, camp in aspen glades splashed yellow and gold by the changing leaves, wake to frost decorating the trees, and see very few people once you leave the bus.

Section Progression

Expeditions, unlike a college classroom, are influenced by weather, terrain, the group's health and skills, experience, and ability. We can't script our courses, as tightly as in the traditional classroom, but to give you a sense of the experience, we'll describe what your days may be like on this short section.

Wilderness expeditions often hike three out of every four days. Backpacking in small hiking groups lets you learn to lead and travel as we move through beautiful wilderness. The day begins early when you start your stove, cook breakfast, organize and pack your pack, and enjoy breakfast. We're usually hiking by mid-morning. Lunch on the trail might be bread you baked the day before, or a trail mix of nuts, cheese, and dried fruits. You may stop for a short class on natural history or GPS navigation, or to learn how to cross a river, travel over boulders or snow, or traverse a high pass. When we arrive at our new camp location we'll first spend time choosing a Leave No Trace site and organizing camp, then we'll prepare dinner. If the day was long, a short evening meeting may wrap things up. If the day was short, we may fit in a class or discussion.

The difficulty of a hiking day is hard to predict. Long miles on trail may be physically easier than climbing a high mountain pass or a day spent hiking through boulders and fallen timber in a wilderness without trails. Your pack may be lighter than usual as you approach the end of the section, or you may be carrying extra gear to lighten the load of a course mate who is not feeling well. The wilderness has a knack for providing challenges to all.

We'll occasionally have a layover day to rest, enjoy a special location, teach a class, or climb a peak.

Wilderness First Responder

One of the main components of the outdoor educator semester program is wilderness risk management. Prior to or after your backpacking section you will spend ten days on our WFR course. This 80-hour course features first aid training specifically applicable to wilderness situations. Staff from the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS will teach your WFR course. It will be held at our Three Peaks Ranch near the town of Boulder, WY over a ten-day period. This is the standard course for outdoor professionals and provides you with the tools to make critical medical and evacuation decisions in remote locations. Half of your time will be spent completing practical skills, case studies, and scenarios designed to challenge your decision-making abilities.

You will also spend approximately four days in Lander focusing on risk management, NOLS history, leadership, defensive driving (possibly), and managing challenging students. Managers from both NOLS Headquarters and NOLS Rocky Mountain will facilitate these classes.

Climbing Section

- Trip duration: 20–26 days
- Average group size: 12–15 students / 3–5 instructors

Environment

This climbing section takes place in areas rich in climbing tradition, with high-quality rock, beautiful scenery, and challenge for all levels of climbers. For you to learn and teach many different climbing techniques, your climbing section could take place in 2 or 3 different areas. The location(s) depend on weather. You may climb the varied rock of Sinks Canyon, Split Rock, Devil's Tower, Vedauwoo, or Lankin Dome, in Wyoming; you may find yourself at the Needles/Mt. Rushmore area of South Dakota;



Unaweep Canyon of Colorado; or you may even hit the granite slabs of the House Range of Utah or Red Rocks, Nevada.

Section Progression

The climbing curriculum covers the NOLS rock climbing teaching progression, some rock rescue techniques, and top-rope site management. You will also be able to develop your climbing skills on top ropes and multi-pitch climbs. Climbing sections are base camps. You'll set up your tents, establish a kitchen, and stay in one place for the duration of your time at each climbing area. You may be camped in established campgrounds or in more pristine areas. Regardless, you should expect to encounter people on this section, and you may end up driving to and from the crags each day.

Instruction will progress from the basics of movement on rock, knots, rope handling, and belaying to protection placement, anchors, rappelling, and rope-system management. Plan to spend a lot of time on the rock. More advanced topics such as fixed-rope ascension, direct aid, and cliff rescue will be addressed.

Climbing may be done as part of a large group when top-roping, or in a small group of three to four for multi-pitch routes. You will be able to progress at your own speed. Instructors emphasize building a non-competitive attitude toward climbing, and the development of your own natural abilities. For these reasons, they are selected for their teaching ability, as well as for their technical expertise.

Of all the activities you will experience, climbing is the most weather dependent. We attempt to schedule courses during months of historically stable weather, but due to many variables beyond our control (permits, available areas, and not the least, weather itself), we cannot guarantee this. You should come prepared to spend a lot of time on the rock, but realize this does not always happen. We will do everything possible to make your time productive, but only self-motivation can help overcome the "bad weather blues."

After completing a careful progression of instruction and climbing, students are expected to set up and supervise top rope and rappel sites in diverse mountain settings. Emphasis is also placed on developing lead climbing skills, setting up climbing sites, and focusing on management/risk management concerns when climbing with students.

Canyon Section

- Trip duration: 23–30 days
- Hiking route: 70–120 miles
- Average pack weight: 50-60 lbs.
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors

Environment

On this section, you will backpack through a unique and beautiful region—the canyon country of the Colorado Plateau, located in southern Utah and northern Arizona. This area is characterized by rugged terrain and delicate beauty, with red sandstone and green junipers adding color to the arid landscape. You may see relics of the Anasazi culture in the form of pueblos, petroglyphs, and potsherds. At certain times you will travel across the mesa tops with spectacular vistas in all directions while at others you will wind your way through the labyrinthine depths of the steeply incised waterways that give this region its name.

Canyons are known for impassable pour-offs, slick rock terrain, the possibility of flash floods, spiny plants, and the rigors of a climate where water is often scarce. You may experience temperatures that drop below freezing and storms that leave snow to hike through.

Section Progression

Once in the canyons, you'll learn and teach fundamental wilderness travel skills. Map reading and route-finding can be tricky in this convoluted country where your travel days may involve miles of dense bushwhacking, squeezing through narrow slot canyons, technical descents of steep pour-offs, wading deep pools, or ten miles of flat mesa walking. The canyon environment is also a great opportunity to learn, refine and teach GPS skills. You will be challenged by the difficulty of minimizing your impact in an area where the soil is fragile and water scarcity is common.

In addition to learning to live and travel in the desert, you will focus on gaining an understanding of the area's natural history and geology. Here, exposed landforms provide textbook illustrations of the land's geologic past, and lush riparian zones contrast with stark expanses of rock, sand and blackbush. Prehistoric Indian cultures once thrived in the region, and you may



view the remains they left tucked into alcoves. Not only will you learn about the natural history of the area but you will also learn and practice many different teaching ideas and styles.

Leadership is an important component of your canyon section. You'll be given more responsibility for the structure of the course as your skills and expertise improve. On many canyon sections, student leadership teams are responsible for planning the day's activities, teaching classes, and, with instructor oversight, managing and assessing risk.

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, usually of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructors 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 travel 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 culminate in a 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 four 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. However, instructors with emergency communication capability 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 choose to fast during the student expedition (or optional solo). Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Winter Section

- Trip duration: 15–21 Days
- Avalanche 1 Recreational certification
- Average pack/sled weight: 80 lbs
- Skiing route: ~30 miles
- Quinzhee or igloo snow shelter
- Group size: 12-15 students / 3-5 instructors

Environment

Winter in the mountains—cloaked in a blanket of glittering snow, the world is transformed into a quiet, magical place where icicles decorate the trees, animal tracks tell a story, and untracked powder snow calls you to ski. Temperatures can plummet to 30° F below zero, and three feet of snow can fall in one storm, but hard work and a positive attitude make winter one of the most rewarding times to travel in the backcountry. Your winter section will take place in one of several Wyoming mountain ranges: the Snake River, Absaroka, Gros Ventre, Wyoming, or Wind River Mountains. While these mountains are very different geologically, they are all known for dependable snow and skiing. Heavily timbered slopes are intermixed with open glades and broad bowls. Steep, expert terrain is broken up by gentle beginner slopes and intermediate runs. These mountains are magical places to explore, and exhilarating areas to learn the intricacies of backcountry skiing and winter travel.

Section Progression

Your winter section begins with six days at the NOLS Three Peaks Ranch in Boulder, Wyoming. These days are busy, combining classroom days to cover the avalanche curriculum, a beginning telemark ski progression at nearby White Pine Ski Area, and issuing winter gear and rations for your expedition. Evenings will include classes on managing and preventing cold injuries in the field. After six days at the ranch you'll then head for the mountains.

During this section, you'll learn the basics of snow camping, skiing, avalanche training and risk management, snow physics, cold-weather physiology, and winter ecology. You also will learn how to plan a winter expedition as well as teach and competently manage groups in this setting. Your homes will shift between elaborate snow shelters that you and your



expedition members construct and commercially manufactured tents or flies. Whether you build igloos, quinzhees, or snow caves, you'll find these shelters are remarkably warm and comfortable. Outside the wind can rage, snow can fall, and the temperature can drop. Inside, you'll be reading by candlelight oblivious to the blizzard beyond your snow walls.

Camp chores take up a big portion of your days. Melting snow for water, shoveling snow, building snow kitchens and snow shelters, packing up piles of gear and clothes, and staying warm and dry are time-consuming activities. Once you become efficient at these tasks, the time you free up can be spent learning about winter ecology, furthering your avalanche assessment skills, teaching classes, or skiing untracked powder. If weather and snow conditions permit, you may have an opportunity for a winter peak ascent.

In these mountains, avalanches are common, and can bury unwary skiers and travelers. Avalanche science and forecasting focus on surrounding terrain, weather conditions and changes, and snowpack assessment; experience and practice are necessary to refine your judgment. An extensive portion of the winter curriculum will focus on avalanche assessment and rescue techniques.

Student Classes

Students are expected to teach throughout their semester. Topics will be decided before leaving town. Instructors will advise you on content, and the NOLS Staff Library will be available for a short time at the start of your course. You should try to prepare as thoroughly as possible before leaving town. Doing so will help your classes be clear, concise, and relevant, as well as effective and fun. NOLS is known for creative and effective use of impromptu teaching aids like anatomical diagrams on bodies or "blackboards" on ensolite pads or sandbars. Critiques of classes can help everyone learn about education when done positively and constructively. After some warm-up mini-classes, feedback may become more formal and possibly begin with a self-critique.

On any NOLS course, the classes support the activities, but the activities are the heart of the course. Instructors constantly adjust plans with changing conditions, especially as teachable moments arise. This makes the scheduling of your classes tentative. It also means that NOLS instructors routinely plan for many different alternatives, only making use of the most fitting ones. It is possible that one or two prepared classes will not even be presented. We also hope that you will point out teachable moments as you experience them. Guided discovery is what experiential education is all about. Helping you to develop your skills to both model and guide others in this discovery is the foundation of this NOLS Semester for Outdoor Educators.

Course Format

You will be living with two or three other students in "cook groups" during the course. Usually the composition of cook groups changes each ration period, so you get to know and work closely with all members of your semester. These small groups help disperse our impact on the land, and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll receive lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn new skills. Before you know it, you'll be savoring homemade pizza or cinnamon rolls—gourmet delicacies that you make from scratch on a single-burner stove.

Group dynamics and leadership are an integral part of our curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other members, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success. As your group gains leadership skills and experience working together, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for leading yourself and your peers.

You may come back to town between sections to shower, reorganize equipment, and receive mail. The expedition continues through transitions, and you may or may not have the opportunity to do laundry and collect mail. Not all courses return to town; some are "on the road" for two or three sections, and have their transition days in places like Moab, Utah or at NOLS Three Peaks Ranch. Due to long travel distances, all courses spend several days travelling by bus. The final day of the semester is spent in town de-issuing equipment and finishing evaluations. That evening, there will be an end-of-course banquet.

Weather and Other Challenges

Fall weather in the inter-mountain west is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to quite warm. During the course of your semester, you'll feel the seasons change from warm fall weather to the cold days of winter. You'll learn to live comfortably outside in blizzards, rainstorms, wind, and sunshine. Given the altitude and latitude of the areas you will be in, cold and snowy conditions can occur any month of the year. There are times when you will be cold, wet and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations and maybe even smile while you do.



Life in the wilderness can be tough. You may be off-trail bushwhacking through thick vegetation, or battling wind gusts that threaten to “turtle” you. You’ll traverse steep slopes of loose rock, snow or grass, and grunt up steep passes. There will be times when you’ll wish you were somewhere else, but the hard work is worth it. There’s nothing quite like taking your pack off at the top of a pass, feeling the wind dry the sweat off your back, and looking down at miles of new country opening up before you. It’s exhilarating!

Bear avoidance techniques will be integrated into the mountain hiking section. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. You will protect food from bears for mountain hiking sections. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence.

Climbing occurs on exposed cliffs where loose rock and unexpected falls are potential dangers. Winter hazards include avalanches, cold temperatures and demanding travel on skis. 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—which could be falling rock, stormy weather, animals, moving water or steep terrain—will be a constant theme of our instruction. Throughout your course, you’ll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances and hospitals may be several days away. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild places healthy and fun.

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 tracking devices (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 (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after the field portions of their course.

College Credit

You can elect to earn up to 19 credit hours through the University of Utah for successfully completing the NOLS Semester for Outdoor Educators. Please see the college credit paperwork enclosed in your enrollment packet.

A key educational tool will be ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the semester, with written performance summaries at the end of each section, whether you are receiving college credit or not.

Course Prerequisites

Participants must be at least 21 years old. Admission is selective. If you are applying for this course, you need to be a current professional in the outdoor industry or have personal wilderness experience and the desire to teach, lead and administer outdoor adventures.

Course Objectives

As an overall course objective, we expect graduates to be capable of responsibly leading groups of novices through educational experiences in the wilderness. Each semester 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:

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, acceptance of others and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

- Work effectively as a member of a team
- Appropriately communicate ideas and concerns on individual and group levels



- Accurately identify strengths, skills, and areas for growth in developing outdoor leadership styles in self and others
- Display an appropriate initiative in a teaching/leadership role with peers
- Demonstrate effective problem-solving and planning skills
- Provide effective oral and written feedback
- Display an awareness of group strengths and limitations

Outdoor Skills

NOLS students learn to live, travel and guide others in the wilderness within a framework of personal well being, competence and care of the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain environment: camping, cooking, and dressing for varied conditions
- Travel competently in mountain terrain using appropriate off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, and river-crossing techniques
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of elementary climbing systems including knots, belaying, and anchors
- Set up and supervise top-rope and rappel sites in diverse mountain settings
- Experience multi-pitch climbing and non-technical peak ascents
- Acquire skills and knowledge of snow travel techniques
- Accurately assess skills, strengths and endurance in self and others and conservatively apply those limits to given situations

Environmental Studies

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently demonstrate sound *Leave No Trace* living and travel skills on personal and group levels; be able to apply this knowledge to varied settings
- Use basic observation, interpretive and teaching skills to convey an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of this region
- Facilitate the transference of wilderness ethics and practices to daily life
- Discuss the history of pertinent environmental problems and offer potential solutions
- Demonstrate familiarity with the geography of the intermountain west
- Display a broad elementary knowledge of field natural history including: geology, ecology, ornithology, mammalogy, botany, meteorology and snow science; focus on active, observational study
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and discuss the means to be involved in issues of interest

Risk Management and Decision-Making

NOLS' goal is to prepare students to teach and practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in the varied environments encountered and apply this knowledge to new environments
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Describe emergency plans for groups in the outdoors in a variety of settings and circumstances
- Show the ability to provide emergency and extended medical care for a remote wilderness setting using the available resources
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion
- Understand and work within NOLS risk management policies and procedures

Wilderness Education Skills

The Semester for Outdoor Educators prepares students to be wilderness educators as well as wilderness leaders. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate the ability to teach basic outdoor living skills effectively
- Demonstrate knowledge of environmental and risk management concerns and their influence on learning in the wilderness
- Be an exemplary model of a competent and effective wilderness educator
- Demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm in the pursuit of learning
- Be effective in the presentation and utilization of learning opportunities, adapting to the variables of the course

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

