

# Course Description

## Professional Instructor Course

### Features of This Course:

- Course length: 16 days
- 9-10-day backcountry hiking expedition emphasizing the teaching of NOLS' curriculum of mountain backpacking, basic climbing, and wilderness skills.
- 4 day climbing base camp at the end of the course
- 1 day in-town administrative orientation
- Hiking route: 30-50 miles (on and off-trail)
- Grizzly bear habitat
- Average pack weight: 60 lbs.
- Minimum age: 25
- Average group size: 10 students/2 instructors
- Average age: 30
- Opportunities for third and fourth class peak ascents, top-rope climbing curriculum, teaching, fishing, natural history and sharing professional experience and insight
- Travel below and above tree line

### The Expedition

The Professional Instructor Course is conducted once a year and is designed for practicing outdoor educators interested in working for NOLS.

The course takes place in the Wind River Range of Wyoming. This rugged, glacier-carved range is renowned for its sheer granite walls, alpine peaks, and world class fishing and climbing. Because the environment and terrain are representative of many NOLS programming areas, the Wind Rivers are ideal for introducing you to NOLS' field practices. This is the mountain range where NOLS began educating wilderness users in 1965 and is where many of our ideas and techniques evolved.

The Professional Instructors Course has three components: nine days of backpacking, a four-day rock climbing camp, and a one-day administrative orientation.

### Administrative Orientation

During the first day and a half of the course, you will be issued gear and rations for the backcountry expedition while becoming familiar with NOLS' outfitting philosophy and methods. There will be time to access the NOLS library so students can prepare the classes that they will teach on the course. There will also be presentations from several NOLS directors and managers, during which students will have an opportunity to discuss topics pertinent to NOLS and outdoor education. These presentations may include: NOLS history and mission; hiring procedures; expectations NOLS has for employees and what you can expect as an employee; what NOLS is doing to promote a positive learning and working environment; risk management; and curriculum. You will also receive an orientation to our facilities, our administrative departments, and the structure of NOLS operations in Lander. The course will leave for the backcountry on the afternoon of the second day.

All PIC students are required to take and pass the NOLS Wilderness First Responder written exam given to all NOLS Instructor Course students. All PIC students must possess WFR certification, at a minimum. The test will be administered during the first or second "in town" day of your course. Consider using [wmiquiz.com](http://wmiquiz.com) as a study guide.

### Backcountry

During the nine-day backcountry section, we plan to travel on and off-trail in both forested areas and above tree line. Your pack will be heavy for several travel days, as you will carry all food and supplies needed for 9 days of wilderness travel. Given the early season date of the PIC, you can expect to spend most, if not all, of the backcountry section camping and traveling on snow. Topics covered during this section will include NOLS leadership progression, risk management, navigation, river crossings, practices for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat, and travel on steep snow. Other topics, depending on weather and route, may include fly fishing and managing travel in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class terrain.



## **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 also allow you to travel away from camp. In addition, you will have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after your course.

## **Independent Student Group Travel**

On a typical NOLS course, our goal is to provide students with the skills they need to travel without instructor supervision. We believe this independence is critical in their progress toward becoming self-sufficient in the mountains.

To reach the point where students are ready to hike without instructors, we follow a carefully planned teaching progression. It is not necessary to follow this same progression on the PIC because it is expected that you come to the course with these skills in place. Therefore, the focus on this course will be on discussing and modeling the NOLS progression for independent student travel so you will be prepared to follow its steps when you begin instructing for the school.

## **Climbing**

You will have a short, 4 day rock climbing base camp in Sinks Canyon outside of the town of Lander. Typically, the climbing camp focuses on NOLS' top rope climbing progression for novice students. This includes: top rope site selection and supervision strategies, backcountry rappelling techniques and supervision, belaying, knots, natural and artificial protection, anchors, and anchors systems. Given good weather conditions, there may be time to cover additional climbing topics during the climbing camp. For those coming to this section with a strongly established background in climbing, it may also be possible to be assessed by your instructors to work climbing courses for NOLS.

## **Teaching**

Your instructors will review NOLS standards and practices in a wide variety of curriculum topics including but not limited to: Leave No Trace practices, river crossings, climbing, field medical protocol, emergency procedures and evacuations, bear camping and travel practices, student supervision strategies, student leadership progressions, course paperwork, student evaluations, and feedback. The course instructors will teach specific classes so that key NOLS curriculum elements are presented in NOLS fashion. You and your fellow students will present at least one class each on topics such as fishing, knots, natural history, navigation, leadership and communication, or other specific areas of expertise. We want to see you teach, and we want each student to contribute to the course content and curriculum.

Feedback from your instructors and fellow students on the content, presentation and effectiveness of your class will be a part of the course. Students will have ongoing leadership opportunities during daily travel or activities. This provides us with an opportunity to see you in a leadership role, and allows you to have the chance to shape some aspect of the course. Many discussions of NOLS practices will evolve into a sharing of perspectives gained from your diverse backgrounds in outdoor education.

## **Weather and Other Challenges**

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Often you will be off-trail bushwhacking through thick forests or scrambling around refrigerator-sized boulders. You will traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock or grass, and grunt up high-mountain passes. Rivers will be cold and volume can be significant. As you know from prior experience, it may be necessary to hang food or use portable electric fences to keep it away from bears or other animals. You will be miles from the amenities of civilization, and telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.

Bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling will be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. To minimize risk, group size in bear country is generally four persons and you will always camp and travel in a group. This is a challenging aspect of living in grizzly bear country. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, making loud calls to warn bears of your presence when moving through areas where visibility is poor, and hiking with bear spray.

One aspect of our instruction will be to emphasize the identification and management of mountain hazards (such as: falling rock, weather, animals, moving water and steep terrain) as we travel. We will also discuss strategies for applying this knowledge while leading NOLS courses. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild mountains 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.

## Course Wrap Up

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 course, learn about the NOLS staff training programs and benefits, and meet individually with the staffing manager or staffing coordinator(s).

## Evaluations and Future Employment

Your instructors, some of NOLS' most senior, 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. Early on, the instructors will check-in with the group and individual students regarding expectations, goals, and anxieties. Feedback will be ongoing. The instructors will check-in at various times to see how the course is progressing and how each student is doing. Each student will receive a thorough oral and written evaluation at the end of the course.

## Course Prerequisites

Participants must be at least 25 years old and possess, at a minimum, current WFR or WEMT certification and CPR. Applicants must be professional outdoor educators with extensive time in the field as an instructor/leader/guide for a multi-day *wilderness-based* outdoor education program. By “extensive” we mean **at least 50 field weeks** (7 field days = 1 field week.) We will only count work that has been a minimum of one consecutive week per trip in the backcountry towards the required 50 weeks. Successful applicants will have a broad base of proven expertise in outdoor living skills, backpacking, mountain travel, wilderness camping, etc., AND at least one additional area of expertise relevant to the NOLS curriculum such as: natural history, teaching, mountaineering, rock climbing, sea kayaking, sailing, and river running. We expect students to have:

- Outstanding risk management record as an instructor
- Demonstrated excellence in leadership
- Strong performance as a teacher
- Strong performance in expedition and interpersonal skills
- Experience supervising other instructors
- Excellent physical health

Most NOLS courses are in remote locations (at least 24 - 48 hours from medical care) for extended periods (14 to 30 days). NOLS instructors need to be able to carry heavy loads, handle strenuous travel, and be able to look after tired students during hard and long days in harsh weather. If this sounds like you, then we look forward to meeting you at the start of the PIC.

