Course Description
Semester in the Rockies

Features Of This Course:

- Backpacking section
- Rock climbing section
- Whitewater rafting and kayaking section
- Average Group Size: 12-15
- Average Pack Weight: 40-50 lbs (only on the backpacking section)
- Average Age: 20
- Minimum Age: 17
- Field Days: 58 / Transition Days: 10

The Expedition

A semester spent in the outdoors with NOLS entails two and a half months camping out, exploring the west, developing skills, meeting people, finding limits, and having fun. The expedition is broken into sections that will take you from snow-covered mountains in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, to the Black Hills of South Dakota, Devil's Tower, to the Green River in Utah. You may find yourself jamming your hands and feet into granite cracks or surfing a wave in a kayak. You'll sleep out under the stars, watch the rain from under a tarp, and bake bread on a one-burner stove. You'll work hard hiking with all of your gear on your back in steep, rocky terrain, but you'll play hard, too. These semesters are action-packed, learning adventures that leave you with the skills and experience necessary to travel in the wilderness long after the end of your course.

The summer semester is broken into three sections: four weeks of backpacking which may be split into two or three sections, three weeks of rock climbing, and three weeks of whitewater rafting and kayaking. With the exception of one person — your proctor, who will travel and live with you for the entire expedition — the instructors will change as the sections change so that you get the most qualified leadership we can offer.

You'll come back to town between sections to do laundry, shower, organize equipment, rest, and receive mail.

During the hiking and climbing sections, you'll cook and camp with two or three other students. A small group helps disperse the impact on the land and enables you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. During the whitewater section, two or three people prepare a single day's meals for the entire group.

You'll also travel in small groups on the hiking section, usually groups of four to six people. Initially, these groups include an instructor. However, once students learn the intricacies of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, they travel on their own. NOLS courses are designed for learning to take place through experience. Your instructors are there to train, supervise, and provide feedback and advice, but ultimately, what you learn depends on what you practice.

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 taking college credit or not.

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

College Credit

A student can earn up to 16 credit hours through the University of Utah for successfully completing the semester. Please see the college credit paperwork enclosed in your enrollment packet.

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 their course starts and at times between sections of their semester.

Weather and Other Challenges
Weather in the intermountain West is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. 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. Expect weather that changes quickly; summer storms can be violent and sudden.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Early season courses (early May through the end of June) may spend most of their time camping on snow and using snowshoes to travel. At other times, you may bushwhack off-trail through thick forests or scramble around refrigerator-sized boulders.

You may have to deal with swarms of mosquitoes or hang your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. Rivers will be icy from snowmelt and can be hard or impossible to cross. You'll traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock, or grass, and grunt up high-mountain 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!

River travel has its own set of hazards including large, crashing waves, shallow water, hypothermia, sun exposure, re-circulating holes, and strong currents that can pin paddlers against rocks.

To learn rock climbing, you'll climb and rappel on or above sheer cliffs where loose rock and steep terrain require precise movement. You must master rope and protection systems to minimize the danger of falling. Unforeseen changes in weather can be especially hazardous if you are in the middle of a climb where the possibility of retreat is limited.

Bear avoidance techniques will be integrated into mountain hiking and river sections. 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.

This list of hazards is not meant to intimidate you, but it represents the reality of living and traveling in the wilderness. Throughout your course, you'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. Identifying and managing hazards—whether we're talking about falling rock, stormy weather, 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 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.

General Hiking Section

- Trip Duration: 24 Days
- Hiking Route: ~ 90 miles
- Elevations of 9,000' - 12,000'
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Excellent wildlife and natural history
- Grizzly bear territory
- On- and off-trail hiking
- Average Group Size: 12-15 Students / 3 Instructors

Section Progression

This section takes place in Wyoming's Absaroka Range or Wind River Range. The Absarokas are renowned for their rugged beauty and amazing opportunities for seeing wildlife such as moose, grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, and elk. For four weeks, you'll backpack in these mountains surrounded by towering peaks, glistening alpine lakes, and perennial snow. The Wind River Mountains is a glacier-carved range of granite peaks and broad valleys, punctuated by numerous lakes and rivers. Elevations range from 8,000 to greater than 12,000 feet, with timberline at about 11,000 feet. No roads and few developed trails exist. These ranges support lush vegetation and large populations of elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep, and are home to black and grizzly bears. The climbing areas used for this course provide an excellent environment for all levels of climbing expertise.

Your semester will begin with the basics: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Eventually, the curriculum will move on to more advanced instruction on topics that range from baking yeast bread and fishing for cutthroat or rainbow trout, to discussing environmental issues and identifying plants and animals.

Expedition behavior and leadership will also be an important part of the course curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. As your group gains maturity and experience, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for the course and its outcome.

We'll plan to do some peak climbs, and if appropriate conditions exist, snow travel may round out the progression of mountain-travel skills.

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 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 culminate in an independent student group expedition. If your instructors think your group is ready after demonstrating successful practice with daily independent student travel, they 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 throughout their expedition. The instructors with emergency communication capability may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Proper first aid, emergency procedures and risk management are taught prior to students traveling on their own. 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 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. Instructors will discuss fasting with students in depth if the option to fast is presented. Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Whitewater Section

- 85 miles in Desolation/Gray Canyon
- Travel by kayak, oar raft, paddle raft
- Group kitchen
- 45 miles in Dinosaur National Monument
- Trip Duration: 18 Days
- Average Group Size: 12-15 Students / 4-5 Instructors (3:1 ratio)

The Expedition

Utah's Green River is a perfect river for beginners to learn boating skills. You'll start on flat, moving water and move downstream through progressively more difficult rapids. This high desert region is full of geological diversity, human history, and unique flora and fauna. As you travel through the limestone and sandstone canyons, you'll camp in the thickly vegetated riparian zone surrounded by barren desert and sparse plant cover. It's a paradoxical garden surrounded by a desert starved for water. Few roads exist. This remoteness helps preserve populations of deer, bighorn sheep, and an occasional mountain lion.

After arrival at the Utah Base, you'll be issued personal and group whitewater gear, pack a dry bag with course necessities, and store your personal belongings and valuables. On the first day you'll also be introduced to river camping and group kitchen skills. Before getting onto moving water, you'll go to a swimming pool to learn kayak skills such as wet exit and entry and the elements of a "combat" roll. You'll also learn and practice basic kayak strokes and maneuvering in a nearby lake. Then you'll travel to the Green River where rafts will be presented and you will help in the rigging process. After this intensive introduction to whitewater gear and basic kayak skills, you head downstream.

During moving water kayak instruction, you'll learn eddy turns, peel-outs, ferries, river reading, and how to surf waves and play holes. Rafting instruction begins with an overview of paddle rafting and captaining skills. Mastering the stroke combinations, timing, and communication skills needed to put your raft exactly where you need it precedes more advanced techniques, including flipping and raft rescue. You'll learn to scout rapids and employ the techniques necessary to ensure your party's well being as you negotiate them. Learning to rig, load, and row the oar rafts that carry the gear completes a well-rounded curriculum of whitewater skills.

The section provides an outstanding opportunity to explore the diverse natural history of the arid Utah canyon country. The contrast of the wet river corridor with the spectacularly exposed geology makes a perfect classroom for studying plants, animals and ecosystems. Rivers are a popular wilderness resource and their use involves special management and conservation concerns, including specially adapted desert-river *Leave No Trace* techniques. You'll examine these issues and participate in discussions on wilderness ethics oriented to the river environment.

At the end of the Desolation/Gray section of river, you'll spend a day breaking down the rafts, packing all the gear, driving to the put-in, and re-rigging your rafts to float the Dinosaur section. While in Dinosaur, you'll participate in a service project and have a chance to run harder rapids.

Climbing Section

- Trip Duration: 20-24 Days
- Extensive rock climbing
- Basic rescue systems
- Base camping/backcountry
- Learning to build anchors and top ropes
- Potential to lead both traditional and sport climbs

The Expedition

Semester climbing camps take place in different areas in Wyoming and South Dakota. You may find yourself jamming your hands into cracks at Devil's Tower National Monument in Wyoming, searching for crystals to grab on the granite towers in the Needles/Mt. Rushmore area of South Dakota, hanging from a limestone jug in Sinks Canyon, Wyoming, or building top-rope anchors at Vedauwoo in southeastern Wyoming. All of these areas offer excellent rock quality and climbs that will challenge beginners and experts alike.

Climbing camps are base camps. You'll set up tents, establish a kitchen, and stay in one place for a week or more. You may camp 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 rock crags each day. One week of your climbing section may be spent camping in the backcountry to take advantage of wilderness climbing opportunities.

Instruction will progress from the basics of movement on rock, climbing knots, rope handling, and belaying, to protection placement, anchors, rappelling, and rope-system management. Plan to spend a lot of time climbing. More advanced topics such as self-rescue and multi-pitch climbing will be addressed. If you master all the requisite techniques, there may be opportunities for you to lead climb.

Climbing may be done as part of a large group when top-roping or in small groups of three or four on multi-pitch routes. You will be able to progress at your own speed and according to your personal goals and interests. The instructors emphasize a responsible, positive 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.

Climbing is a weather dependent activity. We attempt to schedule courses so that climbing sections have the optimum chance of good weather. However, 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 with the understanding that this does not always happen. We will do everything possible to make your time productive, but only large measures of self-motivation can help overcome the "bad weather blues."

Summer Semester in the Rockies General 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 accomplish the following:

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

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in the varied environments encountered; apply this knowledge to new situations
- Consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Formulate and show the ability to implement emergency plans for groups in the outdoors
- Display sound judgment and decision-making skills based on knowledge of equipment, the wilderness environment, other expedition members, and one's own limits
- Demonstrate the ability to prevent, evaluate, and care for medical problems in wilderness setting

Leadership and Expedition Behavior
Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership 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:

- Accurately identify strengths, skills, and areas for personal growth in developing outdoor leadership
- Support others in their development and growth
- Take responsibility for learning; set and attain personal goals
- Take initiative in teaching/leadership roles with peers
- Help plan and participate in an environmentally sound, multi-day, student-led Small Group Expedition
- Work effectively as a member of a team; display a positive attitude despite hardship
- Initiate resolution of interpersonal conflicts
- Play an active role in defining group goals and expectations; demonstrate initiative in activities and tasks

Outdoor Skills
At NOLS, students learn to live and travel in the outdoors within a framework of personal well being and care for the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live proficiently in all course environments; dress effectively for a variety of conditions
- Demonstrate environmentally sensitive and efficient campsite selection and tent or tarp set-up skills
- Cook nutritious meals using a camp stove or fire

- Travel competently using topographic maps and compass
- Use off-trail navigation and route finding to mitigate terrain hazards
- Take responsibility for the care and organization of personal and group equipment
- Exhibit good personal hygiene; be punctual and organized
- Display fundamental knowledge and skills in specific pursuits, e.g., climbing, river travel, mountaineering

Environmental Studies

An integral part of every semester course is to raise students' awareness of their influence on ecosystems and to encourage reflection upon their role, impact, and contributions to the larger environments. Objectives include the ability to:

- Consistently demonstrate sound *Leave No Trace* living and travel skills on personal and group levels and be able to apply this knowledge to varied settings
- Show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; identify characteristic flora and fauna of this region
- Demonstrate familiarity with the geography of the inter mountain west
- Understand the history of pertinent environmental issues and offer potential solutions
- Display a broad elementary knowledge of field natural history, including: birds, mammals, plants, weather, geology, snow science; focus on active, observational study
- Demonstrate knowledge of public land management and discuss the means to be involved in issues of interest
- Make plans for the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life