Course Description
Winter Outdoor Educator

Features Of This Course:

- 15 backcountry days, 6 days at NOLS Teton Valley
- Ski route of 30 to 50 mile, Elevations of 7,000 to 12,000 feet
- Training in avalanche assessment
- Training in backcountry ski techniques
- Excellent backcountry skiing opportunities
- Travel on skis, often towing sleds, through forested mountain terrain
- Pack/sled loads up to 70 lbs.
- Typical Male/Female ratio: 70/30
- Average group size: 12 student and 3 instructors
- Minimum age: 18 Average age: 27
- Each student will present a class related to the winter environment
- Opportunities to develop educator skills within a group of peers

The Expedition

It is 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 well below zero and three feet of snow can fall in one storm; hard work and a positive attitude make winter one of the most rewarding times to travel in the backcountry. This course is designed to help you develop the skills to teach others about camping and traveling responsibly in the winter environment.

The first six days of the winter outdoor educator course are spent at NOLS Teton Valley near Driggs, Idaho. Here in the comfort of a heated facility, with home-cooked meals, and dormitory-style accommodations, we'll teach, basic skills (pack and sled packing, lighting stoves, dressing for the field) and stage for day trips. We will review the equipment you brought, issue equipment you need and bag food for the course. You will spend two days at Grand Targhee Ski Resort on the western side of the Teton Range. Grand Targhee is renowned for its powder and open-glade skiing. Your instructors will begin the morning with the basics—balance and movement on skis, wedge turns, telemark turns, and cross-country ski techniques. Then, the expert staff at Targhee will take you through clinics tailored to your ability level. Time not spent in lessons is devoted to skiing with your NOLS instructors and new friends. Lifts and videotaping will speed your progress. Even if you plan to travel on AT gear, we recommend you take advantage of the Targhee time to develop telemark skills.

Avalanche assessment instruction begins on the fourth day. You will split the next three days between the classroom and the field. Classroom instruction will cover the intricacies of snow crystal formation, metamorphosis, and the physics of avalanche occurrence. Fieldwork on Teton Pass and the surrounding areas will include route finding, hazard evaluation, beacon use and backcountry risk management procedures.

On the morning of the seventh day, the expedition heads into the Snake River Range or to the southern Absarokas. Both are known for dependable snow and excellent skiing. Heavily timbered slopes are intermixed with open glades and broad bowls; steep, expert chutes are broken up by gentle beginner and intermediate terrain. These mountains are magical places to explore, and exhilarating areas to learn the intricacies of backcountry skiing and winter travel.

For 15 days, you'll camp, travel and play in the backcountry. Living in the winter is hard work and days are long, but you'll quickly learn that you can be comfortable and happy outside in temperatures well below freezing. Your homes will be elaborate snow shelters—igloos, quinzhees or snow caves, which you'll find 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 enjoying the muffled sounds of the blizzard beyond your insulating snow walls.

Camp chores take up big portions of your days. Melting snow for water, building kitchens and shelters, packing up piles of gear and clothes, and staying warm and dry are time-consuming activities. But you'll quickly become masters of efficiency and the time you free up can be spent learning about winter ecology, furthering your avalanche assessment skills, teaching classes, or making turns. You will also have plenty of structured and unstructured time to develop your educator and mentoring skills through practice and discussion. If weather and snow conditions permit, you may also climb a peak.

In the backcountry, you'll be divided into groups of two, three or four people for cooking and camping. Together, you'll dig snow shelters, melt snow for water, prepare meals, and enjoy the warmth and coziness of a well built home. Teamwork and cold injury prevention will be important to the entire group's comfort and morale while you are in the field. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other members, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success.

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. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. In town, students have some independent unsupervised time, before and after their course starts.

Weather and Other Challenges
Given the altitude and latitude of these mountain ranges, bitter cold and blizzard conditions can occur at any time. You should expect highly variable weather that can change quickly from sunshine to snow, and sometimes even rain.

The demanding winter environment is extremely challenging. You will be living in cold (possibly sub-zero) temperatures and constant care must be exercised to minimize the possibility of hypothermia and frostbite. Travel requires skiing with a pack and, at times, pulling one of the sleds that each tent group shares to help transport its gear and rations. In these mountains, avalanches occur and can bury unwary skiers. Predicting the likelihood of an avalanche is a skill akin to predicting the weather; it requires experience and practice but is never 100 percent accurate.

While the course is in the backcountry, you will be far from telephones and transportation.

Our instruction emphasizes recognizing and managing hazards. We'll focus on providing you with the tools to travel responsibly and enjoyably through the winter.

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. For this reason, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc.), cell phones, or satellite phones on NOLS courses. Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone and a ground-to-air or marine band radio) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

Winter Outdoor Educator Course Objectives
Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent each student accomplish the following outcomes.

Leadership: Performs timely appropriate actions that guide & support the group to set & achieve realistic outcomes.

Communication: Communicates effectively on interpersonal and group levels.
- States personal opinions and expectations with clarity and timeliness.
- Actively listens; when necessary seeks clarification.
- Balances participating, listening, and observing in-group interactions.
- Gives timely, growth-oriented, specific, behavior descriptive feedback.

Self-Awareness: Understands personal tendencies, strengths and limitations as a leader and expedition member.
- Seeks feedback and learns from experience.
- Displays an awareness of their impact on others.
- Shows the self-confidence to take personal risks and state opinions.
- Displays an awareness of personal values and goals.

Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty: Maintains a positive attitude during adverse and uncertain conditions.
- Stays calm, focused and positive during hardship.
- Manages conflict appropriately.

Vision and Action: Helps plan and implement course activities.
- Demonstrates initiative and completes tasks.
- Takes responsibility for self-learning.

Expedition Behavior: Demonstrates teamwork, respect for others and commitment to group decisions.
- Supports leadership in all group members.
- Is punctual to meetings and activities.
- Balances group goals with personal goals.
- Helps others without routinely doing their work.
- Influences the group in a positive way, supports a positive learning environment.
- Displays a work ethic that contributes to group goals; does their share of group tasks.
- Treats everyone with dignity and respect.

Outdoor Skills: Lives comfortably in a winter environment.
- Dresses effectively; quickly adapts to conditions.
- Cooks nutritious meals using a camp stove.
- Consistently arrives prepared for day trips and meetings.
- Demonstrates effective group travel skills.
- Demonstrates the ability to select a good campsite, set-up a shelter and construct a kitchen.
- Demonstrates fundamental map reading and navigation skills.
- Safely constructs a viable snow shelter.
- Consistently practices bombproofing, organization and efficient camping skills.

Risk Management and Judgment: Demonstrates hazard awareness and good judgment & decision-making skills.

- Participates in the decision-making process.
- Recognizes, anticipates and assesses objective & subjective hazards.
- Appropriately minimizes and manages hazards in a winter environment, including prevention techniques for cold injuries.

Rescue and Avalanche Skills:

- Understands terrain, snow pack, weather and human factors and how they relate to avalanche hazard.
- Demonstrates safe travel technique in avalanche terrain.
- Competency with the use of transceivers; understands and demonstrates how to check range and function.
- Demonstrates the ability to quickly locate a shallowly buried transceiver.
- Participates in an avalanche rescue scenario.
- Completes curriculum and training and received a NOLS Recreational Level 1 Avalanche Certification.

Environmental Studies: Shows an understanding of their surroundings & practices LNT skills.

- Demonstrates natural history observation and interpretation skills by noticing and studying tracks, flora, fauna and other natural wonders of the area.
- Demonstrates appreciation through enthusiasm and interest, learning and sharing with others.
- Demonstrates knowledge of ecological concepts pertinent to the surrounding environment.
- Understands winter plant and animal adaptations.
- Consistently performs sound Leave No Trace (LNT) living and travel skills.
- Understands the transference of wilderness ethics to daily life.

Skiing Skills:

- Travels competently and efficiently with a pack and sled while moving camp.
- Travels efficiently using wax and climbing skins.
- Demonstrates basic proficiency with Nordic downhill skiing techniques (telemark or parallel turns).
- Demonstrates the ability to travel on skis in a variety of snow conditions.

Based on the conditions experienced on this course, this student, at this time:
(Instructor will check one upon the completion of the course)

- Should seek additional training before leading novices.
- Can lead peers of a similar skill level in similar conditions.
- Can assist leading novices under supervision of a more experienced leader.
- Can lead novices in similar conditions.

Suggested Reading
Two weeks in the backcountry is a short time to assimilate the depth of knowledge to be gained on a winter expedition. If you are keen to begin now, here are several of the texts we use on our courses. You can start preparing for your course next to a cozy fire or snuggled deep under the covers! If you only have time (desire) to read a little, start with any of the first five on the list.

- *Allen and Mike's Really Cool Backcountry Ski Book,* Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland, Falcon, 1996
- *Allen and Mike's Really Cool Telemark Tips*, Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland, Falcon, 1999
- *Snow Sense,* Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler, Alaska Mountain Safety Center, 1994
- *Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival*, Bernd Heinrich, Ecco, 2003
- *Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain*, Bruce Tremper, The Mountaineers, 2001

- *The Avalanche Handbook*, David McClung and Peter Schaerer, The Mountaineers, 1993
- *Avalanche Safety for Skiers and Climbers*, Tony Daffern, Cloudcap, Second Edition 1992
- *The Avalanche Book*, Betsy Armstrong and Knox Williams, Fulcrum Publishing, 1992
- *Winter: An Ecological Handbook*, James C. Halfpenny and Roy Douglas Ozanne, Johnson Books, 1989
- *Field Guide to Tracking Animals in the Snow*, Louise R Forrest, Stackpole Books, 1988
- *Free Heel Skiing*, Paul Parker, The Mountaineers, Second Edition 1995