

PRT 3043 – NRL: Risk Assessment and Management, and Decision Making

National Outdoor Leadership School with the
University of Utah, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism
Natural Resources Learning Program

Course Curriculum Description: True safety on wilderness expeditions is elusive. But intelligent management of risks is central to the curriculum of both NOLS and the University of Utah's Natural Resources Learning program within the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism. Hazards and risks to students are an inherent component of all outdoor courses. To minimize the risk to each student and the group, students are taught to recognize developing hazardous situations. Students are taught avoidance or compensatory actions for mitigating many risks. Students are taught and use several judgment and decision-making tools. Students take from these courses the knowledge, skills, and ability to lead others in wild places in an intelligent way.

Over 30 hours of specific classes and demonstrations in addition to the modeling of behaviors by instructors will guide students in their understanding and application of wilderness risk assessment, management, and decision making throughout a course. Every instructor has the academic freedom to arrange the learning process to custom fit each environment, to serve each group of students. Most instructors offer sessions from the following core information:

- Accident Potential Model
- Human factors in accident analysis
- Local weather and climatic hazards, assessment, and mitigations
- Common camp and travel hazards, assessment, and mitigations
- Common activity hazards, assessment, and mitigations
- First-aid for common injuries
- Skills for competent use of equipment
- Defining and developing judgment in the outdoors
- Decision making for students
- Decision making and styles of leadership
- Using a cost/benefit analysis as a foundation for decision-making
- Decision making theories – Classical, Heuristics, Expertise
- Communication skills
- Partnering Control (cause and maintain an action) with Responsibility (to analyze, manage, inform)
- Leadership skills to responsibly analyze, manage, and keep the group informed

Course Objectives: By the end of the course we expect each student to:

- Demonstrate responsibility for their own risk management
- Demonstrate knowledge of environmental hazards for that course type (rock fall, weather, stream crossings, open crossings, avalanches, etc.)
- Demonstrate knowledge of the Human Factors in the Accident Potential model
- Consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazardous situations
- Demonstrate first-aid skills to support a patient until help arrives
- Demonstrate the ability to develop a contingency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self limits
- Practice responsible habits that promote health and safety of themselves and others

Letter Grades, By Percent:

93-100% A, 90-92 A-, 88-89% B+, 83-87% B, 80-82% B-, 78-79% C+, 73-77% C, 70-72% C-, etc.

Course Requirements: Students typically spend 25-30 days in the field with their instructors. Each course type or semester section will have different requirements and equipment lists. Students will receive the specific student evaluation/grading forms in advance of the outing. Students will meet with their mentor-instructor at the mid point of the course to review their progress and set objectives for the second half of the course. Students will receive a written evaluation and grading form by the end of the course. Students must successfully complete the course and earn the grade according to their evaluation.

Domain specific Text Resources:

Canoeing and Kayaking – Instruction Manual (1987) Gullion, L.
Fundamentals of Kayak Navigation (1993) Burch, D.
Learning to Rock Climb (1981) Loughman, M.
Mountaineering: The freedom of the hills (1992) Graydon, D.
NOLS Climbing Instructor Notebook (1997) ed. Powers, P.
NOLS Leadership Toolbox (2001) ed. Gookin, Doran, and Green
NOLS Mexico Sailing Instructor Notebook (1997) ed. Sickle and Burke
NOLS Sea Kayaking Instructor Notebook (1997) ed. Conlan and Peabody
NOLS Wilderness Educators' Notebook (1999) ed. Gookin
NOLS Wilderness First Aid (2000) Schimelpfenig and Lindsey
NOLS Wilderness Mountaineering (1993) Powers, P.
River Rescue: A manual for whitewater safety (1997) Bechdel and Ray
Sea Kayaking: A manual for long-distance touring (1988) Dowd, J.
The Complete Whitewater Rafter (1996) Bennett, J.
The National Outdoor Leadership School's Wilderness Guide (1999) Harvey, M.
Wilderness Educator's Notebook (1999) Ed. Gookin, J.

Note: This syllabus has been created as a guide to the class and is as accurate as possible. However, all information is subject to change as the semester progresses. Any changes will be discussed during class and will be documented in writing. It is your responsibility to keep track of any changes.

Curriculum Contacts:

NOLS: John Gookin,
Univ. of Utah: Kirk Nichols