

# ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

## FOR STUDENTS ON FIELD EXPEDITIONS



The mission of NOLS is to be the leading source and teacher of wilderness skills and leadership that serve people and the environment. NOLS field and expedition courses are multi-day or week wilderness trips with the goal of training outdoor leaders.

The health and well-being, of our students and staff and the effective education of our students are top priorities. The wilderness environments NOLS courses live in and travel through are remote, dynamic, and physically and emotionally challenging. These environments along with the educational activities conducted and the living and traveling conditions encountered require students to be fully committed to and capable of working hard, taking responsibility for themselves, and working effectively in the group to achieve the goals of the course.

A qualified person is one who can meet the Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC) for participation in the program activity.

The following apply for all NOLS expedition courses.

### SAFETY AND JUDGMENT

#### Each participant must...

1. Be able to independently identify and recognize environmental hazards. These hazards may include, but are not limited to, falling objects/rocks, loose rock and unstable surfaces, rugged steep and uneven terrain, cliff edges, crevasses, moving water (fast or slow) such as rivers, creeks, surf, or tides; and potentially hazardous animals and insects.
2. Recognize and understand the hazards and risks posed by other course members, which include, but are not limited to, fatigue, state of mind, and actions that may influence judgment and decision-making.
3. Recall and understand hazards and risks previously explained by instructors.
4. Be able to effectively alert and warn others of potential or impending dangers such as falling rocks, aggressive animals, or other environmental hazards.
5. Be able to effectively signal or notify course instructors or other course members of personal distress, injury, or need for assistance.
6. Be able to do the preceding warnings and notifications up to a distance of 50 meters and in conditions with limited visibility such as in darkness or inclement weather or with loud background noise, such as high winds or while near roaring rivers.
7. Act reliably around above stated hazards to minimize risk even when not directly supervised.
8. Independently perceive, understand, and follow directions and instructions given by others to be able to successfully execute appropriate and perhaps unfamiliar, techniques to avoid hazards and /or manage risks. These directions may be given before the hazard or risk is encountered or may need to be given during exposure to the hazard/risk and out of necessity and practicality, are often given orally.
9. Be able to stay alert and to focus attention for up to several hours at a time while traveling in wilderness terrain, attending classes, or receiving instructions.
10. Be able to respond appropriately to stress or crisis such as when encountering large and/or potentially hazardous animals, severe weather, or a medical emergency.

11. If taking prescription medications, be able to maintain proper dosage by self-medicating without assistance from instructors or others (except possibly in emergency situations).

## **LEADERSHIP AND EXPEDITION BEHAVIOR**

### **Each participant must...**

1. Work effectively as a member of a team despite potentially stressful and difficult conditions. This may require problem solving on an interpersonal or group level as well as a willingness to accept differences.
2. Contribute to a safe learning environment—no verbal or physical inappropriate behavior of others is tolerated for any reason.
3. Be able to willingly and equally share responsibility with tent mates in daily tent group chores. Each student may not do an equal share each day, but over a period of several days each student should do a proportionate share. All students are learning the skills and being challenged by the conditions and activities; there can be no expectation that any other student will be able to continually assume a greater share of the work or that an instructor can continually focus a greater share of his/her energy and time on one student.
4. Effectively communicate ideas and concerns on an individual and group level.
5. Have the cognitive ability to learn necessary skills given normal time limitations of a NOLS course.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

### **Each participant must...**

1. Learn and then practice Leave No Trace camping and travel techniques.

## **OUTDOOR SKILLS: CAMPING**

### **Each participant must...**

1. Learn and competently perform the fundamental camping skills of finding a campsite, setting up a shelter, and cooking with a camp stove.
2. Remain adequately hydrated, fed, and properly dressed so as to remain generally healthy and be able to avoid environmental injuries such as hypothermia, heat illness, sunburn or frostbite.
3. Be able to perform, after being instructed, the above activities independently in cooperation with course mates without direct supervision.
4. Be able to move about the campsite in order to attend classes, attend to toileting needs, and contribute to camping tasks as necessary.
5. Live in a physically demanding, remote backcountry environment for the uninterrupted period of the course length, which can range from one to four weeks or more. Conditions of this environment may vary from cold (below minus 20° F) to hot (above 90° F) depending on course location and season and may include, but is not limited to, rain, snow or hail, uninterrupted sun and/or wind, or the absence thereof. The remoteness is such that it may require at minimum 1-day's travel, but perhaps in excess of 1 week's travel, to reach the nearest roadhead and advanced medical care.

The following are the additional EEC specific to different course types or activities.

## WILDERNESS HIKING COURSE

Each participant must...

1. At minimum, be able to travel over and negotiate through varied wilderness terrain with a backpack weighing up to or exceeding 60 pounds or 40%–45% of body weight. (Some hiking courses are designed with pack weights less than 60 pounds.)
2. Travel conditions may include, but are not limited to, rough, rugged, uneven steep and sloping terrain; human made and animal made trails; rocky terrain that may range from smooth bedrock to extensive areas of large rock boulders (boulder fields); needing to cross rivers and creeks without the aid of bridges up to three feet or more in depth; ascending, descending or traversing slopes covered in snow, rocks or vegetation; bushwhacking off trail through thick standing and/or downed vegetation. Any and all travel can occur during periods of inclement weather or nighttime hours.
3. Travel distances can range from less than one mile to more than ten miles in one day. On average, a month-long wilderness course travels up to or exceeds 100 miles during the course.
4. Travel duration can range from less than one hour to more than 12 hours in one day and occur on successive days.
5. Have average strength and endurance and basic balance and agility to travel through such terrain with a backpack.
6. Have the ability to have a third point of contact for balance purposes, such as with hand(s) or to hold an ice axe/walking stick, for travel through deep rivers, on snow slopes or ascending or descending slopes.
7. Although groups will often be able to take hourly breaks or camp early if weather becomes hazardous, occasionally this is not possible. Examples include: descending/ascending a 2000' boulder choked gully; descending a peak with a threatening thunderstorm; descending a mountain pass in similar conditions.
8. Resupplies of food occur every 7–13 days (depending on course type, route, and pre-arranged logistics). Thus, students need to be able to carry gear, food and personal items or personal medications, (such as insulin) needed for that ration period. A limited amount of necessary personal items may be sent in at each re-ration.

## MOUNTAINEERING OR CLIMBING COURSE

The requirements for Wilderness hiking courses apply to mountaineering courses with the addition of the following:

Each participant must...

1. Effectively communicate independently in an oral dialogue over a distance of up to 50 meters when participating in multi-pitch rock climbing or alpine mountaineering or during glacier travel.
2. The potential necessary communication of climbing signals, may include, hand signals, spoken signals or a rope tug system. Electronic aids are likely not reliable.
3. More notably, communication includes both:
  - a. Direction from the instructor as to what the student should do, e.g. if the student falls 30 feet into a crevasse, direction regarding the procedures to be used needs to be communicated; on a multi-pitch climb if the rope becomes jammed and the instructor and student must communicate and work together to figure out what the problem is and how best to solve it.

- b. Response from the student to the instructor, e.g. if a student falls, or has difficulty with a section of the climb and the instructor has to determine, by asking questions, about the student's well-being and whether rescue procedures are necessary.
4. Provide a reliable belay to another climber during roped climbing. To do so a student must be able to reliably manipulate a climbing rope through a belay device such as an ATC, Grigri, other such device and understand the necessary climbing signals. The instructors leading the course may deem a backup belay person is necessary.
5. Independently tie the overhand and figure of eight series of knots.
6. Perform a self-arrest with an ice axe if traveling on snow or glaciers.
7. Reliably and independently perform simple technical tasks such as tying into a rope, clipping into an anchor and getting into a harness without the direct supervision of an instructor.

## WINTER SKI OR SNOWBOARD COURSE

### Each participant must...

1. Move on skis or snowboard over flat to steep (35 degree) unpacked snow-covered terrain.
2. Be able to move a load of gear weighing at minimum 60 lbs. by means of sled, backpack or some combination thereof.
3. Be able to travel from camp to camp, which may take all day (8+ hours).
4. Be able to shovel in order to perform camp chores and to participate in rescues where people, gear or shelters have been buried in the snow such as in an avalanche or drifted in during storm.
5. Be able to perceive and differentiate signals from an avalanche transceiver (transceivers are currently manufactured to transmit visual or audio signals) and efficiently move over avalanche debris without skis.
6. Be able to withstand cold temperatures (-20 degrees F or colder).

## WILDERNESS HORSEPACKING COURSE

### Each participant must...

1. Be able to mount and dismount a horse independently.
2. Be able to rapidly dismount when directed to on short notice in any terrain in situations where a horse might be in distress and rapid dismount is necessary for the safety of the rider and horse. Assistance to remount may not possible in such situations.
3. Be able to balance independently in the saddle while traveling over rugged steep mountainous terrain and negotiating obstacles such as rocks, deadfall, and mud.
4. Be able to maintain balance on horse during river crossings with swift, deep, cold water and during -entry and exit of river when steep banks may be present and need to be negotiated.
5. Control the horse by giving it signals to stop, move, turn left or right, and calm down. This is typically accomplished through leg, hand and/or voice signals.
6. Be able to lift minimally up to 35 lbs. in order to pack a horse.
7. Be able to walk one to two miles on trail when or if horse is injured, ill or unable to carry a rider.
8. Be able to move self over uneven mountain or desert terrain at camp in order to attend to and care for the horses.

9. Be able to perform an emergency one-rein stop by reaching down to the horse's neck, grabbing rein tightly on one side, and pulling it hard to your toe while maintaining balance on the horse.
10. Maximum weight for an individual is 220 pounds, which is a function of the horse's weight carrying ability.

## **SEA KAYAKING AND WHITEWATER RIVER EXPEDITION COURSES**

### **Each participant must...**

1. Control a paddle and pull it through the water in order to steer and propel the boat forward.
2. Be able to perceive, understand and respond to audible commands given by a boating partner or communicate such commands to boating partners (such as in a tandem canoe, double sea kayak or paddle raft) to maneuver a boat to maintain proper heading or avoid obstacles.
3. Be able to exit a capsized boat, fend for self while in the water away from the boat, attain and maintain correct body position if out of the boat in a rapid or rough seas, grab onto another boat or rope for rescue purposes, and/or perform self-rescue or cooperate with assisted rescue.
4. Physical strength and coordination to carry gear from boats over uneven and rugged terrain to camp.
5. For whitewater canoeing, specifically, weigh 250 pounds or less.
6. For sea kayaking, specifically:
  - a. Need to have physical strength and agility to re-enter kayak in the event of a capsize, either assisted or unassisted, in order to avoid prolonged immersion in cold water.
  - b. Maximum weight for an individual is 250 pounds, which is a function of the kayak's weight carrying capacity.

## **SAILING**

### **Each participant must...**

1. Be able to move around the cockpit as necessary to shift weight such as leaning out from the boat when it is heeling so the boat will handle properly and/or avoid hazards on board such as avoiding the boom during a change in tack.
2. Be able to secure self within the cockpit so as not to be thrown overboard.
3. Be able to observe and assess the sail trim, the surrounding terrain (for navigation purposes), and the hazards in and conditions of the water.
4. Be able to exit a capsized boat, fend for self while in the water away from the boat, attain and maintain correct body position if out of boat in rough seas, exit out of the water to shore, grab onto another boat or rope as necessary for rescue purposes, and perform self-rescue and/or cooperate with assisted rescue.
5. Be able to exit the cabin in an emergency through the V-berth escape hatch located in the ceiling of the cabin. This hatch is an isosceles trapezoid measuring 18" x 18" x 23" and requires passengers to pull themselves up through the hatch.

In addition to the above the following applies to sailing at NOLS Mexico.

1. When landing or casting off shore, move through water near the shore with a rocky bottom in surf conditions.
2. Be able to enter a boat from a standing or floating position while in the water.