Fall Semester for Outdoor Educators Course Description

You're passionate about education, and you know the power of an outdoor classroom. You're eager to bring your experience and passion to the next level. If you're seeking an experience to develop your skills as an educator in the outdoors, this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 87 days
- Course sections: backpacking, Wilderness First Responder (WFR), rock climbing, canyon travel, and backcountry skiing
- Average group size: 12–15 students / 2–4 instructors (varies by section)
- Average age: 27 / minimum age: 21
- Average pack weight: 50–65 pounds
- Skills: on teaching outdoor living, technical climbing, and winter camping
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors (based on instructor discretion)
- On- and off-trail hiking
- Certifications: Wilderness First Responder (WFR)
- NOLS Certificates: Leave No Trace Master Educator, NOLS Level I Avalanche Training

Overview

This course will take you from the high peaks of Wyoming to the red canyons of Utah, where you'll refine the teaching and leadership skills needed to work as a professional outdoor educator. A foundational course goal is building an inclusive community with your peers. Learning the value of teamwork, you will tackle group challenges and achieve common goals.

In the backcountry, you and your coursemates will learn various approaches to effective teaching and facilitation in an outdoor education context. You will ultimately be responsible for teaching a piece of the curriculum. When we say "teaching" at NOLS, we mean a whole collection of mechanisms that, when used intentionally, help students learn. You will be challenged to experiment with different teaching styles as your peers and instructors provide constructive feedback. Your instructors will teach ongoing classes about risk management and mitigation in various environments.

Course Sections

Backpacking

- Duration: 16 days
- Route length: approximately 60 miles
- Elevation range: 7,000–10,000 feet
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Notable wildlife: grizzly and black bear, elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep
- Grizzly and black bear habitat
- On- and off-trail hiking
- Location: Wind River Range

Your semester begins in Wyoming's Wind River Range. The Winds are glacier-carved mountains renowned for their sheer granite walls and world-class fly-fishing. No roads and few developed trails exist. Fall weather is notoriously unpredictable; your course could experience sunny and mild weather one day and receive several feet of fresh snow the next.

You'll begin with basic camping and travel skills: cooking and stove use, map reading, Leave No Trace practices, and techniques for responsible hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat. Later the group will move into more advanced topics: fly fishing, compass use, snow travel, first aid, expedition behavior, and leadership. This section builds the foundation of camping and leadership skills that you will use throughout your course.

Wilderness First Responder

- Duration: 10 days
- Emphasis on judgment and decision-making in the wilderness
- Location: NOLS Noble Hotel, Lander, Wyoming

Your second section will be at the Noble Hotel in Lander, WY. This 80-hour course, the industry standard for outdoor professionals, is taught by faculty from NOLS Wilderness Medicine. You'll learn to make critical medical and evacuation decisions in remote locations. Your time is divided between classroom case studies and outdoor clinics, where you'll practice patient assessment, CPR, and injury care.

Rock Climbing

- Duration: 20 days
- Top-rope site management and multi-pitch climbing
- Natural-anchor building and artificial gear placement
- Lead belaying and lead climbing
- Location: Red Rock Canyon, Nevada

Depending on the weather and time of year, your climbing camp may be held in Utah's House Range; at Split Rock, Lankin Dome, Devil's Tower, or Sinks Canyon, in Wyoming; at Red Rocks in Nevada; or in Colorado's Unaweep Canyon. Each area offers excellent rock and world-class climbs to challenge beginners and experts alike.

You will begin with the basics: climbing movement, knots, rope handling, and belaying. Soon, you'll be placing artificial protection, building anchors, rappelling, and managing rope systems. More advanced topics, such as fixed rope ascension, direct aid, and self-rescue may also be addressed. If you are ready, you may have the opportunity to lead a climb. NOLS has standard criteria used to evaluate readiness and ability before allowing students to lead climb.

Climbing camps are base camps. You'll set up your tents, establish a kitchen, and stay in one place for the duration of the section. You may stay in an established campground or at a backcountry site. You should expect to encounter other climbers not affiliated with NOLS on this section, and you may drive to and from the crag each day.

Canyon Travel

- Duration: 22 days
- Route distance: 50–75 miles
- Average pack weight: 50–60 pounds
- Location: southern Utah

This section takes you through the unique canyon country of the Colorado Plateau in southeastern Utah.

On this section, you'll draw on your maturing leadership and navigation skills to find your way through complicated canyons. Your days will involve walking through the bottom of canyons, navigating along the mesa top, or scouting for a way into or out of a canyon. Depending upon your route, you may have the opportunity to descend technical slot canyons on day hikes as you navigate intricate movement challenges utilizing skills

obtained on your climbing section. You'll work hard to minimize your impact in an area where the soil is fragile and water is precious.

In addition to outdoor skills, you'll immerse yourself in topics that may include history, ecology, and learning more about this unique part of the U.S. Exposed landforms show the land's geologic past and you'll see flora and fauna change dramatically as you travel. People have lived in this area for thousands of years, and you may observe cliff dwellings or potsherds; classes and readings may cover this ancient history as well as address current topics around culture, history, and land management.

Drawing on the library of resources you're carrying, you and your coursemates may teach a short lesson on a topic relevant to this stunning part of the U.S.

Peer leadership is a critical component of your canyon experience. Student leadership teams are often responsible for planning the day's activities, assessing and managing risk, and facilitating evening meetings. Some canyon areas have group-size limits that are smaller than the size of your group. In these areas, two "sister sections" of 12–15 students are mixed together and divided into three hiking groups of 8–10 students for the duration of the section.

Solos
On this section, you may have the chance to do an optional "solo," where you spend up to 36 hours alone. There is no hiking during the solo. The canyons can be a deeply spiritual place, and many students find this experience a rare and powerful opportunity for introspection.

Independent Student Group Travel
At the beginning of the course your instructors will travel with you to teach travel skills including navigation, leadership, risk assessment, and decision-making. As you develop competence, instructors will gradually give you more responsibilities. Once you gain proficiency and demonstrate competence to your instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for up to a day at a time—we call this independent student group travel.

Student Expedition
After successful practice with independent student group travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, your course may culminate in a multi-day student-led expedition. Usually, for the Student Expeditions you will travel in a group of four to six students independently of instructors for two to six days (depending on location). This

independent expedition caps off your NOLS experience and gives you a chance both to put into practice the skills you've learned and to appreciate the relationships you've formed with your expedition mates over the duration of your course.

Independent student group travel is carefully planned with your instructors and emergency plans are created for each group. Your instructors may be up to 24 hours away, but each group carries an electronic emergency communication device to alert the NOLS emergency response system in the event of an accident. Ultimately, on this course you will develop the competence to travel independently in the wilderness and with your family and friends.

Backcountry Skiing

- Duration: 15 days
- Average pack/sled weight: 80 pounds (combined)
- Route length: approximately 30 miles
- Certificate: NOLS Level I Avalanche Training
- Location: varies by course

Your winter section will take place in one of several Wyoming mountain ranges, including the Absaroka, Gros Ventre, Wyoming, or Wind River Mountains. These ranges provide excellent opportunities to learn the intricacies of backcountry skiing and winter travel.

After outfitting winter clothing, alpine-touring (AT) ski equipment, and high-calorie rations at our base in Lander, Wyoming, you're off to the backcountry. You'll first learn the basics of skiing with a sled, snow camping, and winter ecology, as well as how to manage a group in avalanche terrain. You will sleep in elaborate, snug snow shelters you'll, which you and your course-mates will learn to construct.

Camp chores will take up a big portion of your days. Melting snow for water, digging avalanche "test pits," and staying warm and dry are time-consuming activities. Once you become efficient at these tasks, you'll devote more time to teaching classes and skiing untracked slopes. If weather and snow conditions permit, you may have the opportunity for a winter peak ascent.

Classes on avalanche science and forecasting focus on the surrounding terrain, weather conditions and changes, and snowpack assessment; experience and practice are necessary to refine your judgment. A significant portion of the winter curriculum focuses on avalanche assessment and rescue techniques.

Student Classes

You will be expected to teach a lesson or facilitate an activity several times throughout this course. Your instructors will offer guidance on how to plan clear, concise, and engaging lessons. Your peers will offer formal and informal feedback on your classes, and you'll improve as you try new ideas.

Your instructors will adjust the curriculum as conditions change and "teachable moments" arise. You may plan a half-hour lesson on species adaptations, only to have to deliver a five-minute version of it in a downpour. Guided discovery and shared inquiry are the foundation of outdoor education. Outdoor Educator courses encourage you to move beyond lecture-style classes to facilitate exceptional experiential learning.

Course Format

In the backcountry, you'll typically live with two or three other students in a "cook group." The composition of these groups will change regularly, allowing you to work with all members of your semester. Initially, cook groups are single gender; later in the course, they may be co-ed. On your river section, you may cook as a single large group.

As you transition between sections, you may come back to Lander to organize gear, receive mail, and even take showers and do laundry. Alternatively, your course may be on the road for multiple sections and have their transition days in small towns and campgrounds remote from NOLS facilities. There is very little time between sections to attend to personal business, as semesters are designed to maximize time in the field. The final day of the semester is spent in Lander de-issuing equipment, finishing evaluations, and debriefing with NOLS program staff. That evening, there will be an end-of-course banquet and celebration.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

Fall weather in the Rockies is unpredictable. You'll learn to live comfortably outside in blizzards, rainstorms, and high winds. Cold and snowy conditions can occur any month of the year, and you will likely spend some time camping and traveling on snow.

Terrain

You may be bushwhacking off-trail through thick vegetation, scrambling over refrigerator-sized boulders, or battling sleet. Rivers are icy from snowmelt and can be

difficult or impossible to cross. You may have to traverse slopes of loose rock and carry a heavy backpack up steep passes.

Climbing

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 possibility 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.

Wildlife

The area your course will travel through is home to grizzly and black bears. NOLS, in collaboration with bear biologists, has developed specific practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter. Your instructors will teach these practices to you and you will have to follow them every day. Bear avoidance practices include carrying bear deterrent pepper spray, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, not having food in tents, and proper food storage. In some situations in grizzly bear country, the minimum group size is generally four people. You will live, travel and take care of personal necessities with a group of your peers always close by. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course, one of the most challenging aspects of living in grizzly bear country.

Remoteness

Identifying and managing the risks from hazards—such as falling rock, stormy weather, animals, moving water, and steep terrain—will be a constant theme on your course. You're often miles from the amenities of civilization, including medical care; telephones may be several days away. You are expected to demonstrate the highest regard for risk management in the field.

Learning Goals at NOLS

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams and in communities; care for themselves and others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult

circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.