



WHAT IS A NOLS EXPEDITION?

Every NOLS course features excellent instruction, practical leadership skills, hands-on teaching of technical skills, enjoyment of the world's best wilderness, and most of all, fun! Read on to learn what a NOLS expedition is all about.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

Leadership

The leadership lessons you learn on your NOLS course easily transfer to your daily life. Because you'll live and travel as an expedition, you'll develop the leadership and group skills necessary for working with others in the office, at school or at home. Self-awareness, group management, communication, teamwork, decision-making, judgment, initiative, and increased tolerance for adversity and uncertainty will transfer to many aspects of your life.

As a NOLS student and as a developing leader, you'll recognize how important it is to adapt and learn such things as: openness for the ambiguity of the unknown, appreciation for challenge and hard work, patience for your own and others' anxiety, tolerance for feedback, and tolerance for discomfort. You'll experience the joy of meeting a challenge, being part of a vibrant community and creating something that makes you proud.

Wilderness Skills

On your course you will learn how to live and travel comfortably in the wilderness. Your expedition will give you the time to learn and apply such things as map and compass use, caring for yourself and your equipment, cooking, Leave No Trace techniques and much more. You'll have more than just a brief introduction to these skills; you'll have ample opportunity to practice and master them.

After your NOLS course you should be ready to take family and friends out on wilderness excursions with confidence. The wilderness will offer a lifetime of recreation and learning opportunities, thanks to those weeks you spent at NOLS.

Risk Management

Managing risk at NOLS starts with learning how to take care of yourself so you can become and remain a functional team member. You will also learn to recognize the hazards encountered in the backcountry and mitigate the risks of those hazards. You will learn and apply leadership skills to facilitate effective group decision-making to attain the goals of the course. As your expertise develops NOLS coaches you on how to shift from following simple rules to applying sound judgment.

Environmental Studies

Your NOLS course will include thorough training in the Leave No Trace principles. Studying local ecology and natural history will help you both enjoy the environment and better understand local land management issues. Learning and practicing the principles of wilderness ethics and sustainability combine with the NOLS leadership skill set to give you the values and tools to be an effective leader in your community when you return home.



WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

A Unique Course Format

NOLS is a wilderness based nonprofit school that uses wilderness skills to teach leadership, risk management, and environmental studies. Our courses vary in length from eight days to an entire academic year. During your course, classes are held regularly and your classroom is the great outdoors. Learning will also occur in informal situations and through practice as you live and travel in the wilderness. A NOLS expedition has roughly three hours of applied activities for every hour of class time. Daily activities and classes vary according to location, weather and other factors.

NOLS instructors are professional educators, trained in experiential education. They will teach you to identify hazards and manage risks. You will be expected to practice these techniques to protect yourself and your course mates. Early in the course, your instructors will provide close supervision, but as you gain experience and proficiency, the level of supervision will change.

On most of our courses, one of the ways we help you develop into an outdoor leader is by giving you the opportunity to travel without instructors. By the beginning of the second week of many NOLS courses, you will travel in student groups without instructors for a day at a time. To prepare for this, you'll have classes and practical experience with staff in backcountry travel. You'll learn decision-making processes from your instructors and they'll observe, coach and help you develop your leadership skills.

If your instructors feel that your group is ready, the culminating experience of many courses is the Student Expedition. For several days of your course, you and a few of your classmates will travel without an instructor. You will put your traveling, navigation, camping and leadership skills to use.

Your instructors help the course divide into groups, select a leader and plan a route. You will know your instructors' route and campsites (usually no more than a day away). You and your group make the daily leadership decisions but still have the benefit of NOLS support systems.

This is excellent preparation for the backcountry trips you will lead for family and friends after you get home and is often cited by our alumni as the most significant learning experience of their NOLS course.

Expedition Behavior

Besides weather and other environmental factors, one of the biggest challenges you will face is the expeditionary nature of the course. With fellow students from all over the world, tent groups that may be co-ed, and everyone coming from different backgrounds and experiences, it will sometimes be challenging to live in close proximity with the same people every day. However, caring for fellow expedition members and helping others when the going gets tough is what makes a course successful. At NOLS, we call this type of teamwork "expedition behavior." As a group member, it is vital that each individual be fully committed to the success of the expedition and the well-being of other participants.

Evaluations

The evaluation process is an integral part of every NOLS course. You will receive feedback in a timely fashion throughout the expedition.

You will also receive a written evaluation from your instructors at the end of your course and after each section on semesters. In turn, you will be asked to provide feedback to your peers, your instructors and the overall program. Giving and getting positive or constructive feedback is a valuable communication process that you can take beyond your NOLS course.

Good Food

Being physically active in the outdoors requires good food and lots of it. NOLS supplies a nutritious diet of dried foods, offering numerous combinations that are limited only by your creativity. Rice, pasta, beans, flour, cereal, nuts, cheese, soups, and dried fruits and vegetables are among the basic ingredients. Different avenues of cuisine can be explored by experimenting with your spice kit, and wild foods may provide other creative possibilities. You will learn how to prepare filling, nutritious meals even if you're a first time cook. We try to adjust rations for food allergies or medical related food restrictions. We may not be able to adjust for personal diet preferences. If you have special dietary needs, please contact our admission office.

Instruction in Backcountry Sanitation

Personal cleanliness in the wilderness is important for health and well-being. At the beginning of the course, your instructors will discuss hygiene topics including: bathing, hair washing, proper disposal of human waste and proper disposal of tampons or sanitary napkins.

A Positive Learning Environment

We want to provide you with a positive learning environment. Each person's values and beliefs affect the rest of the group and balancing these issues is an important part of expedition behavior. If you feel NOLS' staff or students are not respecting your values or beliefs, it is essential that you speak up so the issues are addressed. You can expect the following:

- Freedom from discrimination on any basis, including race, color, gender, religion, creed, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability or socio-economic background
- A learning environment free from physical or verbal harassment
- Real challenges and meaningful experiences (We will try to inform you of anticipated curriculum and risks, but it must be understood that unanticipated situations occur and all expectations may not be met. Group dynamics may dictate that more attention is given to some elements of the course and others might receive minimal or no attention.)

- Thoughtful, honest and timely comments concerning your performance and abilities
- Well-trained and qualified instructors NOLS expects the following of you:
- To follow the safety practices and policies described pre-course information, course orientation, and as taught by instructors throughout the course and to be responsible for your own safety and for contributing to the safety of the group
- To participate fully in the expedition—take part in classes, camp chores, activities, discussions, leadership, conflict resolution and the building of a safe learning environment for all
- To respect the values and beliefs of other expedition members
- To be courteous to local residents and merchants and help to maintain a positive image of NOLS

Issues should be addressed promptly, ideally with the individual involved and an instructor. If more follow-up is desired, the concerns should be raised with the director of the program.

