

ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

FOR STUDENTS ON FIELD EXPEDITIONS



NOLS field and expedition courses are multi-day and multi-week wilderness trips that teach outdoor skills and leadership.

The health and well-being, of our students and staff and the effective education of our students are 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.

The predominant language used on field courses is English. Fluency is not required, but the ability to understand instruction and directions, particularly when it comes to risk management (safety), is necessary. (There are a few field courses in Mexico and Chile for residents of those countries that are taught in Spanish.)

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.

RISK MANAGEMENT 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. Expedition living is in close quarters with limited personal time. There can be a lack of, or variable, daily routines which likely change day-to-day. Expedition living 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 their 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.