

## Course Overview

The Northwest Outdoor Educator course is a comprehensive expedition program that combines the beauty and challenging environments of the Washington wilderness with intensive educational curriculum and activities, giving priority to the skills needed to work in the fields of outdoor and adventure



education. Designed specifically for all individuals interested in pursuing instructional, guiding, or outdoor teaching positions, this course offers 50 days of in-depth learning in mountaineering, sea kayaking, and first aid while simultaneously exploring group dynamics, experiential education theory and methods, and wilderness activity management. Within a supportive community of like-minded adventurers, you will be provided with opportunities to act as both a student and an educator, drawing references from your experiences to affirm the wilderness educational concepts being explored. Previous course participants are out working in all facets of our

industry — as guides, instructors, and classroom teachers — and have, along with course instructors, expressed that this course delivers invaluable experience, relevant skills and the knowledge needed to help students become better educators.

Your course will begin the moment you meet Outward Bound transportation at the Seattle-Tacoma airport. That same day, you will make the journey into the San Juan Islands to begin your expedition. Although there will be times for rest and reflection while on course, this is still an intense experience: seven weeks of skill development and backcountry living combined with physical and mental challenges.

Experienced wilderness educators know that backcountry travel is highly demanding. From getting up early, packing your bags and cooking breakfast to paddling a kayak or hiking up a mountain, the wilderness is unpredictable and necessitates total focus for success. It can take every waking moment to get from point A to point B. Course alumni and instructors all agree that arriving physically fit will not only enhance your experience and ability to do well on the course but ultimately allow you to take full advantage of the expedition.

## Outdoor Educator Courses Vs. Semester Leadership Courses

Northwest Outward Bound School offers two distinct types of long-format (50 days +) courses: Semester courses and Outdoor Educator courses. Outdoor Educator courses are specifically designed for participants who want to explore a career in outdoor education, whereas semester courses are designed for participants looking for a long Outward Bound course that maximizes the depth of the Outward Bound experience. While both course types teach numerous technical and human skills, the Outdoor Educator course adds a rich layer of educational skills. Outdoor Educator course participants spend significant time learning experiential education theory and are required to utilize their educational learning in a formal educational practicum where they design and implement a multi-day outdoor education experience for



local students. Outdoor Educator courses also include a 9-day Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certification course. If you have any questions, or are having difficulty choosing between a semester and instructor course, please call your course advisor.

## Course Areas

**SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WASHINGTON** – Nestled between Vancouver Island and the North Cascades, the San Juan Islands are a unique coastal cruising ground with large expanses of sparkling water and mountain scenery. During your journey you will encounter coastlines with a combination of sandy and rocky beaches, shallow and deep harbors, placid and reef-studded bays. Knotty, twisted Madrona trees grow along much of the shorelines while evergreen fir and pine forests cover large inland areas. Sightings of harbor seals, porpoise and eagles are common as well as the rare glimpse of an Orca whale. The islands get less average rainfall than the surrounding area due to the rain-shadow effect of the Olympic Mountains. Summertime high temperatures are around 70 degrees Fahrenheit while lows could be in the 40's.

**THE NORTH CASCADES, WASHINGTON** – The North Cascades are called the “American Alps” for their rugged beauty and glaciated peaks; they remain some of the wildest and least traveled wilderness in the United States. The North Cascades host the greatest concentration of glaciers in the lower 48 and are full of high mountain meadows peppered with wild flowers. The mountain sections of our programs operate in the Sawtooth, Pasayten, and Glacier Peak Wilderness areas, as well as North Cascades National Park. All lie on the east side of the North Cascades and receive significantly less rainfall than the western coast of Washington. Temperatures typically range from freezing to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Our course area is on the eastern side of the Cascades, and thus tends to be drier; however, rain and thunderstorms are not unusual.

## Course Activities

### SEA KAYAKING SECTION (10-14 DAYS) –

The course starts with almost two weeks of sea kayaking in the San Juan Islands, exploring the inner coastal waters that make this area a renowned cruising ground. You will paddle with your group, seeking out island campsites, and getting acquainted with the fascinating natural and cultural history of the Pacific Northwest coast. To become a competent sea kayaker, you'll learn how to read a chart, perform self and assisted rescues, paddle efficiently, and assess sea conditions appropriate to



you and your group's abilities. This course focuses on team building during the sea kayaking expedition, which sets you and your crew up for success during the remainder of course.



## MOUNTAINEERING/ROCK CLIMBING SECTION

**(12-16 DAYS)** – The rock and mountain section focuses on mountaineering skills and an institutional top-rope climbing management. You will learn skills such as knot tying, climbing and belaying technique, anchor building, and climbing site management. Each day presents a different focus, with ample time for experiential learning. The instructor-to-student ratio is never more than 1:5 which, allows for personal coaching on the physical techniques of climbing and mountaineering. Our small ratios also enable our instructors to cater curriculum to the specific interests and aptitudes of individual course

participants. During the mountaineering section, your instructors focus curriculum on educational philosophy and group dynamics.

## WILDERNESS FIRST RESPONDER SECTION (WFR) (9 DAYS) –

We'll spend nine days completing 72 hours of advanced backcountry first aid and evacuation techniques. Mornings are devoted to lectures and exams. Afternoons are devoted to practical hands-on sessions and rescue simulations. Expect many rescue simulations with made-up victims and stage blood that will be recorded for enhanced learning. Evenings are reserved for study and assignments. Successful completion of this section involves full participation in the field simulations and written exams that make up the assessment process. You will receive WFR and CPR certification cards from Wilderness Medicine Training Center upon successful completion of the course. These are the industry-standard medical certifications that are required for professionals in the outdoor industry.



**SOLO** – The Solo Experience provides the opportunity to reflect, rest and practice the campcraft skills you have been learning throughout the course. Solo length is based on length of course, weather, student condition, age and instructor preference. You will not travel during this time and your instructors will check on you occasionally, but you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. Instructors will choose your solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, within a safe distance for emergency contact with them, and you will be provided with sufficient water, food, and equipment. Most students spend their Solo time journaling, drawing, reflecting, thinking and resting as they process lessons of the course to focus on their goals for the future.

**SERVICE** – Service to others and the environment is a core value of Outward Bound and is integrated into each course. Groups follow Leave No Trace ethics as service to the environment and engage in acts of service while leading and supporting fellow students. Designated service projects are coordinated with



land managers like the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service to collaborate on land restoration projects. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to work alongside select social service agencies like nursing homes, hospitals, and organic farms. Students develop a value of service, seeing the impact of their actions firsthand, and transfer this desire to serve their communities back home.

**FINAL EXPEDITION (3-8 DAYS)** – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. During the travel sections of course, Outward Bound instructors purposefully and gradually transfer certain leadership responsibilities to the students culminating with our “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course—if you and your group have demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem solving and wilderness living skills—you may have the opportunity to travel without your instructors immediately present. Many of our students feel this phase of the course is the most rewarding, as the group learns to work as a team, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills they have acquired.

**EDUCATIONAL PRACTICUM SECTION (2-4 DAYS)** – Toward the end of the course you will have the opportunity to practice the educational skills used to lead groups in a wilderness environment. Many students consider this the highlight of the course, because it allows you to use many of the skills that you have learned in the past six weeks. We typically invite local schools to provide students; you will be their instructor. Two days of intensive training and practice led by the Outward Bound staff prepare you to fill the instructional role with confidence and competence. Afterwards you will receive direct, constructive feedback from Outward Bound staff about your performance.

**FINAL CHALLENGE EVENT** – We typically end our courses with a Final Challenge Event—an individual final physical push. This might take the form of a run or a triathlon-style challenge.

**OUTCOMES** – Outdoor Educator Course students will receive in-depth training in technical, interpersonal, and educational skills that apply to being an outdoor educator. With a progression of teaching and leadership skills where instructors and peers provide feedback in an organized setting, students will gain a strong foundation to begin or continue working as an outdoor educator. Much like other courses, students will be challenged to try new things, step outside their comfort zones, and do things they never before thought they could do. As a team, each group will work together to complete difficult tasks necessary for backcountry travel, expedition living, and outdoor leadership.

## Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your itinerary may look like. Your actual course plan will vary according to weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor preferences.



Day 1	Course Start and transport to the San Juan Islands
Day 2-13	Sea Kayak Section
Day 14-22	Wilderness First Responder
Day 23-37	Mountain Section
Day 38-44	Final Expedition
Day 44-45	Practicum Prep
Day 46-47	Practicum
Day 49	Final Challenge Event & Service Project
Day 50	Course End

## REFLECTIONS FROM A NW OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL OUTDOOR EDUCATOR COURSE ALUMNA:

*“To have finally had my first real experience as a teacher and leader has shown me that I truly am capable of it, and that I can happily continue down this career path as an outdoor educator.”*

- Nicole Bezerril