



Sierra Institute

Wilderness & Cultural Field Studies

Office of Extended Education • Humboldt State University

Environmental Education and the Wilderness Experience

Education (EDU 480)

4 semester units/6 quarter units

Instructor: Karen Allen

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION

The assumption in this class is that the program as a whole is the laboratory in which the academic concepts are experienced directly. In this case that “laboratory” is a raft trip, a series of backpacking trips, and campground stays in various wilds areas of Alaska. Thus the activities and complexities of a long-term, small-group camping trip are not merely the context of the class, but to a large extent are the class itself. Students learn by examining and discussing their own experience and relating it to the ideas supplied by lectures, readings, exercises and class discussion.

But the class is not exclusively experiential; it does involve intellectual themes as well, including an analysis of the purpose and practice of field environmental education in general. Distinctions will be made in examining field programs at the personal, academic, and social levels. Topics will include application of learning styles to the wilderness experience, discussion of the academic vs. experiential learning dichotomy, group dynamics and communication skills, and a variety of environmental education values.

COURSE OVERVIEW

The class begins with a focus on understanding environmental field programs from three vantage points: personal, academic, and social. The separate validities and qualities of those levels will be discussed and experienced.

We will then focus on wilderness education—theories, goals, academic vs. experiential approaches, interdisciplinary models, and learning styles. Special emphasis will be given to the complementary dimensions of ecological literacy (a deepening understanding of the particulars and processes of nature) and the ecological self (a deepening felt sense of one's place in nature). Exercises to cultivate both of these dimensions will be introduced.

Group dynamics in a wilderness setting will be discussed along with a variety of experiential methods to develop group rapport. Points of discussion will include self-disclosure, privacy, individuality, conformity, compromise, and dispute resolution. Various decision-making formats will be introduced, particularly consensus.

For the last section of the course, environmental ethics and cultural and personal values will be explored. We will search for definitions: nature, culture, education, sustainability, etc. The intent is to for students to clarify their personal understanding of these concepts. As we prepare for return, we will review our time together and assess the cumulative experience, evaluating changes in our ecological literacy and our ecological self, and extrapolate from those changes to a general understanding of the wilderness experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) To develop one's ecological literacy: a deepening understanding of the particulars and processes of nature
- 2) To develop one's ecological self: a sense of one's place in the large contours of nature
- 3) To understand the virtues and challenges of in-the-field experiential education by direct participation in such a program.
- 4) To be able to monitor and follow one's learning experience as it is happening, and to share and discuss it with one's peers in class.
- 5) To be able to analyze field education in terms of personal, academic, and social components.
- 6) To learn about group dynamics through participation, discussion and observation.
- 7) To learn communication skills through active participation in formal and informal group sharings.
- 8) To learn and practice consensus decision-making.
- 9) To gain a general sense for the natural history and overall ecology of each of the five wilderness areas visited.
- 10) To enter a solo period (optional) for several days and learn about oneself and the wilderness in that way.
- 11) To allow the nine weeks of wilderness time to sink into oneself and to be able to express and discuss that influence.

COURSE OUTLINE

- | | |
|---|--|
| I. History and Purpose of Wilderness Education | assignments |
| A. Approaches to the backcountry classroom | 2. creativity and personal reflection |
| 1. personal | |
| 2. academic | |
| 3. social | |
| B. Goals of wilderness education | III. Group Dynamics |
| 1. academic content and standards | A. The individual and the group: rights and responsibilities |
| 2. ecological literacy | B. Stages of group development |
| 3. ecological self and the wilderness effect | C. Communication |
| 4. group communication and rapport | 1. privacy and self-disclosure |
| | 2. direct feedback: giving and receiving |
| II. Facilitating Learning in Wilderness | D. Cooperative learning |
| A. Learning styles and academics in the outdoor classroom | 1. instructor as member of group |
| B. Experiential education: theory | 2. learning from peers and small groups |
| 1. learning by doing | E. Decision-making and facilitating group consensus |
| 2. education of the whole person (body, mind, spirit) | F. Interpersonal difficulties and dispute resolution |
| C. Experiential education: practices | |
| 1. getting out of the way: nature as teacher | IV. The Spirit of Wilderness Education |
| 2. cultivating the wilderness effect | A. The mythic journey: separation, initiation, return |
| 3. games, exercises, processes, rituals | B. Deep ecology: an individual experience |
| D. Working with field journals | C. Environmental ethics: marrying philosophy and practice |
| 1. integrating field observations and | |

REQUIRED TEXTS

Reader

- Orr, David. "Intro: The Problem of Education"; "What is Education For?", from *Earth in Mind*. Covelo: Island Press, 1994.
- Orr, D. W. 1992. *Ecological Literacy*. New York: State University of New York Press. (selections)
- Noss, Reed, *Saving Natures Legacy*, Island Press, Washington D.C., 1994. (selections)
- Lopez, "The Naturalist", *Orion Magazine*, autumn 2001
- Devall, Bill and George Sessions. *Deep Ecology*. Salt Lake City, UT: G.M. Smith, 1985. (selections)

Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application. Louis P. Pojman. Wadsworth Publishing;
5 edition, March, 2007. (selections)

In addition, a substantial filed library of texts is made available for students from which they draw material for their ecological literacy reports.

EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated according to the following requirements:

- 30% Lead discussion
- 40% Environmental Education research project with report and presentation
- 10% 6-week practicum
- 10% participation
- 10% Self- Assessment (oral eval mid-course; written eval. end of course).

The grades used in this course will be as follows:

A+	98-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A	93-97			D	63-66
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D-	60-62
		C	73-76		
B+	87-89	C-	70-72	F	Below 60
B	83-86				

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following table indicates the planned class meetings for this course:

date	day	morning	afternoon	evening	hours
6-Jul	Sun		meet in Anchorage, 2 pm; to REI for nec. Gear	class: orientation to course	2
7-Jul	Mon	Travel day to McCarthy.	Kenny Lake: Wrangell Institute for Science Education:	settle into basecamp in McCarthy	2
8-Jul	Tues	class: orientation to basecamp, safety protocols; academic expectations; Approaches to the Backcountry classroom: academics, skills devt., personal growth		class: Circle (group communication and rapport)	3
9-Jul	Wed			class: Goals of Wilderness Education	2
10-Jul	Thurs	class: working with field journals	directed field observation/journal exercise on glacial processes	eve - free; explore historic mining town of McCarthy	3
11-Jul	Fri			class: backpack trip planning (equipment, food, route, etc.); How to pack your backpack	3

12-Jul	Sat	Pack, depart on 3 day backpacking trip	class: Leave No Trace Principles, minimum impact camping	set up camp; read: Orr, Ecological Literacy; Discussion/Class: Ecological Literacy	2
13-Jul	Sun	Class: Experiential Education Practice: getting out of the way; map reading pack up; hike	hike; set up camp.	class: Group Dynamics: the individual and the group; stages of group development	4
14-Jul	Mon	reading: Noss, Soul of Wilderness; Class: Experiential Education Practice: exercise - cultivating the wilderness effect pack up; hike	return to Basecamp; clean up	class: Subsistence Living; Circle (group communication and rapport)	3
15-Jul	Tues				
16-Jul	Wed	Class: Field Journal Exercise		reading: Lopez, The Naturalist class/Discussion: The Naturalist; Conservation of Species and Ecosystems	2
17-Jul	Thurs	day off	day off (backpack preparations)	day off	
18-Jul	Fri	depart on 5-day backpack; guided tour of Kennicott: cultural history of local area		set up camp	
19-Jul	Sat	pack up and hike		eve around campfire; Learning styles and academics in outdoor classroom	2
20-Jul	Sun	pack up and hike	hike, set up camp; Class: rock glaciers	eve off	
21-Jul	Mon	layover day; class: Experiential Education Practice: leadership exercise			2
22-Jul	Tues	class: Group Dynamics: Communication; pack up and hike	return to Basecamp; clean up	eve off	2
23-Jul	Wed	am to self		readings: the Spirit of Wilderness Education Class: deep ecology	2
24-Jul	Thurs	class: Copper River Watershed	prep for raft trip; pm to self.	prep for raft trip; clean up base camp. Circle: closure for McCarthy; highlights, sharing; group communication and rapport.	2
25-Jul	Fri	start Copper River Raft trip from McCarthy to Cordova (180 miles)		set up camp; river camping etiquette and camp logistics, duties.	
26-Jul	Sat	pack up; raft	directed field observation, assignment	set up	2

27-Jul	Sun	pack up; raft	raft; field observations, discussions.	reading: Environmental Ethics; class/discussion: Environmental Ethics	2
28-Jul	Mon	layover	directed field observation, assignment	class: Circle (group communication and rapport)	4
29-Jul	Tues		directed field observation, assignment	eve off; camp chores	1
30-Jul	Wed		study, raft. Midcourse Evaluations	class: Spirit of wilderness on the river	4
31-Jul	Thurs	study, raft. Midcourse Evaluations		class: experiential education game.	2
1-Aug	Fri	raft; day off of academics	raft; day off of academics	eve off	
2-Aug	Sat			class: Circle (group communication and rapport)	2
3-Aug	Sun			class: group communication and rapport: raft trip closure	2
4-Aug	Mon	raft to Child's Glacier	take-out upstream from Cordova. Unload. Pick up van	settle into lodge; clean up; dinner out.	
5-Aug	Tues	day in town; laundry, communications, logistics	day in town; laundry, communications, logistics	day in town; laundry, communications, logistics; stay in lodge	
6-Aug	Wed			move to campground. Settle in	
7-Aug	Thurs	prep and leave for Powers Ck. Backpack trip. Safety talk.	hike read: Orr. What is Education For?	Class/discussion: Orr	2
8-Aug	Fri	guided field journal exercise	hike	set up camp. Eve off	2
9-Aug	Sat	hike	Student Reports & Presentations	mid-course evaluations: one-on-one.	3
10-Aug	Sun	Student Reports & Presentations	hike out. Settle in to campground.	class: Circle: communication and rapport: debrief backpack trip; group decision-making	5
11-Aug	Mon		Exploration of Puget Sound		
12-Aug	Tues			eve off; instructor reviews field journals.	
13-Aug	Wed				
14-Aug	Thurs	Hike to Sheridan Glacier		class: Circle: communication and rapport: wilderness values; transference	2
15-Aug	Fri	travel on ferry to Whittier	shuttle Whittier to Anchorage	dinner out; celebration of course closure.	
16-Aug	Sat	course ends at 9 am.			
				Total	69