



Office of Extended Education • Humboldt State University

California Wilderness Program:
Environmental Education and the Wilderness Experience
Education (EDU 480)
4 semester units

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION

The assumption in this class as "Practicum" 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 series of backpacking trips in various wilderness areas of California. 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

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

REQUIRED TEXTS

Reader

- Joanna Macy. In Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind. Roszak, Kanner, Gomes. Sierra Club, 1995.
- John Tarrant. The Light Inside the Dark. Harper Collins, 1998. (Selections)
- Chogyam Trungpa. From Shambhala: the Sacred Path of the Warrior. Shambhala, 1984 (Selections)
- Robert Greenway. Wilderness Experience. In Ecopsychology, see above.

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:

- 1) participation in class discussion and group activities
- 2) 60-day practice: each student designs some sort of experiential practice that they commit to practicing daily with the intention that the practice in some way deepen their relationship with nature (or, we might say, expands their ecological self). Instructor will ask for random spontaneous brief updates throughout the program on how the practice is going. At the end of the program a brief written report is due summarizing the practice and its effects.
- 3) ecological literacy presentation: a 15 to 20 minute presentation to the group on some aspect of ecological literacy (the particulars and processes of nature). All students have access to a field library from which they may draw texts in order to research their particular topic. Presentation is evaluated according to both content and style. For content, what is desired is novel, intriguing, and useful information that enriches the group's knowledge of the world in which we live. For style, we are looking for a lively and entertaining presentation.

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 general structure of the California Wilderness program is that there are 6 separate backpacking segments throughout the 9 weeks. For information on the location of each segment, please see the California Wilderness "Program" web page. Each backpacking trip varies from 7 to 12 days. Usually, we hike in to a base camp over the first one or two days. Then we establish our academic routine, which consists of a class in the morning, an afternoon to do reading and other assignments, and then a second class around a fire after dinner.

The following table indicates the planned class meetings for this course during each backing segment:

<i>Backpack segment</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Class hours</i>
#1	Natural and cultural history of area Components of field education: personal, academic, social Ecological literacy and Ecological self Separation, Initiation, Return (Mythic Journey) Spirit/Soul Meditation	<i>Reader</i> Macy Tarrant Trungpa (field library for ecological literacy)	Begin 60-day practice	14
#2	Natural and cultural history of area Group dynamics Consensus	(field library for ecological literacy)	Ecological literacy presentation (2-3 students) Continue 60-day practice	8

#3	Natural and cultural history of area Group dynamics and consensus (continued) Self-disclosure and boundaries	(field library for ecological literacy)	Ecological literacy presentation (2-3 students) Continue 60-day practice	8
#4	Natural and cultural history of area Group dynamics and consensus (continued) Individuality and compromise	(field library for ecological literacy)	Ecological literacy presentation (2-3 students) Continue 60-day practice	9
#5	Natural and cultural history of area Group dynamics and consensus (continued) Solo time Native American Sweat Lodge	Reader Greenway (field library for ecological literacy)	Ecological literacy presentation (2-3 students) Continue 60-day practice	19
#6	Natural and cultural history of area Group dynamics and consensus (continued) Return to the world; leaving the wilderness	(field library for ecological literacy)	Ecological literacy presentation (2-3 students) Continue 60-day practice Presentation and written report on 60-day practice	7
				Total: 65