Wilderness Education & Leadership

Instructor: John Abbott, Ed. D.
Asst. Director of Student Life, Outdoor Programs
Davis Student Center #310

Class Meets: Wednesday 4:05-7pm, Old Mill Annex A207
Classroom Sessions:
September 2, 19, 16, 23, 30
October 7, 14, 21, 28
November 4, 11, 18
December 2

2 Weekend Expeditions: September 26 & 27, November 7 & 8
Office Hours: by appointment
Contact: (UVM) 656.7729 (H) 899.5212 (C) 324.3694
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I. Course Description:
Interest in wilderness education and leadership has increased rapidly in the past decade. Today it is rare to meet a college or university student who hasn’t had or isn’t aware of unique educational programs emphasizing self-motivation, leadership skill development and learning by doing in outdoor settings. Whether in the context of non-competitive, group and team-building "new games", low and high ropes course initiatives or on a 28 day immersed wilderness trip as part of an Outward Bound (OB) or National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) experience, UVM students are seeking the powerful, formative, educational experiences these programs provide.

The primary objective of this course is to provide understanding of the history, global evolution, current issues, leadership skill standards, ethics and future trends in wilderness education and leadership. Secondarily, students will pursue skill mastery in concrete leadership “hard skills” (map & compass, stove use & maintenance, group travel management, campsite selection & shelter construction, Leave No Trace (LNT) and general expedition behavior) and more interpersonal “soft skills” leadership skills emphasizing group development and dynamic challenges (understanding leadership & learning styles, risk management, judgment & decision-making etc). Finally, students will be expected to place these personal leadership skills and passion into a professional context.

Class time will be committed to sharing readings, expedition planning, teaching presentations and wilderness living skill development presentations. A student planned and led field practical trip will be the culmination of our learning and group experience. To reflect the importance of student-centered learning in wilderness environments, students will collectively plan the expedition, implement lessons & facilitate group debriefs. Students will present
written projects to their community of peers. In addition, students will develop a portfolio of teaching/leadership skills and personal experience as a means of understanding the process of professional development in the field of wilderness education.

II. Objectives:

**Learning objectives for Wilderness Education and Leadership class:**

- Students will develop an understanding of the history, theory and implementation of wilderness-based educational leadership & ropes course programs.
- Students will consider differing styles of teaching, facilitation and leadership in wilderness environments.
- Students will reflect on and cultivate a sense of personal teaching and leadership style.
- Students will consider historical and personal perspectives in defining a personal ethic in regard to: environmental impact, wilderness preservation and effective leadership interventions.
- Students will share wilderness education and leadership experiences and skills. Peer education in developing requisite "hard skills" (technical skill related to living in wilderness environments) and "soft skills" (interpersonal skills related to group dynamics and teaching) will be emphasized.
- Students will consider controversial issues in the field of wilderness education including: impact of communication & electronic devices in the backcountry, issues of personal & institutional liability and most importantly issues of social justice and lacking inclusion of under represented leader and participant populations.

**Students will demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:**

1. Planning and leading a backcountry wilderness experience while minimizing environmental impact.
2. Exercising sound judgment and decision-making ability in leadership situations.
3. Understanding personal leadership/teaching style and areas of needed development.
4. Presentation of wilderness skill/leadership portfolio that emphasizes personal development.
5. Students will understand the differences between and connective threads binding, experiential, environmental, wilderness and adventure based education modalities.
6. Students will develop the ability to teach independently and facilitate group process as part of a leadership team.
7. Students will develop a leadership/teaching portfolio and resume’.

III. Learning Activity, Evaluation & Grading:
Students will evaluate learning and development in a manner consistent with experiential education principles. Qualitative assessment based on personal insight and reflection will be emphasized. Learning modalities will include group discussion of reading, group skill development presentations, structured reflection/journaling and wilderness trip leadership experiences. Most importantly, students will be evaluated on attendance, participation and engagement in class activities.

Evaluation and qualitative assessment of student skill development and contribution to team learning process will be weighed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Attendance (includes BOTH field practicals), Reading &amp; Class Participation</td>
<td>40 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper Exploring Leadership, Ethics or Emerging Issue</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resume' Development &amp; Leadership Position Search</td>
<td>10 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals, Self-Reflection &amp; Skill Inventory</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hardskill &amp; Situational Leadership Presentations</td>
<td>20 pts.</td>
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Evaluation of assignments will follow traditional grading scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-97</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-90</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-87</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Etc…</td>
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**Attendance, Punctuality & Participation**

Evaluation in this area reflects current wilderness education models of living in a backcountry community. Awareness of motivation levels, teamwork mentality, preparation, communication, risk taking and contribution to discussions/debriefs are integral leadership development values. Assigned readings are indicated in the syllabus. Students should always come to class having completed assigned reading and be prepared for interactive discussion. **Participation in 2 weekend field practical is mandatory…No exceptions!**

**Academic Honesty**

UVM has a commitment to honesty and excellence in academic work and expects the same from all students. Academic dishonesty or cheating, can occur whenever you present -as your own work- something that you did not do. You can also be guilty of cheating if you help someone else cheat. Being unaware of what constitutes academic dishonesty (such as knowing what plagiarism is) does not absolve a student of the responsibility to be honest in his/her academic work. Academic dishonesty is taken very seriously and may lead to dismissal.
from UVM. Additionally, if a student helps a peer cheat, it can also be considered academic dishonesty. It is the responsibility of each of us to be aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty and to be honest in our own academic work.

Additional Needs or Support
If you have any additional needs to help you be successful in class this semester, please see me or contact me via email so we can discuss your situation. Students who require formal academic accommodations for this course are encouraged to see me and contact the Access/TRIO office.

Assignments:

I. Leadership, Ethic or Emerging Issue in Wilderness Education Reasearch
This writing assignment requires deeper exploration and research of an issue holding personal interest or meaning to your development as a wilderness educator. Issues of globalization, cultural diversity, gender, environmental impact, environmental stewardship, judgment and decision-making, bolting climbing areas, use of technology and risk-management all present viable concerns for developing wilderness educators/leaders. Topic and resources must be pre-approved by instructor. Paper will be 6-8 double spaced pages.

OR

Critique of Leadership in a Book or Article of Personal Interest
This writing assignment requires a critical analysis of leadership in action. How would you characterize the leadership style, expedition behavior and decision making as represented in the story or article? According to the WEN (or other class texts), which critical leadership skills are demonstrated proficiently or are significantly lacking? Connect your personal understanding of excellent wilderness leadership practice and expedition planning to the events outlined in the story. What were the most significant accomplishments and shortcomings? Paper will be 6-8 double spaced pages.

II. Professional Leadership Position Research & Resume’:
This research and writing assignment requires web-based research of a professional position in an area of leadership or with organizations of interest to you. Students will present an “application packet” including: 1) downloaded position descriptions describing at least 5 positions of interest to you and accompanying skill and experience requirements. 2) A cover letter in support of one position you are most interested in pursuing and 3) a well written, professional leadership and teaching resume’ highlighting: prior experience,
leadership skills, certifications and expedition experiences. Please include 3 references. **Assignment goal:** As undergraduate or wilderness educators and leaders seeking seasonal employment or as nearly graduated/post grad students seeking career opportunity, consideration will be given to the realities of hiring in an increasingly competitive field.

**III. Personal Skill Inventory & Journaling (3 Required):**

**Journaling** presents the opportunity to capture a hallmark component of wilderness education...reflection and understanding of personal ability. Each class period students are expected to journal bi-weekly reflections on readings, presentations, group dynamics, leadership issues, ethical issues, skill development challenges, wilderness trip outcomes and emerging personal insight as a wilderness educator/leader. **Journal entries (not to exceed three double spaced pages) are expected to connect personal thoughts to both assigned readings and topical content covered during class time.**

*All journal entries will be submitted in hard copy in the beginning of the class they are due. Handwritten entries will not be accepted.*

**IV. Individual Hard Skill Presentation:**

Students will develop an interactive lesson on a wilderness skill development topic of personal interest. Topic should be “hard skill” focused: a technical hard skill, teaching approach, skill development tip or leadership development strategy. Presentations are expected be well researched engaging, inclusive and clear. Presentations should mirror a "teachable moment" as they might manifest themselves in a wilderness setting. Presenters will benefit from feedback on style and content from the group.

**VI. Team Situational Leadership Role Play:**

Group presentations should be developed to reflect role-modeled interplay between leadership team members and students in wilderness environments. While topics will vary widely in content, emphasis will be placed on the balance of the team teaching dynamic. Are learning objectives clear? Is content well conceived and organized? Is "air time" and personal contributions from leaders balanced? Is lesson timely and draw from the skills, experiences and perspectives of group members? Presentations will focus on philosophy, leadership and ethical issues presented in wilderness education communities.

**Assignment Reminders:**

1. All written assignments will be submitted online via Bb page. Please no e-mailed papers or journal entries!
2. Assignments are expected on the day they are due! Late assignments will be assessed a single letter grade devaluation for each day late, unless prior discussion has taken place with instructor.
3. Unexcused absences will result in a semester end grade deduction of a percentage corresponding to the overall number of classes missed.