What are the Outdoor Educator Blocks?

The Outdoor Educator Professional Development Blocks are distinctively designed and integrated courses within the Outdoor Education program that focus on the transformation of college juniors and seniors majoring in outdoor education into professionally prepared teachers of outdoor education. Students in the Professional Development Blocks focus on concepts and skills of becoming teachers in, for, and about the outdoor environment. In addition to being taught by professional outdoor educators from Northland College, you will also spend concentrated time within another professional education setting under the tutelage of well qualified professional mentors. The Northland College Outdoor Education Program has over 25 years of experience in integrated semester blocks.

What professional skills will I develop in the Outdoor Educator Blocks?

Students successfully completing the block programs have abilities to:

- Assess the goals and or needs of specific client groups
- Design educational outcomes based on preliminary assessments
- Design and implement comprehensive and effective lesson and program plans for a variety of client groups
- Manage program delivery and administration of short-term programs
- Develop basic assessment tools for determining program effectiveness
- Identify and manage risks associated with program delivery
- Work cooperatively with intra- and inter- agency personnel
- Teach individually and cooperatively
- Teach holistically using the foundation of various educational theories
- Teach concepts and skills within varied outdoor and indoor environments
- Additionally, depending on which block you take, you will gain specific abilities in one of two additional areas- natural history interpretation or serving special needs populations

What courses are included in the Outdoor Educator Blocks?

Students in the fall semester Professional Development Block take OED 381 Outdoor Education Teaching Techniques, OED 382 Outdoor Education Practicum, and OED 383 Ecosystem Interpretation. Students in the winter semester Professional Development Block take OED 378 Adventure Leadership and Programming, OED 379 Therapeutic Program Design, OED 381 Outdoor Education Teaching Techniques, and OED 382 Outdoor Education Practicum. (See web site for course descriptions and prerequisites.)

How do the Outdoor Educator Blocks differ from most semesters at Northland?

Both the fall semester and the winter semester blocks begin and end when the regular semester does. However, in the block programs, you take a specified grouping of courses. Typically block students are in class about 8 hours each day studying and applying the skills of teaching and programming. Along with class instruction, the students act as a de-facto outdoor education program designing and delivering programs to the community. Also, the atypical schedule allows the professor to choose a variety of options for study. Examples include working in Colorado with an internationally recognized outdoor education program serving diverse populations or spending a week traveling in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area studying ecosystem interpretation. Students in both professional development semesters spend anywhere from 4 to 15 weeks off campus.

How do the Outdoor Educator Blocks compare to other field programs?

That depends on what field program you are comparing the Outdoor Education Professional Development Blocks to. Our
blocks are specifically designed to give you both content and experience in program design and delivery within actual community settings while under the direct supervision of professional outdoor educators. We have spent significant time cultivating relationships where the service you provide teaching others meets the needs of specific populations within a community, agency, school or organization. In other words, you are not just teaching your peers, you are actually out in the community teaching! Additionally, you teach concepts and skills used in a variety of outdoor education settings. You may teach the concepts such as ecology, landforms, or how human use is reflected in the landscape of the environment. Or maybe, you will use initiative activities to help participants to assess the effectiveness of different problem solving strategies. You may teach children how to appreciate their natural surroundings through crafts and storytelling or teach a child with a disability how she can access the winter environment with her peers through adaptive alpine skiing.

In addition to learning skills and concepts of individual and cooperative program development and delivery, you will test your individual abilities at a professional education internship site during the semester. This site is selected with your interests and skills in mind and is an opportunity for you to make outside professional contacts, practice teaching, and develop additional professional interests or skills.

Graduates of our program and employers of our graduates state that the comprehensive preparation they receive in the Professional Development Block Programs prepares them to stand out above other entry level teachers in outdoor education.

**How do the Outdoor Educator Blocks meet the needs of an Adventure Education Major?**

If you intend to work where you will be teaching outdoor skills in a natural or wild setting, we encourage you to take the fall block option. In the fall Professional Development Block, in addition to gaining the common teaching and programming skills, you will learn the art and science of interpreting the natural and cultural environment. These adventure educators will be immersing their students in the natural environment- typically through wilderness travel or eco-tourism. In addition to being taught specific outdoor skills, your students will benefit from your knowledge of the environment. You will be the person who can help interpret that environment for and with your student. Your employer will see, in you, an additional skill that other entry level employees do not have. Additionally, there are many naturalist jobs offered through federal, state, and local agencies that offer better salaries and more typical working conditions than those usually available to the adventure educator. You may be the person that teaches the next senator the importance of saving our environment for future generations and connects them emotionally to that sacred space.

If you believe you are more likely to be teaching in a college or community recreation program, desire to work with youth with behavior or learning difficulties, want to use the outdoor environment to help individuals increase self-confidence, or help teams work more cooperatively and effectively, then you are a likely candidate for the winter Professional Development Block. In 1990, the US passed civil rights legislation that requires most adventure programs to accommodate people with disabilities within the standard program offerings. According to the US 2000 census figures, 20% of the US population has a disability and these people are legally protected from discrimination and exclusion by any adventure program that serves the public. Also, currently there are over 500 wilderness adventure programs in the US serving at-risk or adjudicated youth. Typically, these programs pay salaries averaging $25,000 per year for entry level adventure educators. Many outdoor educators find themselves working with at-risk youth sometime in their career whether it is because of better salaries, desire, or because these youths are enrolled “for their own good” by well meaning adults. The reality is, if you work in the field of outdoor education, you will be working with populations with special needs. The more knowledge and experience you have teaching people with diverse abilities, the more skilled you will be as a teacher and the more broadly marketable you will be in the field of adventure education.

Whether you choose the winter or fall option your educational background will contain breadth and depth opening more career opportunities to you within the outdoor education field.