

Everyone is welcome to the Outdoor Program

Our goal as a school is education in a wide variety of content and skill areas, including how to enjoy the outdoors and how to pursue outdoor activities in a safe and fun manner. We design most trips to include students from grades 6 through 12, and we design each trip to be of interest to both novices and those already experienced in the given activity. We actually encourage this mix as yet another way of allowing students to get to know each other across grade levels and as a means of fostering opportunities for “peer education” that occur when younger and older students and novices and those with more experience are enjoying the same outdoor activity. Indeed, there are times when it is a younger student who has more experience and/or knowledge about a given activity than an older one, and that is a great lesson for both.

Orienting the novice camper

To facilitate and support younger and/or less experienced students to participate in these outdoor activities, we have a wide array of gear that we can loan out (packs, tents, sleeping bags and pads, stoves, etc.) and we include a detailed equipment list for each trip with the pre-trip form. We meet before each trip and help students gather into food, tent, and hiking groups when entering wilderness areas that limit each party to 12 persons. We observe which students are forming groups and advise as needed to make sure newer or less experienced participants are joined with others who can and will be supportive. We ask about gear and make sure each participant either has the gear they need or will be borrowing what they need from our extensive supplies. For trips that require pre-trip instruction – e.g., igloo and snow-cave building, or kayaking safety – we hold pre-trip sessions to provide that training. We also offer Camping 101 – a trip that teaches the basics of camping to introduce students to the Outdoor Program and basic camping systems.

Food

In our pre-trip meetings, we advise on types of food to consider both for nutritional value and for ease of preparation. On the overnight trips, we usually shop for the food at a grocery store on the way to our initial destination, and faculty are available to consult with students about food choices. In our experience, the food groups almost always manage to eat well, learning from one trip to the next which food choices work best for the particular activity and situation.

Camping and safety skills

In terms of the actual camping, faculty are always present to help students with tent set-up and to give advice about keeping gear (and food) dry and protected from animals. Finally, we teach the activities involved in that particular trip, be it backpacking, kayaking, cycling, rock climbing, skiing, snow shelter construction, etc. This teaching always involves both the skills and the safety and risk management aspects of the given activity.

Responsible, caring supervision

We encourage you to send your child out on a trip and trust that he or she will be in good, caring, and responsible hands, and that other trip participants – both faculty and students – will be available to support, instruct, and befriend the student(s) new to either the program or to that kind of activity. We have had any number of students over the 30-plus years of running this program join us as young (or not-so-young) novices and leave the school with great skills and confidence to enjoy the outdoors in a variety of ways and under almost any conditions. We have had a number of very young

and/or inexperienced students join our trips this year and have a good time even as they learned new skills, made new friends, and weathered a variety of conditions. A number of our graduates have gone on to be outdoor trip participants and leaders at their colleges and universities.

Questions?

If you have questions or concerns about sending your student on one of the trips, please contact Sophie Daudon, the Outdoor Program Coordinator. Because the majority of our Outdoor Program Leaders are also teachers at Northwest, she can direct you to one who will likely be well known to your student (and vice versa). Finally, if your student is nervous about their abilities, encourage them to sign up for Camping 101 – a new trip this year that is designed to introduce students to the Program.