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## INTEGRATING OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP EDUCATION INTO THE ACADEMIC SETTING

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Educating outdoor leaders has typically occurred through extending fieldwork for those students who have the time and money. This approach has been effective for private outdoor organizations such as Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School but not as successful for academic institutions who wish to combine outdoor leadership training within standardized park and recreation college curricula.

The Wilderness Education Association (WEA) is a non-profit organization that introduces and promotes wilderness education and outdoor leadership within mainstream academic institutions. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, the majority of university-based WEA outdoor leadership programs have been offered more along the lines of extra-curricular opportunities, outside of the academic structure of the program.

To integrate outdoor leadership education effectively within university academic programs, innovative curricula need to be developed that combine field and classroom work. The goal must be to enable students to understand and assimilate the knowledge base within the classroom and to be able to apply and show judgment and competence in the field.

Since 1991, Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Parks and Recreation Management Program has been offering basic outdoor leadership courses as an affiliate of WEA. While the leadership course has been successful at NAU, there are several problems and limitations. The first problem is that the basic course does *not* lead to national certification

through WEA for NAU's students. Second, the course has been offered each year only during the summer session, which has resulted in limited accessibility to park and recreation majors. And third, the course has been so restricted in size (current capacity is 12 students) that interested students have been turned away on a regular basis.

NAU has developed an integrated approach to outdoor leadership education, as an affiliate of WEA, through the use of two semesters of sequential coursework. The objectives of the NAU outdoor leadership program are as follows:

- 1) To train outdoor leaders over the course of an academic year through a combination of class time and intensive, applied field practice.
- 2) To provide outdoor leadership instruction that leads to WEA national certification for NAU's outdoor leadership students. The intention is to have the students develop their knowledge base and leadership skills over the course of an entire academic year so that by the end of the year, they are independently functioning outdoor leaders.

NAU is implementing the academic year curriculum during spring/fall, 1996. Questions to consider regarding the approach are:

- 1) Does the sequential course process allow for enough time in the field; and
- 2) Does the classroom material transfer to field application without additional in-the-field classes?

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