

Best Practices for Training Conserve School's Exploration  
Week Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

This project focused on compiling the best practices for training wilderness trip leaders at Conserve School. Each semester, trip leaders take small groups of students on a week-long wilderness trip called Exploration Week. However, all trip leaders are at different stages of proficiency with their technical and interpersonal skills and there is little time to extensively train the trip leaders. To achieve overall success on Exploration Week, trip leaders must have a common knowledge base to work from. A review of pertinent literature reveals a wealth of curricula about technical skills. Books and articles directly related to facilitating outdoor tripping are fewer; however, general facilitation books are abundant. The best practices for trip leader training included standard procedures for training leaders in a variety of important technical and interpersonal skills. The technical and facilitation skills that past Conserve School trip leaders found essential for these trips were also compiled. Interviews were used to collect data from various institutions, a focus group with current Graduate Fellows was conducted, and a survey of past Graduate Fellows was used to broaden the data pool. All data was qualitatively analyzed. Important recommendations include taking trip leaders on a training trip, utilizing the staff manual as a part of the training process, and teaching skills by modeling them for the trip leaders. The skills that were found necessary to lead an Exploration Week trip include the gamut of basic backcountry camping skill, and a variety of simple facilitation activities. The completed best practices for training and list of skills were submitted to Conserve School for consideration in May 2013.

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## **Chapter I: Project Introduction**

### **Statement of Problem**

This research developed a list of best practices which contains the critical skills (technical and facilitation) needed for the staff of a residential environmental education center to successfully conduct a wilderness trip with participants, as well as an outline for a staff training procedure.

### **Statement of Sub-problems**

**Sub-problem 1:** To identify other residential environmental education centers throughout the United States that have a wilderness trip as a part of their curriculum.

**Sub-problem 2:** To interview these centers about the training that they provide their staff in order to prepare them to effectively lead a wilderness trip, and analyze the data collected. Supplemental data was acquired from past and current Graduate Fellow experiences.

**Sub-problem 3:** To determine from the data what the necessary skills (technical and facilitation) are that a staff member of a residential environmental education center needs to lead a wilderness trip, as well as the best practices for training staff members in these skills.

**Sub-problem 4:** To create and submit to Conserve School a list of best practices that contains recommendations for what skills (technical and facilitation) a staff member needs to know and be able to perform in order to effectively lead a wilderness trip, as

well as a recommendation for how Conserve School can more effectively train its staff members to lead wilderness trips.

## **Background and Rationale for the Project**

Conserve School is a residential environmental education semester school for high school juniors located in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin. As a part of their curriculum, Conserve School sends all of their students on a week-long wilderness trip. Graduate Fellows and teachers employed by the school serve as the leaders of the trips. This list of best practices, which was submitted as a recommendation to Conserve School, is important for the training of new staff members. Staff members have a very limited time in which to prepare for leading a wilderness trip. This time frame is problematic, because some staff members have little to no experience in leading groups on wilderness trips. Conserve School was in need of a training process that would ensure that all staff members have a base of standard knowledge and experience of how to lead a wilderness trip.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitation #1:** This list focused on what skills (technical and facilitation) are important to know, but did not determine the technical method by which the staff are trained in those skills.

**Limitation #2:** This list and suggested training process did not increase the timeframe of the in-service training that the new staff members participated in.

**Limitation #3:** This list will not stop staff members or students from utilizing a different (or potentially hazardous) method for a skill other than the one provided during training.

**Delimitation #1:** The list of best practices focused on only the specific gear that is provided by Conserve School.

## **Definitions**

Residential Environmental Education Center: A residential environmental education center is a facility at which students reside for an extended period of time and participate in environmental education activities (sometimes in addition to other educational subjects).

Semester School: An independent school that admits a certain number of students per semester, for only that semester. Most semester schools focus on a theme such as the environment or social justice.

Conserve School: A residential environmental education semester school for high school juniors located in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin.

Graduate Fellow: A staff member who belongs to a cohort of 16 graduate students, who are earning their masters from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point while working at Conserve School. Each cohort moves through in a two year cycle with no overlap.

Debriefing: The process by which a group leader helps their trip participants to understand what is happening on a trip and how the trip is affecting them on a physical and emotional level. Synonyms: processing, facilitation event.

Technical Skills: A technical skill is a physical camping/outdoor skill, including but not limited to tent pitching, fire building, stove operation, canoe strokes, canoe portaging, etc.

Facilitation Skills: A facilitation skill is a skill such as group facilitation, group decision making, debriefing skills, campfire processing, icebreakers, downtime activities, etc.

Wilderness Trip: A wilderness trip is an excursion that takes participants away from the residential environmental education center for a week or more and into the backcountry.

Trippers: A person who participates in a wilderness trip.

Best Practices: Best practices are the most tried and true standard operating procedures for a given industry; often referred to as the industry standard.

## **Assumptions**

**Assumption 1:** There were other residential environmental education centers that facilitate wilderness trips.

**Assumption 2:** All staff members would be open to learning a standard method for performing technical and facilitation skills.

**Assumption 3:** All staff members would implement these skills while on a wilderness trip.

**Assumption 4:** There would be time during staff in-service to train all staff members in the technical and facilitation skills that the list suggests.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

A thorough review of the literature related to expedition leadership practices was necessary in order to make a good recommendation for what would be included in a best practices list. The best practices list contained both technical and facilitation skills. Traditionally these skills were referred to as “hard” and “soft” skills. Technical skills were considered “hard” skills because they deal with physical dimensions and facilitation skills were considered “soft” skills because they deal with psychological dimensions (Seaman and Coppens, 2006; Warren and Loeffler, 2006; Shooter, Sibthorp, and Paisley, 2009). For the purposes of this literature review, technical skills refer to the physical skills needed to complete the trip and facilitation skills refer to the thinking and communication skills needed to lead a discussion or debriefing. This literature review covers three main areas of importance for expedition leadership practices: (1) Importance of Experience, (2) Facilitation, and (3) Technical Skills.

### **(1)Importance of Experience**

Outdoor leaders enter the field for any number of reasons. Zmudy, Curtner-Smith, and Steffen (2009) explored the reasons behind two young adults’ decisions to become adventure educators. They find that these individuals chose to become adventure educators because they want to provide fun physical experiences for students. Due to inexperience, the individuals did not understand the implication of adventure education to teach participants life-long lessons. Therefore we come to realize the importance of experience. Experience is necessary for success in any occupation. Many organizations require their outdoor leaders to have a variety of different skills in both facilitation and

technical aspects (Shooter *et al.*, 2009). Outdoor leaders have a variety of technical and facilitation skills for which they are responsible. During preparation for a trip and while on trail, outdoor leaders must be able to demonstrate the ability to perform all the necessary camping and tripping skills. It cannot be assumed that participants on the trip, even if they have been trained prior to the trip, will know how to perform a given technical skill. It is the responsibility of the leader to know how to perform and be able to pass along a skill to a participant. Another important aspect of the outdoor leader's responsibility is facilitation. Outdoor leaders help to facilitate group discussions and debriefings. Many extended trips that are taken have an underlying purpose; teambuilding, place-based education, travel-abroad experience, ecological learning, experience, and physical challenge are a few examples. An outdoor leader must be able to facilitate the discussions that help the participants to process their experience.

Galloway (2002) discusses the effect that experience has on decision making in outdoor leaders. A more experienced leader comes to the same decision as an inexperienced outdoor leader who has been trained; however, the experienced leader comes to the decision faster. While Galloway's study focuses on emergencies in the backcountry, the research has implications for all aspects of extended trips. Those leaders with experience will make better decisions faster. This can aid in the process of efficiently selecting and setting up a good camp site or leading an involved and inclusive debriefing on an experience in a structured amount of time.

Experience is something built up over time. To be able to successfully lead an extended trip, an outdoor leader must be well versed in both facilitation and technical skills. Organizations are able to assist their outdoor leaders in gaining the experience in

facilitation and technical skills needed to lead extended trips by training staff members in the skills essential to their particular program.

## **(2)Facilitation**

Facilitation is a fluid concept that changes and evolves with time in the field of outdoor education. The role of a facilitator in a group discussion has changed from the facilitator being separate from the group to an integral part of the discussion. Facilitators can be either active or passive in their behaviors. An active facilitator leads the discussion participants in the direction that they as the facilitator deem important. A passive facilitator, however, acts more as another participant would and allows the group as a whole to determine where the discussion leads (Stan, 2009).

Facilitation can often be the hardest skill of all to master. Knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say it are the basic skills of a good facilitator. Thomas (2008) debates the importance of intentionality and intuition in facilitation, two aspects that are often employed by experienced facilitators. Facilitators ought to say things with intentionality in order to help guide their group; however, sometimes experienced facilitators will say something on the spur of the moment using their intuition, not knowing what response it will spark. The use of intuition in facilitation can be controversial, because it often takes an experienced facilitator to use it right. Use of intuition by an inexperienced facilitator can often lead to discussions running far off track.

In his book *Outdoor Leadership: Technique, Common Sense, and Self-Confidence*, John Graham discusses the importance of an outdoor leader using a

leadership style that complements their own personality. Participants are often able to tell if a leader is using a leadership style that does not fit their personality; the congruence is obviously not there (Graham, 1997). Much of what Graham applies to leadership can be applied to facilitation, a direct responsibility of the leader. A facilitator who attempts to use a technique that does not fit their personality or a facilitator who attempts to overcompensate can easily throw a debriefing off track.

The misunderstanding most commonly associated with facilitation skills is that they are easier or less important than the technical skills needed for an extended trip (Seaman and Coppens, 2006; Warren and Loeffler, 2006; Shooter *et al.*, 2009). However, the psychological aspects of facilitation are often the most important, if a program is seeking for its participants to gain more from the trip than just memories.

### **(3) Technical Skills**

Technical skills are the skills that make the trip happen in a physical sense. These are the skills that leaders and participants need in order to survive in the backcountry for an extended period of time; skills that will allow them to fulfill their basic needs of food, water, and shelter. Technical skills were traditionally referred to as “hard skills.” This label, however, has fallen under scrutiny for the stereotype it invokes (Seaman and Coppens, 2006; Warren and Loeffler, 2006; Shooter *et al.*, 2009). These skills have traditionally been seen as the most important skills that a leader possesses (Shooter *et al.*, 2009).

One of the most important overarching concepts of backcountry tripping is the concept of Leave No Trace camping. Leave No Trace (LNT) camping emphasizes the

importance of making minimal impact on the environment through which one is traveling. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) has published many books on the subject of LNT camping, two of which are *Soft Paths* (1995) and *NOL's Wilderness Guide* (1999). *Soft Paths* provides a background for LNT camping and the basic principles for how to choose campsites, how to utilize fires and stoves, and waste disposal and sanitation. The book also goes through different environments in which trips can take place such as deserts, snow and ice, and bear country. While *NOL's Wilderness Guide* also covers LNT camping, this book provides a more holistic view of extended trips. Trip planning, team-building, clothing needed, food, equipment, weather, cooking, and much more are covered in the guide.

Another helpful guide compiled by Wagstaff and Attarian is the *Technical Skills for Adventure Programming* (2009). This curriculum provides many other skills besides the trip planning and LNT camping skills that the previous two books covered. Canoeing, mountaineering, caving, and rock climbing are all included. These skills cover the physical body movement needed to combat the many diverse terrains that could be encountered on an extended trip.

## **Summary**

These articles all provide evidence for the need to provide both facilitation and skills training to expedition leaders. There are many aspects of training necessary as well as controlled experience and the opportunity for practical application. Proper training will ensure that leaders are able to successfully lead and facilitate an extended trip with a group of participants with varying skill levels.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Data**

Data collection was exclusively qualitative. Data for this list of best practices and staff training outline came from semi-structured interviews with wilderness program directors from various residential environmental education semester schools and other related outdoor programs. Feedback on Conserve School's prior wilderness trip training and the skills needed to lead an Exploration Week Trip was received from past Graduate Fellows. A focus group about the current training process was carried out with a small group of current Conserve School graduate students.

The methods for this study were submitted to and approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The Protocol for Original Submissions can be found in Appendix A.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Sub-problem 1**

The first sub-problem was to identify other residential environmental education centers throughout the United States that have an extended trip as a part of their curriculum. Several methods for collection were employed such as word of mouth, internet searches, and networking. The administration and staff at Conserve School were the primary audience asked for suggestions of other similar semester school programs and other similar tripping programs.

## **Sub-problem 2**

The second sub-problem was to interview the semester schools and camps that were suggested about the training that they provide their staff in order to prepare them to effectively lead an extended trip and analyzed the data collected. Supplemental data was acquired from past and current Graduate Fellow experiences.

The Wilderness Directors of the various organizations were contacted via email or telephone and asked for their participation in a phone interview. Once they had consented, a time and date for the phone interview was arranged (with the exception of one interview which was conducted in person).

The phone interview was a series of semi-structured questions pertaining to the tripping program of each institution (Table A). After the phone interview, a letter of informed consent was mailed to the interviewee for signature and return.

A survey of questions about Conserve School's past trip training process was sent to nine of the Graduate Fellow alumni, four of whom responded. The questions were open response questions allowing the Graduate Fellow alumni to respond as they saw fit (Table B).

The focus group that was carried out with current Graduate Fellows was based on one question: "What can Conserve School do to improve their wilderness trip training?" Graduate Fellows were allowed free response to this question. Dialogue continued until Graduate Fellows decided that they had thoroughly discussed all of their points.

Table A. Semi-structured interview questions used for semester school, college, and camp wilderness program directors.

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Question Content</b>
<b>Question 1</b>	What technical skills (i.e. fire building, bear bagging, Leave No Trace, etc.) do your trip leaders need in order to lead an extended trip in the backcountry?
<b>Question 2</b>	Do all trip leaders have a standard method by which they perform these tasks, or do they use their own method?
<b>Question 3</b>	What interpersonal skills do your trip leaders need in order to lead an extended trip in the backcountry?
<b>Question 4</b>	What specific things do your trip leaders do to help the participants process their experiences?
<b>Question 5</b>	How do you train your trip leaders for these trips?
<b>Question 6</b>	What kind of resources do you provide for your trip leaders?
<b>Question 7</b>	Are there other organizations that are similar to yours in terms of outdoor wilderness trips?
<b>Question 8</b>	Could you please explain your general method for how you train your trip leaders?

Table B. Survey questions sent to Graduate Fellow alumni.

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Question Content</b>
<b>Question 1</b>	What technical skills do you think are important for Exploration Week Group Leaders?
<b>Question 2</b>	What facilitation/interpersonal skills do you think are important for Exploration Week Group Leaders?
<b>Question 3</b>	What were you prepared for in terms of technical skills for Exploration Week?
<b>Question 4</b>	What were you prepared for in terms of facilitation/interpersonal skills for Exploration Week?
<b>Question 5</b>	What could have been done to make you feel more prepared for leading an Exploration Week group?
<b>Question 6</b>	Are there any resources that you wish you had available to you in order to better prepare you for Exploration Week?
<b>Question 7</b>	Do you have any suggestions for how to better prepare future Grad Fellows for Exploration Week?

### **Sub-problem 3**

The third sub-problem was to determine from the data what the necessary skills (technical and facilitation) are that are needed by a staff member of a residential environmental education center in order to lead a wilderness trip, as well as the best practices for training staff members in these skills.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively coded. From the coded interviews, propositions, categories, and themes were derived. The past Graduate Fellow surveys were used to compile a list of the technical and facilitation skills that are needed by the leaders of Conserve School's Exploration Week trips. Information from the past Graduate Fellow surveys and current Graduate Fellow focus group was used to compile a list of suggestions for how to improve the leader training.

### **Sub-problem 4**

The fourth sub-problem was to create and submit to Conserve School a list of best practices that contains recommendations for what skills (technical and facilitation) a staff member needs to know and be able to perform in order to effectively lead a wilderness trip, as well as a recommendation for how Conserve School can more effectively train its staff members to lead wilderness trips.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews with the different organizations were transcribed and qualitatively coded. Each individual interview was assigned a unique number and each question in the interview was assigned a number. As the interviews were analyzed, the propositions

were highlighted, recorded, and labeled with a unique number, the interview number, and question number (i.e. proposition 1; 1-1). Subsequent propositions that were similar in content to a previous proposition were considered supporting evidence and not assigned a unique number. Unique propositions that were similar (but not similar enough to be considered supporting evidence) were grouped into categories and similar categories were grouped into themes (O'Leary, 2010).

## **Chapter IV: Results**

**Sub-Problem 1:** The first sub-problem was to identify other residential environmental education centers throughout the United States that have a wilderness trip as a part of their curriculum. The list that follows is the result of word of mouth, internet searches, and networking.

**Residential Environmental Education Centers:** Chewonki Semester School (Wiscasset, Maine), High Mountain Institute (Leadville, Colorado), The Outdoor Academy (Pisgah Forest, North Carolina), Northland College (Ashland, Wisconsin), Camp Gray (Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin), Camp Manito-wish (Boulder Junction, Wisconsin), and Camp Widjiwagan (Ely, Minnesota).

**Sub-Problem 2:** The second sub-problem was to interview these centers about the training that they provide their staff in order to prepare them to effectively lead a wilderness trip and analyze the data collected. Supplemental data was acquired from past and current Graduate Fellow experiences.

### **Interviews**

Seven interviews were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively coded. These interviews took place with either the wilderness program director (or the camp director in the case of Camp Gray) and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Thirty-eight propositions, 10 categories, and 4 themes were found when the interviews were qualitatively coded (Table C).

Among the interviews there was a substantial amount of overlap in propositions. This led to the relatively small number of propositions, categories, and themes overall. Included with each category are direct quotations from different interviews that help illustrate the different themes and categories.

Table C. This table shows an overview of the results of the qualitative data analysis for sub-problem 2.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number of Propositions within the theme</b>
Important skills	Interpersonal skills training; skills to hire; technical skills;	12
Renowned tripping programs	Similar programs	2
Training	Overall training method; standard methods; certifications; on-going training; finding time for training	18
Resources	Additional Resources	6

***Theme: Important Skills***

**Category: Interpersonal skills training**

Interpersonal skills training was identified as an important portion of the staff training. Not only are leaders responsible for the physical well-being of their trip participants, but they are also responsible for the emotional wellbeing of them. Being sure that trip leaders are able to communicate and work effectively with their group members is vital to the success of a trip. Six of the seven organizations identified the importance of meeting daily with the group in order to discuss and process what happened that day, and five of the seven organizations provide structured guidelines to

their trip leaders for how to run a daily meeting. Facilitation skills are commonly taught on-trail during a training trip (training trips will be discussed at length during the “training” theme). In one instance, semester school trip leaders received facilitation training during their residence life training:

"We facilitate some kind of group evening meeting every day where the kids debrief their experience, give feedback to each other about how the specific student leaders of the day did, how they could have improved. And our dean of students works, because they're residential faculty as well, they're working with the dean of students who's more of an expert than I am in the conflict management, bonding, all these kind of specific ways that we teach our kids all those soft skills, so that kind of transcends just their outdoor programing goal...It's built into their training as residential staff, more so than it's my responsibility to train them in that for outdoor programing."

This quote shows the multi-faceted uses of facilitation skills. These skills are not ones simply learned for the trail. Often times the facilitation skills necessary for the trail are developed in different areas such as residential school settings, camp settings, or team oriented workplace settings. In this particular organization, leaders learn facilitation skills during their residential life training.

On-trail learning during a training trip is another time to learn facilitation skills:

“...on the first day of actual hiking we’ll do kind of the introduction to debriefs and talk about all the different ways you can run a debrief and that kind of thing then similarly for kind of coaching students...”

An organization that already knows and has standard guidelines for how they want their trips processed need only train their staff in their preferred method. This can easily be accomplished on the trail by “teaching by modeling.” While not directly suggested in this quote, “teaching by modeling” would be an effective way to train trip leaders by the trainers modeling how they want their leaders to facilitate a trip discussion.

Organizations often, but not necessarily always, hire leaders who have previous experience. Individuals who do have previous experience can be valuable resources for training leaders new to facilitation:

“A lot of that training is definitely discussion-based and gives the opportunity for people who have experience, whether it's leading our trips or working with kids or as part of a group in another capacity, to share their thoughts on how to handle a scenario.”

Open discussion allows staff members the opportunity to ask questions of more experienced facilitators and to learn different tips and tricks for leading group discussions. The multi-faceted nature of facilitation skills is re-emphasized in this quote in that people who have experience in trips, working with youth, or working with groups are called on for their expertise.

The goals of the particular institution for their wilderness trips will ultimately determine the intensity and kind of processing that is done on the trip. Even simple conversations when facilitated well can have an impact on participants. The structure of a debrief does not have to be complicated to be effective:

"We have a set of sort of guidelines and questions that they can ask to help the debrief get going...but there's the understanding that there's a group meeting at the end of each day on a trip just to check in, we've done highs and lows, plus/delta, roses and thorns, a lot of different things. There's the basic structure, but staff are really free to kind of go with it where they feel they need."

The facilitation techniques mentioned (highs and lows, plus/delta, roses and thorns) are all rather straightforward methods that ultimately get at the question "what was good about the day, and what could have gone better?". Staff members can then listen and ask probing questions to help the students understand why something happened or how something could have been approached in a different way.

### **Category: Skills to hire**

Two of the organizations interviewed provided specific prerequisite skills for hiring trip leaders. One organization required that their trip leaders have prior experience in outdoor skills, while the other was willing to hire trip leaders who have little to no experience in tripping. Organizations often evaluate the intensity of their tripping program to determine the necessary pre-requisite skills their trip leaders must possess.

"Almost everyone is relatively competent in backpacking and has had experience before, but we have to make sure when we hire people, you know someone needs to be very solid on their rock climbing skills ideally."

"As far as wilderness tripping goes, I guess our training would start with our interview process. So having people know that that's what they're going to be

doing. There isn't really any requirement to have wilderness tripping skills when coming here, but they do need to expect that and want to learn about that."

These two quotes show the dichotomy between hiring mindsets. The skills that an employer hires for will vary depending on the intensity and specificity of the kind of trips they provide. Before beginning the hiring process an organization should examine the goals of their tripping program and the kinds of skills that are necessary for a leader to know. If these skills are general backcountry camping skills, an organization may be able to hire leaders who don't have previous experience; however, if an organization runs trips that require very well developed and specific skills the organization should clearly lay out the pre-requisites for hiring.

### **Category: Technical skills**

The technical skills that each organization trains for include virtually the whole gamut of basic camping skills such as Leave No Trace camping, backpacking, canoeing, orienteering, fire building, knots, backcountry sanitation, bear bagging, etc. Organizations differ in the technical skills that are needed for their specific trips (i.e. crossing boulder fields, white-water canoeing). Organizations often evaluate their specific wilderness trips and determine the necessary skills to teach their trip leaders.

### ***Theme: Training***

#### **Category: Overall training method**

Overall training method may arguably be the most important result of this research. An overall method is the vehicle by which trip leaders learn everything that

they need to know. There are two major keys to overall training method that were repeated by nearly every person interviewed: taking leaders on a training trip and teaching technical and facilitation skills to the leaders by modeling those skills. Training trips are intensive, focused, and purposeful trips during which leaders can be trained in both technical and interpersonal skills while gaining critical personal experience. While on these trips, trainers have the opportunity to teach skills by modeling the skills themselves, or by teaching the trip leaders as if the trip leaders were the trip participants themselves. Modeling can be an effective way to teach interpersonal skills such as debriefing and processing of experiences, while teaching trip leaders at the level of their trip participants can be an effective way to teach technical skills.

The following quote is an example of the basic overall trip training process which is favored by many organizations:

“Our staff training is eleven days long total. The first day is a lot of logistical stuff, filling out paperwork as well as getting to know you activities. The second day is basically going over policies and procedures, things that are clearly black and white issues. So that they know both what we expect of them as staff and then the expectations behavior based that they have to hold their campers to. That second day is a lot of stuff like emergency procedures and that sort of thing, not just for when they’re leading trips, but for when they are around our property, like what happens if there’s a big lightning storm here on the property or someone gets hurt while they’re on a nature hike around here, that sort of thing. The third day is what we call a risk management day; we have a volunteer physician who works with the staff come and go over the typical types

of illnesses or injuries that we routinely see on the trips; assessing sprained ankles, assessing stomach pain, whether it's food related or caused by constipation or any number of things like that. And dealing with cuts and minor burns and those sorts of things, so that's primarily the third day is just going over those sorts of diagnosing and addressing the real commonly seen first aid issues and then the afternoon is a couple of scenarios to practice those skills. And then day three and four are pretty much based on working on those group dynamics and handling issues that come up on the trip, like I talked about earlier whether it be homesickness or bullying or anything like that. And then we basically spend one day planning for what we call our break-in trip and then we do a four day, we break everyone into groups of six or seven and we do a four day training trip that is. So each group will have one of the senior staff leading it and then they go out canoeing or backpacking for four days and nights and that's where it's really focused on all the technical skills, camping skills, paddling and hiking skills, decision making and those sorts of things.”

This favored outline, a few days spent on paperwork and policies followed by the introduction of major training topics culminating in a training trip (or mock trip), is an efficient and effective method utilized by many organizations throughout the industry. Five of the seven organizations interviewed incorporate training trips such as this into their wilderness trip training.

Teaching by modeling is a popular way to teach skills. Modeling allows the opportunity for someone to “see” a skill, “do” that skill, and then be able to “teach” that skill. There are different levels to this modeling technique. The training trip can be seen

as one giant model; a model of what an actual trip looks like. The lower levels of modeling include things like modeling how to hang a bear bag or modeling how to pitch a tent.

"So when we're teaching classes, we're teaching them at the level of this is how we would teach it to a 17 year old, not this is how we would teach it to you guys who have backpacking experience."

The teaching by modeling that is happening in this instance allows the trip leader to learn how to teach the skill to one of their trip participants without the hassle of trying to figure out how to adapt it themselves.

#### **Category: Standard methods**

There's often more than one way to do something, but sometimes there is a method that is regarded as being standard, or a skill that is always done the same way. Among the organizations interviewed, there was no consensus on the standardization of methods for the technical camping skills. Some organizations have a standardized method by which all of their leaders perform technical skills. Other organizations allow their leaders to perform technical skills based on their past training or experiences. In the end it ultimately boils down to the organization's preference and their standards for their own tripping program.

#### **Category: Certifications**

Certifications provide proof that a person has been trained and is competent in a certain set of skills. For instance, a babysitting certification proves that a person has

undergone childcare training and has been found capable of caring for other people's children. Likewise in the tripping industry, certifications prove that a trip leader has been trained and found competent in certain situations. For this reason, many organizations require their trip leaders to have an assortment of safety certifications. Safety certifications ensure that trip leaders have been trained in how to handle different emergency situations in the backcountry. The most common certifications required include Wilderness First Responder, lifeguard training, and swift-water safety.

“We require two different or three different certifications, I guess. One would be Wilderness Water Safety or Lifeguarding for all of our leaders no matter if they're backpacking, sea kayaking, or canoeing in anticipation that most of the backpackers will probably come across water and want to swim at some point. Not always the case, but we require it across the board. And then Wilderness First Aid for counselors, so anybody in our summer camp program going on anywhere from an overnight to nine days or so, they all need at least Wilderness First Aid.”

These different certifications ensure that a leader has been trained and is able to handle these different situations should they arise on a backcountry trip. Certifications can set tripping programs apart from one another. An organization that requires its staff to possess certifications is sending the message that they take backcountry safety seriously and have prepared their staff for the challenge of leading wilderness trips.

### **Category: Ongoing training**

Initial intensive training is only one part of the training process. Similar to how formal certifications must be renewed on a fixed rotation, organizations often choose to do fixed trainings to ensure that their staff stay current with their skills. These on-going training sessions took on a variety of different guises depending on what each organization identified as important to their program. Some organizations set aside a morning each week to go over pertinent readings, practice skills, or go over topics such as risk management. Sometimes even a whole day would be set aside for a short training trip to practice technical skills. Annual first aid and safety updates would often be considered on-going training.

"...then Thursday I have them all day. We occasionally spend the morning reading some kind of article, academic paper, doing an activity to build up their professional skills set, talking about risk management and judgment and whatnot, but also practicing certain skills in terms of wilderness medicine that I expect them to be able to do or other things along that line."

This type of training can ensure that staff members stay current with their skills and don't allow those important skills to get "rusty." In an industry that greatly emphasizes risk management, on-going training is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

### **Category: Finding time for training**

An overarching concern is often the amount of time needed to train staff. In many instances wilderness tripping is not the only facet of an organization's program and staff members have more than one role to fulfill. How does an organization find time to train

staff for wilderness trips and maintain staff at a high level of skill if they aren't constantly utilizing those skills? Finding time for training was identified as being part of the culture of an organization. An organization needs to make the time if they desire training to be a part of their trip preparation.

"...we have always made it a real commitment, as an organizational commitment, which makes it really helpful. It is part of the culture here that training is just as important, as you know, the experience."

Organizational culture determines a lot of the different aspects of an organization. An organization that wishes to have a successful tripping program in addition to their other programming must be sure that they have the time to commit to training and preparing their leaders for the task of facilitating wilderness trips.

### ***Theme: Renowned Tripping Programs***

#### **Category: Similar programs**

In any well-developed industry there is often an organization that stands out as the model for others. The tripping industry is no exception to this. Most, if not all, of the semester schools and camp-based organizations that were interviewed for this project identified the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and/or Outward Bound as the organizations that they modeled their programs off of. NOLS is the organization that is often spoken of as being the industry standard for the tripping world.

Within the interviews the exception was Northland College. Northland uses their wilderness trips for a very specific purpose: college orientation. The outdoor orientation

program began in 1975 and was originally based off of other collegiate outdoor orientation programs such as Rutgers and Princeton. Since then the outdoor orientation has evolved into its own program unique to the needs of Northland College.

***Theme: Resources***

**Category: Additional Resources**

Additional resources supplement the trainings and certifications that wilderness trip leaders receive during their formal training. These resources can come in a variety of different forms. Some of the additional resources provided to trip leaders by the organizations interviewed included a thorough staff manual, a field version of the manual, weekly readings from professional journals or industry magazines, grant money for professional development, and a knowledge bank in the form of seasoned staff members.

Each of the following quotes comes from a different one of the seven interviews done during which wilderness program directors were asked to speak about the resources they provide their staff. These quotes reveal the depth and expanse of the different resources listed above:

"I bring them in a lot of outside resources for our professional Thursday slot. Readings from different journals, from different perspectives all over, but they're not given a list of these sites that might be helpful, I kind of bring that to them and give them copies and they put them in a binder so they can go back and check. We get a lot of stuff from the Wilderness Risk Management Conference, a

lot of great articles to discuss; the AE Journal of Experiential Ed has some great stuff that we subscribe to as well"

"We have a pretty detailed staff manual that each staff member gets...most of the other resources are the staff that are here."

"There was also a smaller field guide for trip leaders that was on a. Well originally we laminated it, I think now they use one of those waterproof papers. So it's meant to fit into a back pocket or into your pack and it has some of those really key skills and key not just skills, but procedures. So it definitely had some of the key emergency procedures, it had weather issues in it and how to handle severe weather, some of the key leadership skills and here's what you're supposed to do every day."

"We try to each year put together a packet of information that is focused on sort of two things, one is teaching technique and second is pertinent information about simple ways to break down and explain things to campers about conflict resolution or about leadership styles, decision making styles, those sorts of things."

Each organization determines what fits their unique organizational needs and adjusts as they see the need. Staff manuals that are given to each leader are nearly compulsory with five of the seven organizations reporting that their staff members all possess and utilize their manuals during training. Because so much of what is contained in the staff manuals is necessary to know on the trail, one organization has created a field edition of their manual that can easily be brought on the trail. Articles from journals,

industry magazines, and conferences can be used as professional development for trip leaders.

## **Graduate Fellow Alumni Surveys**

Four Graduate Fellow alumni responded to the survey. The following is a summary of the answers given to each of the questions posed to the Graduate Fellow alumni.

### ***What technical skills do you think are important for Exploration Week group leaders?***

The skills that were identified as important include camp set-up, fuel/wood collection, water filtration, waste disposal, menu planning with attention to food rationing, camp cooking (camp stove +/- campfire), route planning/choosing appropriate travel distances, map reading, map and compass navigation, campsite selection with attention to safety, first aid, knowledge (what/why) of appropriate clothing choices, knowledge (what/why) of necessary personal gear choices, pitching a tent/tarp shelter set-up, fire building, general, simple repair/troubleshooting of gear (i.e. unclogging a stove fuel line, fixing a broken backpack strap, patching a hole in a tent, etc.), canoeing, portaging, canoe rescues, hiking, Leave No Trace, bear bagging/bear canister storage location, backcountry hygiene, and cleanup and storage knowledge for post trip.

This list is simply a compilation of the four answers with duplicates removed in order to create a comprehensive list of the technical skills that trip leaders would need to know in order to lead an Exploration Week trip. This list represents the gamut of basic camping skills needed for any kind of backcountry trip.

***What facilitation/interpersonal skills do you think are important for Exploration Week group leaders?***

The skills that were identified as important include knowing how to engage students in group conversations and discussions, conducting structured campfire discussions, knowing get-to-know-you games for the Fall semester, knowing how to provide reflection and closure for the Spring semester, open-mindedness, the ability to make executive decisions without worry of someone being upset (especially when it comes to safety), listening, task delegation, facilitating group decision making (letting students choose the route, setting up camp, etc.), decision-making techniques (consensus/majority rules/leaders have ultimate decision), techniques for working with co-leaders, conflict resolution techniques, and fostering a sense of place.

Once again this list of facilitation skills is a compilation of all four answers with the duplicates taken out. These responses suggest that many of these facilitation skills are skills that are gained through time and experience working with others; they may not be skills that are easily taught during a week-long training. On the other hand, there are skills such as campfire discussions, get-to-know-you games, conflict resolution, etc. that can be covered. Skills such as knowing get-to-know-you games for the Fall and how to facilitate closure discussions for the Spring acknowledge that the purpose of the wilderness trips could differ by semester and require some specific training to make sure that those goals are attained.

***What were you prepared for in terms of technical skills for Exploration Week?***

The following answers are left separated in order to demonstrate the different skill levels of Exploration Week Leaders.

1. “Since I had a strong background in leading trips from years of experience, I felt confident in my technical skills, both when we went to the Boundary Waters and later in the Porkies. I felt prepared and confident in the skills listed in #1 [Answer to #1: The specific skills obviously depend on the trips that are now being taken. If the trips are the same (either hiking in the Porcupine Mountains or canoeing in Sylvania), there needs to be a foundation set for camp set-up - choosing campsites, LNT, fire building & fuel/wood collection (dead, down & brown), stove usage & food prep, pitching a tent, water filtration, ‘waste disposal’ (all forms ☺), hygiene, etc. Aside from that, I think that understanding Wilderness First Aid, and specifically the signs of dehydration and how to properly treat it. This is all on top of the assumption that they will have a good understanding of hiking and canoeing skills (including care for the canoes, proper strokes, etc.)]. I think all of these are important – not only for the leaders to know, but to have strong background knowledge on these techniques as well.

That being said, it was always nice to have a co-leader with a second pair of eyes to help assess situations and decide what needed to be done to resolve any troublesome situations. I think that the trip training we did at the beginning of our 2<sup>nd</sup> year was definitely a step in the right direction, as our instructors tried to get us all on the same page as to how we would not only lead Exploration Weeks, but also how we would develop the curriculum for Field Instruction.”

2. “Canoeing (basic, only being in the front), tent pitching, cooking.”
3. “Basics of camping, Year 2 we had Wilderness First Aid.”
4. “Menu planning , camp cooking (camp stove +/- campfire), route planning/choosing appropriate travel distances, map reading, map and compass navigation, campsite selection w/ attention to safety, first aid, knowledge (what/why) of appropriate clothing choices, knowledge (what/why) of necessary personal gear choices, pitching a tent, fire building, canoeing, portaging, canoe rescues, Leave No Trace, bear bagging/bear canister storage location, backcountry hygiene, cleanup and storage knowledge for post trip.”

These answers are provided to give insight into the backgrounds of the different Exploration Week leaders. During the hiring process, Conserve School inquires as to a person’s experience in the outdoors. Extensive and intensive experience is not required; however, some do have such experience as is illustrated in these answers.

***What were you prepared for in terms of facilitation/interpersonal skills for Exploration Week?***

The following answers are left separated in order to demonstrate the different skill levels of Exploration Week Leaders.

1. “As these weeks can be both physically and emotionally draining for students (especially those who have never done anything like Exploration Week before), I think it’s important for leaders to learn skills on how to engage students in group conversations and discussions. I would have liked to have seen more structured campfire discussions at night, and in hindsight wish I would have facilitated more of these. The skills needed

will vary from semester to semester. During our cohort, the fall Exploration Week was very early on in the semester, so more “get to know you” activities were appropriate. However, during the spring Exploration Week, it was more towards the end of the semester, so more activities on reflection and closure on the semester would have been more appropriate.”

2. “The ability to make executive decisions, task delegation; however, I was not taught such skills in the program – they came from my precious work experience in business field.”

3. “We had what we learned in training about working with teenagers, we learned everything we needed to know from Phil.”

4. “I had the knowledge of the skills I listed for 2 [Answer to #2: Decision-making techniques (consensus/majority rules/ leaders have ultimate decision), techniques for working with co-leaders, conflict resolution techniques, fostering a sense of place], but my co-leader and I did not specifically discuss implementing those skills, and thus we did not use them in an intentional way.”

These answers reiterate what has been mentioned earlier, that facilitation skills are often skills picked up throughout one’s lifetime and in different settings. The more particular skills specific to Conserve School’s setting, such as working with teenagers and campfire discussions, can be covered during the different staff trainings required during the in-service weeks and can be further developed over time.

***What could have been done to make you feel more prepared for leading an Exploration Week group?***

Graduate Fellow alumni would have felt more comfortable knowing that there is a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for technical and facilitation skills. It should be ensured that leaders are prepared from a safety standpoint and that leaders are mentally prepared. Leaders should have a better idea of their role in the expedition so they could prepare; some leaders found that they generally ended up depending on the other leader for the technical skills and just considered themselves as back-up. Leaders should be trained in the necessary interpersonal/facilitation skills that Conserve School wanted them to utilize on the trip. Graduate Fellow alumni would also like to have been provided with a list of things to do/remember prior to embarking on the trip; for example, to have co-leaders decide how they will make decisions both with the group and between themselves prior to meeting with the students. That way there can be an established set of facilitation/interpersonal skills that will be used for the entire trip which can increase consistency. Graduate Fellow alumni also indicated that more training in how to ration food per person per day and more training in common repairs/ trouble-shooting techniques for all of the gear that will be used would be useful to Exploration Week trip leaders.

***Are there any resources that you wish you had available to you in order to better prepare you for Exploration Week?***

Three of the respondents remarked that they felt Conserve School offered enough resources to prepare them for Exploration Week. The last respondent suggested: a

compilation of common repairs/troubleshooting for all of the gear (i.e. a how-to-fix-it booklet) and literature on food rationing for group backcountry trips (i.e. a packet of information about food rationing taken from the NOLS Cookery book).

***Do you have any suggestions for how to better prepare future Grad Fellows for Exploration Week?***

Graduate Fellow alumni suggest a more standardized trip training so as to direct more consistent instruction, as well as provide ideas and examples for structured group discussions. Find the right Grad Fellows (those who are a good fit to lead trips and are comfortable in such environments). Train Grad Fellows on or talk to Grad Fellows about motivation: whatever it might be for each of them (one Graduate Fellow alumnus indicated that even though they were uncomfortable they were motivated to do their job well and thus were able to learn what they did not know with Conserve School help and on their own). Wilderness First Aid training was indicated as being important. It was also suggested that a backcountry canoe and backpacking trip should take place soon after the Graduate Fellows arrive. The trip should cover all technical skills needed. It should also be ensured that on the trip each Graduate Fellow is able to practice the skills themselves. A session on meal planning and rationing would be helpful. A pre-trip meeting of all trip leaders could be facilitated for the sharing of knowledge; a post-trip meeting of all trip leaders could be facilitated in which the unexpected successes or troubles can be discussed and how the trouble was resolved (i.e. more sharing of knowledge).

## **Current Graduate Fellow Focus Group**

A group of seven current Graduate Fellows responded to the following question: “What do you think Conserve School could do to better train staff members for Exploration Week?” Participants were then allowed to put forth suggestions and/or concerns and explain why they thought these were relevant suggestions or concerns.

### ***(Concern) How can leaders facilitate group discussion before Exploration Week?***

In the past, Exploration Week leaders have not been given clear guidelines on how to prepare their groups for Exploration Week short of making sure that students have all the proper gear and are physically ready to go on the trip. Some leaders independently developed their own discussion formats and materials. Current Graduate Fellows would like to have some guidelines provided for how to engage students in a pre-trip discussion to determine students’ goals for the trip as well as the students’ expectations for the trip leaders and the trip in general.

Because of the difference in experience levels of leaders coming into Conserve School’s tripping program, it is important for Conserve School to provide clear guidelines on their expectations for what trip leaders should be doing in terms of mentally preparing students for the experience of Exploration Week. Simply providing a framework or timeline of when to have what type of discussion would greatly aid leaders in planning for their trips.

### ***(Suggestion) Exploration Week should have a clear common goal.***

Current Graduate Fellows feel that Exploration Week could be improved if it had a clear, common goal that each of the groups could achieve or work towards achieving.

A clear, common goal would lend cohesion among the different Exploration Week groups and help to put an end to the competition amongst the groups. A clear and defined purpose would also help in the concern listed above. Leaders will be able to keep the goal in mind as they plan and prepare for Exploration Week.

***(Suggestion) Partner Graduate Fellows with experienced teachers or administrators for their first Exploration Week.***

It was suggested that for the first Exploration Week Graduate Fellows be partnered with an experienced teacher or administrator. Pairing Graduate Fellows with a more experienced staff member would allow the experienced staff member to pass on their knowledge about trip planning, the specific areas that Exploration Week takes place in, and ensure that safety concerns are properly handled while on the trip. It seemed to the current Graduate Fellows that sending two inexperienced trip leaders out into the backcountry could be seen as a liability by some, even if they have been trained. Current Graduate Fellows acknowledged that pairing a Graduate Fellow with an experienced staff member could be difficult, because there may not be enough staff members to accommodate this.

***(Concern and Suggestion) Graduate Fellows did not feel very confident in their technical skills during the 1<sup>st</sup> Exploration Week. Could a “Field Instruction-like” course be taught to the trip leaders?***

Current Graduate Fellows felt that their technical skills were not as strong as they should have been in order to lead a backcountry trip. A suggestion was made that it could be helpful if Graduate Fellows could participate in a “Field Instruction-like”

training course. This would have a two-fold benefit: Graduate Fellows would receive a skills-intensive training to prepare them for Exploration Week and it would allow Graduate Fellows to see how Field Instruction can be taught. This suggestion echoes some similar findings from earlier. A skills-intensive training taught by modeling could allow Graduate Fellows to quickly learn skills they need for Exploration Week as well as how to teach those skills for Field Instruction.

***(Concern) How can leaders use the comfort level indicators to make Exploration Week a better trip?***

At the beginning of the each semester, some Field Instructors chose to give an individual skills inventory to help determine the students' ability levels in regards to technical camping skills. Current Graduate Fellows wondered if there was a way the comfort level indicators can help them plan for Exploration Week. The comfort indicators help leaders to know what level each of their individual group members is at, but is there a way that leaders can use it to better facilitate group dynamics?

***(Suggestion) Was the winter camping training Graduate Fellows received more effective?***

After the first semester of the Graduate Fellowship program, during the winter in-service training, Graduate Fellows received a winter camping skills training. The training involved a meeting about gear and winter camping techniques. Overall, current Graduate Fellows thought that the training was hands-on and offered a good training for winter camping. It may be a good idea to create an introductory training for the very first in-service that is structured similarly to this winter camping training.

***(Suggestion) Create a resource bank for trip leaders.***

Current Graduate Fellows suggested that a resource bank be created so that future Graduate Fellows could know where to go if they had questions about something specific. For instance, knowing which staff members have experience leading trips in certain areas, knowing which staff members can answer questions about specific types of gear, etc. This too was correlated in the interview data. An institution's best resource is often the experience of the people already working there. There are many very experienced staff members who work permanently at the school and could serve as this resource bank.

***(Suggestion) Prior to leaving on Exploration Week, leaders should make a plan for facilitation activities for each night of the trip.***

If Exploration Week leaders want to run facilitation activities with their group, it was suggested that they make concrete plans and preparations before they leave for the trip. Having pre-planned and well thought out facilitation activities can help trip leaders tie student experiences back to the purpose of Exploration Week. This could easily be accomplished if leaders are provided with a framework for discussions and some training in a few facilitation activities.

***(Concern and Suggestion) Graduate Fellows would like to see better expectations for inclusion of the students in the trip planning process.***

Currently there is a difference of opinion between Exploration Week leaders as to whether or not they should include students in the trip planning process. Trip leaders are responsible for route planning, meal planning, group gear collection, facilitation activity

planning, etc. While students are not traditionally involved in facilitation activity planning, it can be beneficial for the students to learn how to plan other components of a wilderness trip such as route planning and meal planning. Students have the potential to take more ownership for the outcome of their trip if they are able to participate in planning things like the route and the meals. In the past, trip co-leaders have chosen either to include or not include students in the trip planning process. Students have noticed and brought up this inconsistency.

**Sub-Problem 3:** The third sub-problem was to determine from the data what the necessary skills (technical and facilitation) are that a staff member of a residential environmental education center needs in order to lead a wilderness trip, as well as the best practices for training staff members in these skills.

**Necessary Technical Skills:** camp set-up, fuel/wood collection, water filtration, waste disposal, menu planning with attention to food rationing, camp cooking (camp stove +/- campfire), route planning/choosing appropriate travel distances, map reading, map and compass navigation, campsite selection with attention to safety, first aid, knowledge (what/why) of appropriate clothing choices, knowledge (what/why) of necessary personal gear choices, pitching a tent/ tarp shelter set-up, fire building, general, simple repair/troubleshooting of gear (i.e. unclogging a stove fuel line, fixing a broken backpack strap, patching a hole in a tent, etc.), canoeing, portaging, canoe rescues, hiking, Leave No Trace, bear bagging/bear canister storage location, backcountry hygiene, and cleanup and storage knowledge for post trip.

These skills are a compilation of the answers from the Graduate Fellow alumni surveys. Based on their experience of leading Conserve School's Exploration Week trips for two (or more in some cases) years they were the ideal audience to compile a list of the necessary skills.

**Necessary Facilitation Skills:** how to engage students in group conversations and discussions, conducting structured campfire discussions, knowing get-to-know-you games for the Fall semester, knowing how to provide reflection and closure for the Spring semester, open-mindedness, the ability to make executive decisions without worry of someone being upset (especially when it comes to safety); listening; task delegation, facilitating group decision making (letting students choose the route, setting up camp, etc.), decision-making techniques (consensus/majority rules/ leaders have ultimate decision), techniques for working with co-leaders, conflict resolution techniques, and fostering a sense of place.

Once again, owing to their experience, the Graduate Fellow alumni compiled this list of the skills they feel are necessary to know in order to lead an Exploration Week trip.

**Sub-problem 4:** The results of sub-problem 4 are included as the List of Best Practices in Chapter 5. The outline for the staff training trip is included in Appendix B. The skills covered in the training trip include all of the technical skills (excluding the ones that are necessary to learn beforehand) and the facilitation skills that are directly related to Exploration Week.

## **Chapter V: Discussion and Recommended Best Practices**

This chapter includes the conclusions of the data analysis and the compilation of the recommended best practices for training Conserve School's Exploration Week leaders.

### **Conclusion of Data Analysis**

The substantial amount of overlap found in the semi-structured interviews suggests that there is a standard method used to train trip leaders. The analyzed data support this statement. Despite the technical differences between the organizations interviewed, each organization had similar components to their trip leader training. Standard training components include certification trainings such as Wilderness First Aid, policy and procedure training, and a training trip on which technical and facilitation skills are taught (trips usually last between three to seven days). It is important that an organization critically assess their wilderness tripping program and determine the technical and facilitation skills and certifications that they want their leaders to possess. The training that the wilderness trip leaders receive should be built around the pre-determined skills and certifications.

### **List of Best Practices for Training Conserve School's Exploration Week Leaders**

Based on the results of this project's data collection, the following are the recommended best practices:

***Recommended technical skills that Conserve School should train their trip leaders in:***

- Camp set-up
- Fuel/wood collection
- Water filtration
- Waste disposal
- Menu planning with attention to food rationing
- Camp cooking (camp stove +/- campfire)
- Route planning/choosing appropriate travel distances
- Map reading,
- Map and compass navigation
- Campsite selection with attention to safety
- First aid
- Knowledge (what/why) of appropriate clothing choices
- Knowledge (what/why) of necessary personal gear choices
- Pitching a tent/ tarp shelter set-up
- Fire building
- General, simple repair/troubleshooting of gear (i.e. unclogging a stove fuel line, fixing a broken backpack strap, patching a hole in a tent, etc.)
- Canoeing
- Portaging
- Canoe rescues
- Hiking

- Leave No Trace
- Bear bagging/bear canister storage location
- Backcountry hygiene
- Cleanup and storage knowledge for post trip.

***Recommended facilitation/interpersonal skills that Conserve School should train their trip leaders in:***

- How to engage students in group conversations and discussions
- Conducting structured campfire discussions
- Knowing get-to-know-you games for the Fall semester
- Knowing how to provide reflection and closure for the Spring semester
- Open-mindedness
- The ability to make executive decisions without worry of someone being upset (especially when it comes to safety)
- Listening
- Task delegation
- Facilitating group decision making (letting students choose the route, setting up camp, etc.)
- Decision-making techniques (consensus/majority rules/ leaders have ultimate decision)
- Techniques for working with co-leaders
- Conflict resolution techniques
- Fostering a sense of place.

## **Recommendations for Best Practices:**

1. Provide paper copies of the Outdoor Manual to each trip leader.
2. Utilize Outdoor Manual during trip leader training.
3. Take trip leaders on a training trip every two years (in rotation with new Graduate Fellow cohorts).
4. Teach technical and interpersonal skills by modeling them; teach leaders how you would like them to teach the students.
5. Provide trip leaders with a resource bank of information pertinent to wilderness tripping.
6. If at all possible for the first Exploration Week of each Graduate Fellow cohort, pair an experienced staff member with a less experienced staff member.
7. Create clear expectations for facilitation and debriefing of Exploration Week experience with students.
8. If Conserve School chooses to have leaders facilitate and debrief the Exploration Week experience with students, leaders should be provided with a resource bank of facilitation techniques and activities.

**Resources collected for Conserve School to utilize in revamping their trip leader training:**

High Mountain Institute: Wilderness Program Guide (Staff Manual)

Camp Gray: Voyageur Program (Staff Manual)

Camp Manito-wish: Experience Manito-wish (Staff Manual)

The Backpacker's Field Manual: A Comprehensive Guide to Mastering Backcountry Skills by Rick Curtis (Book)

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# Appendix A: Protocol for Original Submissions

11-12, 086

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

## Protocol for Original Submissions

A complete protocol must be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to the initiation of any investigations involving human subjects or human materials, including studies in the behavioral and social sciences.

For all research protocols, please submit the following:

- **1 printed copy with Faculty Mentor and Department Chair signatures** of (1) the completed protocol; (2) project abstract; and (3) samples of informed consent forms. PROTOCOLS LACKING ANY ONE OF THESE THREE ELEMENTS WILL NOT BE APPROVED.
- **A second copy of this page, with signatures.**  
Printed materials should be submitted to: **IRB/Grants Office, 204 Old Main.**
- **Electronic copies of all submission materials (multiple files are acceptable)** emailed as attachments to Jason R. Davis, IRB chair: [jdavis@uwsp.edu](mailto:jdavis@uwsp.edu) AND Sharon Courtney, Grants Office: [scourtne@uwsp.edu](mailto:scourtne@uwsp.edu)

### PLEASE TYPE

Project Title: Development of a Best Practices Manual for Training Conserve School's Exploration Week Leaders

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Faculty Sponsor (if required): \_\_\_\_\_  
(Faculty sponsor required if investigator is below rank of instructor.)

Expected Starting Date: February 2012 Expected Completion Date: May 2013

Are you applying for funding of this research? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

If yes, what agency? \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the categories of subjects to be included in this project. Please check all that apply.

Normal adult volunteers       Minors (under 18 years of age)  
 Incarcerated individuals       Mentally Disabled  
 Pregnant women       Other \_\_\_\_\_ (specify)

(Faculty Member) I have completed the "Human Subjects Protection Training" (available at <http://www.uwsp.edu/special/irb/start.htm>) and agree to accept responsibility for conducting or directing this research in accordance with the guidelines.

Brenda Lackey  
(Signature of Faculty Member responsible for research)

(Department Chair or equivalent) I have reviewed this research proposal and, to the best of my knowledge, believe that it meets the ethical standards of the discipline.

David Swede  
(Signature of Department Chair or equivalent)

\*\*\*\*\* Do not write below this line - for IRB use only \*\*\*\*\*

IRB approval [Signature] Exempt Date 4-20-12  
(Signature of IRB Chair)

Approval for this research expires one year from the above date.  
If research is not completed by this date, a request for continuation must be filed and approved before continuing.

Revised form: September 2010

## Appendix B: Outline for Staff Training Trip

<b>Prep Day (LRC)</b>	<b>Day 1 (Group 1 Cooks)</b>	<b>Day 2 (Group 2 Cooks)</b>	<b>Day 3 (Group 3 Cooks)</b>	<b>Day 4 (Group 4 Cooks)</b>	<b>Unpacking Day</b>
<b>Morning</b> Backcountry Hygiene  Meal Planning	<b>Hike out</b> Campsite Selection and Set Up  Water-filtering	Practice Portaging  T-Rescues	Leave No Trace  Map Reading & Compass Navigation (Plan afternoon hike)	Interpersonal Skills Scenarios	<b>Hike in</b> Shower, clean up personal gear
<b>Afternoon</b> Route Planning  Group Gear Checkout	Bear-bagging  Waste Disposal	Fuel collection and Fire building  Tarp Shelters	Afternoon Hike	Backcountry Emergencies	Post-trip group gear clean up (LRC)
<b>Early Evening (After Dinner)</b>	Debrief: Why did you come to Conserve? (Fall)	Debrief: Highs and Lows	Debrief: Rose, Bud, Thorn	Debrief: How has your time at Conserve impacted you? (Spring)	Job well done!!!
<b>Late Evening</b>	Fireside Q&A	Fireside Q&A History of Sylvania	Fireside Q&A	Fireside Q&A History of the Porkies	

16 Graduate Fellows (four groups of four); 2 Trip Leaders (minimum)

### Topics covered beforehand:

Gear Repair

Wilderness First Aid

Knowledge (what/why) of appropriate clothing choices

Knowledge (what/why) of necessary personal gear choices

Canoeing