

Risk Management in the Outdoor Education Program

The Outdoor Education Program is committed to promoting a positive learning environment for its students in our outdoor adventure activities. Faculty and staff strive to manage the physical and emotional well-being of students, and we involve them in the process of managing the inherent challenges and hazards in the areas where we conduct courses. Recognizing and responding to the risks in adventurous activities and/or remote travel is what we teach in every course.

Personal Responsibility

Students are expected to manage their own clothing and equipment, carry weight of approximately 40+ pounds over uneven terrain, prepare meals suitable for the environment, sleep in co-ed groups, and care for themselves in a variety of weather conditions, including extreme weather. They need to be able comprehend directions in challenging situations and respond appropriately to changing conditions and very real dangers. We often ask students to work collaboratively in small teams, and each student's attitude is important to the success of the educational experience. We conduct our training activities with sequential instruction and practice to deepen the knowledge, skills, and judgment of our students.

Environment

We use a variety of programming sites that include mountains, inland lakes and rivers, and the seacoast and Atlantic Ocean. Even the most experienced traveler is subject to hazards like rock fall, fluctuating rivers, and plummeting temperatures. In some remote programming areas in the Northeast, evacuation is a complex process that may take more than a day. OE faculty, staff, and students may need to manage situations for extended periods until medical help can be obtained. The program has clear emergency response protocols and evacuation procedures for its programming sites. Students must recognize that even more accessible locations may require several hours to obtain assistance.

Communication

We carry cell phones to our practice sites and on trips for life-threatening emergencies, but this does not guarantee reliable communication between the field sites and our program contacts at UNH. Phone communication is subject to terrain, atmospheric conditions, battery life, and more. Increasingly our culture has an expectation of communication, yet the river valleys and mountainous terrain in which we program can interfere with phone transmissions. We do not allow personal phone calls to students on trips in an effort to preserve the battery life of our phones, nor does the UNH base expect status reports from our faculty and staff in the field on a regular basis.

Medical Considerations

Upon admission to the university students are required to complete a physical assessment and immunization record with a health care provider and to submit the information to Health Services. We recommend that OE students obtain an annual physical exam and obtain medical care as needed to be physically and emotionally prepared for our courses. We may ask students with a medical problem to obtain a medical provider's clearance to participate or defer the course to a later date. Together we try to make sure that a student is able to handle the rigors of an experience so that we can prevent an evacuation.

Faculty and staff are registered Emergency Medical Technicians and Wilderness First Responders who can manage medical incidents and are trained to evacuate students with more serious injuries or obtain . In addition, our students are expected to pass the national registry exam for the EMT-Basic certification.

New Hampshire state protocols for standard of care for EMTs and WFRs prevent our faculty and staff from carrying and administering prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs in our first aid kits. We recommend that students with medical conditions carry their own medications in an easily accessible location. Students with known allergies are advised to carry two courses of epinephrine and Benadryl.