

Living/Learning Center Programs
The University of Vermont
<http://www.uvm.edu/lcenter/>

Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

The goal of Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills is to encourage members to develop a closer relationship with nature through learning naturalist skills. It will encourage members to view the natural world not only as a classroom, but as a playground, sanctuary, and home. Through the study of ‘hard skills’ – such as fire by friction, animal tracking, and shelter building – as well as ‘soft skills’ – such as sitting quietly in nature, practicing skills of awareness, and using intuition and tapping into innate wisdom – members will learn about the world of nature that is rapidly being destroyed, about themselves and their place in the world, and about the human communities within which we live. In addition to a strong focus on living in harmony with nature and her other children, the program will stress the importance of a close community, especially on such a large and diverse campus.

Most of us lose our innate connection with the earth early on in life, and as we speed into the new millennium it becomes ever harder to regain that vital part of who we are as humans. Because of this, we lose the ability to truly connect with each other and it becomes hard to even find ourselves. Most importantly, without a relationship to the natural world we are less passionate about fighting on her behalf. By reconnecting with nature, we can grow into our true selves and our relationships with one another will thrive, and we can become the advocates for the earth that she desperately needs.

The program welcomes any and all prospective members, regardless of previous experience or demographics, and only expects that members will be willing to share and learn from one another.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND ACTION STEPS

Learning Objective 1

Members will gain a basic understanding of the core naturalist categories: plants, mammals, birds, trees, reptiles and amphibians, and insects, as well as weather and cosmology. By the end of the year, all students will be aware of which other beings share the land with us in the Burlington area, and will have a basic understanding of the night sky and weather patterns.

Action Steps

1. Members will create one short species journal every two weeks and share it with the program. The journals will not be difficult, but will require some research; they will include basic information about a species that lives in this area (such as Latin name, size, identifying characteristics, coloring, uses (plants and trees), eating habits, and distribution) as well as an informal sketch. Each member will create two journals in the above six categories (excluding weather and cosmetology) over the course of the year, and together we will compile a community resource of Burlington's wildlife.
2. Members will participate in occasional night sky observation sessions, in which we will share our knowledge about the constellations, planets, and other celestial bodies. Members will be encouraged to do research prior to and after these informal gatherings, to make them more valuable.
3. There will be four field trips and guest lectures throughout the year with local specialists in naturalist fields, including an herb walk with Annie McLeary (Wisdom of the Herbs School), a tracking session with Angella Gibbons (EarthWalk Vermont), a winter tree ID session with Lorene Wapotich (Her Feet On The Earth) and an introduction to bird language with bird enthusiast Bridget Butler.
4. A copy of the Kamana Naturalist Training Program will be purchased for the program. Members will be encouraged to use this resource either as a guide and reference, or fully part-take in the intensive program.
*Kamana is an intensive naturalist program designed by the Wilderness Awareness School. Many universities offer credit for this program, and members would be encouraged to work with UVM to build this into their formal education if they choose.

Learning Objective 2

Members will learn basic survival skills including (but not limited to) friction fire, shelter building techniques (summer and winter), water purification techniques, and ethical harvesting of wild foods. Members will be encouraged to push their skills and challenge themselves, but no part of the program will entail significant risk.

Action Steps

1. We will lead a friction fire workshop, introducing both hand drill and bow drill, and will be available throughout the year to mentor members wishing to practice either skill. Materials will be on hand for members to make either type of primitive fire set. Other members with experience in fire-making will be encouraged to share their knowledge with the program. We will share our skills with the greater Living and Learning community with the presentation of our final projects late in the spring semester.

*Fires will never be made in nor around UVM buildings without direct permission from the director's office (in the case of a public bow drill demonstration, for example) and these skills will only be practiced in safe and legal environments.

2. Members will be encouraged to study various shelter building techniques, and try out some of these ideas in the Centennial Woods. We will hold a quinzee (snow shelter) building party if the snowfall permits, and any willing members will be encouraged to sleep in it. We will display a photography exhibit of our organic shelters in the Fireplace Lounge at the end of the year.
3. Resources will be provided for members to discover safe and easy ways of finding water in the wild that is safe to drink. These will include posters describing the process of rock-boiling water and finding springs, and information on purchasing water purifiers.
4. We will end the year with an exploration of the wild edible plants that can be found growing near where we live. Each member will have investigated what wild edibles are to be found in the area and how to safely prepare them, and will have taken part in a discussion on ethical harvesting of plants. We do this for informational purposes only, and the program will not include sampling wild foods.
5. We will also hold discussion sessions about using and purchasing modern survival and camping gear. We will have an information session with a local outdoor gear retailer to become familiar with these devices, and go on a field trip to practice using this gear.

Learning Objective 3

Each member of the program will develop a personal relationship with nature and with their intuition/inner wisdom in a way that is individually meaningful. Members will write a short reflection on this at the end of each semester, and will have the opportunity to share it with the program if they choose.

Action Steps

1. Members will engage in a meaningful practice which will assist their personal growth and inner awareness. Ideas include practicing a meditation, adopting the age-old practice of sitting quietly alone in nature, tracking their dreams and seeking meaning from them, and learning yoga. This can be a continuation of a participant's existing spiritual practice, and this action step depends entirely on each member's comfort.
2. Each member will be introduced to the core routines of awareness – including the sense meditation, fox walking (a meditative walk), and the practice of finding a secret spot – during the welcome meeting at the beginning of the semester. Members will be encouraged to make these a part of their regular life at UVM.

3. We will end the year with a yoga and meditation hike guided by a local instructor.

Learning Objective 4

Members will practice eco-friendly lifestyles and aim to broaden their understanding of living in sustainable ways. This action step stresses the importance of preserving the earth that we enjoy in this program and in our daily lives.

Action Steps

1. Each member will research 2-3 sustainable lifestyle changes and share them with the program members. We will choose as many as possible to implement in our living community.
2. We will attend local sustainability workshops to further accumulate our knowledge of new environmental movements.

Action Step for all Learning Objectives

Each member will create a year-long (or two semester-long) project of their choosing, which in some way relates to one or more of the learning objectives. Projects can be research based or primarily experiential, and all must have at least a small writing component. Project ideas can range from an in-depth study of Burlington's wildflowers or researching the crafts of Native American communities in Vermont, to using 10 different types of wood to make hand-drill coals or making a flex bow. We will create a list of possible projects to inspire the program, and project ideas will be approved by the program members. There will be opportunities throughout the year to share projects with the program, and with the Living and Learning community at the end of the year. Projects should be designed to be enjoyable, without becoming overwhelming or conflicting with schoolwork, so members will not be expected to spend more than 5 hours a month working on them.

Small projects will be ongoing throughout the year, to contribute to our above action steps.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

As a community will organize a project to complete on/around Earth Day in April. Collaboration with the greater UVM community will be encouraged. Projects can range from community education or trash drives to petitioning for double-sided printing in the computer labs, and will be expected to have a significant visible outcome.

One day per semester we will work with the Girl Scouts and/or Boy Scouts in Burlington. This may be in collaboration with SPROUTS – a group on campus that works with the Girl Scouts

intermittently throughout the year. In the circumstance that collaborating with these more traditional nature education programs is not possible, we will work instead with the kids from UVM's children center and share our love for the earth with them.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER L/L PROGRAMS

We would like to work with the program directors of the Ecological World Cuisine program to plan a local and organic dinner for our programs.

We will collaborate with the Exploring Culture through Tea program and run tea workshop that incorporates ingredients that could be found in the area.

We will team up with Animalia to run an animal tracking program, and learn about Vermont's wild animals.

We will also work with the Emergency Services program to conduct a wilderness first aid session.

At the end of the year, we will present to the greater Living and Learning community some of the skills we have been working on. This open presentation could include bow-drill demonstrations, sharing research on a particular species, presenting crafts and tools we have made throughout the year, or inviting students over for Nettle tea and Dandelion salad.