Learning in Outdoor Education at Sydney Uni

Coordinator: Dr Steve Georgakis

Unit description
Engagement with natural environments in Australia forms a significant part of growing up for many Australians, whether in formal educational settings, organised leisure activities or through informal experiences of leisure and/or sport. It is also of interest for a growing number of overseas visitors wishing to experience Australia’s unique natural environments. Outdoor Education forms an important aspect of the key learning area, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education in the NSW syllabus. Learning in Outdoor Education examines the nature and significance of learning that takes place through these experiences of natural environments in Australia, with a particular focus on how and what children and young people learn in outdoor education. While the unit aims to develop knowledge and understanding of specific areas of natural significance in NSW, it focuses more on the nature of learning in outdoor education. It does this by examining two different, yet interrelated, modes of learning in and about natural environments: through lectures about these places and through experiences of bushwalking and camping expeditions in them. At the same time, it addresses the relationship between concerns of outdoor education with the environment and students’ social learning. During the course of the unit of study, students come to know the places they visit through the two distinctly different learning experiences provided by formal lectures and field trips.

Field trips
Field trips to significant natural landscapes in NSW form the core learning experiences of the unit. Students will take part in two field trips in this unit and participate in activities through which significant and meaningful learning and understanding develop. Each of the two field trips is preceded and followed by lectures structured to maximise learning and the development of specific knowledge during the field trips. Assessment tasks are also tied into the field trips to form an integral part of learning over the duration of the unit:

- The first field trip is a two-day hike along rugged coastal terrain in the Royal National Park, involving overnight camping, two ‘in situ’ tutorials, and examination of coastal ecology.
- The second field trip is a three-day expedition in the beautiful Barrington River which flows through a national park in the mountains north of Sydney. This field trip includes two nights bunk accommodation in cabins, day hikes, kayaking and a number of ‘in situ’ tutorials.

About the staff
Dr Steve Georgakis teaches in the Human Movement program in the Faculty of Education and Social Work where he lectures in physical education and sport. His research is in the area of comparative sport, physical education and the scholarship of teaching. He has taught physical education and outdoor education in NSW secondary schools and has also taught outdoor education at tertiary level. Dr Georgakis played soccer at elite, international level in under-17, under-20 and under-23 and senior national teams.

Dr Richard Light is Director of Study Abroad Programs in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. He has taught and coached physical education in Australia and Japan and has conducted extensive research on the social dimensions of sport and other physical activity. Dr Light has played representative rugby in Australia and held national and international titles in martial arts. He is a prominent researcher in the sport and physical education field. He is Section Editor, Pedagogy, for the Asian Journal for Research in Sport Science and sits
on the review board for the international journals, International Sports Studies, Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy and Evidence-based Research.

Dr Tracey Rockwell has extensive experience as a teacher of outdoor education, including fifteen years at tertiary level, and is coordinator of Outdoor Education in the Human Movement program at the University of Sydney. Dr Rockwell played elite level water polo at national level and researches in the areas of the history of sport, sports management and experiential learning. He is currently completing a book on the history of water polo in Australia.

Indicative reading list