

## OC Whitewater Program

Western's Outdoor Center Excursions is a program designed for the entire WWU and Bellingham community. Our goal is to provide students, staff and anyone who wants to get outside with the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities, excursions, programs and skill building workshops. The OC aims at providing enriching experiences for all levels of outdoor enthusiasts. Starting with the conjunction of Val Halla's student group for Outdoor Excursions and James Miles biking group four decades ago, the students and employees of the Outdoor Center have worked hard to keep this mission alive.

Our growing whitewater program aims at giving people an exciting and memorable adventure on the water. Here in Washington many are in dire need of an experience that will actually improve with rain. The Pacific Northwest holds some of the most beautiful, exhilarating and consistently flowing rivers in the world and we are dedicated to giving students, staff and community members a chance to experience these now. However, we are currently limited in what we're capable of achieving as our rafts were retired last year. In purchasing new rafts, the OC will have the ability to provide many more incredible outdoor opportunities to students. This winter we will take students on Scenic Eagle Floats down the Skagit River where large numbers of Bald Eagles come to feed on the salmon in this river. Come spring we plan on making trips to the beautiful and exciting Sauk, Methow, and Wenatchee rivers that encompass the amazing diversity we have here in Washington State. We also give the opportunity to learn how to undergo whitewater first hand in our Intro to Whitewater Kayaking course.

Below are brief outlines of how our whitewater trips and classes work, as well as the various rivers and destinations we plan on visiting. A minimum of 4 rafting trips will go out every year, with 1 in fall and winter and 2 during spring quarter. On top of these there will be at least one raft trip leader training either late winter quarter or early spring quarter. The program will also include the ever popular multi week Intro to Whitewater Kayaking Course every spring.

### Excursions

- Overhead focus
  - o Skill building and knowledge of activity
  - o Team building and community within group
  - o Appreciation of activity and awareness of inherent risk
  - o Environmental consciousness

A typical raft trip consists of:

#### Pre-trip meeting

- o Fit Gear
- o Team building games
- o Safety talks
- o Logistics

#### Day Rafting

- o Basic river skills demonstration
- o Basic river safety
- o Rafting the river

## **Winter Quarter: 1 River Rafting Excursion, 1 trip leader training (minimum)**

- Bald Eagle Floats on the Skagit River
  - Bald Eagles come to this area by the hundreds to feed on the salmon in the river, providing a superb bird watching and mellow whitewater experience.
  - A popular trip in the past and for larger companies, we could possibly do this trip twice during peak Eagle season
  - This trip includes the above mentioned curriculum as well as information on the nature and ecosystem surrounding the trip.

## **Spring Quarter: 1 Rafting excursion, Intro to Whitewater Kayaking Course, and a Whitewater training (minimum)**

- Methow River Whitewater Rafting Trip
  - In the beautiful scenery of the Methow Valley, the Methow River provides a perfect intermediate level whitewater trip, with miles of continuous Class II rapids highlighted by several miles of Class III that come after a good warm up.
  - As in any whitewater rafting trip, one of our main goals is to build a strong group connection enabling us to work as a team to successfully navigate rapids.
  - Having spent multiple weeks as a commercial guide on this is a river I know it very well and know other very qualified guides for this trip.
- Wenatchee River Whitewater Rafting Trip
  - Spring on the Wenatchee holds some of the biggest waves and fastest rapids in Washington. However it also has very little hazards and is known as some of the most forgiving big water around.
  - Having spent two full years as a commercial guide on the Wenatchee I know it very well also and know several other trip leaders with a lot of experience as well.
- Sauk River Whitewater Rafting Trip
  - Right here in the PNW the Sauk is one of the most beautiful rivers I've been down. With high quality whitewater and great views of the Cascades this trip is perfect for adventure seeking folks that love being in the trees and mountains.
  - With the biggest rapids being Class III+/IV- this is the most technical on the list but is also a pool drop, meaning it has the forgivingness of flat-water after the major rapids. The river guides we have on the trip leader staff this year are very qualified and highly skilled to guide runs at this level and higher.
- Intro to Whitewater Kayaking Course
  - Covering all the basics needed to enter the world of whitewater kayaking, this course starts with several pool roll sessions followed by two weekends on the river.
    - Pool Session: How to roll/basic paddle strokes/basics of bracing.
    - Skagit River: More involved paddles strokes/bracing. Eddying out/in
    - Wenatchee: Scouting and running rapids/intro to surfing.

- Perfect for the adventurous student who wants to learn a challenging and rewarding sport, this course has proven to be a success in the past and evolves yearly with every experience.

## **Trainings**

- Whitewater Rafting Guide Training
  - For Whitewater Trip Leaders and those who hope to be in the future, this training is aimed at expanding our core group of guides and getting all of us on the same page.
    - We will cover the basics of steering a raft, reading water, and swift water rescue skills needed to be a guide
  - A training like this will help us work better as a team and create a smoother trip for the participants.
- Whitewater Kayak Rental Training
  - Available to anyone this week long training covers two roll sessions and a full day on the Skagit River.
  - Geared toward potential trip leaders, this course will be designed to take past participants along as assistant trip leaders.
  - With completion, participants are added to a list that allows them to rent out kayaks and whitewater gear from the OC.
- Intermediate Whitewater Kayaking
  - Also for trip leaders and students who participated in the Intro course, this is a course to establish trip leaders for future years. Covering advanced techniques and basic rescue skills, this will help get our core trip leaders on the same page and become more effective as teachers.

With these courses and trips we have the ability to give many students a powerful experience that will improve the quality of their college experience. It also opens the door to employing and building the outdoor skills of trip leaders and employees of the Outdoor Center. The more students we are able to give a positive experience too is also a valuable tool of growth for the OC. The best form of advertisement for a department such as this is word of mouth and through whitewater trips we can keep students talking resulting in more students signing up for all types of excursions.

Financially speaking, a whitewater program can be a consistent source of income over the years. In the past, we have had few trips that didn't max out our capabilities of gear and transportation. Both this January as well as last February we've had Skagit River Rafting trips fill up in the first week of being offered. Having the capability to give rafting trips year round keeps the buzz going on campus and people signing up for our excursions. With the capability of taking 14 people out on a whitewater rafting trip keeping this program alive is a valuable asset to the AS. However, without rafts we are unable to keep this going which not only slows down the number of people coming in and spreading the word of OC excursions, but drastically reduces our capability of using and producing with the rest of our not inexpensive whitewater gear we have in store. With a successful whitewater program we can also open up reason for

future trainings and certifications for OC trip leaders and others who hope to take their skills to a level that qualifies them for professional jobs as river guides. Working with groups such as the ACA we can create opportunities such as a Swift Water Rescue, Whitewater Kayak Instruction, and Whitewater Raft Instruction. Programs such as these can be a great tool to keep people coming in and getting involved with the OC.

Here at Western Washington University we have all the right resources to build a successful and potentially incredible whitewater program. With a perfect location, surrounded by many exciting and scenic rivers for all adventure levels from fun float to intense whitewater, we are lucky enough to have another critical piece of the puzzle that most of the country doesn't. This is our climate. As many dismay our typically wet weather, those in the whitewater game relish and enjoy the extra flow it gives our rivers and makes them capable to run year round. The final important element we have here in the Pacific Northwest is a large and passionate drive from the people of our community to get outside. With these three elements at our hands, it comes as a surprise that we haven't taken the initiative to expand this program to all it could be sooner.