No previous backpacking or sea-kayaking experience is required to participate in Wilderness Orientation (WO). Outdoor skills to be covered include backcountry living, leave-no-trace camping and map reading. Students on the backpacking program will have the opportunity to climb a major peak, experience a 24-hour solo, and travel off trail. Students on the sea kayaking program will have the opportunity to learn expedition paddling skills, navigation, rescues, experience a solo and do a service project. Your Wilderness Orientation adventure is a great way to make new friends and prepare for a positive transition into university life!

EXPERIENCE Wilderness Orientation

Wilderness Orientation (WO) is an invaluable experience for incoming college students. It serves as an orientation to the college experience by providing students an opportunity to form new friendships and discuss their hopes and fears about entering college. This experience gives them the confidence they need to dive into the college experience.

• Learn basic backpacking or sea kayaking skills.
• Make friends while having a great time.
• Have the opportunity to discuss college life and unique aspects of a UCSC education.
• Learn about yourself through wilderness challenges.
The Wonderful Staff

Since Wilderness Orientation began in 1983, this popular program has grown to seven times its original size. The program is now an integral part of the Outdoor Recreation Department at UCSC. The WO staff takes great pride in the program and strives to create meaningful experiences for all participants. Each hiking and kayaking group of 11-12 students is led by an instructor, an assistant instructor, and a student volunteer. All of our staff make safety their first priority. All of the instructors are highly skilled in backpacking, rock climbing, expedition kayaking and group facilitation, and they are all trained in wilderness first aid. Many also work with Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School. Each leader works hard to encourage positive and supportive group dynamics. They are dedicated, energetic, and inspiring people.

Director: Lauren “Lulu” Nord came on WO as a freshman in 2009 and hasn’t left since. Throughout her time at UCSC, she led a variety of backpacking and whitewater rafting trips for the Recreation Department. She graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of the Arts in Literature with a concentration in Creative Writing. Since that time, Lulu has continued to find her passion in outdoor education, working with the Northwest Outward Bound School in Oregon and teaching for the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS. She is very excited to be returning to Wilderness Orientation for her seventh year and can hardly wait for all of the staff to come together once again to create the WO magic for the class of 2016!

Sierra Nevada Backpacking

The Backpacking program will spend nine days traveling on foot through California’s majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains. There are four different routes, each in the “High Sierra” region south of Yosemite. Much of the time will be spent above timberline in the crisp alpine air between 6,000 and 11,000 feet.

Backpacking Session 1: Aug. 21 (1pm) - Aug. 31 (10am) - $650
Backpacking Session 2: Sept. 6 (1pm) - Sept. 16 (10am) - $650

Pt. Reyes Expedition Sea Kayaking and Service

The Sea Kayaking program will spend 8 days in one of California’s hidden gems, Tomales Bay within Pt. Reyes National Seashore. We will travel by kayak with all of our gear and food moving from beach to beach. The last day will be spent doing service work in the park.

Sea Kayaking / Service Session 1: July 31 (1pm) - Aug. 7 (10am) - $550
Sea Kayaking / Service Session 2: Aug. 21 (1pm) - Aug. 28 (10am) - $550
Sea Kayaking / Service Session 3: Sept. 6 (1pm) - Sept. 13 (10am) - $550

Equipment and Costs

The fee covers food, round-trip transportation from UCSC, instruction, and group equipment (tents, stoves, group cooking gear, climbing gear, maps and all kayaking gear). Students are expected to provide all personal equipment including boots, clothing, sleeping bag, backpack, and sleeping pad. A limited amount of equipment is available for rent through Wilderness Orientation. A complete equipment list is available online. Expect additional expenses for personal gear.

Get Signed Up

Register at recreation.ucsc.edu. Registration is on a first-come, first-serve basis. Upon receiving your payment, you will receive an email with a link to our website where you will need to fill out our paperwork and print out a gear list. If the trips fill (and they do fill fast), you may place your name on the waiting list online. Wilderness Orientation can be a physically and emotionally demanding experience. If you are under the care of a doctor concerning your physical or emotional health, please consult him or her before registering for this program. If you have questions, please call (831) 459-2807 and ask to speak with Matt Brower.

Cancellations: Full refund with 40 days notice prior to the course starting date; 50% refund with 25-39 days notice; no refund with fewer than 25 days notice, even if due to last-minute illness or injury.