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About the program

What is Mountain Classroom?

The oldest traveling high school program of its kind anywhere, Mountain Classroom stands as a cornerstone of Proctor Academy’s commitment to experiential learning. Since 1972, ten students and two teachers have set out on the road to gain firsthand experience among the myriad people and vast landscapes of the American West. Combining outdoor education with academic inquiry, Mountain Classroom students examine the complex and intricate connections between people and the natural world. Along the way, the group sleeps out under the stars; travels through some of the most unique and beautiful places in North America; and discusses issues with guest speakers and locals who share their perspectives, challenge assumptions, and inspire them to think critically. Mountain Classroom offers two 10-week, term-long expeditions during the Winter and Spring Terms.

Mountain Classroom Objectives

• To provide students the opportunity to learn through the process of applied and integrated education.

• To give students the experience of studying a geographical area intensively, through a curriculum involving literature, history, and natural science.

• To provide students with the opportunity to develop and fine-tune outdoor skills ranging from rock climbing and boating to backcountry trekking and camp craft.

• To provide students with a framework for understanding the role of humankind on the Earth through the integration of outdoor skill development and academics. This includes topics ranging from wilderness ethics to utilization of natural resources.

• To challenge students in a vigorous environment that demands group cooperation and self sacrifice, thereby providing students with the opportunity for growth in emotional maturity and self reliance.

Eligibility and How to Apply

Applicants must be current sophomores or juniors in good social and academic standing and must meet the Essential Eligibility Requirements. Applications are submitted in early December for the following academic year.

To apply for Mountain Classroom students must complete three steps:
1) Complete an Off-Campus Student Information Sheet
2) Obtain signatures supporting their participation in the program
3) Write five short essays.

There are a maximum number of ten students who may participate in Mountain Classroom during the Winter and Spring Expeditions. To establish priority in sign-ups, the following criteria will be used: year of graduation, previous terms off campus, years at Proctor, essays and effort grades. Other factors, such as housing may also be considered.

Physical and Mental Health Expectations

Mountain Classroom is a physically and mentally demanding program. In light of this, we want to be transparent about the program’s physical and mental health expectations.

Physically, students should be willing and able to participate in the following activities:

- Multi-day backpacking trips, 5-15 miles a day, carrying ~40 lbs
- Hiking at high elevation, 5,000-10,000 feet
- Daily 15 minutes of jogging, 15 minutes of abs, 15 minutes of playing a physical game
- Running a 10k race
- Rock climbing for multiple days in a row
- Multi-day canoeing/kayaking/sea kayaking trips, including rapids and/or tides
- Regularly lifting ~35 lbs

Mentally, students should be prepared to be challenged by the following circumstances:

- Living in a small community of 12 individuals for 10-weeks
- Having limited personal time and space
- Sharing a tent with others for 10 weeks
- Communicating openly and frequently with peers and teachers
- 4-night solo experience, taking care of all personal physical needs
A few disclaimers about mental health on Mountain Classroom:

- Contact with counselor may be possible, but cannot be expected
- Medication will be administered and monitored by instructors
- Logistically, programmatically, and health wise this is not a program on which you can rehabilitate.
- Students need to have stability in their medication intake and their mental health for 6 months to 2 years, depending on the condition, in order to participate in Mountain Classroom.

**Academics**

The academic program lies at the heart of the Mountain Classroom experience. It is designed to integrate not only academic disciplines, but to engage students on social and emotional levels as well. The academic curriculum takes full advantage of the program’s small size and mobility to meet these objectives. Above all else, academics on Mountain Classroom require a love of learning, a sense of adventure, and intellectual curiosity.

Learning the Mountain Classroom way can best be described as learning in action. Free from the confines of “the four walls,” the curriculum aims directly at the sources of student investigations—while studying border issues, we may meet with Border Patrol; while exploring industrial agriculture, we may head for California’s Imperial Valley; while learning Lakota traditions, we may participate in a Lakota sweat-lodge ceremony. Rather than acquiring facts in the comfort of isolation, Mountain Classroom encourages students to experience issues in real-life contexts—charged with complexity. As a rule, the program avoids simple textbook answers, challenges long-held assumptions, and encourages students to develop critical thinking skills.

Unlike traditional high school curriculums, Mountain Classroom begins with an assumption of interconnectedness. Rather than sequestering intellectual inquiry into separate 50-minute classes, we push our students to explore interrelationships between subject areas, blur the lines between self and community, and demonstrate how every thing is connected to everything—that nothing and no one exists in isolation.

Rigorous coursework is a cornerstone of this process. All academic courses are taught by the two Mountain Classroom teachers. Each is a Proctor faculty member teaching in his or her own field. The curriculum is centered on four subject areas: literature, environmental science, and Western American studies. Though more integrated and experiential than typical classes, students should expect to be challenged with a significant amount of reading and writing during the term. Juggling homework and day-to-day
responsibilities with an endless stream of “once-in-a-lifetime” experiences has proven to be one of Mountain Classroom’s greatest challenges!

Because each expedition travels to a different area, it is impossible to list the exact courses and texts of each semester. However, examples of previous topics and resources are listed below.

**Prerequisites:** Successful completion of one year of Biology and solid social and academic standing are prerequisites for attending Mountain Classroom. It is imperative that each student has a high level of fitness to successfully complete the physical components of the Program.

**Mountain Classroom Social Science**

**GOALS AND MATERIAL COVERED:** The Mountain Classroom Social Science course provides students an opportunity to explore real-world issues in the environment where they are occurring. The course focuses on the regional and cultural issues pertinent to the areas that the Mountain Classroom group visits. Through readings, interviews and first hand observations, students are able to develop a thorough understanding and form personal opinions regarding the topics discussed in the course.

**ASSESSMENTS:** All assignments are hand written in a composition notebook that is collected and graded periodically. These notebooks include reflections on readings and interviews that students conduct throughout the term. Students are additionally assessed on their participation in class discussions and completion of a study guide that is geared toward synthesizing and organizing their research, interviews and observations. The course culminates with a final exam or project.

**TEXT:** As the course may switch its main focus term to term, the reading is similarly varied. The following is an example of books and resources that have been used in recent years: *The Devil’s Highway* by Luis Alberto Urrea, *Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, *Collapse* by Jared Diamond, *The Earth Shall Weep* by James Wilson, *God is Not One* by Stephen Prothero, *Enrique’s Journey* by Sonia Nazario, *Black Elk Speaks* by John Neihardt.

Articles from: New York Times, The Economist, NPR, High Country News, Newsweek, and local news sources may also be included.

**Mountain Classroom English**

**GOALS AND MATERIAL COVERED:** Mountain Classroom English is designed to improve descriptive writing skills. Through a series of readings, discussions and writing exercises, students explore a number of written forms and styles as a means of helping to document the varied surfaces of everyday experience. While traveling across the country,
students maintain a journal to develop a daily writing practice and hone their abilities to capture moments in time.

ASSESSMENTS: All assignments are hand written in a composition notebook that is collected and graded periodically. These notebooks include reading responses as well as sample writings of the forms that we study throughout the term. In addition to their writing notebooks, students are required to maintain a daily journal which is graded solely on completion (content is not read by the instructors). The term culminates with each student’s compilation of an anthology of their work throughout the course.

TEXT: Readings may include, but are not limited to: Desert Solitaire by Edward Abbey, Mountains and Rivers Without End by Gary Snyder, Field Guide to Nature Observation and Tracking by Tom Brown, Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh, How to Haiku by Bruce Ross, Getting Over the Color Green: Contemporary Environmental Literature of the Southwest edited by Scott Slovic, Tao Teh Ching by Lao Tzu, Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg

Mountain Classroom Science

Goals and Material Covered: This is a field based ecology course that focuses on the regions we encounter as we travel across the United States, primarily New England, Texas, Arizona and California. We will study regional watersheds, annual weather cycles, and biome characteristics. Students will be asked to paint a scientific picture of these regions with an eye toward human impact, and will relate observations from field work with current environmental issues.

Assessments: Two major components of the science grade are the Science Journal and Project Presentations. Journals will integrate observations on weather, water sources, soil, flora and fauna. Presentations will emphasize field work and connections to current environmental issues. Students will be challenged to design solutions for dilemmas facing the regions we research. There will also be points given for active reading, resources collected and group discussions.

TEXT: Data and analysis on regional watersheds from Research Center for Educational Technology, research on biomes of the United States from the U.S. Forest Service and Biotic Communities of Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico, environmental issues presented by the United States Global Change Research Program, Arizona Conserve Water, and Discovering a Watershed: The Colorado put together by Project WET, as well as primary and secondary resources collected on current issues.

Mountain Classroom Expedition Skills

GOALS: The goal of Expedition Skills is for students to acquire the tools to be able to plan and execute backcountry expeditions with family and friends or professionally.
MATERIALS COVERED: Throughout the term, students work on a combination of technical and interpersonal skills. Topics covered may include, but are not limited to: rock climbing technique and safety, backpacking, whitewater safety, backcountry and front country cooking, meal planning, budgeting, Leave No Trace, equipment care and repair, hygiene, water purification, communication, decision making, risk management, expedition behavior, respect, permitting, orienteering, etc...

ASSESSMENT: Students are assessed based on a combination of written work and observed performance on skill mastery. Throughout the term, students work toward the completion of a technical skills checklist. Students will take a midterm exam and execute a student led backpacking expedition for their final.

TEXT: May include but not limited to: AMC Guide to Outdoor Leadership, Leave No Trace: North America and other selected readings.

Mountain Classroom Group Dynamics

GOALS: Group Dynamics is one of the main focuses of Mountain Classroom. Students learn how best to understand and nurture their community through a combination of nightly group meetings, individual and group feedback, reading, reflection, free writes, team-building activities, and active problem solving. Throughout the term, students are given numerous leadership opportunities and make great strides with effective interpersonal communication.

MATERIALS COVERED: The course focuses on general aspects of community growth. More specifically, we look at effective communication skills, leadership, risk management and decision making.

Credits

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<th>Credits Earned</th>
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Schedule

Expeditions (Winter & Spring)

Mountain Classroom runs expeditions during the Winter and Spring trimesters for ten Proctor Academy students who are fit and are in good social and academic standing. Due to seasonal variations and differences in scheduling, the two terms differ in their structure.

Winter Term

Students often begin the Winter Term in New Hampshire. Students build a foundation in each of their academic subjects. In addition, there are discussions and seminars on topics necessary for group living such as conflict resolution, decision-making, and communication skills. The afternoons during this time are devoted to expedition skills training. This typically includes wilderness first aid, camping, Leave-No-Trace ethics, expedition planning, and initiative challenges. During this portion of the term, the group embarks on a road trip and winter camping expedition to test students' newly acquired skills.

After holiday break, we ask winter Mountain Classroom students to fly to Austin, TX, where Coco and Timbah will meet them with the bus and trailer...ready to go! For the next seven weeks students travel by minibus—camping out, roughing it together, and bonding as a group. Typically, the Winter expedition heads for the Southwest. A sample expedition would include a week of backpacking in an area rich in Native American ruins and geological features such as southern New Mexico’s Gila Wilderness; whitewater canoeing on a river like the Rio Grande in Texas; rock climbing in an area of historical significance such as Hueco Tanks in Texas or Mount Lemmon in Arizona; visiting a Native American Reservation such as the Tohono O’odham to gain a native perspective on place, and a three-day wilderness solo. In addition, the Winter expedition usually spends several days in El Paso studying Border Awareness with Annunciation House.

Students spend the final week of the term at a library, cabin, or other indoor facility completing their final projects. At the end of the term, students and faculty debrief and evaluate their experience before flying back to New Hampshire.

Spring Term

The Spring Term begins with students flying to a city out somewhere out West. Once there, they embark on an intensive weeklong orientation program to build a foundation for their academic, expedition skills, and group dynamics courses. After orientation (usually spent at a campground or cabin), Mountain Classroom heads out on the road. Recent destinations have been California and the Pacific Rim, the Four Corners, and the desert Southwest. Some highlights from the past few springs include: climbing at
Joshua Tree, backpacking in Northern California’s Lost Coast and Colorado’s Piedra River; whitewater rafting on the Sauk and Winache Rivers in Washington; canoeing on the Green and Colorado Rivers; and attending a Lakota sweat lodge ceremony in South Dakota as they drive back to New Hampshire. In addition to our wilderness expeditions, the group has also spent time in major cities and culturally significant areas including San Francisco, Las Vegas, Moab, and Boulder.

Before heading out on their road trip back to New Hampshire, students typically spend three or four days in a library, cabin, or other indoor facility completing final projects. The past few years, the group has finished their term with a student lead backpacking trip in the White Mountains which has proven to be a valuable way to end their experience.

Expedition Schedule

Winter Term: Students arrive on the same date as on-campus students for the December period and fly home before holiday break. The Winter students spend the full holiday break with their families and fly to Austin, TX on . Mountain Classroom for the 2014-15 Winter Group will be ending on February 28th and students will need to fly out of Phoenix, AZ airport.

Spring Term: Students arrive to Tucson airport on March 22nd (the beginning of Project Period) and will finish May 26th at Proctor.

Rules & Expectations

It is important that students familiarize themselves with Proctor’s Green Book before attending Mountain Classroom. While many of the less consequential rules that help govern campus life do not relate to Mountain Classroom, Proctor’s principles and value systems inform the bulk of our program. Because of our absolute dependence on the integrity and trust of each group member, any serious breach of the core rules and/or expectations will result in an immediate removal of the student/students from the program. In the situation that a student needs to be sent home, he or she will do so at his or her expense.

Core Rules and Expectations

• **Integrity:** Above all else, we demand integrity from our students. Plagiarism and cheating, lying or intentionally misleading, and sneaking off in the middle of the night are serious violations of this standard.

• **Inclusivity:** Foremost, Mountain Classroom is a group experience. In this light, we ask all students to refrain from exclusive behavior. Pairing off or forming
cliques in a way that is distracting or disruptive to the group’s well-being and morale is not acceptable.

• **Sobriety**: Use of illegal drugs (or abuse of legal medications), alcohol, and/or tobacco while on Mountain Classroom will result in dismissal from the program.

• **Whereabouts**: Due to the extraordinary importance of expedition safety, students are required to keep the instructors accurately informed of their whereabouts at all times.

**Ethics**

At Mountain Classroom, we believe all education is environmental education. By this, we recognize we are not simply passive observers, but active participants within the places we travel. As a program, we have committed to buying local products, organic foods, and Fair Trade items whenever possible. We encourage students to reduce their personal waste by buying less, reusing what they can, and recycling. The bus has rooftop solar panels to provide students hands-on experience with alternative technologies. In the backcountry, we believe in practicing Leave No Trace camping techniques. However, in keeping with our belief that nothing exists in isolation, we also encourage students to consider the high impact their “low impact” equipment has on the places of its manufacture.

It is important to convey that at Mountain Classroom we take our commitment to the environment seriously. We refuse to pay lip service to ecological considerations, and we do not attempt to negate our obvious impacts; instead, we devote substantial resources to environmentally appropriate practices and technologies and are actively exploring new ways to make our program more sustainable.

**Technology Policy**

Mountain Classroom officially encourages you to unplug while on course. **DO NOT BRING LAPTOPS or iPads**! Because Mountain Classroom is an intentional community, we will be asking students to turn in their cell phones at the beginning of the term. We will have track phones that students will be able to use to contact parents and friends a few times during the term. If a parent needs to get in touch with a student, he or she should contact the director or the adjunct instructor. Although limited in number, we will have sporadic opportunities to check email at libraries and/or cafes. Most student work is done with paper and pen.

Additionally, students who would like to bring a music device are asked to bring a device that does **NOT** have any internet access. Students should expect to use this only while traveling in the bus for more than two hours.
Health and Safety

Mountain Classroom Instructors are certified Wilderness First Responders. Safety is of the utmost importance to our program and the instructors practice industry standards. All medications are kept locked and are administered by the instructors or a visiting faculty member.

Emergency Plans are established for each backcountry trip and families are contacted promptly whenever a student has a serious illness or an injury that warrants medical attention.

Insurance

In addition to your own personal health insurance policy, your child is also insured with accident and sickness insurance through Proctor while studying off-campus. The cost of this insurance is paid for through your child’s deposit.

The policy that Proctor has is through NAHGA, Inc., and Commercial Travelers Mutual Life Insurance Company and provides for the treatment of illnesses, medical emergencies and medical evacuation, it is not for long-term treatment or convalescence.

Program Fees

Deposit

The nonrefundable reservation deposit of $200 serves as Proctor’s guarantee that a student indeed plans to participate in Mountain Classroom. This deposit will be charged to a student’s account once he or she has been officially put on a list for either the Winter or Spring group. This deposit does NOT offset the cost of flights or school supplies.

Boarding Student Tuition

Boarding student tuition for Mountain Classroom is included in the boarding tuition. See below for additional expense of flights and books/supplies.

Day Student Tuition

The cost of the program for a day student is the difference between boarding and day tuition for one term. For the academic year 2016-17 that amount is $7400.

Flight Costs

Families are responsible for the cost of flights. In the winter this consists of three flights. A flight home from Memphis just before holiday break. A flight to Austin, TX in
early January and a flight home from Phoenix, AZ at the end of the term. In the spring this consists of a flight to Tucson, AZ in March.

Additional Costs

Families should expect additional fees of up to $250 for schoolbooks and supplies.

Spending Money

The only out of pocket expenses students should expect during the term will be for souvenirs, snacks, postal expenses, and laundry. **Students usually find that $200-$300 is plenty.** Do not bring large amounts of cash. We recommend students use ATM cards.

Travel Information

Students participating during the Winter Trimester will require a valid passport and any necessary visa as the group will be traveling into Mexico.

Preparing For the Trip

Equipment

Mountain Classroom provides all community camping gear, cooking equipment, group first aid kits, climbing gear, and tents. Students need to provide the items found on the Mountain Classroom equipment list. Please do not bring extra items as space is very limited.

Equipment Rental

If you need to borrow or rent gear, please contact us as soon as possible to insure equipment is available.

Contact Information

Patty Pond, Director  pondpa@proctoracademy.org  603 731-7450

Timbah Bell, Instructor bellti@proctoracademy.org

Caroline(Coco) Loehr, Instructor loehrca@proctoracademy.org
Paperwork

A detailed letter and packet will be sent to families during the term prior to a student’s participation. The packet will including a Mountain Classroom Health Form, a detailed equipment list and all necessary waivers.