

Presentation Outline
“Teaching on the Road”

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A workshop on the topic of taking university student groups into the field
 Presented at Animal Behavior Society Albuquerque, June 2012

Teaching in the field produces unforgettable lessons. When done right, students describe “experiences of a lifetime.” In the field, lessons are delivered in a multidimensional context, and are almost always combined with strong emotional valance.

<u>Things to decide up front</u>	
Pre-scout destination vs go uncharted	Much better to take students to a place with which you are already familiar
Destination	Go with what you know Go with where you know
Which student group to serve. Club vs class vs team	Each has advantages
Daytrip vs overnight	Start small and build skills gradually Start with day trips to zoos and local wildlife refuges Build up to weekenders
Hotel vs camping	I have learned that I can teach biology, or I can teach camping. But I do not have the endurance to do both at the same time.
Alone vs co-instructor	Much better to have a partner when available. But the lack of one does not restrain me from going.
Optimal group size	I cancel trips when groups fall below six. I begin to lose the personal connection when groups rise above twenty. For me, the sweet spot is 12-14.
Student selection vs free sign up	The chances of problems increase when any student can freely sign up. When possible, it is better to have a degree of selectivity (via some sort of try-out process).
<u>Academic structure</u>	
Set academic goals/lessons Focal lesson/assignment	Students most often want to observe mammals But lessons built around birds and insects are more reliable. Other good lessons revolve around tracks and scat Consider using camera traps/baiting

Isolated field experience vs trip imbedded within larger coursework context? Pre-trip classroom study/assignments Post-trip classroom study/assignments	Consider the CAC model Paying lessons forward w student service learn more at www.canisius.edu/~noonan/cac/the_cac_program.htm
Use existing eco tour companies?	Sometimes necessary. But never preferred. If you are taking packaged eco-tour, then why are YOU needed?
Incorporate lessons from local experts?	Almost always a good idea.
<u>Travel Itinerary</u>	
Be sure to know and follow any applicable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • university travel policies • university codes of conduct • state department warnings 	
Anticipate the problem of bringing along required equipment (camera traps, bat detectors, etc.)	I require each student to participate in a three-bag flying system <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. own duffel 2. own carry on 3. one team bag provided by me.
Will you allow animal contact?	If yes, you should assume that an IACUC protocol is necessary.
Church on Sunday?	Do not be surprised if one or more of your participants will want this. On most of my trips, a church stop is not possible. When it is possible, I provide for it. Whatever you decide, make your policy/arrangements known in advance.
Hold best for last	Don't climb to mt peak on first day. Save what you know will be the highlight for the last day.
<u>Anticipate uncertainty</u>	
Field conditions highly variable Thus uncertain lesson plans Anticipate and adapt to this uncertainty	Learn to not set goals Teach the lesson that happens (It is often enough to simply narrate what you observe) Assume a sequence of spontaneous adaptations on your part

<p>There will be inevitable side lessons There will be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural lessons • Social lessons 	<p>Teach a respect for nature. For example, use attention to flight distances as a teachable moment.</p> <p>Wear eco colors / require it in your students?</p> <p>More generally, you should know that you will be continuously modeling. Always remember to continuously model proper behavior</p> <p>More than anything, you will be judged by your behavior when things go wrong</p>
<u>Handling safety/emergencies</u>	
<p>Noonan rule 1. The distance you travel from your university should be determined by your willingness to with an emergency at that distance</p>	
<p>Noonan rule 2. The distance you travel from the road should be determined by your willingness to deal with an emergency at that distance</p>	
<p>Prepare for the worst</p>	<p>Imagine a lawsuit. Behave accordingly. I set policy of joint veto power vis-à-vis risk taking</p>
<p>Learn orienting, but carry field GPS Prepare back up plan Acquire first aid lessons Master the art of tick removal Learn field rescue techniques Bring safety equipment First Aid Kit?, walkie talkies? rope, etc.</p>	
<p>Require rain suits Waterproof boots</p>	<p>Police preparedness? I do. I require a pre-trip check of this material.</p>
<u>Contingency planning</u>	
<p>Have a contingency plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for travel delays 	<p>Be prepared to be stuck wherever you take your group.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for student illness 	<p>Will you leave the student behind at the lodge? Alone? Have a plan.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for trips to the hospital 	<p>Always know the location of the nearest hospital.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for sending student home separate from group 	<p>This could be for any number of reasons. If this does become necessary, I advise you coordinate with your dean of students so that you can be assured that someone will pick up responsibility for the student after you put him/her on the plane.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for teacher illness 	<p>If YOU get sick, the group will have to slow down and wait. Have a backup plan with something worthwhile (and safe) for them to do.</p>
<p>Will you administer a pre-trip health questionnaire?</p>	<p>I do. Simple stuff, like “do you have any pre-existing back or joint injuries?” You will be surprised how often the answer is yes. And you will be glad to know about them.</p>
<p>Will you screen participants based on health/physical fitness?</p>	<p>For me, it depends on the nature of the trip. For mountain trips, I administer a stair climbing test. For snorkeling trips, I require a swim test. For many, no test.</p>
<p>Will you require, monitor, or advise immunizations?</p>	<p>My student health center wants me to only point to CDC website, and then leave all else to student decision in conjunction with their own health care professionals. My college does not want me to advise or require any medication.</p>
<p><u>Managing the group (its mood; its social dynamics)</u></p>	
<p>Team building exercises Games Evening activities</p>	
<p>The problem of cliques What to do about them</p>	<p>If you have the answer to this, please let the rest of us know. On some trips I manage a van seating rotation and a roommate rotation system</p>
<p>Know when to ease off Know when to push harder</p>	
<p>Know that the group will be limited by its weakest member weakest physical fitness weakest stamina weakest emotional stability</p>	<p>Impossible to anticipate in advance who this will be. Sometimes it will be you.</p>
<p>Learn to not set goals. (Suppose you set out to see a humpback whale, but instead end up seeing dozens of fin whales, minke whales, and white sided dolphins, your group will somehow be disappointed.)</p>	<p>Try not to talk about other trips Avoid talking about usuals Instead have high enthusiasm about whatever comes In every case, the trip you are on is the best trip ever!</p>

Set expectations low. (If you can reasonably expect to log observations on 40 species of birds, announce only that a good trip will see 20.)	
Find balance between teacher-taught and self-discovery	
The question of free time It is essential. But it also the time when most problems develop	I work hard to position hotels far from temptations

<u>Discipline—enforcement</u>	
Ninety-nine percent of the time, you will be friends with the students, and they will love it. But once in a while, you will have to correct them --- even discipline them.	Best to always maintain a faculty/student distinction.
The question of you rooming with students	I advise against.
Include own family on trip?	I sometime do this. But it does make it awkward at times.
The question of alcohol.	Often problems if you allow it. Sometimes resentment if you don't. Decide and communicate a clear policy. As for me, I run alcohol-free trips. It works well for me.
Written contract re expectations?	Yes, I have a 3 page document that students sign before each trip.

<u>Managing money</u>	
Who pays for this?	External funding for student travel is very rare. Sometimes your department will cover all/some costs if the travel is attached to a course. Argue that it is part and parcel of running a lab section for your course (comparable to the cost of supplies for other lab courses). Usually the students pay the costs. Price it honestly. If it is worth it, those that can afford it will sign up.
Controlling costs Restaurants vs grocery stores Fly v drive Self-drive rental van vs chartered bus	You will want to reduce costs for the students' sake. Just remember that you get what you pay for. Don't go so low that you/they will be uncomfortable.

Estimating costs	Don't underestimate! No one will complain if you distribute a refund at the end, if there is a surplus. Everyone will complain (a lot) if you need to ask for more at the end, in order to cover a deficit.
Handling gratuities	Gratuities are a necessary part of traveling. Plan for them in your budget. Carry the cash you will need. Overseas this can sometimes mean a great deal of money (even more than \$1000). When preparing a trip accounting, gratuities can be the most challenging. I usually try to have one or more trip participants witness me distributing gratuities.
Keep very careful records of all expenditures.	Always assume there will be an audit of your accounting. Behave accordingly.

Final advice	
Only do this if you are already an experienced traveler	
Take care of yourself	If you get tired/frustrated, then the whole group/trip will go south.
One student will dominate your time	It is impossible to know in advance who this will be, or why. Just go with the flow when it does occur.
Take LOTS of photos while you are away. Be sure that many of them have YOU in them, pictured in teaching settings.	You will be doing a wonderful thing, but it will be completely out of sight of your colleagues and administrators. Do not underestimate the importance of photo documentation for a feed-forward process. Post the pictures in the hallway, on your website, and try to get them in the campus press. It will help a lot when you are trying to get support for your next trip.
Is it worth it?	Sure it is! I have had students leaning over the ship's railing to watch dolphins bow wave riding. I have had students sitting under a rain forest giant while howler monkeys howled overhead. I have had student witness a polar bear mother taking her cubs to a whale carcass. And I have sat with soaking students while Gombe chimpanzees have done a rain dance above us.

Background:

Michael Noonan, PhD, is located at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY.

Canisius College houses the nation's largest undergraduate program in animal behavior, and the nation's only graduate program in Anthrozoology.

Noonan has completed 33 years of teaching, hundreds of off-campus day trips, and 79 teaching-related field trips extending from 3-20 days and on five continents. Collectively, he has spent 450 days on the road with undergraduate students.