

Petition for Establishing a New SIG

Name of person submitting petition: Jayson Seaman, Ph.D.
AERA Member # 240141

Contact information: Campus Address: University of New Hampshire
NH Hall 205C
124 Main Street
Durham, NH 03824, USA

phone: 603-862-1162

e-mail address: jseaman@unh.edu

As a member of the American Educational Research Association, I support the establishment of a Special Interest Group within AERA with the title of:

Adventure Education and Expedition-Based Learning

Please submit a statement describing three aspects of the proposed SIG: (1) its purpose, (2) its scope, and (3) its uniqueness compared to existing SIGs. All three of these aspects are highly important and will be reviewed carefully by the SIG Executive Committee.

Each petition to establish a SIG must be accompanied by a fee, currently \$100 to offset the additional administrative cost to the Association Council. Checks should be made payable to AERA. To assist new SIGs, it is recommended that each signature on the start-up petition be accompanied by the minimum annual membership fee of \$5.00. This will ensure a minimum collection of \$150 at SIG start-up time, covering the \$100 AERA fee and leaving at least \$50 in the new SIG's treasury.

Information about the people who will become members of the proposed SIG should be listed below. Signatures can be obtained electronically, following a procedure described in Section III-B on page 6.

Section 1) Mission and purpose: *AERA Criterion #1: The mission must emphasize educational research.*

The mission of the Adventure Education and Expedition-Based Learning SIG is to promote the creation and dissemination of knowledge about the instructional uses of *adventure* and *expeditions* in formal and informal educational settings, with different age groups, and in different cultural, national, and geographical contexts.

Specific purposes include:

- To expand the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks used to study and design adventure and expedition-based practices in and out of schools.
- To further develop sound “evidence-based practices” by promoting original research and by interfacing with other organizations focused on this topic.

- To engage with critical social and environmental issues that affect the vibrancy, the ethics, and the longevity of adventure education and expedition-based learning approaches in different communities and in developed and developing regions.
 - To support up-and-coming scholars within the broader arena of educational research.
-

Section 2) Scope

The Adventure Education and Expedition-Based Learning SIG will invite a broad range of perspectives to fulfill its mission. It will provide an important international forum for the expansion of knowledge about this evolving field of practice and inquiry. Although the SIG will be focused on the *educational* uses of adventure and expeditions, it will encourage dialogue with related fields such as outdoor behavioral healthcare, ecological/environmental interpretation, and recreational youth/adult development. Through such dialogue, the SIG will conceive of new possibilities for adventure education and expedition-based learning, as well as arrive at clearer articulations of educational purposes versus recreational/therapeutic ones.

The locations for adventure education and expedition-based learning include schools and colleges, urban environments, wilderness settings, community-based nonprofits, and others. Participants include youth, college students, and adults of varying backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Therefore, research conducted in any of these settings and with any of these populations will be welcome. Additionally, linkages between adventure and art, adventure and theater, adventure and digital media (e.g., Second Life), and other formal disciplines (e.g., literacy, science) are of interest. Critical perspectives on the nature of adventure are also welcome. This invitation is meant to bring multidisciplinary perspectives to bear on adventure education and expedition-based learning—especially as they inform empirical inquiry. Central to inquiry in these areas, however, should be the “spirit of adventure”: the combination of challenge, shared discovery, social and/or physical interdependence, and individual development (noting that these elements may be emphasized, added to, or even questioned to varying degrees in different projects).

Finally, the Adventure Education and Expedition-Based Learning SIG will act as an important interface between existing research networks in these areas and the broader community of educational researchers. For example, formal relationships will be sought between the SIG and the Symposium for Experiential Education Research (SEER) and the Council on Research and Evaluation of the Association for Experiential Education.

Section 3) Uniqueness compared to existing SIGs

Two existing SIGs share some common interests with this proposed SIG, yet they differ in important ways: the Service Learning and Experiential Education SIG and the Ecological and Environmental Education SIG. These differences will be discussed in turn.

Service Learning and Experiential Education SIG: This difference may be understood both historically and substantially. Historically, two primary organizations have promoted

“experiential” methods of teaching and learning in and out of schools, at least in the U.S.: the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE) and the Association for Experiential Education (AEE). Clearly these groups share some commonalities—they have even jointly hosted conferences. However, NSIEE has focused on internships, work-based learning, and service learning particularly in academic contexts, while AEE has served as the clearinghouse and gathering place for those interested in adventure education and expedition-based learning in formal and informal educational settings. The difference between the Service Learning and Experiential Education SIG and this proposed SIG may therefore be understood as an extension of the difference between NSIEE and AEE.

In substantive terms, the difference between these interests comes down to the central role played by the “spirit of adventure” as described above, which, although it may be experienced in an ancillary way by students, say, in service projects, is not emphasized in all “experiential” pedagogies. In other words, adventure- and expedition-based approaches intentionally exploit this “spirit of adventure” in a way that other approaches do not. Although both SIGs are experiential in nature, the promotion of adventure and expeditioning carries with it several unique ethical and practical dimensions, largely centering on the intentional uses of risk and remote (or novel) environments to achieve educational aims. These dimensions are worthy of exploration and interrogation *independent of* their overlap with other experiential pedagogies. The establishment of the Adventure Education and Expedition-Based Learning SIG will therefore help this evolving field define itself in the context of this historical difference, while still seeking collegial and interdisciplinary discussions with different “experiential” approaches in different settings.

Ecological and Environmental Education SIG: Clearly, adventure education and expedition-based learning depends on healthy ecosystems. Additionally, programs fitting under the rubric of “adventure-based” or “expeditionary” may also promote enhanced environmental awareness among participants in a direct way. As with the Service Learning SIG, this new SIG therefore shares interests with the Ecological and Environmental Education SIG. However, although they may strive for environmental sensitivity in their practices, not all adventure or expedition style programs emphasize their ecological location or try to promote environmental values as central aspects of their pedagogy.

That this new SIG is being proposed as a separate entity from the Ecological and Environmental Education SIG may be a cause for alarm for some, and the role of the natural environment in adventures and expeditions should be the topic of ongoing inquiry. Again, however, a great number of educational programs and research projects currently exist that may be classified as adventure-based or expeditionary in nature while *not* emphasizing ecology as central to their pedagogy or methodology. Instead, these programs tend to emphasize the physically, socially, and personally demanding aspects of adventure and risk to achieve their goals, and researchers have long been interested in the mechanisms and outcomes associated with such programs regardless of ecology. Establishing this new SIG will help better articulate adventure- and expedition-based approaches without confusing them with overlapping—yet distinct—areas, and will allow for a more thorough analysis of this unique pedagogy.

Section 4) Signatures (submitted electronically)