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THE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF AN INTERNET-BASED WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT COURSE

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During winter quarter of 1996-97, the University of Montana's School of Forestry and Center for Continuing Education; provided an Internet-based wilderness management class to 23 students majoring in Natural Resources Management at the University of Minnesota, Crookston.

The course was designed to feature student's ability to interact among themselves and the instructors. The interaction was facilitated through the use of Network News Groups, chat rooms, e-mail, and live Internet conferencing. Using the Internet as a resource, assignments were designed to help students gain mastery in complimenting textbook information with wilderness information available from government agencies, universities, and non-profit groups and to apply that information toward real world management problems.

The use of this multi-layered educational delivery system allowed the students at a relatively small, remote campus to access training, resources, and expertise available through a nationally recognized center for wilderness management and philosophy. Conversely, this arrangement allowed the wilderness management distance education program the ability to expand its audience from the traditional field manager to the college environment. The experimental nature of this offering provides an opportunity to assess educational outcomes, institutional cooperation and the emerging role of distance learning in higher education.

Evaluation of the course's success was based on strengths and weaknesses of the course as compared to the traditional classroom interaction. The evaluation included, group interviews and follow-up questionnaires. A majority of the students considered the quality of course content, discussion, interaction with instructors, assignments, presentations and improvements in learning skills to be greater than or equal to the traditional classroom environment. Criticisms of the course centered on technical difficulties and scheduling problems that arose from school closures.

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