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J. Mark Fly

Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, Knoxville, TN

Amy Mathis

Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, Knoxville, TN

Denise Keele

College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY

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Using the Engaged Student Approach in Wildland Recreation Classes Proposed Session: Learner-Centered Education

J. Mark Fly¹, Amy Mathis² and Denise Keele³

In the fall of 2000, the structure of the introductory class in Wildland Recreation (50 students) was revised from a more traditional approach to a blend of the “engaged student” and “mastery learning” approach. The “engaged student” approach is based on creating opportunities for the student to become involved with real world activities and make connections with professionals in the field while learning the basic concepts of recreation. The class is viewed as a job setting with similar expectations. The “engaged student” takes responsibility for their own learning, similar to what they need to do throughout their career with life-long learning. All students have to meet the minimum criteria of a test score of 85 or above on class lecture material. For some students this means they have to take the test multiple times or pass an oral exam. The students can choose to earn additional points needed by participating in field trips, practicums, a professional meeting or public participation sessions, conducting a park or resource problem analysis, and/or reading chapters from the textbook and responding to discussion questions in written format. Additional points can be earned by giving a presentation to class and attending guest lectures and student presentations. Early feedback on the course indicated that 71% of the students thought that they learned more with this alternative self-directed approach than they would have if the class had been taught in a traditional mode. Details of the procedures will be presented and the advantages and disadvantages discussed.

¹Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, 274 Ellington Plant Sciences, Knoxville, Tennessee, 37996-4563, (865) 974-7979 markfly@utk.edu

²Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, 274 Ellington Plant Sciences, Knoxville, Tennessee, 37996-4563, (865) 591-9064 amathis@utk.edu

³College of Environmental Science and Forestry, 1 Forestry Drive, Syracuse, NY 13210, (315) 727-2740, dmkeele@syr.edu