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INFUSING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING INTO A WILDLIFE CURRICULUM: TWO MODELS FOR ONE COURSE

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ABSTRACT: Experiential learning refers to contextually relevant knowledge acquired through problem solving, critical reflection and discussion, and decision making. It is not a new concept to academe; however, ways to incorporate experiential learning into our curriculum have been challenging as class size increases and student contact hours decrease. For wildlife students, learning experientially is an unwritten job requisite. Increasingly, students are exiting learning environments with little to no contact outside of formal lecture experiences. In this paper, we suggest ways to incorporate experiential learning into an undergraduate curriculum. Specifically, we focus on experiential learning in the wildlife curriculum with particular emphasis on the “Wildlife Techniques” course. This course is centered on teaching the practical application and limitations of various field, analytical, and management techniques. Consequently, this course is a perfect candidate to be taught using experiential learning techniques. We present two models for teaching this course that incorporates experiential learning throughout the duration of each program. One course is a two-week intensive program with little formal lecture periods, while the other is a semester-long course with a one-week intensive session at the beginning and more formal lecture, discussions, and case-study activities throughout the remainder of the semester. The pros and cons and lessons learned while teaching under these respective structures will be presented.