



MATters

An Update from the Management Assistance Team



State Fish and Wildlife Agencies Do It on the Web

ConservationLearning.Org

A Virtual Campus for Leadership Development

On May 1 this year MAT launched its first foray into delivering leadership development classes online. This is an important step in increasing the reach of MAT's Leadership Development Toolbox to the state fish and wildlife agencies.

Offering the states a new learning tool was a major strategic decision for MAT and the AFWA Leadership and Professional Development Committee. Without adding this new tool to the box, MAT would simply not be able to deliver all of the workshops to meet the anticipated demand. The question became, how can MAT maintain quality and increase its delivery capacity? Online learning emerged as a keystone strategy to this complex problem.

What is Online Learning Anyway?

Perhaps the answer is partly what it is not...It is not computer-based training —also known as CBT. CBT is the “old” CD-Rom or website that walks the learner through a bunch of information and typically ends in a short quiz. The learners don't have the opportunity to interact, and frankly the training can be boring. Research has shown that CBT may be effective in the short-term for

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MAT Team Member Receives Paul C. Weikel Award



In May, MAT's Dr. Dwight Guyenn received the Organization of Wildlife Planners most distinguished award recognizing individuals for their outstanding or distinctive contributions to improved agency management, on a national or international level. Dwight said, "Receiving this award was such a surprise and a true honor. I knew Paul and to receive this award which bears his name is a double honor." Paul Weikel had a great passion for fish and wildlife and a dedication to improving agency management. He was constantly pushing fish and wildlife agencies to be better, to live up to the challenges that were before them, and to be the best that they could be.

This award was established in 1992 in memory of Paul C. Weikel, whose personal history of innovative management and desire to improve fish and wildlife agency performance inspired the creation of this award. The criteria used to choose each year's award recipient fall under five categories: innovation, effectiveness, transferability, implementation, and comprehensiveness. The award is given each year at the annual conference of the Organization of Wildlife Planners.

All of us here at MAT are very proud of this recognition for Dwight.



MAT

Better Conservation Through

"A Virtual Campus for Leadership Development"

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direct information transfer, but it falls short on long-term knowledge creation.

Rather, MAT uses the same learning model that currently is employed by most major universities— asynchronous, instructor led classes. In this model, through the magic of the Internet, the learners may do the coursework on their own schedule as long as they meet pre-defined deadlines for participation and assignments. The learners need only an Internet connected computer and basic computer skills such as email and visiting websites.

The students interact on instructor moderated discussion boards located on the course website. Courses may also direct students to audio or video presentations, PowerPoint slide presentations, short lectures, assignments, or other learning activities. Again, the learners may participate on their own schedule as long as they make their discussion contributions before the assigned deadline. This is great for busy professionals who cannot take 2 or 3 days for training during field season. Rather, the course participant needs approximately 5 hours per week that they self-schedule. Courses are typically 6 weeks.

Economically Attractive

In contrast to CBT, studies conducted by the Sloan Consortium have demonstrated a high level of effectiveness for learners using asynchronous, online learning. In some cases learning online may be more effective than a face-to-face workshop. For example, complex leadership concepts may be best absorbed by the learner if they have the opportunity to work on processing the lessons and create deeper understanding by participating a few hours per week over several weeks.

The simple fact is that training is expensive, no matter how it is conducted. Even when MAT delivers a "no-charge" workshop on site, the participants lose productive time traveling to and from the training site. The state typically incurs travel related expenses for workshop participants, and sometimes the state must even pay for a training facility.

In contrast, online learning incurs nominal course fees of about \$80 per student per course that pays for eCollege to maintain the course infrastructure and for course textbooks, etc. But with no fees for travel, facilities, and no lost productivity the courses are typically far more economical than a face-to-face offering.



h Better Managed Fish and Wildlife Agencies

MAT Beta Tests New Offerings

MAT is known for its professional workshops delivered in a face-to-face format. Now, MAT has entered the world of offering online classes in leadership. MAT has developed and is beta testing in May and June three online classes:

The Adaptive Leader

A six-week course which uses concepts from Harvard's Cambridge Leadership Associates and Ron Heifetz's book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, on adaptive leadership.

Visionary Leadership

A four-week course which deals with how to develop a vision and the processes for making that vision real for others.

Creative and Critical Thinking

A six-week course which uses concepts of critical thinking and practical ways to increase creativity in order to achieve better decisions.

A number of state fish and wildlife agencies volunteered to have employees participate in the beta tests. They were CO, FL, MT, PA, SD, TX, and WY. Each course has 12–15 participants that are currently taking the course and completing all assignments. There are multiple reasons for conducting these beta tests:

- Beta test students help MAT find and suggest fixes for any technical bugs in the online courses
- Beta testing helps ensure that instructions and communications embedded in the courses are clear
- The beta tests also provide a reality check on the estimated time required to complete the courses
- Last but not least, the beta testing process will help MAT discover any unforeseen instructor challenges in teaching these online courses

Beta test courses were free to students that volunteered to take them. MAT covered the costs of books and student technology fees. Once courses have been tested and the final versions are made available to state fish and wildlife employees, there will be a cost of approximately \$80 per student for each course. This money does not go to MAT but is instead used to pay for books and eCollege for use of their online software system.

Beta testing on the three courses mentioned above will be completed in mid-June and these courses will be available in the fall of 2006. Three additional courses will be beta tested in July (see *MAT Wants You!*)

What The Students Are Saying

Following are comments from various students involved in beta testing the MAT courses:

"The lectures and discussion were provocative..."

"The materials are high quality and provocative..."

"The whole (online) discussion thing worked very well. I liked reading what my classmates had to say and learning from them."

"The pace at which I was allowed to work was a benefit to me."

"I could use my time wisely. If I had a solid hour, I could use it productively and learn. That is a huge benefit to this online course as opposed to a traditional class."

"The online discussions were great. I also found it helpful when the instructor joined in to ask thought-provoking questions or get us focused."

"What worked for me were the reading assignments, the written assignments and the self-check was especially useful and fun!"

"...once I got the hang of it, navigating the various locations and participating in discussions was very easy."

Going Virtual Exposé from a MAT Conservation Learning Campus Instructor

Let me try to give you a feel for what it's like taking a course in the states' new virtual learning campus. A particular course typically may have around 15 to 20 students. They may be from the same state fish and wildlife agency, or several different states. The students introduce themselves to each other through a *Class Lounge*. They exchange introductions, make the usual clever quips to one another, and basically, begin to form as a group. They can "hang out" in the *Class Lounge* on their own time to discuss, debate, question one another on issues related to the main focus of the course but not on any particular assignment.

The course is structured in weekly "modules." Each week is typically one "module" of the course. There are weekly objectives accompanied by that week's reading assignments, activities such as viewing a powerpoint presentation or listening to an audio of a speech, etc., a short quiz (which they can retake as many times as they want until they get all the answers correct), and some form of written assignment. Written assignments are saved as a Word document and submitted into the class *Dropbox* where they can be read by the instructor. Comments, or thought provoking questions, from the instructor are sent back to the student about the assignment. The student is asked to post

comments to their classmates on a class *Discussion Board*.

A most enjoyable and quite powerful synergy is created through these discussion postings. The instructor interacts, but it is principally the dialogue between the classmates where real learning begins to emerge.

Let me try to give you a taste. In one of my classes recently I had students listen to the original "I have a dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King

and discuss what made it powerful as a visionary leadership tool? I also had them compare visionary leaders such as Walt Disney, Teddy Roosevelt, Sam Walton, Chief Sitting Bull, and Bill Wilson (Alcoholics Anonymous). Their essays were insightful and wonderfully written. They were learning and it was going in deep. And, just as importantly for busy adult learners, they were enjoying it! All in all, I think we're on to something with this virtual thing.

MAT Wants You!



The Management Assistance Team is seeking volunteers to test the trial run (beta test) for three of MAT's new online courses. The courses are "*Organizations as Ecosystems*" (4 weeks), "*Good to Great*" (4 weeks), and "*Power*" (6 weeks). The normal cost for these workshops is around \$80 each but MAT will absorb the costs for those who volunteer to participate in the initial beta testing. If you are interested in volunteering, check out the MAT website at <http://www.matteam.org>. Registration is first-come, first-served for state F&W agency employees. Registration closes on June 25. Courses start on July 10.

Organization as an Ecosystem

- In this course, you will learn how to rise above the everyday work events and gain a "helicopter view" of your organization. This course is designed to help you determine how to use the helicopter model for addressing root organizational problems and not just symptoms.

Going from Good to Great - Why do some companies have continuing, sustained growth in excess of those companies around them? These concepts are the focus of this course developed around research by Jim Collins in his best selling book, *Good to Great*. Learn why good is the enemy of great.

Power - In today's world many lust after power but what would you guess enables leaders to get power and keep it? In this course, you will get clear about three fundamental power strategies developed by Blaine Lee and presented in his book, *The Power Principle: Influence with Honor*.

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