

# Decisions, Decisions:

## Course Redesign to Reinforce the Decision-making Process Among Future Park and Recreation Managers

### 1 Background & Purpose

**THE CONTEXT** Management in Park & Recreation Facilities (REC 401) – Junior/Senior level course

Decision making involves critical thinking and has been noted as an important skill for recreation managers

**THE CHALLENGE** Inadequate learning and application of “Decision Making Process” (DMP) observed FA12 – SP14 (via exam results & student discourse)

#### **THE GOALS**

1. Using concept mapping to contextualize DMP within other key course concepts
2. Foster student understanding of a structured DMP
3. Facilitate student ability to apply the DMP in a recreation management setting

### 2 Methods

#### **2 PRIMARY STRATEGIES**

1. Course Framing through concept mapping (see Fig.1) - develop a more coherent overview of course from beginning to end...including decision-making process in context
2. Introduce 2-day workshop on decision-making process (DMP) with authentic case study in Fall 2014 & Spring 2015 (Ambrose, et al., 2010)
  - a. Student led development of DMP (Day 1 – see Fig. 2)
  - b. Faculty provided DMP (Day 1)
  - c. Combine DMPs and work through case study (outside of class)
  - d. Debrief DMP implementation (Day 2)

### 3 Results

**Concept mapping** addressed Goal #1 -

Importance of understanding decision making process in relation to other key management concepts and in relation to overall class.

Concept map reviewed 4 times throughout semester (quarterly) followed by dialogue about relevance of and connections between concepts.

**EVIDENCE:**

No SEI comments specific to rationale for inclusion of any specific topics.

Pre-concept map exam scores (SP14): 63% of students earned B/C or better

Post-concept map exam scores (FA14 & SP 15): 69% of students earned B/C or better

**Workshop** addressed Goals #2 & #3 – comprehension & knowledge retention

**EVIDENCE:**

Student discussion content revealed successful decision making process. Specifically, students successfully identified where they considered possible outcomes, developed various results based on different path choices and showed range of effects on stakeholders.



Figure 1. Concept Mapping Tool

### 4 Conclusion

- **Concept mapping** successful!
  - Facilitated students' ability to understand how decision-making process functioned within greater management scheme.
  - Reduced fragmentation of course concepts throughout semester
- 2-day **Workshop** with take-home component coupled with in-class small group debrief and out of class discussion **increased comprehension & knowledge retention** of decision making process – builds on self-explanation as learning process (Fonseca & Chi, 2011).

#### **LIMITATIONS**

- Small class size (12-15)
- 1 section of course
- Some students still not engaging in-depth

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

1. Increase student engagement - Introduce student self assessment after 2-day workshop, e.g.
  - a. Did I complete the take-home?
  - b. Key challenges I encountered?
  - c. How might I use this in my profession?

### 5 References

1. Ambrose, S.A., Bridges, M.W., DePietro, M, Lovett, M.C., & Norman, M.K. (2010). How Learning Works, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
2. Fonseca, B. & Chi, M.T.H. (2011). Instruction based on self-explanation. In Mayer, R. & Alexander, P. (Eds.), The Handbook of Research on Learning and Instruction. London: Routledge Press.



Figure 2. Students engage in “Decision Making” discussion during traditional class period