Problem-Centered Learning Overview

During 2008-2010 SPP’s training methodology will be based on a problem-centered approach to instruction and learning. Problem-centered learning (PCL) encompasses critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking and collaborative learning. PCL encourages and supports class discussions and independent research by adding relevance, meaning and purpose to the training curriculum and dialogue. The problem at the center of the learning is designed so that it is engaging, real, and significant. It allows inquiry and sustains participant engagement. It is curriculum-based and interdisciplinary.

An essential component of PCL is that content is introduced in the context of complex real-world problems. In other words, the problem comes first (Boud, 1985; Boud and Feletti, 1991; Woods, 1985). This contrasts with prevalent teaching strategies where the concepts, presented in a lecture format, precede "end-of-the-chapter" problems. In problem-centered learning, participants working in small groups must identify what they know, and more importantly, what they don't know and must learn (learning issues) to solve a problem. These are prerequisites for understanding the problem and making decisions required by the problem. The nature of the problem precludes a simple answer. The primary role of the instructor is to facilitate group process and learning, not to provide easy answers. With the change in format come different forms of assessment [see Assessment Options section]

Why Problem-Centered Learning? Above all problem-centered learning encourages participants to take charge of their learning. It emphasizes critical thinking skills, understanding, learning how to learn, and working cooperatively.

PCL is designed to provide participants with opportunities to:
♦ Integrate their knowledge and apply it to actual situations outside the classroom
♦ Problem solve
♦ Collaborate, cooperate, and communicate
♦ Participate in self-directed learning
♦ Question and challenge their understanding of topics
♦ Conduct independent and interdependent research
♦ Share the knowledge they have acquired by resolving the problem