Park leaders are faced with rapidly escalating issues such as climate change, habitat loss, encroachment into parks and protected lands, budget constraints and frequent changes in leadership — all of which make management a sometimes overwhelming challenge.

That’s where the University of California, Merced, and its National Parks Institute Executive Leadership Seminar step in. The seminar — a partnership between UC Merced, the National Park Service, the Great Valley Center, the National Parks Conservation Association, and the Stanford Graduate School of Business — provides the opportunity for 30 park leaders from around the world to share knowledge, learn from world-renowned experts on topics that affect the future of natural lands, and learn how to anticipate and lead strategic change, reinvigorate their organizations and incorporate innovative thinking into their management repertoire.

Each year, during the seminar’s intensive 12-day program, park leaders use the lens of business management strategy to build a framework for future management action. The framework is based on the foundational concepts of an ambidextrous, responsive organization and three underlying pillars of support: science, law and policy. Within this framework, students learn how to lead change and facilitate organizational renewal. Interactive discussions are lead by world-renowned researchers, naturalists, innovators and park leaders and are supplemented by field excursions, course work, small-group problem solving sessions and case challenge learning.
EDUCATIONAL SETTING

San Francisco
A key element in the design of the seminar is the journey participants take during the program. The journey begins at historic Fort Baker and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, where the key foundational concepts for the course are set by Stanford Business School Professor Charles O'Reilly. At this location, the seminar explores the innovative partnerships and management approaches pioneered by Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Institute at the Golden Gate in an urban interface protected area.

Merced
The second section of the seminar is hosted by the University of California’s newest campus in Merced. Located in the heart of the Central Valley and within close proximity to Yosemite National Park, the university’s world-class researchers meld academic research, technology, innovation and leadership to scrutinize resource challenges and provide management recommendations. The unique relationship between UC Merced and the National Park Service, demonstrated through the collaboration on the National Parks Institute, highlights the value of engagement and partnership between protected area managers and academic research institutions.

Yosemite
Yosemite National Park in the California Sierra Nevada is the setting for the culmination of the seminar. At Yosemite, participants integrate the knowledge and tools learned during previous sessions through interaction with on-the-ground application of protected area management. As a large, flagship protected area with significant natural and cultural resources, high visitation, and world-wide visibility, Yosemite provides the perfect case study for stewardship.

CASE CHALLENGE APPROACH

MANAGEMENT, CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION ISSUES ARE APPROACHED FROM A REAL-WORLD CASE PERSPECTIVE. THE CASE PERSPECTIVE APPROACH TEACHES HOW TO APPLY A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK TO ISSUES AND WORK THROUGH CHALLENGING SITUATIONS TO ARRIVE AT A STRATEGIC, INNOVATIVE, WELL INFORMED PATH FORWARD.

The case perspective is also taken one step further: Each participant brings a local park management challenge. With feedback from their instructors and peers, each participant develops an implementable action plan for their challenge to take home at the conclusion of the course.

LEADERS AID LEARNING

SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS ALSO LEARN FROM THE WORLD’S LEADERS AND INNOVATIVE THINKERS. AFTER A PUBLIC, PLENARY ADDRESS HOSTED BY UC MERCED, KEYNOTE SPEAKERS RETREAT WITH PARTICIPANTS FOR AN INTIMATE, CLASS-ONLY DISCUSSION. PREVIOUS KEYNOTE SPEAKERS INCLUDE FORMER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, HARVARD PROFESSOR E.O. WILSON AND NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DIRECTOR JONATHAN B. JARVIS.
GLOBAL SCOPE

THE NATIONAL PARKS INSTITUTE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP SEMINAR INTENTIONALLY DRAWS NATIONAL PARK AND PROTECTED AREA LEADERS FROM THE UNITED STATES AND AROUND THE WORLD.

By involving multinational park leaders, the seminar gives participants the opportunity to explore how different nations manage park resources under multiple different systems. Each cohort of participants is chosen to represent a diversity of perspectives: geographic, political, ecosystem, gender, age, organization type, management level and knowledge area.

THE FUTURE

Knowledge exchange and relationship development across political boundaries and widely varying backgrounds is key for the future sustainability of effective and appropriate protected area management. The personal and professional relationships developed in the seminar serve as an anchor for the professional network and global alumni community of NPI leaders and provides an avenue for collective knowledge exchange and continued innovation.

THIRTY FOREIGN COUNTRIES WERE REPRESENTED BETWEEN 2010 AND 2012: Australia, Bahamas, Bhutan, Botswana, Cameroon, Chile, China, Columbia, Dominica, Ethiopia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Israel, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherland Antilles, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Thailand and Vietnam.
ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARKS INSTITUTE

THE NATIONAL PARKS INSTITUTE (NPI) IS THE CULMINATION OF 10 YEARS OF DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED, AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. THE VISION FOR NPI IS TO HAVE A SUSTAINED ACADEMIC-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP WITH A PHYSICAL CENTER ON THE UC MERCED CAMPUS.

The multidisciplinary institute is devoted to addressing and providing innovative solutions to the challenges that face domestic and international national park and protected area management.

NPI IS BEING INCUBATED IN UC MERCED’S SIERRA NEVADA RESEARCH INSTITUTE AND ACTIVELY SERVES AS THE UMBRELLA FOR THREE VIBRANT PROGRAMS:

The Executive Leadership Seminar  |  The Yosemite Leadership Program  |  The Wilderness Education Center

Within five years, it is anticipated that NPI will become part of a new School of Management at UC Merced or grow to be a stand-alone institute on campus.

AS TIME PROGRESSES, NPI WILL MATURE TOWARDS ITS GOALS TO FOCUS ON:

• Scientific research and scholarly thought
• Technological innovation
• Non-traditional audience outreach and education
• International cooperation
• Academic workforce preparation and management development for current and future national and international park managers and staff
• Collaboration between academics, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and private industry

AREAS OF SPECIAL EMPHASIS WILL INCLUDE:

• Multidisciplinary scientific research
• Collaborative relationships among national laboratories, state and federal agencies, cooperating universities, and within the 10-campus UC system
• Establishment of a multidisciplinary parks issues think tank for long-term thinking
• Research facilities on campus including a center for strategic fire studies and geographic information system (GIS) technology laboratory
• Forum for discussions on large-scale global issues that challenge protected area management
• Curriculum tracks that lead to four-year degrees, advanced degrees and certificate programs in specific areas of land management and leadership
• Lifelong learning for leadership in environmental and cultural resource management
• Development of sustainable technologies for use in public land management arenas