

1982

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Recommended Citation

Thomason, Pam (1982) "An Academic Perspective," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 1 : No. 3 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol1/iss3/23>

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AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the issue of students preparation from an educator's perspective. It recognizes the realities of institutional development and suggests new program emphases that must be designed into curricula to better prepare students for the commercial recreation profession.

AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Currently, the field of commercial recreation is receiving much acclaim as a potential field of employment for recreation graduates. This, in fact, is directly opposite to the current job market. The commercial recreation market is tight, and it is difficult to obtain that first job. Employers are looking at individuals with specialized skills in addition to the basic programming emphases that traditional students receive from recreation and leisure programs. Employers are looking for individuals who can perform public relations functions, have some business skill and an ability to apply that skill. Basically, there are two types of positions that are available for those individuals in the recreation and leisure field. One is providing direct program services in resorts, and the other is in a specialty area such as marketing or golf. If an individual starts as a programmer in a resort, to obtain job advancement he/she will have to develop some type of specialty in management or a specialized function to achieve lateral or upward employment placement. This does not suggest there are no opportunities in the commercial sector. There are opportunities, but some employers have not realized the full value of a recreation and leisure person. Employers are interested in hiring an individual who has specialized skills. Therefore, the key ingredient is skill preparation by the student and the student's ability to sell the employer on his/her skills.

Currently, there is proliferation of educational institutions trying to add a specialty or an option in commercial recreation and/or travel and tourism. These curriculum developers are in the process of recognizing the value of commercial recreation as a legitimate profession and see potential student employment opportunities, especially with waning jobs in more traditional recreation occupations. Many of these institutions do not have the faculty or the resources to develop a program that has the necessary practical experience or skill development opportunities. Poorly supported curricula and proliferation of curricula

may influence potential job opportunities because the student will be attempting to enter a very competitive market. The key element is not degree status but an ability to produce, and the educational program must be geared to a sound theoretical as well as a practical application. Institutions that have limited resources would probably be better off not to develop commercial recreation and/or travel and tourism degree programs. There have already been situations where this field has been oversold, and individuals have not been able to find employment. The resulting condition is one of human wastage, loss of individuals who through frustration and dissatisfaction leave the field.

The type of curricular preparation that is necessary is one that includes basic programming skills as well as balance of communication and business courses. Another possible dimension to the preparation of students is acquisition of a minor in business or a related field of study. Specialty is a key to obtaining a job and advancement within the commercial recreation settings. Even if it is not a specialty in business, an activity such as tennis or golf will help to provide an employment avenue into the organization because then the individual has a marketable skill that the organization needs. Preparation should be in terms of marketable skills. The curriculum must not be so specialized that an overall sound understanding of the leisure profession is forgotten. By understanding recreation concepts and principles an individual may be able to synthesize a good management team and thereby provide quality services. A good academic program needs to strive for balance.

The RCRA is a unique organization because it dedicates much time to students and their professional preparation. In fact, the primary theme of the first RCRA conference was professional preparation, and there was direct student involvement. Students participated on an equal basis with professionals and were directly involved in the conference at all levels. This is in contrast to many associations that have either ignored commercial recreation as a viable entity or have segregated students through establishment of a separate student section. RCRA is dedicated to professional preparation and students are an integral part of the association. This organization is also trying to establish good lines of communication with universities and colleges. If RCRA can help to improve commercial curricula, this will ultimately improve the quality of the profession. RCRA has also undertaken an advocacy role at the national level for the leisure industry. Membership in RCRA can be both fun and professionally enriching because of the spirit of help, understanding and cooperation.
