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COMMERCIAL RECREATION AND TOURISM:
A SUGGESTED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of quality products and services is essential for the growth of the profession. One of the ways of achieving this is through the better understanding of curriculum preparation processes. This article reviews the major components and provides an overview of some major curriculum issues.

COMMERCIAL RECREATION AND TOURISM:
A SUGGESTED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PHILOSOPHY

There will be considerable growth in industries related to commercial recreation and tourism services and development in the next decade. The increased operational complexity of this industry coupled with greater competitive pressures between and within the various segments of the industry requires that more people be formally trained to work in the industry.

Recreation and leisure services, tourism, and other functionally related academic programs must be geared towards giving students the broad based skills which are required to obtain entry level jobs in these industries if academe is to make a substantial contribution to the training of personnel for the industry. Academe must communicate with the industry to foster an understanding of what formally trained people can do to improve the industry as well as to find out what the industry feels are the most needed skills for young people who wish to enter the industry. The academic sector must also provide an increased amount of outreach services such as research and educational seminars to the industry. These outreach services will help the industry obtain a greater understanding of how the academic and industrial sector can interrelate.

There is a good deal of controversy over what types of courses go into a commercial recreation and/or tourism program. Some programs little more than one course which has been tacked onto an established academic curriculum. Other programs focus in on a particular part of tourism or commercial recreation such as sports management or tourism planning and development. There are, however, few programs which provide (regardless of what they are called) a comprehensive indoctrination to the student of all of the diversified skills and knowledge which are needed to insure success in an industry as multi-faceted as commercial recreation and tourism. The academic sector must realize that commercial recreation and tourism is a complex applied science. It is an industry which is founded upon knowledge from many of the liberal arts and sciences as well as many other related areas of applied knowledge (notably business administration).

There are also many "segment specific" skills which a potential professional must learn either before (or as tradition has had it, after) you assume a job in any of the many different segments of the industry. It is industry. It is important for a person who is seeking an entry level position to have been exposed to as many of these segment specific skills as possible prior to engaging themselves in the job market. It is truly difficult for a student to know which segment of this highly diversified industry they will actually pursue a career in until they obtain their first job. Frequently, young professionals work in several different segments of the industry before they solidify a career in any one segment. We have seen students begin their careers in health clubs and end up working for a tour operator; have designs before graduation on being employed in industrial recreation and end up working for a theme park; start out with an entry level position in a hotel and become the director of a tourist attraction's tour operations; and dream about a career managing a professional sports team and wind up being employed as an operations director in a civic center.

The diversity of the industry as well as the commonalities of all the industries various segments must be recognized by the educator who is formulating any academic program which pertains to the industry. Educators have the opportunity to be pioneers in unifying the industry by providing students with a broad overview of knowledge, and skills pertinent to the industry. If students are imparted with a broad conceptual framework which brings all of the many facets of the industry together under one roof we will eventually have many professionals out in the field who also view the various segments of the industry as clearly being interrelated. This would move us towards unifying the studies of all commercial recreation and tourism industries into a recognized and strong academic discipline.

As with all academic programs there are many ways to organize the learning program to provide for all of the information and experiences which should be imparted to the student. There are probably no more than two dozen colleges and universities in the United States which currently offer comprehensive programs in commercial recreation and tourism (regardless of what these programs are actually called or in what academic department they are located). Some of these programs offer even more industry specific courses to their students than the program which is described herein, but in some cases not all of the courses offered are

required. There are several dozen other colleges and universities which offer adequate courses focusing in on just one or several segments of the total industry. (See Table One for a sampling of some of the previously referred to colleges and universities.) There are a few more colleges and universities which provide the student with an adequate education in commercial recreation and tourism by utilizing appropriate courses from other academic departments at the school, and expert faculty advisement (which includes identifying appropriate out of the classroom experiences). Unfortunately, there are several dozen more colleges and universities which currently claim to offer programs or specializations in commercial recreation and tourism which are woefully inadequate either by design or ignorance. These programs have had and will continue to damage the reputation of commercial recreation and tourism education. It is hoped that the program outline and information provided in this article will spawn more comprehensive quality programs in commercial recreation and tourism.

THE PROGRAM AT MONTCLAIR STATE COLLEGE GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

The program at Montclair State College in Commercial Recreation and Tourism is designed to produce uniformly qualified entry level candidates for positions in all facets of the commercial recreation and tourism and functionally related industries. We do not in every case, offer indepth coursework in all areas pertinent to commercial recreation and tourism. Instead, we require that all students should be exposed to at least an entry level knowledge of all facets of the industry.

Our program enables the student to be able to interface with all facets of the industry. They are not, however, experts in every facet of the industry. We recommend that our students undergo graduate study (particularly an M.B.A.) to develop the more specialized business skill (or other related skills) which may be more applicable above the entry or middle management level.

The following objectives of the academic program fulfill the program's philosophy:

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND DESCRIPTION: OBJECTIVE ONE-BASIC STUDIES

Advise students into basic studies courses which provide knowledge in areas which best support their career objectives. All students are required to take a foreign language; we also suggest that the student take relevant courses in psychology, sociology, and computer science. We stress that the student select as many courses as possible that support their career objectives.

OBJECTIVE TWO-GENERAL LEISURE SERVICES MANAGEMENT

The objective of this part of the program is to give students a systems oriented background in leisure and functionally related services management. This is a "second generation" leisure services delivery program which gives the student a conceptual framework which they can utilize to execute the delivery of a wide variety of human services which broadly satisfy human needs in recreation, tourism, and functionally related areas. A key concept that is imparted to the students is the idea that the programming delivery system is usable for delivering a wide range of services to society. One of the best examples of this is the production of a trade show. A trade show is a systematically organized program which has as its primary purpose the sale of the exhibitor's products or services. The concept of associating products and services with leisure activity is widely utilized in the marketing of many products and services in our society. The trade show epitomizes the concept of "leisurized" selling by utilizing a leisure oriented atmosphere to help entice people into buying the goods and services that are on display.

Our leisure services management program includes required coursework in programming delivery systems, accounting (or budget and finance), management, philosophy, park and recreational facility planning and design, legal management, and leadership techniques. Most of these courses are offered by the Recreation and Leisure Services program.

OBJECTIVE THREE-ENTRY LEVEL INDUSTRY SPECIFIC SKILLS

A four course sequence of industry specific skills courses is required for all commercial recreation/tourism students. These courses are the heart of our industry specific program and are frequently sighted as having enabled students to be successful in the job market. The courses include:

1. Introduction to Commercial Recreation and Tourism-Students develop a general worldliness about the business world and commercial recreation and tourism enterprises.
2. Delivery of Commercial Recreation and Tourism Services-This is a basic skills course in Travel Agency management, tour management, retailing (gift and souvenir emphasis), games, and gameroom operations, food services (systems-fast food emphasis), and basic lodging operations.
3. Commercial Recreation and Tourism Planning, Development and Analysis-Students develop skills in marketing (all phases), tourism planning and analysis, and managerial analysis.

4. Special Events and Auditorium, Arena and Convention Center Management—Students develop skills in entertainment production, contracting for services, banquet and catering management, crowd management, security, exhibit hall design, facility marketing, facility design, and general convention services.

OBJECTIVE FOUR—WORK EXPERIENCES

The students are encouraged to and are given assistance in finding work experiences in commercial recreation and tourism and functionally related industries throughout their college careers. These experiences are encouraged by offering the students a number of different academic credit options for their work experiences. All students must undergo a one semester work experience (internship) in order to graduate. Another credit hearing experiential program is a four to eight credit cooperative education program. Occasionally independent study credit is also granted for projects conducted by students in conjunction with a work experience.

OBJECTIVE FIVE—CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Students are continually offered career development advice and are asked to pay careful attention to their career goals. Several courses focus in on career development issues and topics including a senior seminar course. This topic is, however, covered to some extent in courses as early as the freshman year.

OBJECTIVE SIX—FOCUSED ELECTIVES

Students are encouraged to focus their elective courses in areas which pertain to their career goals. Frequently, students take concentrations of courses in the business school in marketing and management and courses in other departments such as theater (Example: Theater "tech." courses) which relate to specific skills required in commercial recreation and tourism industries.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that a commercial recreation and tourism program is much more than a business or recreation management program with a few supplementary courses. This is a highly specialized career field in a job marketplace which increasingly demands specialists. A well developed program must provide instruction in a diverse number of skill areas which relate to the industry.

There are about seventy-five students currently enrolled in Commercial Recreation and Tourism program at Montclair State College. We have a placement rate of over 90% for students that truly seek jobs in the industry and faithfully execute the program. Since we are a state collegewe do little or no recruiting and have seen no drop in total enrollment in our recreation and leisure studies program. A well developed commercial recreation and tourism program is something all people in academe should consider having on their campus.

TABLE 1

List of Colleges and Universities with better developed programs in Commercial Recreation and Tourism (This list is limited to four year programs and is not meant to be all inclusive.)

Texas A and M
Montclair State College
East Stroudsburg University
University of Massachusetts
Niagara University
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Florida International University
Clemson University
University of Utah
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
Ithaca College
Pennsylvania State University
Georgia Southern College

University of Florida

Brigham Young University-Hawaii

George Washington University