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BLENDING BUSINESS AND RECREATION COURSES

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ABSTRACT

Leisure professionals support the inclusion of business courses in the recreation/leisure studies curriculum. This support has been chiefly instigated by financial exigencies experienced by the public sector. Exploring methods of blending commercial recreation and business curricula requires an examination of changes which include public-private commonalities, trends and humanization of business. Further exploration of the problems in blending these two different disciplines revealed the industrial bias of most business curriculums. A final look at the possible solutions to reflect appropriate business skills into recreation curricula reveals several approaches that may be appropriate. In conclusion, the effective inclusion of business curricula relies upon further research into competencies that reflect the field.

BLENDING BUSINESS AND RECREATION COURSES

INTRODUCTION

"Business competence without a grounding in leisure/recreation studies is likely to lead to missing significant opportunities. A background in recreation without business skills is usually a prelude to failure." (8, p. vii) This is stated in the preface of a recent recreation business text that is designed to blend the business and recreation aspects of the commercial recreation field.

The need for a blend of business and recreation skills as depicted above is supported to some extent by those in the public as well as private sector. Such support documentation has included the many economical, social, and political changes affecting the status, structure, and direction of the leisure profession. For example, the financial crisis that arose in the late 1970s due to tax limitation measures caused public recreation and park agencies to "seek out scarce resources and use management and marketing skills to ensure that money is used to yield maximum social and economic benefits". (8) Williams (16)

offered similar support for curricula to include better management practices to handle planning needs that relate to future trends. The concept of commercial recreation was posed as a legitimate form of business for anyone interested in combining the tools of business with the philosophy of leisure.(5)

In studying the nature of the blend of business and recreation skills, it is important to examine some of the changes affecting the leisure profession that also have impact on curriculum. Then, it is necessary to point out problems inherent in the blending of two or more disciplines from the practical and curricular standpoint. Finally, a suggested approach to this "blend" is imperative in order to deal with possible solutions to the dual need of the human and technological dimensions of the leisure profession.

The Era of Change

Change has been the byword of the leisure profession in the 1980s. Living with change has been the challenge of professionals who have heretofore worked in a very stable environment. Facing this challenge has been complicated by several factors:

- 1) the private and public sectors have moved toward blending as the terms "privatization," "partnerships," "joint ventures" have appeared when describing agreements to raise funds or otherwise share the burdens of the economy;
- 2) vast changes, known to be sweeping and dramatic, have caused speculation on the very structure of the future;
- 3) the humanization of business resulting in a potential change in the way business education is taught. A review of these factors can provide quoted documentation of the trends.

Public-Private Blend

The changes in the public sector in recent years have been primarily the result of the tax limitation measures that were introduced in 28 states in the late 1970s. Interestingly enough, those measures and the resultant cutbacks in public recreation were very stimulating to private business. The success of private/commercial recreation enterprises was emulated by the public sector as new sources of financing and similar marketing techniques were incorporated. The result? There was more willingness to deal with pricing, marketing, and sound fiscal practices than was present when "human service" was such a strong thrust.

Commonalities among the private and public sector leisure efforts drew interest on the part of textbook authors to represent the broad spectrum of the leisure profession. The need to have "a basic knowledge

of all types of recreation--public quasi-public, commercial and private" has been asserted.(3)

Howard and Crompton noted that, "A recreation and park agency is a business which happens to operate in the public rather than the private sector," (8) and further, "The recreation and park manager (is viewed as) an entrepreneur who operates in a public sector environment."(8)

To further exemplify this blend, government is involved in recreation in the United States to such an extent that the private sector would be heavily impacted if there were to be any changes. Examples of this government involvement are:

1. More than 80 federal government agencies, commissions, councils operate over 300 separate "outdoor recreation-related" programs.
2. Local, state, and federal government support for cultural facilities and programs exceeds \$1 billion annually.
3. The National Park Service, one of the eight agencies involved in the management of land for recreation, has an annual budget of over \$350 million and employs more than 7600 permanent staff to administer its 12 million ha (30 million acres) of land.
4. The National Endowment for the Arts allocated \$27 million in federal money to be used as matching funds for 75 arts organizations in 23 states in 1978.
5. The California state legislature recently provided \$25 million in matching funds to aid local government agencies in acquiring and developing public recreation areas.(3)

The additional fact that commercial recreation enterprises in the form of food services, entertainment and activity centers, tourist attractions and the like are located on vast and undisclosed amounts of public land, underscores this blend and interdependency.

Vast Changes Taking Place

The recent focus on megatrends affecting one's life has shown the effect of change in society and the potential future that can be envisioned through a study of such changes. While Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives, by John Naisbitt, has illuminated dramatic changes in our society, earlier changes and transformations within the leisure profession have already been felt. One such dynamic change has been the nation's preoccupation with fitness and sport prevalent for over a decade. The Miller Lite Report on American Attitude Toward Sports (11) shows increasing participation of women, spectator involvement and attitude, sports and education, and sports and the family.

The fact that three out of every four (75%) American parents

frequently engage in some kind of athletic endeavor with their children and one quarter (25%) attend sporting events more than 20 times a year show testimony to this phenomenon. (17, 19)

Another change described in Megatrends, high tech/high touch, shows that as technology increases, people will increasingly seek out human warmth to offset the increasingly alienating world.

Further trends show the extent of participation or participation magnitude that has affected the leisure profession:

1. About 50 million Americans play a musical instrument for pleasure; of these 18 million play the piano and 15 million play the guitar.
2. Collectively, Americans are estimated to spend 100 billion hours a year watching programs on 145.7 million working television sets.
3. Two out of every five Americans participate in one or more craft activities.
4. Nearly 20 million Americans jog regularly; about 50,000 individuals have competed in at least one marathon event.
5. Millions of Americans every year enjoy an evening of dancing in one of 20,000 discotheques located throughout the country.
6. Attendance at major sporting events of all kinds is over 250 million in the United States alone.
7. The 3 dozen major amusement parks in the United States attract around 80 million visitors a year.
8. Some 1.2 million Americans annually go on a river or ocean cruise. (3)

The overwhelming evidence of the rise in expenditures for recreation, tracked over many years, is a sign of continued growth and change. Some examples of the magnitude of expenditures depicted by Chubb and Chubb (3) are shown below:

1. Each year, Americans spend an average of \$90 per child on the purchase of toys; annual retail sales exceed \$5 billion with dolls, road-racing sets, and electronic games each accounting for sales of about \$500 million.
2. During their annual visits to 35 state and 2350 local fairs, Americans spend \$1 billion.
3. Annual expenditures on travel trailers, campers, motor homes, and other recreation vehicles exceed \$4 billion.
4. The visitor to a major amusement park spends an average of \$12; total expenditures exceed \$900 million a year.

5. Americans spend over \$55 billion a year on domestic travel for pleasure; foreign travel expenditures exceed \$11 billion.

6. Skiing expenditures including travel, lodging, equipment, clothing, and lift tickets exceed \$2 billion a year.

Kelly (10) marks the growth in recreation services over a five year period to illustrate variety of changes in patterns. For example, during the years 1972-1977 retail nurseries and lawn and garden supply stores grew over 50%, while mobile home dealerships decreased by 20%. Stressing that some types of recreation businesses do better than others in any given period, Kelly notes the differentiation prevalent in leisure business.

In depicting changes in total recreation expenditures of three decades (1960, 1970 and 1980), the proportion of expenditures has not changed radically but has been about 6.5%. (10) Thus, market fluctuations due to changing participation patterns do not seriously affect the steady overall growth of the leisure industry.

Therefore, financial status aside, the prognosis for the leisure profession is considered "guardedly optimistic" (10) with recreation appearing as a growth area. Both participation data and leisure expenditures support that tenet as it affects managed and self-guided leisure pursuits.

As further trend analysis is explored, Megatrends (12) and its companion piece Reinventing the Corporation, by Naisbitt and Aburdene, point out the general trends that can affect our future. Several themes in these books have strong implications for change in the leisure profession. First, reference to current history as a time when "two crucial elements of social change are present--new values and economic necessity" suggests major reorganizational needs for institutions and corporations. It is important to rethink what business definition will best fit the changes in society. The fact that the new information society has replaced dollar capital with human capital reveals major adjustments in business that will impact upon the leisure profession. (14, 4) Asserting that "corporations that cling to the outdated philosophy and structure of the old industrial era will become extinct in the new information society", Naisbitt and Aburdene suggest that people now want work to be fun. The need to reconceptualize what business we are in is supported further by Mobley (12) in addressing the changes that have taken place in the leisure profession.

The need for reconceptualization in light of trends is further underscored and described as "mission analysis" in Organizing Leisure and Human Services. Suggesting that "we have lost the human side", the mission of leisure and human services is often weak and vague. (1)

Thus, general trends impacting the leisure profession have resulted in the following:

1. Leisure participation is shown to have continued and dramatic growth.

2. Leisure expenditures are growing steadily.

3. In times of growth and change, a need to redefine the leisure profession is evident.

The Humanization of Business

It must be noted that while the leisure profession undergoes a metamorphosis, the business profession is also undergoing drastic change. Peters and Waterman, in In Search of Excellence, analyze successful businesses and point to the positive ways that employees are involved in the organization and service to consumers as factors that contribute to business success.

The trend to include a more humanizing approach in business is evidence of a shift from the fundamental profit and product orientation of most corporations. Also, the entrepreneurial revolution, which comprises 80% of all business, focuses on the use of intuition and vision instead of the more quantitative realities affecting the corporation. The humanization of business marks an interesting departure from the traditionally held beliefs in management.(3)

Problems Inherent in the Blending of Business and Recreation Curricula

Traditionally, the benefits of incorporating business skills into a commercial recreation program have been concerned with the need for students in a public recreation education curriculum to retrain to gain job opportunities outside of the domain. According to Bullaro, "Many recreation graduates facing the task of landing their first professional employment will almost be required to consider commercial recreation because of the availability of positions".(5) This initial approach to commercial recreation caused a curriculum to grow as a specialization. Unfortunately, education in the leisure profession has typically emphasized the public sector which is estimated to be as little as 2-3 percent or as much as 9-10 percent of all leisure delivery systems. The major problem in the offering of professional preparation has been the narrow focus of the curriculum. This narrow focus has made it more difficult to blend needed business skills into the leisure professional preparation program.

Another problem has been the industrial bias of business skills. Draper (4) noted that while professionals in the leisure profession are calling for more business expertise, actual business programs are biased to manufacturing and product orientations, not the service orientation that is being called for in contemporary society.(4)

This industrial orientation may be compatible with the leisure and human services orientation so important to the profession. It was further noted that when comparing Job Diagnostic Survey results between public recreation and leisure service organizations and industrial and

business organizations that the degree to which the job involved dealing with people was .21 and .62 respectively.(4) The researcher further points to the need for further research to investigate which business skills, if any, are most appropriate for the leisure profession.

Research that points to competencies in the leisure profession is sketchy. In 1982, a job analysis study conducted by Kelley showed typical tasks of those in generalist, outdoor, therapeutic and commercial settings (9). Competencies of commercial recreation sport managers (6) revealed several areas that could be developed curricularly. Testimonies of leisure educators and practitioners tend to guide more of the curricula development. Chubb and Chubb (3) suggest that recreation should be interdisciplinary in nature, and that the motivations and feelings of participants should be reflected as well as environmental factors. All settings should be reflected as a base to this approach.(3) The complexity of recreation decision-making should be explored empirically to further educate in the classroom. Kelly offers an econometric approach stressing fundamental differences between public recreation and commercial recreation for profit (10, preface). Epperson refers to the sleeping giant of commercial recreation and shared competencies basically developed for tourism (5, preface). Bullaro suggested Robert Langman's dissertation, Development of a Commercial Recreation Curriculum, which includes the fact that students aspiring in this field should have training in "accounting, business law, marketing, leadership training, politics and decision-making processes."(5)

The lack of broad and comprehensive research can only lead to speculation when establishing a blend of business and commercial recreation curricula. Because of this, the relevancy of business courses to the recreation curricula can be validly questioned.

The third and final problem is coping with the dramatic changes in the past decade. The leisure profession has undergone such transformation that the business strategies adapted in practice and incorporated into curriculum in theory have simply not stood the test of time. This, when viewed as a problem, has caused fragmentation of the curriculum, a fear reported by the California State University Self-Study of the Curriculum, when it was stated, "The most persistent and telling charge against the undergraduate curriculum is that it fractures, rather than makes coherent, student's encounters with the world of ideas.(2)

The Blend--What are Solutions?

There is no simple answer to the methods of blending the curriculums of two disciplines as diverse and potentially opposed as business and leisure. It must be recognized that business is based upon an economic model while leisure is based upon philosophy. The similarities do exist, however, in the implementation or practical application of those skills.

There are potentially three ways that business and commercial recreation courses can be blended. The following three models are ways in which the courses have traditionally been blended:

1. A curriculum which prescribes a commercial recreation core and a business minor. Essentially, this farming out of students to take a minor program in the business school may cause the greatest conflict in relevancy of the two disciplines.

2. Incorporating all related business attributes (financing, managing and marketing) into the commercial recreation core to relate only those business aspects that have relevance to the commercial recreation setting. This solution can cause problems because, to date, there is no comprehensive data to pinpoint what related business materials apply to commercial recreation.

3. A combination of 1 and 2 which involves selecting specific courses that are relevant business skills and incorporating additional skills that are relevant to the leisure curriculum. This approach also assumes that there is sufficient information regarding the knowledge base and courses available to effect this blend.

What is currently lacking in all three approaches is sufficient research on what competencies are really needed for curriculum development in commercial recreation. Also existing is the problem of offering setting-specific materials in a public emphasis and adding commercial as a specialization. It is suggested that once the knowledge base is determined, appropriate business competencies may be incorporated into the recreation core which emphasizes leisure management regardless of setting. Then only those business courses that have been adopted to reflect these competencies (the service or management orientation as well as manufacturing) needed by leisure managers will be incorporated. The specific commercial courses could go further in depth on specific attributes that may require further training.

CONCLUSION

Change has been the byword in the past decade. Commercial recreation curriculum has developed in response to a need for alternate career paths. Unfortunately, there has been insufficient time for research to support the effective incorporation of the commercial business aspects into a curriculum that at base differs philosophically from traditional business curriculum.

It is time to define the appropriate "high tech/high touch" aspects of the leisure curriculum and effectively incorporate those changes, and change as the profession is in a process of redefinition.

The Mobley model calls for broadening of the curriculum to allow for all possible settings and train the technology on the job. Further study would allow for appropriate technologies to also be incorporated into the curriculum. (12)

In this time of change, the opportunity is present for coherent blending of these two valuable curricula. This opportunity depends upon research and investigation into the sensitive nature of leisure choice, satisfaction and those techniques that allow for smooth management within

this blend.

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Figure 1

Base		
Recreation Business	1. Incorporation of appropriate business competencies into major course	Advanced incorporation of commercial competencies
public private commercial	2. Selection of appropriate courses in business	Advanced incorporation of commercial competencies
