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Essay Choice 2B – Needed Knowledge and Skills for the RLST Professional

People have been enjoying their leisure activities for millennia without anyone's help (providers) and without facts as to why they should do what they already do (researchers). The question is "If we can do it all by ourselves, why do we need a leisure professional?" It is a logical question. That question should remain in the forefront of any mission statement for a program or in the topic of any leisure related study. It should certainly be thought of when designing educational programs to train leisure professionals. If the leisure professional is well acquainted with both a thorough understanding of research and the ways it is implemented in the field of leisure, it becomes easier to explain our existence as leisure professionals.

NRPA Executive director T. Destry Jarvis says his goal is "More training, for more people, more often, and in more places". NRPA Southeast Regional Director Larry Zehnder believes "...the biggest limitation in our ability to do training is the lack of resource for agencies to travel for education...the upper-level administrators get to use the travel money to go to meetings, when there are knowledge gaps throughout the agency. And while there are great schools that focus on aquatics, therapeutic recreation, maintenance, marketing and programming sprinkled around the country, finding the time to get there is another constraint" (*Parks and Recreation*, 2002).

Samdahl desires the leisure researcher to “...Rattle the cage by critiquing the paradigms that have shaped our research” and to “...look outside of leisure studies and challenge us to maintain relevance to broader social theory and social issues” (Samdahl, 2000). Further, Samdahl is troubled by her observations that most current research is merely a way to ensure job security for university professors and only serves to reinforce the status quo.

Hunnicut admonishes us to “...return to the simple, elegant idea of community leisure service; building facilities and programs deliberately designed to reform our culture; aspiring to return active culture doing and making to localities; striving to rebuild a democratic culture; recalling those “democratic vistas” that once inspired us” (Hunnicut, 2000).

Not only must we understand program promotion/implementation, and how to understand the research (is it valid/reliable, does the study mean what it says it means), we must also understand the populations we are attempting to serve. Who makes up the population? What special characteristics does our population have? What are the constraints of this population/how will we negotiate these constraints? In addition, we need to understand what our population wants from us. If we seek to implement programs that have no audience, we do not justify our existence as Leisure Professionals.

If we are to change the way leisure is thought about (or perhaps more importantly: if we are to make sure leisure is being thought about by individuals who are not in the field), we need skills beyond program implementation. Programs live or die with the budget. If we are taught how to find sources of money and how to write successful grants, we will find ways to fund our

programs. In addition, skills dealing with how to make presentations and how to administrate co-workers are very important in order to insure that our organization's mission is carried out.

For the Programmer and those who implement programs, courses in curriculum development, learning theory, educational psychology, and subject-area skills should be taught. As a society we understand the need for teacher education programs. It is necessary for teachers to understand differing learning styles and ways to improve comprehension. As leisure providers, we are in much the same setting- why shouldn't we be armed with the same tools?

In this age of litigation, we should all be aware of risks and how to manage them. Our liabilities are numerous, perhaps more now than ever before. As professionals we should be trained to look for these risks and know how to deal with them. Legal settlements of several hundred thousand dollars are becoming more commonplace. While that amount might be frivolous to a corporation, it can kill a recreation department.

The leisure professional should be trained in the concepts of resource management. Our leisure environments are easily compromised. Just as one cannot swim in a polluted stream, a small trail can be devastated by too many people all at once. Ways to train the public (leave no trace campaigns, etc...) should be taught to the leisure professionals to ensure not only the environment stays, but also our jobs that go with the environment. (You don't need a trail guide if you have no trail!).

In order to be professionals and to justify our existence, we should understand all of the factors that we are dealing with. Financial factors, research factors, implementation factors, and liability factors are things we should have a firm grasp of if we are to “rattle leisure’s cage” (Samdahl, 2000).

References:

Hunnicut, Benjamin Kline. 2000. *Our Reform Heritage: Recovering the Vision of Community Leisure Service*. Journal of Leisure Research. Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 58-61

Samdahl, Diane M. 2000. *Reflections on the Future of Leisure Studies*. Journal of Leisure Research. Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 125-128

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