PRESIDENT’S CORNER

What are you reading?

We have just come off the experiences of another successful The Academy of Leisure Sciences Conference, this time organized by the University of Illinois and its partners. This Herculean effort was taken on by them while also jointly organizing an overlapping conference with the China International Leisure Research Association. The combined conferences brought together scholars, academics, researchers, teachers, and students to exchange ideas and knowledge. I am unsure what your experiences were, but mine was filled jotting notes for things to follow up on. But my notes are filled with sources that were shared. Like many of you, your web browsers have another tab opened or your summer reading list grew that much more.

Growing up, there used to be an after-school or Saturday commercial for RIF (Reading Is Fundamental). Unbeknownst to younger Rasul was that RIF was a nonprofit advocating for improved literacy in the United States. They advocated for reading for STEM (before it was given an acronym), and reading for….(drum roll), recreation. They advocated in those commercials that reading could be fun in one’s spare time. Think about it—how many of you began your appreciation for Stephen King before adulthood? Read J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings despite it not being a children’s book? Or, remember the Choose Your Own Adventure books that taught you very early on that every decision could result in actions that would take you in a number of ways, some favorable and others less so? Besides these commercials, RIF also had a book mobile driving through select cities and neighborhoods throughout the country. Despite federal budget cuts under the past two presidential administrations, RIF has given away over 400 million books to just over 40 million children since its inception in 1966. I was one of those children, but this is a tangent.
My point is, our body of scholarship is no different and is just as important for our “adult” selves. How many of you scan the table of contents that are sent through the listserv for Leisure Sciences, the Journal of Leisure Research and Annals of Leisure Research, Leisure Studies, and many others for a new article in our subject matter? What about the expanse of books from Sagamore-Venture Publishing, Taylor & Francis, Palgrave MacMillan, or CABI? How about searching for an article or book chapter to add to our literature review for an impending manuscript? This is likely the norm.

But how many of us scan those table of contents and decide to read outside of our subject matter? From a colleague that we know or have met at a conference who is not in our niche area of study? Or, have simply read to just read (because reading is fundamental), to know the field because we are in it and we teach it? This is likely not the norm.

Can we challenge ourselves to read for the latter set of questions rather than former? Further, can we use our spaces of exchange like TALSnet, the Facebook page, email, the hallway at our University, or the next conference to discuss a source that is beyond our scope or area of study? For me, I am still reading, re-reading, and processing three articles of note related to the future of the field in terms research and pedagogy: Talmage, Seale, and Wilson’s 2017 article in Schole, “Examining the State of Parks and Recreation Degree Programs,” Parr and Schmalz’s 2019 article in the Journal of Leisure Research, “Leisure Studies in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities in Our Collective Identity,” and lastly, Spracklen’s 2014 abstract for the Leisure Studies Association conference that same year, “Leisure Studies Education: Historical Trends and Pedagogical Futures in the United Kingdom and Beyond.” They respectively provide either data (Talmage et al., 2017) and discussion (Parr & Schmalz, 2019; Spracklen, 2014) on the past and future of the field based on a thorough examination of past texts and discussions. In our need to be published for promotion and tenure purposes, the sheer volume of things that have been studied and discussed can get easily lost, and in some cases may even become “dead” texts, forgotten and never cited again. Besides making important points to consider and re-envision a new future, they revive some of these “dead” texts, like the Sapora (1986) article in the forgotten SPRE Annual, where it was stated that our courses and programs should be enriched with “theoretical knowledges about leisure as a phenomenon” (p. 28). And Maguire’s (1982) appeal in the Parks & Recreation magazine for students and by extension their instructors, “to see beyond traditional boundaries, to embrace new alliances, and to translate hopes into action—in short, to be visionary” (p. 45).

Spraklen (2014) in particular draws us to an important consideration, how many of us read beyond our geographic boundaries and countries of origin? Are we familiar with the ways that leisure, tourism, sport, recreational therapy, and outdoor education is examined elsewhere? What about geographic areas that there are scholars in leisure but we have not bothered to know of their work but they know ours because of the value that has been placed on language? Thinking of our colleagues in Brazil, India, Korea, Mexico, and South Africa, in particular. What about even beyond the leisure-specific but still about leisure? Thinking beyond just citing under-represented scholars, how about even reading them?

I ask you to share, what are you reading?
1. How did you get into the field, and what inspired you to pursue a career in recreation and leisure?

Like many people in our field, I had never really heard of “recreation” growing up. I grew up on a farm in a very rural area of Iowa and was raised on 4-H, which was always defined as an “educational” organization. My parents loved going to local parks, and so that was always a real treat to do that and I grew to love them. Growing up on a farm, I was always playing in the outdoors and I loved that, too.

My undergraduate degree was in physical education. I had a high school math teacher who told me that since my math skills were not particularly stellar, PE would be a good place for me. Plus, I was a high school basketball star, so it all seemed to fit. I chose to go to school at Iowa State University because I had visited many times and was connected to lots of people there because of my 4-H opportunities.

I was doing my student teaching in PE and was teaching junior high girls how to serve a tennis ball. I lost control of the class and the girls were having a wonderful time just knocking the ball around. I, of course, was harshly criticized by my supervising teacher as I tried to explain that I thought it was OK because they were having fun. That didn’t go over real well, but I realized at that moment that I cared much more how having fun was more important than doing something perfect. I knew that PE teaching was not going to be for me.

I had the opportunity to work as a 4-H agent in a very rural county of Iowa for 5 years after my undergraduate degree. I began more to learn about what recreation was, and knew I was using it all time in working with both kids and leaders to make education FUN. I also knew that someday I wanted to do more with recreation in Extension or a university, so I got a master’s in counseling as a complement to the psychological side of PE. I was fortunate in being accepted into a PhD program at the University of Minnesota. I went thinking I wanted to go back and work in Extension at a state level, but fell in love with research while I was there. I also realized what a fine line can exist between good education and good recreation. I had wonderful mentoring at Minnesota from John Schultz, Caroline Weiss, and Leo McAvoy, and I really wanted to be like them when I graduated. By the way, my first post-PhD job was at the University of Wisconsin with a split appointment between University Extension as an Extension Specialist, and in the Department of Continuing and Adult Education with an emphasis on recreation.

2. Whose work has inspired you over the years and why?

The individuals mentioned above were very influential in convincing me that I had the ability to be successful doing research (despite my internalized math phobias). I have been so blessed to have such great colleagues and mentors over the years and it is hard to begin listing them. Jerry Apps at the University of Wisconsin was a wonderful department head and a prolific author who supported and inspired me. Doug Sessoms was wise enough to recruit me to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where I could thrive. I know he thought some of my ideas about feminism and qualitative research were a little off the wall, but he ALWAYS supported
me. I am also indebted to many colleagues whom I worked with and across the country. Sue Shaw was a wonderful contemporary and someone that I learned so much from. Geoff Godbey was willing to publish our first book on “women and leisure” and he provided so much support for this emerging area within our field. He also saw the potential for a book on Qualitative Approaches and enabled me to get that out to the world. I also cannot say enough about my partner in crime for many years, Deb Bialeschki. I always had lots of ideas, but she knew how to get the research done. I am eternally indebted to Doug Wellman, Beth Wilson, and Phil Rea for their part in getting me to NCSU for the last 10 years of a wonderful career. I also cannot begin to mention all the students I worked with over the years who made me a much better teacher and researcher. In retirement, I miss the students more than anything.

3. What are some important trends and issues we should be addressing in our field (from any perspective—social issues, research, education, outreach, administration/leadership, etc.)

I feel like every day I get further and further away from our field, although I continue to be very interested in what is happening in TALS and NRPA, as well as the American Camp Association, where I continue to do most of my professional volunteering.

I am encouraged by the way TALS has grown, and I continue to believe that we have to have something core to the many specialties in our field. I think TALS offers that means for pulling people together. As I have written several years ago, however, I continue to wonder what it is that holds us together. I think it is leisure, but that seems to be something many people do not necessarily coalesce around. I know the word has lots of baggage, but so far I do not see anything that is better. I wish I knew the answer to that question.

I guess one concern I have related to this issue is how we can be a united field that is inclusive of many diverse ideas. I firmly believe in the importance of social, economic, and environmental justice, and I have spent my career trying to address various facets of that. The thinking about inclusion and social justice is continually evolving, and I am not sure that all folks in our field are evolving that quickly. I think we need to continue to bring people along and not suggest that today’s way of thinking is right and what people thought a few years ago is wrong. I guess I think that we need to always keep in mind that the world is a “both/and” world (not either/or).

Saying that does not mean that we embrace “isms” that we did not recognize in the past, but it also means we need to move people along in a way that makes sense. What we believed years ago was what we had then. Since we have evolved rather quickly, but not everyone has changed that quickly. I guess I am saying that our field needs to embrace change and have lofty goals, but we need to bring people along in an evolutionary way. I have been distressed with some of the rhetoric on the TALS listserv that has not recognized that everyone is at the same stage of evolution.

4. You recently made a donation to NC State University where you worked from 2004-2014. What was the intention behind this gift, and what impact do you hope it will make in the future?

As I mentioned, I grew up on a farm and had a mother who was an elementary teacher. I had a working-class upbringing but parents who were very well read and smart (my dad only had a high school education). Farming was not a lucrative endeavor most of the time, but my dad invested very wisely in the stock market based not on advice from a broker but on his thoughts about where the country and world were headed. When my mother passed away last year, she had a sizable amount of money that my dad had left to her. He wanted to make sure she would be well taken care of after he died five years before. I was the beneficiary with my two sisters of a sizable inheritance. I looked around and knew there were a lot of things that I could potentially want—a much fancier house, more money in the bank, etc. But I asked myself what I needed. I determined that I needed nothing. I have a nice house, an old but reliable car, a beautiful place to live, many good friends all over the world. I needed nothing. I wanted to give the money away.

Where to give large sums of money was a huge decision. I believe we need so much help in areas related to environmental protection, animal concerns, human rights, etc. But I also kept coming back to how much I had
loved being a parks, recreation, and leisure educator. NCSU had been very good to me. I had had wonderful colleagues and students. I decided I wanted to give a major gift to NCSU that would perpetuate what I believe to be one of the leading programs in the country. I was so privileged to be able to endow a distinguished professorship in my name in memory of my parents, Marge and Jim Henderson. I also designated that the person who held this Distinguished title should be studying parks, recreation, and leisure with a broad emphasis on what these areas contributed to social justice. I had devoted my career to that area and knew that it could continue in new ways at NCSU.

I was extremely privileged to be able to make this large contribution. However, I acknowledge that others have made similar gifts (such as Chris Cashel and Joel Meier) and that other universities have distinguished lectureships and awards endowed to further our field (e.g., Rey Carlson, Gold Metcalf, Allen V. Sapora to name only a couple). I also recognize that most universities have scholarships for students named in honor of former faculty. Most people in our field have made major financial contributions to such scholarships and I think every penny we give to promote our field in needed. I was also inspired by Dan Dustin, who single handedly financed the Future Scholars fund (in honor of his parents) for several years before we had the endowment intact. I was able to give a large gift, but many, many others have made major donations to perpetuate our field. I thank them and am so humbled that I could do something that will help a faculty member at NCSU continue his/her research and work with students who support social justice pertaining to the myriad of areas within the broad field.

So many opportunities exist to contribute to perpetuating the goodness of our field and I hope others will give to various opportunities as they are able. I was so fortunate to contribute to many of these scholarships over the years and to make another lasting contribution due to the wisdom and generosity of my parents.

5. What about yourself? Where do you find leisure?

I am living my dream to be in the mountains. Ever since I was 8 years old and saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time, I dreamed of being in them every day. I finally got my dream when I retired. I wasn’t really ready quite yet to retire in 2014, but I so much wanted to move to Colorado while I was still healthy enough to enjoy lots of outdoor activities.

I do miss working—travelling to meetings around the world, being in the classroom (but do not miss grading papers!), interacting with colleagues, writing stuff that people may or may not want to read, and keeping up on the fast-growing and changing professional literature. But I also love to volunteer to promote positive experiences in Rocky Mountain National Park (I have volunteered almost 6,000 hours there since I moved 5 1/2 years ago). I enjoy talking to visitors, eradicating invasive weeds in the park, and helping out however I can (but without any major responsibility).

When I am not volunteering, I am in the park hiking, spiking, snowshoeing, x-country skiing, or looking for wildlife. I continue to play in the Estes Park Village Band and sometimes in the Estes Park Oratorio Orchestra. I have met lots of interesting people. I still travel some for my own leisure, and have a huge bucket list that I will probably never check off. Life is good.
The Academy of Leisure Sciences conference in Champaign-Urbana took place from February 11-14, 2020, at the snowy campus of the University of Illinois. It was preceded by the 4th Congress of the China-International Leisure Research Association (Feb 10-11) and The Academic Leadership Retreat (Feb 11). TALS conference was attended by 202 faculty, students, administrators, and recreation professionals from nine countries (the US, Canada, Austria, Ireland, China, Taiwan, Korea, South Africa, and Israel). It featured 45 themed sessions that included 70 presentations, 11 panels and workshops, and 13 posters.

The conference opened with the JJ Bannon keynote lecture by Drs. Rachel Switzky (Director of the University of Illinois Siebel Center for Design) and William Patterson (Senior Design Strategist for Social Impact at the University of Illinois) who talked about Tapping into the ghetto genius: Design thinking to connect leisure and social justice. Their keynote speech was followed by a response from Dr. Diana Parry, a Professor and Associate Vice President for Human Rights, Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Waterloo, Canada.
In the evening, following the opening ceremony, the participants gathered for the Sagamore-Venture Social that was held at the I-Hotel and Conference Center.

On Wednesday, in addition to concurrent sessions and the TALS Identity, Values and Mission workshop that was held in the morning, 23 graduate students and early career faculty were paired with 12 senior faculty mentors at the Student & Early Career Mentoring Program.

The Poster Session and Graduate Recruitment Fair took place on Wednesday evening. Thirteen posters were at a display and six schools had their information booths and tables.
Following the Poster Session, on Wednesday evening, the attendees were able to unwind at the Leisure Sciences Social held at the Esquire Lounge in Champaign. The temperature outside dipped into low teens and a snowstorm has moved through the area but that did not dampen the spirits and over a hundred people showed up to have fun and socialized at Esquire.

Following a day of concurrent sessions, panels and workshops, on Thursday afternoon, the attendees had a chance to take part in three unique educational tours – a tour of the University of Illinois campus, a tour of the UIUC Activities and Recreation Center and an exercise session, and a Tour of the Krannert Center for Performing Art. The day ended with the TALS Business Meeting and Awards Ceremony, sponsored by the Human Kinetics.

The conference ended with a closing keynote by Dr. William Sullivan, Professor & Director of Rokwire | Smart, Healthy Communities, University of Illinois who spoke about Health and wellbeing for urban communities: Envisioning the future and with a workshop focused on the Academic Job Search Process organized by Dr. Toni Liechty.

The conference committee would like to recognize the TALS 2020 sponsors—Sagamore-Venture (Sagamore-Venture Social), Leisure Sciences (Leisure Sciences Social), Human Kinetics (TALS Dinner and Awards Ceremony), Illinois State University, Western Illinois University, Eastern Illinois University, and Southern Illinois University (sponsoring coffee/tea and cookie breaks); The TALS 2020 Organizing Committee – Drs. Monika Stodolska (Chair), Kimberly Shinew, Toni Liechty, Liza Berdychevsky, Bill Stewart, as well as Leslie Camarillo (doctoral students at the University of Illinois) and Don Hardin and Robyn Deterding (Lecturers at the University of Illinois); Session Review Coordinators—Drs. Kathy Andereck, Kelly Bricker, Kate Evans, Darla Fortune, Kathy Ann Jordan, Tracy Mainieri, Nick Pitas, Taryn Price, Kindal Shores, Julie Son, Daniel Theiriault; and 22 ad-hoc reviewers.
This year’s conference also saw a number of awards presented to TALS members across teaching, scholarship, and service.

- **2020 Inductees, The Academy of Leisure Sciences Fellows:** Dr. Carla Santos (University of Illinois) and Dr. Brijesh Thapa (University of Florida)
- **President’s Award:** Dr. Laura Payne (University of Illinois) and Dr. Rasul Mowatt (Indiana University)
- **2019 Best Student Paper –** William Rice (Penn State University)
- **2019 New Researcher –** Dr. Ryan Gagnon (Clemson University)
- **2019 Innovation in Teaching –** PRTM Writing Mentorship Project - Dr. Lauran Duffy and Dr. Gwynn Powell (Clemson University)
- **2019 Excellence in Teaching –** Dr. Lauren Duffy (Clemson University)
- **2019 Distinguished Researcher –** Dr. Monika Stodolska (University of Illinois)
- **2019 Distinguished Colleague –** Dr. Kimberly Shinew (University of Illinois)
- **Future Scholars –** Taylor Wycoff (University of Utah), Hannah Wells (Clemson University), Christine Ausman (Dalhousie University), and AJ Richard (University of Northern Iowa).