

ACTION PAPER FOR FUTURE PROJECTS (VISION 2020)
ACADEMY OF LEISURE SCIENCES

Draft 1: 24 March 2009 (initial thoughts from Jim Murphy and Linda Caldwell), to task force members Lynn Barnett, John Datillo, Charlie Bullock, Diane Samdahl, Dave Compton, and Larry Allen

Draft 2: 25 May 2009 (based on feedback from Lynn Barnett, Charlie Bullock, Dave Compton, and Larry Allen)

Draft 3: 6 July 2009 (based on feedback from the membership)

Background

After a series of drafts and feedback regarding Vision 2020, we are now ready to commit to action! Thanks to all who provided feedback; it was extremely helpful and we received a number of thoughtful comments. The preface material from previous emails is not included with this list.

Now is the time to **step up and volunteer** for one or more of these options that make you most excited! Please let us know if you are interested in chairing, co-chairing, or working on a small committee to further clarify and move forward these ideas. The goal will be to make progress on the task over the coming year, with a report to the membership at the 2010 ALS luncheon meeting.

Please note that in response to our previous draft of 25 May 2009, Bev Driver put together a very thoughtful paper which we have decided to append to this document. Two of his comments are compatible with our possible projects, and he suggests an additional project that has to do with certification. That is listed as #3 under new ideas.

Please let Linda Caldwell (lindac@psu.edu) and Jim Murphy (jfmurphy@sfsu.edu) know of your interest leadership of or working on any of these issues by 15 September 2009.

New Ideas to Pursue

1. Internationalization of ALS in more formal ways. (Linda is interested in working on this with others).
2. Encourage efforts to solicit, if necessary interview, our senior members for their insights on the development of leisure and/or background information on the evolution of our discipline (or another worthwhile topic that is 'held' in the heads and experiences of our senior colleagues) that could be shared in both written form and part of a presentation at NRPA, CCLR, or WLRA. Perhaps a video series would be appropriate.
3. Work with other relevant organizations to revise and update the current two certification requirements for recreation professionals to cause both of them to require/attain proficiency in understanding the science-based knowledge about the benefits of leisure and the significances of such.

Continuation of Projects

1. Deb Bialeschki is working with folks this year and maybe next to publish another set of "White Papers" on issues related to leisure. Perhaps these white papers could be done on a five-year cycle so as to provide periodic updates on the status of leisure and its impact on quality of life. Perhaps also the papers could be viewed in retrospect with some notion of benchmarking key issues over time.
2. We are working on a three year campaign (to be developed more fully) to establish an endowed fund for the Future Scholars program. (Jim is interested in continuing to work on this with others).
3. Continue supporting the Butler Lecture series (working with LRS).
 - a. Butler lecture presenter and discussants come to luncheon?
 - b. Someone coordinate?

**Proposal to Members of the Academy of Leisure
Sciences to Promote Wider Understanding and
Appreciation of the Significances of the Benefits of Leisure**

by B. L. Driver (6.3.09)

This document presents, describes, and offers rationale for a general and three specific proposals for members of the Academy of Leisure Sciences to consider. The general proposal is that the Academy promote greater understanding of the benefits of leisure and the many positive ramifications of such understanding. My three specific proposals are that the Academy:

1. Work with other relevant organizations to revise and update the current two certification requirements for recreation professionals to cause both of them to require/attain proficiency in understanding the science-based knowledge about the benefits of leisure and the significances of such.
2. Work to create greater understanding of the merit good aspects of leisure.
3. Create widely distributable media (DVDs, videos, etc.) to promote greater understanding and appreciation of the benefits and their significances.

Rationale

Wider understanding and appreciation of the benefits of leisure and its significances would:

- Enhance and advance all of the leisure "professions" and in particular significantly improve the relevance, efficiency, and responsiveness of administrators, planners, and managers of park and recreation agencies and similar practitioners employed by related agencies/institutions that do not "label" themselves as park and recreation agencies but nevertheless provide many important leisure opportunities (e.g., libraries, museums, wildlife management agencies).
- Substantively support the actions of elected officials responsible for allocating funds and providing policy guidelines to public park and recreation agencies.
- Increase the understanding and appreciation of the benefits of leisure by members of the general public which is sorely needed to (1) generate and maintain adequate support for leisure services provided by public agencies and (2) help the general public appreciate more fully the tremendous **comparative** importance of leisure services vis a vis other services (e.g., educational, medical, and welfare" services, and fire and police protection, etc.).
- In all the above ways, contribute substantively to "repositioning the images" of leisure that has so adroitly been called for by John Crompton and his associates.

To further explain why I believe that the proposed promotion of the understanding of the benefits of leisure and its significances is perhaps the most important thing the Academy can focus on, I will review some conclusions I have reached about such understanding after having spending most of my past 40 years of professional endeavor studying the benefits of leisure, attempting to contribute to credible research findings about such benefits, promoting greater understanding of those benefits and the significances of them, and working closely with practitioners to help develop and refine several recreation resource planning and management systems that overtly focus on managerially relevant benefits as well as avoiding negative outcomes. But first, in the following paragraph permit me to try to put what I am proposing within the context of some concerns which I know are held by some members of the academy.

I am quite aware that a few of you have expressed both published and unpublished "concerns" about the research approaches I have used and about some things I have written, especially related to Experience-Based Management (as emphasized by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum system) and Benefits-Based Management (now being called Outcomes-Focused). A lot of the criticisms were caused by misunderstandings of what I had written.¹ I take

¹ And yes, there has been a little setting me up as a straw person to "burn"-- speaking "metaphorically!" Ain't science fun!

responsibility for not being clearer. I mention these concerns here **only** to propose and hope that any of them still held should not prevent any member of the Academy from agreeing with me that the **primary reason** any publicly-provided leisure service is provided is because of its likely benefits. Put differently, although we might not agree about the types of scientific inquiry to follow or the most appropriate ways to manage leisure resources and services, I trust that will deter each of you for supporting wider understanding of the beneficence of leisure and its many significances?

It has been interesting and very disappointing for me to observe that the negative impacts of the provision of leisure services are being articulated much more clearly and especially more comprehensively than are the positive impacts. Specifically, current understanding and appreciation of the empirically-supported benefits of leisure and of their significances is sorely lacking by all relevant concerns. There is fairly wide intuitive/subjective understandings of the benefits gained from personal experience, reflection, and communication with professional associates. To be sure, that understanding and personal judgment has been, is, and will remain extremely important to each of the leisure professions. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, there has been significant increases in the amount of science-based knowledge about the benefits² which must be understood reasonably well for true professionalism, which is required along with good judgment and “art.” There is more on that topic below when I describe my first specific proposal.

Not only do the empirically-supported benefits and their ramifications need to be better understood more widely. But, another type of understanding is needed to advance the leisure professions and give them more social credibility. That understanding relates to my oft-make, perhaps bold, assertions that the provision and management of publicly-provided leisure service **add as much, or more,** value to a society **as any other publicly-provided social services** including educational and medical services. I did not come to this conviction quickly, emotionally, or without considerable doubt of its validity. But, during my past 40 years of studying, reflecting on, and promoting wider understanding of the benefits of leisure, I realized that I had to accept the following three things:

1. The benefits of leisure pervade all aspects of human endeavor, and **no other social service** is nearly as pervasive. Included are mental and physical health, spiritual inspiration, family bonding, establishing and maintaining other social networks and camaraderie, sharing, stress management, mentoring, avocational interests and learning, promotion of positive self concepts, cultural identity, appreciation of places and history, and nurturance of environmental ethics and related behaviors. Think about it!
2. Second and related to the first, the “merit good” aspects of leisure are grossly misunderstood even though they probably are as great as or greater than those of all other social service services including educational or medical services. To review, a “merit good” [actually good or service] refers to one for which its provision and use create “meritorious” spin-off benefits (external economies in economic jargon) to **others than the direct users of that good or service.** The primary reason that there is such widespread public appreciation and support of public education is because of its “meritorious” nature. Ask yourself, how do leisure services compare?
3. When considered **comprehensively** (beyond just publicly-provided leisure services), the leisure **sector is the largest or one of the largest economic sectors** of any industrialized economy in terms of value added to gross domestic product or any other economic measure such as contribution to net foreign exchange balances of payments.

The last part of the rationale for my general proposal is that to my knowledge, **no organization in the United States** is now seriously promoting better understanding of the benefits of leisure and their significances. At least one needs to. In addition, to my knowledge only two organizations **in the world** are now giving serious attention to understanding the benefits and their importance. The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s current revisions and updating of its 1997 highly informative and influential “The Benefits Catalogue” is a useful effort, but that updated catalogue will not be

² The best documentation of the breadth and results of this research is in the 1979 Canadian Parks/Recreation Association’s “The Benefits Catalogue,” which is currently being updated.

ready for several years. The Australian State of Victoria's "Healthy Parks-Healthy People program is also laudable, but its focus is very limited. In addition, neither of these two efforts address some concerns relevant to provision of leisure services in the United States, such as the first one described in my below three specific proposals. Therefore, I ask you, what organization other than the Academy of Leisure Sciences is better suited to take on the charge in the United States? Its members, as recognized and influential scientists and educators, are the best qualified to understand said benefits and their significances. In addition, the Academy is centrally relevant to any attempt to improve and advance the leisure professions if in fact the most telling description of any profession is the body of professional knowledge that its members must have demonstrative proficiency in understanding.

Three Specific Proposals

Each of my three specific proposals to the Academy will now be described.

1. Update Professional Certification Requirements

The purpose of this proposal is to assure that the two current certifications of leisure professionalism require proficiency in reasonably understanding the nature and scope of the benefits of leisure and their relevance to the administration, planning, and provision of leisure services. Those certification procedures must also require reasonable proficiency in understanding the merit good aspects of leisure and its fundamental role in "repositioning the image" of leisure.

The two certifications of concern here are the National Recreation and Park Association's program to help someone become a "Certified Park and Recreation **Professional** [emphasis added]" (or CPRP) and the NRPA's and the American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation's joint program for accrediting baccalaureate "programs in colleges and universities that prepare **new professionals** [emphasis added] to enter the broad field of parks, recreation and leisure services."

I firmly believe that true leisure professionalism cannot be assured if the two to recreation "professional" certification procedures do not require proficiency in reasonably understanding the currently existing, and ongoing additions to, credible empirical documentation of the benefits of leisure and of the significance of such. The problem is that neither certification requirement does not now adequately define all types of proficiency needed by recreation "professionals" and park and recreation academic programs. Put slightly differently, the proficiency currently required by both certifications is **necessary** but not **sufficient** for true leisure professionalism. It is not if one accepts the widely held belief that a profession is an area of expertise that is founded on expert and specialized knowledge. For example, "Wikipedia—the free encyclopedia" defines a profession as requiring "Expert and specialised knowledge in the field which one is practising professionally. And it adds, "Although sometimes referred to as professions, such occupations as skilled construction work are more generally thought of as [trades](#) or crafts." And, "In sports, a professional is someone who participates for money." The point is that although most professions have other characteristics (e.g., periodic testing of knowledge, licensing, and codes of ethics), the most fundamental characteristic of a professional is highly specialized knowledge.

After considerable reflection about the knowledge required by all professions with which I am familiar, I became convinced that the required "specialized knowledge" mentioned by "Wikipedia" can more meaningfully be defined as **an empirically-supported body of knowledge**--whether supported by case studies or by "more rigorous" scientific inquiry. As said above, a "good" professional also needs sound judgment and sensitivities relevant to practicing her or his "art" as well as science.

So, given the widely held definition of the word “profession,” can it be said that the two certifications of professionalism in recreation in fact now promote true professionalism? I recently answered that questions as follows on page 96 of my Chapter 5 of the Venture 2009 text on Outcomes-Focused Management which I edited:

“One can review on line the requirements of these two certification programs.³ On the NRPA's web page describing CPRP certification, there is **no** direct reference to needs to understand knowledge about the benefits of leisure and how to use it when reviewing the subject areas tested in the required CPRP examination. Specifically, if one reviews the "Test Content Outline" in the on-line "Candidate Handbook," no content relating to benefits can be found, and none of the many "Recommended Texts" have adequate coverage of the current knowledge about those benefits or how to use it. The same holds true for accreditation requirements of park and recreation academic programs by NRPA/AAPAR. Their web page shows learning/instructional requirements in several major subject areas and their many sub-topics. Considerable appropriate emphasis is given in those accreditation and certification requirements for efficient management of park and recreation resources and services. But, extremely little attention is given to requirements related to accountability and responsiveness of such management in terms of benefits desired and negative outcomes to be avoided.... For example, Section 8.14:02 of the "Program and Event Planning" subject displays the very minimal attention given to benefits at that site. Only there can the very few words that refer to "outcome-oriented goals and objectives" be found; no other reference is given to benefits in the other subject areas such as Delivery Systems, Administration, or Management.

The unfortunate conclusion is that current certification and accreditation procedures do not require that professionally certified people who work in leisure, or the academic programs that guide their professional training, understand the very important science-based knowledge on which that professionalism should be established.[emphasis added here in this proposal to the ALS].”

Can one be truly professional if they do not keep current with the existing body of knowledge relevant to his or her particular professional endeavors? NO! And to me, the current certification requirements for leisure "professionals" is equivalent to medical doctors being granted licenses to practice if they only understand what practices they need to employ without being required to understand the impacts of those practices on their patients and others. Fortunately, reasonable understanding of those credibly documented impacts have moved medical practice from quackery to professionalism despite the recently emerging to frequent practice of recommending too many very costly medical tests to help determine possible but not highly probable negative impacts. Am I suggesting to some practices of park and recreation “professionals” currently border on quackery?

This specific proposed effort by the Academy would require working closely with the other organizations involved with the two certifications. It would also need to describe in detail the types of understanding required and suggest the published sources that are now available for attaining that understanding. I could rather easily provide several such readily available sources, suggest academic instructional programs required, and provide a set of questions to test for reasonable proficiency in understanding. It ain't rocket science!

2. Promote Wider Understanding of the Merit Good Aspects of Leisure

The second task I propose for the members of the Academy to consider is to promote greater understanding on the merit good aspects of leisure. I described my rationale for this proposal above when elaborating the three, perhaps bold conclusions I was required to accept about the benefits of leisure after studying them for several decades. So, all I will

³ The web page for these two certifications is <http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=826>

say here is that I expressed my sentiments about these merits good aspects and gave examples of the considerable amount of research that has documented those benefits on pages 96-100 of my Chapter 5 of the 2009 Venture text I edited on Outcomes-Focused Management. The Academy is welcome to crib whatever it might wish from those pages. John Crompton has also provided much information about these types of benefits in several of his and his associates' publications. The point is that this would not be a difficult or very time-consuming task for the Academy to take on.

3. Preparation of Widely Distributable Media about the Benefits and Their Significances

The media (e.g., DVDs, videos, etc.) could help promote the called for understanding by wider audiences. Some of the media could have a general focus, and others could be more specific, such as "The Economic Significance of Leisure When it Is Considered Comprehensively" [about which I have written and can be cribbed], "Significance of the Merit Good Aspects of Leisure" [about which much has been written and can be cribbed], "The Impacts of Leisure on Mental and Physical Health" and on and on. This effort should include plans for the wide dissemination of such media.

I close by stating that I know of no greater contribution the Academy can make to the different arenas of leisure than the one of promoting wider understanding of the benefits of leisure and of their significances.

I am willing to help in any way I can.