
BOOK REVIEW**Outdoor Program Administration: Principles and Practices**

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A cursory review of the table of contents in *Outdoor Program Administration* could lead one to believe that the collective efforts of both the authors and editors has led to the creation of an oxymoron—a *comprehensive introductory* book on outdoor programming. However, a more thorough review of the text reveals not necessarily a comprehensive coverage of outdoor programming, but undoubtedly an extensive and expansive resource—encompassing the diverse parameters typically found in outdoor programming—from its historic foundations to the safe and competent delivery of such programs. This book is certainly a strong, *introductory* text because the authors did a masterful job of delimiting the multidimensional nature of developing and managing outdoor recreation programs.

The field of outdoor recreation and outdoor programming is inordinately diverse, in fact, Priest (1999) once described outdoor recreation as "... any activity done outdoors" (p. 112). Because of the extensiveness of this field, it is extremely challenging, perhaps even impossible, to create a single resource that can "teach readers how to do outdoor programming." On the other hand, the authors and editors of *Outdoor Program Administration* have done a yeoman's job of delineating the essential concerns and topics for outdoor programming—those aspects commonly shared across most outdoor recreation activities, those that must be acknowledged and negotiated in the design and implementation of such programs. Therefore, it seems very plausible that educators, outdoor program administrators, or other outdoor program professionals will discover some valuable information, useful ideology, as well as pertinent assessments about program issues and concerns somewhere between this book's covers. This is good news given the fact that within the first few pages of *Outdoor Program Administration*, the editors identify the book's intended audience to be outdoor recreation administrators, field instructors, and students enrolled in outdoor recreation courses. What an enormously ambitious goal, to write for the neophyte and at the same time for the experienced professional, quite a daunting task given the wide-ranging gamut of knowledge and experiences across such an audience.

The editors did a commendable job in arranging the book's 21 chapters into four distinct sections. The first section, Outdoor Program Foundations (chapters 1 – 4), introduces the reader to outdoor program administration, proposes specific skills and competencies for outdoor program administrators, traces both the historical foundations of outdoor programs in the United States and the evolution of professionalism within outdoor recreation, links outdoor recreation with the three recreation service delivery systems (public, private, and nonprofit), and identifies specific societal trends, such as the changing demographics of outdoor recreationists and professional standardization, that are proposed to likely impact the future of outdoor programming. As a whole, this first section provides the reader with a sense of direction—beginning with where outdoor programming has been and point to where the field may be headed in the future.

The second section of the book, Program Design and Implementation (chapters 5 – 12), is the most voluminous section of the text, making up nearly 40% of the entire book, and well it should. The topics of chapters within this section are the core to outdoor programming: risk and risk management, organizational structure, mission statements and strategic planning, legal considerations and negligence, financial management—particularly budgets, marketing basics, public land access and permits, environmental stewardship, and the development of policies and procedures for outdoor programming. Cumulatively, these topics and processes are at the crux of how outdoor programming is developed, created, and implemented. While these chapters convey how important each one of these topics is within the sphere of outdoor programming, it seems that a change in the sequencing of these chapters would strengthen this section of the book. For example, the chapter on risk management seems to be most related to the legal considerations chapter, and yet they are not sequential. In a similar fashion, the chapter on organizational structure and policy development chapters could be linked to one another; and the financial and marketing chapters could be ordered sequentially. But this is a minor criticism; again as a whole, this section of the book contains a multitude of information that encourages the creation of better outdoor programming.

The third section of the book, Staffing Considerations (chapters 13 -15), could have easily been labeled "Human Resource Management" as these three chapters deal with human resource planning, the process of conducting job analyses, staff recruitment and supervision, and staff training and assessment. Whether by design or not, this section, more than any other section in the book, could easily be exchanged with similar chapters in most administration or management textbooks. The content contained within these chapters is generic and generalizable—which may be the intent. If the goal for this section of the text was to develop and present information that would be applicable to *any, and all*, outdoor program(s), the authors were exceptionally effective. However, a caveat to readers who are seeking human resource management information pertaining specifically to outdoor programs, material found within these chapters could leave you somewhat disappointed because content in this section of the book in no way specific to outdoor programming.

The final section of *Outdoor Program Administration*, Facilities and Programs (chapters 16 - 21), focuses on specific types of outdoor programs/facilities such as rental operations, climbing walls, challenge courses, a couple of broad program areas called “land-based programs” (e.g., backpacking, cycling, caving, mountaineering, etc.) and “water-based programs” (e.g. canoeing, kayaking, sailing, rafting, etc.), and finally a chapter on special event programming. This last section is challenging to summarize or to critique, because although there are similarities across some chapters, each chapter is also unique in terms of how the authors chose to format and present the information in their respective chapters. Some chapters are more detail-oriented emphasizing activity specific information and others are rather generic—entailing a general identification and introduction of management concerns, specific to the activity/facility (e.g. risk management) and some terminology.

The strength of this book is its extensive coverage of the multidimensional structure of outdoor programming; and for this reason it has great potential as an introductory textbook for those with little to some knowledge about the field. There is little doubt that this book can serve as a valuable introductory text for educators and for students, as it is written and formatted in a straight-forward manner. The language and vocabulary is appropriate for such a resource; each chapter is logically organized and contains a “comfortable” mixture of text, diagrams, models, and pictures; the book has a very functional index; and the listing of references and resources, arranged by chapter near the end of the book, should easily facilitate further exploration of specific topics in outdoor programming.

In addition, depending on the breadth and depth of their professional experiences, outdoor recreation program administrators may also find *Outdoor Program Administration* to be a valuable resource. The book’s merit for these individuals would seem to be inversely correlated with the amount of experience a particular reader has in terms of overseeing outdoor recreation programs—those with limited experience should find the book’s coverage of an extensive array of topics helpful, while more experienced practitioners may see the coverage of some of aspects of outdoor programming as being a little too rudimentary or superficial.

In the final analysis, because an extensive approach was taken to explore outdoor programming, professionals looking to expand their *basic* understanding of the diverse field of outdoor programming should find this book to be a valuable resource. The vast majority of the chapters *introduce* the reader to essential components of designing and managing outdoor programs. However, with the exception of some chapters (the chapters on negligence, liability, developing policies & procedures, and rental operations were more comprehensive than others), the content in *Outdoor Program Administration* lacks the logistical details that more experienced outdoor programming professionals and field instructors may be looking for. For example, even in the last four or five chapters that cover specific types of outdoor facilities and programs, the authors appear to have chosen to write in general terms, rather than supplying the depth and detail that many field instructors often seek.

It is important to recognize that *Outdoor Program Administration* has great potential as an introductory text in the academic setting; that it addresses the extensive, multi-dimensional nature of outdoor programming; and that it is a valuable resource for anyone who is trying to develop a basic understanding of managing outdoor programs.

References

Priest, S. (1999). The semantics of adventure programming. In J. C. Miles & S. Priest (Eds.) *Adventure programming* (2nd ed.). (pp. 111-114). State College, PA: Venture.