

Kraus, R. (1997). *Recreation programming: A benefits driven approach*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Reviewed by

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Biographical Information

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So, what's new in the process of program planning? A little of this, a little of that; just about everything and not much at all. All of these perspectives seem to be covered in Kraus' (1997) book *Recreation Programming: A Benefits-Driven Approach*.

A little of this, a little of that

What is new about the book is Kraus' addition of several issues and contexts that affect the program decision-making process, program implementation, and evaluation. I believe this book covers emerging trends quite nicely; e.g., co-sponsorship of programs and joint ventures, multiculturalism, and the increased use of computers and technology. Kraus begins the text with a detailed overview of the components of a leisure delivery system and includes a discussion of co-sponsorship and cooperation among agencies. Throughout the book, Kraus includes extensive examples from a broad range of leisure service agencies from the U.S. and Canada, including therapeutic recreation agencies. Previous texts have focused primarily on public agencies in the U. S. This reflects the changing structure of the delivery system and is covered in a comprehensive and up-to-date manner.

Although lifespan issues are covered in other texts, Kraus does a nice job synthesizing key points from developmental psychology and motor development, and identifying implications for recreation agencies and programmers. A nice supplement to the lifespan information is programmatic implications of issues related to gender (including gay/lesbian concerns), race and ethnicity, and disabilities. In his discussion of program areas, he includes a section on the values and potential outcomes associated with each area. This, combined with the activity analysis and lifespan issues, aids the reader in understanding the connection between the chosen activity and the desired participation outcomes (i.e., benefits).

Finally, Kraus begins each chapter with a list of the relevant National Recreation and Park Association's accreditation standards covered in the chapter. The intent is to tie the chapters' educational objectives directly to required content for accreditation. This

is a new and potentially valuable approach; unfortunately, the content in the chapters, for the most part, falls short of the goal. I had a difficult time identifying the corresponding content for several of the identified standards. In addition, the accreditation standards make a distinction between “understanding of” and “ability to” that was not addressed in the content of the chapters.

Just about everything

The book represents a timely effort to apply research findings regarding the benefits of recreation. Driver, Brown, and Peterson’s (1991) edited book provided a nice synthesis of research findings that begin to document the beneficial outcomes of participation in recreation and leisure. Instead of simply documenting outcomes *after* participation, enough evidence exists to warrant incorporating those desired benefits throughout the planning process; using desired outcomes as a starting place, rather than the activity itself as the starting point. In that sense, the benefits-driven approach to program planning, i.e., making decisions regarding types of programs to offer based on meeting individual, agency, and community/social needs, is a new, concentrated effort. However, both Edginton, Hanson, and Edginton (1992) and Rossman (1995) affirm the viewpoint that programs are a means to an end rather than ends in themselves. In particular, Edginton, et al. (1992) characterize leisure programs as “vehicles” used by professionals to deliver benefits to customers (p. 14). So, although the concept of the benefits approach has received a lot of recent attention by researchers and professionals, the concept is not all that new.

Not much at all

Overall, the text does not contain any drastically new and different insight on the process of program planning. However, Kraus’ coverage of the major components of program planning, such as needs assessment, goals and objectives, program design and activity analysis, staffing, facilitates, and promotion are given adequate coverage. The topic of tournaments is not covered, but relatively few texts cover this and it is easily supplemented.

In addition to the current issues and contexts discussed previously, I believe the book does have some strong points that are worth mentioning. Each chapter includes a set of excellent discussion questions and activities that will assist students in synthesizing and applying the material presented. The section on societal trends affecting recreation is worthwhile and discussions could be facilitated to explore the link between these trends and the kinds of programs offered and the methods used to produce and implement them. I also appreciated the inclusion of highly specific therapeutic recreation examples and attention to disabilities. Many recreation and leisure services curricula offer a basic program planning course required of all majors and perhaps a separate program planning class specifically geared toward therapeutic recreation students. I believe “generalist” faculty members who teach the core program planning course will find the TR examples very helpful.

The book also has some weaknesses that I believe keep it from being an outstanding new addition to the array of program planning texts. In general, I found the book to be organized in a less than straightforward manner. In chapter two, Kraus presents several approaches and guidelines that influence program planning and then presents a 7-step programming cycle. The distinction between issues and approaches that influence the manner in which the planning cycle is carried out and the significance of the planning cycle itself is unclear. Compounding this problem, the content that follows in subsequent chapters is never effectively tied directly to the planning cycle. While the components of the cycle are covered, they do not appear to be presented in a systematic fashion.

In several sections of the book Kraus discusses, at seemingly great length, programming processes and procedures advocated by other authors' and then proceeds to say that these detailed processes are not practical and/or not widely practiced by professionals in the field. For example, Kraus summed up a discussion of program planning approaches by stating, "While such innovative approaches clearly contribute to creative program planning in recreation, park, and leisure-service systems, one might ask whether pragmatic agency managers are likely to accept overly complex or theoretical approaches to programming" (p. 30). I believe that this gets at the crux of the problem that the benefits-based approach is attempting to remedy; recreation professionals must begin to see their role as facilitators of outcomes rather than simply providers of activities. There are a significant number of professionals who were educated and who have practiced under a different set of social circumstances. But, as Kraus describes, the nature of the "business" and the climate within which we operate has changed. Thus, the onus is on recreation faculty to educate a "new age" of professionals that understand the theoretical underpinnings of human behavior and how to incorporate that into the program planning process.

With the whole focus of the book on the "benefits-driven" approach I expected a much more detailed description of potential benefits of recreation participation. Edginton, Hanson, and Edginton (1992) provide an extensive list of possible outcomes and reasons why people engage in recreation activities. In addition, I expected to see more connection between benefits and program components, particularly in the program design. For example, how does using a particular program format, or facility, or registration procedure, or leadership style influence a participant's experience?

Most of the application of the benefits-based approach, beyond the initial definition and description, focused on benefits accrued by a society that values positive forms of recreation. While this may be a personal bias, I think a benefits-based approach should also emphasize the individual benefits that are gained by meaningful recreation and leisure experiences. Through these experiences, individuals become better citizens. In addition, these experiences can be facilitated by recreation professionals through the careful design of programs.

In conclusion, the text does offer up-to-date statistics and current issues facing program planners. However, the lack of a straightforward, step-by-step approach to

program planning and implementation is a limiting factor in the usefulness of this text. The incorporation of computer applications, multicultural issues, leisure delivery systems, and excellent discussion questions and activities are welcome additions to the currently available information and I would recommend them as supplementary materials.

References

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