

Mitra, A., & Lankford, S. (1999). *Research methods in park, recreation, and leisure services*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore.

Riddick, C. C., & Russell, R. V. (1999). *Evaluative research in recreation, park, and sport settings: Searching for useful information*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore.

Reviewed by

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Biographical Information

Maridith A. Janssen is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at California State University, Long Beach. She is also the coordinator of the therapeutic recreation certificate program. Her primary responsibilities are teaching therapeutic recreation and general recreation courses, advising therapeutic recreation students and advising graduate student research. Her areas of interest are older adults, quality of life research and leisure education.

This review includes two books relating to research in the profession of recreation and leisure studies. To make the review useful, each book is reviewed separately. A concluding overall commentary on research evaluation is included.

Research Methods in Park, Recreation, and Leisure Services

Mitra and Lankford have provided a text which is designed "to help beginning researchers and practitioners conduct research in pursuit of resolving leisure service problems and issues" (p. ix). This book has been specifically aimed towards a variety of leisure service providers from sports management specialists within a university setting and open space planners focused on long-range land use plans. It is designed to guide researchers (whether students, academicians, or practitioners) through a systemic process that focuses on methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting information.

The book is divided into 11 chapters with each chapter focused on an element of the scientific research process. Chapter one is an introductory chapter with an overview of research concepts and ideas. Aside from the general overview of the research process, the authors discuss the importance of conducting research in leisure in order to advance the profession from a multitude of practice levels. The focus on the need for research from all levels of professional practice is addressed in several contexts.

While chapter two mainly addresses common methods of data collection in leisure research, the authors introduce the topic of a multimethod approach to leisure research.

Their examples of multimethod approach research in practice through cited studies give the reader an introduction to combining various research techniques.

Chapters three and four are basic in their definitions of measurement and research design in leisure research. Chapter three gives the reader an overview of terminology used in research. Descriptions of independent/dependent variables, validity and reliability and levels of measurement are simple enough to give the beginning researcher introductory information. Chapter four defines experimental and quasi-experimental research designs. The authors provide detailed information that explains internal and external threats to validity in the two designs and strengths and weaknesses of each. Chapters five through eight are dedicated to the description, development (i.e., sampling methods, questionnaire design) and application of leisure and survey research.

Chapter nine prepares the reader for data analysis through a general description of identifying the type of data and what variables (independent and dependent) are being analyzed for further analysis. This chapter is basic in the sense that it defines how to take the information from a questionnaire and apply identification codes for analysis. The chapter does provide a useful introduction in which the authors define differences between the academic/statistical approach and the practitioner/pragmatic approach.

Chapters 10 and 11 are designed to provide the reader with information pertaining to data analysis methods and which data reporting approaches to use based on the type of information one is seeking to obtain from the data. The authors provide descriptions of statistical tests that measure relationships, differences, or trends. Chapter 11 is short in its description of reporting the data with an overview of how to design a research report for dissemination being discussed at the conclusion.

The authors have concluded the text with several appendices that specifically identify useful questionnaires, executive summaries, and data presentation. The text as an orientation to research methodology in the leisure profession is useful.

Evaluative Research in Recreation, Park, and Sport Settings: Searching for Useful Information

Riddick and Russell have developed a research and evaluation text that is designed to be used as an undergraduate text in evaluation and management as well as for the professional who conducts research as part of their professional position. The text is divided into three sections: Part I: Foundations; Part II: Evaluation Planning Model; and, Part III: Evaluative Research in Action. As a text to be used with students, the authors have designed and organized each chapter to include an introduction (in which a statement of learning goals are discussed), a summary of the main points from the chapter, and study questions to help guide the student toward further comprehension of the material. The book also includes an instructor's manual to help facilitate teaching methods used by instructors.

In Part I, the reader is introduced to evaluative research (Chapter one) and is able to define the purpose and benefits of conducting research in recreation and leisure programming. The reader furthers their understanding of evaluation in chapter two by defining internal and external evaluation methods, proposal development and methods for establishing standards of practice through agency accreditation. Chapter three guides the reader through a discussion of personal and professional ethics and their relationship to research.

Part II of the book is designed to guide the reader through the research process. This part is divided into four research stages that further define the concepts and process of evaluation and research. Three chapters comprise Stage 1 and help define the focus of the evaluation. These chapters focus on the importance of a thorough review of relevant literature that supports the area of evaluation; identification of qualitative or quantitative measurement based on logic and theory; and, purposeful identification of the scope of the study in order to provide a context for significance.

Two chapters support Stage 2 and identify the approaches used in determining the evaluation. The authors identify various research designs in relation to validity, reliability, and distinguish the differences in qualitative and quantitative design methods. Sampling concepts and factors that directly affect sampling methods are also addressed in this Stage.

Stage 3 consists of four chapters and is directed at the implementation of evaluations. The reader is introduced to “the procedures necessary to execute an evaluative research study” (p. 167). The aspects of validity, reliability, and internal consistency are defined along with guidelines to conducting a pilot study. The authors examine methods of data collection associated with both qualitative and quantitative research. The reader will become familiarized with the process of collecting information that is pertinent to their area of study.

Writing and presenting the reports and taking the results and applying them to policy and practice are addressed in Stage 4. The focus of these chapters of the book is the link between the research, agency accountability and management decisions. The reader is guided through various strategies designed to assist the researcher in writing the final report. In addition, the most effective methods of disseminating evaluation information to target audiences is discussed.

Part III of the book includes 5 chapters that focus on examples of “real-life applications of how evaluation is used by recreation, park, tourism, and sport organizations” (p.285). Examples include program evaluation, needs assessments, evaluation of personnel, evaluation of space, facilities, equipment, and an evaluation of a marketing plan for an organization.

Conclusion

In order to maintain justifiable services in the profession of recreation and leisure, efficacy research must take place. Research in the form of evaluation is a constant in the mind of program success and viability. More practitioner-based research needs to be conducted in our profession and both of these books are useful introductions and guides to successful future research. Both texts are designed to enlighten the reader to the notion of research from a basic to more complex understanding. Both texts introduce the reader to the basic elements of assessment, design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination. From the perspective of design and implementation of survey based questionnaires, both books focus on qualitative research methods. For ease of interpretation and application to a greater level of understanding, both books have taken examples of real research in the profession of recreation and leisure and used those examples to further the comprehension of the reader.

From the perspective of a student-oriented textbook, I found Riddick and Russell's book more applicable to the undergraduate student. With their use of relevant text, main points and study questions (along with the provision of an instructor's guide) teaching this most challenging undergraduate topic is made easier. I also found their chapters discussing both the interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data analysis more thorough.