

Focus on Leisure

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Introduction

The constant challenge of actively involving students in the world outside the confines of the university classroom must be met with creativity and enthusiasm. This is particularly important for introductory courses in leisure services. Informal surveys of students reveal a wide range of motivations for taking a 100 level recreation/leisure course. Some are committed to the academic major, others are remotely interested due to their own positive experiences with park and recreational services, while others are under the impression that the course would be easy; “my coach told me to take it”. While the motivations may vary and past experience can be quite limited, it is paramount that the students understand the pervasive role that leisure assumes in our society.

The Focus on Leisure activity outlined in this paper attempts to have the students explore the role of leisure in their lives and in the lives of community members. Using the arts, and photography in particular, has proven to be an effective and interactive learning tool in school settings and in service learning projects. Major producers of photographic equipment and supplies such as Kodak and Polaroid provide web-based support for photography related learning strategies.

Description of the Activity

Students in an introduction to leisure and recreational service course are first asked to keep a one-week log of all of their daily activities, identifying both required and voluntary activities, recorded on an hourly basis. These charts are then used to assist the student in differentiating between leisure and non-leisure behavior. This exercise provides, for many students, their first experience of self-reflection and analysis of their weekly behavior. It also introduces time management, a new concept for many students.

Having developed an initial experiential basis for an understanding of personal leisure, the students are then challenged to look beyond their experience and beyond the university to the lives of those living in the local city. This is accomplished by requiring the students to take photographs of residents involved in leisure activities.

Working in pairs, the students must plan their approach to recording community involvement in leisure activities. The students must include photos of youth, young adult, family and older adult activities. The study must also include both indoor and outdoor, group and individual, and special population activities.

The students are provided with guidelines concerning the taking of photographs of strangers, with a review of pertinent laws and the need for etiquette. The students are

asked to develop a checklist of necessary steps related to the project to keep them on task. The students are encouraged to learn more about their subjects: why they are participating in a particular activity, and what they perceive to be the benefits of their participation. The student teams are required to develop a class presentation, using PowerPoint, in order to describe their subjects, the activities depicted, and their experience during the project.

Material and Costs

Disposable cameras are provided free of charge by a local photographic supply store. The students must pay for the development of the photos at the same store. The students must also invest time, provide for their own transportation in order to take the pictures, and commit to the project. The University provides scanning equipment and storage disks for the students.

Intended Outcomes

The following outcomes are discussed with the students prior to beginning the project:

1. *Cognitive:* The students identify and catalogue their understanding of the diversity of leisure behavior in their community. The students synthesize their personal observations and experiences, with their photos in order to effectively present their findings to the class.
2. *Teamwork and Planning:* The students must coordinate the project by developing a plan to identify sites and the participants to be photographed. If photos are to be taken on private property, permission must be obtained prior to the photo shoot. Individual release forms must be made available if subjects are identifiable in the photos.
3. *Diversity Awareness/ Social Skills:* The students will be away from the university environment and will need to take an active role in meeting and relating to individuals of varying age, gender, race, ability and economic backgrounds. The students must use appropriate social skills in presenting a positive image of the university and in their efforts to successfully interact with the subjects.
4. *Technical Skills:* The students will develop some proficiency in photography and will interface with digital technology through the scanning and presentation of their photos.
5. *Management:* The students will understand the relationship between the sponsorship support provided by the company supplying the cameras and the benefits inherent in this type of mutually beneficial relationship. Building relationships is an important element in the success of a leisure service organization. The project presents several opportunities to experience this with classmates, sponsors, social agencies and the subjects of their study.

Observations

The project challenges the students to reach beyond their campus environment to encounter community life. Students who are considering a career in recreational services will benefit from early experiences that place them in contact with the public. The photos presented by each team provide for additional discussion regarding their interests in careers in leisure and recreational services.

Student response to the project ranges from presentations of photos of sports activities to creative interpretations of very diverse aspects of leisure behavior. The majority of students express positive feelings about the project due to the opportunity for personal input, the independent scheduling of the activity, and the chance to be creative.

Suggestions

1. Understanding that many students have very busy schedules, allow several weeks for the completion of the project. Weekend activities provide unique opportunities for leisure exploration.
2. Students should be encouraged to provide updates on their projects during class time. Sharing ideas and experiences may help the less creative students in planning and completing their projects.
3. Developing a detailed checklist of the tasks identified as critical to the completion of the project is strongly recommended. Emphasize the usefulness of this procedure in organizing and implementing recreational programs and activities. Create a photographic database that can be used each year to introduce or reinforce the student's understanding of the role of leisure in community life.
4. Involve the local media – this project is a unique interaction between students and the host community. Positive experiences between students and residents are always noteworthy. Reporters welcome this type of information. Students will become more aware of the vital relationship between recreational service providers and the Press.
5. Keep the project fun, encourage creativity, and reward all efforts!