

Knowing Something About Leisure: Building a Bridge Between Leisure Philosophy and Recreation Practice

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Abstract

Professionals with and without degrees in recreation and leisure studies (RLS) all define leisure similarly as free time, activities, choice, fun/enjoyment, and passive/relaxation (Estes, 2000, 2001, 2002; Parr & Lashua, in press). These limited views of leisure are problematic for the recreation profession because they indicate that those formally trained in RLS programs do not have an in-depth understanding of leisure, which arguably should serve as the philosophical foundation upon which recreation practice is based. I argue that this in-depth, philosophical understanding of leisure is necessary for us, as RLS professionals, in order to articulate what we do, explain why it is important, and promote the legitimacy of our profession. The purposes of this study were to (a) design an upper-division RLS course that would facilitate students' development of a philosophical understanding of leisure and critical thinking about applying leisure philosophy to practice, and (b) evaluate student outcomes to discover what students learned about leisure and how they applied their learning to their recreation practice. Findings indicated that RLS students primarily defined leisure as free time, choice, and activity, both pre- and post-course. Following the course, students' definitions were slightly more varied and included more descriptors associated with freedom, creative thought, personal enhancement, and experience. Students perceived that their learning impacted their recreation practice in a variety of ways including: advocating for the profession, educating others about leisure, and enhancing participants' understanding of how leisure influences quality of life.

Keywords: leisure, philosophy, curriculum, recreation education, professional

Biographical Information

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Introduction

Preliminary studies have examined what leisure means to recreation and leisure studies students, recreation practitioners, and other non-recreation professionals and found that these groups all perceived leisure similarly (Estes, 2001, 2002; Parr & Lashua, in press). Leisure was defined primarily as free time, activities, choice, fun/enjoyment, and passive/relaxation (Estes, 2000, 2001, 2002; Parr & Lashua, in press). Collectively, these views appear to be indicative of how leisure is viewed in modern society. However, these limited views of leisure are problematic for the recreation profession because they indicate that those formally trained in RLS programs do not have an in-depth understanding of leisure, which arguably should serve as the philosophical foundation upon which recreation practice is based. This in-depth, philosophical understanding of leisure is necessary for RLS professionals in order to articulate what we do, explain why it is important, and promote the legitimacy of our profession. This assertion further implies that recreation professionals who have this in-depth philosophical understanding of leisure will provide higher quality services than those who lack it. The discussion that follows outlines the logic behind these arguments.

Background

Advocates for the continued unification of recreation education and leisure studies have contended that individuals with bachelor's degrees in RLS can provide higher quality leadership to recreation agencies than individuals with degrees in other professions, such as business (Godbey, 1985). Just what is it that is unique about RLS graduates that enables them to provide this higher quality leadership? Recreation educators have argued that it is the RLS graduates' understanding of leisure which serves as the philosophical foundation upon which all professional recreation practice—therapeutic, community, commercial, resource management, and others—is based (Burton 1991; Howe, 1986; Goodale, 1992, 1995; Parr, 2000; Riggins, Sylvester & Moore, 1985; Sapora, 1986). Parr (2000) posed a related question: What unique qualities does an RLS graduate possess?" One answer was "That's easy, we know something about leisure!" (Parr, 1995, p. 1). Thus, an understanding of leisure can arguably provide the basis for making choices about service delivery in the recreation profession. Just what this understanding is, and how it could inform practice, is poorly understood. It is problematic that research to date has indicated that RLS practitioners, with RLS degrees, had views of leisure that were no different than recreation practitioners with degrees in other fields, or from non-recreation professionals (Parr & Lashua, in press). This calls into question whether those trained in RLS programs have a different (i.e. in-depth) understanding of leisure that serves as a foundation for recreation practice. The problem lies not with understanding the link between leisure and recreation, but with RLS education programs that have not adequately prepared students in this area. Questions about whether the study of leisure belongs in the same profession with recreation have been raised before (Burdge, 1985; Smith, 1985).

Eighteen years ago, Burdge (1985) argued for the separation of recreation education and leisure studies programs. In the ensuing years, some recreation, parks, and leisure educators have continued efforts to bridge the gap between practically-oriented recreation and park education programs and theoretically-oriented leisure studies. However, evidence supporting that this gap has narrowed is virtually non-existent. If RLS educators want to continue to purport that students' understanding of leisure provides an important foundation for recreation practice, we need to conscientiously design effective curricula, measure outcomes to document students' understanding of leisure, and identify how this understanding provides a foundation for recreation practice. This connection, or bridge, between leisure philosophy and recreation practice is important not only to determine sound educational practices in RLS, but also in order to address broader issues about the legitimacy of the recreation profession.

The purposes of this study were to (a) design an upper-division RLS course that would facilitate students' development of a philosophical understanding of leisure and critical thinking about applying leisure philosophy to practice, and (b) evaluate student outcomes in order to discover what students had learned about leisure and how they applied their learning to their recreation practice, at the beginning of the course, at the end of the course, and during students' internships.

If RLS educators want to contend that practitioners with RLS degrees can deliver leisure services in more effective ways than recreation practitioners without RLS degrees, then we must develop a much better understanding of what constitutes knowledge of leisure, how it is taught, and how it informs recreation practice. This descriptive study is a first step towards implementing Parr's (2000) suggestion that we "demonstrate that the leisure knowledge required to provide leisure services effectively and efficiently can only be gained through formal, advanced education" (p. 103). As Parr (2000) acknowledges, accomplishing the above recommendation will first require a much better understanding of how knowledge of leisure does in fact connect with practice. Parr's recommendation is only plausible if we first accept the premise that knowledge of leisure separates RLS professionals in some way from non-RLS professionals. It should further be noted that the above claim does not contend that knowledge of leisure is a privileged domain, limited only to those studying in RLS programs. However, while knowledge of leisure is not privileged, in that anyone can reflect critically on philosophy of leisure, it becomes the purview of RLS graduates because people generally do not reflect on philosophy of leisure. Further, RLS students will not reflect critically on philosophy of leisure either unless they are compelled to do so as part of the required RLS course of study. RLS majors are reluctant and apathetic students of leisure philosophy until they have been impelled into studying it from critical and applied perspectives.

Philosophical and Current Issues in Leisure Class Design

The class design was based on the premise that teaching students about concepts of leisure in the humanistic tradition, in combination with a critical examination of spe-

cific implications for professional practice, would help students develop a rich and useful philosophy of leisure (see Estes, 2000, 2001, 2002). One thing that set this course apart from other similar courses was the purposeful application of the theoretical foundations of philosophy. By increasing upper-division RLS students' knowledge of philosophy, history, and political implications of leisure, students could develop their philosophical position. Further, through guided instructional experiences, students could be taught to apply their leisure philosophy to professional recreation practice.

Students typically began *Philosophical and Current Issues in Leisure* with very limited understandings of philosophy. Therefore, it was necessary to teach about philosophy in order to provide students with the necessary tools for understanding, comparing, and valuing differing leisure perspectives. The course started with a discussion about the differences between philosophical and ordinary thinkers. In order to engage the students' interest in using philosophical thinking, narrative examples were used to demonstrate times in history when people failed to think and resulted in great tragedy. Applications of philosophical thinking to the problems of everyday life were also discussed. These students, educated in the Western tradition, are often very reluctant philosophers and considerable effort was needed to engage them in genuine philosophical discourse. Lectures, therefore, also included basic philosophical terminology and emphasized its use throughout the semester.

Students learned that there are three basic questions asked by philosophers: (a) "What is real?" (metaphysics), (b) "How do we know what we know?" (epistemology), and (c) "What is of value?" (axiology). Of particular interest to the study of leisure, is the ontological question, "What is the nature of being?," and axiological questions, "What do we value?," and "What is the nature of the good life?" These questions were subsequently applied to the study of differing philosophical views of leisure including, for example, the views of, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Sartre. Students learned how each philosopher's view of the nature of being led to understanding his way of knowing, what he considered of value, and what his view of the good life would be. Further, the implications of each philosopher's ideas were directly applied to understanding of leisure, and the value that would be placed upon leisure within that philosophical system. The text chosen for this class, *Concepts of Leisure in Western Thought* (Dare, Welton, & Coe, 1998), was uniquely situated to facilitate these discussions because it presented the evolution of leisure from historical, political, and philosophical perspectives.

Through the study of the *Concepts of Leisure* text, students explored the historical/political contexts, philosophical foundations, and implications of changing views of leisure over a 2000-year time span. Topics, covered in historical order, included: classical leisure, neo-classical leisure, modern leisure, and an attempted synthesis where work and leisure were integrated and humans were viewed as contemplative, economic beings (Dare, et al., 1998). The two fundamental questions, "What is the good life?," and "What does it have to do with leisure?," were addressed during each of the key time periods.

Students were required to develop their own, supported, philosophical positions about leisure and how they believed leisure contributed to living a good life. The teaching methods used to facilitate the students' understanding of this complex material included study guides, semi-structured class discussions, oral quizzes, unit quizzes, and small group presentations. One of the keys to success in teaching this difficult material was regularly engaging students in playful discussions. The resulting classroom atmosphere was one that valued questioning, risk taking, critical thinking, and the struggle to grapple with difficult ideas. The use of philosophical terminology, critical thinking, synthesis, and application of concepts to recreation practice, was stressed throughout the course.

A professional philosophy paper served as the capstone assignment. In this paper, students were required to describe their professional philosophy of leisure using a structured format designed to assist them in articulating their positions. First, students were asked to define, and provide examples of, leisure, recreation, and play, including a discussion of the interrelationships between these three constructs. Second, the students described several key aspects of the good life and explained what their vision of good life had to do with leisure. Third, the students described their intended area of practice, and identified specific ways that their philosophy could impact their delivery of leisure services. The following paragraph describes, in more detail, how the writing of this paper facilitated students' development of their professional leisure philosophies.

In order to emphasize the importance of this challenging assignment, it was explained that the process of coming to know one's philosophy of leisure was an act of reflection on information, ideas, and experiences that could help RLS practitioners decide what is real, good, and useful. Understanding how leisure is more than free time, and how it can be viewed as a way of being, contributed to the students' evolving leisure philosophies, and their views that subsequently served as guidelines for evaluating the world and determining standards for behavior. Of particular importance, was each student's ability to articulate his or her philosophical position, so that the student's practice could be congruent with what he or she described as real, useful, and good.

The students' professional philosophy papers provided professional standards, as developed and articulated by the students, by which they could subsequently judge their behaviors and select programs and methods for use in recreation practice. In so doing, these future recreation and leisure studies professionals were able to describe how and why the services they offered were essential to the quality of their participants' lives.

Another goal of the class was to examine current social issues and discuss how philosophical thinking about leisure could assist recreation professionals in formulating potential solutions. Current issue topics included "How Americans Spend Their Time," "Instrumental versus Expressive Leisure," "Leisure and Socialization," "Today's Childhood," and "Recreation and Economics." Units on current issues were scheduled throughout the semester. Themes and ideas from these current issues were interwoven during discussions of the philosophical, historical, and cultural meanings of leisure. Teaching

methods utilized included outside readings, news articles, National Public Radio shows, debates, and reflection papers. Students were encouraged to become critical consumers of society's messages about leisure and to create ideas for leisure education that could potentially improve the quality of participants' lives.

In summary, this course emphasized reading, critical thinking, discussion, debate, synthesis, and application to practice, through the writing of a professional philosophy paper. Throughout the course students developed more in-depth understandings of leisure and articulated applications of their professional leisure philosophy to recreation practice. At the end of the course, students could thoughtfully answer questions such as: "What is leisure, recreation and play?," "How do leisure, recreation and play relate to each other?," "What is the good life?," "What does it have to do with leisure?," and "How will my philosophy of leisure impact my recreation practice?" The RLS students who took this course have learned to ask these and other important questions as they continued to evolve in their thinking about applications of leisure philosophy in their recreation practice.

The second purpose of this study was to evaluate student outcomes to discover what students learned about leisure and how they applied their learning to their recreation practice.

Methods

A survey was designed to determine how this course impacted students' definitions of leisure and their perceptions of how learning about leisure philosophy would impact their recreation practice. The surveys were administered in six classes of students over three semesters, at the beginning of each class, at the end of each class, and during one semester of internship. A pre-test, post-test, design was chosen for this descriptive case study. This design has a number of potential threats to internal validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), and several of these are particularly relevant to the present study, including: (a) history (e.g. did something that happened during the same time students were taking this class, such as another class, cause the change); (b) maturation (e.g. did the students' natural development over time cause the change); and (c) testing (e.g. did the students' awareness of the socially, or instructor/researcher, approved responses cause the change). While there have been a number of theoretically-based discussions to-date that stated that an understanding of leisure provides a foundation for recreation practice, no studies have described how an understanding of leisure impacts recreation practice. Thus, the present study was intended to evaluate only the outcomes of this particular course, as taught by this instructor, at this university, and in consideration of the threats to internal validity.

Three steps were taken to mitigate the potential threats to validity. First, the time frame for data collection spanned four semesters, which may have reduced the effect of history to some degree. Second, students did not put their names on the surveys, were

told that their responses would in no way affected their grades, and were told that the instructor/researcher really wanted their truthful answers to all questions in order to encourage honesty over social acceptability. Third, in addition to answering questions "Yes," "Somewhat," "Not sure," and "No," detailed explanations were requested in order to increase the students' thoughtfulness in cases where they might be aware that the instructor approved of positive responses.

The study sample included six classes of upper-division students enrolled in the instructor/researcher's *Philosophical and Current Issues in Leisure* class in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RCLS), at a major University, over three semesters. Students from two of the six classes were surveyed in a fourth semester, and during their internships, to assess how the class content was being utilized. This course was a part of the required core course of study in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, therefore both Recreation Management and Recreational Therapy students were included in the study sample.

Pre- and Post-Class Surveys

The methods for the pre- and post-class surveys were identical. The first survey question, "In your own words, what is leisure to you?," determined whether or not students had developed new views of leisure by the end of the course. First, students' open-ended responses were compiled into terms and phrases by three raters. These terms and phrases were entered into Anthropac®, a software program that assists in defining cultural domains (Borgatti, 1996), and the FreeList function was used to "clean" the data by grouping words with similar phrasings. Sixteen final descriptors were identified. The definitions given by students on each survey were coded, and each term or phrase was counted once. For example, if a respondent said leisure was "free time" and "time left over after work and other obligations" this was counted once as "free time." All surveys were reviewed a second time by the researcher to ensure consistency in coding. Respondents' definitions contained between one and six different descriptors.

Question 2 on the survey asked "Do you think an understanding of leisure philosophy is important to your professional practice in recreation and leisure?," and respondents were further asked to explain the reason(s) for their answers. The three raters grouped students' open-ended responses into four categories: "Yes," "Somewhat," "Not sure," and "No." The first four classes' open-ended responses were compiled into representative statements by the three raters. The survey was then modified for ease of analysis before classes 5 and 6 were surveyed, and these students were asked to check one or more statements from this list. An "other" category was added to encourage students to express views other than those on the list.

SPSS® was used to determine differences in pre- and post-class responses for questions 1 and 2. Frequencies and the differences between responses were examined using chi-square analysis ($\leq .05$). Fisher's exact test was used for cells with a frequency of 5 or less.

Finally, the surveys for classes 5 and 6 also included additional questions about the class. A third question was added that asked, "Do you believe this class will enhance your understanding of leisure philosophy in a way that will impact your practice?" Students checked a box for "Yes," "Somewhat," "Not sure," and "No," and they were asked to provide open-ended explanations for their answers. A fourth question asked students to "List other ways you believe a person could develop a professional philosophy of leisure, besides taking a class." Respondents provided only open-ended answers to this question. The researcher grouped answers into representative categories. No statistical comparisons were made for questions 3 and 4 due to the relatively small sample size in these two classes.

Follow-up Survey

Eight students in classes 5 and 6 agreed to complete a follow-up survey during their internship. An on-line survey was developed so that students could respond easily from remote locations. Questions 1, 2 and 3 were identical to the pre- and post-class surveys. Additionally, respondents were asked to describe specific instances of how they had applied information learned in the class during their internships. Respondents also provided "advice for current RLS students" and provided the instructor with "advice for teaching RLS students about leisure philosophy." The researcher carefully reviewed interns' open-ended responses and selected those that were most explanatory.

Results

Results from question 1, "In your own words, what is leisure to you?" are illustrated in rank-order in Table 1. Three terms that appeared in the top five both pre- and post-course included: activity, choice, and free time (listed in alphabetical order). Respondents to the pre-course survey used 11 different terms to describe leisure, and the post-class respondents used 14 different terms.

Comparisons of frequencies for each leisure descriptor were made to determine if there were significant differences between the pre- and post-class definitions. Table 2 illustrates which descriptors increased at the end of the class, and Table 3 illustrates which descriptors decreased at the end of class. Three hundred and sixty-nine descriptors were used to define leisure pre-class, for an average of 2.73 descriptors per student, and 388 descriptors were used post-class, for an average of 2.90 descriptors per student.

Frequencies of students' responses to the second question, "Do you think an understanding of leisure philosophy is important to your professional practice in recreation and leisure?" were examined. Respondents indicated: "No (pre=3, post=7)"; "Not Sure (pre=8, post=3)"; "Somewhat (pre=7, post=13)"; and "Yes (pre=115, post=110)." There were no significant differences pre- and post-class. Due to the small number of respondents to the follow-up survey (n=8), no comparisons were made for this group and their responses are not included in Tables 1, 2 or 3.

TABLE 1

Rank-order of descriptors used to define leisure at the beginning and the end of the class

Pre-Class Ranking		Post-Class Ranking	
1	Free Time	1	Choice
2	Activity	2	Activity
3	Enjoyable	3	Free Time
4	Choice	4	Experience
5	Relaxing	5/6	Enjoyable
6	State of Mind	5/6	Intrinsically Satisfying
7	Has Benefit	7	State of Mind
8	Intrinsically Satisfying	8	Contemplation
9	Experience	9	Has Benefit
10/11	Contemplation	10	Self-Actualization
10/11	Self-Actualization	11	Relaxing
		12	Recreation
		13/14	Escape
		13/14	Flow

Note. Rank order was determined by which the frequency of use of each descriptor. Only descriptors receiving more than 5 responses are included. Pre-class n=135; post-class n=134.

TABLE 2

Descriptors used to define leisure that increased in use at the end of the class.

Term	Pre	Post	P value
Choice	54	77	.000
Contemplation	5	21	.001 ^a
Experience	7	33	.000
Intrinsically Satisfying	8	29	.000
Self-Actualization	5	16	.013 ^a
State of Mind	14	16	.037

Note. All descriptors listed increased significantly post-class at the .05 level.

^aFisher's exact test due to less than 5 in one cell

TABLE 3

Descriptors used to define leisure that decreased in use at the end of the class.

Term	Pre	Post	P value
Activity	77	54	.006
Enjoyable	66	29	.000
Free Time	88	51	.000
Relaxing	35	2	.001

Note. All descriptors listed decreased significantly post-class at the .05 level.

Respondents' explanations for the second question (see preceding paragraph) were examined. Reasons given for "No" included: "Business ethics are more important (pre=0, post=1)"; "Leisure is relative to personal definition (pre=1, post=1)"; "No one will care what your leisure philosophy is in practice (pre=0, post=3)"; "Not as important as specific techniques (pre=1, post=2)"; "Philosophy is a personal opinion and should not be imposed on others (pre=0, post=3)"; and "Other (pre=0, post=3)." Reasons given for "yes" included: "Advocacy for the profession (pre=37, post=42)"; "Educate others about leisure (pre=47, post=56)"; "Guidance for profession and making choices in practice (pre=50, post=52)"; "Understand clients and help them reach their leisure potential (pre=61, post=55)"; "Understand leisure (including philosophy) (pre=55, post=66)"; "Understand the good life (pre=22, post=48)"; "Understanding different points of view informs us (pre=48, post=43)"; "Understanding the past informs us (pre=21, post=29)"; and "Other (pre=8, post=15)." The only reason that changed significantly at the .05 level post-class was "Understand the good life," which increased.

Students in classes 5 and 6 responded to question 3, "Do you believe this class will enhance your understanding of leisure philosophy in a way that will impact your practice?" (pre n=55; post n=53). Respondents stated: "No (pre=0, post=0)," "Not sure (pre=5, post=2)," "Somewhat (pre=13, post=7)," and "Yes (pre=37, post=46)." There were no significant differences between pre- and post-class responses. Students' open-ended explanations about how they expected course material to be useful in practice were grouped into four categories by the researcher including: (a) applications to practice, (b) enhances critical thinking, (c) provides a foundation, and (d) understanding leisure, philosophy and why leisure and philosophy are important. Table 4 contains those student comments that were judged by the researcher to be most explanatory for each category.

Students in classes 5 and 6 also provided open-ended answers to question 4, "List other ways you believe a person could develop a professional philosophy of leisure besides taking a class." These were reviewed by the researcher and grouped into four categories: (a) work experience, hands-on experience, or field experience (n=15); (b) reading and listening to others' views (n=6); (c) speaking to other professionals or having guest speakers (n=5); and (d) writing a paper (n=4).

TABLE 4

Descriptive statements from RCLS students in classes 5 and 6 about ways they thought information learned in RCLS 4004 would impact their professional practice.

Category	Student Response Examples
Applications to practice.	<p>This class forced me to create my own philosophy of leisure. It made me really look at the definitions and determine how, as a professional, I will put these definitions into practice.</p> <p>The class made me more open minded to other’s opinions. The class also made it possible for me to educate others about recreation, leisure, play, and the good life.</p>
Enhances critical thinking.	<p>The class allowed me to think more critically from a personal viewpoint about what I thought leisure was and how my style of delivery should display my perceptions.</p> <p>Now that I know what my philosophy is I can put it into practice. Before I did not know what I thought. I only knew what others said was true.</p> <p>I think that leisure philosophy has improved my values and the way I think about things. I think it makes me a better professional in the field of recreation.</p>
Provides a foundation.	<p>Now I know where it [leisure] began. I believe that in order to be successful, you need to know the foundation of your chosen career.</p> <p>Now I understand what the purpose of this profession is.</p> <p>I think that it has helped me understand my own approach to RT. It also gives me more knowledge to educate my clients, advocate for the profession and enhance my own idea of what the good life is.</p>
Understanding leisure, philosophy, and why these are important	<p>This class opened my mind to different views of leisure and helped me to develop my own understanding of leisure.</p> <p>Before this class I was unsure about how to actually describe leisure. Now I feel that I can easily do that. It has also made me realize how it will apply to my profession.</p> <p>I now have an understanding of where leisure came from, but I also know why it is important to have leisure philosophy.</p>

Note. Statements included in this table were those judged to be the most explanatory by the researcher. They were edited with care to maintain integrity of meaning.

Respondents to the follow-up survey (n=8) provided rich descriptions of specific instances in which the interns had used ideas learned in the class. Table 5 contains the intern's comments that were judged by the researcher to be most explanatory for each category.

In the follow-up survey, several interns provided advice to current students with regards to the usefulness of this course. One intern stated, "Take it seriously because you WILL be put in situations where you must: 1) make ethical decisions, 2) have to advocate for the profession, [and] 3) have to explain to other professionals the need/basis for your profession." Another intern advised, "It is important, so write that ten page paper, and develop your own philosophy and understanding of recreation and leisure. You will need to understand it in your internship and in the real world." A third intern stated, "Make sure that you learn as much as possible because it will be helpful once you get into the 'real world'."

Interns responding to the follow-up survey also provided advice for the instructor of this course. One stated, "Do more practical situations to help the students relate to what is being taught, and include ethics as a part of the class." Another advised, "Spend more time on the recent philosophers rather than so much time on the ancient philosophers. Not that they are not important, but I learned more from the more recent philosophers because I was able to relate to their issues because they were similar to everyday issues." A third stated, "Continue organizing the class the same way. It helped those who are not naturally interested in philosophy understand and appreciate it." And the fourth and fifth interns added, "Keep teaching it because it comes in handy when educating patients on the benefits of leisure," and "Keep teaching this because it is important in our profession."

Discussion

Students' pre-class responses to the meaning of leisure (based on the top 5 descriptors used) are remarkably similar to those stated by Estes (2000) and Parr (2001): leisure is primarily free time, activities, enjoyable, choice and relaxation. Post-class responses are a little different and somewhat more diverse; leisure was seen as choice, activities, free time, experience, and enjoyable/intrinsically satisfying. Interestingly, while activities, free time, and enjoyable remained among the top five descriptors they were used significantly less often at the end of the class. Also, experience and intrinsic satisfaction replaced relaxing and state of mind in the top six descriptors used to define leisure.

Students' definitions of leisure post-class were slightly more diverse and complex with three new descriptors added. Further, the use of several descriptors increased significantly including: choice, contemplation, experience, intrinsically satisfying, self-actualization, and state of mind (see Table 2). Students' definitions of leisure averaged 2.73 descriptors pre-class, and 2.90 descriptors post-class. Taken together, these findings indicate that by the end the course, students had more complex understandings of leisure. The increased use of specific descriptors post-class may be indicative of shifting atti-

tudes, such as (a) “choice” may indicate students were linking leisure to freedom; (b) “contemplation” may indicate students were thinking of leisure as creative thought; (c) “state of mind,” “self-actualization,” and “intrinsic satisfaction” may indicate students had an increased understanding of leisure as a personally enhancing experience; and (d) “experience” may indicate that fewer students see leisure as a specific activity (activity is often associated with definitions of recreation).

The majority of students who took this class perceived that leisure philosophy would influence their practice pre- and post course and during their internships. Students’ descriptions of how their leisure philosophy would influence their practice indicated that students felt they could use information learned in this class in order to (a) advocate for the profession, (b) educate others about leisure, (c) provide guidance for their profession and make choices in practice, (d) understand clients and help them reach their leisure potential, (e) understand leisure (including philosophy of leisure), (f) understand the good life (i.e. live a more satisfying life), (g) understand how different points of view informed them, (h) understand how the past informed them, and (i) provide a code of ethics (or values) to follow in recreation practice. “Understand the good life” was the only reason given that increased significantly post-class. This was not surprising because this topic was the focus in both class discussions and writing assignments.

Overall, students perceived that the class enhanced their understanding of leisure philosophy in ways that would impact their practice. Post-class, students expected that what they learned in the class would have applications to practice by: enhancing their critical thinking skills; providing a foundation of ideas on which to base choices in practice; providing an understanding of leisure, philosophy, and why an understanding of leisure philosophy was important; and, in advocating for the profession. Interns responding to the follow-up survey were able to provide rich, descriptive details about how their learning enhanced their recreation practice during their internships (see Table 5).

While students generally advocated for this course, and appeared to believe that the course design was a good one, they also had some ideas for improving the course. These included incorporating hands-on experience, more reading and listening to other points of view, and having guest speakers. The “Professional Philosophy Paper” was mentioned numerous times in the surveys as a very helpful and important assignment that facilitated students’ abilities to synthesize and apply class content.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This descriptive study provides a foundation for understanding how knowledge about leisure gained through formal education can impact recreation practice. For the students who took this course, with this instructor, at this university, outcomes indicated that an understanding of leisure was taught through the *Philosophical and Current Issues* in Leisure course. Students indicated the course impacted their recreation practice in a number of ways.

In terms of students' definitions of leisure, outcomes revealed some post-class changes. While leisure was consistently defined as free time, choice, and activity both pre- and post-class, students' definitions of leisure did get more complex. The post-class definitions included more references to descriptors associated with freedom, creative thought, personal enhancement, and experience.

Overall, this course achieved the goal of facilitating students' critical thinking about how their leisure philosophy could be applied in recreation practice. Findings indicated that students were able to articulate both what they learned in the course, and describe how what they learned affected their practice. Following the course, students described impacts such as advocacy for the profession, educating others about leisure, providing guidance for making choices in practice, understanding clients and helping them reach their leisure potential, understanding philosophy of leisure, understanding the good life, understanding how different points of view and the past informed them, and understanding a code of ethics to follow in practice.

Recommendations for future research to examine how RLS educators can build bridges between leisure philosophy and recreation practice include: (a) involve other instructors from other universities willing to use this course design to see if similar student outcomes can be obtained with different instructors and students; (b) vary the course design and continue to assess student outcomes to see if there are any causal relationships between particular course content, assignments, and outcomes using quasi-experimental research designs; (c) exploration of how RLS practitioners utilize philosophical thinking in practice in order to better understand what RLS educators need to be teaching; (d) exploration of the claim that RLS practitioners who have an in-depth philosophical understanding of leisure provide higher quality services than those who do not; and (e) apply the collective outcomes of this research to improve the NRPA/AALR Accreditation standards, which at present, do not include the philosophical understanding of leisure.

In conclusion, I have found the exploration of these questions is not clear-cut. My experiences as a recreation practitioner, student, instructor, and philosopher lead me to believe that this issue is central to the continued health and well being of our profession and the participants we serve. One of the criticisms leveled at our profession is that we are unable to articulate the uniqueness of what we do or explain why it is so important. If we cannot clearly articulate what we are about, and explain why what we do is essential to quality of life, then we limit our profession's ability to establish legitimacy. Developing a philosophical understanding of leisure is not just a pointless semantic exercise; it is a way of facilitating understanding, critical thinking, and the development of a professional, philosophical foundation that we can rely on for making quality choices in practice. Philosophical understanding of leisure contributes significantly to an understanding of how to help people live good lives, and this is of critical importance to our profession. Leisure philosophy must be taught as part of the required RLS course of study. In times, when the focus of Western civilization is increasingly on doing more with less, an

understanding of leisure is more important now than ever. If those educated in RLS programs do not provide this unique philosophical understanding of leisure, then what do we provide?

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