

Comment on Dustin and Schwab Article “Consider the Kirtland’s Warbler”

Cary McDonald
Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism
104 Huff Hall
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820
Phone: 217-244-5817
carym@uiuc.edu

The article by Dustin and Schwab (this issue), “Consider the Kirtland’s Warbler,” raised several concerns about the relationship between park and recreation management and sport management. Specifically, I would like to address the concern raised by the authors about the “fit” of a sport management program within a park and recreation program.

The student demand for sport management programs has increased at an alarming rate over the last ten years. Much of this demand can be attributed to the high profile of sport in today’s society and the glamour of professional opportunities in the sport management field. New sport management programs have emerged in response to the student demand while some existing sport management programs have struggled in their search for an academic home. Traditionally, sport management programs have been located in business and physical education/kinesiology programs. Sport management programs located in business programs seem to be quite comfortable with the focus on the business aspects of sport. Sport management programs once comfortable in physical education/kinesiology programs have explored other academic homes, including park and recreation programs as well as business programs, as these more traditional programs have moved in the direction of exercise physiology, motor development, and biomechanics.

We have yet to identify a niche that represents the field of park and recreation. If we have, there is no general consensus. Over the years, we have gone from recreation with a focus on programming to integrating a natural resource component, a therapeutic recreation component, a tourism component, an environmental education component, and more recently sport. Furthermore, we are very interdisciplinary in nature which also complicates attempts in defining a niche. I suggest that we are in an evolving field as we attempt to find our niche—most of what people do in their leisure time moves beyond the traditional park and rec-

recreation domain into areas that incorporate entertainment, the arts, etc. Park and recreation use is a small part of the total leisure domain.

I would like to make the argument that sport management programs may “fit” within some, but not all, park and recreation programs. “Fit” is an extremely elusive concept. When discussing “fit,” consideration should include such factors as the curriculum, the faculty, and the departmental culture. One of the most critical factors that should be considered is the overarching umbrella that allows for integration of various dimensions (e.g., parks, recreation, tourism, etc.) within a program. Sometimes, I think we try to put everything in a nice, neat box with labels (e.g., park and recreation, sport, tourism, etc.) which prohibits us from thinking outside the box and can diminish the overall value of our programs to society. What is our overarching umbrella that allows us to integrate dimensions of a total program? Is it park use and recreation programming? Is it leisure? I think these are the questions we need to be addressing. At the University of Illinois, we believe the overarching umbrella is leisure—what people do in their “leisure time” falls under our domain. Obviously, it is not feasible for one department to cover all the dimensions implied under a leisure umbrella. Some aspects of sport fall under the leisure umbrella, especially as we consider the amount of “leisure time” devoted to sport either as a spectator or a participant.

Even within traditional park and recreation programs, there is a vast amount of diversity. Factors such as the type of institution (e.g., R1 institution), academic home within an institution (e.g., college and departmental home), type of degrees offered (e.g., Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctorate), and curriculum all have an impact on “fit.” In fact, if one was to examine traditional park and recreation programs, there are differences based on these factors. Furthermore, when one examines the accreditation standards for park and recreation and those proposed for sport, there is considerable similarity. From the perspective of “academic fit,” both programs focus on a similar set of management skills. It is the context of the application that differs.

In summary, traditional park and recreation programs can be an academic home for sport management. However, not all aspects of sport will “fit” in every park and recreation program, nor are all park and recreation programs a suitable academic home for a sport program. I would encourage anyone contemplating integrating sport management into a park and recreation program to carefully consider the “fit” with the existing program. Although an important consideration, student demand should not be the sole determining factor in the decision to integrate sport management into a park and recreation program. Without careful consideration a sport program could significantly change in a negative context, as opposed to enhance, the culture of the existing program and fail to deliver the quality of the academic experience expected by “all” students in the program.