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# The Value of a Master's Degree to Recreation Professionals

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## Abstract

This study assessed the nature of the relationship between earning advanced degrees and career outcomes such as salary, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital among professionals in the parks and recreation field. The sample ( $n = 196$ ) was drawn from parks and recreation agencies located in the United States. Agencies, excluding educational institutions, were identified via an Internet search for parks and recreation agencies in urban areas. Findings indicated there was a positive relationship between earning a master's degree and salary. Earning a master's degree, however, was not significantly related to job satisfaction, social capital, or human capital. Furthermore, when comparing mean salaries across different types of master's degrees, respondents with a business degree or other type of non-recreation related master's degree earned significantly more than respondents with a recreation-related master's degree. Findings indicate a need to evaluate recreation-related master's programs in context of desired career outcomes.

*KEYWORDS: Value of a master's degree, salary, recreation professionals, job satisfaction*

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Among the general public, there is a consensus that graduate degrees enhance skills, increase employee competency and employees' perceived value to employers, and result in higher pay (Arkes, 1999; Buchanan, Kim, & Basham, 2007; Grubb, 1993). Though these studies suggest there is a financial benefit to earning an advanced degree, the research detailing the relationship between specific advanced degrees and career outcomes such as salary is limited.

Research is equally limited when assessing the relationship between earning and advanced degree and additional career outcomes such as job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital. In particular, the relationship between earning a master's degree of any type and parks and recreation career outcomes is unclear. While there are many reasons for pursuing an advanced degree, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between earning a master's degree (recreation and non-recreation) and salary, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital among professionals in the parks and recreation field.

### **Review of Literature**

To understand the relationship between advanced degrees and the career outcomes of salary and earnings, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital, each of these concepts must be understood individually. This section will review and synthesize the literature on each of these outcomes in context of earning an advanced degree.

#### **Salary and Earnings: An Outcome of Educational Attainment**

Workforce trends indicate education quite literally pays off. As education level increases, earnings increase (Day & Newburger, 2009; Graduate programs, 2009). The gap between earnings for workers with advanced degrees and those without continues to increase. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average employee with a master's degree will net an additional \$10,000 or more per year than an employee with a bachelor's degree (Day & Newburger, 2009). Professional degrees such as law or business (i.e., MBA) degrees and doctoral degrees earn even more (Graduate programs). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), median weekly earnings by degree in 2011 were as follows: bachelor's earned \$1,053, master's earned \$1,263, professionals earned \$1,665, and doctorates earned \$1,551. In context of the parks and recreation profession, the estimated average salary for an entry-level position in parks and recreation—without regard for education—falls between the high \$20,000s and high \$40,000s (Careers in recreation, 2003).

Life earnings also increase with advanced degrees (Day & Newburger, 2009). Workers with bachelor's degrees can expect to earn approximately \$2.1 million over their career, whereas workers with master's degrees can expect to garner life earnings estimated at \$2.5 million. Professional degrees render the greatest life earnings at \$4.4 million, while doctoral degree holders can expect approximately \$3.4 million in life earnings (Day & Newburger, 2009). Lifetime earning estimates suggest there is a clear difference in the monetary value of certain advanced degrees. For example, earning a business or engineering graduate degree typically "boosted income by more than enough to justify the cost" whereas master's degrees in the liberal arts or social sciences did not always produce an equivalent financial advantage (Weston, 2009, para. 7). Many recreation-based master's degrees fall under the umbrella of social sciences;

however, little research has investigated the potential career advantages for recreation professionals that may be associated with earning an advanced degree.

### **Job Satisfaction**

While salary is perhaps the most common indicator of career attainment, job satisfaction is a crucial career outcome and indicative of an individual's overall well-being (Argyle, 1973; *Beyond salary*, 2007; Judge & Watanabe, 1993). In general, job satisfaction is assessed by measuring the discrepancies between employee expectations (i.e., whether the job matches the employee's ideal) and work conditions (Moe, Pazzaglia, & Ronconi, 2010). Job satisfaction is expected to increase over time and as industry experience increases. Furthermore, job satisfaction can be affected by job performance, genetics, and overall working conditions (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989; *Beyond salary*, 2007; Judge, Thoreson, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Moe et al., 2010). Additional factors known to influence job satisfaction include the age of the worker, hours of work, employer or company size, and, of particular interest to this study, level of education (Vieira, 2005).

Salary has not been found to be a consistent predictor of job satisfaction, however, many students focus primarily on acquiring a high-profile or high-prestige job that boasts a high salary while ignoring other important aspects such as supporting work environment, coworkers, mentors, and interesting work assignments (*Beyond salary*, 2007). Not long after entering the workforce, however, these same students—now turned recent graduates—“quickly trade high-paying jobs with prestigious firms for positions that are more likely to bring them long-term satisfaction and success” (*Beyond salary*, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, salary—though it is heavily considered in job selection—may only represent a small part of career attainment and educational outcomes. Job satisfaction maybe an additional career outcome associated with earning an advanced degree.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is another career attainment indicator that may be influenced by educational achievement, specifically advanced degrees. Social capital is generally defined as the creation of personal contacts and career-based relationships and attachments (Cocchiara, Kwesiga, Bell, & Baruch, 2010) and more specifically as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 247). A central tenet of social capital theory is that “networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs” and provides socially recognizable credentials (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). These social resources are then embedded in the general benefits associated with social capital such as physical and emotional well-being, and academic and professional advantages (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008).

Education may facilitate greater access to these social resources, and the ensuing advantages. Overall, educational attainment is associated with increased social capital (Putnam, 1995). Research has established that increases in education are associated with increases in social tolerance, social trust, which are two indicators of overall social capital (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007). Furthermore, scholars have determined that

increased levels of education are “accompanied by higher general levels of political and social engagement”—both of which are additional indicators of social capital (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007, p. 14). Education therefore essentially drives social capital when assessed in terms of social trust and social engagement (Putnam, 1995). Finally, networking is a specific tool used to build social capital. Networking consists of “proactive attempts by individuals to develop and maintain personal and professional relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit in their work or career” (Janasz & Forret, 2005, p. 630). Networking research has expanded in recent years to include the use of social networking sites (SNS). College students are among some of the highest users of social networking sites, and research suggests students use them to generate social capital by maintaining relationships (Konetes & McKeague, 2011). Therefore, because education has such an impact on so many facets of social capital (i.e., social trust, social engagement, socially recognizable credentials, and networking), earning advanced degrees may be beneficial to overall social capital career outcomes.

### **Human Capital**

Closely related to social capital is human capital. Human capital is defined as managerial competencies and is often driven by the same socially recognizable credentials associated with social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Putnam, 1995). The two concepts are somewhat reciprocal. For example, Lanzi (2007) stated “by increasing individual skills, abilities, and competencies, human capital accumulates and enlarges individual freedom by making self-empowerment, civic engagement, and social participation easier to achieve” (p. 424). Social participation and civic engagement, therefore, are critical elements to both social and human capital.

Likewise, education is essential to developing and accumulating both social and human capital. Illustrating the importance of education to building human capital, Janasz and Forret (2005) stated

formal education systems are primarily designed to focus on the development of our human capital, that is, the investments we make in ourselves to build skills and abilities that make us become marketable. Our education, as well as our prior work experiences, training, knowledge, and abilities represent critical sources of human capital that determine our value in the workplace. (Janasz & Forret, 2005, p. 630)

Thus, managerial competencies as a measure of human capital are typically associated with the education and training provided by earning an advanced degree, meaning higher levels of education and the subsequent higher levels of human capital are often associated with an increase in managerial work responsibilities (Cocchiara et al., 2010). When assessing human capital, Winters (2011) found that the presence of colleges and universities in a region was an important indicator of the local level of human capital. Theoretically, the presence of colleges and universities increases access to higher education and the training necessary to increasing human capital (Alm & Winters, 2009; Winters, 2011). Increased human capital not only benefits individual employees in terms of increased earnings, but also has been shown to be related to region-specific increased quality of life (Shapiro, 2006; Winters, 2010; Winters, 2011).

Therefore, education is an important factor to consider when examining human capital in context of career outcomes.

### **The Cost of Earning an Advanced Degree**

As was demonstrated with human capital, earning an advanced degree can boost economies and societies simply by providing a pool of highly educated workers (Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005). Conversely, some researchers caution certain advanced degrees, such as master's degrees in psychology can potentially limit acceptance into Ph.D. programs (Bonifazi, Cresy, & Rieker, 1997; Howell & Murdock, 1972). The cost of seeking an advanced degree is also a potential limiting factor in the overall value of a master's degree (Weston, 2009). The overall value of a master's degree may, in fact, be decreasing due to a phenomenon known as "degree inflation." The hypothesis of degree inflation suggests as "the number of degrees at a certain level increases enough, the labour market value of those degrees actually decreases" (Kivinen, Hedman, & Kaipainen, 2007, p. 233; see also Collins, 1979, 2002 and Goldin, 1999). In other words, "jobs that once were filled by high school graduates and later by college graduates today often require a master's degree" (Trachtenberg, 2009, para. 5). Other research indicates "the prestige of the master's degree has diminished as it has been awarded in increasing numbers" (Howell, & Murdock, 1972, p. 647). Furthermore, there is conflicting research concerning the value of a master's degree as qualification for a hiring privilege (Davis, 2006). In some cases, work experience is considered a greater asset than an advanced degree (Davis, 2006).

Understanding the costs and benefits of earning an advanced degree is important to educators designing curriculum, administrators making funding decisions, and policy makers (Buchanan et al., 2007). Understanding the costs and benefits of earning advanced degrees can help students and professionals determine the value of earning an advanced degree in parks and recreation careers. This knowledge, however, is not readily available to students, educators, or professionals, and what little research exists relies heavily on anecdotal evidence (Buchanan et al., 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the nature of the relationship between earning advanced degrees and career outcomes among professionals in the parks and recreation field. Specifically, this study analyzes the relationship between earning a master's degree and salary, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital.

### **Methods**

This study utilized questionnaire survey research design (Babbie, 2013) with a convenience and snowball sample of urban recreation professionals—primarily executives and managers of public parks and recreation agencies. The questionnaire for the study was available to study respondents online at Qualtrics.com. The instrument consisted of general demographic questions, job and agency questions, and modified job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital scales as used by Cocchiara et al. (2010). Job satisfaction was assessed using a modified version of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) in which references to satisfaction with life were replaced with references to satisfaction with job (Moe et al., 2010). The scale consisted of five items and used a 7-point scale with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Chronbach's alpha coefficient was reported at .84. Social capital was

measured using two items: (a) how much had the graduate degree helped become part of valuable networking, and (b) how much had the graduate degree helped gain friends and collegiate contacts. A scale was used with responses ranging from 1 = *very low* to 7 = *very high*. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported at .82. Three items were used to assess human capital. Respondents were asked to indicate (a) the degree to which they believed the graduate degree had helped improve managerial competencies, (b) learn new management theories, and (c) gain specific knowledge of management. A 7-point scale was used with responses ranging from 1 = *very low* to 7 = *very high*. Chronbach's alpha coefficient was reported at .85.

Job and agency questions included in the survey asked about agency location, agency size in personnel and budget, job title, length of time at that agency and in the field, professional membership and conference attendance, and current salary. The link to the online survey was sent to urban parks and recreation agencies located in the United States. The 100 largest urban areas in the United States were included. A Google search for parks and recreation agencies within these urban agencies rendered a list of 546 recreation agencies. Urban agencies were chosen because they would have a larger staff available to answer the questionnaire and because it was assumed they would be more likely to include personnel with advanced degrees. Respondents were asked to categorize their agency as federal, state, municipal, private, or nonprofit. Educational institutions (i.e., universities) were excluded from the search because they did not represent the type of agency desired for this study.

Agencies were contacted in two stages. During the initial online search, where e-mail contact information was available, an introductory e-mail with an invitation to participate in the survey was sent to each agency. This e-mail was sent to a strategic member of the agency such as an executive or an administrative staff member who could forward the survey to other agency employees. When no e-mail information was available, agencies were contacted via telephone, in which an invitation to participate was extended, and the necessary e-mail address was acquired. The link to the online survey was then sent to the agency. To encourage adequate response rates, there was a participation incentive in the form of a \$5 gift certificate to Amazon.com. This incentive was made available through an internal research grant funded through the authors' university. Of the 546 agencies originally identified, 296 responded in some way, for a response rate of 54%. One hundred ninety-seven surveys were completed and usable for this study. All respondents of completed surveys received a \$5 Amazon.com gift certificate.

## **Analysis**

Data were downloaded from Qualtrics, the online survey host, into SPSS 18.0. SAS was also used to assess linear regression and generalized linear models. Annual salary was calculated for cases in which only hourly pay was provided. Job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital scales were reverse coded and the indices were calculated and scored as required (Cocchiara et al. 2010) in preparation for descriptive statistics. Zero-order correlations, stepwise regression, and interaction effects in a generalized linear model were then assessed. Because the salary, operating budget, number of employees, and years in the field variables rendered considerably skewed data, the natural log of these variables was taken to appropriately estimate the regression models. The stepwise

regression identified variables that explained a statistically significant portion of the variance in salary. The generalized linear models allowed a test for interaction effects as well as main effects. Significance was estimated at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

## Findings

Of the 546 agencies, 296 received surveys, 197 of which were completed. Salaries among the respondents ranged from \$20,000 to \$132,000, and the average salary for the sample was \$64,781. Job satisfaction scores ranged from 11 to 30 ( $M = 23.17$ ,  $SD = 4.12$ ). Social capital scores ranged from 5 to 10 ( $M = 8.67$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). Human capital scores ranged from 5 to 15 ( $M = 12.95$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ).

Approximately 32% of respondents listed Director as the category that best matched their job title. Administrative coordinators accounted for 13.6% of responses and Deputy Director claimed another 12.6%. On average, respondents had worked 17.93 years ( $SD = 10.61$ ) in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry, and had worked at their current position an average of about 8.5 years ( $SD = 6.82$ ). The majority of respondents worked at municipal agencies (92.4%). The reported operating budget of each agency ranged from \$30,000 to \$350 million. The average reported operating budget was approximately \$11.2 million. The reported number of employees ranged from 1 to 1,300, and the average number of employees was 133.

The majority of respondents reported bachelor's degree as the highest completed degree (57.1%). Respondents reported earning bachelor's degrees in recreation management (38.6%), other fields (33.3%), other recreation fields (14.0%), business (11.7%), public administration (1.2%), and therapeutic recreation (1.2%). Fifty-seven respondents had completed a master's degree, accounting for 29.1% of the sample. Of respondents who earned a master's degree, 23.8% earned a master's degree in recreation management, 20.6% in public administration, 14.3% in other recreation fields, 11.1% in business, 1.6% in therapeutic recreation, and 28.6% in other fields (see Table 1).

Zero-order correlations were produced to examine the relationships between key research variables. Salary was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $r = .271$ ,  $p < .01$ ), social capital ( $r = .393$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and human capital ( $r = .350$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital were all significantly related (see Table 2). Significant zero-order correlations were found between salary and having a master's degree ( $r = .236$ ,  $p < .01$ ), years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry ( $r = .465$ ,  $p < .01$ ), agency operating budget ( $r = .371$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and number of employees at the agency ( $r = .188$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Job satisfaction ( $r = .263$ ,  $p = .01$ ), social capital ( $r = .216$ ,  $p = < .01$ ) and human capital ( $r = .150$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significantly related to number of years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry. Having a master's degree, however, was not significantly related to job satisfaction, social capital, or human capital.

**Table 1**

*Percentage and Frequency of Recreation and Non-Recreation Degrees for Bachelor's and Master's Level Respondents*

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Type of Degree</i>	<i>Percentage (Frequency)</i>	
Bachelor's degree		57.1%	(112)
	Business	11.7%	
	Public Administration	1.2%	
	Recreation Management	38.6%	
	Therapeutic Recreation	1.2%	
	Other Recreation Field	14.0%	
	Other Fields	33.3%	
Master's degree		29.1%	(57)
	Business	11.1%	
	Public Administration	20.6%	
	Recreation Management	23.8%	
	Therapeutic Recreation	1.6%	
	Other Recreation Field	14.3%	
	Other Field	28.6%	

**Table 2**

*Zero-Order Correlations among Study Variables*

<i>Variable</i>	Salary	Job Satisfaction	Social Capital	Human Capital	Master's Degree	Operating Budget	Agency Size	Years in Field
1. Salary	.271**	.332**	.350**	.236**	.371**	.188*	.465**	.035
2. Job Satisfaction	--	.393**	.283**	-.068	.144	.136	.263**	.079
3. Social Capital		--	.496**	.083	-.036	-.154*	.216**	.087
4. Human Capital			--	.050	.052	.005	.150*	.014
5. Master's Degree				--	.026	-.013	.057	-.073
6. Operating Budget					--	.712**	.101	-.199*
7. Agency Size						--	-.055	-.139
8. Years in Field							--	.404**

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .



To test potential interaction effects between variables that would contribute to the explanation of variance in salary, stepwise regression and generalized linear models were assessed. Stepwise regression allowed variables to be added in stages so as to identify the independent variables that could be used to generate the best fitting model. Generalized linear models allowed for interaction terms to be created and used in the model. The stepwise regression identified two significant interaction effects: human capital and the natural log of operating budget, and social capital and the natural log of operating budget. These variables were therefore included in the final model. The natural log of number of years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry was also statistically forced into the model, based on the assumption that increased work experience would predict salary increases. The first model explained a significant amount of variance in salary ( $R^2 = .364, p < .001$ ). The natural log of number of years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry was positively related to salary ( $Std. B = .159, p < .001$ ). In other words, if you double the years of experience, there was an associated 12% increase in salary. Similarly, the interaction between human capital and the natural log of operating budget was positively associated with salary ( $Std. B = .003, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, the interaction between social capital and the natural log of the operating budget was positively related to salary ( $Std. B = .004, p < .001$ ).

In the second model, the master's degree variable was added. This model also explained a significant amount of variance in salary ( $R^2 = .400, p < .01$ ). The natural log of the number of years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry was positively related to salary ( $Std. B = .161, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the interaction between human capital and the natural log of operating budget was positively associated with salary ( $Std. B = .003, p < .01$ ). Similarly, the interaction between social capital and the natural log of the operating budget was positively related to salary ( $Std. B = .004, p < .001$ ). Having a master's degree was positively related to salary ( $Std. B = .167, p < .001$ ) after accounting for the variance explained by the natural log of the number of years worked in the parks and recreation or leisure services industry, the interaction between human capital and the natural log of the operating budget, and the interaction between social capital and the natural log of the operating budget (see Table 3). In other words, there was an 18% increase in salary with a master's degree.

There was a significant difference in salary when comparing respondents who had earned a non-recreation related master's degree (i.e., business, public administration, etc.) and respondents who had not earned a master's degree ( $t = -3.94, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant difference in salary when comparing respondents who had earned a non-recreation related master's degree and respondents who had earned a recreation-related master's degree ( $t = 2.09, p = .038$ ). Respondents who had earned a non-recreation related master's degree reported significantly higher salaries. In assessing additional models, a master's degree was not significantly related to job satisfaction, social capital, or human capital.

**Table 3**

*Predicting Salary for Parks and Recreation Professionals Using Years in Field, Interaction between Human Capital and Operating Budget, Interaction between Social Capital and Operating Budget, and Master's Degree*

Predictor	Salary Std. B
R <sup>2</sup>	.400**
Years in Field	.161**
HumCap(Operating Budget)	.001**
SocCap(Operating Budget)	.001**
Master's Degree	.053**

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the nature of the relationship between earning advanced degrees and career outcomes such as salary, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital among professionals in the parks and recreation field. There were three key findings from this study. First, there was a significant and positive relationship between earning a master's degree and salary. Second, there was a significant difference in salary among the various types of master's degree—specifically when comparing recreation-specific to other master's degrees. Third, having a master's degree was not significantly related to job satisfaction, social capital, or human capital.

### Master's Degree and Salary

The researcher found a positive relationship between having a master's degree and reporting a higher salary. In other words, when considering general salary outcomes, having a master's degree is in fact associated with higher earnings. Existing research suggests the average difference in yearly earnings between bachelor's and master's degrees is approximately \$10,000 (Day & Newburger, 2009). In this study, respondents who had earned a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$61,297, while respondents who had earned a master's degree reported earning an average of \$73,211, a difference of \$11,194 per year. These findings were consistent with existing research which indicates that as general education level increases, earnings increase (Day & Newburger, 2009; Graduate programs, 2009). The findings of this study corroborate existing literature, and the clear difference in salaries between the groups of respondents (bachelor's and master's degrees) suggests the monetary value of earning an advanced degree. It is important to note, however, recreation professionals with a master's degree may not earn \$10,000 more their first year. Instead, that salary increase may come over time with a corresponding increase in practical career experience. Therefore, it is important for students, faculty advisors, and young professionals to plan accordingly.

### **Type of Master's Degree**

After establishing the general relationship between master's degrees and salary, salaries among the various types of master's degrees were examined. In examining this data, it was determined respondents who reported earning a master's degree in business, public administration, or other fields also reported higher salaries than respondents who reported earning a master's degree in recreation management, therapeutic recreation, or other recreation-related fields. This is consistent with previous research which has established that professional degrees such as a master's of business administration (MBA) or master's of public administration (MPA) render higher salaries (Day & Newburger, 2009).

As reported in this study, master's degrees in public administration were nearly as prevalent as master's degrees in recreation. This finding suggests that integrating public administration programs with graduate recreation programs, creating professional tracks in graduate recreation programs, or creating a recreation emphasis in a public administration program may serve both fields and the students who wish to bridge them. Such hybrid programs may benefit recreation students, professionals, and academic programs to provide MPA education opportunities if students plan on careers in public recreation. Likewise, it may increase the pool of students from which MPA programs recruit were they to include master-level recreation classes in their curriculum. Overall, curriculum should be addressed to provide professional development opportunities that will enhance educational and career outcomes. Finally, given these findings, graduate programs should be prepared to advise incoming students as to which academic program would best suit their career goals.

### **Job Satisfaction, Social Capital, and Human Capital**

While a master's degree is significantly related to salary, it is not associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, social capital, or human capital. Salary was, however, significantly related to job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital. Salary is significantly related to these three outcomes for potentially two reasons. First, based on current findings, the number of years in the parks and recreation and leisure services industry is also significantly related to salary. The greater the number of years in a particular industry, the greater the amount of practical field experience employees accumulate and apply, the greater professional network they will have, and the greater managerial experience they will have, making them more valuable to the company—and subsequently rendering a leadership position with the agency and a larger salary. Second, with greater compensation, employees report feeling more valued and more satisfied with their work. Again, work experience may largely explain this relationship. As years in an industry and overall work experience increase, employees typically develop larger professional networks, and have more opportunities to fulfill career goals and milestones. Overall, current findings suggest that what matters most in securing a position that pays well, is satisfying, and provides optimal social and human capital opportunities is work experience, not an advanced degree.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

We recognize some limitations to this study. The Internet-based sample used in this study excluded parks and recreation or leisure service agencies that do not have a Web presence. Therefore, the data may be representative of the professional parks and

recreation population. This study does, however, provide a basis for understanding national trends and directions for future research. Furthermore, the data collected from the sample relied on self-reports of salary, operating budget, and number of employees, etc. Uncorroborated self-reports, such as those used in this study, are historically subject to human error. In addition, the data collected may not capture the differences from one university or master's program to another. University accreditation and national program ranking information were not collected. The difference in salary outcomes may be in part attributable to the quality of program or university each respondent attended. This, too, is an important consideration for future research.

This research does not account for the value of a master's degree (recreation or otherwise) in context of other motivations such as students interested in pursuing a Ph.D. and entering academia rather than the professional realm. A similar study could be conducted among parks and recreation scholars to determine the benefits of a recreation-related master's degree in their academic achievements and career outcomes. Additionally, thesis versus non-thesis recreation master's programs and their respective career outcomes could be analyzed in a similar study. Finally, this research does not account for the personal development, value, and passion that may motivate a student to pursue a recreation-related master's degree. Scholars should consider these other motivations as well as the limitations in future research.

Future research should also consider broadening the job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital scales since only abbreviated versions of those scales were used in this study. Broader measures of those three outcomes may better illuminate variations according to overall educational attainment and type of degree earned. Furthermore, career outcomes should be analyzed in future research in context of gender and age. For example, is there an increase in salary or job satisfaction for employees with less experience but who earn a master's degree? Furthermore, career outcomes such as salary, job satisfaction, social capital, and human capital could also be examined across types of professional recreation positions. Finally, we urge future research to examine the optimal combination of degrees in maximizing positive career outcomes. Are recreation professionals better off earning a bachelor's degree in recreation and then pursuing a master's of public recreation? How much of that depends on individual career goals? Future research that answers these and other questions about the value of master's degrees will be crucial to the future development and trajectory of master's programs for recreation professionals.

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