Curriculum Requirements in, and Student Attitudes Toward, Qualitative Research Training in Leisure Studies Doctoral Programs

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Abstract

This article reports findings from two studies. The first study examined research requirements in leisure studies doctoral curricula (n = 16) in North America. The second study investigated North American doctoral students' (n = 92) attitudes and practices concerning qualitative research. Results indicate that the typical doctoral program requires three statistics courses, and three research methods courses. The average student in the sample reported taking three statistics courses, one quantitative methods course and one qualitative course. Many students (54%) reported that they had completed a qualitative study. A majority of students view qualitative research positively, but many students have reservations about the current rigor of qualitative research in leisure studies. Most students (59%) believe that leisure studies journals are biased against qualitative studies. Although 49% of respondents agreed that their advisor encourages them to study both paradigms, only 27% agreed that most advisors support student efforts to develop qualitative competencies. Results are discussed in the context of the potential developmental benefits for students who study qualitative research methods.

Key words: Qualitative research, Doctoral students, Attitudes, Research requirements

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Introduction

Much attention has recently been focused on qualitative research, but little is actually known about qualitative research training in the current cohort of leisure studies doctoral students. This article reports findings from two studies that were conducted to address this issue. The first study examined research requirements in leisure studies doctoral curricula in North America. The second study investigated North American doctoral students' attitudes and practices concerning qualitative research.

Previous studies have documented the relative scarcity of published qualitative research in leisure studies journals. For example, Riddick, DeSchriver, and Weissinger (1984) reported that none of the 122 studies published in the Journal of Leisure Research (JLR) from 1978 - 1982 utilized qualitative methods. A follow-up study found that only three of the 74 empirical articles published in JLR from 1983-1987 used qualitative methods (Riddick, DeSchriver & Weissinger, 1988). Bedini and Wu (1994) reported that only 4% of the studies published in the Therapeutic Recreation Journal from 1986 -1990 utilized qualitative methods.

These findings are ironic, given the number of writers who have described the advantages of expanding the range of leisure research paradigms to include qualitative methods. More than a decade ago, Bullock (1983) outlined the uses of qualitative methods in therapeutic recreation research, and Howe (1985) clearly articulated the utility of qualitative methods for investigating the process and meaning of leisure from a sociological perspective. More recently, Lee, Brock, Dattilo and Kleiber (1993) have suggested the usefulness of qualitative methods in developing knowledge about leisure behavior from the "insiders" perspective. In 1990, the Journal of Leisure Research published a special issue containing five papers that examined the philosophical and theoretical disadvantages of a body of research dominated by positivistic quantitative methods, and the corresponding advantages of paradigm expansion (Goodale, 1990; Hemingway, 1990; Henderson, 1990; Sylvester, 1990; Weissinger, 1990).

In addition to these broad discussions, several writers have described the utility of specific qualitative methods such as participant observation (Glancy, 1986), qualitative interviewing (Howe, 1988), triangulation of qualitative data (Howe & Keller, 1988), naturalistic inquiry (Howe, 1991), critical theory (Henderson, 1993), qualitative experience sampling methods (Lee, 1990), and the linking of qualitative and quantitative data (Henderson & Bedini, 1995). These writers consistently argue that if leisure researchers become knowledgeable about qualitative methods, significant benefits to the understanding of leisure phenomena, such as enhancement of theory, decreasing the gap between research and practice, and enhancing social responsibility, will occur.

Purpose of the Studies

Taken together, the existing literature would seem to suggest that qualitative research is rare in leisure studies, and yet there is a growing acceptance of qualitative methods and increasing interest in the potential benefits of the knowledge gained in qualitative studies. Examined in

the context of on-going calls for increased use of qualitative methods, this leads to the obvious question of whether or not the next generation of scholars in leisure studies is being trained to understand and apply qualitative research. Two studies were conducted to provide empirical information about this question. The purpose of Study One was to describe research training requirements in all North American leisure studies doctoral programs. The purpose of Study Two was to assess the attitudes and practices concerning qualitative research among doctoral students in North America. Both studies were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author's university; all participation was voluntary.

Methods

Study One

This study focused on research requirements at all North American doctoral degree granting programs (N = 18) listed in the Society of Park and Recreation Educators Curriculum Catalog. In December of 1994, letters were sent to graduate coordinators asking for a copy of current research methods, statistics and philosophy of science requirements and catalog descriptions of required research methods courses.

Study Two

This study was a mailed survey of students in enrolled in North American leisure studies doctoral programs in April 1995. All eighteen programs were contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the student survey. Fourteen programs responded positively. Graduate coordinators of these fourteen programs were mailed several survey packets. Each student packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the questionnaire and a stamped return envelope. Graduate coordinators were asked to distribute the packets to doctoral students. The student cover letter explained the purpose of the study and asked students to complete the questionnaire and return it in the stamped envelop. This procedure was designed to maximize students' perceptions of anonymity, and thereby increase their willingness to be truthful in responding to survey items. No names or other identifying marks were placed on questionnaires. The questionnaire included items about the number of research methods, statistics and philosophy of science courses required in the student's programs, and the number of these courses the student planned to take. Also included were items about the number and type of qualitative studies in which the student had been involved, and the student's role in those studies. A series of 13 items asked students to rate their attitudes toward qualitative research, and another group of 12 items asked students to rate their attitudes toward graduate student training in qualitative methods.

Results

Study One

The original population included 18 doctoral programs, and responses were received from 16 (89%) programs. Nine programs responded to the original mailed request, while information was gathered from the remaining seven programs in telephone interviews. Table 1 summarizes data from these 16 programs. Results showed that all doctoral programs required

at least one research methods course, four programs required two courses, nine programs required three courses, and two programs required four or more courses. Five schools required only one statistics course, nine required two courses, and two required three or more courses. Research course descriptions from five schools noted a qualitative component to the required research methods course. One doctoral program recommended a qualitative methods class, three required a qualitative class. One doctoral program required a philosophy of science course, and one doctoral program recommended such a course.

TABLE 1

Research Training Requirements in Doctoral Programs (n = 16)

	# Required Courses	# Programs with this Requirement
Research Methodology Courses	1 course	1 program
	2 courses	4 programs
	3 courses	9 programs
	4 or more	2 programs
Statistics Courses	1 course	5 programs
	2 courses	9 programs
	3 or more	2 programs
Philosophy of Science Courses	0 courses	15 programs
	1 course	1 program

Note. Three programs require a qualitative research course; one program recommends a qualitative course; five programs include qualitative methods as part of a course. One program recommends a philosophy of science course.

Study Two

An accurate calculation of the response rate in this study is not possible. Graduate coordinators were asked to mail back a postcard in order to report the exact number of survey packets distributed at their university. Thirteen of the fourteen coordinators complied with this request. These 13 programs reported distributing a total of 176 packets. The total number of packets distributed in the other university is not known. A total of 92 completed questionnaires were returned. With this limited information, the highest possible response rate for the study is 52% (92 of 176), though the actual rate is almost certainly lower.

Students in the sample identified variety of areas of concentration, including sports management (4), therapeutic recreation (9), leisure behavior (23), outdoor recreation (9), tourism (17), program development (2), management (14). The sample included 47 females and 45 males. The sample included doctoral students in their first year (22), second year (18), third year (22), and 26 students who had been in their doctoral program for four or more years.

Table 2 summarizes data concerning research training and experience of the doctoral student sample. Respondents reported that during their doctoral program they intended to enroll in an average of 2.9 graduate statistics courses (range = 0-6), 1.4 quantitative research classes (range = 0-4), .96 qualitative research classes (range = 0-4), and .82 philosophy of science courses (range = 0-4). A total of 49 (54%) respondents said they had completed a qualitative study, with a majority (37) reporting that they were the primary researcher on the study, These students had completed an average of 1.7 studies each, for a total of 82 studies. Case studies were the most frequently used qualitative approach reported (27 respondents said they had conducted at least one case study), followed by grounded theory (13 respondents), ethnography (13 respondents) and critical theory (2 respondents). Sixteen respondents reported using other qualitative approaches.

TABLE 2

Research Training and Experience of Doctoral Student Sample (n = 90)

Percent of students who intend to take this number of courses:

	Number of Courses							Mean Number
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Statistics	5%	8%	30%	26%	18%	7%	7%	2.9
Quant. Methods	15%	40%	31%	9%	5%	0%	0%	1.4
Qual. Methods	42%	31%	20%	6%	3%	0%	0%	.96
Phil. of Science	46%	37%	8%	6%	3%	0%	0%	.82

Number of respondents who had completed at least one qualitative study:

Yes	49 (54%)
No	39 (44%)

Number of qualitative studies completed by respondents:
Mean = 1.7
Total = 82

Of the 39 respondents who reported never having conducted a qualitative study, fifteen reported that the primary reason they had not done qualitative research was because of lack of knowledge of qualitative methods. Six reported they did not do qualitative research because they lacked confidence in qualitative data.

Student Attitudes

The student questionnaire included 13 items that assessed respondents' attitudes toward qualitative inquiry (Table 3). A majority of respondents agreed that qualitative research will open up important new research questions (90%), and that qualitative research is relevant to practitioners (85%). A majority disagreed that quantitative research is still the best source of information (53%), and that qualitative research does not provide valid data (80%).

Responses suggested a balanced point of view, with a majority agreeing that quantitative research is also relevant to practitioners (78%), and that all scholars should understand both methods (95%). However, students' responses also reflected concerns about qualitative research, with 30% agreeing that it may be too time consuming, 31% agreeing that grant agencies will not accept qualitative research, and 39% agreeing that most of the qualitative research in leisure studies is not very rigorous. Perhaps most troublesome is the finding that 59% of respondents agreed that leisure studies journals are biased against qualitative research, and 46% agreed that a new journal focused on qualitative research is needed.

The questionnaire also included 12 items intended to assess respondents' attitudes specifically toward graduate student involvement in qualitative research. Percent responses to these items are presented in Table 4. Some items reflect positive attitudes toward graduate student involvement in qualitative research. For example, 48% disagreed that doing qualitative research will hurt a student's job chances. A majority agreed that studying qualitative research makes a student a better scholar (56%), that students learn important things from other students who conduct qualitative research (57%), that all students should understand both research approaches (95%), and that all students should be able to read and critique qualitative studies (91%).

TABLE 3
Respondent Attitudes Toward Qualitative Research (n = 90)

	Percentages				
	Disagree				Agree
Qualitative research methods do not provide valid data	55	25	13	6	2
Qualitative research will open up important new research questions	1	3	6	33	57
Qualitative research is too time consuming	14	25	31	24	6
Practitioners can relate to qualitative research better than quantitative	9	16	46	18	10
Qualitative research is relevant for practitioners in the field	2	2	11	38	47
Quantitative research is relevant to practitioners in the field	0	7	15	45	33
Recreation research is relevant to practitioners in the field	1	9	21	28	41
Grant agencies will not accept qualitative research	9	22	38	28	3
We need a new journal focused on qualitative leisure research	22	18	15	24	22
Quantitative research is still the best source of useful information	24	29	31	12	5
All scholars must understand both quantitative and qualitative studies	1	0	5	26	69
Most of the qualitative research in leisure studies is not very rigorous	4	14	44	33	6
Our journals are biased against qualitative research	6	8	27	45	14

However, responses to some items reflect considerable variation in student attitudes. While 49% disagreed that students pick qualitative research because they fear statistics, 35% agreed with that statement. Similarly, 41% disagreed that doing qualitative research diminishes a student's chances to publish, but 30% agreed. Some responses imply that qualitative and quantitative research may attract different kinds of students; 66% agreed that students tend to be drawn to one paradigm or another, and only 12% agreed that most students are interested in doing qualitative research.

TABLE 4

Attitudes Toward Graduate Student Involvement in Qualitative Research (n =90)

	Percentages				
	Disagree				Agree
Students pick qualitative research because they fear statistics	21	28	16	25	10
Doing qualitative research will hurt a student's chances to get a job	20	28	34	14	5
Studying qualitative methods makes a student a better scholar	7	12	25	32	24
I learn important things from students who do qualitative studies	2	8	33	32	25
Students tend to be draw to one paradigm or the other	1	9	23	49	17
All students need to understand both research approaches	0	1	5	35	60
Most students are interested in doing qualitative research	12	35	41	11	1
Most advisors support student efforts to develop qual. competence	8	43	22	17	10
All students should be able to read and critique qualitative studies	1	1	7	47	44
My advisor encourages me to study both qual. and quant. methods	15	19	17	14	35
Most advisors encourage students to study both methods	15	33	27	14	11
Doing qualitative research diminishes a student's chance to publish	13	28	30	25	5

Doctoral students in this sample had mixed reviews for faculty advisors. Forty-nine percent agreed that their own advisor encouraged them to study both qualitative and quantitative methods, while 34% disagreed. When asked about the practices of most advisors in their program, only 25% agreed that most advisors encourage students to study both methods, while 48% disagreed. Only 27% agreed that most advisors support student efforts to develop qualitative competence, while 51% disagreed.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of student responses to the 25 attitude items, three additional analyses were conducted to compare females and males, to compare students at various stages of their program, and to compare students who had done qualitative research with those who had not. First, a MANOVA was conducted with the 25 attitude items as dependent variables and gender as the independent variable. The MANOVA was non-significant ($F = 1.37$, $p = .163$), indicating that females and males did not differ on responses to the attitude items.

A second MANOVA was conducted with the 25 attitude items as dependent variables and "year in program" (1, 2, 3, 4 or more years) as the independent variable. The MANOVA was non-significant ($F = 1.18$, $p = .193$), indicating that the four groups did not differ on responses to the attitude items.

A third MANOVA compared students who reported that they had conducted a qualitative study with students who had not conducted a qualitative study, using the 25 attitude items as dependent variables. The MANOVA was significant ($F = 2.05$, $p < .05$), indicating that the two groups differed on some attitude items. To follow-up the significant MANOVA, 25 univariate ANOVA analyses were conducted in order to compare the two groups on each attitude item. Because multiple univariate tests create the potential for

inflated family-wise type I error rate, the Bonferroni correction was applied (Bray & Maxwell, 1982; Haase & Ellis, 1987; Harwell, 1988). This simple procedure divides the total family-wise alpha (.05) is by the number of tests (25) to produce a corrected pair-wise alpha (.002). After applying the corrected pair-wise alpha, the two groups differed on four of the 25 attitude items (I learn important things from students who do qualitative studies; Qualitative research will open up important new research questions; Practitioners can relate to qualitative research better than quantitative research; Qualitative research is relevant to practitioners in the field). In each instance, students who had conducted a qualitative study reported more positive attitudes toward qualitative research than students who had not conducted a qualitative study.

Discussion and Possible Implications

Study One

The results of Study One, while representing 89% of the doctoral degree granting programs in North America, should be interpreted carefully. First, it is difficult to compare requirements across programs because research courses differ in number of credit hours, department offering the course, and instructor effectiveness. Furthermore, even when reading catalog descriptions of required courses, it is difficult to judge the portion of class time spent on qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally, the study focused on departmental requirements, but individual advisors may alter these requirements by adding or substituting courses in their students' programs of study.

Within these limitations, tentative conclusions can be drawn about research requirements in leisure studies doctoral programs. Most programs have minimum requirements for three or more research methodology courses. Catalog descriptions suggest that most of the research methods courses are quantitatively oriented (only 5 programs specifically note that qualitative methods are a part of a research methods course, and only 3 programs require a qualitative methods course). This finding is consistent with practices in other applied fields. For example, Todd and Reece (1990) surveyed 85 professors teaching educational research methods courses in the US and reported that 70% of the courses were exclusively quantitative.

Given the complexity of introducing students to qualitative methods, it is possible to speculate that the current requirements in qualitative training may be insufficient. Webb and Glesne (1992) describe the results from their study of 75 professors of qualitative research courses, which suggests that several important tasks must be accomplished in qualitative research training. Students must "surrender their ethnocentric biases," while at the same time learning to "hold their newly acquired relativizing skills in reasonable check" (p. 786). Students in qualitative research courses must first accomplish this perspective shift, and then learn a great variety of theoretical, procedural and analytical techniques that accompany several types of qualitative methods. It is difficult to imagine these tasks being accomplished in one course, much less in a portion of one course.

This relative lack of focus on qualitative methods can be viewed in combination with the finding that only one doctoral program required a philosophy of science course. Although students may be gaining this knowledge in other courses, it is possible that doctoral students are not fully prepared to understand the important epistemological assumptions that underlie methodological differences. Tierney and Lincoln (1994) have noted that teaching qualitative research at the graduate level is a complex process of helping students to understand the epistemological differences among the diverse group of methods labeled "qualitative." A well designed philosophy of science course (using a text like Bernstein's (1976) The restructuring of social and political theory) could be helpful to students as they sort out underlying assumptions of differing methods.

Study Two

Results of Study Two may be influenced by non-response biases. It is not clear what portion of the current doctoral student population is represented in this sample. Furthermore, it seems possible that respondents and non-respondents in Study Two may differ. A plausible hypothesis is that non-respondents may be more negative about, or less interested in, qualitative research than are respondents. This would imply that results of the current study reflect a more positive view of qualitative research than is actually true in the doctoral student population as a whole. The results of the study should be judged with these cautions in mind.

Student reports of the number of research, statistics and philosophy of science courses they intend to complete roughly parallel the results of Study One. This finding would suggest that many students are not taking more than the required minimum number of courses in these areas. In fact, students in this sample report that they intend to take slightly fewer courses than the requirements would suggest. This may be a result of sampling bias, or may reflect a tendency for advisors to allow students to waive departmental requirements.

The large portion (54%) of students who report that they have completed a qualitative study is surprising, as is the total number of qualitative studies this sample has completed (82). Even if an over-reporting bias is assumed, this finding would still indicate that a large number of qualitative studies have been conducted. Given the previously documented scarcity of published qualitative research, three possible explanations emerge. First, these studies may be class projects, pilot studies, or mini-studies that are not perceived as publishable and therefore not submitted for publication. Second, student perceptions of bias against qualitative research in leisure studies journals may inhibit submission of potentially publishable studies. And third, perhaps these studies are in final stages of the writing process and will yet be submitted, indicating a future increase in published qualitative studies.

The MANOVA analyses for the 25 attitude items showed no gender differences and no differences between students at different years in their doctoral program. This finding suggests that the traditional stereotype that women are more positive about qualitative research may not hold in the current cohort of doctoral students. The MANOVA showing that students who had done a qualitative study were more positive on four of the attitude

items than students who had not done a qualitative study is difficult to interpret. Why the two groups would differ on four of the items and not differ on the other 21 items is a matter of speculation. The emphasis on interpreting these results is perhaps best placed on the counter-intuitive finding that, for the great majority of attitude items, students who have never conducted a qualitative study hold attitudes as positive as those of students who have conducted qualitative research. The overall conclusion to be drawn from all three MANOVAs is that the results from the attitude items are fairly robust across different groups in the sample.

Results from the 25 attitude items present a mixed picture of student perceptions. On the one hand, a majority of students are open to the possibilities presented by qualitative research. On the other hand, many students have reservations about the current rigor of qualitative research in leisure studies. This may imply that students' understanding of the criteria for good qualitative research is an important area of study. Several qualitative methods books include chapters focused on these criteria (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Henderson and Bedini (1994/1995) summarize this literature and draw implications for leisure studies students and professionals.

Of particular concern is the finding that a majority of students perceive a bias against publishing qualitative research in leisure studies journals. This perception, whether accurate or not, may negatively influence students' decisions to conduct qualitative research, or to submit qualitative manuscripts to leisure studies journals. Other fields, such as education, have gone so far as to publish formal statements of interest in qualitative research. Smith (1987), writing in the American Education Research Journal overtly stated that "manuscripts based on qualitative research are being welcomed by AERJ editors" (p. 173). Smith's article goes on to outline the possible forms that qualitative manuscripts might take, and the possible criteria by which they could be judged. Given the level of student anxiety about this issue, perhaps such statements are now required in leisure studies journals.

Students in the sample vary in their perceptions of faculty support for qualitative research training. While 49% of respondents agreed that their advisor encourages them to study both paradigms, 34% disagreed with this statement. Only 27% agreed that most advisors support student efforts to develop qualitative competencies. This would seem to suggest that some faculty members are not supportive of their students learning about and practicing qualitative methods. This finding is disconcerting when judged against the previously cited leisure studies literature that has analyzed the potential theoretical and empirical benefits of qualitative investigations of leisure behavior.

Student perception that advisors may not support qualitative research training is also troubling in light of recent literature that examines specific developmental benefits to students who study qualitative methods. For example, Kutz (1990) described the metacognitive outcomes for students who engage in an ethnographic research assignment. She contended that ethnographic methods demand a high level of insight from students concerning their own perspective, their logical assumptions, and their relationship to the phenomenon being

observed. Furthermore, Kutz maintained that college instructors can consciously use qualitative research training to allow "students not only to see how the knowledge of the field is constructed, but to see and give voice to their own expanding authority - their own role in the construction of what they know " (p. 356), and to "step out of the limited frame of their own experience and to perceive the effect that a shift in perspective has on what you think you know about a given topic " (p. 346).

This theme of student transformation also appears in many qualitative research methods textbooks, Meloy (1994) documented learning outcomes among 20 individuals who had completed qualitative dissertations (she conducted the study as the basis for her textbook, Writing the qualitative dissertation). Delamont (1992), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Shaffir and Stebbins (1991), Eisner (1991) and Denzin (1989) all describe the personal, theoretical and philosophical advancements students can make as a result of studying qualitative methods. The clear implication of this literature is that studying qualitative research methods can provide students with enhanced and expanded developmental opportunities. More importantly, these opportunities seem to be directly related to critical skills of effective scholarship.

Conclusion and Recommendation

A majority of leisure studies doctoral students in this sample are interested in learning about and/or conducting qualitative research. Reviewed literature concerning the process of qualitative research training argues that students face a complex learning task when they expand their epistemological and methodological perspectives. This would imply that training experiences for students seeking expertise in qualitative methods should be numerous and varied. Doctoral advisors may want to consider additional coursework, independent reading experiences, collaborative research projects, and consciously constructed mentoring relationships as necessary parts of a doctoral program. Furthermore, given the mixed opinions expressed about faculty support of qualitative research reported by this sample of students, departments may want to evaluate the extent to which they allow for a variety of theoretical and epistemological perspectives.

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