Benefits of Leisure Courses:
A Current Theoretical Context for Student Development

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Abstract

Assessments of higher education in America have traditionally focused on the academic aspects of the college experience. This article considers outcomes associated with student development as a result of enrollment in two general education leisure studies classes. A theoretical framework (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) provided a systematic context for assessing student development. Seven vectors of change were addressed: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Key words: Leisure studies courses, Student development, Educational outcomes, Vectors of student change

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Introduction

In the definitive text, Benefits of Leisure (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991), a distinction is made between tests of economic efficiency that measure the benefits of leisure and the perspective of benefits as improved or desired conditions of individuals, groups, and society. Similarly, in higher education, a distinction can be made between accounting of expenditures in relation to pecuniary outcomes and less tangible benefits such as changes viewed to be advantageous to individuals, groups, and society (Astin, 1993). Assessments of student learning in college usually consider the tangible aspects of the undergraduate experience--the classroom, laboratory, and studio (Kuh, 1993).

Indeed, education in the United States has traditionally focused on the transfer of information about a subject matter from the instructor to the student (Adler, 1984). However, test scores and transcripts reflect only a fraction of how students change. Higher education produces benefits for individuals in the form of personal development and rich satisfactions, and benefits for society in the form of political, economic, and cultural advancement (Bowen, 1983).

Chickering (1969) offered a conceptual model of student growth and change in college along seven vectors. In a monumental review of more than 2,600 studies on how college affects students, Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) suggested: "Probably no other psychosocial theorist has had a greater influence than Arthur Chickering (1969) on the study of college student development. . ." (p. 20).

Chickering & Reisser (1993) provided an updated framework for thinking systematically about student development with revisions to, and renaming of, some of the seven vectors. The model of student development is considered a "simple-stage model" (Rest, 1979) as there is no movement from one "stage" (category) to the next as in a hierarchy. The seven vectors are not all realized in the same order or to the same degree by all students. Rather, movement along any vector can occur at different rates. Figure 1 provides an overview of each of the seven vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. According to Chickering & Reisser (1993),

> "The vectors describe major highways for journeying toward individuation--
> the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being--and also toward
> communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national
> and global society" (p. 35).

From	To
Developing Competence	
Low level of competence	High level of competence
Lack of confidence	Strong sense of confidence
Managing Emotions	
Little control over disruptive emotions	Flexible control and appropriate expression
Little awareness of feelings	Ability to integrate feelings with responsible action
Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence	
Emotional dependence	Freedom from pressing needs for reassurance
Independence	Recognition and acceptance of the importance of interdependence
Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships	
Intolerance of differences	Tolerance and appreciation of differences
Nonexistent, short-term, or unhealthy relationships	Capacity for intimacy which is enduring and nurturing

Establishing Identity

Confusion about "who I am"	Clarification of self–concept
Dissatisfaction with self	Self-acceptance

Developing Purpose

Unclear vocational goals	Clear vocational goals
Shallow, scattered personal interests	More sustained, focused, rewarding activities

Developing Integrity

Unclear or untested personal values	Personalizing (clarifying and affirming) values
Self-interest	Social responsibility

Figure 1. The Seven Vectors: General Developmental Directions.
Adapted from Chickering & Reisser (1993).

Method

The purpose of this study was to ascertain student outcomes in two general education leisure studies courses offered by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at San Diego State University. The intent was to determine if changes occurred that were consistent with the Chickering & Reisser (1993) theoretical framework.

Two hundred and eighteen students (N=218) participated in the study at the end of the semester in the spring of 1994. Respondents were enrolled in one of two sections each of upper division classes titled "Challenges of Leisure" and "Wilderness and the Leisure Experience" (four sections total). The students were almost exclusively juniors and seniors, because upper division general education credit is granted only when they have completed 60 semester units.

The two general education classes offered by the department were chosen because these courses are structured to provide an overview of subject matter to meet the needs of students university-wide (e.g., majors and nonmajors). These courses are somewhat unique in their breadth of scope. The "Challenges of Leisure" course is an in–depth examination of the meaning of leisure for humankind. "Wilderness and the Leisure Experience" encompasses the wilderness concept in American culture as well as contemporary wilderness management and philosophy. This course also includes an experiential component. Students may choose rockclimbing, canoeing, backpacking, or sea kayaking outings offered through the outdoor program of the Associated Students' Leisure Connection.

To achieve general education status at San Diego State University, a course is subjected to several levels of curricular review including that of the university general education

committee. General education courses, for example, must have a broad orientation and a well-defined writing component.

Although the Chickering and Reisser (1993) model encompasses the entire college experience, the intent of this study was to determine if similar developmental changes occurred for students enrolled in the aforementioned general education courses. These classes were chosen for their unique characteristics and for what they offered the general university student.

The approach taken in this study embraced the positivist paradigm (e.g., *a priori* [preestablished] theory). However, methodology (quantitative or qualitative) cuts across both the positivist and interpretive paradigms and in this instance qualitative data were collected. This study employed two broad, open-ended questions that were used on a written survey for students at the conclusion of the leisure studies courses:

1) What are the three most important outcomes that you have realized from this class? Your response may extend beyond what you have learned from the class and focus on what you have gained, overall, that is important to you.

2) Please explain any change in your personal behavior that has occurred as a consequence of this class.

Chickering & Reisser (1993) related the student development model to student perceptions of their college experience by using two similar questions (although broader and not limited to the scope of one class). The questionnaires were "not based on carefully designed sampling procedures, [but] the statements excerpted from them bring to life the potentially dry formality of theory" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45).

Qualitative data offer rich and deeper explanations in capturing points of view without predetermining those points of view (Henderson, 1991). The use of qualitative data enables the presentation of first order information; that is, data in the language of everyday life (Howe, 1988).

Content analysis of the student responses indicated general consistency with the theoretical framework of Chickering & Reisser (1993). A first, overview reading of the questionnaires revealed commonalities with the student development model, although the approach taken in this study generated a wide range of responses. During the second reading, comments were coded according to the seven vectors in the framework. The coded data were then transcribed to include representative comments in each category. Responses, in sum, were categorized (selected and "forced") into the seven preexisting vectors.

Results

For each of the seven vectors a brief description of that particular dimension is provided followed by verbatim respondent testimony related to that vector. An important point is that specific student comments that fit so neatly into the various vectors of the theoretical model were not prompted but rather emerged from responses to the broad, open-ended questions.

Developing Competence

A sense of competence stems from assurance that one can cope effectively and can achieve successfully what one sets out to do. Competence may refer to the intellect or physical skills. An increased sense of competence facilitates "more open and energetic action in the service of learning and development" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 79). Students are more willing to take risks and persist at difficult tasks as their confidence increases. Written responses of students enrolled in the general education leisure studies courses revealed the following testimony consistent with developing competence:

I have learned that I feel better about myself when I push and challenge myself.

I am way more confident! I went rockclimbing and it was the best thing
I have ever done!

I have started to take more risk in my life.

That without pushing ourselves to our fullest potential, we gain little.

Managing Emotions

The ability to manage emotions is critical for mature adults. Students come to college with any combination of unmet needs, resentment, distorted ideas about sex, self-doubts, and so on. The settledness of campus life is increasingly disrupted by date rape, suicide, violence, and drug abuse. Toxic feelings (fear, anxiety, anger, depression, guilt) must be dealt with constructively while positive emotions (caring, optimism) need cultivation. Managing emotions necessitates awareness of feelings and control of them. Representative student responses related to managing emotions follow:

I know what to do with myself when I feel overwhelmed by the stress in my life.

Because of this class I have become more relaxed . . .
I am now less stressed and appreciate time to myself.

I look at life a bit differently now. I am far more focused on the positive things
that happen rather than the negatives. I really enjoyed this class and feel that
it has really changed my wholeview on happiness.

I have become less bitter and angry.

Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence

This vector focuses on moving from continual and pressing needs for reassurance (primarily from parents), to solving problems in a self-directed manner, to recognizing the importance of interdependence (an awareness of one's place in and commitment to the larger community). There are changes in students' locus of control that result in a sense of more influence over what happens to them and a decline in their sense that the world is controlled by fate. The following responses reflect moving through autonomy toward interdependence:

> Impressing other people is not as important anymore as it used to be.

> I feel that I could take care of myself.

> I understand that you must do what you want to do, even if there are risks.

> I try to be nice to other people and give of my self more.

> I have learned to worry about others and future generations . . .

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

Relationships refer to connections with other people that students interact with on a regular basis. At college, students are often exposed to people who are different from themselves. Mature interpersonal relationships require tolerance and an appreciation of differences. Over time, interpersonal skills evolve that help to sustain long-term, growth-inducing relationships. The following student responses relate to this vector:

> I have become a more outgoing person as a result of this class.

> I think the most important factor is to *respect* my world . . .
> I have a special outlook on life. I feel I have come to respect others more.

> I give older people more respect . . .

> I've realized that the right kind of attitude can be the difference in interacting well with other people.

Establishing Identity

Development of identity encompasses, at one level of generalization, all of the seven vectors. Establishing identity, as a single vector, refers to a basic comfort with oneself and a strong sense of self-concept. Chickering & Reisser (1993) explained: "The primary element is that solid sense of self, that inner feeling of mastery and ownership" (p. 181). Changes along this vector were represented in the written statements as follows:

> I began to accept myself. I used to compare myself with somebody else.

> I have done a lot of self-analysis in this class and through all of the probing I have gotten to know myself better. I think I have a better grip on how to improve my life.

I have gained a better sense of who I am. It [this class] has definitely helped me achieve a sense of identity.

Developing Purpose
This vector encompasses an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify ambitions, to be proactive, and to persist despite obstacles. In a broad interpretation, purpose is the courage to envisage and pursue valued goals (Erikson, 1964). From the perspective of a student in college, purpose often relates to establishing clear vocational goals. Clarifying purpose was revealed in the following student written responses:

The major outcome . . . is that it [this class] made me realize that business is just not for me. So I changed my major. I have gained a greater sense of purpose-- and why I am on this earth.

This class has given me a "sense of stewardship."

It was during this semester that I finally joined the Surfrider Foundation
[an environmental group].
I feel I did this partly because of the influence of this class.

[I] have reexamined personal materialistic goals and will downsize future house/ auto aspirations.

Developing Integrity
The development of integrity is closely related to establishing identity and developing purpose. According to Chickering & Reisser (1993), integrity is the clarification of a personally valid set of beliefs that have internal consistency and provide a guide for behavior. Representative responses related to integrity follow:

[I gained] A solidification of my own beliefs and ideas of just what are the important things in life.

I feel I can articulate my values better now than I could before.

I have an increased awareness of my personal responsibility towards nature and humanity.

I have gained the philosophy that equality does not stop at just [humankind] but also includes all of nature.

We have to take responsibility for our own actions.

Discussion

What a student learns and how a student changes during college will depend somewhat on the nature of courses he or she takes. This exploratory study offers evidence that student development outcomes may occur as a consequence of enrollment in general education leisure studies courses. Furthermore, the methods of this study may serve as a simple exercise that can be employed by educators in this discipline. That is, use of general questions such as those in this study may be used at the end of a term to determine outcomes that transcend traditional learning of course material as evidenced on papers and exams. Courses may be assessed with reference to fulfilling the seven vectors and then refined to emphasize various aspects of student development.

For example, although all seven vectors were documented in this study, the greatest emphasis was on changes associated with developing competence, managing emotions, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose. A course may also be arranged initially with the developmental vectors in mind.

Chickering & Reisser (1993) viewed course content as a vehicle for encouraging effective learning and personal development. Course design may promote broad development themes for more relevant, personally enriching, and growth-inducing classes. Some of the responses on the questionnaires from this study can be traced back to course content and structure.

For example, under "developing competence," student comments reflected a shift toward higher levels of competence and confidence. In the "Challenges of Leisure" (hereafter referred to as "Challenges") course, a unit addressed the physical, mental, and social aspects of risk. In the "Wilderness and the Leisure Experience" (hereafter referred to as "Wilderness") course, students participated in various outdoor pursuits. This experiential component seemed conducive to student skill development and feelings of confidence. Student comments associated with this developmental vector were well-represented in the data.

In the realm of "managing emotions" student responses suggested more awareness and control of feelings, particularly in response to stress. This pervasive theme may be attributed to an elaborate unit on leisure and stress in the "Challenges" course. In the "Wilderness" class, students indicated feeling both more settled and more vibrant as a consequence of the outings.

Student comments suggested "moving through autonomy through interdependence." A related unit in the "Challenges" course was titled "The Art of Being Fully Human." The "Wilderness" course offered lectures and readings on global community and future generations.

In the area of "developing mature interpersonal relationships," student comments reflected greater awareness of how their behavior affects other people. Students also revealed

more tolerance and respect for diversity. Student responses associated with this vector were highly evident in the data. In the "Challenges" course comprehensive units were taught on "The Challenge of Human Relationships" and "The Challenge of Leisure for People with Disabilities." The outings program that served the "Wilderness" course was open to students throughout the university and was particularly popular with international students. Hence, students often had the opportunity to meet and learn about individuals quite different from themselves.

Student responses clearly suggested advancement in "establishing identity." One of two major written projects in the "Challenges" course was a life philosophy paper. Similarly, in the "Wilderness" course, the term project was a reflective paper on the student's philosophy of wilderness (values to individuals and society), that was presented in the context of class sessions, the readings, and the outing. As just one example, students could refer to Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" model which was covered in class. Student comments associated with establishing identity were well-represented in the data.

In the realm of "developing purpose" students indicated clarification of vocational goals and more focus in their personal interests. Elements of developing purpose comprised a consistent theme in the student responses. The "Challenges" course included lectures titled "The Power of Play," "The Wisdom of Work," and "The Pursuit of Happiness." Much of the reading in the "Wilderness" class focused on environmental stewardship. One of the texts for the course was a collection of essays titled Learning to Listen to the Land (Willers, 1991). The authors of the book call on readers to recognize the consequences of their actions--and inactions--and to develop a sense of connection with the earth. Both the "Challenges" and "Wilderness" courses touch on the tenets of voluntary simplicity.

Student comments reflected "developing integrity " in terms of personalizing values and recognizing the importance of social responsibility. Both courses encompass the holistic nature of human beings (Murphy, Niepoth, Jamieson, & Williams, 1991). A lecture in the "Challenges" course was titled "Ethics: The Choice is Yours." One of the last readings in the "Wilderness" class was an essay by Barry Lopez (1989) titled "Grown Men." The story is an eloquent account of Lopez's role models who were men that worked intimately with and close to the land. The essay brushes on the themes of responsibility and integrity. Again, written projects in both courses inspired students to clarify personal values.

Chickering & Reisser (1993) proposed that educational environments can be created that influence students' change along the seven vectors. Certain teaching behaviors improve intellectual competence and may influence desirable student development beyond course content. Chickering & Gamson (1987) identified seven principles for good practice by teachers in undergraduate education: 1) encourage student-faculty contact, 2) encourage cooperation among students, 3) encourage active learning, 4) give prompt feedback, 5) emphasize time on task, 6) communicate high expectations, and 7) respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Many professors in the field of leisure studies and recreation education have graduate degrees that include coursework in education. Based on this training, these

professors may be better equipped than professors in other disciplines to teach effectively and based upon educational theory. The possibility exists that park and recreation educators are more attuned to students because of the nature of the discipline and the strong human orientation. (Beck, 1991).

Facilitating active participation in academic and extracurricular activities can promote student learning and personal growth (Astin, 1984). For example, students can become more actively involved in developing purpose by participating in research projects, attending public lectures, and volunteering in a career-related field of interest (Miles, Sowa, & Laden, 1994). A method for fostering social responsibility ("moving through autonomy toward interdependence") is to involve students in community service projects where the impacts of their actions on others are direct and meaningful (Dahl, 1992; Anderson, Schleien, & Green, 1993). This active participation from fieldwork and internships to community service is often promoted in leisure studies and recreation administration curricula.

We must examine the impact of our leisure studies curricula in the context of the entire university program. The student development theoretical framework (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) offers a useful perspective. Leisure studies, as evidenced here, can provide powerful outcomes in the arena of student development. Our discipline offers unique possibilities in course content, teaching actions, and curricular developments in promoting student change. As Chickering & Potter (1993) admonished,

> "If [university] curricula are driven increasingly by short-term goals and immediately marketable specializations, then those other curriculum elements that provide breadth, a sense of larger social issues, and historical and cultural perspectives will be perpetually . . . under-funded" (p. 35).

Driver et. al. (1991) suggested the importance of further study on the general benefits of leisure as defined by desirable consequences and improved conditions. Similarly, research needs to be conducted on the benefits of leisure studies coursework in promoting desirable student development and change. Further study could support the importance of leisure studies and recreation education curricula as advantageous in terms of improved or desired student outcomes. As Chickering & Reisser (1993) concluded, "We need a citizenry and a work force with sufficient breadth and personal characteristics to participate actively in social self-determination" (p. 484). Our discipline has much to offer.

Footnote

1. To assist interested readers in more fully understanding the relationship between course content, structure, and the seven developmental vectors, the author will provide upon request detailed course syllabi of the general education leisure studies courses.

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