Comparative Analysis of Recreation Management Curricula Among Doctoral-Granting Universities

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Abstract
Currently, there are 16 universities granting doctoral degrees in recreation or leisure in the United States. These universities offer differing degrees amongst differing colleges and with different names; each university requires a specific number of total credit hours, research/statistic credit hours, and a “core” set of classes to complete for graduation. This study explores the various programs. Mixed methodology is used to derive meaning from the data; central tendencies for credits and qualitative coding to produce salient themes among the core classes. Threshold Capability Integrated Theoretical Framework was applied to make greater sense of curriculum development in a recreation setting. Finally, a geographic analysis of degree programs was conducted to add richness to the study.
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Introduction

The rapid growth of doctoral programs in the United States has created a need to determine demographic attributes of the academic program, admission criteria, and curriculum standards (McEwen & Bechtel, 2000). There are many universities offering degrees in recreation management or leisure studies throughout the United States. These many institutions vary from public to private, small to large, and research to teaching schools. There are, however, far fewer universities that offer a doctorate (The Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D. or The Doctor of Education, Ed.D.) in recreation management or leisure studies. Currently, there are sixteen universities in the U.S. offering doctoral programs in some aspect of recreation/leisure programs. Although these universities offer similar degrees, are their curricula similar? This study will examine the potential similarities and differences among the curricula from universities offering a doctoral degree in recreation management as well as the implications for students and universities at-large.

The intended purpose of higher education has evolved over many centuries. Modern higher education is perhaps far removed from the initial Greek interpretation of the Academy being “charged with addressing the Trivium (literally, “the three roads) consisting of grammar, logic, and rhetoric” (Powell, Johnson, Anderson, & Paisley, 2013, p. 11). Rather, current public opinion of education looks for a more rounded approach to teaching. This opinion consists of: research, intellectual property, and a student who graduates with specific skills needed to successfully perform a job/career (Powell, et. al. 2013). Higher education advocates go on to outline best practices for quality education. Among them includes “signature, unique experiences that can be defining, such as study abroad, internships, research opportunities with faculty, or experiential learning” (Powell, et. Al. 2013, p. 12); this is especially true with recreation
management degrees. Although the evolution of higher education is primarily meant for undergraduate degree seekers, there are takeaways for doctoral students. Much like the undergraduate, the modern doctoral candidate in recreation management needs to produce research and intellectual property, obtain signature experiences, all while developing the skills needed to successfully perform the duties of professorship.

Perhaps the most important aspect surrounding the issue is that of consistency. Maintaining the consistency of curricula among doctoral programs in the country will be a benefit for the development of the program (McEwen & Bechtel, 2000). Is it appropriate to assume that new graduates with recreation management doctoral degrees from across the country should/would have faced similar degree requirements? If the primary prerequisite for attaining an assistant professor position at a university is a doctoral degree, there should be some assurance that doctoral degrees are educating at a reasonably consistent level.

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to more lucidly examine this question, theoretical framework was applied. Developed by Baillie, Bowden, and Meyer (2013) the Threshold Capability Integrated Theoretical Framework (TCITF) is an appropriate tool for use. The TCITF was developed in 2013 and was a combination and expansion of two previous frameworks involving the development and implementation of curricula. TCITF uses pieces of Threshold Concepts Framework (Land & Meyer 2003) and Capability Theory (Bowden & Marton 1998), while Threshold Concepts Framework involves curriculum in terms of variation and phenomenon. Capability Theory is more concerned with analyzing what constitutes a concept for learners. What is produced in TCITF is “the dynamic linking the two theoretically underpinned approaches is the progression from attaining understanding of threshold concepts to developing...
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threshold capabilities and thence to knowledge capability” (Baillie, Bowden, & Meyer, 2013, p. 236). In more practical terms, the TCITF creates a seven-step model to creating a sound curriculum:

1. What should the learner be capable of doing at the end, given the need to deal with an unknown future?
2. What threshold concepts are important to understand to enable the development of such capability?
3. What kinds of learning experiences and in what combination would best assist the learner to develop interim threshold capabilities and ultimately build on them to develop the capability to handle the unknown future after graduation?
4. How can the learning environment be best arranged to provide access to those optimal capability development experiences?
5. How can the differing needs of individual students be catered to?
6. What, specifically, is the role of teachers in supporting such learning by students?
7. What kinds of assessment of student learning will motivate learning of the kind desired and authentically measure the levels of achievement of the intended learning outcomes? (Baillie, Bowden, & Meyer, 2013, p. 237)

These steps will put into context the analysis of recreation management curricula among doctoral-granting universities. The TCIFT is intended to be a framework with which university staff can evaluate their curriculum or create new curriculum. By using the tools outlined, greater and deeper scrutiny of the varying universities may take place.
Review of Literature

As the literature is explored regarding recreation management curricula among doctoral granting universities, few examples are found. There is very little that specifically addresses the topic. There is, however, literature containing recreation studies at the undergraduate level as well as literature that consists of the development of doctoral curriculum in general terms. Although not specific to doctoral recreation curriculum, these two branches of the literature offer insight and richness to the topic.

Iglesias-Martinez and colleagues (2012) looked at undergraduate students and their reasons for choosing recreation/leisure studies as a major. This study took place at a large, Midwestern university and used undergraduate recreation students for sampling purposes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of students chose the major based on future career aspirations (Iglesias-Martinez, Martinez Ruiz, & Tortosa-Martinez, 2012). Although this may be common among many different university majors, it is especially true of majors directly tied to a profession or career. Within this study, the researchers also looked at the factors that make a recreation curriculum especially effective. Among these factors was “collaborative learning conducted in communities and situated learning experiences that allow a high degree of transference” (Iglesias-Martinez, et. Al., 2012, p. 687). In other words, a successful curriculum includes real-word experiences such as internships which are geared towards obtaining a successful career.

The literature regarding doctoral curriculum varies between the need to emphasize research to future teacher preparation. According to Gilbert (2004), the main shift in doctoral pedagogy has been from the completion of a dissertation to the actual skills and training needed to conduct independent research. This research, however, tends to have some technical issues
including that the “investigation of doctoral preparation tends to yield small sample sizes with inconclusive results” (Stumbo, Carter, Wilder, & Greenwood, 2013, p. 180). Nonetheless, literature exists addressing doctoral curriculum and preparation.

Not always at the forefront of curriculum development is the issue of cultural sensitivity, which could prove to be potentially problematic in doctoral curriculum. According to Sanzgiri (2006), cultural sensitivity should be present in a doctoral curriculum. Sanzgiri (2006) conducted a case-study at a Northern California University during the development of a new doctorate program. The study produced new recommendations that move from no cultural awareness to multiculturalism, as well as a firm belief in educational hierarchy to a belief that education should support several and varying models of curriculum implementation (Sanzgiri, 2006).

Finally, Bass (1993) explored the bridge that exists between the doctoral degree as purely research-focused to one that holistically prepares future professors to teach and research. In other words, “activities, programs, evaluations, and supports we develop to enhance the pedagogical training of the future professoriate should be generated by the same ethos and rhetoric that currently govern scholarly training” (Bass, 1993, p. 29). This sentiment sheds light onto the idea that not all doctoral candidates are preparing for work as future researchers, rather the curriculum should include at least some focus on pedagogy. “The increasing diversity of the Ph.D. degree blurs the often cited distinctions between the ‘pure’ research of the thesis-only Ph.D. and the professional orientation of the specialist degrees” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 302).

In order to explore the topic further, research questions were developed:

R1: Are universities granting doctoral degrees in recreation management offering curricula that have a common core of classes?
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R2: What differences are found within the various curricula?

R3: Do universities offering a degree in “leisure” have a different curricula than those offering “recreation”?

Methods

With approximately 16 recreation management doctoral granting universities, obtaining an adequate sample required a high number of data sets from the universities. The curricula from ten universities were analyzed for the purposes of this study. All data were obtained from publically available sources such as departmental websites. The captured data consisted of total credit hours of each doctoral program, course descriptions, research credit hours, statistics-related courses credit hours, cognate credit hours, dissertation credit hours, and the designation and title of the degree. Degrees included: Ph.D., Re.D (The Doctor of Recreation), or Ed.D as well as recreation management, recreation administration, leisure services, etc.

In order to compare and contrast the curricula, a mixed method approach was administered: both qualitative content analysis on course descriptions, as well as central tendencies on credit hours will be processed. To measure the differences between Central tendencies were produced using SPSS 22.0 software. Content analysis coding was also done by the researchers. Themes were identified, compared and contrasted using the “Constant Comparison” method of qualitative research. This method produces salient themes until the point of data saturation.

Results

For the purposes of this study, mixed methods analysis were utilized. A total population of data from recreation doctoral granting universities were gathered. Table 1 included the doctoral granting universities with a degree in recreation management (or similar).
Table 1

Universities Offering a Doctoral Degree in Recreation or Leisure Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Degree Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>Recreation &amp; Sport Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona St.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Community Resources &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baylor</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Kinesiology, Exercise Nutrition, &amp; Health Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemson</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Parks, Recreation, &amp; Tourism Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Health &amp; Human Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Natural Resources, Recreation, &amp; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Recreation, Sport, &amp; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Leisure Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Tennessee St.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Human Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina St.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Natural Resources, Recreation, &amp; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Iowa</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>Allied Health, Recreation, &amp; Community Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma St.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Health, Leisure, &amp; Human Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania St.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Recreation, Park, &amp; Tourism Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Recreation, Park, &amp; Tourism Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Parks, Recreation, &amp; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Forestry &amp; Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but two universities (Northern Iowa and Arkansas) offer the doctoral degree as a Ph.D.

North Iowa and Arkansas currently offer only an Ed.D. Total credit hours as well as credit hours dedicated to research/statistics were also explored. This data are represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Credits at Doctoral Granting Recreation Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Credit Hours</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>72.88</td>
<td>13.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research/Statistics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, courses required of all doctoral students were collected for analysis. Considered to be “core” curriculum, these courses generally consisted of 2-4 classes involving such topics as: teaching methods, philosophy, and many others. Using grounded theory, themes of classes were identified. These themes include:

- Issues/Problems
- Overview/Foundations
- Teaching/Curriculum
- Human Behavior
- Management
- General Seminar

**Discussion**

The data show some interesting findings. For example, total credit hours range from 60-96 total for a doctoral degree. Although these universities all make mention of some master’s level coursework being accepted towards graduation, there was no connection to total credit hours and mention of master’s credits. Most programs listed a 3-4 year completion rate at full-time study. It is likely that most programs on the lower end of the credit hours are not including master’s credits and those at the high end are, but the data did not expressly show this.

Total statistics and research coursework credit hours ranged from 9-18 credits. A mean credits of 13.3 paired with a relatively small standard deviation of 2.63 suggest that most programs are similar in the statistics and research required. The lowest of required research/statistics was Northern Iowa at 9 while Utah sat atop the list at 18. It should be noted that Northern Iowa is one of the two programs offering an Ed.D degree which sometimes suggest less emphasis on research than the traditional Ph.D.
As the core curriculum is considered, several interesting things emerge. The six themes (Issues/Problems, Overview/Foundations, Teaching/Curriculum, Human Behavior, Management, General Seminar) were found in the data. In other words, each doctoral program had some core classes that fit into at least one of these themes. This suggests that although each program has a sense of unique identity, which is consistent with the idea of a “core curriculum”, or foundational set of classes.

The next thing considered about the programs was the actual labeling of the doctoral degrees. With 16 total programs, a total of 13 distinct names of doctoral degrees can be earned by students. Although the name differences can be subtle, there are some degrees with widely varied names under larger departmental degrees; “Human Performance” or “Forestry” for example. As the different names of degrees are considered, several themes are discovered: First, recreation as a key component of the programs. Second, tourism and parks are the next highly used labels as key components, and third, recreation as a specialization of another degree name such as “human performance”. To further highlight these findings, please see figure 1. Each word appearing in the degree names is found on the figure. The relative size and darkness of the word indicates the frequency of its use among the 16 degree programs.
Figure 1. Frequency of Degree Names Among the 16 Institutions
Finally, it is interesting to note the geographic location of the universities. The geographic breakdown of the universities is found in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Geographic Breakdown of the 16 Institutions.

The distribution shows a concentration of universities offering a doctorate in recreation or leisure studies in the Southern and Eastern portions of the United States with a strong representation in the Southeast. This concentration of universities is not especially convenient for students wanting to study in the Western portions of the country. With large population centers in locations in California, Oregon, Nevada, and Washington, there are no opportunities for doctoral students to attend local universities.
Future Research

This study begins the discussion about universities granting doctoral degrees in recreation or leisure by presenting the current status of the industry. By exploring core coursework, credit hours, research/statistics credit hours, and geographic location, academics and students alike can have a more well-rounded understanding of the opportunities across the nation. Potential for future research includes a more detailed exploration of coursework through interviews and surveys to institutions listed above, as well as a comparative analysis of coursework to National Recreation and Parks Association requirements for agency accreditation. Furthermore, future research should include an examination of actual academic position descriptions compared to the curriculum being offered by various doctoral-granting institutions.
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