THE NEED FOR MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TOURISM EDUCATION

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As universities rush to respond to the student demand for education in tourism, a plethora of programs has emerged, especially in the United States. Training of employees and mid-management has occurred primarily at the community, junior, and technical college level. Universities have concentrated primarily at the managerial and policy levels. Crompton (1991) reported that eight schools—Clemson, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan State, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania State and Texas A&M—dominate higher education in leisure studies, recreation and park, and tourism doctoral studies in the United States.

The key question faced by all program leaders has been what form should the curriculum take? Is there a fundamental body of knowledge at the undergraduate level? How must this focus be modified at the graduate levels, masters and doctoral? And, what are needs of tourism public education at the community level? But the main concern here is whether tourism is to be considered as one more discipline to be added to university offerings.

Put forward here is the precept that tourism is a multi-disciplinary field. Discussion of this precept is then followed by an example of the amalgam of park-recreation-tourism education, the Texas A&M University experience. This paper is not the result of a research study but rather is based on the author’s experience of four decades of involvement in tourism education. Involvement began with participation in the first extension educational program in the United States, the Tourist and Resort Service of Michigan State University, starting in 1945. This was followed by experience in research and academic teaching in several universities with many opportunities for consulting work in other countries as well as the U.S. Coincidentally, it was in 1972 that the first three books on tourism were published in the United States: Tourism Principles, Practices, Philosophies by Robert W. McIntosh, The Tourist Business by Donald Lundberg, and Vacationscape: Designing Tourist Regions by Clare A. Gunn. Each of these focused on separate aspects of tourism and were independent expressions of need and reportings of the state of the art at the time.

This educational experience of four decades now suggests that several modes of education in tourism are equally valid. Each one needs to be adapted to needs of the field as well as to the administrative support of the university administration. The case of Texas A&M University’s program demonstrates the opportunity for mixing the fields of park, recreation, and tourism because of the strong degree of overlap in subject matter. In recent years, several other schools have adopted this mode.
TOURISM--MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

Scholars are increasingly recognizing that tourism is a field, not a discipline in the traditional sense of university education. As such, it is difficult, if not impossible, to direct curriculum building toward a discrete body of knowledge. Tourism does not lend itself to such fine tuning.

The many definitions of tourism generally justify its identification as a field. Most definitions include the following elements:

--travel from home to destination and return,
--visitor activities engaged in during travel and at destinations,
--facilities and services developed for visitor use,
--economic impact from traveler purchases of services and goods.

If the element of travel is to be understood, several disciplines and specialties are implied. Certainly, all forms of passenger transportation are critical--air, rail, ship, bus (tour, scheduled), automobile, and other forms of people-movers (cable-car, horseback, walking, mass transit, minibus). Equally important today is intermodal transportation, a sequence of many modes. Many characteristics of transportation need to be known such schedules, pricing, convenience, routing and safety. Management policies of both the public and private sectors are important. Several academic disciplines come into play when one considers the breadth of transportation and travel: transportation, political science, geography, and engineering.

Visitor activities encompass many disciplines. Traveler behavior has become an increasingly popular topic of research. Understanding this aspect of tourism has several dimensions. Characteristics of populations at their places of residence, such as demographics, motivations, and benefits they seek from travel are important. Of equal interest are traveler activities en route and at destinations. Those seeking to develop the supply side of tourism search for clues to these behavioral patterns in order to provide products and services. Place characteristics at destinations are important in their ability to create the desire for travel. Basic disciplines of geography, psychology, sociology, history, archeology, and marketing come into play for understanding this tourism element.

The realm of facilities and services involves several dimensions. First, there are three sectors of developers: commercial enterprise (lodging, food service, shops), nonprofit organizations (historic sites, festivals), and governments (parks, reservoirs, transportation, infrastructure). Each sector is influenced by a multiplicity of stakeholders, policies and practices. Commercial enterprise is driven by profit-making based on the sales of services and products sought by travelers. Nonprofit organizations have a variety of objectives directed toward the promulgation of their beliefs and actions. Governments are motivated primarily by social good and the common weal. If one is to understand facilities and services pertinent to tourism several disciplines apply such as political science, business management, hotel and food administration.
accounting, marketing, ecology, conservation, forestry, wildlife science, planning, landscape architecture, architecture, and engineering.

The dimension of economic impact is a prime motivation for most of tourism development. The creation of jobs, incomes, and the generation of tax revenues are critical issues. These give rise to concerns over competitive pricing, labor relations, the creation of wealth, rural and urban economic development and financial support. This realm of tourism draws upon disciplines of finance, economics, management, business, entrepreneurship, and political science.

This brief review of four major elements of tourism provides a sampling of the complicated nature of tourism. The intent here is not to add to the confusion of educational direction but rather to demonstrate the complexity of tourism. Those seeking to develop programs and curricula at the university and community levels must recognize the reality of this multi-disciplinary truth.

THE TOURISM-RECREATION-PARK MIX

As universities began to focus on tourism education, several modes emerged. One was attachment to hotel and restaurant management curricula. This included one or more courses in tourism, emphasizing the marketing, business, and economic aspects. The primary outcome was students able to accept management positions in restaurants and hotels. Another mode was attachment to schools of leisure and recreation studies. In these cases, the human behavioral and activity sides of tourism gained emphasis. A third mode has been the expansion of recreation and park departments to include tourism. These programs provided not merely the separate specialties but rather a mix that related tourism to the more traditional park and recreation emphases. A fourth emerging mode is attachment to business schools. This is the dominant European mode and is emerging in North America in Calgary and in Victoria.

Probably the first program of the park-recreation-tourism mix was the Park, Recreation and Tourism Sciences Department of Texas A&M University, established in 1965. This innovative approach continues to demonstrate that the concepts laid down over twenty-five years ago are still valid. This program remains as the dominant doctoral program in the world. In retrospect, several features of this program have contributed to its worth.

Subject Matter Overlap

Because the fields of park, recreation and tourism have a high degree of subject-matter overlap, there is much to be gained by combined education at both the university and community education (extension) levels.

Understandings of visitors to destination areas are common to all three fields. Needs assessments performed by park and recreation researchers are similar to travel market studies.
Behavioral characteristics, demographics, origin-destination, motivations, and preferences of activities are important for all three fields. Students need to learn how research of visitors is being done, how reported, and the factors influencing changes in travel markets and visitors.

All three fields involve the "supply" side--design development and management of land, facilities, services, and programs. Factors of transportation, lodging, food service, shops, entertainment, information, attractions, and promotion are common to all. All involve three sectors of developers--commercial enterprise, nonprofit organizations and governments.

Issues of resource management, conservation, finance, policy, geographical distribution, and economics are common to all.

**Student Accomplishment**

One tangible measure of the outcome of the park-recreation-tourism mix is the job performance of graduates. Early on, students found that their multi-disciplinary education was often too innovative at the entrance level. But, it proved itself later on as graduates demonstrated breadth of competence.

At the undergraduate level in the beginning greatest placement was in the public sector. As the tourism and commercial emphasis became better known, many students found positions in these fields. Results of a survey of undergraduate placement from 1986-1989 are shown in Table 1. (Survey, 1991)

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<tr>
<td>UNDERGRADUATE PLACEMENT</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986-1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial Recreation</td>
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<td>Travel and Tourism</td>
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<td>Military Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>100%</td>
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Masters graduates (54) from 1984 to 1991 have found positions shown in Table 2. (Survey, 1991).

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<tr>
<td>MASTERS PLACEMENT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public park, recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial recreation and tourism</td>
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</tbody>
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4
Nonprofit resource organizations 11%
Academic institutions 8%
Further degree work 9%
Other 13%
100%

Of the 30 Ph.D. students graduated from 1984 to 1991, the distribution of positions is shown in Table 3. (Survey, 1991).

TABLE 3
DOCTORAL PLACEMENT

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<tr>
<td>Academic institutions</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, state and federal agencies</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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Qualitative measure of student accomplishment is difficult. Some evidence can be found in favorable responses from employers, increased demand for graduates, continuing requests from prospective students, and visibility in professional organizations. Graduates have shown leadership throughout North America and in several locations abroad.

Multi-disciplinary Faculty

At the outset, Dr. Reid, as department head, conceived of the innovative multi-disciplinary faculty that continues today. It was his belief that the existing programs in park and recreation management and tourism had their specialized value but that there was need for a new kind of educated individual--one with greater breadth.

Another very important policy at the start was placement of highly accomplished full professors on the faculty. Such a policy was contrary to the traditional pyramid of many instructors at the bottom and only a few full professors at the top. This act had several advantages. It established an immediate image and visibility of a highly competent faculty core. It facilitated rapid acceptance of a graduate program by the university administration. These factors combined to attract students from throughout North America as well as overseas. And, in the first few years, testimony and placement of graduates soon established this as a productive and relative department.

In the beginning, the core faculty included specialists in forestry, geography, regional planning, economics, sociology, landscape architecture, tourism, and park interpretation. Currently, the faculty encompasses 19 professors with degrees in rural sociology, forestry, outdoor recreation, political science, wildlife resource science, english, education, business administration, recreation and resources development, recreation education, botany, anthropology, law, land and water conservation, finance, watershed management, geography, landscape architecture, accounting, and park administration.
Two advantages have been demonstrated by this mix. First, students are directly exposed to individuals with a diversity of subject matter ability. Second, professors maintain close linkage with their "home" discipline providing the student with quick and easy access to other departments on campus and professionals in the field.

**Personal Advising**

Because of this great diversity of specialized subject matter, students could become confused easily and lack direction. This problem has been averted by means of close student advising. Because this was a non-traditional program, all faculty subscribed to an "open door" policy that involved personal attention and guidance for each student. Feedback from former students has proven the value of this time-consuming policy.

To accomplish this desirable objective, faculty members also developed strong collegiality. Understanding each other's specialties was professionally complementary and of great assistance to students.

For many years, required courses were kept to the minimum to allow tailoring each student's program to his own needs. Later, four generalized emphases were identified: park and recreation management, tourism and commercial recreation, interpretation, and marine recreation. For advising purposes, the faculty created lists of elective courses suited to these emphases.

**Faculty Professionalism**

It has been interesting to observe that this multi-disciplinary faculty did not give up its allegiance to fundamental disciplinary backgrounds. Most became very active in professional organizations, such as the National Recreation and Parks Association, Texas Recreation and Parks Society, Travel and Tourism Research Association, and the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association. However, this was not done at the expense of losing ties with their basic professional organizations, such as the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Society of American Foresters, and American Marketing Association.

This duality of professional ties, together with their own demonstration of expertise, has put faculty members in demand for outside seminars, conference presentations, scholarly writing and consulting work.

**Public Service**

From the beginning, the department has maintained a strong public service responsibility. This has been expressed both by voluntary faculty participation in public meetings, conferences, and seminars and also through the Extension Service.

Even with a relatively small staff, the educational impact has been substantial. Many tourist businesses and organizations have benefitted from special services, workshops, special
Close rapport has been developed with the Texas Travel Industry Association, the State Tourism Division, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Many communities throughout Texas now have more and better park and tourism development due to the field activities of academic faculty and Extension Specialists. They have been effective in identifying opportunities, establishing leadership, and utilizing public and private funding sources. In 1990 alone, over 250 communities received assistance in tourism and recreation planning and development, resulting in $7.2 million in capital investments and land acquisitions. (Annual, 1990)

A cooperative program with the Texas Department of Commerce, Division of Tourism and Southwestern Bell Foundation, called "Texas Hospitality", has trained local leaders who, in turn, have trained over 2000 managers and employees of travel-related businesses.

A tourism marketing information system has been developed based on experimental work in Fredericksburg, Texas.

**Research**

From the beginning, all faculty members have had dual responsibilities of research as well as teaching. This brought vitality to the teaching program and applied faculty expertise to the solution of problems in the field. A sampling from the last five years includes:

--analysis of public agency delivery services
--public recreation equity
--psychological benefits from hunting
--analysis of winter visitors to South Texas
--risk management strategies
--barriers to use of private lands for recreation
--user conflicts at Padre Island and Everglades National Park areas.

Faculty and graduate research projects are reported regularly in scholarly and refereed journals.

**International Service**

Without doubt, the special interdisciplinary mixes of expertise have fostered demands on the faculty for international consultations and presentations. In the last few years alone these projects have brought faculty members into Canada, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Mexico, England, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Netherlands, Korea, Moorea, New Zealand, Turkey, Germany and many other areas around the world.

**All Degree Levels**
From the beginning, it was visualized that the Ph.D., and masters degree, as well as the baccalaureate degree, were necessary. Faculty members are involved in all three degrees which tends to enrich the quality of instruction in each. Professors chairing masters and doctoral student advisory committees frequently bring worthwhile data and research results into the undergraduate classroom. And, undergraduate students observe that faculty are not merely lower level instructors--they are maintaining up-to-date professionalism as well. Doctoral students, most likely to enter university careers, have the opportunity of classroom training.

EVALUATION

The Texas A&M University example has proven its value as one mode for tourism education but requires further comment.

First, this mode demands a highly dedicated, experienced and mature faculty. As some faculty members retired or left and as the 20-year tenure of the department head came to an end, changes were necessary. Considerable stress occurred as a new department head took over and new faculty were hired.

Second, this condition was exacerbated by a surge in undergraduate enrollment, from approximately 200 to 400 students in a one year period.

Third, because of changing conditions in the fields of parks, recreation and tourism, updating the curriculum was in order. Intensive review by the faculty has identified needed changes in course content and curriculum for all three degrees. Especially important will be new sequencing of undergraduate courses for the several emphases.

Fourth, it is likely that for the undergraduate curriculum, a core of required courses will be established. This core would be taken by all undergraduate students before they specialize. Already the faculty has identified six elements in a "Critical Body of Knowledge" for all undergraduate students, as listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4
ELEMENTS OF
THE CRITICAL BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

--conceptual foundations of recreation, park and tourism sciences
--operations and maintenance of land, facilities, and programs
--planning and design of land and facilities
--natural and cultural resource foundations and protection
--administrative principles and practices, public and private
--research methodology and analysis
Fifth, the department continues to strive for closer rapport with the many constituencies in the field. Because recreation, parks and tourism involve so many actors and stakeholders this becomes a difficult task. As yet, a completely satisfactory mechanism has not been found.

Sixth, as with all university programs, especially in large universities, they are vulnerable to administrative and organizational changes. Often, new administrators at the higher levels have no knowledge of these fields, especially tourism, because they are not as well known as engineering, physics, or agriculture. Therefore, the faculty members and their leader often find themselves in a defensive posture. Even though there may be student demand, high levels of professionalism, and support from several constituencies, an administrator may attempt to shift financial and physical support to more traditional fields.

Finally, even this reasonably successful program requires constant reevaluation. As research and experience increasingly raise the level of the state-of-the-art, new challenges arise. The present level of all programs, undergraduate to doctoral, is generic rather than advanced. Even for the baccalaureate degree, courses of greater depth and specialization are needed, such as for tourism visitor centers, community tourism leadership and involvement, tourism and minorities, and tourism planning and design. At the graduate level, specialized courses, such as the following are not yet available: social psychology of travelers, tourism forecasting, tourism marketing, public-private policy relations, tourism financing, tourism development and tourism impacts.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion to be derived from this discussion is that tourism education is a specialty that must find its own niche. This niche will be influenced by several factors. For one, it is important to identify mission in terms of educational objectives: research accomplishment, placement of students, broad education of students, mix or specialty of subject matter, different curriculum for three degrees, and relevance to field needs. For another, how well can it compete with programs already in place? Will it be able to attract students, faculty, and financial support? And certainly, any program's success will be influenced by how well a multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary curriculum can be established. Some small universities lack an adequate diversity of support disciplines.

Another conclusion is the continuing validity of the park-recreation-tourism mix as one productive option. The rise in environmentalism, the increased tourist use of parks, the increased diversity of leisure and recreation activities, and the solid economic power of tourism and commercial recreation foster the amalgam of the three fields in educational programs.
REFERENCES


TOURISM ELEMENTS

* Travel
* Visitor Activities
* Facilities/Services
* Economic Impact

TRAVEL

* Transportation
* Political Science
* Geography
* Engineering
* Public/Private

VISITOR ACTIVITIES

* Psychology
* Sociology
* History
* Archeology
* Marketing
* Conservation
* Forest./Wildlife
* Architecture
* Land. Arch.

FACILITIES SERVICES

* Management
* Finance
* Hotel/Food Admin.
* Architecture
* Land. Arch.
* Political Science

ECONOMIC IMPACT

* Economics
* Finance
* Business
* Entrepreneurship
* Political Science

PROGRAM FEATURES

* Subject Matter Overlap
* Student Accomplishment
* Multidisciplinary Faculty
* Personal Advising
* Professionalism
* Public Service
* Research
* International Service
* All Degree Levels