RECREATION, PARK & TOURISM SCIENCES

Fall /Winter 2020-2021 Newsletter

SNOW BLANKETS THE GARDENS AT TAMU ON JANUARY 10, 2021

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As we begin 2021 we look back on recent months with concern and a sense of accomplishment. The Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences (RPTS), our College and Texas A&M University came through the fall term with much to be thankful for. The University remained open and on track with both on-campus and remote classes. While most students chose to access their courses remotely many came to campus following mask and social distancing rules. Of course, we are not out of the woods yet and the spring term will continue to present challenges. The RPTS faculty, teaching assistants and staff have done an exceptional job of keeping the Department up and running.

Our faculty were champs in adjusting course materials to on-line and Zoom formats and in working with students on a variety of issues they faced during the term. Graduate teaching assistants were often key players in making sure technology was in order and worked to keep communications with students open and timely.

In this issue of the newsletter you will hear from a recent PhD graduate whose Peace Corps experience led her to study nature and human wellbeing, a new MS student with her sights set on working in experience design and an undergraduate who aspires to become an event planner. Each has a unique path to RPTS but all want to serve the greater good.

In December a Departmental visioning process was implemented to help set a course for a future that integrates hospitality into our research, teaching and outreach. It is likely that in the next year or two the Department’s name and educational offerings will be updated to reflect our evolution. One that will better accommodate the needs of Aggies and all Texans.

Here is to wishing you all the very best for a safe, healthy and enjoyable 2021. Remember your three Ls - Love, Laugh and Learn!

Scott Shafer
**Student Interviews:**

**Former Student**

**LAUREN REDMORE'20**

*Where are you from?*
I grew up in New Jersey, but had the opportunity when I was in high school to visit my father who lived in Canada, England, Italy, and India. After finishing my bachelor’s degree in Pennsylvania, I worked in New Mexico, Kenya, and Oregon before I decided to join the Peace Corps where I served as an agroforestry volunteer in Southern Cameroon, and my time there has deeply influenced not only my career choices but who I am and what I value.

*What led you to pursue an education in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?*
I decided to come back to school for my Ph.D. in RPTS because of the opportunity to study as an Ecoexist Fellow with the Ecoexist Project, a Botswana non-profit run by my advisor, Dr. Stronza. I was interested in learning more about how people live with elephants, and being housed in RPTS made a lot of sense given the department’s focus on applied research for social wellbeing and community development.

*What inspired you to choose your field of study?*
From a young age, I became interested in the connection between people and nature and read everything I could about female conservationists, like Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall. In my formative teenage years, I had a very inspirational high school biology teacher who encouraged me to not only learn about the environment, but to seek to be a better steward of the earth. As I gained more life and work experience I learned that conservation necessitates a deep understanding of people and their perspectives. Although I did not start out my career with the intent of becoming a social scientist, I realized that there is nothing I care about more than the wellbeing of both people and planet.

*What topics in your studies are of most interest?*
I loved taking classes in Applied Biodiversity Sciences. The courses integrated different conservation studies, including wildlife and natural resource management, political ecology, sociology, economics, among others. I really enjoy sitting in rooms with people who use different frameworks to understand the world. It’s a fun challenge to find common ground to advance the shared mission of ecosystem health and human wellbeing.
Student Interviews: Former Student (cont.)

LAUREN REDMORE '20

What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?
Hiking. I have two dogs and look forward to our daily walks around the neighborhood, though I really live for a good long hike somewhere beautiful, preferably with good views. I also love cooking, though much less so since the pandemic has kept us cooking at home most days.

What have you learned through your experiences while in the RPTS Department?
Through the classes I took in the RPTS department, as well as the classes I assisted with Dr. Scott, I learned how to connect across the multiple dimensions of human wellbeing to better understand society and practices of resource management. For example, I learned to connect practices of work and leisure and to integrate a historical perspective of social change to better understand human-elephant conflict in Botswana. Those skills are transferable to many different modern dilemmas and I use them every day in my work. RPTS faculty encourage students to think holistically and to consider both what is visible and invisible—these real-world, problem-solving skills are invaluable for tomorrow’s leaders.

Where do you see yourself in the future? How might your current studies influence your career and/or your life in general?
I would like to continue to work in new geographies, to explore the intersection of culture and environment in challenging situations where problems seem “wicked.” I also love learning through my work, and I hope to continue to seek out opportunities that will allow me to grow personally and professionally. I want to make a real impact on peoples’ lives and the environment, and wherever my career takes me, I hope to contribute to meaningful change.

What advice would you give new students or those thinking about becoming students in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?
RPTS is a diverse field that can open many doors, no matter what specific aspects of the field interest you. The most critical thing, I believe, is to get hands-on experience. Take as many internships and volunteer positions as you can because the problem-solving skills you will develop in the field will serve you well, both personally and professionally. I also recommend talking to as many people as you can about their career trajectories because you never know what interesting and potentially life-changing opportunities are out there.

Side question: If you won an all-expense paid trip to go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
I would take a trip to the bottom of the deep sea. I find it so incredible that the deep sea is as alien to us as Mars and I imagine that exploring the sea from a human occupied vehicle is as perspective-shifting as seeing Earth from space.
Where are you from?
I was born and raised in Frisco, Texas.

What led you to pursue an education in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?
When I was first accepted into Texas A&M as an undergraduate, I didn’t really know what I wanted to pursue a career in. I started out in business, but soon realized the 8 to 5 desk job wasn’t for me. My mom – a RPTS graduate herself – suggested that I look into RPTS, and I knew immediately that I belonged here. I am at my happiest when I am making others happy, and my interests correspond perfectly with the mission of this department to create positive experiences and provide a better quality of life for everyone. I loved the department so much that I decided to come back for Round 2 and pursue a master’s degree in RPTS. I don’t think I could have found a better fit!

What inspired you to choose your field of study?
I can’t answer this question without giving most of the credit to my parents and my upbringing. Some of my fondest memories so far have been the ones that were made on family vacations. Being a family of six, flying to our destinations and staying in fancy resorts could get expensive, so our vacations often consisted of road trips and visiting unique, sometimes off-the-beaten-path attractions. For example, I got to drive a tank, go mudding in the back of a monster truck in the rain, and see Carrie Underwood perform at the Grand Ole Opry all in the same trip! I chose my field of study because I would love to help design these types of experiences so others can create fond memories that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

What topics in your studies are of most interest?
I enjoy the topics that can be applied to experience design, including customer behavior, motivation, and experience, as well as marketing and journey mapping.

What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?
I spend more time on social media and watching shows and movies than I should probably admit – there are just too many good shows out there and not enough time to watch them all! I also really enjoy fishing, hiking, doing puzzles, and playing games with my family and friends.

What have you learned through your experiences while in the RPTS Department?
I think the coolest thing I’ve learned while being a student in RPTS is that I can have a career designing amazing experiences like the ones I had growing up and where work doesn’t actually feel like work.
**Where do you see yourself in the future? How might your current studies influence your career and/or your life in general?**

I would love to have a career as an experience designer within the experience industries. My specific path at the moment is focused on tourism and events, but I could also see myself venturing out and using my studies for other types of experiences like themed youth camps. It would be amazing if I got the opportunity to work for Disney, as they are one of the major leaders in experience design (plus I’m a big Disney nerd myself). However, I think my ultimate goal is to become an independent experience designer where I can help those off-the-beaten-path attractions similar to what I grew up with to thrive and continue to provide amazing experiences for generations to come.

**What advice would you give new students or those thinking about becoming students in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?**

To new students – don’t be afraid to talk to and make connections with your professors. I was shy and didn’t talk to my professors much during my undergraduate years. When I started my graduate studies, I made it a goal to connect with my professors more, and I’m so glad that I did. The professors in this department are some of the coolest and nicest people you will ever meet. To potential students – I may be a little biased, but I would highly recommend joining RPTS. Whatever your topic of interest may be within RPTS, you will have the opportunity to bring positivity into the world and change people’s lives for the better.

**Side question: If you won an all-expense paid trip to go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?**

I would LOVE to go to Norway. The natural scenery and the historic architecture are beautiful, and the people seem so friendly. I would love to be immersed in their culture, especially during the holiday season!
**Student interviews: Undergraduate Student**

**AMANDA MONTGOMERY'21**

Where are you from?
Georgetown, Texas.

What led you to pursue an education in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?
My freshman year of college I started out as a Biology major and I dreaded being in that major. I knew I needed to change my major during my first semester and started looking into other degrees at A&M. As I was looking, I knew I was passionate about weddings and originally wanted to be a wedding planner. When I came across RPTS, I immediately knew it was calling my name and that it was where I was supposed to be. I am so grateful that I learned about the degree and career field early on in college because I have had the most enjoyable educational experience I could have, learning about careers I know I am passionate about.

What inspired you to choose your field of study?
I originally started to grow a passion for weddings in high school because my sister-in-law is a wedding photographer. I was able to see a lot of her work and hear about her experiences with weddings. I did not know about RPTS until after I started college, but when I heard about it, it instantly sparked my interest. This was the field of study that was perfect for me because I could learn more about events and gain experience with them. I am thankful for my sister-in-law because I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, and she inspired me to pursue a career in something that I enjoy that motivates me to learn more about it and be better at what I do. I was also intrigued by travelling even though I had not traveled much growing up. Wanting to travel more in the future and learn more about the industry inspired me to pursue the tourism part of RPTS.

What topics in your studies are of most interest?
Since transferring to RPTS, my interests have slightly changed. I have learned that I might not be the best wedding planner, but I would excel in managing wedding venues and just helping with the planning process. Tourism is also a topic that I am most interested in because I am a curious and adventurous person who wants to see the world and make it more suitable for tourism. I want to give people experiences that they will never forget because I value that when traveling or participating in tourism activities. So, wedding events and tourism, more specifically resort, are the topics I find most intriguing.
What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?
In my leisure time, I enjoy looking for new places to travel to and find fun activities to do. I love going country dancing and spending time with friends and family, playing games, especially Catan. When I travel, I enjoy going to all the local shops and restaurants. Going to the beach is one of my favorite vacations. I also love being busy and involved in organizations, especially my sorority.

What have you learned through your experiences while in the RPTS Department?
I have learned so much since being in the RPTS department. One thing I have learned that has caught my attention greatly is how much tourism impacts the environment, economics, and different cultures. I have also learned how diverse the industry is and the amount of options in careers I have to look forward to once I graduate. The event management program has taught me how flexible and prepared for change I need to be because there are so many components that go into events. The hospitality courses have taught me more about hotels and resorts. The tourism classes have taught me to be creative in how to give people the best experiences they can have while on vacation and how important it is to give exceptional first and last impressions. There are endless experiences and lessons I have learned through being in the RPTS department, and I have grown so much in how I perceive others, create experiences, and prepare for a career in the field.
Where do you see yourself in the future? How might your current studies influence your career and/or your life in general?

In the future, I hope to work at a beach resort. Further in the future, I hope to own a wedding venue. I could see myself in these roles because I want to have extraordinary experiences and working at a resort or with weddings will give me that. My current studies will influence my life and career because I am motivated to learn and grow in these areas since I am passionate about it. RPTS has been perfect for me because it has taught me so many life skills as well that other majors do not teach. The professors in the degree have also been fantastic and have influenced my aspirations. Since I will be working with many different people, my current studies have also taught me to be more open minded and prepared to interact with and learn about other cultures.

What advice would you give new students or those thinking about becoming students in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences?

I would tell students to find what makes them happy and pursue those studies because it is important to find a career that you enjoy. RPTS has a lot of career fields and there is so much you can do, so I would encourage students to pursue multiple certificates within the major. I am pursuing 4 of the 6 certificates, so this has been very beneficial for me in having options and being more knowledgeable in the field.

Side question: If you won an all-expense paid trip to go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

I would go to Tahiti! I have dreamed of going there for a while, and I love the idea of going to a tropical island because I have never been to one before. It is so beautiful there and it has stuck out to me because it is unique, and a lot of people would not think to go there over Europe or Hawaii, etc.
The end of spring semester 2020 brought with it many changes for our RPTS Event Management students implementing planned events in RPTS 321. With more time to implement change, Fall 2020 RPTS 321 students provided 7 amazing events, all either completely online or with some element online. Due to management concerns related to some of our events continuing as planned, some went on as pilots—or a practice run of the event, in a virtual setting.

Students from other RPTS classes volunteered as participants to provide the full experience. RPTS 321 students kicked off the semester with a virtual pilot Midnight Yell Practice. With video content of yells and fables filmed by volunteer Yell Leaders and many student fans “sawing ‘em off”, a community atmosphere was created in a Zoom room to spread Aggie spirit before the Alabama home football game. The next day, another group from RPTS 321 was well poised to host a virtual tailgate experience for current and former RPTS students to connect via the virtual chatroom space, Discord. With very competitive trivia games, a candy guessing game, and an acoustic musician, students and former students in attendance were able to laugh and have fun while chatting about Texas A&M on and off the field. Later in the semester, another group hosted Texas A&M media legend, Dave South and former Texas A&M president, Dr. R. Bowen Loftin for a virtual question and answer session via Zoom and Facebook Live as part of the Brazos County A&M Club’s Beats and Eats fall connection event. Many Aggies joined in with questions during the live event and many more watched and shared the videos of the event after the fact.
These students also had the chance to plan and implement events for two local mixed-use destinations, LakeWalk Town Center and Century Square. While the original farm-to-table dinner planned for Traditions residents at LakeWalk had to be postponed to post-COVID times, a chance to pilot a virtual Cook From Home event allowed the students to showcase how to involve participants in an interactive meal preparation and place setting contest over Zoom. Century Square fans got the chance to be super sleuths and hunt down clues within their restaurants, stores, and hotels either in-person or online for The Hunt via a scavenger hunt app called Scavify. With a one night stay at The George, 6 $50 gift cards, 8 picnic blankets and an assortment of participation door prizes on the line, participants were busy all week searching for clues on the property, all the while learning more about the tenants and boosting foot traffic and sales for the venue.

Students also engaged in event support for several local non-profits this fall. In place of a planned fundraiser 5k fun run for Books & a Blanket, a group that provides books and blankets to local children to promote youth literacy, a week-long interactive Witches & Wizards magical 5k took its place. In addition to coached walk and run times throughout the week, the students provided sessions on spell book making, butterbeer potions, and a shared movie watching experience. Throughout the week, participants had the chance to speak with the founders of Books & a Blanket, sisters Harper and Maggie Cunningham, to learn about their passion for helping their peers in the community.

Our final RPTS 321 group worked with the St. Thomas Early Learning Center on their annual Grow With Me Gala fundraiser. Due to pandemic concerns, the event was moved to an outdoor location on the site of the school that allowed for fresh air and social distancing. Parents at the school provided complementary live music and a video and live stream service, with a large video screen on-site for participants. In person and virtual participants touted the experience as worthwhile and fun.

Even though many events this fall had to “pivot” to survive, our clients were well pleased and our students learned valuable knowledge, only available to them in this hands-on environment. With an unknown future in mind, all RPTS 320 students were required to provide in-person and virtual options for their spring 2021 event plans that they proposed to their clients. With more time to plan and prepare for such a change, no doubt our spring events will result in events more well-attended and successful events for our students and campus and community clients.
DEPARTMENTAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CONGRATULATIONS TO...

The Sequor Foundation and our Youth Development group. The Sequor Foundation has been selected as a 2021 recipient of the Extension Partnership Award from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Dr. Peter Witt developed a partnership with Sequor during his tenure as Department Head. The partnership has provided exceptional financial support through the Bradberry Endowed Recreation and Youth Development Chair (currently held by Dr. Gary Ellis) and additional annual funding that supports graduate student salaries, student scholarships, research projects and outreach activities.

Dr. Jim Petrick for a new role. Dr. Petrick will serve as a next Co-Editor of the JTR, Journal of Travel Research.

Dr. Tazim Jamal and co-authors/editors for a double special issue on Justice and Tourism in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Vol 29 (2-3) online and free to access in Dec. and March. [https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsus20/29/2-3?nav=tocList]. The introduction article by Tazim Jamal and James Higham discusses the special issue and emerging knowledge platform on justice and tourism [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09669582.2020.1835933].

Dr. John Crompton and former graduate student Sarah Nicholls for a new book entitled, "The Impact on Property Values of Parks, Trails, Golf Courses and Water Amenities" (2021), Sagamore/Venture.

Dr. Jamie Rae Walker and associates for securing another year for the WOW-E (Working on Wellness Environments) program funded by the Centers for Disease Control. Dr. Walker’s program has been funded at approximately $1 million per year for five years.


Dr. Angela Durko for her role as an expert on an international panel that discussed the pandemic's impact on Tourism and Hospitality. Representatives were from different countries and shared their perspective on the present and future of the industry. Students from 5 countries posed questions during the live discussion. Email Dr. Durko at angela.durko@tamu.edu if you would like to view the recorded proceedings.

Dr. Dalene Locke for continued involvement in the State's 4-H International Exchange Programs. Dr. Shafer recently received a letter from the President and CEO of this program expressing deep thanks stating that the program’s “positive effects would not have been possible without the hard work of Darlene Locke.” If you have never asked Dr. Locke about her involvement in this program and how it works, you should. The program helps students from other countries and from the US learn more about one another’s cultures. We need this more than ever in today’s world.

Charriss York’s program The Green Infrastructure for Texas (GIFT) program at TCWP for beginin to plant a five acre constructed stormwater wetland at the new Houston Botanic Garden. After construction delays, and COVID-19 delays, this project is taking shape just in time for the new botanic garden to open. Volunteers are planting every Thursday and Saturday following Extension volunteer guidelines. Also, Charriss York for receiving an new grant award titled – Galveston Bay Coalition of Watersheds: A collaborative approach to watershed plan implementation. The award is sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Texas General Land Office.

Steven Mikulencak’s Citizen Planner and CHARM programs that recently signed final paperwork on two major grants/contracts. One is with the State of Texas General Land Office and the other is with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The projects will be multi-year and will create significant growth in the staff and related capacity at TCWP.

Melyssa-Anne Stricklin who was named the Office for Student Success Advisor of the Month!

PhD Student Aiden Song, Dr. Courtney Suess-Raesinafchi and coauthors for a paper published in the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management titled Comparing substantive and communicative servicescapes’ influences on healthcare travelers' emotions: The moderating effect of peer-to-peer accommodation and hotel interior design style.
A FAVORITE CAKE RECIPE FROM ADVISOR ANN ALEXANDER

Enjoy some special Ann’s cooking (Kahlua Cake)

Cake: Follow mixing instructions on cake box, substituting 1 cup Kahlua for 1 cup water. Fold mini-morsels into mix before baking. Follow backing instructions on box.

Icing: Mix whipping cream, cream cheese and butter together and let come to room temperature. Mix powdered sugar and vanilla into ROOM TEMPERATURE whipping cream mixture; beat until thick and smooth. Apply to cool cake.

Enjoy!
Our department is committed to providing an excellent education. We hope that the educational experience you had in our program and at Texas A&M is proving to be a positive influence in your life. Collecting information from former students like you will help us communicate the RPTS profession and plan for the future. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Responses will not be identified with you. Results will be aggregated and used to advise prospective students, assist current students, and plan for positive changes to the program.

Please go to the address below to complete the survey: https://bit.ly/2SZduvZ
We invite you to learn more about giving to the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. The webpage link below can link you to specific opportunities that need your support. Wherever you choose to direct your gift, it will have a lasting impact on our Department. Through your gifts, you can be a fellow “educator,” helping us to maintain and enhance the outstanding quality of the RPTS Department’s faculty, students, and programs.

You may give to support students through an enrichment fund. You may also support faculty and staff enrichment. These enrichment funds support either students or faculty and staff with travel to conferences, small research grants, educational enhancement, or professional development of different types. To give online, please visit: www.txamfoundation.com/give.aspx?c_id=2&d_id=13

*For more information about giving including details about contributing to specific scholarships, please contact Dr. Scott Shafer, Department Head, Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, at sshafer@tamu.edu or call 979-845-7324.
**MISSION AND VISION OF RPTS**

**Mission:**
Our mission is to generate and disseminate knowledge that increases our ability to understand relationships among people, environment and economy in order to respond to the needs of a diverse society.

**Vision:**
The Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences Department is committed to supporting wellness and prosperity through sustainable environments and positive experiences.

**Core Values:**
We value...
- the contributions that parks, recreation, community development, and tourism can make to the health of communities.
- scholarship that is validated by peers and external audiences; and we believe that scholarship can be expressed through teaching, research, and extension.
- that our education, scientific research, and outreach programs contribute to the expansion of knowledge and to the enhancement of the quality of life.
- that our primary responsibility is to the people of Texas;
- that our contributions to the State of Texas will be enhanced by scholarly activities at the national and international levels.
- in preparing society-ready graduates, with a solid educational foundation that includes experiential and liberal education, and development of skills for career employment and lifelong learning.
- that the process of education is a collaborative learning experience, and students, faculty, practitioners, and professionals from other fields are participants in this process.

*We recognize...*
- the growing demographic and geographic diversity of Texas and the United States; the value of diversity in thoughts and ideas among the faculty, staff, and students; and the opportunities presented by an international border.
- the value of human diversity and interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching, research, and extension, and affirm the individual strengths that people bring to the Department.

*We are committed to...*
- the contributions of recreation, parks, community development, and tourism make to the sustainability and stewardship of cultural, historical, and natural resources.
- concepts of social and environmental justice.