

## RECREATION LEADERSHIP

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I left the Hart Auditorium after the announcement that Ricks College would become BYU-Idaho and went directly to my office. I went to the internet and printed off the accreditation standards of the National Recreation and Parks Association for four year institutions. I was pleased to see that we had the minimum number of faculty and were already offering a number of the required courses. A phone call gave me information concerning the cost of accreditation and the application process for new institutions. After a few hours of study that afternoon, I realized that we could offer an accredited program with the addition of four core courses and by requiring our majors to take additional classes in other departments. I printed off the accreditation standards and gave a copy to each of our faculty, with the note attached, “This is where we are headed.”

The announcement by President Hinckley that Ricks College would become a four-year university was the beginning of a long summer of self evaluation. I recognized immediately that the Recreation Education Department would make significant and important contributions to the expanded campus activities program, but I was also driven by thoughts of contributions that would reach beyond this campus. My self evaluation led me to a set of activities: a review of my own reasons for selecting this field, interviews with every graduate of the two-year program who could be contacted, a review of professional opportunities for our graduates, and an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of our current program and faculty.

The next day I phoned Dr. Brian Hill, head of the Recreation Management and Youth Leadership Department at BYU and Dr. Cal Lathen, Dean of the College of Education and a 30-year recreation faculty veteran at Idaho State University. I asked two questions: “If you could start with a new canvas, what would your new four-year program look like?” and “What unique areas of professional training can BYU-Idaho provide?” Both of these individuals were excited to hear from me and were open and positive about BYU-Idaho meeting some training needs that were not currently being covered in the region. My conversations with Dr. Hill, Dr. Lathen, and later with Dr. Blahna at Utah State University, confirmed my early impressions to develop a program with emphasis options in commercial recreation (private business ventures such as theme parks, sports arenas/facilities, convention/visitor bureaus, destination resorts, sporting goods, and outfitting) and recreation resource management (high quality outdoor recreation which also protects natural, social, and cultural resources for

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the future). My review left me excited for the opportunity to develop a baccalaureate degree in recreation.

Since recreation professionals deal with the most valued commodity of our modern era—time—I am convinced that BYU-Idaho recreation students will contribute to the well being of individuals and society in significant ways. The world we live in and the events we experience seem to be moving faster and faster, urging us to rush through life. As ancient Athenian philosophers observed, starving for time does not result in death, but rather in never beginning to live (Robison and Godbey). The recreation profession is about living and the renewal of the human spirit, Elsner, Lewis, Snell, and Spitzer claim in their introduction to their book, *Nature and the Human Spirit*,

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Renewal of the human spirit is important for the individual to enjoy a full life and to be a productive member of society, for the members of a family to regain their vigor, motivation, and interests in the family unit, and for members of the community and nation to maintain a long-term productive role as economic agents and as socially responsible citizens.

I remember listening as President Hinckley first read *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* at the 1995 General Relief Society Meeting. The list of principles for establishing and maintaining successful marriages and families ended with “wholesome recreational activities.” This one phrase naturally has deep significance for me personally and professionally. Through the research I am familiar with in my field as well as personal experience as a spouse, parent, church youth leader, and member of my community, I know that wholesome recreational activities do not always come naturally. Our choices for the use of free time have become more individualistic, varied, complex, and uncertain today than before industrialization. The influence of church, family, and neighborhood on leisure choices has diminished. With no framework of values or moral context for the use of time, many individuals find a void rather than meaning in their recreation. With no compass or direction from theological and ethical systems, members of society today suffer alienation and use leisure as an arena for the consumption of products and services according to someone else’s plan for them (Goodale and Godbey).

Americans, for example, listed television-watching as the first activity they would give up if they had to (Robison and Godbey), yet time diary research indicates that the viewing of television is the predominant free time activity in America. In addition, television has been found to correlate negatively with other more active forms of leisure, such as participation in sports or the arts (Robison). Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi found that negative mental states were the result of the passivity and lack of mental stimulation resulting from watching television. Students in the Leisure and Society course here at Ricks College confirm these statistics through their

own six-week leisure diary. Television viewing consistently comes out on top among recreation activities pursued by Ricks College students, but with one of the lowest satisfaction ratings.

Wise use of our free time in society today requires commitment, imagination, reflection, and discipline. This effort on the part of individuals does not usually come from a vacuum, but from environments where some form of recreation leadership exists. Our society will become less skilled in self renewal as a generation unskilled in leisure choices become the parents and trainers of the next generation. Renewal of the human spirit through recreational activities often requires effort, resources, instruction, and encouragement from others.

This department is fortunate to be able to teach in this uniquely blessed location. We are surrounded by world-class rivers, mountains, snow, and deserts. A mainstay of the regional economy is the recreation industry. We envision great laboratories for all aspects of the recreation profession. This was reaffirmed as we hosted a student group from Western Carolina University at Badger Creek this summer. This group spent ten days in the Tetons and then came in for resupply. As we discussed our transition to a four-year program with their faculty, they stated again and again, "You have the best location for this type of training!" I again was reminded of the blessings of our location when I attended a national teaching institute for the Society of Park and Recreation Educators. Numerous respected researchers and teachers in the field inquired about how many new faculty we would be hiring. I was humbled that I already had a position at this premium location.

The faculty in the new Recreation Leadership and Education Department are honored to contribute to the building of the kingdom through the training of skilled, inspired, and committed recreation professionals who will make significant contributions to the well-being of their families, wards, and communities. ∞

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