

## **Review of the B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration**

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 31.0301  
Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Facilities Management, General

The B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration program is housed in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation within the College of Applied Science and Technology. The school also offers a B.S. in Athletic Training, a B.S. in Exercise Science, and a B.S., B.S.Ed. in Physical Education; minors in athletic coaching, exercise science, and recreation and park administration; and a M.S. in Kinesiology and Recreation.

Students in the B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration (RPA) program enroll in one of two sequences. The recreation management sequence prepares students to plan, organize, and administer recreation and sport programs, services, and activities for people from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of interests. The therapeutic recreation sequence prepares students to utilize recreation and leisure as a means to improve health, well-being, and quality of life for people with disabilities, illnesses, or other conditions.

The RPA program at Illinois State University is one of four undergraduate programs at Illinois public universities sharing CIP code 31.0301. In fall 2014, the program at Illinois State had the largest enrollment of the four (277), and in fiscal 2014 the program had the highest number of degrees conferred among the four (94).

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT**

**Self-study process.** The self-study was a year-long process that coincided with the Recreation and Park Administration (RPA) program external accreditation process. The process was led by the RPA program director and included contributions from all RPA faculty and the director of the School of Kinesiology and Recreation. The University Assessment office was essential in providing feedback on the RPA assessment plan. Others contributing to the process included RPA undergraduate students, academic advisors, the RPA advisory council, and Milner Library. In addition, data were collected from a variety of sources such as the office of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis; Research and Sponsored Programs; the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT); the Illinois Board of Higher Education; and peer academic programs.

**Program curriculum.** The curriculum for the program is strongly influenced by standards established by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT) and the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification. The RPA program is designed so students who enter the program as freshmen will be able to graduate in four years and students who transfer into the major as juniors will be able to complete the program in two years. The recreation management sequence requires 52 credit hours in the major, and students graduating from that sequence are eligible to sit for the Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP) exam. The therapeutic recreation sequence requires 70 credit hours in the major, and students graduating from that sequence are eligible to sit for the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) exam. Over the last three years, 88 percent of program alumni who have taken the CPRP exam have passed, which is 2 percent higher than the national average of other accredited programs. In addition, in the last three years, 74 percent of program alumni who have taken the CTRS exam have passed, which is 6 percent higher than the national pass rate. Standards for progress in both sequences include a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 and completion of all required courses with a grade of C or better. The enrollment targets for the RPA program have increased since the last program review from 210 to 270 and have been exceeded in recent years.

**Program or academic unit faculty.** The RPA faculty consists of nine full-time faculty members. Six serve in tenure track faculty positions, and three serve in non-tenure track faculty positions. Composition of the RPA faculty has changed considerably in the last five years due to retirements and individuals moving to new positions at other institutions. However, RPA faculty members continue to exceed program goals in scholarly contributions, hold leadership roles in professional organizations, and serve on editorial boards for scholarly journals in the discipline.

**Program goals and quality indices.** RPA program goals are an extension of *Educating Illinois 2013-2018* (the strategic plan for Illinois State University), align with *The Illinois Public Agenda* (the strategic plan for higher education in the state), and are reflected in the RPA strategic plan. The goals are to provide premier undergraduate academic programs; provide exemplary graduate academic programs; engage in quality state, nationally, and internationally recognized scholarship; and engage in service and outreach initiatives to enhance relationships with professionals and alumni. Metrics selected by program faculty as indicators of program quality include required graduate point average, number and content of program sequences, ratio of program core credit hours to sequence credit hours, number of credit hours in required field experiences, student-to-faculty ratio, and number of student organizations.

**Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process.** The RPA assessment plan incorporates student learning outcomes established by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT). This plan includes details of the learning goals measured, assessment methods and metrics used, and stakeholders involved. The COAPRT learning outcomes include a series of four standards designed to elicit evidence of student learning in foundations of the profession, provision of services and experience opportunities, and management/administration. Data for assessment are currently only collected for courses on campus. Since the last RPA program review, assessment outcomes have resulted in curriculum changes, study abroad opportunities, and further development of the assessment plan.

**Specialized accreditation.** The RPA program is accredited through the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT). Both the RPA core and the therapeutic recreation sequence were granted continuing accreditation on September 14, 2015. COAPRT cited the program for its excellent facilities, student-centered faculty, and strong alumni relations. The re-accreditation process will next occur in 2022.

**Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review.** The 2007-2008 program review recommended that the program identify and correct problems with the academic advisement system that have led to student, alumni, and faculty dissatisfaction; that the program work with the school and college offices to assess the facilities needed for the recreation program and to develop a plan for its enhancement; that the appropriate balance of students, specialties, and faculty should be established and enrollments monitored to assure that the program does not over-extend its resources; and that probationary tenure line faculty members should continue to participate in the college mentorship program designed to facilitate the development of their scholarly productivity. Since 2008 numerous changes have been made to the advisement system, including a change in personnel, restructuring of the system based on alphabetical assignment of students to the advisors, and the housing of advisement and academic programs centrally. The program and school participated in planning for the new Student Fitness Center-McCormick Hall, which officially opened in January 2011. The RPA program has increased the optimum number of students in the program from 220 to 270, which has also resulted in a better balance between the program sequences. To coincide with student growth, the RPA faculty has also grown to nine full-time faculty positions. Since 2008 all new tenure track faculty members in the RPA program have participated in the college mentorship program and have had successful scholarship records.

**Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand.** Continued focus on student learning outcome plans has been a change led by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT) that has greatly impacted the academic discipline. Another change that has had an impact on the RPA program is the use of technology in academia and the profession. RPA faculty has participated in workshops for online course design, and the RPA program has been able to deliver three online courses during the summer sessions in recent years. Technology has also changed relationships with students and alumni, and the RPA program implements social media strategies that have enhanced communication with these stakeholders. While both student demand for the program and demand for program graduates has remained steady, enrollment in the RPA program has increased over the last five years while enrollment at other recreation and park administration programs at Illinois public universities has declined.

**Major findings of this program review self-study.** While enrollment in the RPA program has increased in recent years to become the largest such program at Illinois public universities, the program has a higher student-to-faculty ratio than desired by program faculty. The RPA program also continues to thrive with respect to the national reputation of its curriculum, students, and faculty. Renovations to McCormick Hall and construction of the adjoining

Student Fitness Center have greatly enhanced RPA facilities. The facility has provided a central location for the school, which has led to improvements in school culture and student advisement. The RPA program provides a wealth of co-curricular opportunities for its students and the opportunity for students to connect with professionals and program alumni. Alumni relations remain a program strength, as evidenced by strong attendance at RPA alumni events; relations could be improved through use of social media platforms. The RPA program needs to continue to improve efforts to engage students in the University Honors program and to provide more opportunities for students to study abroad. In addition, the RPA program needs to more closely examine its aspirational programs with respect to student quality standards, curriculum, and field experience requirements, to identify ways to further improve the RPA program with respect to those quality indices. Lastly, it is important to continue to refine the RPA assessment plan.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** The program has identified the following priority initiatives for the next program review cycle: increase international opportunities for students, investigate opportunities for distance learning, successfully fill any approved faculty lines to reduce the student-to-faculty ratio, complete the COAPRT re-accreditation self-study in 2022, increase student involvement in the University Honors program, enhance alumni relations by establishing connections immediately following graduation and by using social media to maintain those relations, examine the necessity and implications of student quality standards, explore the opportunity to develop additional elective options, develop additional field experience requirements for students in the recreation management sequence, and continue to develop and implement the student learning outcomes assessment plan to meet the changing recommendations of external accreditation.

#### **PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration to be in Good Standing.**

The Academic Planning Committee thanks program faculty and staff for a concise yet thorough self-study report that is critical and forward-looking. The section of the report regarding aspirational programs is especially well done in that quality indicators are cited and specific actions to raise program quality to levels of the aspirational programs are set forth.

The committee congratulates the program on its 30-year relationship with the Council on Accreditation for Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT) and for recent reaccreditation of the program by the council for an extended seven-year period. This accreditation evidences the quality of the program and ultimately benefits students seeking employment in recreation management or therapeutic recreation. Other key indicators of program quality are certification examination pass rates for program graduates. Of the graduates taking the Certified Parks and Recreation Professional exam over the last three years, 88 percent passed, which is 2 percent higher than the national rate. Of the graduates taking the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist exam over the last three years, 74 percent passed, which is 6 percent higher than the national rate.

While all colleges and departments/schools have strategic planning processes, faculty and staff of the Recreation and Park Administration program are actively engaged in strategic planning at the program level. The Academic Planning Committee commends the program for its planning efforts, particularly for annual monitoring of plan implementation. The committee also commends work done by faculty to compile a student learning outcomes assessment plan that includes learning outcomes that align with outcomes established by COAPRT, direct and indirect assessment methods, rubrics, and a process for analyzing data and making program modifications.

The committee cites the program for its two internship experiences that provide exposure to the field in multiple settings. The committee recognizes strategic use of distance education to meet student needs and involvement of program faculty in selecting courses for online delivery. The committee also recognizes the strong collaboration between program and library faculty in teaching information fluency skills and in maintaining research collections that are current and relevant to the curriculum.

### **Recommendations**

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- Student demand for the program has increased in recent years, while the student-to-faculty ratio in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation has exceeded the university-wide ratio. The committee recommends exploring ways to manage this demand and reduce student-to-faculty ratios while maintaining or raising the quality of students admitted to the program. Strategies to consider include, but are not limited to, examination of admission criteria, implementation of new enrollment management initiatives, pursuit of new faculty hires, and differentiating or increasing grade point average requirements for newly-admitted and continuing students.
- The self-study report states that the program is designed to graduate first-time-in-college students in four years. However, the percentage of such students who do so has steadily declined in the last five years while the percentage of students graduating in six or more years has increased. The self-study report attributes this trend to increasing program enrollment and an increase in the number of students completing their culminating internship during the summer term. The committee recommends further investigating time-to-degree and, if deemed appropriate, developing and implementing strategies to increase the percentage of students graduating within four years.
- The percentage of faculty members in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation who identify with a traditionally-underrepresented racial/ethnic group is significantly lower than the university-wide average. The committee recommends designing and implementing strategies for increasing racial/ethnic diversity among Recreation and Park Administration faculty as new hires are made.
- The percentage of students in the program from traditionally-underrepresented racial/ethnic groups has increased since the last program review but remains lower than the university-wide average. The committee recommends designing and implementing strategies for further increasing racial/ethnic diversity among students in the program. One strategy to consider is use of targeted scholarships for admission, to complement awards available to students already in the program.
- The committee recommends regularly evaluating the program for changes needed to remain relevant and current with recreation and park administration professions, in alignment with COAPRT standards, responsive to changing student needs, and effective in furthering student achievement of learning objectives. Among current issues to explore are developing additional elective opportunities to enable students to focus on specializations within the field, balancing field experience requirements of the two sequences, offering additional courses via distance education, and creating opportunities for international experiences relevant to the field. The student learning outcomes assessment plan is a key tool for compiling data for these evaluations. The committee recommends documenting assessment initiatives, including the rationale for changes made to the program based on assessment results. The committee further recommends that, as changes are made to the program, faculty members review the assessment plan to ensure its continued alignment with the curriculum.
- To build on the history of strong collaboration with Milner Library, the committee recommends exploring development of a systematic, tiered approach to library and information literacy instruction across the curriculum. Through such an approach, learning outcomes within courses could be aligned with discipline-specific information literacy competencies and information literacy instruction could be developed, implemented, and assessed in targeted courses.
- The committee recommends exploring ways to more intentionally involve students in research activities and then developing processes to document that involvement.
- The committee recommends continuing efforts to increase student involvement in the University Honors program.