

# Issues Affecting Recreation Management Effectiveness: Comparison of Taiwanese Programs with American Experience

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## ABSTRACT

*In this study, selected recreation programs in the United States were investigated and suggestions formulated for successful management of related programs in Taiwan. The study specifically addressed the issues of organizational leadership and management practices employed in U.S. recreation programs and how these issues apply to recreation programs in Taiwan universities. A review of the literature revealed successes and challenges faced by recreation management programs at U.S. universities. The results of this study were used to examine how similar programs at institutions of higher learning in Taiwan might benefit from this information as their own programs mature. In addition to the challenges faced by U.S. programs, including lack of funding, Taiwanese programs face the challenges of lack of trained professionals, accreditation of such professionals, lack of space, and the projected increase in competition from foreign schools that can open as a result of Taiwan's entrance into the World Trade Organization.*

**Keywords:** *Institituis, recreation programs*

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive education market, this investment represents a resurgence of interest in the role that recreation programs play in attracting applicants and increasing enrollment. Moving in concert with the current trends of rising health consciousness and preventive care, these universities appear to have thrust recreation programs into the forefront of their agenda (Reisberg, 2001). Nonetheless this impressive image of spectacular recreation facilities belies the reality that recreation programs do not rank among the top priorities of many institutions of higher learning. The operation of recreation facilities is jeopardized by the common perception that recreation programs are pleasant but unnecessary features of a university. This stereotypical notion of recreation as a pleasant diversion from the primary work of universities does not do justice to the real importance of recreation programs and the efforts of the recreation professionals who manage them. According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 1997), recreation programs should be considered an integral part of higher education. These programs contribute to the overall educational experience of students, and the programs also help students develop a heightened awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses. Recreation programs also help students learn how to interact well with others.

They learn about the complicated issues involved in the running of recreation programs, such as providing services to people with special needs (Hastings & Chivetta, 1997). They also deal with the diverse needs of campus groups and cope with budget restrictions and conflict situations. Their experiences in the restricted school setting provide them with a foundation for working in other recreation programs (Lewis, Jones, Lamke, & Dunn, 1998). It requires knowledge in diverse areas such as personnel, programming, customer service, facility design, and strategic planning (Moler, 2000)

Fundamentally, recreation professionals assert the value and significance of recreation programs for society (Ross & Young, 1997). Beyond constantly fighting for funding and establishing new programs to entice participants, recreation professionals must ensure that their programs meet the needs of all individuals—program participants as well as the non-participating public (Ross & Young, 1997).

Various management strategies can be implemented to increase the significance of recreation programs and validate the effort invested in them by recreation professionals (Ross & Young, 1997). First, recreation professionals

should target their promotion activities toward the general public, not just those who already frequently engage in recreation programs.

This study was designed to (a) explore the role of recreation programs in universities in the United States, (b) identify and discuss the organizational leadership and management practices employed in recreation programs in U.S. universities, and (c) examine recreation management practices of U.S. universities with reference to their application to recreation programs in Taiwanese universities.

This study used three perspectives to explore recreation programs in the United States: (a) the history of university recreation programs in the United States, (b) the role of these recreation programs, and (c) the challenges and problems faced by recreation professionals in university settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of recreation programs illuminates the leadership of students who not only demanded to participate in recreational sports but also took action in creating sports clubs and programs. According to the CAS (1997), students took the initiative of establishing leisure sports activities in universities, which led in the 19th century to the creation of intramural athletics for college males. However, intramural sports did not capture the attention or imagination of the administrators of the institutions. These recreational sports were regarded as non-educational activities that should not be cultivated. In the face of these new developments, college officials capitalized on the publicity to showcase detailed information about the “sports for all” programs in their subsequent college bulletin, emphasizing the college’s high regard for the significance of recreation programs for all. This college’s dramatic change in attitude toward recreational programs bears a resemblance to contemporary universities’ massive investments in recreation facilities in order to promote their institutions and entice potential students. Over the years, intramural programs continued to grow. Renovating the center to cater to the recreational interests of students today would solve the shortage of equipment and space (Schiltz, 2000).

Furthermore, according to Means (1963), more and more physical education students engaged in graduate study and contributed to the development of recreation programs both on and off campus. Kleindienst and Weston (1964) highlighted the establishment of the National Intramural Association in 1949. The association’s mission was to promote intramural and recreation, offer annual meetings to improve intramural and recreation, encourage research and publications on these topics, and collaborate with the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation; the National College Physical Education Association; the National Recreation Association; and the National Education Association.

However, Cohen (2000) stated that recreation centers constructed in the 1970s did not acknowledge the changes in social trends and sports activities. Instead, administrators and architects were concerned solely with the problem of enough space to accommodate the swelling demand. As a result, the quality of the recreational facilities suffered with shallow pools, narrow running tracks, low ceilings, and a lack of air conditioning. The large, monolithic buildings created an oppressive environment that undermined the desirability of participating in recreational activities. As Robert Larrimer from Moody/Nolan Ltd. put it: “This is more like a sweatshop. You get the impression that this is a place where you toil and sweat and labor... It’s not the kind of place where you’d want to drop in and spend a little of your free time” (as cited in Cohen, 2000, p. 2). Somehow, the puritanical approach from the previous century that conceived of physical activities as work, instead of fun, had lingered on in the recreational facilities and programs of the 1970s. In addition, many of the recreation centers were single-sex facilities that emphasized men’s participation in sports while ignoring the rapid increase in women’s participation. The introduction of cardiovascular equipment and inclusion of people with disabilities also placed tremendous pressure on recreation centers and programs to change (Cohen, 2000).

According to the CAS (1997) and Cohen (2000), a transformation of recreation centers and programs took place during the 1980s with a spurt of construction of new facilities and programs. Bill Canning, a former manager of facilities at Tulane University and the University of California at Los Angeles, and chairman of a recreation management firm in Washington D.C., said that the changes could be attributed to the students’ financial support of the recreation centers. After the 1980s, students were required to pay mandatory fees for the construction and maintenance

of recreational facilities. Thus, facilities were constructed and programs were developed according to students' preferences, transforming recreation centers from sweatshops to popular meeting places (Cohen, 2000).

Kleindienst and Weston (1964) asserted that participation in recreation programs not only builds physical fitness but is also an outlet for releasing mental and emotional stress. According to Means (1963), individuals can relieve the accumulation of negative emotions and mental imbalances by engaging in intense physical activity, even for a short period. Thus, recreational sports can serve as a normalizer for the individuals, preventing nervous breakdowns. Most importantly, recreational sports programs, with their emphasis on noncompetition, should provide an environment conducive to developing affection-values, instead of ego-values. Students learn that their participation is not as important as their attitudes. The crisis of the new Student Recreation Center at Washington State University (WSU) described in Wagnitz's (2001) article reflects the direct impact of state spending cuts on recreation programs. Apart from the positive impact on physical, mental, and emotional health, recreational programs have also been shown to benefit students' academic performance. From the early research conducted in 1940 through recent years, no study has shown that recreational programs exert a negative impact on the students' academic performance; in fact, several have shown a direct correlation between intramural involvement and higher scores. Washke (1940) compared students who participated in intramurals with non-participants at the University of Oregon in the United States over a 5-year period.

The results indicated that participants had higher grade point averages than non-participants did. Twenty years later, Hackensmith and Miller obtained the same conclusions with students from the University of Kentucky, also in the United States (as cited in Means, 1963). In recent years, researchers such as Hossler and Bean (1990) have identified characteristics of recreation programs that enable students to be academically successful. First, recreational activities alleviate the stress of students who have to cope with intensive academic studies. Second, recreational sports and activities challenge participants to think and solve problems in a different context. Students acquire critical thinking processes by learning how to think and act flexibly and spontaneously in a variety of situations. According to many institutions of higher learning, these skills learned in the participation of recreation programs are translated to the students' academic learning, enhancing their ability to cope with academic work.

Most importantly, Kleindienst and Weston (1964) asserted, recreation programs are created to provide a productive and enriching experience to *all* individuals in order to fulfill their educational mission. Because students exposed to recreational activities develop an appreciation for interest in physical activities for the rest of their lives, programs must cater to all potential participants, regardless of their skill level and handicaps. Directors of recreation programs are thus responsible for educating young adults so that they can acquire valuable leisure time skills and knowledge that will last them for the rest of their lives (Kleindienst & Weston, 1964). As Donahue et al. (1958) stated: "The fruitful use of free time must be learned before middle life if those after middle life are to have a real chance to spend their free time wisely" (p.70). In her discussion of the significance of the recreational and intramural sports, Means (1963) asserted that these programs constitute a microcosm of life, preparing young people for a "modern world all too full of maladjustments, inhibitions, complexes, worries..." (p.9). Participation in recreational activities teaches young people how to relax, how to relate with individuals of both genders, and how to use their skills to cope with stress and tension.

Colleges and universities represent the final bastion for educators to transmit the importance of maintaining healthy lifestyles. Although Snyder and Spreitzer (1978) remarked that high school intramurals constitute the last opportunity for formal education to exert an impact on young people, this perception should be extended to higher education. Reisberg (2001) offered examples of how instructors reach out to students by teaching them about personal wellness in mandatory and elective classes. He said that wellness instructor Don Briggs captures the attention of his students by showing them a noose on the first day of his climbing class and explaining that overstressed students often contemplate committing suicide. Thus, he points out the significance of recreational education in alleviating life's pressures and teaching individuals how to live in a healthy and productive manner.

According to Reisberg (2001), personal wellness instructors such as Briggs have established the foundation by offering their assistance to students with problems.

It is important to note that compared to recreation management programs in the United States, Taiwan programs are in their infancy. Chin (2002) described one such state-of-the-art facility in her article on the National Institute of

Fitness and Sports (NIFS). Mobley (1997) reported that higher education has a lower priority than roads and public welfare problems. Only a few universities even offer recreation management programs: Currently only a few institutions are listed, such as Chaoyang University of Technology's Department of Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism Management; Chinese Culture University's Department of Tourism; National Dong Hwa University's Tourism and Recreation Management Center; and Providence University's Department of Tourism (*Outdoor Recreation Research Resource List*, n.d.). Furthermore, most of these departments initially only focused their curriculum on the effects of economic development on the natural environment.

Now that the focus is slowly changing to recreation and leisure management, a few problems and challenges are becoming evident. Through direct contact with the Taiwan educational system, investigating Taiwan universities' recreation management programs reveal some challenges. It is best at this stage to take the impressions of these programs as they appear on departmental websites and in the media as a base for a general evaluation. In this manner, several key issues surface.

## METHOD OF STUDY

This study employed a qualitative analysis in the evaluation of modern management strategies and organizational leadership used in the recreation programs of U.S. universities. A case study of five U.S. universities recreation programs evaluated campus recreation management strategies.

This research method consisted of two fundamental steps: 1. Literature on the current organizational leadership and management theories and practices was gathered for analysis. Areas discussed included the history of recreation programs in U.S. universities, the role and purpose of these programs, fulfillment of needs of participants, relationships forged among participants, collaboration with other university departments, and challenges of recreation program management programs in U.S. universities. Challenges faced by university recreation programs of Taiwanese universities were then examined. 2. Data from a questionnaire distributed to selected university recreation program directors was collected. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions and was e-mailed to the recreation program directors of five universities in a city in the Southwestern United States. A plan to contact directors at other institutions in case these recreation program directors failed to respond to the questionnaires was in place but did not have to be used. Based on the information provided in the survey, more data were collected via follow-up telephone interviews.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Although the qualitative analysis of current literature constituted an important part of the research method, its primary purpose was to construct a theoretical context for analyzing the case study of five recreation programs. The literature analysis provided a narrative from which to construct a more focused and strategic approach to evaluating recreation program management in the United States and applying it to Taiwan. From the literature a two-part questionnaire was constructed. Part 1 (Appendix B) contained 10 open-ended questions to which participants responded. Part 2 (Appendix C) contained 11 closed-ended multiple-choice questions. This questionnaire was sent to five recreation program directors. In detail, the survey was designed to: (a) determine the significance of recreation programs in U.S. universities (questions 1, 2, 3, and 4); (b) evaluate the effectiveness of recreation programs in fulfilling the needs of their users (questions 7, 8, 10, and 12); and (c) identify organizational management and leadership strategies that are applicable to the field of recreation management in universities (questions 5, 6, 9, and 11). Based on this analysis, the applicability of these strategies to recreation programs in Taiwan universities was determined. The analysis also acknowledged the cultural influences in Taiwan that play a role in management.

## SELECTION OF THE UNIVERSITIES

The first task of the research was to define the scope of the study and select the institutions for study. Libraries, the Internet, and other databases were used to collect information from a variety of sources. Based on the preliminary

research, 12 open-ended questions were formulated for the questionnaire. The e-mail addresses of the individual recreation program directors were located through the Internet. The director and another key person in management of the recreation program were contacted via e-mail, told the purpose of the questionnaire, asked for their assistance with the study, and given the consent form (see Appendix A). If the directors did not respond after two attempts, the recreation program director of another university was contacted. When recreation program managers agreed to participate, they were given the questionnaire and a fact sheet (Participant Consent Form, Appendix A) and had 2 weeks to respond.

The literature was collected primarily from books and research articles from journals, databases, and university web sites. The search terms were: recreation, management, universities, recreation leadership, recreation and management and universities, campus recreation programs, and campus recreation management.

## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The data analysis consisted of three major sections. First, the leading perspectives of current organizational leadership and management theories and practices were discussed. The relevant theories of organizational behavior and leadership propounded by prominent theorists were examined because recreation program directors must assume both leadership and management functions. In addition, key concepts that have played a critical role in the running of contemporary corporations, such as human resource management and management information systems, are integrated into the discussion. From this preliminary discussion, the various perspectives on organizational leadership and management practices were applied to the U.S. recreation programs featured in this study. The responses of the recreation program directors are juxtaposed with the theories highlighted in the analysis of the literature. Finally, the validity of management practices used in the recreation programs of U.S. universities were extended to campus recreation programs in Taiwan. This comparison is important in determining whether these theories and programs can override cultural differences.

## **RESULTS**

This research explored management strategies and organizational leadership techniques employed in college recreational programs. Specifically, the organizational leadership and management practices employed in U.S. universities, and an examination of recreational management practices of U.S. universities with reference to their applicability to recreational programs in Taiwan universities have been examined. Data for this analysis were collected from universities in a city in the Southwestern United States. These universities differ in size and include regular and religious campuses, and are private as well as state-funded. A generic reference to these institutions was maintained to keep their identity anonymous, though characteristics of these institutions were discussed. The results from this study were applied to a comparative analysis of recreation programs in Taiwan universities. The questionnaire contained open and closed-ended questions that yielded both qualitative and quantitative data, which were examined by the process briefly outlined in these five points:

1. A brief discussion of response rates and characteristics of the respondents.
2. The results of the closed-ended part of the questionnaire.
3. Comparisons and contrasts of the closed-ended responses.
4. Results from the open-ended section of the questionnaire.
5. The themes derived from the open-ended questions.

Given that there were only five respondents to the closed-ended portion of the questionnaire and that most of the questions posed were simple numeric measures, it is inappropriate to run descriptive statistics for these data. However, some comparisons between the responses can be made.

**Table 1: presents comparisons of frequencies for the responses to the closed-ended questions.**

<b>Frequencies of Closed-ended Questions</b>	
Variable	Percentage of Responses
<b>Type of Institution</b>	
Private, Religious	60%
Public, Secular	40%
<b>Amount of Funding</b>	
\$10,000 to \$20,000	50%
>\$30,000	50%
<b>History</b>	
< 5 years	40%
>15 years	60%
<b>Hours Facilities Are Open</b>	
11–15 hours	80%
>15 hours	20%
<b>Number of Programs</b>	
11–15	20%
>15	80%
<b>Memberships</b>	
Students, Faculty, and Staff	40%
Other: Community and Alumni	60%
<b>Funding of Programs</b>	
Student Activity Fees	80%
Other	20%
Table 4.1. (continued)	
<b>Average Student Visits Per Week</b>	
4–7	100%
<b>Percentage of Students Using Facilities</b>	
20–40	60%
40–60	20%
>60	20%
<b>Number of Faculty and Staff Employed</b>	
<10	40%
>31	60%

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The U.S. tradition of student involvement in shaping and funding recreation programs, which makes them very active in the decision-making processes of the programs, is fundamental to the flexible type of leadership exercised by program administrators and professionals. That is, given the high level of student involvement and student expectations, no other type of leadership would work. It is possible, however, that student apathy, brought on by increasing workloads and lack of time to use the programs, may erode this flexible leadership. Students at U.S. universities should take care that they do not lose their role in the decision-making processes of their programs. Students in Taiwan lack this particular experience but will embrace it if it is offered to them. The challenge lies in the attitudes of senior administrators and officials, at universities and in other sectors that may collaborate with the universities in the creation and maintenance of these programs. But if Taiwan's campus recreation programs and academic recreation management programs are to thrive in the post-WTO Taiwan, the lessons learned from the U.S. experience cannot be ignored.

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