

**Western Carolina University
College of Education and Allied professions
Department of Human Services**

**Quality Enhancement Plan Impact Report for the
Parks and Recreation Management B. S. Degree**

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Parks and Recreation Management

The B.S. in Parks and Recreation Management (PRM) consists of the Liberal Studies requirements, a generalist core, an area of concentration and electives. The generalist core gives the broad knowledge that professionals would need wherever they choose to work in the profession whether it is employee recreation, county recreation, military recreation, resorts, tourist attractions, or the land agencies (Parks, Forest Service, Army Corps, etc.). A focus area is chosen that best fit the area of specialization to the student. The focus areas are, Community Recreation Programs -- city, county, YMCA, military, etc., Outdoor Leadership and Instruction, Commercial and Resort Recreation, and Recreation Resource Management (for the Parks, Forest Service, Army Corps etc.). The overall program focus is on program planning and administration. Some students will develop specialized outdoor leadership and instructional skills. Many graduates will begin their professional careers as program planners and will have management and administration skills “under their belts” so they can move up the “ladder” of promotion.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Parks and Recreation Management Program is to promote resourcefulness, independent thinking, the ability to cope with change, and service to society -- by preparing leaders in the recreation resource and outdoor education professions. The program strives to maintain an intellectual and caring environment through cooperation and collaboration in active learning. Experiential education is also an important component to encourage application and modification of theories learned.

Standards of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities for PRM Students

1. Possess knowledge of theories and concepts of leisure, parks, recreation, the social and individual impacts related to the delivery systems in public, private and non-profit arenas.
2. Possess knowledge about the diversity of populations served by recreational services and the different kinds of leadership (including leading the disabled) required to meet their needs
3. Be able to plan programs, including writing program/grant proposals and marketing plans.
4. Understand risk management at a program and administrative level and be able to write Risk Management Plans
5. Possess knowledge about administrative functions, including budgets, strategic planning, legal issues, policies, boards and supervision.

6. Understand basic research and evaluation concepts including needs assessments, descriptive and experimental research and be able to produce an evaluation report and research prospectus.
7. Possess an understanding of safe outdoor leadership, effective instruction and interpretive techniques
8. Possess an ability to communicate verbally, in written form, as a facilitator, and through electronic means. Also to understand how to analyze and resolve complex problems using good communication.
9. Possess an understanding of the foundations of Leisure, Parks and Recreation with knowledge of the professional literature
10. Have experience through application of theories in labs and internships, field experiences in-class experiential work and expedition style courses.
11. Have the ability to produce comprehensive packages to gain employment including a letter of application, resume, references, and interview portfolio.

Many PRM course have labs to enable practice of skills. The curriculum ensures that all students do three 50-hour internships (mini-internships) and a 400-hour capstone internship. Mini internship requirements are similar to the capstone except management questions and special projects are not required. There are other opportunities to complete field experiences such as an Outward Bound course or a Wilderness First Responder course or further internships.

The WCU Parks and recreation Management Curriculum is one of the academic degree programs in the Department of Human Services which is in the College of Education and Allied Professions. The mission of the parks and recreation curriculum is linked to the mission of the College of Education and Allied Professions and the teaching and learning goals that constitute the central mission of Western Carolina University, to create a community of scholarship in which the activities of its members are consistent with the highest standards of knowledge and practice in their disciplines.

Quality Enhancement Plan for Parks and Recreation Management

The WCU Quality Enhancement Plan is described as follows:

“Synthesis: A pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University initiates new and enhances current connections among existing programs to create a more holistic approach to educating students. WCU faculty and staff recognize that a major challenge of higher education is the need for students to synthesize their curricular and co-curricular (outside of courses) college experiences. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) use synthesis – the ability to integrate knowledge from different areas into an original whole – as the driving framework for teaching and learning. This emphasis on synthesis enhances the students’ educational journey and helps prepare them for life beyond college.”..... The QEP fosters synthesis across disciplines, coordinating curricular and co-curricular experiences to facilitate students’ development of a clearer purpose at the university. The plan’s implementation will impact academics, residential life, service learning, student leadership, study abroad, and career

planning/education. The outcome of the plan will be students who are intentional participants in their own journey.”¹

The parks and recreation management degree program developed plans to refine the PRM program to meet the learning goals and outcomes of the QEP. The WCU QEP plan states “The overarching learning goal of the QEP is one where students will synthesize knowledge from their academic and co-curricular experiences to become intentional participants in their own learning. Specifically, students will:

1. Identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
2. Modify behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
3. Recognize the synthesis of their university experiences and evaluate those experiences relative to their future education and career goals.” (p.1).

The PRM educational goals and outcomes are detailed in the PRM outcomes assessment plan. They are as follows:

- 1. Leadership and Decision-making**
- 2. Program Planning**
- 3. Administration**
- 4. Research**
- 5. Outdoor Leadership and Instruction**
- 6. Communication**
- 7. Career Search**
- 8. Foundations**

Current Applications of the QEP in PRM

The experiential nature of the PRM program along with the cooperative learning philosophy and techniques used are in line with the learning theories supporting the QEP. These theories are outlined in the *WCU QEP Book* -- Bloom’s notion of synthesis as a part of his Taxonomy of Learning Objectives, Kolb’s experiential learning and learner centered approach and the Association of American Colleges suggestions on “creative problem-solving, team work and adaptability.” PRM majors are being challenged as is also suggested to “perform

¹ *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University*, 2007 Ed., Ann Hallyburton. © Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC p.1.

consistently well, communicate effectively, think analytically, to help solve problems, work collegially in diverse team and use relevant skills of the profession”.²

PRM majors are also expected to be active contributors to society. The details of how this is accomplished follows related to the QEP goals where WCU expects students to complete the following:

1. Identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
2. Modify behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
3. Recognize the synthesis of their university experiences and evaluate those experiences relative to their future education and career goals.

1. Identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations

To be admitted into the PRM program, students are required to write an essay describing why they would like to be a PRM major and their professional goals. This essay assists us in defining each student’s direction. It gives us an overview of their writing skills. This is part of the declaration of major process.

“All requirements for admission to Parks and Recreation Management (PRM) must be met by the beginning of the semester following the semester in which the student submitted the application. The following are requirements for admission:

1. Complete an essay after reviewing current PRM Journals on reasons for becoming a PRM major;
2. Complete a personal strategic plan with an advisor in which the plan should include involvement in professional activities as well as academic expectations;
3. Earn (and maintain) a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5 on hours attempt at WCU”.³

We, as advisors, then sit down with each student individually to create a student strategic plan with experiences that will benefit them beyond their class-work. This includes items such as certifications, internships/work experience, PRM club activities/other university club affiliations and leadership opportunities, conferences and opportunities at Southwestern and Haywood Tech that we don’t offer (Wildlife courses and the Law Enforcement for Park Rangers course). This also includes study abroad opportunities, especially with the student exchange agreement with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) in Ireland. The GMIT exchange program started in 2005 after Dr. Phipps visited Ireland in 2004. Writing ability is also assessed and discussed with recommendations for improvements such as the use of the Writing Center and completing additional English courses. The students are also advised to read the PRM Student Handbook (see <http://www.wcu.edu/9182.asp>). This is the first “capture point” where we start the students on the QEP.

² *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University*, 2007 Ed., Ann Hallyburton. © Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC p.1.

³ Western Carolina University Undergraduate Catalog 2011-2012

2. Modify behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences

This goal is met through class work and the different extra curricular activities as suggested in their personal strategic plan. At each advising session when the students visit for *academic* advising, the strategic plan is used to check that they are in sync with the strategies agreed upon in the plan. The students are encouraged to look at their files at any time and visit with their advisor to discuss their progress with both academics and career planning.

3. Recognize the synthesis of their university experiences and evaluate those experiences relative to their future education and career goals.

Most of the synthesis of the students' university experience is done in PRM 370, Orientation to the Capstone Internship and PRM 495, Senior Seminar. In 370, their achievements are all drawn into their job application packets (resume, applications letter, references sheet and "to whom it may concern" references from the mini internships). They apply for their Capstone Internship in the same manner that they would apply for a job. In 495, the students finalize their portfolios and complete comprehensive examinations. The portfolios are called "interview portfolios" as the intent is for these to be taken to interviews so the students can show examples of professional documents that they have completed. It is hoped that as the students know that their documents will be shown to a possible future employer that this is a motivator to achieve a higher standard of work. These two courses are the final "capture points" for the seniors before they graduate. In between these capture points we have added PRM 350 to push them along the QEP Goals.

Core expectations for students as integrated, intentional learners

To achieve the above goals of the QEP, the following set of core skills and behaviors (outcomes) are expected:

- “Integrate information from a variety of contexts
- Solve complex problems
- Communicate effectively and responsibly
- Practice civic engagement
- Clarify and act on purpose and values”⁴

The PRM educational goals show that many of the above skills and behaviors are being practiced. Further examples are given below:

Out of class examples

- Students are actually required to do three small internships (mini –internships) to give them a breadth of experience to help in career choices, class discussions and to help boost their resumes. They also have opportunities to do further internships throughout the year and in the summers.
- The PRM program has required a Capstone Internship that has many requirements, including a special project for the agency.

⁴ QEP Learning Goals and Outcomes Sheet

- The PRM Club offers a place for the students to exhibit leadership and in the past the club has taken part in organizing hikes, Halloween parties for staff's children, English breakfasts, chili cook-outs, adopt a trail, regional conferences, banquets etc.
- The PRM program takes the students to the Regional Adventure Education Conference every year. The conference is planned by students for students. We started this venture 20 years ago and organize it once every five years.
- The PRM program publishes a student newsletter (see <http://hhp.wcu.edu/PRM/PRM.html>) every semester, which details student projects, opinions and experiences. Students use their pieces as PR examples for their portfolios.
- The PRM Program and PRM Club organize the Old Cullowhee Canoe Slalom as a community event and fund raiser for the proposed river park.
- Portfolios currently are part of the outcomes assessment for the student strategic plan. This includes class work examples of professional documents like Business Plans and Program Proposals, but also includes the certificates, resumes, PR Pieces from the student newsletters, and references from internships that are part of the student strategic plan. The portfolio is used as an interview portfolio and physically taken on job interviews. Anecdotal information suggests that this is a very effective strategy in helping student's to be competitive.

In-class implementation of the QEP Certifications

Certifications provided in classes include: Project Wild, American Canoe Association Swift Water Rescue, Outdoor Emergency Care and First Aid, through the National Ski Patrol, CPR and Professional CPR through Red Cross.

Class Experiences

Experiences that PRM classes assist with or organize include:

- Earth Day at Cullowhee Valley School
- Environmental Education Programs at Cullowhee Valley School
- Acting as referees and officials throughout the county
- Acting as guides and instructors for Base Camp Cullowhee leading programs such as rafting, caving, climbing, roll clinics, women only trips, kayak slaloms, kayak touring etc.

Specific Class Projects

- PRM 321 Outdoor Education and Interpretation includes interpretive projects for schools and youth groups
- PRM 356 Outdoor First Aid prepares students to work at local ski areas as ski patrol volunteers
- PRM 361 Program Planning requires students to create, implement and evaluate a program during the semester. These programs have included: environmental education programs in the schools, fund raisers for charities, sports clinics, outdoor activities for the student body and for Residential Life, Halloween Carnivals for Faculty and Staffs' children and many more. Program evaluations are often presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

- PRM 430 Entrepreneurship and Commercial Recreation requires that students produce a business plan for a recreation-based business. Students have implemented these plans upon graduation to develop businesses such as Dillsboro River Company, a DVD Company in Ireland, and a catering service for the Grand Canyon and as well as programs for existing agencies. Each year, several of the business plans are selected for presentation at the Undergraduate Research Expo.
- PRM 433 Outdoor Recreation includes actually doing some research projects that are later presented in the Undergraduate Research Symposium.
- PRM 440 Students in the Travel and Tourism have produced Power Point Presentations, brochures and a Web page for the Mountain Heritage Center, plus outdoor activity guides for the WCU campus.
- PRM 461 Management and Administration of PRM Services require students to gain an understanding of all aspects of managing a parks and recreation related business. Students prepare financial statements, budgets, a strategic plan and a risk management plan for various agencies. Students are required to work with of recreation related business to complete the projects.
- PRM 270 Leadership and Group Dynamics requires students to compile an activity notebook which includes a wide variety of games, activities, initiatives, and icebreakers which the students can use in future classes, internships, or places of employment. Students also practice leading these activities with their peers and small groups on and off campus.

Labs

Several courses have labs to give the students the necessary practical applications

- PRM 254 Introduction to Outdoor Pursuits has lab sessions in the pool, at Cedar Cliff Lake and on the rock in Panthertown Valley.
- PRM 356 Outdoor First Aid lab is where the students practice assessments, splinting etc.
- PRM 361 Program Planning and Evaluation lab is when the students actually plan and implement a program.
- PRM 420 Administration and Leadership of Outdoor Pursuits lab is where the students complete a three-day field trip practicing outdoor leadership, backpacking and rock climbing.
- PRM 425 Land based Outdoor Pursuits Education lab is where the students apply rescue skills in the field.
- PRM 426 Water-based Outdoor Pursuits Education lab is where the students apply teaching, leading and rescue skills out on the lakes and rivers

Expedition Courses

- PRM 427 Wilderness Education was taught nearly all in the field. University red tape curtailed this course

Field Experiences

- PRM 486 Field Experience is for students to be able to get credit for experiences organizations like Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School or Nantahala Outdoor Center.

Changes made to the QEP planning

The PRM program is already meeting most of the goals of the QEP. There are some changes that we have made to increase the effectiveness of the process.

Changes

Our first “capture point” in PRM for the students to enter into the QEP would still be the writing of the Admission Essay. Writing this essay in the PRM 250 Foundations course has become a natural process to follow up on this.

Another “capture point” was needed in the fall semester for students in their third (or the start of their fourth) year. A one-credit seminar course dealing with the processes of the QEP and academic requirements such as completing the Graduation Check Form was instigated – PRM 350 Career Planning. This is where the students write their resumes, begin planning their capstone internships, begin their portfolio, and write their self-analysis of where they are and where they are going. They also study the Student Handbook and get a review of Cooperative Learning and Ethical Decision-making. One change has been made here though regarding the Electronic Briefcase (EB). After the orientation to this and the struggle to complete it, we noticed how de-motivating it was to everyone as it is not in any way an intuitive process. We gave up on this except for two volunteers who undertook completing the electronic briefcase as an independent study. Their feedback afterwards was that the system as it not user-friendly. We have decided to hold off on the EB until it is easy to use. We will continue to use the hard copy interview portfolio that has been very successful for us.

The final “capture point” for completing QEP goals is the Orientation to Internship Course (PRM 370) and the Senior Seminar (PRM 495). This is when the EB materials are finalized, the capstone internship/job application package completed and the “Where I’m going” presentations are done. Research presentations are completed as part of the Undergraduate Research Expo and the Regional Adventure Education Conference.

Impact

We think that the QEP has an enormous impact on our students’ learning as it enables actual application of theories learned. This application (experiential work), done in class, labs, and extra curricular involvement however does increase the workload of faculty tremendously and this is at odds with the research time expected of faculty at WCU. We fear that the involvement of new faculty in the QEP is in jeopardy when traditional publications are expected. The reality is that the perceived standard for tenure and hence the one that will be used by faculty at WCU is a set number of traditional publications even though WCU voices Boyer.

We do feel that we achieve our stated goals and the goals of the QEP. We do realize that the one aspect that we have a problem with is the Ebriefcase. We think that like the original computers before MACs and Windows, it won’t “catch on” until it is easy and intuitive to use. In the future, employers will expect an Ebriefcase and so we suggest enabling a user-friendly one as soon as possible.