

Program Review  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
College of Health and Human Performance  
East Carolina University  
November 2-3, 2010

Dr. Denise Anderson, Clemson University  
Dr. Dan Dustin, University of Utah  
Dr. Ron Mitchelson, East Carolina University

Overview

The Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RCLS) is one of three academic units within the College of Health and Human Performance (HHP) at East Carolina University (ECU). It offers two distinct Bachelor of Science degree programs—one in Recreational Therapy (RT) and one in Recreation and Park Management (RPM)—and two distinct Master of Science degree programs in RT and RPM. The department is composed of 16 tenure track faculty members and 8 instructors, and it serves approximately 200 undergraduate majors and 50 graduate students.

RCLS enjoys the support of the dean, Dr. Glen Gilbert, as well as the support of university level administrators. Indeed, RCLS's history is one of growth and development of both the faculty and the infrastructure to support its program offerings. RCLS is well-served by both its support staff and its location in the Belk Building. There is ample office and classroom space, and faculty and students alike benefit from state of the art technology to support their teaching, scholarship, and service. The faculty pride themselves in their collegiality, and they are ably led by a new department chair, Dr. Debra Jordan.

In addition to a solid undergraduate professional preparation program in RT and RPM and a blossoming graduate program, RCLS faculty members have reached out to the larger university to play important roles in ECU's Center for Sustainable Tourism and the Institute for Coastal Science and Policy. These are highly laudable steps that demonstrate the faculty's potential for contributing to the resolution of many social and environmental challenges confronting eastern North Carolina.

The review team was impressed by the caliber of undergraduate and graduate students interviewed (our sample consisted of RT students only), and by their general esprit de corps. We were also impressed by the department's outreach efforts. The

external constituents we interviewed from the surrounding region complimented the RCLS faculty on their high degree of involvement in community affairs and on their accessibility. In addition, the involvement of undergraduate majors in service-learning projects has not only provided the students with strong, hands-on experience, but also allows the Department to fulfill the service-learning goals of the greater University.

In sum, we believe ECU has demonstrated its understanding of the importance of recreation and leisure in contemporary life by investing heavily in assembling a top notch recreation and leisure studies faculty with great potential to make a substantial positive difference at the local, regional, and national levels. The department has “arrived,” and it is time to ratchet up the expectations for what RCLS can offer ECU in the form of long-lasting dividends on that investment. To that end, the remainder of this report focuses on things to think about and recommendations for action. We trust the faculty will accept what we have to say in the spirit it is offered; we want to help make a really good department even better by thinking strategically and creatively about the future, and by urging the faculty to stretch themselves in attaining their goals.

### Things to Think About

1) While we appreciate the rationale for two distinct undergraduate and graduate degree programs in RT and RPM, we believe this arrangement compromises what ought to be a common sense of professional purpose and practice among students and faculty alike. It is clear from our conversations with the RT students that they perceive themselves to be quite distinct from RPM students. They have separate degree programs and separate curricula while being held together by a thread of common core courses. The strength of that thread is being tested by new CARTE accreditation standards for RT at the undergraduate level, and by overt proclamations by RT graduate students that they would be better off in the College of Allied Health Sciences. What we sensed from our visit is that at a time when it is increasingly desirable to break down barriers associated with academic professionalism and territorialism, RCLS is plagued by newly established boundaries between its program offerings. The faculty may not perceive any erosive effects from this widening divide, but the students we talked to most certainly do. The RCLS faculty members need to figure out what, if anything, holds them together, and what, if anything, they can rally around in pursuit of excellence. It is feared that important instructional and research opportunities are missed as a result of this growing divide.

2) There is some angst among probationary faculty members regarding expectations for promotion and tenure. There is need for a document at the departmental or college level that outlines what is expected of probationary faculty members at both the assistant and

associate levels by their RCLS peers to succeed in the university. Such angst is not uncommon in higher education, but we think it can be reduced appreciably in RCLS through a better communication system and increased mentoring by senior faculty.

At the same time, we were surprised that given the number of tenured associate professors in RCLS, there did not seem to be much thought given to expectations regarding promotion to professor. Indeed, in our conversation with the tenured faculty, several individuals seemed disinterested in the prospect of promotion beyond associate professor. The more we talked, the more we got the impression that what it means to be a professor is lost on many RCLS associate professors. We encourage the department chair to reinforce the ideas of following one's bliss and of engaging in the tripartite responsibility of teaching, scholarship, and service with the understanding that promotion is a byproduct of fully investing oneself in what one loves to do. Promotion will come to individuals who are intrinsically motivated and who achieve excellence in all phases of their tripartite responsibility. Teaching, scholarship, and service should be seen as mutually reinforcing activities and not as competing uses of time. Moreover, the faculty should understand that aspiring to professor status is not, as several individuals seemed to think, a selfish notion. Indeed, working for the good of the order is a highly desirable characteristic in all seasoned professors. It is part of giving back to a university that has made a lifetime investment in them.

3) It is time for RCLS to demonstrate its commitment to excellence in one or more areas reflecting its faculty's expertise. National reputations for program excellence, while desirable at the undergraduate level, are typically built at the graduate level. Such reputations evolve based on collaborative faculty and graduate student scholarship. Clearly, RCLS has had some highly talented master's students as evidenced by the numbers that have gone on to doctoral studies in other universities. This quality and motivation of students can also be seen in the number of M.S. students choosing to write master's theses which is an option for completing the degree. Currently, however, the RCLS master's degree programs are thinly enrolled and RCLS faculty members need to think strategically about how best to build and fund a high quality master's program, especially on the RPM side. Ideally, the Center for Sustainable Tourism and the Institute for Coastal Science and Policy will serve as catalysts for securing the necessary external funding to support a strong cadre of master's students. Recognizing the competitive disadvantage created by the inability to offer out of state tuition waivers, the onus is on RCLS faculty members to generate the needed resources to support deserving master's students. We believe this faculty is capable of responding to that challenge.

### Specific Recommendations

1) *Cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding among your students.* The RT students we spoke to denigrate the nature of the work park and recreation management students are preparing to do. It is as if they feel their clinical orientation to service delivery somehow elevates their status and makes them feel superior to other students. Their misperceptions about the larger field of parks, recreation, and tourism are evident. To suggest that only RT professionals focus on outcomes of service delivery reveals a lack of understanding and appreciation for what the larger field does. We fear they are not getting a well-rounded education in their understanding of the breadth and depth of the profession. It is telling that the CARTE site visitors suggested revisiting the need for RT students to take RCLS 2000. This is a bad idea.

2) *Consider having the best teaching professors take ownership of RCLS 2000 and 2601.* RCLS is a discovery major and these two courses are the windows unto your department. They address the significance of RCLS both as an area of human service and as a dimension of contemporary life. Whether your concern is attracting new majors or contributing to the general education of ECU's undergraduate student body, these are critically important courses. For content consistency as well as quality control, they warrant the attention of the department's most engaging and effective teaching professors.

3) *Rethink the way course content is delivered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.* While the instruction being provided to both levels appears to be strong, there are a number of questions that need to be examined with respect to both efficiency and effectiveness of instruction. Are multiple sections always desirable? Are small classes economically viable? Are there even more opportunities in distance education? When the same course is taught face to face and online, might you compare and contrast the delivery modes via auto-ethnographic or other research approaches? Can you contribute more to the literature on the scholarship of teaching? You have strong expertise in this area. Can you capitalize on it even more?

4) *Track your students after graduation.* The department needs to make sure its graduates in RT and RPM are ending up in careers for which they are being prepared. The heavy investment in a highly clinical RT program appears to be incongruent with the national job market, and it is necessary to make sure there are as many professional opportunities in clinical settings as ECU's RT professors claim. RT services often are not reimbursed in medical settings in the same way Physical and Occupational Therapy are, and RT professors owe their students a realistic appraisal of career opportunities. The future of RT may reside as much in community-based settings as clinical settings,

and if RT students are not prepared for that eventuality, they may be disadvantaged in the job market. We think it's possible to accomplish such tracking through ECU's Institutional Planning Office, Alumni Office, and through professional conferences at the state level. Perhaps an individual should be designated to coordinate this effort as an important unit service function.

5) *Consider consolidating your two master's degree programs into one program with two tracks or concentrations.* As they are currently configured, the two separate master's degrees are thinly enrolled. As we understand the formula, for a master's degree program to be economically viable at ECU, a minimum of 15 students must be graduated every two years. Currently, the two RCLS master's degree programs are graduating about half that number. If they were under one degree program, they would have a healthier critical mass. This consolidation, of course, runs counter to the separation characterizing the current configurations at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. At a time when RT is distancing itself from RPM, this recommendation may not be well received.

6) *"Grow your own" minority master's students.* RCLS has an opportunity to provide an invaluable service to the larger field of parks, recreation, and tourism by recruiting the best of its undergraduate minority students into its master's program, and then, upon completion of the master's degree, sending them on to doctoral granting institutions. The department already takes pride in doing this for their master's students in general, but if they tailored their efforts for minority students they would be creating a much needed "feeder" system of qualified minorities for the professorate. This would require garnering new resources to fund a steady stream of minority graduate students, but it would be well worth it.

7) *Decide on a Center (s) of Excellence.* RCLS faculty members need to come together to determine how and where they want to excel. The faculty as a whole is highly talented, but not all faculty members want to focus on graduate education. A Center of Excellence that celebrates graduate education and scholarship is needed to catapult this department into national prominence. An energized master's degree program organized around a vibrant research agenda would go a long way toward cultivating a new research climate within the department. Ideally, this would lead to a doctoral program farther on down the road. Related, a Center of Excellence may also serve as a starting point for increased collaboration, and related scholarship, both within the department as well as outside the department in areas such as health and quality of living, among others.

8) *Create a hiring plan now.* RCLS is anticipating two retirements in the next two years. A hiring plan is urgently needed that will allow the department to fill those vacancies

immediately. This requires the department's leadership team (PIC) to decide how best to dedicate the open lines. A new Center of Excellence would be a logical place to invest. In addition, this, and all future hiring plans, should focus on making every effort to enhance diversity among faculty within the department.

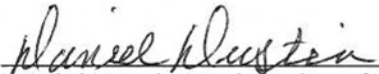
9) *Work with the department chair to define and then achieve a preferred future.* RCLS has a highly capable and enthusiastic new department chair who wants to work collaboratively with her faculty to build a preferred future. This work for the good of the order must be fueled both by the enthusiasm of RCLS's senior and junior faculty members and by RCLS's RT and RPM faculty members working in unison. This is a large group of individuals, and the risk in its size rests in the potential for any number of factions to develop which might impede the progress of the unit as a whole. That is why a common sense of professional purpose and practice is so critical to RCLS's long-term growth and development. If too much distance is allowed to grow between the two degree programs, it will be difficult to hold the department together. "The falcon cannot hear the falconer, things fall apart, the center cannot hold" (Yeats).

*Review Team*



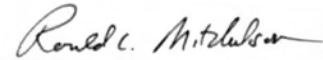

---

Denise Anderson, Clemson University




---

Daniel Dustin, University of Utah




---

Ron Mitchelson, East Carolina University