

Response to Internal Academic Review Report
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RCLS)
College of Health and Human Performance
Program review dates: November 2 – 3, 2010
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The faculty in Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies are deeply appreciative of the time, energy, and expertise of the visitation team and their insights into the growth and development of the department. The Visitor Report included two sections that described potential action items for the department. The departmental response relates directly to each.

Things to Think About

- 1) Two distinct undergraduate and graduate degree programs exist (Recreational Therapy, Recreation and Park Management, Recreational Therapy Administration, Recreation and Park Administration). Faculty need to determine what holds them together and what they can rally around in pursuit of excellence.

Faculty in RCLS have two distinct areas of expertise (Recreational Therapy (RT) and Recreation and Park Management (RPM)), and the RCLS department is based on these two areas. All RCLS faculty share an underlying foundation in recreation and leisure. RT faculty use recreation and leisure activities as modalities to facilitate health and active living among those with functional deficits, while RPM faculty utilize recreational activities and spaces to enhance quality of life. The degree programs prepare students for two distinct aspects of the profession. RPM graduates will work in settings such as local communities, military bases, and parks with the elderly, adults, youth, and children. Those graduating with a degree in RT will sit for the national exam to become Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists, and then obtain NC licensure. With these credentials they are eligible to work in clinical settings alongside physical and occupational therapists with people of all ages.

Although graduates will work in unique settings and with different populations, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, RCLS students share a common core. The RT and RPM undergraduate students share 18 hours of common coursework, and students in the RTA and RPA programs share 12 hours of common core. When qualified, both RPA and RTA graduate students teach in the undergraduate core and provide research assistance to RCLS faculty.

RCLS is similar to many departments in higher education where preparation for the professoriate tends to encourage and reward the development of 'silos' of activity, particularly in the areas of scholarship and teaching. Thus, over the years faculty have tended to develop courses and engage in scholarship that reflected their personal interests within the scope of the professions. Having said this, the RCLS faculty concur with the suggestion to identify areas that hold us together and around which we can rally. Faculty have been working to identify centers of excellence (departmental foci) with which faculty might align. The departmental leadership team (Planning and Innovation Committee; PIC) has been meeting weekly since August 2010 to begin the work of identifying commonalities as well as contemporary issues to drive shared faculty interests. Based on concepts developed during a fall retreat, PIC has tentatively identified sustainability in recreation and intervention-based experiences, functional health and physical activity in recreation and intervention-based experiences, and technology in recreation and intervention-based

experiences. These initial ideas were presented to the faculty in January 2011 and are under consideration by the faculty in the department.

2a) There is a need to document expectations for probationary faculty members at assistant and associate levels.

Opportunities to share and document expectations for probationary faculty is currently provided through meetings with the department chair, mentoring by senior faculty, and the annual Progress Toward Tenure letters that are prepared jointly by the Tenure Committee and department chair. In addition, the ECU Faculty Manual and HHP Code outline expectations for tenure and promotion in RCLS and ECU. To enhance these efforts, the Promotion and Tenure Committees (P & T) have been tasked to identify additional ways to share this information with all faculty. Currently, plans are in place to host a fall 2011 panel session for all tenure-track faculty, which will be hosted by senior faculty and members of the P & T Committees to talk about expectations, documentation, and other items of importance to those on the tenure track. The P & T committee also has expressed an interest in hosting 'brown bag' lunch sessions to maintain open communication regarding these very important processes. In addition, all tenure-track faculty are encouraged to participate in sessions related to P & T offered through the Office for Faculty Excellence. Currently, the Department Chair provides each tenure track faculty member with information related to P & T during their initial orientation. New faculty receive this information verbally, in hard copy, and it is available online.

2b) Limited thought exists among associate professors of moving to full professor rank.

This was an intriguing and unexpected observation made by the Review Team. Since her arrival in Fall, 2009, the department chair has been visiting with associate professors about their thoughts related to seeking promotion. While some admitted to not having given it much thought in recent times, they agreed to reflect on the advantages (individually and departmentally) of seeking promotion. RCLS currently has four full professors, three of whom have been or are department chair. Those three professors arrived to the RCLS department at the rank of professor, rather than being promoted while at ECU. It was only this year (2010-2011) that an internal candidate went up for promotion from associate to full professor; she was successfully promoted. A second associate professor has submitted materials for review for promotion during this coming academic year. We believe that as those holding the associate rank see additional successes in colleagues, more will seek the top rank.

3) RCLS needs to demonstrate its excellence in one or more areas reflecting faculty expertise. MS programs are thinly enrolled; faculty need to think strategically about how to best build and fund a high quality MS program, especially on the RPM [*sic*] side. Faculty need to generate the needed resources to support MS students.

The comment regarding demonstration of excellence in one or more areas is reflected in several of the reviewer suggestions and is addressed most thoroughly in the response to Item 7 under Specific Recommendations. In terms of enrollment in the RCLS graduate degree programs, the two master's programs appear to meet current demand in the discipline (for North Carolina). In the fall of 2009, the department chair contacted other NC state colleges and universities to learn which institutions offer a MS degree in RCLS; she found only three—ECU, NCSU, and UNCG. Other institutions in NC may offer a MS in a related degree program (e.g., MS in physical education with a concentration in recreation), but they do not offer a specific master's degree in recreation and park administration or recreational therapy. Both UNCG and NCSU indicated that they typically have between 8 and 10 students in their MS degree programs at any given time. RCLS at ECU has approximately 45 students in the two MS programs, and this number has been consistent for the past several years. ECU RCLS faculty face challenges in recruiting out of state graduate

students as out-of-state tuition waivers are extremely limited. Further, it is common for students who earned their undergraduate degrees in RTA or RPA to seek graduate degrees outside of the discipline (typically allied health administration and business, respectively) as the outside degrees add a good deal of added value to undergraduate RCLS degrees.

The department is fortunate to be able to fund many of its graduate students as teaching or research assistants. Faculty who teach in the RPA MS program have been active in generating graduate assistantships (GAs) to support RPA students. For the past several years, Dr. Bob Wendling has consistently supported two GAs on his contracts to prepare park master plans for eastern localities. Dr. Kindal Shores has supported a graduate student on a grant for the past two years, as has Dr. Clif Watts. Dr. Paige Schneider was awarded a grant for 2010-2012, which supports one graduate student during the grant period. This past year, Dr. Hans Vogelsong brought in a grant that supported a MS student in RCLS. In addition, RCLS has developed a relationship with Campus Recreation and Wellness whereby CRW provides an assistantship to an RPA graduate student. Recently, contact was made with a local agency to provide a GA position for a RPA graduate student to work in the community; this MOU is under development. Additional assistantships are awarded to graduate students to teach and provide research assistance to faculty as department funds allow.

Specific Recommendations

- 1) Cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding among the RCLS students. RT students denigrate the nature of the work RPM students are preparing to do.

The visitors shared anecdotal information addressing the concern identified in this recommendation, and faculty were surprised to hear that this type of issue existed. None of the faculty members have seen or heard the noted attitudes among graduate or undergraduate students in either discipline (RPM or RT). When faculty and the department chair followed up with students, we did not find any type of disrespect evident. Certainly a difference exists in the type of setting in which RT and RPM graduates will work (the community and clinical settings), but the RT and RPM students appeared to understand the career paths of students in each others' degree programs. After reflecting on this recommendation, faculty believe that this idea was perceived, in part, due to the fact that only RT students were available to the visitors during the review. For a variety of reasons, while several RPM students were invited to attend meetings with the visitation team, none of them were in attendance. Thus, the only perspective shared with the visitors was that of RT students. Nonetheless, the RCLS department will remain sensitive to such concerns so if evidence arises, we can address them directly.

- 2) Consider having the best teaching professors take ownership of RCLS 2000 and 2601.

RCLS faculty see the wisdom of this recommendation, and we are looking to see how we might move in this direction. At the present time the department makes extensive use of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Adjunct Faculty to teach the multiple sections of these courses. Full-time faculty feel a strong professional commitment to teach the upper division practice-based coursework (and, of course graduate courses). With the current teaching and scholarship loads, it is difficult to move faculty into the introductory courses and out of the professional practice courses. Having said that, beginning in fall 2010, Dr. Cheryl Stevens has taken on the role of curriculum coordinator for both RCLS 2000 and RCLS 2601. In this capacity, Dr. Stevens coordinates all section instructors to be sure that syllabi are consistent among the instructors, similar content is being covered, and course objectives are being met and measured. Dr. Stevens led an overhaul and update of RCLS 2000 in 2010-2011, and will conduct a thorough update of RCLS 2601 in summer 2011.

- 3) Rethink the way course content is delivered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (re: multiple sections, small class sizes, more opportunities for DE, compare DE and F2F sections, faculty contribute to scholarship of teaching).

To accommodate student needs faculty have recently increased class sizes in several courses (RCLS 2000 F2F, RCLS 2601 F2F, RCLS 3104, RCLS 3131, RCLS 4000, RCLS 4121, RCLS 4122, RCLS 4130, RCLS 5001, RCTX 4001), which has allowed us to reduce the number of multiple sections. Class sizes range from 40 to 72 in these classes and class size is limited by classroom capacity. The primary courses with multiple sections include RCLS 2000 and RCLS 2601. As noted in the response to Item 2 (above), consistency is maintained through the attention of one faculty member, who is charged with quality control of those courses.

The RCTX (RT) courses are purposely limited in size; admission to the degree program and courses are controlled. Due to the clinical nature of the RT program, no more than 35 students are admitted in any one semester; thus, class sizes will always be limited. In addition, it is difficult to teach skills/competency based courses in any format other than face-to-face.

Enrollments in DE sections of all classes are limited to 30 or fewer due to the impact of such courses on instructional quality and faculty time. Faculty have considered increasing the number of DE sections of courses offered and considered creating additional DE courses to accommodate student interests. In the summer of 2010, two new DE course sections were created: RCTX 4001 and RCLS 5100. Discussion continues about creating additional graduate level DE courses, yet faculty resources to create and teach such courses are limited.

Prior to the academic review, RCLS was involved in creating a DE Peer Observation Form. The form has been developed and is now under review to be approved for use within the department. This will allow us to compare the quality of instruction between the online and face-to-face sections of classes.

- 4) Track the students after graduation (are students working in the field for which they are preparing? Do professional opportunities exist for graduates?).

Faculty endeavor to do this, but we do not currently have a systematic way to collect and maintain these types of data. Certainly, the ECU Alumni Association maintains some contact information for graduates, and the department has access to some of that information. Upon completion of the internship (undergraduate degrees), students are asked to provide permanent contact information, but we are not always successful in gathering this type of data. At the graduate level we ask graduates to provide contact information and stay in touch, and again, success rates vary. We are looking forward to ECU moving to providing permanent ECU email addresses to alumni so that we can reach out to them to gather on-going data. At the present time, efforts to contact alumni are through emails (for those we have), at the annual state conferences (RT and RPM), and the HHP Newsletter.

- 5) Consider consolidating the two MS degree programs into one with two tracks.

Faculty have considered this recommendation for several years. At the present time, the degrees share a common core of 12 credit hours. This common core would likely not change as a result of combining the two degrees. Further, the distinct MS degree in Recreational Therapy Administration is one of five such degrees offered across the country. Having said that, the faculty are amenable to joining the two degrees and as a review of the graduate curriculum is undertaken over this next year, a determination will be made regarding the possible consolidation of the two degrees.

6) “Grow your own” minority MS students.

Faculty appreciate this recommendation and recognize it as an opportunity to increase the numbers of minority graduate students in the parks and recreation professions (across the country both RT and RPM fields are heavily dominated by people who are white). Undergraduate students in RCLS include a relatively high number of students who are African American, which is unique to ECU. Faculty and staff in RCLS have begun to develop a systematic process to accomplish this idea to ‘grow our own’ graduate minority students. Individual faculty are verbally encouraging successful undergraduates to apply to graduate school, the Graduate Director has been reaching out to undergraduate students through emails, and the Department Chair has developed a letter of invitation to be sent to all senior level RCLS undergraduates who have a GPA of 3.0 and better at the end of each fall semester.

7) Decide on a Center of Excellence(s)—how and where do faculty want to excel? Excellence that celebrates graduate education and scholarship is needed to catapult the department into national prominence.

RCLS has a strong faculty as demonstrated by the number of faculty who have been recognized with College and University teaching and research awards (five in the past two years). In addition, two RCLS faculty members have completed the Chancellor’s Leadership Academy and one has completed the Scholarship of Service and Engagement Academy; another will participate in that academy in fall 2011.

In terms of focusing the department on one or more “Centers of Excellence”, the department leadership team (Planning and Innovation Committee; PIC) has been meeting weekly since August 2010 to identify existing commonalities, professional interests, and contemporary issues that might serve to drive shared faculty interests. We have been exploring and wrestling with the question, “What do we want to be known for?” for the past 15 months. Faculty participated in a day-long retreat to examine this question, and PIC has taken that information and tentatively identified three areas of excellence for which RCLS appears well suited. These include (1) sustainability in recreation and intervention-based contexts, (2) functional health and physical activity in recreation and intervention-based contexts, and (3) technology in recreation and intervention-based contexts. These initial ideas were presented to the faculty in January 2011 and are under consideration by the entire faculty group. Further, since the recent work of the EPPC identified the College of Health and Human Performance as a college that might face consolidation, RCLS faculty are actively engaged in proactive planning for the department.

8) Create a hiring plan now (RLCS has two [phased] retirements coming up immediately).

RCLS will have several openings in the near future—

- Open in fall 2011: One tenure-track position in the RT degree program (a faculty member is moving to another university; this was an unanticipated opening and the filled line is critical to our continued success and accreditation of the RT program). This position is in addition to a tenure-track RT position that was not filled in 2009, and for which the department did not receive approval to continue the search.
- Open in fall 2012: One tenure-track position in RPM (a faculty member serving the RPM degree program did not receive tenure and 2011-2012 will be his terminal year; the department chair has submitted a request to search this fall for a replacement to begin in fall 2012)
- Two tenure-track positions in RPM: two faculty members serving the RPM program are going on phased retirement beginning in fall 2011. RCLS has received permission to search for one fixed term replacement to fill the two ‘halves’ we face beginning fall 2011. We are hopeful that when the two tenure track lines open at the conclusion of the phased retirement terms that we will be able to search and fill those positions.

The challenges we face with regard to these open positions are many. ECU is in a serious budget reduction period and open faculty positions are going through additional scrutiny to determine criticality to the institution. Further, the College of Health and Human Performance has been identified as a potential college for consolidation, which will directly impact successful recruitment to RCLS (assuming the unit receives permission to fill the positions). The RPM program has twelve faculty members, yet only four of those are assigned full time to the department. Two faculty members are only 51% with the department as they are jointly assigned to other units. Two faculty members are 51% with the department due to a buy-out of their time to serve yet other units. One of the individuals listed is the Department Chair, another is the Director of Undergraduate Studies—both of these faculty members are on reduced teaching loads due to their administrative assignments. And, as mentioned, two faculty members are on phased retirement, providing only half-time support to the unit.

Eight faculty are assigned to the RT degree program—one tenured faculty member teaches only one course per semester as she is an associate dean; another RT tenured faculty member serves as the Graduate Director and is on a reduced teaching load. Three tenure/tenure-track faculty members are fully assigned to RT, as are two fixed term teaching instructors, one of whom has responsibility for all practicum and internship sites and experiences. Adding to the concern is that all faculty members in RT must hold national certification as well as state licensure to teach in the program. Thus, the recently opened RT faculty line will need to be filled with a qualified and credentialed individual; to maintain and grow scholarship in RT it will be important to maintain this position as a tenure track line.

PIC has spent a good deal of time developing ideas for department foci or centers of excellence. The intent is to ensure that future hires will support the areas of excellence to strengthen the overall program. Outside of the need to immediately fill an RT tenure track line, PIC determined that the next three openings would be replaced with tenure track faculty lines in (1) parks and planning, (2) biofeedback, and (3) sustainability.

The line/position in parks and planning will enable RCLS to continue its service to eastern North Carolina in preparing park master plans for local communities. RCLS has been active in securing contracts to prepare these plans over the past 15 years. The line in biofeedback will serve to enhance the existing biofeedback program (currently only one faculty member is assigned to this growing area), and aid in bringing in external funding for the department. Sustainability is an area well supported by a variety of units on campus (e.g., the Center for Sustainable Tourism, the Institute for Coastal Science and Policy) and provides opportunities for transdisciplinary research and teaching.

- 9) Work with department chair to define and achieve a preferred future; RT and RPM faculty need to work in unison.

PIC, the leadership team of RCLS, consists of faculty representatives from RPM and RT (they include the Graduate Studies Director as well as the Director of Undergraduate Studies), as well as the Chair. As the leadership team for the department, PIC is charged with developing departmental policies and procedures, future directions, and innovative ways to meet the needs of faculty and students. This group is working to prepare options for a preferred future for faculty review. The options will serve as the beginning of a strategic plan; the intent is to have the plan and action steps identified by early fall 2011. The unit faculty sense some urgency in this effort as it relates to the current budget situation within the UNC system.