Unit 8 Section 1: Philosophy of Recreation and Leisure

UNIT OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW

This unit covers the following objectives:

1. Discuss the need for a philosophical basis of practice within the profession.

2. List and describe the seven operational philosophies of recreation and leisure.

Overview

History tells us that play, recreation, and leisure have probably been around since the beginning of mankind. Recreation and leisure as an identifiable profession, however, is the product of a much shorter timeline. Despite vast advances in the past century, there are still many challenges left for the still-evolving recreation and leisure-service professional.

This unit asks several key questions and suggests sources for possible answers in the future. The key to finding the answers to these questions, it seems, will be through the evolution of a sound philosophy of recreation and leisure-services that will effectively meet the immediate needs of the community while producing positive, lasting change.

Seven operational philosophies are presented and discussed for further consideration and application. The challenges to come may best be met through a combination of these approaches, as no model is a magic bullet.

Prospects for the future of recreation and leisure-services have never been brighter, and with each problem lies opportunity. With the benefit of history and the progressive perspectives of leisure professionals today, there is every reason to believe that the field—and those who benefit from it—will continue to flourish.
Part 1: Introduction

The remarkable growth of organized recreation, park, and leisure services throughout the United States and Canada has been documented throughout this course. Despite this growth, a number of serious questions still exist concerning the appropriate role of recreation in community and national life. For example, how can recreation contribute more effectively to the battle against social concerns, such as poverty, racial or ethnic hostility, crime and delinquency, and economic deprivation? What solutions can be found for the overcrowding and vandalism that affect many urban, state, and federal parks and recreation facilities?

Other questions include: How should the major priorities of organized recreation service in the U.S. and Canada be determined? What are the special responsibilities of organized recreation toward people with physical and mental disabilities, toward the aging, or toward those who may have had inadequate opportunities in the past because of their gender or other demographic factors? How have technological developments—especially computers, electronic forms of amusement, and the Internet—affect both leisure patterns and the management of recreation programs? With regard to violence, overemphasis on winning in sport, and policies governing drinking, drugs, gambling, or sexually-oriented play, what should the role of recreation professionals be?

Need for a Sound Philosophical Basis

Such issues should be resolved within the content of a coherent set of values, moral beliefs, and social priorities. What is needed is a sound philosophy of recreation and leisure that can serve the leisure-service field in ongoing policy formulation and program development.
Part 2: Philosophical Analyses of Recreation and Leisure

Some textbook authors examined the field by making use of widely accepted philosophical systems. Earle Ziegler, for example, examined the field of health, physical education, and recreation in light of several philosophical systems, including naturalism, realism, idealism, and experimentalism. However, because his primary emphasis was on recreation education rather than recreation and leisure in national culture, his analysis is somewhat remote from the concerns of leisure in modern society. Apart from such generalized analyses, a number of writers examined specific components of leisure behavior in terms of accepted philosophical criteria.

Sport as a Focus of Inquiry

One example is the immense growth of interest in sports that led many authors to examine amateur and professional athletics from a philosophical perspective.

Sports has been examined from a standpoint of metaphysics (exploring the nature of being and man’s relationship to God and nature); epistemology (concern with the origin and acquisition of knowledge); axiology (examines human ethics and moral conduct); and aesthetics (concern with the nature and form of beauty and art).

Moral Values and Leisure

In an older view of leisure, Aristotle argued that happiness was the greatest good in human life and that it was the result of living one’s life virtuously, chiefly through contemplation and the exercise of one’s intellect in leisure. In contrast, the existential view of human life rejects any a priori laws as to good or bad behavior. Sartre wrote, “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself,” and Ortega argued that man “is the novelist of himself.” Consider for a moment, even though it is widely recognized that gambling, substance abuse, and commercialized or indiscriminate sexual activity have destructive consequences for society, we are ambivalent with respect to public policy and laws regarding them. As we regulate and prosecute private enterprises engaged in providing these forms of play, government condones and promotes the same activities through state liquor stores, legal casinos and race-tracks, and massage parlors and escort services.

Shift in Professional Orientation

As a third example of philosophical analyses of recreation and leisure studies, some authors have examined the changing approaches found within the recreation and park profession. There has been a shift from progressive reformers who sought to improve life through organized play, to today, where recreation has become an area of professional service that has been “bureaucratized, commercialized, and centralized.”
Part 3: Operational Philosophies of Recreation and Leisure

It is more helpful to examine the philosophical views of those who direct the recreation movement today—the boards, administrators, and leaders of recreation and park agencies, voluntary organizations, commercial businesses, and other specialized leisure services. These views are generally expressed in mission statements, membership brochures, or other materials that describe the goals of these organizations.

There are several approaches or orientations found in leisure-service agencies today that are called operational philosophies, including:

1. quality-of-life approach
2. marketing approach
3. human services approach
4. prescriptive approach
5. resource manager/aesthetic/preservationist approach
6. hedonist/individualist approach
7. benefits-based approach

Quality-of-Life Approach

The *quality-of-life approach* has been the dominant one in the field of organized recreation service for several decades. It sees recreation as an experience that contributes to human development and to community well-being in various ways: improving physical and mental health, enriching cultural life, reducing antisocial uses of leisure, and strengthening community ties.

Marketing Approach

The *marketing approach*, a business-oriented approach to providing organized recreation and park programs and services, evolved as a direct response to the fiscal pressures placed on public and voluntary leisure-service agencies. This approach is based on the idea that public, voluntary, or other leisure-service providers will flourish best if they adopt the methods used by commercial recreation businesses. It argues that they must become more aggressive and efficient in developing and promoting recreation facilities and programs that will reach the broadest possible audience and gain the maximum possible income.

Human Services Approach

In direct contrast to the marketing approach, the *human services approach* to organized recreation service regards recreation as an important form of social service that must be provided in a way that contributes directly to a wide range of desired social values and goals. Under this approach, recreation must be designed to achieve significant community change and to use a variety of appropriate modalities, such as the sponsorship of youth and adult classes in a wide range of educational, vocational, or self-improvement areas, special services for people with disabilities, environmental projects, and other functions of this type.
Prescriptive Approach

The prescriptive approach suggests that recreation should bring about constructive change in participants. The clearest cases of prescriptive recreation programs are found in therapeutic recreation as it is often used to help patients or clients master important motor skills, improve social behavior, or achieve other goals of treatment.

Resource Manager/Aesthetic/Preservationist Approach

The resource manager/aesthetic/preservation approach is used as a catchall model to lump together three elements that are not synonymous but that exhibit a high degree of similarity. The resource manager is concerned with managing, using, and protecting the outdoor environment. The aesthetic position is one that values the appearance of the environment, both natural and artificial, and stresses the inclusion of cultural arts and other creative experiences within a recreation program. The preservationist seeks to maintain the physical environment to preserve evidence of a historical past and a cultural tradition. This approach is more likely to be evident in agencies that operate extensive parks, forests, waterfront areas, or other natural or scenic resources.

Hedonist/Individualist Approach

The hedonist/individualist approach is concerned chiefly with providing fun and pleasure and regards recreation as a highly individualistic activity that should be free of social constraints or moral purposes. Hedonist is used to mean one who seeks personal pleasure, often with the implication that it is of a sensual, bodily nature. The term individualist is attached because this philosophical approach stresses the idea that each person should be free to seek his or her own fulfillment and pleasure without regard to group pressures or social expectations. Obviously, certain forms of leisure have gained increased popularity in American life that fit this approach, including drugs, alcohol, gambling, and sex as a commercialized recreational pursuit.

Benefits-Based Management Approach

The final philosophical approach, the benefits-based approach, is relatively new and holds that it is not enough to verbalize a set of desirable goals or mission statements or to carry out head counts of participation and tally the number of events sponsored by a leisure-service agency. Instead, governmental, nonprofit, therapeutic, armed forces, and other types of managed recreation agencies should more clearly define their roles and purposes in terms of community and participant benefits.

The benefits-based approach is based on a three-step implementation process:

1. **Benefits and opportunity identification:** Determine a core group of benefits that users seek and agencies can realistically provide, along with the management changes needed for benefits achievement.
2. **Program implementation:** Make facility or staff modifications needed to achieve desired benefits, and carry out systematic monitoring procedures during programs.

3. **Evaluation and documentation:** Analyze data, determine if program benefits were achieved, develop reports, and disseminate findings to appropriate audiences.

**Philosophical Approaches: No Pure Models**

Although these seven approaches to the definition and management of organized leisure services are separate and distinct philosophical positions, it is unlikely that any single agency would follow one approach exclusively. Many organizations combine two or more positions in defining their missions.
Section 2: Key Principles Guiding Leisure-Service Delivery Today

UNIT OBJECTIVE AND OVERVIEW

This unit covers the following objective:

1. Identify the key principles guiding leisure-service delivery in contemporary society.

Overview

For recreation, parks, and leisure-service practitioners, it is possible to identify a number of key principles that should be used to guide their professional operations today. First, it is assumed that such individuals, no matter what their fields of specialization are, regard recreation and leisure as important to human growth and community development. A contemporary philosophy of organized recreation service should therefore deal with such important issues as the place of recreation and leisure in modern life, the role of government, the development of programming based on significant social needs, and the place of leisure education.
Part 1: Place of Recreation in the Modern Community

In American and Canadian society, our view of recreation as a social phenomenon and area of community involvement is influenced by our governmental systems. We have accepted the view that, on various levels, government has the responsibility for providing certain major services to citizens, including functions related to safety and protection, education, health, and other services that contribute to maintaining the quality of life of all citizens. Through government and many voluntary community associations, we have accepted the responsibility for providing needed services and opportunities for people at each stage of life.

Needs of Individual Citizens

Recreation and leisure are important aspects of personal experience in modern life for the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual benefits they provide. Positive leisure experiences enhance the quality of a person’s life and help each person develop to their fullest potential. To make this possible, government and other agencies should provide recreation resources, programs, and leisure education to help people understand the value of constructively used free time.

Government’s Responsibility

Recreation helps communities meet health needs, gain economic benefits, and maintain community morale. On each level (local, state or provincial, and federal), appropriate government agencies should therefore be assigned the responsibility for maintaining a network of physical resources for leisure participation, including parks, playgrounds, centers, sports facilities, and other special recreation facilities. Government should be responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing programs, under proper leadership, for all age levels. A major concern should be the assurance that the distribution of recreational opportunities be for the public at large to guarantee that all residents have equal programs and services.

Goals of Other Organizations

Each type of organization that makes a contribution to this field should determine its own specialized goals for recreation service, depending on its overall purposes, the nature of its membership, and its available resources. Armed forces recreation should give its highest priority to helping develop and maintain a high level of physical fitness and positive morale and providing needed leisure programs for the families of service personnel. Employee recreation programs are designed to improve the productivity of workers by enhancing their physical and mental fitness and morale and improving relationships between management and line personnel, to name a few. Therapeutic recreation program goals of treatment or rehabilitation for clients serve to direct the course of programming. All forms of organized recreation service provided should be goal-oriented and purposeful.
Part 2: Other Guidelines

In addition to these general guidelines, there are a number of others that are of particular relevance to the role of leisure-service professionals.

Coordination among Agencies

American society today has many organizations of various types that provide leisure services, but they often do so with marked duplication and in wasteful competition with each other. At the same time, there are continuing gaps in service that result in unmet needs. Therefore, it is essential that public, private, voluntary, commercial, and other types of leisure-service organizations cooperate fully in determining community needs and accepting appropriate functions and roles for themselves in providing recreational opportunities. This will help to prevent unnecessary competition among agencies and to identify and fill gaps in community leisure services.

Participant Input

Participants themselves should be as fully involved as possible in the determination of program emphases and needs. This can be accomplished through the use of neighborhood committees or advisory councils, recreation and park boards, task forces, or volunteers.

Balance of Marketing and Human Services Approaches

Can the marketing and human services approaches that appear to oppose one another in philosophical orientation be reconciled? A number of authors have emphasized that although organizations in the public sector may adopt an entrepreneurial approach, they must also be concerned with social and economic priorities that benefit the overall community.

Need for Effective Leisure Education

Finally, there is a need to promote effective leisure education among the various sectors of the public and among professionals in other areas of community service or in special disciplines. Many Americans and Canadians are suspicious of recreation and unaware of recreation’s potential value due to their strong work ethic. Leisure education is necessary to encourage a fuller understanding and appreciation of creative and constructive forms of leisure involvement.
Unit 8 Section 3: Future Challenges of the Recreation and Leisure-Service Field

UNIT OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW

This unit covers the following objectives:

1. Identify the challenges currently faced by the recreation and leisure-service field.

2. Discuss the prospects for the future of recreation and leisure in society and the prospects for recreation and leisure professionals.

Overview

The principles and guidelines that were presented in Sections 1 and 2 deal essentially with the present. However, it is helpful to determine what the rest of the 21st century will bring us in terms of demographic, social, and economic changes that can affect our leisure. Many leisure and recreation professionals emphasize that in order to bring about needed changes, the field will require a new wave of entrepreneurship. We need to think more innovatively, be more goal-oriented, and be more willing to take risks in order to achieve outstanding outcomes.
Part 1: Efforts to Predict the Future

A number of studies in the United States and Canada have attempted to develop systematic predictions of social changes that will accelerate as we go further into the 21st century. One Canadian study identified a number of trends that are expected to characterize Canadian society in the future:

1. “adultism”—the altered family, with many more youth, single adults, older adults, and nontraditional family units
2. *structural economic change*, with greater emphasis on computer and telecommunication advances
3. *greening—the environmental imperative*, with growing concern about waste management, energy management, and preservation of habitats and at-risk species
4. *electronic entertainment cocoons*, with virtual reality taking the place of real experiences

U.S. Views: Agenda for the Twenty-First Century

Many of the same trends described in the Canadian report have been noted by leisure-service professionals and scholars in the U.S. as well. A substantial number of critical needs in the field were identified at a national recreation conference in the early 1990s, including the following:

- Park and recreation professionals must be able and willing to identify, analyze, promote, and respond to changes in society.
- There is a strong trend toward greater participation in the decision-making by citizens and employees; therefore, new leadership techniques will be needed to facilitate consensus building.
- Multicultural diversity will continue to grow rapidly, and recreation providers must find ways to celebrate the variety of cultures in communities.
- The wellness movement will continue to grow, and recreation providers must facilitate this growing movement.
- Success will depend on organizations’ ability to build cooperative relationships and establish networks and coalitions with other organizations and agencies.
- The image of the profession must be improved externally and internally.
- Parks and recreation must be involved in mutually beneficial partnerships with tourism due to tourism being one of the world’s growth industries.
The environment will increasingly become a focus of international concern; therefore, the park and recreation profession must be leaders in shaping environmental policy.

Clearly defined mission statements, goals, and objectives must be developed and articulated in the park and recreation profession.
Part 2: Challenges and Strategies for the Future

In light of all the trends for the future outlined above and in your readings, numerous professional societies and government agencies have sought to outline appropriate strategies for the future. Richard Kraus (1998) conducted a study of recreation, park, and leisure-service educators in the U.S. and Canada which asked them to prioritize the importance of major trends and challenges facing the profession in the years ahead. Their findings of the 14 most important challenges for the 21st century are shown in Table 12.1.

Challenges Linked to Population Diversity

Age Groupings. The growing number of school-aged children and the shift of baby boomers will require expanded service delivery.

Gender-Related Concerns. An earlier unit described the progress that has been made by girls and women in terms of leisure opportunities and professional careers that transcend the traditional “glass ceiling.”

Lifestyle Issues. Issues revolving around the leisure roles of gay and lesbian youth and adults are of growing importance, such as accusations of civil rights violations and community centers designed specifically for this group.

Impact of Racial and Ethnic Diversity. The need to serve a far more diverse population than in the past has become apparent with the rapid growth in the number of Hispanic Americans. Other minorities, such as Asian Americans and Native Americans, symbolize America’s role today as a “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot” society.

Religion-Connected Issues. Religion has become another major issue facing leisure-service agencies. Often the beliefs and customs of individuals from various religious affiliations conflict with traditional American values and pose a concern for community organizations that seek to serve them. For example, some Boy Scout organizations have rejected Muslims as leaders.

Challenges Linked to Environmental Trends

As the U.S. and Canada have become increasingly concerned about environmental degradation and the need to preserve the natural environment, a number of areas of conflict have emerged. The most obvious one has to do with the clash of priorities among at least three groups: those who fight to open up forests and other wilderness areas to logging, grazing, and oil drilling for economic reasons; those who demand the right to use the wilderness or major water areas for recreational pastimes despite possible damage done to the environment; and those who fight to resist all invasions of the natural environment.

Urban Conflicts. There have been legal confrontations challenging the right of suburban communities to ban residents from other neighborhoods from using their beaches, tennis courts, or other park areas. All such trends pose challenges for recreation and park
professionals, particularly those who administer outdoor recreation and park programs and facilities.

**Challenges Linked to Information Technology**

One of the most widely heard predictions for the future is that we are increasingly becoming an interactive society, meaning that we have become almost totally dependent on technological tools such as television, cell phones, DVDs, answering machines, camcorders, and similar devices, both in the business world and in our personal lives. Some see it is a great development that enriches our lives, while others argue that it is helping to create an apartheid society with growing gaps between the rich and the poor.

**Concerns about the Internet.** Over the past decade, the Internet has become a powerful force in education, commerce, and social life. Clearly, telecommuting, job searches, communication, and transactions on all levels are greatly facilitated by the Internet. However, some negative aspects of this new technology are being publicized, such as providing a medium for a host of scams and criminal schemes.

**Impact on Lifestyles.** Telecommuting has been seen in both a positive and negative light. Many believe that the availability of a sophisticated mobile telecommuting workforce will be the biggest workplace trend in the next millennium. However, other critics suggest that telecommuting may create a nation of isolates, helping to destroy the social nature of work. For example, the more time people spend online, the less they can spare for real-life relationships with family and friends.

**Challenges Linked to Commodification, Privatization, and Future Work/Leisure Trends**

Almost every aspect of recreational involvement has been transformed into a product for sale, including many programs offered by public and nonprofit community agencies. Fee charging and marketing strategies now dominate the recreational landscape, including programs offered by armed forces, employee service, and therapeutic recreation sponsors.

Many American families have private backyard swimming pools. Others visit lavish resorts in places like Mexico, Jamaica, and the Bahamas, with several pools and luxurious accommodations. Many others must rely on the spray from a New York City street-side fire hydrant to keep cool in the hot summers. Can the leisure-service profession remedy such contrasts?

**Rich and Poor in American Life.** As the previous swimming pool examples depict, the reality of the state of the American economy is that the “new economy” has had both winners and losers. In the widespread optimism about the flourishing state of the American economy with booming employment, budget surpluses, and rising stock market prices, the continuing plight of the poor tends to be overlooked.

**Too Little Leisure.** There has been increased pressure placed on many industrial employees to work long, hard hours of required overtime. It has become apparent that for growing numbers of men and women, the search for quality time that can be devoted to
family, personal needs, and leisure pursuits has become an important priority in making job choices.

**Prospects for the Future**

The real challenge for many different kinds of recreation, park, and leisure-service organizations and professionals described in this course will be to develop sound philosophies and programs that fulfill their essential function in society. The potential contribution of recreation and leisure in the decades ahead in personal, social, environmental, and economic terms will be greater than ever before.