

COMMUNITY RECREATION INTERNSHIP SUPERVISOR PERCEPTIONS OF
THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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This dissertation and everything it represents, is dedicated to my family – both traditional and chosen. To my traditional family - who have nurtured, encouraged, challenged, supported and loved me unconditionally all of my life; and to my chosen family – friends who have entered my life in various stages throughout my journey whom without my family would not be complete.

Thank you for giving me strength, laughter and the power to believe.

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNITY RECREATION INTERNSHIP SUPERVISOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

by Lori Irwin

In community recreation, the professional student internship is an integral component of undergraduate education. The internship is intended to provide students with an opportunity to apply skills in real-world settings and cultivate personal characteristics that can be difficult to develop in a classroom setting. The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in the development of student professional characteristics. A framework of phenomenological inquiry guided this qualitative study that included semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 community recreation internship site supervisors.

First, supervisors placed significant importance on students' ability to act as advocates for themselves, the field, the department, and their services. Supervisors also connected students' ability to act as advocates with other identified important characteristics such as passion and networking. Second, findings indicated that internship experiences need to incorporate the requirement that students assume a higher level of responsibility for their own development that is more in-line with what is expected of successful community recreation professionals. Third, it is crucial that recreation educators and internship supervisors identify passion in potential future professionals, cultivate that passion and teach students how to exhibit passion in a variety of situations, environments and relationships. Fourth, supervisors identified the ability to relate to diverse groups of people and flexibility as characteristics they felt had the ability to influence the development of other characteristics. Fifth, one-cumulative graded internship project created gaps in the development of professional characteristics because it did

not promote exposure to a variety of experiences. Sixth, supervisors self-identified their roles as “challenging advisors” and created the most realistic environment possible by intentionally placing student interns in situations that created challenge, uncertainty and teachable moments. Seventh, supervisors reported an overall positive impact of student interns and recognized internships as a crucial part of students’ educational experience without which students would not be prepared. Finally, the study revealed supervisors felt that a minimum of 30 weeks of full-time internship experience is necessary for students to develop professional characteristics.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Characteristic: A distinguishing quality, attribute, or trait possessed by an employee (Hurd, 2001).

Competencies: Measurable or observable skills, knowledge, abilities and behaviors that are needed to successfully accomplish a job (Hurd, 2001).

Community recreation: A public or non-profit agency that provides recreation and leisure services to the general population within a community (Edginton, DeGraaf, Dieser, & Edginton, 2006).

Experiential learning: The process whereby knowledge is created through the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.2).

Internship supervisor: An on-site, agency professional who manages, mentors, and evaluates student interns (Vogel, Grice, Hill & Moody, 2004).

Nonprofit recreation agency: Legal entities that promote, in some way, a public service orientation or mission. They perform a service of social value, rather than promoting earned profit. Organizations such as YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters provide recreation and leisure programming for a specific purpose or audience (Edginton et al., 2006).

Professional Characteristics: Personal management skills that are sometimes referred to as “soft skills” or “people skills” that drive one's potential for growth and success in people-centered environments. Professional characteristics can be hard to observe, quantify and measure because they have to do with how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions (Caudron, 1999).

Public recreation agency: A municipality such as a village, city, township, county that provides recreation, parks and leisure services or programs. Pubic recreation agencies receive revenue

from a variety of sources but the main contributor is compulsory resources such as taxes and mileages as a result of the regulatory powers of government (Edginton et al., 2006).

Quasi-public recreation agency: An agency that provides recreation and leisure programming that receives revenue from a partnership of both public and private organizations (Edginton et al., 2006).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Over 400,000 people are employed across America to provide programs and services through state and local parks and recreation. Annually, billions of dollars are spent on public recreation programs and facilities. Recreation professionals who provide these services to the community have the opportunity and responsibility to improve the quality of people's lives. They have the privilege to improve the climate of communities by serving constituents' recreation and leisure needs, exposing them to new experiences and knowledge, and providing opportunities to contribute and make a difference.

The purpose of recreation, parks and leisure education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to direct and/or administer recreational services. Students acquire skills and knowledge to effectively design, organize, implement, manage, administer and/or evaluate recreational programming assuring they effectively meet the diverse needs of the individuals or communities served. Many academic recreation programs depend on an internship experience and the guidance of internship supervisors to help students develop and refine professional characteristics, or "people skills," such as communication, cooperation, and teamwork. However, how internship supervisors interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development and cultivation of student intern professional characteristics was not clear due to lack of research in this area. While research has focused on the value of an internship to both the student and the internship site, how internship supervisors have fostered professional skills had not been explored. This chapter (1) introduces the concept of internships as part of academic preparation in community recreation programs, (2) discusses the

development of student professional characteristics during internships, (3) presents gaps in research regarding student professional characteristics in community recreation, (4) presents areas of inquiry that will guide the study, (5) discusses theoretical frameworks and definitions, and (6) discusses significance of the study.

Internships as Part of Academic Preparation

In addition to a strong academic foundation, community recreation education programs emphasize real-life application of student's training through experiential learning opportunities such as professional internships. "The practice of gaining supervised practical experience is nothing new. In fact, it's ancient: references are found to apprenticeships, thousands of years ago. Known as internships today, it is a rite of passage for students in recent years" (Coco, 2000, p. 41). Internships are crucial in the educational process because they provide students the opportunity to "engage in the practical application of theories learned in the classroom, as they come to realize individual skills, professional stature, and professional goals" (Martinez, 1996, p. 74). Students who complete internships have an opportunity to work in their chosen fields and minimize the gap between what they learn in the classroom and how they are expected to apply it in the workplace. Internships are a natural bridge between college and the work world. "Exposure to real-world problems and issues that are usually not as well defined or assessed as those normally contained in textbooks is a valuable, out-of-the classroom learning opportunity" (Coco, 2000, p. 41).

In order to provide an experience that transitions students from the classroom to the workforce, professional internships incorporate a variety of project and work applications for students. "From an academic standpoint, the primary purpose of the internship is student learning. This includes experiential learning and opportunities for students to demonstrate what

they have learned” (Kelley, 2004, p. 28). Internship programs may include goals and objectives such as program development facilitation and evaluation, creating marketing and public relations materials, budget development, grant writing and fundraising, policy development, personnel management, community relations, facility management, strategic planning, and customer service programs and training.

The Development of Student Professional Characteristics during Internships

Instead of just talking about desired skills or behavior in a classroom, internships offer students real-life experiences. The classroom generally serves as an “artificial lab for honing skills such as problem solving, decision-making, customer service, and professionalism” (Hurd & Schlatter, 2007, p. 31). While group projects, class discussion, and service learning opportunities help promote the development of professional characteristics, they do not allow the “real-life” experience and “teachable moments” that are a realistic part of an internship experience. Many students consider internships the most reliable way to learn the reality of the work environment (Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999). Professional characteristics are personal skills that must be honed and developed in real-life situations such as student internships.

The undergraduate internship is intended to provide students with an opportunity to not only apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, but to also cultivate personal characteristics that can be difficult to develop in a classroom setting. Williams (2004) argues that an important purpose of the internship is for students to develop professionalism.

Professionalism may not be something that students fully understand or are able to practice...Employers are often frustrated by students who do not understand the meaning of proper attire, timeliness, deadlines, and other professional

qualities....No one should assume that students are prepared in the area of professionalism. (Williams, 2004, p. 31)

Professional characteristics are defined in this study as personal management skills that are sometimes referred to as “soft skills” or “people skills” that drive ones potential for growth and success in people-centered environments (Table 1). Professional characteristics enable people to negotiate their environments, behavior, and relationships. Professional characteristics can be hard to observe, quantify and measure because they have to do with how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions (Caudron, 1999). Where traditional “hard skills” that are more technical or administrative in nature can be taught and easily measured, professional characteristics are essentially people skills that determine an individual’s strengths as a leader, team member, communicator and community member.

Table 1. Professional Characteristics: Definition and Examples

Personal management skills that are sometimes referred to as “soft skills” or “people skills” that drive ones potential for growth and success in people-centered environments.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening • engaging in dialogue • managing criticism and feedback • problem solving • cooperation • time management • displaying a positive attitude • patience • adaptable and flexible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of good judgment • networking • maintain a sense of humor • balance work and professional life • self-discipline • work ethic • ability to be diplomatic • embrace diversity • ability to motivate staff/volunteers

Professional characteristics are crucial for success in a human service industry such as recreation, parks and leisure. In order to improve the quality of people’s lives through programs, parks, and services recreation professionals must constantly and consistently communicate with

community stakeholders and the people they serve. Professional characteristics such as communicating, listening, giving feedback, engaging in dialogue, handling criticism and feedback, problem solving, cooperation, time management, displaying a positive attitude, patience, and flexibility are all examples of characteristics that should be applied every day by recreation professionals (NRPA, 2004). Recreation professionals not only work in a person-centered environment, but work in teams and coordinate with outside volunteers, vendors and stakeholders on a daily basis. Professional characteristics such as the ability to motivate volunteers and employees, use good judgment, network within and outside of the profession, maintain a sense of humor, and balance work and professional life are essential when coordinating with and engaging outside organizations and professionals.

Students who engage in internships have the opportunity to enhance these professional characteristics before entering the workforce. Students develop professional characteristics such as personal growth and decision-making, how classroom concepts relate to practical application, improved understanding of their chosen industry, clarification of their own career interest areas and ambitions, and to reduce uncertainty regarding the transition from school to the workplace (Brooks & Greene, 1998; Coco, 2000). Literature indicates that internships should also help students understand the importance of professional characteristics such as time management, self-discipline, communication, and work ethic (Brooks & Greene, 1998; Girard, 1999; Kelley, 2004; & Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999).

Recreation, Parks and Leisure Internships

In a human service industry such as recreation, parks and leisure, the professional student internship is an integral component of undergraduate education. The distinctive contribution of the internship is the experience combined with academic preparation that enables students to

develop professional behavior and apply theory to practice. An internship experience has been required for all accredited parks and recreation college and university programs for over thirty years (NRPA/AALR Council on Accreditation, 2004). The internship program is an essential element in the preparation of students as professionals in community recreation. Hurd and Schlatter (2007) argue:

An undergraduate education in parks and recreation goes beyond completion of required general education courses and major courses that focus on such things as programming, facility management, or budgeting. It is assumed that students are not fully prepared for a full-time job until they go through a culminating internship...the pinnacle of the degree, then, is the senior internship, in which students apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, as required by accreditation standards. (p. 31)

Typical professional credit-bearing internships in recreation programs are usually three to fifteen weeks in length (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1993; Kelley, 2004). The number of credits earned is determined by the amount of hours students work, usually translating into an average of 40 hours per academic credit. Therefore, because the majority of students earn three to fifteen academic credits, the majority of student interns participate in three to fifteen week internships. CAPRA/NRPA accreditation requirements for recreation education programs stipulate a minimum of a 10 week, 40 hour per week internship and the majority of universities require 12 to 15 week internships. However, one recreation education program located at a public university in the Midwest requires a unique 30 week, 40 hour per week, professional internship. While internships are an integral component in recreation education, the length differs according to each university's academic program. No research had been conducted in the field of

community recreation regarding the impact of length of internship in relationship to the development of student professional characteristics prior to this study.

Students secure internships by applying and interviewing for internship positions. Some educational programs also provide internship placement assistant by providing internship site data files and/or staff who assist in the search and selection process. Before beginning the internship, an internship agreement is signed by the student, the agency, and a faculty advisor from the university/college from which the student is earning academic credit. This agreement typically stipulates experiences and tasks in which the student will engage while interning at the chosen agency/site such as internship dates, student projects and responsibilities, agency responsibilities, type of compensation and reporting structure.

Internship Supervisors

While on internship, students are supervised by a faculty advisor from their academic program and an on-site professional within the community recreation agency. For the purpose of this paper on-site professionals who oversee interns will be referred to as “internship supervisors” or “supervisors”. Internship supervisors bridge a gap between recreation educators and recreation professionals. Supervisors are working professionals who assist in the process of recreation education because they house, mentor and manage student interns. On-site internship supervisors are responsible for overseeing and managing the students’ internship experience. Faculty advisors typically communicate with the student on a semi-regular basis through progress reports, email, phone calls, and perhaps a site-visit to the agency. However, day-to-day job assignments, projects, networking opportunities and the quality of the internship and learning outcomes is the result of the experience provided through the internship supervisor and agency where the student is placed.

Communication between internship supervisors and faculty advisors is usually limited and involves signing of the internship agreement, the exchange of progress reports/evaluations, troubleshooting if conflicts arise, and possibly through internship site-visits. Not included as part of the internship negotiation process is the clarification of on-site internship supervisors' expectations or perceptions regarding student professional characteristics. What is not communicated between academic advisors and on-site supervisors has created a gap in knowledge and may be as important as what has been communicated. There is minimal communication between academic faculty and internship supervisors regarding internship supervisor skills sets, motivation, professional beliefs, guiding principles and expectations. Internship supervisors are not trained as educators, nor are they a part of the recreation education program from which they receive student interns. Internship supervisors are not trained by the academic institution regarding how to supervise, develop, or mentor student interns. It is assumed by the recreation degree program that internship supervisors will provide a realistic, work experience where students can apply and hone skills. Educators are expecting that as a non-required additional benefit, students also develop professional characteristics. However, because internship supervisors are not trained educators and/or not trained to do so by university programs, the result is a gap in knowledge and research focus regarding how or if internship supervisors promote the development of student professional characteristics.

The lack of communication and training between recreation faculty advisors and internship supervisors could result in a large gap regarding perceptions of educational needs, philosophy, expectations and outcomes. In fact, research has shown a “discrepancy among the views of educators and practitioners as to what is the critical education undergraduates need in order to become successful practitioners” (Longsdorf, 2004). When asked to prioritize

CAPRA/NRPA academic accreditation standards, recreation practitioners and recreation faculty disagree on the priority and weight of curriculum topics. This indicates a need for further inquiry of potential gaps between what skills, knowledge and characteristics professionals in the field feel is important for job success and what is being supported and provided in academic recreation curriculum program designs. The crux of the issue was that research had not been conducted regarding recreation internship supervisors perceptions of their roles, beliefs or understanding of professional competency development in the student interns that they help educate and develop.

The purpose of recreation, parks and leisure education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to direct and/or administer recreational services, which include professional characteristics. Many recreation education programs depend on the internship experience and the guidance of internship supervisors to help students develop and refine professional characteristics. In spite of the importance placed on an internship experience by recreation professionals and educators, little research had been given to subject of parks and recreation internship issues from the perspective of current recreation practitioners and internship supervisors (Beggs, Ross, & Knapp, 2006). Until this study, no research had been conducted to increase understanding regarding how internship supervisors interpret their roles in the development and cultivation of student intern professional characteristics. According to Dewey (1938):

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences lead to growth...Above all, they should know how to utilize the

surroundings that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (p. 35)

Due to a lack of supporting research, recreation faculty who are responsible for designing educational programs for recreation professionals do not have enough information regarding student development of professional characteristics during internships to create the highest quality, worthwhile experiences that lead to student growth and success. Professional characteristics are essential in the community recreation field, but there was no research regarding the process or intentionality of their development during student internships. Supervisors were important, yet not understood, influences on a recreation students' educational experience. While limited research has argued that students develop professional characteristics during internship experiences, we do not understand internship supervisors' perceptions, intentions, or roles during that experiential learning process. The lack of information created a massive gap in the education of human service professionals who must demonstrate appropriate and effective use of professional characteristics in order to do their job and improve the quality of people's lives and the communities in which they live.

Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in regards to the development of student intern professional characteristics. Additionally, this study addressed how internship supervisors perceive the importance of length of student internships in relationship to student development of professional characteristics.

The following research questions informed this study:

1. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of the development of professional characteristics for students who wish to work in the field of community recreation?
2. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics?
3. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of internship length when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional skills?

Focus on the Field of Community Recreation

This study addressed the perceptions of internship supervisors at community recreation agencies. The study was delimited to the field of community recreation and did not include other areas of the recreation field such as commercial, tourism, outdoor, or therapeutic recreation. A professional who decides to work in the field of community recreation, essentially makes the decision to work in the "people business." Professional characteristics are vital in a human service industry such as community recreation. Career success depends not only on what you do, but how you do it while interacting and communicating with co-workers, board members, stakeholders, volunteers and the public. "The public sector-especially in the case of the recreation field-has managerial responsibilities that are unique to it" (Smale & Frisby, 1990, p.

3). The demonstration of consistent, appropriate behavior and choices is as important as the application of skill and knowledge in the field of community recreation. Information gathered from this study is meant to advance the limited field of inquiry regarding the development of student professional characteristics in community recreation internships and to inspire future research in the general recreation field.

Theoretical Framework

Frameworks that guided this study included experiential learning theory (ELT) and the Entry Level Competency Framework (ELCF) (Hurd, 2005). ELT attempts to build understanding regarding how people learn through applied experience. ELT defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 41). Current experiential learning theory bibliographies include over 2,500 entries including approximately 400 in management, over 800 in education and 200 in science (Kolb & Kolb, 2008) but only one, ELCF, has focused on experiential learning in entry-level positions for recreation, parks and leisure services.

ELCF is a framework that focuses on competencies and characteristics of entry-level professionals in recreation, parks and leisure services. The ELCF is “the result of research done with practitioners who identified [58] competencies needed for entry-level positions in public parks and recreation” (Hurd, 2005, p. 32). In 2007, Hurd & Schlatter developed the Recreation Management Competency Assessment (RMCA) to assess intern competencies in five areas identified as important for entry-level positions which included communication, community relations, interpersonal skills, leadership and management, and professional practice. One important component missing from most competency models that is included in both the ELCF and RMCA is the measure of professional and interpersonal characteristics.

Significance of the Study

This study expands understanding regarding how recreation educators can improve experiential learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics and better educate their students. Professional characteristics are extremely important in a human service

industry such as community recreation. The purpose of community recreation education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to direct and/or administer recreational services. This study provides understanding regarding how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. This study helps bridge the void in literature related to internship supervisors in community recreation settings; offers insights for future research; and advances the field of inquiry by offering insights to recreation education faculty about the level of student professional competencies.

First, the results of this study help to bridge the void in literature related to internship programs in community recreation settings. Until this study, there was no published research regarding the role of internship supervisors in the development of student professional characteristics in community recreation internship programs. Previous research has examined community recreation Chief Executive Officers perceptions of overall competencies for entry-level professionals (Hurd, 2005), but no study had specifically examined the development of professional characteristics in student interns from the perspective of internship supervisors working with community recreation agencies. This study also provides qualitative data regarding the development of student professional characteristics by community recreation professionals. This qualitative approach allowed for in-depth insights directly from professionals who are actively involved in the process of educating community recreation students.

Secondly, this study offers insights to both community recreation faculty and professionals about how internship supervisors see their roles in the development of student professional characteristics. Recreation education programs all over the country send their students to community recreation agencies to complete internship programs. Results inform

faculty and internship supervisors regarding the intentionality that is focused on student development of professional characteristics during internships. Information gathered helps recreation education faculty understand how well students are prepared and what competencies they either have or have not developed. This enables them to improve or reinforce the development of students via curriculum and educational strategies. This study also identifies and clarifies perceptions and actions of practicing professionals who play a large and important role as internship supervisors in the education and development of recreation students.

How internship supervisors interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development and cultivation of student intern professional characteristics is not understood. It was important to explore the perceptions of the parties involved in the education of recreation professionals in order to increase understanding regarding the both the education of students and the consequential quality of learning outcomes. Obtaining this information advances the field of inquiry in the field of community recreation. This study also expands understanding regarding how universities can improve experiential learning opportunities for students in community recreation settings and perhaps other internship programs to better educate their students. Identifying professional characteristics may also help recreation employers recruit and select the best employees and develop staff for future endeavors.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Play for the child, sport for youth, and recreation for adults are essentials of normal life. It is recognized that the creation and maintenance of recreation is a community duty in order that the public might participate in their enjoyment” (President Coolidge, as cited in Weir, 1928, p. ix). Americans spend one-third of their time engaged in recreation and leisure. When not required to be at work or school, recreation and leisure provides people with the opportunity to relax, have fun, socialize, develop a skill, enjoy the outdoors, decrease stress and engage in their communities. Four out of five Americans use local recreation services and facilities (Godbey, Graefe, & James, 1993, p. 78). The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. In addition, this study also examined how internship supervisors interpret how the length of internship affects their ability to provide guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. This review of literature includes an overview of community recreation, community recreation educational standards, community recreation student internships, experiential learning theory in relation to community recreation education, and professional competencies and characteristics necessary for career success in the field of community recreation.

Community Recreation

Recreation and leisure services have the ability to contribute significantly to quality of life and community. The following section defines community recreation, discusses the benefits of community recreation services, overviews the providers of community recreation services,

professional standards and accreditation bodies, and presents students internships as an important component of professional preparation.

In a National League of Cities Poll, the most important qualities of a family-friendly city were in order education, community safety, recreation and community involvement (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2002, p. 171). Community recreation professionals improve the quality of people's lives through recreation programming in fitness, stress relief, socialization, cultural arts, athletics, travel, skill mastery, and general enrichment. Community recreation agencies are an integral part of community development because they provide an outlet for individuals and families to experience fun, joy, health, socialization and contribute to overall life satisfaction.

Delight in life, or spontaneous happiness, is the thing most desired by all people. In a large sense the end and aim of all city planning and especially the part having to do with parks and recreation is to increase joy in life; to help people satisfy the instinctive desires whose expression means happiness. Many agencies are making this possible. None, however, have done more to help secure genuine joy in living than those groups working to advance the [community] parks and recreation movement. (Weir, 1928)

Community recreation agencies and professionals provide recreation and leisure services to all residents within a community by providing opportunities for socialization, enrichment, fitness, and celebration. For the purpose of this research study, community recreation is defined as a public or non-profit agency that provides recreation and leisure services to the general population within a community.

Community recreation has been defined as “recreation services that are provided at the subdivision of government or non-public agencies with the closest relationship to the consumer

or expertise to provide programs and services” (Edginton et al., 2006, p. 302). The goals of these agencies are to service their customers by providing recreation and leisure services to improve the quality of their lives. Community recreation agencies strive to provide the highest level of quality service to all the residents of a community while keeping the cost as low as possible. Community recreation agencies provide programs and services that may include athletics, parks and open recreation areas, fitness centers, pools, child and adult programs, cultural arts, special events, enrichment programs, trips and outings, golf courses, and after-school programming (Coles, 2000, p. 9).

There are great benefits related to community recreation programs and services. These benefits may include: enhancement of family opportunities, stronger community connections, increased community pride, preservation of natural areas, promotion of resident health, increased property values, opportunities for socialization, lower crime rates, increased relocation of families/businesses to communities, and increased tourism (Crompton, 1999; Crompton, 2000; & NRPA, 2010). Benefits of recreation also impact cognitive ability and self-identity. The Michigan Recreation and Parks Association states that benefits for individuals who engage in recreation are improved academic performance, reduction of stress, improvement of health and increased in self-esteem and self-confidence (MRPA, 2010).

Similarly, Ulrich and Addom’s research regarding psychological and recreation benefits of local parks found that recreation helps fulfill psychological and physiological needs such as contact with nature, a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of life and the mere awareness of a park’s presence (1981). Their study supported people’s need for space to absorb and sit passively in nature. Another benefit of community recreation is the profession’s priority of providing parks and natural habitat areas for community residents. Community recreation

departments play a key role in the reclamation of land in order to either maintain or restore land back to its natural state. Community recreation agencies provide and manage parks, trails, lakes and natural preservation areas so that residents have open space in which to enjoy nature and the out-of-doors.

Types of community recreation providers

The provision of community recreation services is accomplished through a variety of different organizational formats because each agency must address specific needs of the community served. Each community has an organizational structure for the delivery of parks and recreation services that best suits its needs. Regardless of the formal structure of a recreation agency, successfully serving the needs of residents depends on the development of partnerships and collaborative efforts in programming. Partnerships create relationships that promote the sharing of resources, information, strategy, human resources, expertise and sometimes funding. Community recreation agencies partner with many organizations in a community such as local businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, health care providers, fire and police, civil service organizations and many others. The development of partnerships and coordination with other community agencies depends on professionals in the field who have strong professional characteristics that support good communication, respect, problem-solving, time-management and flexibility. This section of the review of literature highlights the traditional organizational structures, audiences, and services provided by different types of community recreation agencies.

Municipal Recreation

Community recreation may be provided through a variety of local parks and recreation provider's such as municipal agencies, special recreation districts, nonprofit agencies, schools,

and branches of the armed services called “Morale, Welfare and Recreation” (Edginton, et al., 2006). Municipal recreation providers offer recreation services through a village, city, township, or county department. Revenue is earned from a variety of sources, but the main contributor is compulsory resources such as taxes and mileages as a result of the regulatory powers of government. Other sources of revenue include earned income from fees and charges for programs and services. Contractual receipts from leasing land and renting facilities as well as financial assistance from grants and donations also contribute to revenue. In this arrangement, parks and recreation services become part of the community service offerings of the entire government entity along with services such as police, fire, and public works.

Special District Recreation

Another type of agency that provides community recreation services and is financially dependent on compulsory resources is called a “Special District Recreation Department.” Special districts are defined as an autonomous, separate function of the government having a particular purpose, in this case the provision of parks and recreation. Special districts are independent of other government bodies such as law enforcement and fire protection and are legally organized subdivisions of a state that derives power as a legal entity. Special districts also raise funds through compulsory resources, earned income, contractual receipts and financial assistance. Unique characteristics that qualify these agencies as Special Districts require that they (1) exist as an organized entity with a resident population and defined geographic area; (2) retain governmental character as a separate legal governing body; and (3) maintain substantial autonomy to provide parks and services and the taxing power to raise part of their own revenue that is not shared or controlled with other community services (Edginton, et al., 2006). The reality is that the public would never see a working difference between a community recreation

agency that is categorized as “special district” as opposed to “municipal.” Special districts operate similarly to municipal recreation providers in that they also depend on a tax-base for funding, but do not have to share their compulsory income with other governmental departments such as police and fire. Municipal and special recreation agencies are largely dependent on tax-payer contributions and tax-payer value and support of their services. Community recreation students must learn not only how to behave in a professional manner, but develop skills to communicate the benefits offered by community recreation services to tax-paying residents.

Nonprofit Recreation

Nonprofit recreation providers are legal entities that promote, in some way, a public service orientation or mission. They perform a service of social value, rather than promoting earned profit. Organizations such as YMCA’s and Boys and Girls Club’s program for a specific purpose or audience and primarily provide recreation opportunities for their participants. Basic characteristics for nonprofit recreation organizations include (1) they are designated, specifically, as nonprofit entities when established; (2) they may not divide their assets among members, officers, or directors as all profit must be invested directly back into the organization; (3) they may only program and pursue activities that they have been established to create (Edginton, et al., 2006). Nonprofit recreation agencies do not receive government tax support. The basis of their revenue is generated through earned income and financial support such as grants, donations and endowments. Although they do not receive tax support, they are categorized as a 501(c) & 501(d) federal taxation status which gives them tax-free status and allows donors to receive federal and state tax deductions, provides discounts on U.S. Postal services, and qualifies them to apply for nonprofit grant donations. They do still however, like all other community recreation

agencies, depend largely on their staff to create strong, professional relationships with other community agencies and the public.

University Recreation

University recreation programs provide recreation, leisure and wellness programs, services, and facilities for students, faculty and staff. The mission of university recreation programming is to promote healthy lifestyles and contribute to co-curricular learning & leadership opportunities for the students within the university community (NIRSA, 2002 & 2008). University recreation programs may also differ in their program offerings and facilities but their main goal is to provide the university community all of the same recreation and leisure benefits that a municipal, special district or nonprofit recreation agency would offer their participants. University recreation offers a variety of services such as fitness classes and facilities, aquatics, athletic facilities, open gyms, sports leagues, parks, and trails as well as enrichment and cultural arts programming (NIRSA, 2009). Funding for university recreation is diverse and may be acquired through capital allotment from university general funding, student fees, grants, donations, and endowments. University recreation professionals must work hard to stay ahead of trends and uphold university priorities while addressing student needs in order to promote healthy lifestyles for students.

Military Recreation

Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) are the recreation programs offered by the United States military branches to active-duty service men/women, their families, military retirees, civilian employees and other qualified participants. Recreational services may take place on military bases, ships, areas of deployment, and/or general communities where military

families reside. As in all other community recreation agencies, facilities and services offered vary according to need and resources. Programs may include fitness centers, pools, marinas, bowling centers, golf courses, restaurants, youth summer camp programs, after-school programs, sports leagues, cultural arts, conference centers, special events, movies and off-base recreational opportunities such as sporting events, adventure trips or tourist destinations (U.S. Navy MWR, 2010). MWR recreation professionals are generally civilian contractors who are not active duty personnel. MWR professionals are hired specifically for their training in the provision of recreation services with the responsibility to improve the lives of active duty personnel and their families. Enhancement of family opportunities, stronger community connections, increased community pride, health, fitness and reduction of stress are extremely valuable to military personnel because of a forced transitional lifestyle and high-stress living environment. Professionals working within military recreation must develop strong professional characteristics because strong relationships play a large role when working within a military environment especially when communicating with and listening to the needs of patrons, flexibility of scheduling, and respecting cultural boundaries and traditions of the military.

Although the provision of community recreation services is accomplished through a variety of different organizational formats, all community recreation agencies strive to improve the quality of lives through recreation services. Because these services span such a variety of environments, people, needs and objectives; students preparing to work in the field must develop professional characteristics such as flexibility, communication, and time-management.

Regardless of the agency category under which it is offered, future recreation professionals must acquire skills and knowledge to effectively design, organize, implement, manage, administer and/or evaluate recreational programming assuring they effectively meet the diverse needs of the

individuals or communities serviced. Improving understanding regarding how we educate and train students who will become future RPL professionals is important because of community recreation's significant contribution to the quality of life and community.

Community Recreation Agency Accreditation

Agency accreditation is a distinguished mark of excellence that affords external recognition of an organization's commitment to quality and improvement (NRPA, 2010). Accreditation for community recreation agencies measures overall quality of operations, management, services, and programs to the community. An important component of agency accreditation is the qualifications and skills sets of professionals working within the agency. This section of the review of literature discusses the process and importance of community recreation agency accreditation.

Community recreation agency accreditation is sponsored through the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). Agency accreditation is available to all entities administering park and recreation systems, including municipalities, townships, counties, special districts and regional authorities, councils of government, schools, and military installations (NRPA, 2010). Founded in 1965, NRPA is the leading advocacy organization for community parks and recreation. NRPA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote research, education and policy initiatives on behalf of the recreation and parks movement. "NRPA is dedicated to providing learning opportunities to advance the development of best practices and resources that will make parks and recreation indispensable elements of American communities" (NRPA, 2010). NRPA is the national center for state affiliate recreation associations across the United States. NRPA offers resources to professionals, students, citizens and businesses such as certification programs, conferences, online learning sessions, webinars and seminars,

publications, and academic and agency accreditation. Example offerings of educational sessions and certifications for individuals include the National Legislation Forum on Parks and Recreation, Revenue Development and Management School, National Aquatic Conference, National Institute on Recreation Inclusion, Certified Parks and Recreation Professional and Aquatic Facility Operator. These certifications and educational sessions ensure that professionals follow the highest standard of ethical and professional practice in the delivery of recreation and park services and programs.

NRPA also sponsors two national accreditation programs in an effort to reward and recognize organizations commitment to quality improvement and best practices (NRPA, 2010). Agency accreditation is granted through the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) to recognize excellence in operation and services, and that the agency meets national standards of best practice. CAPRA is a 13-member board composed of representatives from the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, National Recreation and Park Association, International City/Council Management Association, Council of State Executive Directors, American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation, National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials, and Armed Forces Recreation Society.

CAPRA sets quality service standards through an authoritative assessment tool. A standard is a statement of desirable practice as set forth by experienced professionals. The CAPRA standards were developed in 1989 by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and the National Recreation and Park Association. Agency accreditation is based on compliance with 144 standards (NRPA, 2010). Agencies must fully comply with a minimum of 36 fundamental standards and successfully comply with at least 92 of the remaining 108

standards. Through compliance with these standards, recreation agencies provide assurance to the public that the agency meets national standards of “best practice” which are evaluated against established benchmarks of high quality service. CAPRA accreditation is a five year cycle that includes an agency self-assessment report, an on-site visitation, the CAPRA commission’s review and annual updates/reports. Agency self-assessment reports much include verification of staff qualifications including professional degrees, certifications, responsibility/job descriptions and proof of employee development/feedback and evaluation. Agencies must prove that staff working within the agency are exceptional professionals within the recreation field.

Academic Accreditation for Community Recreation Baccalaureate Programs

Accreditation of academic recreation programs is also vital to ensure high-quality learning outcomes that coincide with skills, knowledge and characteristics needed for successful performance of future recreation professionals. This section of the review of literature discusses the process and importance of academic accreditation in recreation education.

The NRPA also sponsors the Council on Accreditation (COA) for Recreation, Parks Resources and Leisure Services academic accreditation for institutions of higher learning that award baccalaureate degree programs in recreation, parks and leisure services. Accreditation is a status granted to an academic program that meets or exceeds required criteria of educational quality. The COA is the only accreditation of recreation, parks and leisure services curricula recognized by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation. COA recognizes “academic programs in colleges and universities that prepare new professionals to enter the broad field of recreation, park resources, and leisure services” (NRPA, 2010). Academic accreditation by COA regulates not only curricular areas, but a minimum number of experience and internship hours. As of March 2010, there were 90 academic programs in the United States that earned

accreditation by the Council on Accreditation. Nineteen of those colleges/universities were located in the Midwest and held a general accreditation in recreation education

Each university applying for accreditation must meet characteristics as declared by the COA. Three characteristics of accreditation for a university are curriculum, viability, and faculty focuses (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010). The first characteristic stipulates that education programs have a declared and approved curriculum concerned with recreation, parks resources, and leisure services that has been in operation for a minimum of three years. The second requires that the institution must be currently accredited by the regional accrediting association approved by the Commission for Higher Education Accreditation. The last characteristic states there must be three full-time faculty members serving the undergraduate curriculum who hold a minimum of one degree, baccalaureate or above, with a major in recreation, park resources, or leisure services. Academic units must also have documentation of a stated mission, philosophy, long range goals and strategic plans that are consistent with the recreation, parks and leisure profession. Each academic unit must also have a designated lead administrator responsible for the management of teaching, research and public function (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010). Administrators are responsible to “ensure student representation through written policies and procedures that address admission, retention, confidentiality of student records and both academic and career advising” (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010, p. 5).

The baccalaureate program of an institution must include coursework that meets three degree standard series in order to hold COA accreditation. Included in this series is curriculum that addresses (1) foundation understanding and general education; (2) provides opportunities to offer options that are accredited specialized areas of study; and (3) professional competencies (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010, p. 9). Foundational understanding refers to the institutions liberal

education requirements outside of the RPL curriculum and must be documented as in compliance with the regional institutional accrediting body. Foundational understanding provides students with a “broad-based background to enhance their quality of life, to enable them to function more effectively in society as professionals, and to provide an educational base from which professional competencies can evolve” (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010, p. 23). This degree standard ensures that recreation education baccalaureate students receive foundational education in the areas such as mathematics, language, humanities, science, and integrative studies.

Specialized accreditation refers to academic units who choose to offer in-depth programs and meet standards that are above and beyond general accreditation requirements (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2010, p. 17-22). Four options offered by the COA for specialized accreditation include (1) *Leisure Service Management* which is management-oriented; (2) *Natural Resources Recreation Management* which offers deeper understanding of the natural environment; (3) *Leisure/Recreation Program Delivery* which requires in-depth program in behavior sciences; and (4) *Therapeutic Recreation* related to individuals with disabilities. Academic units may choose to select one or more options for specialized accreditation but are not required to beyond the COA general accreditation.

Beyond academic units, the COA also delineates seven topical areas of standards in relation to professional competencies. The seven standards include conceptual foundations, profession, delivery systems, program and event planning, administration and management, legal aspects, and field experiences (Appendix D). For the purpose of this study, it should be noted that one of the seven professional competencies specifically states that student must experience an internship consisting of “full-time continuing experience in one appropriate professional recreation organization/agency of at least 400 clock hours over an extended period of time, not

less than 10 weeks” (p. 16). The COA recognizes the professional student internship as an integral component of undergraduate education in the development of community recreation professionals.

In summary, community recreation are public or non-profit agencies that provide recreation and leisure services to the general population within a community. Community recreation professionals improve the quality of people’s lives through recreation services that provide benefits such as enhancement of family opportunities, stronger community connections, increased community pride, preservation of natural areas, opportunities for socialization, lower crime rates, improved academic performance, reduction of stress, improvement of health and increases in self-esteem and self-confidence. Although community recreation services are accomplished through a variety of different organizational formats, students preparing to work in the field must develop professional characteristics. In order to meet the highest education standards put forth by the COA, academic programs must include a minimum of a 400 hour/10 week student internship experience.

Community Recreation Internships

The purpose of recreation, parks and leisure education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to direct and/or administer recreational services, which include professional characteristics. Many recreation education programs depend on the internship experience and the guidance of internship supervisors to help students develop and refine professional characteristics. The benefits of an applied, academic experience such as internships are numerous. Ramos (1997) found that typically 30% of overall graduating seniors receive job offers before graduation. However, students who completed a professional internship were almost twice as likely (58%) to receive job offers before graduation. “Internships can be the

most impressive listing on a student's resume, and it can be the deciding factor in securing employment" (Coco, 2000, p. 42). Internships provide real-life work experience that give students an advantage over other students who have not worked professionally within their chosen field. "Ultimately, the most important result of the internship should be better job opportunities. Internships allow students to impress potential employers and build confidence ...to hone their work values, and to build social skills that are beneficial in the employment interview" (Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999, p. 35). The undergraduate internship is intended to provide students with an opportunity to not only apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, but to also cultivate personal characteristics that can be difficult to develop in a classroom setting. Internships offer students real-life experiences, instead of just talking about professional behavior in a classroom.

Community Recreation Internship Organization.

In order to provide an experience that transitions students from the classroom to the workforce, professional recreation internships incorporate a variety of project and work applications for students. "From an academic standpoint, the primary purpose of the internship is student learning. This includes experiential learning and opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned" (Kelley, 2004, p. 28). A typical internship program is often characterized by four criteria: a specified number of work hours; paid or unpaid compensation; academic credit earned by the student; and supervision provided by an agency supervisor in coordination with a university representative (DeLorenzo-Aiss & Mathisen, 1996). Internship programs may include goals and objectives such as program development facilitation and evaluation, creating marketing and public relations materials, budget development, grant writing

and fundraising, policy development, personnel management, community relations, facility management, strategic planning, and customer service programs and training.

Students secure internships by applying and interviewing for internship positions. Before beginning the internship, an internship agreement is signed by the student, the agency, and a faculty advisor from the university/college from which the student is earning academic credit. This agreement typically stipulates experiences and tasks in which the student will engage while interning at the chosen agency/site such as (1) the beginning and ending dates of the internship; (2) responsibilities/learning objectives of the intern; (3) compensation; (4) the identification of the person to whom the intern is responsible, and (5) the roles/responsibilities of other parties involved in the internship experience.

Student intern performance is evaluated in numerous ways and should be determined prior to the beginning of the internship. Student outcome measures typically include application and reflection projects such as weekly journals/reports, a major project or program for which the student takes a leadership role, a comprehensive reflection project submitted by the student at the end of their internship experience, and an evaluation of the interns' performance completed by the agency internship supervisor. Ideally, student evaluation tools should reflect objectives and goals as determined in the internship letter of agreement as agreed upon by the student, internship supervisor, and academic advisor. Successful internship experiences that result in student development and learning take considerable time, effort, coordination and understanding by all parties involved including the student, academic advisor and agency supervisors (Hurd & Schlatter, 2010).

Internship Supervisors

While on internship, students are supervised by a faculty advisor from their academic program and an on-site professional within the community recreation agency referred to as an “internship supervisor.” Internship supervisors are on-site, agency professionals who manage, guide, and evaluate student interns (Vogel, Grice, Hill & Moody, 2004). Internship supervisors bridge a gap between recreation educators and recreation professionals. Internship supervisors are working professionals who assist in the process of recreation education because they house, guide and manage student interns.

On-site internship supervisors are responsible for overseeing and managing the students’ internship experience. Day-to-day job assignments, projects, networking opportunities, quality of the internship and learning outcomes are the result of the experience as provided through the internship supervisor and agency where the student is placed. “The agency supervisor’s motivation, experience level, and planning before the arrival of the intern can affect the overall student experience” (Williams, 2004, p. 32). Williams (2004) asserts that internships require a cooperative approach between the student, academic advisor, and the agency supervisor. Still, Hurd and Schlatter (2007) contend that misconceptions regularly exist among these three parties with respect to internships. For example, “university supervisors typically expect agency supervisors to know how to provide a quality experience...similarly, agency supervisors sometimes expect students to be able to do all things that entry-level employees can do” (p. 31).

Not included as part of the internship negotiation process is the clarification of on-site internship supervisors’ expectations or perceptions regarding student professional characteristics. Intern supervisors’ commitment to the interns’ learning experience may vary considerably (Williams, 2004). Interns and academic advisors are often unclear about the expectations of

agency professionals in terms of entry-level competencies, including the demonstration of professional characteristics (Hurd & Schlatter, 2007; Beggs, Ross & Knapp, 2006; Williams, 2004). Research findings suggest that practitioners have different expectations regarding student performance (Beggs, Ross & Knapp, 2006). Beggs, Ross and Knapp found that in a comparison between practitioner ratings and student intern self ratings, that practitioners had “significantly higher scores regarding intern skills indicating that practitioners may have higher expectations for interns because they believe that interns may be more skilled than what they actually are” (2006, p. 15). Practitioners’ opinions also varied from students in regards to opportunities that internship agencies should provide to students. The findings of the study demonstrated that recreation internship students and agency supervisors have different expectations and perceptions about internships. “These differences may play a role in actual and expected internship outcome, thus creating a dissatisfying internship experience for both the student and agency” (p. 17).

While the role of the internship has primarily been studied by examining the perspective of students, none have attempted to understand perspectives of internship supervisors in regards to student professional characteristics (Stratta, 2004; Kneymeyer and Murphy, 2002; Kane et al., 1992). What is not communicated between academic advisors and on-site supervisors has created a gap in knowledge and may be as important as what has been effectively communicated. There is minimal communication between academic faculty and internship supervisors regarding internship supervisor skills sets, motivation, professional beliefs, guiding principles and expectations. Internship supervisors are not trained as educators, nor are they a part of the recreation education program from which they receive student interns. Internship supervisors are not trained by the academic institution regarding how to supervise, develop, or mentor student interns. It is assumed by the recreation degree program that internship supervisors will provide a

realistic, work experience where students can apply and hone skills. Educators are expecting that as an additional benefit, students also develop professional characteristics. However, because supervisors' experience level in working with interns may vary considerably, their perceptions in their roles as mentors in skill and personal characteristics also vary greatly (Brooks & Greene, 1998; Williams, 2004; Beggs et al., 2006; Beggs & Hurd, 2010).

A gap in knowledge regarding how or if internship supervisors promote the development of student professional characteristics exists because internship supervisors are not trained educators and/or are not typically trained by the university program from whom they receive their student interns. The lack of communication and training between recreation faculty advisors and internship supervisors could result in a large gap regarding perceptions of educational needs, philosophy, expectations and outcomes. In fact, research has shown a “discrepancy among the views of educators and practitioners as to what is the critical education undergraduates need in order to become successful practitioners” (Longsdorf, 2004).

In spite of the importance placed on an internship experience by recreation professionals and educators, little research had been given to the subject of community recreation internship issues from the perspective of current recreation practitioners and internship supervisors (Beggs et al., 2006). How internship supervisors interpret their roles in the development and cultivation of student intern professional characteristics is not understood. Due to a lack of supporting research, faculty who are responsible for designing educational programs for recreation professionals did not have information regarding student development of professional characteristics during internships to create the highest quality, worthwhile experiences that lead to student growth and success. Practitioners have their own expectations of internships, and they also have a major

impact on the quality of the internship (Beggs & Hurd, 2010). Williams (2004) argues that communication, education and clarity of perceptions between agency supervisor's and academic programs must be developed to ensure a meaningful internship experience.

Williams states:

The benefits of internships to all parties have been widely recognized, but the potential of some opportunities may not have been maximized. Relationship building between the agency supervisor and faculty advisor may be the simplest solution to this problem because it will provide communication and understanding regarding expectations and perspectives of both parties. (p. 33)

The relationships of the stakeholders in the internship process are of considerable importance. The relationship between agency supervisor and faculty advisors greatly impact the internship experience. "Agency supervisors who understand and support the academic component associated with internships are more able to provide students with supplementary opportunities and to assume a more involved mentoring role" (Williams, p. 33). The agency supervisor, faculty advisor, and student intern must be aware of the desired outcomes sought during the internship from each perspective. "By communicating internship expectations from each perspective, a more meaningful internship can be achieved" (Beggs et al., 2006, p. 5). Clarification may also provide additional benefits to "those in academe by helping to ensure the academic integrity of internship programs" (Williams, 2004, p. 32).

Professional characteristics are essential in the community recreation field, but there was no research regarding the process or intentionality of their development during student internships as directed by internship supervisors. Internship supervisors are an important, part of a recreation students' educational experience. "It may not be possible to perfectly match

expectations and perceptions of students and practitioners, but making students and practitioners aware of these differences may help them establish more realistic expectations about the internship experience” (Beggs et al., 2006, p. 17). While limited research has argued that students develop professional characteristics during internship experiences, internship supervisors’ perceptions, intentions, or roles during that experiential learning process is not understood. Intern supervisor perceptions regarding how the length of an internship experience may influence the development of student professional characteristics is also not understood. This lack of information created a gap in the education of human-service professionals who must demonstrate appropriate and effective use of professional characteristics in order to do their job and improve the quality of people’s lives and the communities in which they live.

Experiential Learning

The distinctive contribution of the internship is experience combined with academic preparation. This experiential learning environment enables students to develop professional behavior and apply theory to practice. However, further research was needed to understand the role of internship supervisors in regards to the development of student professional characteristics during their internship experience. The following section of the review of literature discusses definitions, theories and benefits of experiential learning, as well as the importance of experiential learning in the education of community recreation professionals.

People gather and process information from a multitude of sources, but ultimately learn by doing. “There is no discipline in the world so severe as the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent development and direction” (Dewey, 1938, p. 114). Internship programs provide experience that transitions students from the classroom to the workforce environment in which they will be working. “From an academic standpoint, the primary purpose

of the internship is student learning. This includes experiential learning and opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned” (Kelley, 2004, p. 28). This section of the review of literature will highlight learning theories that have contributed to the concept of learning through applied experience which is the capstone in community recreation education programs via professional student internship programs.

Experiential learning is a multi-faceted approach to learning that incorporates both knowledge and experience with the process of reflection and conceptualization. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), as proposed by David Kolb in 1971 & 1984, is built on the foundational learning of theorists such as John Dewey, Early Kelley, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. ELT pertains to how people learn through applied experience. Kolb argued that the learning process involved knowledge as “created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 4). Experiential learning is a holist theory based on a cycle of action/reflection and experience/conceptualization. Experiential learning theories describe models for understanding how the process of learning works and are commonly used to help structure experience-based training and education programs. Experiential learning in this study applies Kolb’s definition as the “process whereby knowledge is created through the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 2).

Student internships are purposely designed as experience-based training. Instead of simply talking about skills or behaviors, students have the opportunity to learn from real-life experiences. This experiential learning approach to education allows for real-life experience and “teachable moments” that are a realistic part of developing as professional. This study increases understanding regarding internship supervisors perceptions of their own roles as guides of students engaged in an experiential learning environment. The distinctive contribution of

internships and the supervisor's who direct them, are the experiences that enable students to develop professional behavior and apply theory to practice.

John Dewey

Dewey (1916) was one of the first theorists to declare that school must reflect and represent real life. "I assume amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and human experience" (1938, p. 12). He maintained that the goal of learning was not to regurgitate information, but to know about the world as we experience it. He questioned students' abilities to actually utilize information and skills learned only in a classroom setting that was not reflective of situations in which students would be required to apply it in real life. As Dewey stated,

Almost everyone has had occasion to look back upon his school days and wonder what has become of the knowledge he was supposed to have amassed during his years of schooling...One trouble is that the subject matter in question was learned in isolation... so disconnected from the rest of experience that it is not available under the actual conditions of life. It is contrary to the laws of experience that learning [in isolation] no matter how thoroughly engrained at the time, should give genuine preparation. (1938, p. 48-49)

As one of the founders of American psychology, he saw that people were more "involved with questions of value than questions of reality and that any adequate education ought to be geared toward personal knowing than theoretical abstracts" (Dewey, 1916, p. 73). Dewey believed that as humans in order to learn we examine all available data, formulate a hypothesis, test the hypothesis in our own experience, reflect upon our findings, and apply the new perspective as learning (Dewey, 1916). He did not argue that students in traditional learning environments do

not have experiences; but argued the lack of connection with other, real-life experiences (Dewey, 1938, pp. 15-16). Dewey believed, as other experiential learning theorists believe, that there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract (Kelley & Rasey, 1952; Kolb, 2008; Lewin, 1999; Piaget, 1976).

Kurt Lewin

In 1910, Kurt Lewin began his studies in Gestalt psychology and social sciences regarding group dynamics and leadership styles (Lewin, 1999, p. 10). Lewin believed people learn best when thought is challenged through application to a concrete experience. He argued the importance of making intentional connections for learners between themselves and their environment to eliminate the habit of treating them as if they function independently from one another. Lewin encouraged learning environments that promote inter-personal challenge because he believed humans interact in a realistic environment that presents true-life problems and decision-making requirements in the pursuit of developed understanding. He developed a model of Action Research comprised of four stages: concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing implications of concepts in new situations. This model emphasized the value of feedback in order to internalize experience and apply action in new environments. “Action research realizes that it does not suffice to study in isolation” (1999, p. 261). Hence, learning becomes the continuous process of applied experience, the generation of abstract thought and evaluation of consequences. The concepts of action research, like experiential learning, are based upon the importance of applied experience in the process of learning.

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget also believed learning comes from a person's interaction with his or her environment, but Piaget's learning model consists of four linear stages instead of the cyclical models of experiential learning presented by Dewey and Lewin. According to Piaget (1976), a child passes through four development stages: sensorimotor (concrete/enactive), preoperational (representative/iconic), concrete operational (abstract/symbolic) and formal operations (hypothetical reasoning capabilities). Piaget's theory maintained that children must first learn to manipulate objects before they process imagery and ultimately make the connection to cultural implications of symbols and behavioral decision-making. Children learn each stage in order of their complexity and use learning from one stage to promote understanding in the next. "Each of these extends the preceding period, reconstructs it on a new level, and later surpasses it to an ever greater degree" (Paiget, 1976, p. 71). Piagets' model required that the order of succession of acquisitions and learning must be constant and that learning from a previous stage become an integral foundation of success at the next stage. Learners master a majority of one stage before progressing to the other, allowing some overlap as long as the foundations are constant (Piaget, 1997). Piaget believed that knowledge is not innate, but a product of action and experience. While not labeled "experiential learning," Piaget's theories of learning incorporate the combination of grasping and transforming experience to build knowledge and contributes significantly to the foundations of experiential learning theory.

Kelley and Rasey

Building upon John Dewey's educational philosophies, Kelley and Rasey (1952) published theories regarding education and the nature of man. They presented seven characteristics in the education of man, without which would result in the "fail of its purpose" (p.

22). The seven characteristics included that (1) man is a unit of energy seeking to spend itself; (2) that all living organisms, including man, possess the dynamic of growth; (3) that man is able to direct his own evolvment; (4) that the fundamental method of progress is cooperation; (5) that what we know comes from us; (6) that we are accumulated experience; and (7) that man acquires knowledge through experience. They believed that because “experience is essential to perception, we must say that man is built by where he has been and what he has done “(Kelley & Rasey, 1952, p. 34).

Similar to other experiential learning theorists, Kelley and Rasey argued the importance of accumulated experience for the acquisition and processing of knowledge. Education and learning result from a sequence of experiences where concepts can be applied, tested, reapplied, processed, and absorbed into personal knowledge. ELT argues that learning is not a product of given knowledge, but that learning is a product of acquired knowledge that has been received and tested in real-life experiences.

David Kolb

A culmination of research from Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, and Kelley & Rasey in areas such as psychology, child development, education and social science became the basis of Kolb’s experiential learning theory. Kolb & Kolb (2008, pp. 3-6) incorporated the foundations from these earlier scholars into six propositions regarding the relationship between experience and learning:

1. *Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.* To improve learning in higher education, the primary focus should be on engaging students in a process that best enhances their learning.

2. *All learning is re-learning.* Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students' beliefs and ideas about a topic so that they can be examined, tested and integrated with new, more refined ideas.
3. *Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.* In the process of learning one is called upon to move back and forth between opposing modes of reflection and action and feeling and thinking.
4. *Learning is a holistic process of adaptation.* It is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total person-thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving.
5. *Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.* Human learning arises from consistent patterns of transaction between the individual and his or her environment. The way we process the possibilities of each new experience determines the range of choices and decisions we see. The choices and decisions we make to some extent determine the events we live through, and these events influence our future choices. Thus, people create themselves through the choice of actual occasions they live through.
6. *Learning is the process of creating knowledge.* Social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner.

Kolb proposed a four-stage experiential learning process called Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Kolb (1984 & 2008) developed an ELT model that focuses on the key concepts of learning cycles, learning styles, learning space, and deep learning and development. Kolb's research found that people learn in four ways with the likelihood of preferring one mode of learning over another. The learning process can begin at any stage and is continuous. This

theory asserts that without the benefit of experience on which to reflect and learn, we would simply continue to repeat our mistakes. In his attempt to classify learners, he proposed a model that integrates two opposing elements: concrete-abstract and active-reflection. He believed that there were two important components to learning: acquiring an experience (experience/abstract thinking), and transforming the experience into knowledge (reflection/action). Kolb's experiential learning cycle contends that experiences are the basis for reflection. These reflections are then processed into abstract concepts from which new suggestions for action can be drawn. These suggestions serve as guides for action and create learning from new experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

Learning styles are also components of Kolb's ELT development model. He believed that a person's learning style results from an interaction between an individual's internal characteristics and his or her external environment (Schellhase, 2006). In 1971, Kolb developed the *Learning Style Inventory* (LSI) to assess individual learning styles. Kolb & Kolb (2008) identified a four-type definition of learning styles in the LSI. Kolb uses the terms *diverging*, *assimilating*, *converging*, and *accommodating*. Kolb contends that individuals with a *diverging* style are best at viewing concrete situations from many different points of view, are interested in learning about individuals, and in formal learning situations prefer work in groups and receiving personalized feedback. People with *assimilating* styles are best at absorbing a large, diverse amount of information and condensing it into concise, logical format. They value logical soundness over practical value and prefer to learn from reading, lectures, analytical models, and time to process. People with *converging* learning styles are good at finding practical uses for general theories. They prefer to deal with technical dilemmas rather than social issues and learn best in atmospheres that promote experimentation with new ideas, laboratory environments and

practical application. Finally, people with *accommodating styles* learn best from hands-on experience. They enjoy new challenges and act on emotion and gut feelings. In formal learning situations they prefer to work with others, engage in field work, and test different approaches to problems and projects. Individual learning styles are an important part of the ELT because even though people gravitate toward their own best practices, Kolb believes that individuals all spiral through the four stages of the experiential process. Individuals may begin at different stages, but will all progress through experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting.

The concept of the significance of learning spaces builds on Lewin's theory that person and environment are interdependent variables and that educators need to help student intentionally tie them together in order for real learning to take place. Learning theorists (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2008; Lewin, 1999) contend that learning space influences the dynamic nature of a person's learning style and transactions between the person and environment. The ELT learning space concept emphasizes that "learning is not one universal process but a map of learning territories, a frame of reference within which many different ways of learning can flourish and interrelate (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 14). People experience a journey through learning spaces which have the power to define experience and thus define personal "reality" and knowledge.

This journey of movement and development through learning stages is an important component of Kolb's ELT development model (2008). Kolb contends that people move through three stages as learning and environments become more complex and integrated. "Integrated deep learning is a process involving a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands" (p. 16). Individuals move through the first stage called *acquisition* from birth to adolescence where basic abilities and cognitive structures develop.

During the second stage of *specialization*, individuals move through early adulthood where “social, educational, and organizational socialization forces shape the development of a specialized learning style” (p. 17). As a result of this stage individuals identify with their best learning style after multiple cycles of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting reflection in a variety of learning environments and spaces. Finally, the third stage of development integrates increasing complexity and *integration* of new challenges that cement an individual’s particular behavior and preferences in development and deep learning. “This is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner “touches all bases” - experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting- in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned” (p. 17). ELT has been widely accepted as a useful framework for learning centered educational innovation, including instructional design, curriculum development, and life-long learning. ELT can also serve as a useful tool to design and implement management education programs in higher education and management training and development (Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Moon, 2004; Schellhase, 2006). Kolb states that learning experiences such as internships create the potential for individuals to reach the third level of integrated development and deep learning because they emphasize modes of action, experience, reflection, and thinking. Internship experiences provide “integration through completion of the learning spiral” (p. 18).

Experiential Learning Theory as Applied to Recreation Internships

Studies in various disciplines have applied ELT to advance the theory and practice of experiential learning. “Since ELT is a holistic theory of learning that identifies learning style differences among different academics specialties, it is not surprising to see that ELT research is highly interdisciplinary, addressing learning and educational issues in many fields” (Kolb, et al. 2000, p. 11) such as education, management, computer science, psychology, medicine, nursing,

accounting, and law. Kolb et al. (2000) found that the majority of ELT studies were in the category of education with the bulk of the focus on learning styles in relation to instructional techniques in higher education. Other educational studies focused on the use of the ELT framework in K-12 curriculum design in the areas of language and science (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; McCarthy, 1996). Current experiential learning theory bibliographies include over 1,000 entries including approximately 400 in management, over 800 in education and 200 in science (Kolb et al. 2000; Kolb & Kolb, 2008) but only one, Entry Level Competency Framework(ELCF), has focused on experiential learning in entry-level positions for recreation, parks and leisure services.

Many academic recreation programs depend on the benefits of experiential learning during an internship to help students develop and refine professional characteristics. The undergraduate internship is intended to provide students with an opportunity to not only apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, but to also cultivate professional characteristics such as communication, cooperation, teamwork and “people-skills” that can be difficult to develop in a classroom setting. What is unknown however, is the perceptions of internships supervisors in regards to the importance and identification of competencies and professional characteristics as demonstrated by student interns. This study expands understanding regarding how recreation educators can improve experiential learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics and better educate their students.

Competency Frameworks

This section of the review of literature discusses professional competency frameworks and the identification of professional characteristics that professionals must possess to work successfully in the field of community recreation.

It will not be out of place to enumerate a few of the characteristics it is desirable a park executive should possess, for unless a young man shows signs of possessing a majority of these he should look elsewhere for his future career. He should be of sterling character...and able to develop executive ability. He should also possess a love for humanity, as this will enable him to render cheerful service to his fellow men, and harmoniously with those he serves and those he controls. (Weir, 1928, p. 996)

A professional who decides to work in the field of community recreation, essentially makes the decision to work in the “people business.” Professionals in community recreation are challenged to motivate people to participate in recreation pursuits and improve the quality of life for the people they serve. This mission requires that professionals entering the field have a strong set of competencies that enables them to effectively interact with a variety of public on a daily-basis while accomplishing businesses as usual. Competencies are measurable or observable skills, knowledge, abilities and behaviors that are needed to successfully accomplish a job. Competencies may be based on knowledge (practical or theoretical understanding), skill (learned or natural ability to achieve outcomes), or behavior (patterns of action). This section of the review of literature will present research regarding the identification of professional competencies needed for professional success within the field of community recreation.

Competencies are often referred to as either “hard” or “soft” skills. The terms hard and soft skills have developed over the years as a way of identifying characteristics and skills needed to be successful in management positions. Hard skills refer to technical aspects of performing a job or task that are often easily observable and measurable. Soft skills are often referred to as interpersonal, human, people, or behavioral skills, and place emphasis on personal behavior and managing relationships between people (Caudron, 1999; Kantrowitz, 2005; Rainsbury, Hodges,

Burchell, & Lay, 2002). One reason businesses may be reluctant to place emphasis on the development of soft skills, is such skills are seen to be more difficult to develop than hard or technical skills (Caudron, p. 61, 1999). In this study, soft skills were referred to as “professional characteristics” and defined as “people skills” that drive one's potential for growth and success in people-centered environments. Research by Spencer and Spencer (1993) suggests that the superior performers are not distinguished solely by technical skills, but by the demonstration of soft skills in the form of behavioral motives, values, traits and attitudes (p. 9). By studying the soft skills essential in the business environment, a company can improve their selection process, enhance their initial training process, improve their development program, strengthen the performance evaluation process, and reduce turnover (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, 1999, p. 355). Professional characteristics can be hard to observe, quantify and measure because they have to do with how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions.

In 1974, Katz placed the skills required by effective managers into three categories: technical, human and conceptual. Technical skills are defined as detail oriented skills in a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods or techniques (p. 90). Conceptual skills were defined as “planning and visioning skills necessary to see the enterprise as a whole” (p. 93) and human skills (also called soft skills) as those interpersonal skills needed in order to manage a group of people or interact in a one-on-one format. Katz defined human skills as primarily concerned with working with people and building cooperation (p. 91). He stated that the ability to work with others is essential for effective administration at every level and believed that although these soft skills can be developed by some individuals without formalized training, it is integral that most people be individually coached by their immediate supervisors (p. 99).

Katz believed that on the job there should be frequent opportunities for a superior to observe an individual's ability to work effectively with others and questioned if a greater effort should be made to "develop people within our organizations with human skill?" (p. 99).

Stevens and Campion (1999) identified four categories for soft skills including (1) leadership, people and relationship skills; (2) communication; (3) management; and (4) cognitive and knowledge. Leadership, people, and relationship soft skills refer to one's ability to negotiate, handle personal and personnel politics, and define the level of need and desire for the provision of service to clients, customers or co-workers. Communication soft skills focus on professionals' ability to listen, express thoughts clearly and professionally, and nonverbal communication such as body language, eye contact, and facial expressions. Management soft skills are primarily concerned with the ability to organize people according to vision/ goals, monitor progress and resolve conflict. Finally, cognitive skills and knowledge refer to a person's ability to think creatively and make sound decisions. Research regarding best practices and competencies in community recreation is just beginning to develop as is discussed in the following section.

Career success within the field of recreation depends not only on what you do (application knowledge and skill), but how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with co-workers, board members, stakeholders, volunteers and the public. "The public sector-especially in the case of the recreation field-has managerial responsibilities that are unique to it" (Smale & Frisby, 1990, p. 3). The identification of the correct competencies by employers and educators is extremely important for successful job performance in community recreation. Identifying the right competencies helps educators develop curriculum and experiences that appropriately prepare

future professionals and also help employers recruit and select the best employees and develop staff for future endeavors. The following section of the review of literature highlights research in the area of competencies and characteristics for recreation professionals – specifically in the field of community recreation and those labeled as “professional characteristics” or “soft skill competencies.”

Community Recreation Professional Competencies and Characteristics

Jamieson (1987) examined competencies needed to manage recreation sports programs in the military, municipal and educational settings. She identified 112 competencies and grouped them into 12 categories including: business procedures, communications, facility maintenance, governance, legality, management techniques, officiating, philosophy, programming techniques, research, safety/accident prevention, and science. She found no significant differences between types of agencies, but did find a difference according to the level of management. Her study indicated the need to establish separate competencies for different levels of professional positions.

Busser and Bannon studied 255 chief executive officers in public park and recreation agencies. The purpose of the study was to discover how CEO’s spent their time and to determine which aspects of their positions they perceived as most important (1987, p. 2). Participants were given a list of 58 skills to rank the level of importance and time spent on each. Items that were identified as most important included keeping up to date on community needs; budgeting; improvement strategies; communication with the public/board/staff regarding organizational activities and plans; and problem solving (p. 11-14). Busser and Bannon suggested that these skills should be implemented into undergraduate curricula in order to build the necessary skills for graduates to eventually assume a CEO position. Hurd (2001) noted that this study was the

first to mention any link between competencies and the importance of incorporating them into the university curriculum like the nonprofit management program has done (p. 33).

Smale and Frisby's (1992) research addressed the question of competencies in public parks and recreation based on four processes of management they identified as planning, organizing, influencing, and controlling. Their study looked at the application of competencies identified in the general nonprofit sector to those competencies in public parks and recreation. They wanted to determine how involved managers are in these competencies and how proficient entry level, middle level and upper level managers felt they were in each area. All three levels of managers chose soft skills such as communication with the public as one of the most important needed for positions in their organization. Entry level managers rated communication with the public and program planning as the top competencies needed for management positions. Middle managers identified communicating with the public and problem solving as their most important needed competencies. Upper level management also selected communicating with the public and problem solving as well as budgeting.

In the sport and recreation industry professional characteristics such as "communication, customer service, motivation, passion and enthusiasm, as well as practical work experience have been highlighted in job adverts as being important requirements for employability" (Martin, Fleming, Zinn & Hughes, 2009, p. 1). Martin et al. found that personal attributes and soft skills of the graduate are considered to have a greater influence on success in the workplace than technical skills or knowledge (p. 1). Their 2009 study focused on the identification of key competencies needed by sport and recreation students entering their cooperative placement (internships) as well as to identify any perceived differences between student and graduate competencies.

Martin et al. identified key themes from the qualitative findings including soft skill themes such as *communication skills, self confidence, relationship building, and developing teamwork and cooperation*. Martin et al. points out that these findings are those highlighted in job adverts as being important requirements for employability (p. 4). Similar results in regards to soft skills were found in both the qualitative surveys (*enthusiastic participation, self sufficiency, and personal organization*) and the top three highlighted key competencies of the quantitative findings (*ability and willingness to learn, initiative and personal planning, and organizational skills*) (p. 4). Martin et al. concluded that to “enhance employability in the sport and recreation industry, work integrated learning programs need to be designed so that students are provided with opportunities to facilitate the development of the competencies identified in this study” (p. 5).

Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera (1999) compiled a list of soft skill competencies found in recreation management literature and then determined a level of importance in the competencies. The study focused on soft skill competencies in entry-level tourism and hospitality recreation managers. Weber et al. found the competencies with the highest means involved working effectively with employees and customers, setting a positive example, displaying honesty/commitment and developing creative solutions to problems (p. 357). Weber et al. argue that identifying these soft skill competencies is vital for business and that having these soft skills determines the difference between success and failure. “People learn soft skills by life, but professionals hone them by training” (p. 359). They conclude their study by calling for more research in the area of soft skill competency development.

In 2008 the California Park and Recreation Society (CPRS) identified 22 core competencies recreation professionals need to succeed in the field of recreation.

The professionals who will succeed in the next decade are those who...understand and can articulate our role in creating community; master the political process to achieve higher goals; display compassion for people; have relevant, honed communication, leadership, and decision-making skills; and...broker resources and bring coalitions together. (p. 51)

CPRS stated that in order to maintain a “vital and relevant profession in the new millennium” professionals had to take responsibility for developing these skills “whether a department head...or a student just beginning your career” (p. 52). CPRS definitions of communication skills focus on the process of exchanging information and impacting ideas. Skills such as speaking, listening, choosing appropriate style and forums for messages, presenting information clearly and concisely, giving and receiving feedback and facilitation are defined as management tools that “supports the organization’s mission and strategic plan, provides a framework for making competent decisions, assists in efficient day-to-day operations and enables effective relationships with multiple and diverse audiences” (p. 54). A professional’s ability to facilitate was defined as someone who can “advocate for fair, open and inclusive procedures” which involves “exceptional interpersonal skills, keen observation, insight and tact” (p. 54). Mediation refers to one’s ability to collaborate and work in teams for successful group decision-making. Community relations competencies focused on skills such as the use of relationships and partnerships to accomplish goals, the ability to motivate people through self-awareness, listening, giving feedback, personal support, and preventing and resolving conflict. Leadership competencies spotlight flexibility, multi-tasking and resourcefulness. CPRS called for leaders with the ability to work with many different people, to be spontaneous and responsive in unpredictable situations, to model integrity in decisions, communication and treatment of people,

and handle conflict to cope with finding solutions (p. 54). All of these soft skills drive potential for growth and success in people-centered environments such as the field of recreation where success depends on how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions.

Hurd acknowledged that “research based competencies in parks and recreation are virtually non-existent” (2001, p. 69). She defined competencies as skills and knowledge that are needed to do a job effectively and characteristics as “a distinguishing quality, attribute, or trait possessed by an employee” (p. 9). The purpose of her study was to identify competencies CEO’s in public parks and recreation organizations “perceived they needed in order to perform their duties” with the intent to extend the existing research in the area of competencies (p. 178).

The result of the study was Hurds’ development of the CEO Competency Framework (Appendix E). Hurds’ framework included seven categories and listed specific categories and characteristics in each of the seven categories. The seven categories included (1) business acumen, (2) communications and marketing, (3) community relations, (4) leadership and management, (5) planning and evaluation, (6) political and legislative acumen, and (7) professional practice. There were a total of 72 competencies and characteristics with 44 being categorized as competencies and 28 as characteristics (2001). Hurd defines competencies as “skills and knowledge that are needed to do a job effectively” and characteristics as “a distinguishing quality, attribute, or trait possessed by an employee” (2001, p. 9). Of the 72 competencies identified, 36 are considered as soft or personal skills. Hurds’ recommendations for future practice includes (but is not limited too) the use of the framework as a guide for recreation curriculum, the implementation of the framework in the process of evaluation and

hiring of recreation professionals and calls for further research regarding perceived competencies in training programs and entry level positions.

Hurd continued her recreation competency skills research and in 2005 developed the Entry Level Competency Framework (ELCF). ELCF is a framework that focuses on competencies and characteristics of entry-level professionals in recreation, parks and leisure services. The ELCF is “the result of research with practitioners who identified 53 competencies needed for entry-level positions in public parks and recreation” (p. 32). The framework is comprised of five general competency categories: (1) communications, (2) community relations, (3) interpersonal skills, (4) leadership and management, and (5) professional practice (p. 53) with fifteen sub-categories and 53 specific identified competencies (p. 53). Of the 53 identified competencies, 26 relate to soft-skill characteristics (Appendix F). Hurd argues that the major contribution of the ELCF is the expansion of competencies from being skill and knowledge based to the inclusion of characteristics because they play a major role in how successful a person is in a job (p. 56). Hurd contends that knowledge, skills abilities and characteristics should all be represented because together they contribute to employee success and calls for further research in recreation competencies including the “perceptions of entry-level competencies at different levels in the organization” (p. 60).

In 2007, Hurd & Schlatter developed the Recreation Management Competency Assessment (RMCA) to assess entry level/ intern competencies based on five areas identified as important for entry-level positions in the ELCF which included communication, community relations, interpersonal skills, leadership and management, and professional practice. Her problem of study related to the belief that although academic preparation, student motivation, and competency level all play an important role for a quality internship experience,

misconceptions exist regarding expectations between students, educational agencies and intern supervisors. The RMCA combined competencies items that measure student preparedness for success in entry level positions. “Additional items address professionalism and issues requiring monitoring and development in students that are simply taken for granted by professionals... such items were necessary so students will understand their importance in the makeup of a professional” (p. 33). The pre, during and post test model requires that students take the RMCA and discuss the results with their academic internship advisor so that students have both the opportunity to build further skill sets before beginning an internship and also so that they have a better understanding regarding expectations of performance and behavior of their internship experience. Students also use the assessment as a communication tool with the agency internship supervisor at the beginning and halfway point of the internship. Students take the RCMA midway through their experience and again upon completion of the internship to measure the development of skills or areas where growth is still needed.

One important component missing from most competency models that is included in both the ELCF and RMCA is the measure of professional characteristics. The RMCA is the only internship assessment model that both addresses professional competencies and is used for a communication tool between students and supervisors. This communication may possibly result in the identification of internship supervisor expectations of intern’s professional characteristics, but it is not the direct intended purpose. A gap in the literature exists regarding internship supervisor perceptions of their own roles in the development of student professional characteristics. Limited research has demonstrated that students develop professional characteristics during internship experiences, but until this study there was no information to

build understanding regarding internship supervisors perceptions, intentions, or roles during that experiential learning process.

Professionals working in the field of community recreation must possess strong professional characteristics that enable them to succeed in what is essentially a “people-centered business.” Research has established that a majority of those competencies include professional characteristics in areas of leadership, facilitation, communication, politics, and professional behavior. How and when those professional characteristics are developed is still a matter of debate. What we do know is that students enrolled in professional recreation degree programs expect universities and recreation agencies to establish and agree upon consistent expectations for skills, characteristics and behavior of successful practicing professionals. Unfortunately, research comparing perceived importance of characteristics between recreation educators and recreation professionals is limited. The following section of the review of literature highlights studies that have identified perceived competencies between educators and practitioners.

Competencies as Defined by Educators and Practitioners

Research comparing the perceived importance of skills and characteristics between recreation practitioners and recreation educators is almost non-existent, but there have been studies related to general business. Soft skills are generally viewed as less important by academics in comparison with workplace professionals (Arnold & Davey, 1994; Page, Wilson, & Kolb, 1993; Sinclair, 1997). There is growing emphasis in the literature on the importance of soft skills required for successful workplace performance, but unfortunately graduates are lacking soft skills in relation to hard skills (Arnold & Davey, 1994; Rainsbury et al., 2002). Sinclair (1997) compared ranked desired characteristics of college graduates between business representatives and university educators and found that business representatives ranked

professional soft skills such as communication and capacity for cooperation and teamwork much higher than did university educators. “Thus, it seems that the prevailing pedagogical priorities of higher education settings are inconsistent with the need for developing school-to-work programs that create a capable work force” (p. 117). Studies in the general business field have indicated that because competencies take on greater importance with the advent of the work experience, cooperative education programs play an important role in providing students with relevant work experience so that their perceptions of the importance of a variety of competencies, most notably soft skills, more closely mirror the views of workplace professionals (Arnold & Davey, 1994; Page et al., 1993; Rainsbury, Hodeges, Buchell, & Lay, 2002). However, literature suggests that there is a lack of emphasis placed on the development of soft skills by many education providers (Caudron, 1999; Chen, Donahue, & Klimoski, 2004; Longsdorf, 2004;) and the current research is not focused in the field of community recreation. “What remains largely undone is the development of methods to assess the necessary skills that have been identified and, further, the teaching of such skills, that is, their integration in some manner into the educational curriculum” (O’Neil, Allerd, & Baker, 1997, p. 24).

A study conducted in the commercial recreation field of hospitality and tourism did find agreement between practitioners and educators regarding the importance of professional soft skill characteristics for entry level employees. Weber, Finley, Crawford and Rivera (1999) used two Delphi panels to assess soft skill competencies, one comprised of hotel and restaurant human resource professionals, the other comprised of educators who teach human resources at four year institutions of higher learning. Weber et al. placed competencies into seven categories: (1) communication/persuasion; (2) performance management; (3) self management; (4) interpersonal; (5) leadership/organization; (6) political/cultural; and (7) counterproductive (p.

357). The study indicated that soft skill competencies such as working effectively with employees and customers, setting a positive example, displaying honesty/commitment, and developing creative solutions to problems were the highest ranked and agreed upon skills between practitioners and educators. This research supported the importance of the inclusion of soft skill competencies in curriculum for entry-level hospitality managers and called for further research regarding the understanding and comparison of educator and practitioner perceptions of soft skill characteristics.

The most recent and relevant study in the comparison of perceptions between recreation professionals and recreation educators looked at perceptions between the Council on Accreditation of Curriculum and public park and recreation administrators (Longsdorf, 2004). “An important factor in developing effective professional preparation curriculum is the need for academicians to understand the... knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to effectively engage in professional practice. This understanding serves to better ensure that academic preparation parallels required competencies for professional practice” (p. 386). The study identified discrepancies between the view of educators and practitioners in regards to critical curriculum for undergraduates in recreation education programs. Results indicated that professional preparation programs should focus more heavily on soft skill competencies such as communication and personnel management (p. 389).

The identification of the correct competencies by employers and educators is extremely important for successful job performance in community recreation. Identifying the right competencies helps educators develop curriculum and experiences that correctly prepare future professionals and also helps employers recruit and select the best employees and develop staff for future endeavors. Students enrolled in professional recreation degree programs expect

universities and recreation agencies to establish and agree upon consistent expectations for skills, characteristics and behavior of successful practicing professionals. Unfortunately, research comparing perceived importance of characteristics between recreation educators and recreation professionals is extremely limited. Internship supervisors bridge a gap between recreation educators and recreation professionals. While limited research has argued that students develop professional characteristics during internship experiences, we did not understand internship supervisors' perceptions, intentions, or roles during that experiential learning process. Until this study, a gap in the literature existed regarding internship supervisor perceptions of their own roles in the development of student professional characteristics.

Conclusion

This review of literature included an overview of community recreation, community recreation educational standards, experiential learning theory in relation to community recreation education, and professional competencies and characteristics necessary to career success in the field of community recreation. The literature has established the benefits of experiential learning environments such as student internships in the development of professional characteristics. Professional characteristics such as communication, relationship building, teamwork, enthusiasm, and flexibility are vital for professional growth in the field of community recreation where success depends on how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions.

The literature examining how students develop professional characteristics during community recreation internships was nonexistent until this study. Research in the field of community recreation in regards to professional competencies was limited to practicing recreational professionals, not the development of students. There was no published research

regarding the role of internship supervisors in the development of student professional characteristics in community recreation internship programs. The literature has indicated the result of which is a gap regarding perceptions of educational needs, philosophy, expectations and outcomes between recreation faculty advisors and internship supervisors.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of recreation, parks and leisure education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to direct and/or administer recreational services. In this human service industry, the professional student internship is an integral component of undergraduate education. The undergraduate internship is intended to provide students with opportunities to not only apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, but to also cultivate personal characteristics. The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. This chapter presents the research questions, phenomenological inquiry, selection of research participants, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for the study.

Research Questions

1. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of the development of professional characteristics for students who wish to work in the field of community recreation?
2. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics?
3. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of internship length when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional characteristics?

Research Method

Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to identify information or perceptions that may routinely escape awareness among people entrenched in a setting or discover things that no one has paid attention to (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Nothing is unimportant and what is not said or seen can be as important as what is. Thick, rich, narrative description captures information that cannot be gathered in numerical data used in quantitative research. This study will help to advance the field of inquiry in community recreation by intentionally focusing on internship supervisor experiences, interpretations and how they created and assigned meaning regarding student professional characteristics.

Qualitative research assumes multiple realities are held by participants in the same context, that context is important in the interpretation of data, and that it is important for researchers to understand their biases for accurate interpretation of data. Therefore, qualitative research must gather data as directly as possible, be done in a natural setting, and must use thick, rich descriptive language (Creswell, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research allows a deeper understanding of the context in which a phenomena exists, allows for naturalistic inquiry, and allows researchers to gather information that participants may otherwise have forgotten, consider unimportant or take for granted. In order to better understand how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies make sense of and interpret their roles in the development of student intern professional characteristics, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews of community recreation internship site supervisors was implemented. Obtaining this information expands understanding regarding how the university can improve experiential learning opportunities for community recreation students in recreation settings and better educate their students.

The methodology of the study follows emergent flexible design because qualitative research is an attempt to gain understanding of a phenomenon through the shared meaning and experience of its participants (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Patton contends that “openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens is important so that researchers can avoid getting locked into rigid designs and may pursue new paths of discovery as they emerge” (2002, p. 40). In order to identify themes and patterns from the data Lofland (1971) recommends that researchers get as close to the situation as possible to gain a deeper understanding of the context; should use thick, rich, descriptive language; document as exact wording or experiences as possible; and gather information as directly as possible.

Phenomenological Inquiry

Phenomenology attempts to understand human behavior from the subject’s point of view. “The phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced – for him or her, the important reality is what people imagine it to be” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 3). Phenomenological studies use qualitative methods such as participant observation and open interviews to gather descriptive data which enable researchers to see the world as their subjects do. A common focus is put on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning.

This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon-how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest. (Patton, 2002, p. 104)

Scott and Morrison (2006) state the emphasis of phenomenology is understood through the way social actors build understanding of the world by continually interpreting information and re-working previous understandings of the same phenomena, set within the context of other people going through the same process (p. 172). In this study the social actors were the internship supervisors and their perceptions of student intern professional characteristics and the importance of length of internship. The process of categorizing, synthesizing and differentiating information creates access to taken for granted knowledge that otherwise would be lost. It was important to gather information regarding intern supervisor perceptions that may otherwise not be shared and possibly not deemed important. Phenomenology intentionally focuses on how people's experience and interpretation create meaning, and in turn, social reality.

“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is-and without which it could not be what it is” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Many academic recreation programs depend on an internship experience and the guidance of internship supervisors to help students develop and refine professional characteristics such as communication, cooperation, teamwork and “people-skills.” However, until this study how internship supervisors interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development and cultivation of student intern professional characteristics was not clear. It was also not clear how supervisors perceived the impact of length of internship on the development of student professional characteristics. Internship supervisors have an intimate and important role in student internship experiences and it is important to understand their perceptions or beliefs regarding their involvement.

What is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world.

This creates an assumption that there is an essence of shared experience. These essences

are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomena commonly experienced. (Patton, 2002, p. 106)

This study builds understanding regarding how intern supervisors help students identify characteristics that help them become professionals in the social reality of real work situations and relationships.

Participants

The following section describes the selection of the research institution, research sites, and research participants. The first segment identifies and justifies the use of the sponsoring research institution. Second, discussion regarding the identification of community recreation agencies that have housed interns from the participating university is presented. Finally, the selection process of supervisors from the identified community recreation agencies is presented.

Selection of Research Institution

This study was conducted from a mid-sized, public, research-intensive university located in the Midwestern part of the United States. The university was selected because of its status as an accredited recreation, parks and leisure services program; because it is one of the largest recreation education programs in the United States; and because it requires the completion of a 30-week professional student internship. Students may, however, choose to complete their internships at one internship site for 30 weeks or two internship sites for 15 weeks each. One area of inquiry for this study was to understand how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of length of internships when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional skills. Internship supervisors who oversee both 15-week and 30-week interns were included in this study. These supervisors have a unique perspective

regarding the importance of length of internships when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional skills.

Selection of Internship Supervisors

Intern supervisor qualification was determined by the Center for Leisure Services (CLS) who manages the recreation internship program at the previously referenced university.

Research participants were community recreation professionals who have supervised student interns for both 15 to 30 week internship programs. Intern supervisors that qualified for the study were contacted via both electronic mail and the United Postal Service requesting their participation (Appendix A) as further discussed in the data collection section of this paper.

Maximum variation allows researchers to interview participants from extreme positions of a context and contends that the interpretation of their views will represent and reflect shared meaning of the group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One aim of the study was that it represented a variety of types of agencies and locations to strengthen the ability to inform the field of community recreation, not just one type of agency. Professionals working within public/municipal recreation agencies as well as nonprofit, special district, and community event/development agencies were requested to participate in the study in an effort to gather information regarding professional characteristics in different community recreation agencies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen internship supervisors (6 men and 9 women), drawn from fourteen community recreation organizations. Participants had supervised interns in municipal and nonprofit agencies located in Michigan. Agencies were located in northern, western, central, south eastern and eastern regions of the state. Of the fifteen supervisors interviewed, all but two had completed university recreation education programs and participated as students in internship programs as a requirement for their baccalaureate degree.

The internship supervisors had a mean of 13.2 years of experience in the field of community recreation. “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (Patton, 2002, p. 245). All of the participants had supervised student interns in various lengths of internships anywhere from 10-30 weeks long. Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting cases because of their close involvement or experience within the subject area.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases for study are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term “purposeful sampling. (Patton, 2002, p. 230)

Maximum variation within purposeful sampling attempts to encompass central themes that cut across a wide variation of a sample. Maximum variation becomes a “strength for small samples because any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a phenomena” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Purposeful sampling is a valid form of participant selection in qualitative inquiry because it gives the researcher the ability to support the purpose and rationale of the study by asking if the sampling strategy supports the study’s purpose. The sample, like all other aspects of qualitative inquiry, is judged in context of the phenomenon being studied.

The first criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants must be supervisors at community recreation internship sites who have supervised interns from the designated institution. One of the research questions in this study specifically addressed building understanding regarding how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive

the length of time of internships when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional skills. Internship supervisors included in the study had to have experience supervising students in both minimal and maximum length internships. Internship supervisors working with the university at which the study was conducted must have had experience supervising both 15-week or shorter and 30-week interns to participate in the study.

The second criterion for inclusion in this study was that internship supervisors must have a minimum of five years, full-time experience in the field of recreation, parks and leisure. Internship supervisors must have the professional experience themselves to judge others ability to act professionally. Internship supervisors must have a minimum level of professional experience within the field to have the expertise to supervise interns and form opinions regarding employee performance. A minimum of five years experience was chosen because that amount of time in the field is accepted by the NRPA professional certification board as a minimum level of experience in the field, regardless of educational degree, to earn professional certification and is also accepted by the university program from which the study is based as an acceptable amount of experience to supervise a student intern.

Data Collection

A phenomenological design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Phenomenological designs continue to emerge even after data collection begins. The primary source of data collection for this study incorporated the use of semi-structured interviews. Data was triangulated using internship records that document student internship objectives and performance evaluations as discussed in the trustworthiness section of this paper. Semi structured interviews were used to direct an understanding regarding how internship supervisors

interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics.

All interviews were performed by the researcher. Community recreation professionals who qualified for the study were contacted via electronic mail with a letter describing the study and their roles as participants. Professionals who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form before interviews were conducted. The consent forms notified participants that they would be audio-taped and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that the objective of the interviews was to learn more about their perceptions in the development of student intern professional characteristics and were also provided with an interview guide upon initial contact (Appendix B).

Interviews employed a semi-structured interview guide that allowed participants to answer specific questions but gave both parties the opportunities to ask follow-up questions and clarify information. Interview guides “list the questions and issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview and ensure the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Interview guides allow the interviewer to build a conversation with the interviewee because they allow the interviewer to probe, explore and ask questions that clarify or illuminate information as shared by the interviewee. Interviewees were mailed a copy of the interview guide in advance of the scheduled interview so that they could see a list of potential questions. This helped ensure that participants were both informed about the content of the interview and to give them time to think about their answers before the scheduled interview.

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) the use of an interview log was also implemented. The interview log contained schedules of interviews, interview transcripts, journal

reflections of the interviewer, memos regarding discovered themes/patterns and interview summaries.

Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. In the first section of the interview, internship supervisors were asked to discuss their perceptions regarding the importance of the development and implementation of professional characteristics for students who wish to work in the field of community recreation. Internship supervisors discussed their interpretation of “professional characteristics”, their beliefs about the demonstration of professional characteristics/soft skills in practicing recreation professionals/staff, and their beliefs about student intern demonstration of professional characteristics. In the second section of the interview, internship supervisors were asked to discuss how they interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Internship supervisors discussed their expectations regarding student intern professional behavior and how they saw their role in the development of student intern professional characteristics. In the third section of the interview, internship supervisors discussed their perceptions regarding the importance of internship length when considering a student’s opportunity to develop professional skills. Discussion included perceptions of internship supervisors in regards to a minimal amount of time needed for students to develop professional characteristics during an internship, how internship supervisors perceived students’ level of professionalism at the beginning of their internship in comparison to the end of their internship and perceptions in regards to an optimal amount of time needed for students to develop professional characteristics during an internship.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) stated that the purpose of qualitative research is to confirm what we already know, gain understanding about what we do not know, and to disprove misconceptions. Themes and patterns emerge from the data instead of being imposed in hypotheses that must either be proved or disproved. Phenomenological analysis focuses on identifying the intentionality or the internal experience of being conscious about phenomena (Moustakas, 1995; Patton, 2002). This study employed phenomenological methods. The first level in phenomenological analysis is *epoche* in which the researcher identifies and attempts to remove or at least become aware of biases, assumptions or viewpoints regarding the phenomena under investigation. As discussed in a following section of this paper regarding trustworthiness of data, the application of strategies such as the use of an interview log, member checking, and multiple reviews of interview transcripts were used to help eliminate researcher bias.

The second level in phenomenological analysis, called reflective description, focuses on the present as it is offered – not influenced by previous experience, thought, or perception. Reflective description is a researcher’s attempt to create an independent description as it is offered – nothing more. Reflective description is the reduction of data into what is referred to as ‘brackets’ where the subject matter is confronted on its own terms –separate from the world and preconceptions in which it occurred. Interview summaries allowed identification of biases and removal of them prior to analysis. The third level of phenomenological analysis incorporates “imaginative variation.” In imaginative variation “each position, in its presence, and from the extreme, is considered...one must be willing to permit alternatives to consciousness” (Moustakas, 1995, p. 53). Researchers must keep their minds open for new possibilities and answers.

Transcripts of the interview were offered to interviewees after the interviews for clarification purposes. This was the implementation of the first two steps, *epoche* and *reflective description*, of the phenomenological approach to analysis. The third phenomenological level was implemented by using a system of bracketing to code and analyze data through the following steps: (1) collect data through participant interviews; (2) identification of key phrases and statements that refer directly to research questions; (3) interpretation of the meanings of the phrases/statements in interview summary; (4) participant feedback of interview transcripts; (5) journal notations regarding recurring themes organizing of them into meaning clusters; (6) examination of clusters using ‘imaginative variation’ to see them from different perspectives void of emotion or texturized data; and (7) synthesis, coding and documentation of the meanings and essences. Nvivo software was used to assist in data organization of interview transcripts, agency documents, accreditation documents, and internship supervisor evaluation comments.

Simplifying and making sense out of gathered data into coding schemes is an important step of analysis. Within this qualitative study, the coding schemes were not predetermined because it followed an emergent design. Coding took place after interviews were conducted and themes emerged from the data, via participant feedback and imaginative variation. Interview transcripts were read and repeatedly reviewed. During the first level of coding themes and words/sentences were identified as expressed by the interviewee. The second level of coding involved the identification and organization of theoretical categories. The third level of coding included analysis and the beginning of the construction of a model of understanding by looking for coherence and differences in the data.

As previously stated, Lofland (1971) recommended that researchers get as close to the situation as possible to gain a deeper understanding of the context; use thick, rich, descriptive

language; document as exact wording or experiences as possible; and gather information as directly as possible in order to diminish research bias. The use of an interview guide, recorded interviews, member-checking, supervisor evaluation documents, and multiple reviews of interview transcripts in this study helped ensure trustworthiness of findings.

Trustworthiness

The intention of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry is to ensure that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Qualitative research requires that four components of trustworthiness should be addressed: (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) confirmability, and (4) transferability. In addressing credibility, researchers attempt to ensure confidence in truth of data and that the phenomenon being studied is accurately represented. Dependability can be difficult in qualitative research because focus is placed on consistency and repeatability of a study. In order to establish dependability in qualitative inquiry it is important that researchers carefully assess the quality of the processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Confirmability requires that researchers demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their own bias, motivation or interests. Transferability shows that findings have application in contexts outside of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following section will describe how this study ensured trustworthiness of data.

Consistent methodology and sound internal ethical practices are important to assure credibility and that the results of inquiry accurately reflect shared participant meaning. Suspension of judgment is one approach to help ensure credibility and requires the researcher to set aside personal viewpoints so that they may see the experience for itself (Patton, 2002). It was difficult to completely separate myself as the researcher because of my experience as both an educator and a recreation professional. I did however do my best to become aware of biases,

assumptions or viewpoints regarding student professional characteristics and was careful to listen and value information as it was presented by the recreation professional being interviewed. I also made notes in my interview log to identify any internal thoughts or reactions that may have been related to personal bias. Identifying potential bias helped avoid subconscious mistakes or assumptions when analyzing data. It is also important to note that while I am familiar with the internship process because of my role as a faculty in the department from which the study is being conducted, I am not connected to the management of the internship program. The CLS office at the university employs a professional staff whose sole responsibility is to place, supervise, and evaluate student interns. As a faculty member I build relationships with students during their on-campus course work, but do not have direct connections with students or internship supervisors in regards to their internship experience.

Credibility and Data Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of other sources of data collection and helps ensure credibility of data (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Triangulation was difficult due to the fact that the primary data source was based on participant interviews. In this study, triangulation was completed by using member checks and interview notes, internship letters of agreement and internship evaluations as completed by the actual internship supervisors.

Member checking was applied in this study to give participants an opportunity to review their interview transcript for corrections and clarification of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking gives opportunities for both parties to summarize key points, correct errors, provide additional information and confirm direct quotes if needed. This gave interview participants the opportunity to review and provide feedback/clarification to the researcher.

Where possible, supporting data in the form of documents was also used to provide background to help explain and verify details supplied by participants. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). This study incorporated the use of internship letters of agreement and internship supervisor evaluations. Internship letters of agreement are created before a student begins an internship and describes activities in which the student will engage while interning at the chosen agency/site such as (1) the beginning and ending dates of the internship, (2) responsibilities/goals of the intern, (3) type of compensation, (4) the identification of the person to whom the intern is responsible, and (5) the responsibilities of each party involved in the internship experience. Letters of agreement are signed and kept as part of official internship records. This study incorporated the review of 37 letters of agreement as signed by study participants and compared student internship objectives to interviewee comments in regards to student intern accomplishments.

Data was also triangulated with the review of 118 student internship final evaluations as completed by study participants. Ideally, student evaluation tools should reflect objectives and goals as determined in the internship letter of agreement as agreed upon by the student, internship supervisor, and academic advisor. Final evaluations were reviewed to identify for and compare comments regarding student professional characteristics to transcripts of interviews. Narrative comments were examined for supporting, differentiating, and/or gaps of information in comparison to interview transcripts. It is important to note that narrative comments contained in the supervisor evaluation of interns are voluntary open-ended comment areas. Supervisors are given the opportunity to make suggestions, discuss concerns, and praise performance. It is up to the supervisors' discretion to include statements in the open comment portion of the evaluation.

These comments were reviewed to see what supervisors chose to focus upon and what they thought important to note when given an open forum.

This study also examined three documents referred to by interviewees during interviews they felt shed more light on their perceptions of student professional characteristics as demonstrated during the internship experience and included one employee handout, one training manual, and one intern interview guide.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability in qualitative research supports the accuracy of results through the correct interpretation of participant meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study potential biases were identified by the interviewer via notes taken during the interview process. These notes were utilized during analysis to identify concerns, themes and identify bias. This approach, while not perfect, helped confirm the accuracy, dependability and transferability of results because the participants themselves were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and researcher interview notes indicated potential areas of bias before analysis was conducted. Multiple reviews of interview transcripts promoted a strong intimacy with the data to ensure that findings emerge from the data and not from researcher predispositions.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability for the new understanding of phenomena to aid in the understanding of the same phenomena in a different context. Transferability of this study could be limited because the study is delimited to community recreation professionals who have supervised interns in 15 to 30 week internships. Thick, rich descriptive data and the documentation of exact wording was used to help readers of the study identify with

commonalties. Interviews were recorded to aid in accuracy of note taking and were stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Understanding the role of the researcher also supported the transferability of results as is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to carefully consider how data is collected, analyzed and used because qualitative research involves human subjects – including both the part of the researcher and research subjects. All participation was voluntary and interviews conducted only after participants agreed to participate. Prior to interviews, participants received the informed consent form which explained how the data was to be used, the significance of the study, a list of potential interview topics, and agreement to be recorded (Appendix C). Informed consent is a process that ensures that participants received valuable information about the study in which they will participate. Informed consent forms in this study included information regarding purpose of the study, use and dissemination of data, and participant guidelines. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants before their participation in the study. Participants were notified they could withdrawal from the study at any time. Participants signed consent forms to ensure confidentiality of information collected.

All data from this study was confidential. Individual participants are not identified and the information collected not credited back to any specific agency. Pseudonyms were assigned for interviewees and were identified with letters of the alphabet such as “Supervisor A” and “Supervisor B.” After interviews were conducted and transcribed, all data was stored in a secure, locked location. Interview transcripts, summaries, results and reported data included in discussion uses the pseudonyms assigned and not actual agency or individual names.

It was necessary to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects at the university from which the study was based because this study utilized humans as a source of data. The application was filed by the researcher after the approval of the methodology and prior to any collection of data.

Delimitations

Delimitations are choices regarding a study made or controlled by the researcher (Creswell, 2003). There are three delimitations to this study of supervisor perceptions in the development of intern professional characteristics: (1) limited scope, (2) participant selection, and (3) role of the researcher.

Limited Scope

This study examines the perceptions of supervisors of intern students at community recreation agencies. This study was delimited to the field of community recreation and did not include other areas of the recreation field such as commercial recreation, tourism, outdoor recreation, or therapeutic recreation. Professionals working in the field of community recreation must possess strong professional characteristics that are unique to field and enable them to succeed in what is essentially a “people-centered business”. Research has established that a majority of those competencies include professional characteristics. How and when those professional characteristics are developed is still a matter of debate. Research based on competencies in community parks and recreation is virtually non-existent (Hurd, 2001). This study addressed gaps in research regarding internship supervisor perceptions of the development of student professional characteristics during community recreation internships.

Participant Selection

Only one university in the United States requires 30-week internships as a graduation requirement. This study was delimited to community recreation agencies and supervisors who have participated in that university's double 15 week site internships and single 30 week internship programs. Participants were also delimited to supervisors who have worked in the field for a minimum of five years in order to ensure that they have had the opportunity to build their own understanding of professional characteristics. These requirements were meant to increase participants ability to recall information and perceptions about their experience.

Role of the Researcher

Moustakas (1994) stated that researchers take one of three roles in qualitative research. A researcher who acts as *being-in* gathers information from an impartial view and accepts/documents all information without judgment. *Being-for* requires that the researcher support the data/patterns/themes that emerge and that they act as an advocate. *Being-with* may include both roles of *being-in* and *being-for*, but also refers to a researcher who may introduce their own experiences, beliefs, or values to the phenomena being studied. *Being-with* means that a researcher is always present as their individual self, with their own knowledge and experience. "What another person communicates enters into my own awareness and perception and through a process of indwelling leads me to form my own understanding, beliefs and judgments" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 84). *Being-with* means listening as a researcher, but it also may include offering perceptions and views. "There is, in being-with, a sense of a joint enterprise-two people fully involved, struggling, searching, exploring, sharing" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 85). *Being-with* encompasses a process called "indwelling" where the researcher must immerse themselves into

the other's experience and direct themselves as a researcher toward meaning beyond the appearance of things to find truth.

My past experience as a community recreation professional and current position as an instructor within the department from which the study was conducted could make it difficult not to be tempted to advocate for issues/themes that may be presented by participants. "In *being-with* I become a searcher – the glimmerings that emerge from the other person's communications offer beginning data from which indwelling clarifies and leads to a mutually derived understanding" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 85). During this study I took the role of being-with because of my professional experience as an educator, community recreation professional and researcher.

Limitations

Limitations are factors outside the scope of the researcher that may influence results of the study. A limitation to this study of supervisor perceptions in the development of intern professional characteristics included the potential that participants were not completely honest.

Participant Honesty

Community recreation is a close-knit field because professionals depend on personal relationships for much of their partnership and community coordination success. Participants may not have felt comfortable sharing truthful information, they may have felt judged by the interviewer, or they may not have shared non-relevant information due to the researchers involvement as a professional in the community recreation field. The use of a confidentiality agreement, sending the interview guide early to participants for review, using the internship guide to keep conversations focused on issues related to the study, member checking, and

interview summaries were meant to decrease participant hesitation and to build trust in the research process.

This study was purposefully delimited to a narrow field of community recreation professionals in order to advance the limited field of inquiry regarding the development of student professional characteristics in community recreation internships, to inspire future research in the general recreation field, and to manage a “bite-sized” piece of the puzzle at this point.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

“Professional characteristics are critical in making you successful or not. It’s the difference between being really good at your job and just status quo” (Supervisor A).

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. This initial inquiry of internship supervisors’ perception of their roles is an important step in order to expand understanding of how recreation educators can improve experiential learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics and better educate students. Professional characteristics are defined as personal management skills, often referred to as “soft skills” or “people skills” that drive potential for growth and success in people-centered environments. Professional characteristics are crucial for professionals in a human service industry such as recreation, parks and leisure. Professional characteristics such as communicating, listening, giving feedback, engaging in dialogue, handling criticism and feedback, problem solving, cooperation, time management, displaying a positive attitude, patience and flexibility are all examples of characteristics that recreation professionals should utilize regularly (NRPA, 2004). Although professional characteristics are essential in the community recreation field, limited research exists regarding the intentionality of their development during student internships as directed by internship supervisors. Internship supervisors are an important part of a recreation students’ educational experience and until this study, no research had been conducted to develop a better

understanding of internship supervisors' perceptions, intentions, or roles during that experiential learning process.

This chapter details five main themes that emerged regarding internship supervisor perceptions of their roles and experiences in the development of student intern professional characteristics. First, supervisors identified the professional characteristics they felt important to community recreation professionals that could be developed during an internship experience. Second, supervisors discussed opportunities for students during internships they felt were important in the development of professional characteristics. Third, supervisors identified the internship as an educational experience that allows students to develop professional characteristics but did not necessarily identify themselves in the role as educators. Fourth, supervisors identified having interns as an overall positive experience but expected student interns to not only learn from their experience, but to also bring new knowledge to the agency. Finally, supervisors agreed that the longer the length of the internship the better the ability of students to develop professional characteristics.

Industry Characteristics

First, supervisors reinforced key professional characteristics that were important in the community recreation industry. Supervisors felt these characteristics could and should be developed during an internship experience. Seven major characteristics were identified by supervisors including communication/advocacy, self-awareness, passion, being able to relate to diverse groups of people, credibility, and flexibility.

Communication

Communication was defined as the effective exchange of information, ideas, and opinions between professionals, stakeholders, and customers. All interviewees and one-third of written evaluations identified communication as an important professional characteristic for community recreation professionals. In this study, communication included interpersonal communication and advocacy.

Interpersonal communication was identified as an important characteristic by over half of supervisors who mentioned “communication.” Verbal and listening skills were vital when supervising staff, promoting services, motivating participation, facilitating programs, answering questions, and for professional networking. Supervisor C summarized the need for professional interpersonal communication this way:

I'd say recreation is a people orientated field. People, and communicating with them, are important to our industry. Really listening to what they need and the ability to articulate messages well. [This is important] because the philosophy used to be the customer's always right. But now with risk management and current best practices...the customer is not always right. How do you approach them in a positive way that doesn't belittle them or doesn't discredit their real concern? How do you go about educating them that I hear what you're saying, but in the best interest of [safety] this is the reason why we have this practice? Personal communication is key.

Supervisors described interpersonal communication as a crucial customer service tool when trying to discover stakeholder needs. Intern evaluations contained references to interpersonal communication and half identified student's verbal communication, listening skills, and ability to express ideas clearly as strengths. Two direct quotes from written student evaluations include

“demonstrates confidence in her communication with clients and displays professionalism and maturity when dealing with current and potential clients” and “great ability in communicating and presenting.” Some evaluation comments regarding interpersonal communication referred to the need for improvement, “he is good at communicating ideas, but sometimes needs to just slow down and work on listening” and “noticed that when communicating with participants that he is a little scattered.”

Supervisors identified interpersonal communication as face-to-face interaction as well as telephone conversations. Professional communication via telephone was also a concern from both interviewees and on written evaluations. Written evaluation comments referred to the need for students to develop interpersonal phone skills. Supervisor A gave this example:

I used to have interns in my office because after hearing and learning a couple of times, I’m like “okay, we’ve got a problem with phone skills. I need to keep an eye on these kids.” I need to be able to hear them and give them some suggestions to practice. And that was really intimidating to them. So, now the situation is they’re going to be in a cubical and I hope I can hear them because I think that’s so valuable and maybe I will do some pretend phone calls or...call and ask them to give feedback of who they are talking to. Because I would just cringe sometimes hearing them on the phone.

The majority of supervisors felt that interpersonal communication was an important characteristic and while interns needed some fine-tuning they were for the majority successful.

Advocacy

Advocacy refers to effective communication of agency values and vision in the promotion of community recreation. In 2008 the California Park and Recreation Society identified advocacy as one of the crucial competencies needed to succeed in the recreation field,

“the professionals who will succeed in the next decade are those who...understand and can articulate our role in creating community ...broker resources and bring coalitions together” (p. 51). Most participants referred to development of student’s ability to act as an advocate for themselves, the field, department or services. One intern evaluation comment stated:

She is gaining in knowledge of...the influence we have in the community...She learned quickly how to be an advocate for not only our department, but our industry as well. She was tested on several occasions [at several public meetings]. In all of these situations she handled it with grace and a very high degree of professionalism.

Another supervisor encouraged students to be, “willing to share passion with other staff with the goal of motivating them to also embrace the importance of recreation.” Supervisors believed interns should demonstrate their passion. Supervisor C stated:

We have students make a presentation to the commission. Professionals usually don’t get that experience until they’re out in the real world. [It teaches students] how to communicate to a commission that is different than you do staff [or other] people. [Interns] need to [learn to] handle the pressure. [Interns] stand in front of the commission and communicate/advocate support for a recommendation and it is good experience.

The concept of the necessity for recreation professionals to be skilled as advocates is supported through national standards in both university curriculum and professional certification.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness refers to a person’s ability to identify, accept and capitalize on his or her strengths and weakness. The majority of supervisors and the majority of written evaluation comments identified the need for interns to know themselves in order to function as a professional. First, supervisors expressed the need for professionals to know their individual

skills and abilities, to be accepting of feedback for improvement, to understand what motivates them, to not take themselves too seriously and to be able to separate personal relationships from business. Supervisor I expressed, “it is important to separate personal and professional lives because it shows integrity in decision-making, maturity, and the way professionals carry themselves.” The need for professionals to have the ability to separate personal issues from business was a strong theme. Supervisor E:

Another important [characteristic] is the separation of personal and professional, so even though something happened at lunch, you can leave it at lunch and move on to the meeting after. Not carry it over into the workplace, so it’s not making you think differently about somebody when you’re working with them.

Third, supervisors noted that in order for students to be self-aware, they needed the ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Supervisors expected students to share accomplishments and communicate challenges and failures. Supervisor H stated she thought the development of this characteristic was important for students to learn during their internship:

I tell students to never hide a problem. Nothing is so devastating that it cannot be fixed, but the sooner the better. Learn to own and solve problems as soon as possible. It is how you handle a problem that makes you a good professional. We all make mistakes.

The ability to accept feedback was seen as important and the majority of supervisors made comments regarding student intern’s ability to accept and process criticism without taking it personally. For example, a written comment on a student evaluation commented, “we are working to improve [her] professional skills. She needs to learn that at times it is hard to separate our personal feelings and efforts from the job.” The majority of comments were supportive but encouraged the continuous development of feedback acceptance. Supervisor K:

Some of [the interns] take [feedback] very personally. That's one of those other intangibles where you have to be willing to really be in a position of learning and to be comfortable with all pieces of learning. Whether it's on the days that you do awesome, as well as the days that you have a lot of red ink on your paper.

Another example of a supervisor's emphasis of tolerance of criticism is demonstrated in the following written student intern evaluation comment:

As positive as enthusiasm can be, do not forget to listen to and consider other people's opinions and/or suggestions. Sometimes having such a high enthusiasm and passion for a project can prevent a person from accepting help or criticism that may actually enhance the project being worked on. Criticism is meant to be constructive, especially coming from supportive co-workers.

Finally, self-awareness was identified as the need to "not take yourself so seriously that your own ego gets in your way" (Supervisor N). Supervisors expressed that because community recreation is a human-service business that requires professionals to work in a sometime chaotic, busy, and multi-tasking environment it is important to "move on [from problems], and just let go. I think everybody does better with a fresh start and a fresh perspective. And it's hard sometimes to let go but give yourself a break, give them a break and just keep moving on" (Supervisor J).

Supervisors believed self-awareness drove potential for growth and success in people-centered environments such as the field of community recreation. Understanding how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their behavior or decisions is an important characteristic for community recreation professionals.

Passion

Passion refers to a professionals' communication of enthusiasm and dedication to the field of community recreation. Participants referred to the need for demonstrated passion in order to be a successful professional. Passion, as defined by supervisors, encompassed concepts of motivation; a love for the job; a willingness to multi-task and pitch in wherever needed; and understanding the value/benefit of community recreation with the ability to communicate the benefit to others. Supervisor B stated, "You know we have to communicate what we do and the importance of what we do. We have to communicate enthusiasm, a passion for what you do, a love for what you do." Supervisors expressed the importance of a professional's ability to self-motivate and motivate others regarding the benefits of recreation:

I think an overall belief in the philosophies of recreation. That there's more to it than [just providing programs]. The individual self-esteem, social aspects, lifelong skills...all those benefits gained from participation in [community recreation]. Being motivated by those things, as well as an internal motivation and passion. (Supervisor D)

Written evaluation comments also related passion to an individual's desire to improve their performance and become a better professional:

She may not have as much experience in the field, but what she lacks in this area is made up in her initiative and dedication to learning more about recreation and doing the work. In whatever she does she puts her heart into it and you see that she is passionate about it.

Career success depends not only on what professionals accomplish, but how they accomplish tasks while interacting and communicating with co-workers, board members, stakeholders, volunteers and the public. Over half of supervisors believed that in order to successfully serve the needs of residents, recreation professionals must have the ability to

communicate their passion in their pursuit to manage staff and volunteers, recruit participants, and develop relationships to promote the sharing of resources, information, strategy, human resources, expertise and sometimes funding (Smale & Frisby, 1990).

Relating to Diverse Groups of People

Supervisors defined “people persons” as those who genuinely like people and can relate to a variety of personality types in a positive manner. Interviewees and written evaluations referred to the importance of people skills and commented on a student’s ability to relate to people. Student intern evaluation comments reflected supervisor’s emphasis of the need for professionals to develop good personal relationship:

[Her] greatest strength lies in the way that she deals with people. She always has a positive, cheerful attitude and seems to work well with young and old alike. Her pleasant, friendly personality instantly puts people at ease. I think her talent with people will serve her very well when she has to enforce our rules with the public.

Community recreation is a human service industry and the majority of supervisors expressed the need for the opportunities to develop people skills almost above hard skills because they felt that hard skills could be taught in classroom settings. Participants felt that being a people person was something that needed to be developed over time through experiences like internships.

Supervisor J commented, “people skills are the core of success. You always want technical skills and the academic side, but it has to be offset by an even higher percentage of people skills. Liking people and knowing how to deal with them.” Participants believed a professional who decides to work in the field of community recreation, essentially makes the decision to work in the “people business.” Supervisors felt that the level of interaction with different audiences made people skills vital to a community recreation professional. The interaction, instruction,

coordination, advocacy, and networking meant that professionals are often considered a “product” or face of the services offered. Supervisors felt that professionals were limited in the field of community recreation without the skills to relate positively to a variety of people.

Credibility

Most of the participating supervisors identified establishing credibility as an important characteristic for success in the field of community recreation. Supervisors interviewed and written evaluation comments reinforced students’ abilities to establish professional reputation of trustworthiness, integrity and knowledge. Networking, support of culture and values, and follow-through were highlighted as important aspects of professionalism when building credibility. Connecting with other professionals, customers, board members, sponsors, and other stakeholders to build relationships and exchange knowledge and ideas is important to recreation professionals (NRPA, 2004). A majority of interviewees discussed the importance for professionals and students to build networking skills not only with other recreation professionals, but with residents and leaders within the community. Supervisor G commented, “We're serving the public so as a collaborative I have to have good relations with other entities, government entities, other businesses...we need to stay in touch and help each other.” Supervisors believed that involvement with community and professional initiatives helped build students credibility because it gave students the opportunity to demonstrate skills, prove commitment to the industry, and promoted networking.

With her involvement with the Michigan Recreation and Park Association, she will be able to increase the network that she will be a part of in the coming professional years. Networking can be difficult, but she has expressed a desire to learn how to build her network and I am confident that she will.

Some supervisors saw need for growth or improvement in student networking. “I encourage her to reach out to other professionals in the field on a personal level. She is work, work, work but social interactions on a professional level are just as important and beneficial to a career in recreation” (Supervisor I). Supervisor B commented “the fact that I’ve spent one of the 100%’s of my time at community meetings and networking trying to create that connection. That was something that I hadn’t had to do when I first got into the field. It’s important.” Understanding the importance of networking and networking effectively was an important characteristic for a majority of supervisors in relation to establishing credibility.

Supervisors who spoke about “credibility” as a needed professional characteristic referred to the need to understand and function within an organization’s culture. Interns ability to engrain themselves into the spoken or assumed relationships, politics, traditions, and rituals of a community recreation organization was viewed by supervisors as crucial in establishing credibility. Supervisors commented about the importance of helping student interns “understand the culture of the agency as much as anything else. They need to learn how to adapt and develop ‘survival’ skills.” Some of the written evaluations referring to credibility remarked about the need to understand culture and the “big picture of what we do, why we do it, why we approach things the way we do.” The majority were positive statements regarding student interns’ ability to assimilate to the culture of the agency and develop credibility. Comment such as “works well with staff because has paid attention to our culture;” “he understands what is expected of him – even when the atmosphere or job is difficult;” and “needs growth understanding the complexities of the office dynamics because you’re not always going to like the people you work with” demonstrated supervisors focus on credibility through assimilation to culture.

Supervisors also considered the ability of professionals to initiate projects and complete them successfully as important when establishing credibility. Participants used the term “full-circle” when describing the process of managing a program including project inception, design, development, production, evaluation, and wrap-up. Professionals who completed projects in timely and thorough fashion were seen as credible professionals. Many written evaluations contained statements regarding a student’s ability to follow through with projects and work independently. Supervisors commented on the importance of recreation professionals to complete projects without constant reminders. One supervisor commented, “She worked diligently and completed tasks with little to no supervision” and “[she] is extremely professional and has thorough follow-through no matter what the task.” Supervisors felt that quality professionals are distinguished by the demonstration of credible professional skills in the form of behavioral motives, values, and actions (Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, 1999).

Flexibility

The final professional characteristic identified as important by supervisors is flexibility. Most interviewees and many written evaluations addressed the value of the ability and willingness of a community recreation professional to multi-task and handle minute-to-minute changes in a professional manner. Flexibility was even part of one agency’s internship interview. Students applying for internship positions were asked to respond to scenario questions on the application. An example scenario from the application reads as follows, “It is the day of annual Holiday breakfast with Santa and the event begins at 9:30am. You were in charge of finding a Santa, and he was scheduled to arrive at 8:30am. It is now 8:45 am – what

would you do?” Another example of the need for flexibility in community recreation was described by Supervisor N:

You’ve got to be able to think on your feet and be flexible. A perfect example was a couple weeks ago. [A program] that’s staffed by volunteers only had four volunteers show up when ideally they’d like to have 10. So, okay, you don’t know that the volunteers aren’t showing up until they did not show up. You’ve got all these kids here, now how are you going switch that game plan? What are you going do? To be able to have that flexibility, communicate back to everybody, and keep going definitely makes thinking on your feet important.

Supervisors commented that community recreation was often unstructured and that professionals need the flexibility and ability to access resources in order to adjust to various environments, situations and to “prepare for the unknown” (Supervisor H). The majority of comments regarding flexibility on student evaluations were positive and included statements such as “very flexible and willing to work outside the typical scope” and “you are able to make appropriate adjustments on the spot when you feel they are needed whether it’s for safety reasons or the flow of the program in general.” A majority of supervisors believed flexibility and multi-tasking were important professional characteristics for community recreation professionals.

Opportunities

The second section of this chapter presents supervisor perceptions of opportunities during internships that allow students to develop personal characteristics. The advantage of internships in the development of professional characteristics is that internships combine experience with academic preparation. As experiential learning environments, internships enable students to develop as professionals and apply theory to practice through a variety of internship

responsibilities and duties. During interviews supervisors identified opportunities they intentionally provided for interns that were important to the development of intern professional characteristics. Intern opportunities reported by supervisors were categorized in to the following themes and included programmatic, advising, networking, challenges, and student initiative.

Programmatic

All participants identified the importance of allowing students to apply their skills in the planning and production of recreation programs, activities and events as essential. The realm of opportunities identified by supervisors incorporated in the category of programming included (1) exposure to a variety of programs/activities in addition to the department where the intern is directly reporting, (2) observation of programs produced by other professionals or agencies, (3) the importance to allow “teachable moments” where students need to work through challenges, and sometimes fail during program production, and (4) concern that some student interns are too focused on program requirements instead of the overall internship experience.

First, multi-department exposure to a variety of programs was important to the majority of supervisors because this exposure allowed students to see the larger picture or vision of the agency. Supervisor N:

I firmly believe [interns] need to be involved with other people and other departments – to get a sense of not just what everybody else is doing, but how important it is to be involved as a team and how we all work together. Our department cannot function without the help of [other departments]. I mean, they're all intertwined. We're part of something much bigger than just this department. It's important for them. They've got to understand that. I think it's important, especially from a recreation standpoint to understand how the departments are working, how they function. What we do here might

be done completely different in fitness or wherever...you have to adapt to who you're dealing with and the different types of people. I always try to get interns involved in as much as possible. I think it's important.

Supervisors felt that by exposing students to different departments and responsibilities they could better prepare them to be able to multi-task and take on numerous responsibilities. Supervisor E:

I think that's kind of in our philosophy with our interns, that to be a good programmer we need to understand facilities. To be a good facility person, you need to understand programs. They might think you know, 'I love programs.' But, they might realize there's another side to facilities... especially in community recreation... you have to be the programmer and the facility director. They go hand in hand. As you go into bigger organizations, you have the opportunity to specialize. But, you have to keep those things in your back pocket, because that makes you more credible as a professional.

Job shadowing was included by many supervisors as another strategy to expose students to other departments or programs. Supervisors felt it was important for students to not only gain multiple program experience, but to interact with different professionals to learn from their examples, styles and approaches. Supervisor F expressed his belief that “ in your career if you want to be a director or want to be in programming, it's good to have a bigger picture of what folks around you are dealing with...and how they manage...it makes you a better professional.”

Secondly, supervisors believed interns should observe programs produced by other professionals or agencies. The majority of supervisors spoke of the importance of involvement in other community events and all believed that participation in events produced by professional recreation associations would benefit students. Supervisor B:

We bring our interns to every [professional association] and community event we can find because we know how important it is to be able to show them the world. [Interns] need to see all of it and little bit of everything to understand the profession as a whole and ‘get it.’

Supervisors stated that students could learn through observation and participation in these events as well as benefit from even more exposure to other recreation professionals’ styles of management and production strategies.

Third, all supervisors believed that taking advantage of “teachable moments” as they occurred during an interns work in programmatic settings was important in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Supervisors defined “teachable moments” as learning through a challenge or failure of a direct experience such as the production or facilitation of a program, activity, or special event. Supervisors believed that interns learn by reflecting on their successes and failures, but that processing reasons for failure was often one of the best learning tools. Supervisor C stated that while “it’s hard to just stand back and let them learn by their failures or learn by their successes, but that’s the only way they make it.” Supervisors viewed the provision of a safe environment for intern failure as a critical in professional development.

Supervisor E:

I know I’m never going have that person that’s coming in as a finished product. They might think that they’re a finished product and I’ve had a lot of them who thought they were, but it’s all about coaching. I think our delivery is to understand that they’re going to mess up. We don’t want them to fail or break their leg or do harm to our participants or themselves or to the staff, but we’re going let them make the mistake. Skin their knee. Because how do you learn? You learn from your mistakes.

Supervisors tried to keep their distance to allow those “teachable moments” and capitalize on the opportunity to help students develop as professionals as a result. Supervisor N gave the following example:

I've told our interns it's okay if you run a program or you run something and it's a flop.

That's all right. Good. Why was it a flop? What can we do better? And how can we tweak the structure and see if we can make it better? That's a chance to get better.

Always take those. That's what I try to tell interns.

Supervisors expressed a need to still hold interns' hands, but to do so at a distance. Permission to fail, processing why failure happened and how to correct problems were concepts shared by all interviewed supervisors.

Finally, almost all supervisors expressed a concern that students efforts and motivations were focused only on programs that counted toward students' final internship grade. Most education programs include a culminating individual project as a large part of student intern's final grade, and supervisors believed students were too narrowly focused and not giving themselves the opportunity to experience everything the internship had to offer. Supervisors believed that students gave most of their effort and focus to the one culminating program for which they were responsible and lost motivation for involvement and the consequent learning opportunities of other programs. Most students received grades in their internships based on supervisor evaluations, completion of objectives, and accomplishment of a capstone individual project. Supervisors were concerned that interns put too much time, effort and stress on only the components or projects during their internship that were a designated percentage of their overall internship grade. Supervisor K commented on one student intern:

We struggled...she was incredibly project driven the whole time. I understand that's what [interns] grades are built around, but I think sometimes that becomes a priority kind of over other things. I think that we struggled a little bit through that with [our intern] just because she knew her project was not an event that wouldn't be done until near the end. [She] was missing the total experience of things that you learn along the way. I understand why they have a big project, but at the same time sometimes that becomes tunnel vision for them because all they're looking at then is 'I have to get this project done so I can complete it and get my grade' instead of really being present in where they're at and being able to learn from everyday things.

The majority of internship agreements listed these projects as the most significant part of student intern experiences and grades. Learning objectives were often focused on “programmatic” and measurable actions. While all supervisors included programmatic opportunities as important, the majority also provided new information regarding opportunities for student interns such as teachable moments through failure during program production and concern regarding barriers to professional development due to students’ tunnel vision toward only graded programs and projects.

Advising

All but one supervisor discussed the importance of creating opportunities for students to meet with supervisors for planning, feedback and discussion. Supervisors defined individual advising sessions with students as opportunities to develop professional characteristics because conversations helped students interpret, process, and reflect upon experiences and teachable moments. The majority of supervisors reported that while regularly scheduled meetings provided time to answer questions, review schedules, and explain policies meetings also served

as opportunities to discuss student intern goals, visions, future plans, and motivation. Supervisor E reinforced this idea:

We made it a priority to have weekly meetings because not only do they work with us on a one-on-one basis, but that's an opportunity for us to share about what we do. Share about our career choices, get an opportunity to kind of take down the roles and responsibilities and kind of see people in action. We kind of made it in a fun environment to ask those questions; 'what do you want to be?' 'Who do you want to be?' Or let's start looking at your resume and start thinking about your next step. Let's work on this and share a little bit. Give interns an opportunity for them to kind of drive the agenda, but also it fuels what we do here. It important to have some meetings so you can talk a little bit about them and their goals and do some of that professional development.

Most supervisors identified student advisement and counseling as major opportunities in their role as internship supervisors. Advising included processing of feelings, confidence building, and organizational assimilation rather than logistics and job tasks. Supervisor M exemplified "I explain to them you're getting your feet wet and [beginning] to see relationships. So we talk about that. And I say 'I need you to ask questions about relationships, about what you see or dynamics happening and [talk] about how you feel'." While all internship agreement documents reviewed for this study contained learning objectives for student interns, less than half contained direct language regarding supervisor responsibilities to the student. None of those agreements contained language referring to internship supervisor responsibilities to provide opportunities for advisement or counseling to students.

Networking

Occasions for students to network with other professionals, whether community recreation professionals or in a related field, were reported by all supervisors as important opportunities for students to develop professional characteristics. Forums such as community, public, or civic group meetings where students could meet and interact with other community leaders was viewed by supervisors as crucial in the development of professional characteristics.

Supervisor A emphasized professional development advantages related to networking:

I would take them with me to different meetings. Students needed to understand how to interact whether meeting with the Chamber, meeting with one of the sponsors, or meeting with other recreation people. That's another thing that won't come without experience. Students need to see the informal network that goes on. Then we debrief them and explain what we're doing, why we're networking and ask if they observed how I talked to people. We then talk about how I can follow up the conversation at a later date.

Supervisor I explained that although networking opportunities were not always a positive experience, networking always contributed to students' professional character development:

When I first started having interns, I left them out of meetings that I knew that there was going to be somebody that typically [caused a problem] because I did not know if I wanted an intern to see this? And I actually hear people say 'Well, we don't want to invite interns because this might get ugly...or people might say inappropriate things.' I think if [interns] can be in those meetings when people say inappropriate things they can learn from that situation. Have [interns] at the meeting and process after the meeting with them. Help them break that down and see why this happened. Ask [interns] how it made them feel? That's part of the teaching piece of the internship.

The majority of supervisors commented on the importance of student intern involvement in professional organizations to develop professional characteristics. Supervisor B stated, “The networking part is huge. We bring our interns to every Northwest, MRPA and committee meeting that we can find. Because we know...how important it is to be able to network...and connect with all those other recreation professionals.” Advantages for student interns included learning from other professionals, making future job connections with professionals, observing and learning how connections and relationships are formed, learning about issues and trends, and seeing other professionals’ motivation and passion. Supervisor F:

I think one thing that’s kind of underrated, is that whole concept of a professional conference or certification seminar. I think as a student you get a better perspective of what the professions all about when you can attend a conference and interact with professionals. As an intern, you see professionals interacting in a municipality with other public employees like finance people, community leaders or the police department and get a good perspective of the community. But when an intern goes to a professional conference they get an even broader perspective. Just talk to a student that’s gone to a [professional] conference...you know they’re like juiced up. They think ‘I thought we were just here all by ourselves but there are people like us all over the state.’ They get a better understanding of what people do and then they have a chance to talk to them or listen to what they’re saying and see that there’s a lot of other perspectives of the same job out there. [Interns] can get a totally different understanding of the profession at that point. It changes the student’s perspective.

Supervisors reinforced that networking is an important industry characteristic for professional development (CPRS, 2008; NRPA 2004). All internship supervisors provided

students opportunities to network in the immediate community while most also encouraged involvement in regional, state or national opportunities.

Challenge

Internships are intended to provide opportunities where students create knowledge through the transformation of real-life experiences that are a realistic part of developing as a professional. The reality of recreation programming is that nothing ever goes exactly as planned. As a result, supervisors believed that recreation professionals need to develop characteristics that promote their ability to effectively deal with change, correct problems, demonstrate flexibility or resourcefulness, communicate with stakeholders, and validate decisions. The term “challenge” in the context of opportunities refers to supervisor’s intentional absence of direction in order to test students and create possibilities for “teachable moments” through real-life experiences. All but one supervisor talked about creating opportunities for growth as a result of intentionally not being clear on directions or pushing students outside of their comfort zones in an effort to develop students’ ability to deal with challenge. Supervisor E commented that students were expected to figure out how to deal with challenges on their own instead of simply looking for direction from other professionals. “We create a sense of ‘how do I start?’ It would do disservice to spoon feed them. [Instead] I give interns a little information and tell them to take it from here and run and put your mark on it.” Supervisors felt these opportunities were exactly what the internship experience was all about – learning through experience and challenge. Supervisor J:

I think as much as you can give them a shot to fly solo. Don’t have the supervisor always around to help interns. Have support for them, but I think doing - experiential learning is still the way. And whether [interns] are trying to build confidence, speaking skills or relationships - they still have to just do it. And so I think that's important- definitely.

Supervisors reported creating challenging opportunities that required students to make and justify their own decisions such as leading volunteer trainings, producing events, conducting coaches meetings, or acting as advocates. Supervisor N stated “I think allowing [interns] to have those experiences and responsibilities does a lot for them and they get professional respect for themselves. It makes interns see themselves in a different light. I think it's important.” In the case of student internship professional characteristic development, the majority of supervisors intentionally created challenging scenarios that tested students’ abilities to apply skills.

Supervisors identified “challenge” as opportunities intentionally created to professionally develop students. Supervisors felt that challenging experiences develop industry characteristics important to succeed to in community recreation such as thinking on the fly, flexibility, communication, and passion.

Student Initiative

An emergent theme revolved around supervisors’ belief that students need to demonstrate more initiative during their internships in the creation or identification of professional development opportunities. Most supervisors interviewed and many of the written student evaluations expressed the need for students to take more responsibility for initiating opportunities in which they could develop professional characteristics. CAPRA educational outcome assessment standards require that students “understand the importance of maintaining professional competence and the available resources for professional development” (NRPA, 2004). Supervisors believed that students needed to demonstrate a willingness to learn by asking questions and actively seeking new experiences. A direct quote from a student intern evaluation:

An area that could be easily improved is asking questions. [She] will spend time hanging back and observing, which can be a good learning strategy in certain situations, but she will rarely ask the ‘why’ or ‘how’ questions that will give her much more information. Another student evaluation comment referred to a students’ willingness to learn. “[Her] best strength is her ability and willingness to learn. While she worked as an intern I saw her develop as a professional and am confident that she will seek out and easily gain new opportunities.” Supervisor B commented that while she knew it was her responsibility to present options to an intern, it was also the interns’ responsibility to seek them. She was looking for a balance:

I think it’s our responsibility to make sure [interns] get the whole picture. So, if they’re choosing not to do so, then I don’t know if I would want to take them on as an intern.

‘No, you only want part of the experience? You’re going to do part of your job?’ I mean I think you have to have that whole balance thing. I think that’s our responsibility to make sure [we give them options] because they don’t always know the whole picture.

So, that’s up to us because we’re working in the field and we know what it takes. But as a professional, it’s our responsibility to look for people who want that entire experience, who are going to have the passion and want to be in the field, to do the work that’s there.

Supervisors felt students needed to contribute effort towards creating development opportunities for the best possible learning experience. Supervisor M stated, “You need to ask questions about relationships. I need you to ask me questions about what you see or dynamics happening, what you feel in the meeting.” Supervisors commented that student interns diminished supervisors’ ability to help students develop professional characteristics by not asking questions or initiating possible experiences. Supervisor K:

I think [interns] need to have the courage, the desire to not only get an A, but to get the experience that they want out of it. You know, so that they want to learn. [Interns] that won't are kind of a nightmare for us because when you ask 'are you okay' and they say 'yes' and then they're not okay. They take it out of your hands to help them anymore. Supervisors felt that some interns did not understand the impact of dishonesty regarding what they needed, work interest areas, their own comfort level or questions with projects. The majority of supervisors wanted a more collaborative learning environment where students, faculty advisors, and internship supervisors all contribute to the development of learning objectives.

Supervisors also expressed concern that the internship would not be successful if students did not actively take advantage of or initiate different leaning experiences. Supervisor F:

You have an intern that comes in and says 'Hey, I'm really just focused in this area and that's kind of what I want to do,' but by the time they're done with their internship, they end up saying 'Wow, I did not know there was this part of this.' So by the time a student is done [with their internship] they're not so focused on just that one thing and they see other avenues. Hopefully one of the goals of an internship is to open their eyes so they can see different aspects that they haven't seen before.

Supervisors expressed that while they assumed responsibility to shape student intern experiences, the majority of supervisors thought students needed to step up to the plate and take more responsibility for their own development.

In summary, while internship agreements attempted to outline experiences that should be presented to students, no-one spoke with supervisors to determine what they provided in the development of professional characteristics. The intentional provision of opportunities such as

programming, networking, challenge, advisement and shared responsibility may influence how supervisors perceive their roles in the development of student characteristics and how they perceive the importance of length of internship in that process.

Supervisors Self-Identified Roles

Internship supervisors are responsible for overseeing and managing student job assignments, projects, opportunities, and the overall quality and learning outcomes of students' internship experiences. The purpose of this study was to build understanding regarding how supervisors perceive their roles and their consequential actions, decisions and behaviors in the development of student professional characteristics. This section details supervisors' perceptions regarding their roles in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Most of the supervisors had difficulty defining their supervisor roles because they had not previously been asked to self-examine their actions, choices, decisions, or intentionality. Themes emerging from the data include supervisor's perceptions of their role as challenging advisors, intentionality with their roles, and concerns regarding both agency and individual reputations connected to future student professionalism and performance.

Advisor

The first perception supervisors identified related to their roles in the development of student professional characteristics was their positions as *advisors* and *role models*. The majority of supervisors felt their roles should be to lend support and resources and manage interns from a safe distance. Supervisors believed their roles were to challenge students in a supportive environment. Supervisors saw themselves as advisors who did not need to spell out

every detail or dictate every decision. Interns were expected to function on their own as young professionals. Supervisor K:

I feel like it is okay to hold their hand but, you know it's like a long distance hand-holding. They need to know that you're there. They honestly need to know that you're watching them, that you're not just like, 'okay, I'll see you when you're done.' I think they need to feel that along the way so that they're confident of the decisions that they're making, but leave them alone to do that.

Most participants also stated that in order to advise students, they needed to role model appropriate behaviors. Supervisor N:

Leading by example is important because when [students] come in to an internship they are looking at what can they learn from these people. 'Who is there? What can I learn to do right and well? What can I learn?' I had supervisors that were brutal, but I'm thankful for that because I learned what not to do. I learned how not to treat people. But I think just leading by example is important to understand.

These supervisors also expressed a responsibility to point out the difference between good role models and poor role models. While supervisors knew that students were watching and learning from them, they also knew that interns' interactions with other professionals would also influence how they developed as professionals. Supervisor F:

I think if you have an intern that comes into an environment that they're not [familiar with] and you have a professional that is confident in what they're doing and is successful in what they're doing, the student picks up on that. A lot of interns are looking for a mentor. If professionals are cutting corners and doing some questionable

ethical type things the students going to emulate that and it makes an impact [on the intern] regarding what this profession is all about.

While all supervisors talked about teaching interns skills and educating them about the community and the industry, only half of supervisors self-identified themselves as *teachers* or *educators*. Supervisor G stated:

I think mentor and teacher are the biggest roles. But you're also a facilitator of their thinking and their evolution. You're facilitating that maturity into them believing they really are a professional. You're a facilitator of evolution ...hoping the journey leads to that point.

While teaching and education were descriptors of action, only half of supervisors used those terms as descriptors for themselves. For example Supervisor C commented, "sometimes people say we need work done so let's get an intern, rather than let's get an intern to assist with the educational experience which are two different things." Supervisor I self-identified as a role model but used this example incorporating the terms *education* and *teaching* into the description of her role as an intern supervisor:

I want to grow them. If I haven't grown you since you've been here, what am I doing and what are you doing here? This is all educational and hands-on education. If you cannot learn while you're here, then you're not in a place of learning or willingness to learn and I'm not teaching you anything either. So I challenge myself to have those hard moments. So if you're not interested in teaching, if you're not interested in giving that opportunity to take a risk, then you have no business taking an intern.

While supervisors acknowledged their participation in an educational experience for students, they did not identify themselves as educators. The majority of supervisors perceived

their roles as *challenging advisors* and *role models* who promoted the development of professional characteristics by taking advantage of the teachable moments experienced by students in real-life work scenarios.

Intentionality

The majority of supervisors reported making intentional decisions to help students develop skills and to provide them with opportunities to do so. Supervisors described making conscious choices regarding their actions, decisions and behavior when working with interns. Supervisor C stated, “I consciously make the decision that I want them to be in [certain] situations.” Supervisors commented about what they had to offer in [intern] development.

Supervisor N elaborated:

Take a look at yourself and not just the intern too. I think that's important. As a supervisor, what am I doing? Am I being fair? Am I being right? Am I being honest? What could I be doing? And don't be afraid to ask them as well. You know, I'll ask our interns, ‘What do you need from me?’, ‘What can I do?’ ‘Is there something you need?’ Just be there and know what [you have] to offer them.

Supervisor F commented, “For me, it's my job to put in front of [interns] the most valuable learning opportunity I can.” Supervisors who reported consciously thinking about their role in the development of interns also acknowledged that it is not always easy. Supervisor G:

We know the challenges. But that's the real world. So you [the student] come into your internship and as a result I [as a supervisor] have to find that balance. But somebody else that's got an intern will forget to think about it and just have them do menial stuff and that's it.

Supervisor H spoke about her own dedication as a professional to the field and the value of

training upcoming professionals when she said, “as an organization we need to look at the responsibility that we have to the future of our organization...the better we can do to develop professionals now...the stronger the field is for the future.” From an educational standpoint, supervisors must understand and embrace their roles during student internships to provide the best experience possible. The majority of supervisors approached their roles with the intention of helping students to develop professional characteristics during their internships.

Impact

The fourth section of this chapter presents supervisor perceptions of the impact of student interns on agency productivity, reputation, and the willingness of supervisors and agencies to work with interns. This theme emerged because while the majority of supervisors discussed the perception of their roles, they simultaneously discussed the impact of barriers and advantages to assuming their roles as intern supervisors. Supervisors’ discussion of the impact of interns lends insight regarding the opportunities they choose to provide in their guidance of the development of student professional characteristics. Impacts of working with interns as identified by supervisors included supervisor’s sense of worth in regards to their personal contributions to the field through the development of new professionals, the energy and new skills brought to the department by interns and supervisor concerns regarding student intern performance and personal or agency reputation.

Contribution to the Field

Participants believed that by supervising student interns, they had a positive educational impact on the future of the profession. The majority of supervisors enjoyed teaching students and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the field by developing new professionals.

Supervisor G stated, “I feel like the practical is very crucial because [you cannot replace that] experience. We feel good turning out better professionals. And we hope that's what we're doing knowing that someday we might actually work with them –that’s impact.” Supervisors believed that while classroom learning is important, internships translate classroom knowledge into practical learning. Supervisor D:

We have a lot of alumni that have worked for us that are in this field and that’s pretty cool to see some young professional that was an intern for you being a great professional. You just know he’s going to be successful with where he’s going with the kind of experience that [we were able] to give him and the motivation he saw while he was working here with my staff. Stuff like that is pretty cool.

Personal and professional pride was a theme shared by supervisors. Supervisors enjoyed watching students grow and develop as a result of their influence. Supervisor F:

It’s nice, you see the light bulb go on. We can talk to [students] in the classroom [as a guest speaker] but here I get the opportunity to actually implement it, and that’s where if [students] have the foundation and the scholarly knowledge they’re going to gain that practical knowledge through their internship with us.

Most of the participants shared their belief that the internship experience and working with professionals was an important part of students educational experience and that without the internship, students would not be prepared to work in the community recreation field.

Supervisor J:

I think it is important [interns] have those characteristics or have the willingness and the ability to learn them. Because we all know [professionals] don’t go into a field having all

those tools. But I think the internship gives students that possibility and ability to learn those skills more and us the ability to teach them what we know.

Most participants commented about the amount of time and effort involved in supervising interns. Supervisor E stated, “while [interns] are a lot of work to have... I believe in helping [to educate new professionals].” Supervisor K commented that while he believes in contributing to student’s education, that it can be disappointing to train an employee that you know is only “short-term”:

It’s a bummer I think on our end, on the investment end. It is like once you've gotten [interns] good at their job they leave. ‘All right, I'm going to go do a good job for someone else.’ You're like bummer – ‘Why do I keep training these people to leave?’

Overall, supervisors acknowledged that while supervising interns is a big investment of time and effort, they believed real-life work experiences with current professionals was an important part of student’s educations. Supervisors in this study supported experiential learning theorists, perhaps unknowingly, in the belief that there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract without a connection with other, real-life experiences (Dewey, 1938; Kelley & Rasey, 1952; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Lewin, 1999; Piaget, 1976).

Culture and Skill

Most participants commented that interns positively impacted the culture and energy of their department. Supervisors felt that the excitement for the profession that some students demonstrated improved other staff’s motivation. Supervisor F stated, “I’ve enjoyed it! It kind of keeps me young and keeps everyone motivated. I appreciate that about interns, especially in what can be a stressful environment. Plus they stay the same the older I get...” Supervisors also appreciated and expected student interns to positively contribute the department by bringing new

skill sets and teaching current professionals. Supervisor M commented, “I expect [interns] to be able to bring new knowledge to me. I think that in this day and age, when people are taking interns in, they want new things brought to the table. They're looking for the new stuff.” Skill sets that supervisors expected to learn about from students interns related to technology and fresh programming ideas. Supervisor G:

I feel like I learn from [interns] as well. We wouldn't have ventured out with Facebook if our interns hadn't insisted that we needed to be doing this. [Interns] taught us all how to [communicate via social media] with Facebook, tweeting, skyping... I did it by myself the other day and I was excited.

Supervisors commented they were more likely to be motivated to work with interns and promote the development of professional characteristics when interns positively impacted the culture and skill level of the agency.

Reputation

While discussing impact and supervisor perceptions of their roles in the development of student professional characteristics, supervisors demonstrated concern for their professional reputations. Supervisors acknowledged a relationship between intern performance and personal or agency reputation. Supervisors were concerned that poor performance on behalf of student interns would reflect negatively on their own professional credibility or that of the agency for which they interned. Supervisor K:

I think our goal is to put [interns] out into the professional world better than they were when they first started. They might still have some learning to go, but at the same time we feel good and proud about the kind of professional that's going out in the world

because of the time they spent with us. Where [students] complete their internships is talked about and a big deal.

Supervisors concerns regarding possible negative impacts of students' performance lends insight regarding the roles they assume and the opportunities they choose to provide in the development of student professional characteristics. Supervisor D stated, "your butt's kind of on the line as an intern supervisor" and Supervisor E commented that both interns and educational faculty need to "understand that this is our risk, this is our culture." Supervisor concerns related to their struggle in allowing for teachable moments and protecting their reputations and services at the same time.

Supervisor K:

...because ultimately if interns make mistakes, they are not at fault. It falls back on my lap. It's a reflection of our department. That's where you [question] where you let them skin their knees versus being a detriment to our program and our image and stuff like that...

Other supervisors expressed concern because they did not want to experience backlash from releasing students who did not demonstrate the development of professional characteristics into the field after an internship with them and their agency. Supervisor A:

I think that's important. I feel like we think 'well they're a student' but forget they're going to be a professional. So, are we passing this person into the professional field when we don't feel like they're ready or they don't have the skills to succeed? That's a disservice to [interns] and to us. I wouldn't want that [intern] to go to a job and go tell everyone 'I did my internship with Agency A and I passed' when their performance is horrible. Other professionals will think 'What? How did that happen?'

While over half of supervisors expressed a concern regarding the negative effect poor student intern performance could have on themselves or their agency, all supervisors still supported developing intern professional characteristics through teachable moments, challenge and failure.

Supervisor L:

And I try to give [interns] safe risks. So I know the risks [interns] are taking. If they bomb on that it's not catastrophic. 'The center will not close because of your mistake today.' And we talk a lot about that kind of thing. 'So if this doesn't succeed what's going to happen and why?' So we're talking and kind of like forecasting. And then we talk about it afterwards. 'What did we learn?' 'What are you thinking for next time?' We're not going to deliberately let [interns] go out and fail, knowing it would hurt the program, but yet we may let them fail in the process to where it's still possible to fix...and then we help them figure that out too.

While it may be generally assumed that working with interns contains some level of risk, supervisors' expressed concern regarding their reputations is new information. This information is important when considering supervisor motivation to accept an intern, what opportunities they may or may not offer to students and how they self-identify their level of responsibility in student development of professional characteristics.

Length of Internship

The fifth and final section of this chapter details perceptions of supervisors regarding the impact of the length of internships on student development of professional skills. Themes that emerged from the data included the need for students to experience a "full-cycle of opportunities" during the length of their internship and that the majority of supervisors believed

that longer internship experiences were more beneficial to the development of professional characteristics.

Full-Cycle Opportunities

Participants suggested the need for students to complete progression of programs from conception to completion. Supervisors suggested that in order for students to develop professional characteristics, interns needed to be engrained into a full cycle of programming so that they could process not only the logistics, but the communication, relationships, networks and culture of community recreation mission and partnerships. Supervisor F explained that students need to, “have some time to take all they learned and process it, so going through a full cycle of things...is an important piece of understanding the profession.” Supervisors felt in order for students to develop professional confidence and self-awareness, they needed to experience complete follow-through of a project and experience how everything either fits or does not fit together. Supervisor E stated, “It is the inherent confidence and knowledge of processes and the full cycle that students need to learn and understand. Without the opportunity they will never master professionalism.” Supervisor N showed support for building confidence through a full-cycle process with this statement:

The big thing is building confidence in themselves [interns]. Because it is intimidating sometimes when you step into [a new job] especially as an intern. And you'll start to see and notice interns start to lean a lot less on you. They're starting to kind of make their own decisions and then you start to notice they start to feel empowered, they're confident in themselves and they begin to start making their own decisions and doing their own thing. [Interns] need that. I love seeing that.

All supervisors agreed that longer internships are better to ensure students had the time to process, reflect and develop professional skills. Supervisor H summarized the majority of supervisors perception of time related to the ability to build these skills:

You definitely see a difference in student level of confidence after 30 weeks. At 15 weeks [interns] get the experience and are just beginning to develop enough confidence to assert themselves and really start processing, and buying into the mission/vision. At 15 weeks [interns] are just starting to develop relationships or just figure out what protocol and processes are. If [interns] leave too early they don't get a chance to learn. [Interns] can recognize these at 15 weeks, but they don't actually internalize it and learn it.

Supervisor C supported that concept:

Thirty weeks at least - at least 30 weeks. By the time you have [interns] 15 weeks they have just figured out where everything is and the parks are. You just have [interns] acclimated to who the people are and they are just themselves starting to feel comfortable with the people and their surroundings. Then you give [interns] another 15 weeks to really develop. If [interns] don't have those additional 15 weeks, I don't know if [the internship] can be successful.

Supervisors' perceptions of timing also related to the seasonal nature of most community recreation programming. The majority of programs were typically offered on a seasonal basis depending on weather, sports season, holidays, facility or field availability, the school year and many other factors. Supervisors described the need for students to start their internships during the planning stages of programs, which is usually three to six months before a program begins and complete their internship after the program cycle has ended. Experiencing a program from

planning to full completion usually requires a time commitment of five to six months.

Supervisor B:

[Programs] involve not just [interns], but involve our whole recreation section [such as] the park staff and others. [Interns need] that whole length of time. If [interns] leave halfway through a project, they don't learn how to do the follow through and follow up, they don't get to see how that works. You know from beginning to end - problem solving, critical thinking, flexibility. And with our larger events when they have to deal with a lot of sponsors and partners that whole communication piece, networking piece, putting that all together is important so it isn't just [learning] the technical skills of laying out that event. It's all the rest that's important to learn...

The majority of supervisors believed students were more likely to build professional characteristics in an internship that lasted longer than 15 weeks. Supervisors supported an internship that at least doubled current minimum accreditation standards of 10 to 20 weeks, but favored 30 weeks of full-time experience. Supervisor N:

The more that [interns] can experience and go through I think the stronger they are going to be when they get out of it. 12-15 weeks is tough because [interns] get in and it's just so quick. Interns don't really have a chance to reflect and start to build on what they've learned. I feel like if [an intern] does something, it's just over. [Interns] don't get a chance to have that follow-up and to try to do new things. I think the longer they're here, the better. I do think there's a line. Yes. I think 30 weeks or about eight months - I think that's a perfect time.

Supervisors also supported a longer internship time frame because they believed more time would enable students the opportunity to experience and work in various departments or

programs of community recreation. One of the professional characteristics identified by supervisors was flexibility to work in multiple areas and to also multi-task throughout the agency. Supervisor C:

Another thing we do is give [interns] opportunities to not only be a programmer, but [interns] could go to the water park, they could go to the campgrounds, they could work with seniors. [Interns] could spend 30 weeks going to different places. [Interns] would work with different supervisors so they could get different skill sets from different supervisors about how to manage, how not to manage. Learning to deal with different people, different situations, different settings is important because as [community recreation professionals] you're all going to deal with [different audiences and departments] at some time. Interns might as well get experience doing it [during the internship] rather than not have that opportunity. And so, from that aspect, I think 30 weeks is important.

Overall the majority of supervisors believed internships that lasted 30 weeks of full-time experience or more provided better opportunities for students to develop professional characteristics. Supervisors connected the development of professional characteristics such as confidence, follow-through, self-awareness, communication and flexibility to a longer internship experience.

The Conceptual Model

The purpose of the study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in regards to the development of student professional characteristics. Additionally the study addressed how internship supervisors perceive the importance of length of student internships in

relationship to student development of professional characteristics. The conceptual model visually adds to the understanding of supervisor's perceptions of their roles in the development of student professional characteristics (See Figure 1). The conceptual model was based on the review of the literature and experiences of current recreation practitioners. The conceptual model resulted from supervisor interviews, supervisor evaluations, and agency internship-related documents collected during the study.

Findings from this study resulted in the identification of five main themes regarding internship supervisor perceptions of their roles and experiences in the development of student intern professional characteristics. First, supervisor's identified the professional characteristics they felt important to community recreation professionals that could be developed during an internship experience. Second, supervisors discussed opportunities for students during internships they felt were important in the development of professional characteristics. Third, supervisors identified the internship as an educational experience that allows students to develop professional characteristics but did not necessarily identify themselves in the role as educators. Fourth, supervisors identified having interns as an overall positive experience but expected student interns to not only learn from their experience, but to also bring new knowledge to the agency. Finally, supervisors agreed that the longer the length of the internship the better the ability of students to development professional characteristics.

The model was constructed with four major components: (1) academic accreditation; (2) experiential learning theory; (3) community recreation professionalism; (3) impact of community recreation internships; and (4) community recreation internship supervisor perceptions which influence the development of student professional characteristics. The model demonstrates the relationships between minimal, significant and direct influences related to internship supervisors'

perceptions of the development of student professional characteristics. “Bulls-eye” modeling with circles building upon one another was chosen to represent the study influences. The model was intended to represent the nature of influences as they both layer and narrow down to impact each other.

In this section of the chapter, evidence of support for the model will be discussed including (1) the minimal influence of accreditation standards for both education and agencies; (2) the significant influence of professionalism, impact of interns and experiential learning theory; and finally (3) the direct influence of student intern initiative and supervisor perceptions in the provision of guidance and learning opportunities in regards to the development of student intern professional characteristics.

Minimal Influence

National industry accreditation for recreation agencies and educational institutions were assumed to have large influence and a “trickle-down” effect because accreditation dictates both academic and recreation standards. Agency accreditation is a distinguished mark of excellence that affords external recognition of an organization’s commitment to quality and improvement (NRPA, 2010). Accreditation for community recreation agencies measures overall quality of operations, management, services, and programs to the community. An important component of agency accreditation is the qualifications and skills sets of professionals working within the agency. Agencies must prove that staff working within the agency are competent professionals within the recreation field. Professionals working in the field of community recreation must possess strong professional characteristics that enable them to succeed in a “people-centered business.” Research established that a majority of necessary competencies include professional characteristics in areas of leadership, facilitation, communication, politics, and professional

behavior. Industry guidelines are in fact influenced by the opinion of practicing professionals because they reside on the NRPA/COA board of directors that author and regulate industry guidelines. In turn, academic and educational standards are influenced by industry guidelines because educators must prepare students to work successfully in the industry as stipulated by professional guidelines. NRPA accreditation standards for both agencies and educational programs are assumed to influence the development of student professional characteristics because they stipulate guidelines and standards of recreation benchmarks and education, and in turn, have the power to influence internship supervisor choices of behavior and actions.

This study found that industry accreditation guidelines only have a minimal influence on supervisor's perceptions of their role in the development of student professional characteristics. The study showed no evidence of a connection between supervisors concern regarding accreditation standards and daily decisions or perceptions. National academic accreditation standards dictate requirements of internship minimal length and hours for students graduating from an accredited educational program, but does not include a list of specific opportunities, programs or relationships that must be offered or established. The categorization of "minimal influence" is supported by research that shows disagreement between recreation practitioners and recreation faculty regarding the priority and weight of CAPRA/NRPA academic accreditation standards and curriculum (Longsdorf, 2004). The study also suggested that because internship supervisors are not trained as educators, are not a part of the recreation education program from which they receive student interns, and do not self-identify their roles within the internship process as educators, that educational accreditation standards play little if any role in supervisors' influence on the development of student intern professional characteristics.

Significant Influence

This study also demonstrated support of the inclusion of community recreation agencies, experiential learning theory, professionalism and impact of interns as significant influences. The middle circle of the model represents significant influences regarding supervisors' impact on the development of student intern professional characteristics.

Professionalism as an influence first includes this study's demonstration of supervisors' support of identified important industry characteristics in the field of community recreation. Professional characteristics identified by supervisors match standards recognized by the National Recreation and Parks Association, California Parks and Recreation Society, and in recreation literature (CPRS, 2008; Hurd, 2001; Jamieson, 1987; Martin et al., 2009; NRPA, 2004; Smale & Frisby, 1992; Weber et al., 1999). Community recreation agencies themselves were also thought to act as important influences because of their power to control and direct the actual internship experience and because they were assumed to act as the filter and catalyst for industry standards, guidelines and educational curriculum/practices. While this study found that agency's have a small influence, the concept of professionalism was more clearly supported in this study by supervisors who stated their desire to support the field by contributing to the development of young professionals who demonstrate characteristics such as passion, advocacy, flexibility, dedication professional development, self-awareness and networking. The agencies themselves are included under the professionalism label because this study found that supervisor desire to support professionalism had a greater influence on supervisor perceptions than agency filters alone.

Experiential learning is also represented as significant in the conceptual model. Experiential learning is a multi-faceted approach to learning that incorporates both knowledge

and experience with the process of reflection and conceptualization. Experiential learning is based on a cycle of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. Experiential learning models are commonly used to help structure experience-based training and education programs (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Student internships are purposely designed as experience-based training. Experiential learning in the model is represented as a significant influence that impacts educational strategies because the distinctive contribution of the internship is experience combined with academic preparation. Academic accreditation by COA regulates not only curricular areas, but a minimum number of experience and internship hours. One of the seven professional competencies included in educational criteria specifically states that student must experience an internship consisting of “full-time continuing experience in one appropriate professional recreation organization/agency of at least 400 clock hours over an extended period of time, not less than 10 weeks” (NRPA, 2010, p. 16). The COA recognizes the professional student internship as an integral component of undergraduate education in the development of community recreation professionals.

The model reflects the finding that experiential learning theory was supported as a significant influence on supervisors. Supervisors demonstrated support of experiential learning through their self-identified roles as *challenging advisors*, the opportunities supervisors offered to interns, and supervisors’ perceptions of the importance of longer internships to allow a full-cycle of experiential learning incorporating action, reflection, internalization, and transformation. Lewin argued the importance of making intentional connections for learners between themselves and their environments to eliminate the habit of treating them as if they function independently from one another. Lewin encouraged learning environments that promote challenge because he believed the pursuit of developed understanding required that people learn in a realistic

environment that presented true-life problems (1999). Experiential learning theory is categorized as a significant influence on supervisors' contributions to the development of student professional characteristics because supervisors demonstrated support for experiential learning in this study through their decisions, discussions and actions.

Impact is also represented in this model as significant. This study has suggested that supervisors may be more likely to both work with interns and make intentional choices regarding their roles because of the perception that students contribute positively to supervisors personal and professional lives. This study found that supervisors enjoyed the chance to share their opinions, values, thoughts, experience, and advice. Supervisors also acknowledged a possible negative impact that poor performance by a student could negatively affect their own professional reputation or the reputation of the agency in which they worked. This could cause supervisors or agencies to reconsider working with interns, that said, this study found the majority of supervisors felt the positive impact outweighed any risks. However, both positive and negative perceptions regarding the impact of working with interns may influence supervisors' motivations, actions and choices in the development of student professional characteristics and so it was added to the model.

Direct Influence

The inner circle of the model represents direct influences on student development of professional characteristics and contains supervisor perceptions and student initiative. Another conclusion drawn from this study is supervisors' perception of the importance for student interns to develop the capacity, willingness and passion to take responsibility for their own professional development and learning. The majority of supervisors expressed that student interns did not take enough initiative or make enough effort to promote their own development.

If supervisors believe students need to become more proactive in their own professional development, it may influence supervisors' motivation and approach regarding the development of student professional characteristics. Student initiative is included in the conceptual model as either a benefit or a barrier to a supervisors influence in the development of student professional characteristics.

Internship supervisors hold a great deal of power regarding internship experiences because they bridge a gap between recreation educators and recreation professionals. This study concluded that supervisors' self-identified role as *challenging advisors* has demonstrated a connection between the way supervisors perceive their roles and the opportunities they offer student interns. This study also concluded that supervisors feel a minimum of 20-30 weeks of full-time experience is necessary to effectively develop needed industry professional characteristics such as communication, self-awareness, passion, being able to relate to diverse groups of people, credibility, and flexibility. Supervisors, not the educators who depend on internships to develop professional characteristics in students, are the on-site professionals who manage, schedule, advise, teach and evaluate student interns (Vogel et al., 2004). This intimate position gives supervisors a great deal of influence over the development of student intern professional characteristics and is the reason "supervisor perceptions" are the center and most direct influence in the conceptual model.

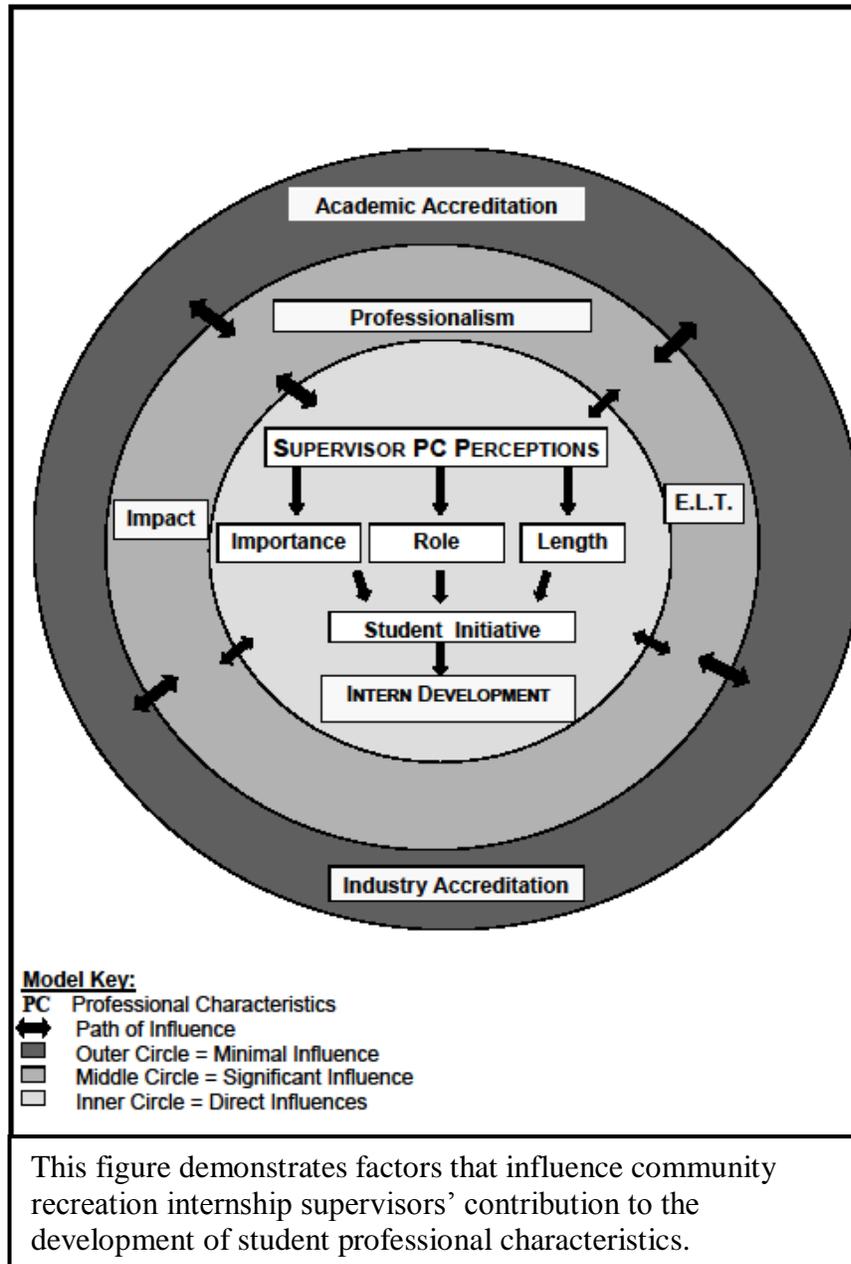


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed findings regarding how fifteen community recreation internship supervisors interpreted their roles in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Supervisors identified professional characteristics that could be developed

during internships such as communication, passion, the ability to related to diverse groups of people, and flexibility. This finding informed the first research question presented in this study which questioned how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of the development of professional characteristics for students who wish to work in the field of community recreation.

The second, third and fourth sections of this chapter informed the second research question which questioned how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Section two presented opportunities supervisor's discussed providing that helped students develop professional characteristics including involvement in program services, mentoring/advising sessions, networking, and personal challenge. Supervisors also reported a need for student interns to take more responsibility for their education and learning opportunities in order to ensure the best possible learning experiences. The third section highlighted findings including supervisor's perceptions of their role as advisors and intentionality with their roles. The majority of supervisors reported that while they participate in the education of student interns, they considered themselves "advisors" rather than educators. Supervisors reported intentionally choosing opportunities for interns they thought would contribute to the development of professional characteristics. The final section that related to supervisors perception of their roles presented supervisors perceptions regarding the impact of student intern performance on the development of student professional characteristics. Supervisors expected student interns to not only learn from their experience, but to also bring knowledge and energy to the agency. Some supervisors expressed concerns related to the possible relationship between intern performance and personal or agency reputation. Supervisors

were concerned that poor performance on behalf of student interns would reflect negatively on their own professional credibility or that of the agency for which they interned.

The fifth section of this chapter informed the third research question which questioned how internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of internship length when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional characteristics. The majority of supervisors agreed that a minimum of 20 weeks, but preferably 30 weeks of full-time experience was necessary in order to give students the opportunity to experience a full cycle of programming, the flexibility to work in multiple departments with various professionals, and the ability to process and internalize professional characteristics.

The final section of this highlighted the conceptual model that guided the study. The following chapter will present interpretations and conclusions of findings of the study as well as implications for practice.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the overarching conclusions that emerged from interviews with fifteen community recreation internship supervisors, internship supervisor evaluations, university internship agreements, industry accreditation guidelines, industry professional certification documents, and various community recreation agency student internship documents. First, a summary of the research study and results are presented. Second, interpretations and conclusions of collected data are discussed. Third, implications are presented. Finally, the fourth section presents suggested recommendations for future research.

Summary of Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpreted their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in regards to the development of student intern professional characteristics. Additionally, this study addressed how internship supervisors perceive the importance of length of student internship in relationship to student development of personal characteristics. The following research questions informed this study:

1. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of the development of professional characteristics for students who wish to work in the field of community recreation?
2. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics?
3. How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the importance of internship length when considering a students' opportunity to develop professional skills?

Results of this study suggested that community recreation professionals identified communication, self-awareness, passion, the ability to relate with a diverse population of people, credibility, and flexibility as important characteristics that contribute to professional success. The study also identified supervisors' perceptions of the opportunities offered students interns to develop professional characteristics; the roles supervisor's self- identified in student intern development; and the impact of the presence of student interns on staff and the agency in which they worked. Finally, the study indicated that supervisors felt that a minimum of 20 weeks, preferably 30 weeks of full-time internship experience was necessary in order for students to process, internalize and develop professional characteristics.

Discussion of Interpretations and Conclusions

Recreation practitioners and educators establish education accreditation guidelines, agency accreditation guidelines, and certifications that promote professional characteristics. While neither party lacks desire to develop student professional characteristics and all parties desire the same outcome, there is a large gap of communication, expectations and knowledge. Recreation practitioners and educators have not clarified who is responsible, how those involved in the internship process define their roles, and strategies applied or assumed to be applied in the process of student professional characteristics development.

A number of key findings pertaining to the development of student professional characteristics were presented earlier in chapter four. In this section, eight overlying conclusions are discussed. Conclusions relating to the study's first research question focused on the importance supervisors placed on professional characteristics included student communication and advocacy; student initiative; passion for the profession; and influential characteristics. Conclusions relating to the second research question focused on how supervisors interpret their

roles in providing guidance and opportunities that influence the development of student professional characteristics included internship project focus; supervisor's self-identification as "challenging advisors;" and the overall positive impact of student interns. The third research question focused on internship length. The final conclusion details the need for longer internships to better develop student intern professional characteristics.

Communication and Advocacy

Recreation professionals not only work in a person-centered environment, but work in teams and coordinate with outside volunteers, vendors, customers, and stakeholders on a daily basis. The need for effective communication in the form of interpersonal communication and advocacy was identified and was also found to be an important influence on industry characteristics identified by supervisors including passion, being able to relate with diverse groups of people, and flexibility. All of these characteristics require professionals to have the ability to communicate a vision, philosophy, motivation or need. Recreation professionals need the ability to communicate the benefits of community recreation services to participants and policy-decision making bodies. Community recreation benefits that need to be communicated include stronger community connections for families and businesses, increased resident health, increased property values, lower crime rates, increased relocation of families/businesses to communities, increased academic performance, reduction of personal stress, increased self-esteem and self confidence, and increased tourism (Crompton, 1999; Crompton, 2000; MRPA, 2010; & NRPA, 2010). Recreation professionals need to have the ability to communicate the tie between benefits to the return on investment of monies spent on services to participants, taxpayers, sponsors, funders and potential future stakeholders.

This study indicated that supervisors were satisfied with day-to-day interpersonal communication demonstrated by student interns. However, supervisors noted students' ability to advocate as unsatisfactory and expressed the need for student internship learning outcomes to include the development of advocacy characteristics. Community recreation advocates spent a large amount of time speaking with and presenting to potential supporters or partners such as policy-making boards, local businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, commercial recreation businesses, health care providers, fire and police, civil service organizations and many others. Supervisors placed significant importance on students' ability to act as advocates for themselves, the field, department or services. While the concept of advocacy is supported in industry and educational standards (CPRS, 2008; NRPA, 2004 & 2010), student demonstration of advocacy characteristics are not emphasized within current recreation internship learning outcomes.

Supervisors connected students' abilities to advocate with other important characteristics such as passion and networking. Supervisor I demonstrated this by encouraging students to be "willing to share passion with other staff with the goal of motivating them to also embrace the importance of recreation." The development of partnerships and coordination with other community agencies depended on professionals in the field who not only understand why networking was important, but were comfortable and effective doing so. A large part of advocacy involved the development of relationships with other professionals, community members, sponsors, vendors and other stakeholders. Supervisors expressed the need for recreation practitioners and educators to recognize the importance of developing students' ability to act as professional advocates. Young professionals need to develop their abilities and commitments to advocating in their communities during their formal education. Internships

offered safe, realistic learning environments that allowed students to observe other professionals in their roles as advocates, to begin to understand the culture and importance of advocacy in the community recreation field, and to train as advocates themselves. Experiential learning contends that learning is a continuous process of applied experience, reflection, the formation of conceptual thought and internalization (Kolb, 1984; Lewin, 1999). The concepts of internships, like experiential learning, are based upon the importance of applied experience in the process of learning.

Student Initiative

As learned in this study, student interns need to develop the capacity, willingness and passion to take responsibility for their own professional development and learning. Supervisors felt that students did not demonstrate enough self-initiative and waited for others to present opportunities to them, instead of actively seeking them out for themselves. While supervisors supported experiential learning theory and specifically Kelley and Rasey's seven characteristics of learning (1952, p. 34), supervisors did not see those qualities reflected in student behaviors. Supervisors did not believe that students possessed the capacity for self-motivated growth, nor did supervisors believe students effectively directed their own involvement in learning opportunities. Instead, supervisors commented that students did not attempt to identify development opportunities and did not develop their own inherent knowledge or process knowledge learned through experience unless they were prompted to do so by someone else. Kelley and Rasey believed that man is built through his ability to self-improve through trial and experience (1952, p. 23). While CAPRA educational outcome assessment standards require students to "understand the importance of maintaining professional competence and the available resources" (2004, p. 10), this study is the first to identify internship supervisors concern for

students within that capacity. Supervisors expressed the need for students to take more responsibility for initiating opportunities in which they could develop professional characteristics. Supervisors felt students needed to demonstrate initiative and a willingness to learn by asking questions and actively seeking new experiences.

Community recreation professionals are expected to serve the diverse recreation and leisure needs of the public. Providing quality services requires that professionals continuously find new creative programs, solutions to problems, and constantly seek feedback from the people whom they serve. Staying ahead of trends and producing programs/services for such a diverse population demands self-initiative and a willingness to constantly develop as a professional and seek new information. Community recreation professionals cannot simply regurgitate the same program or services. Offerings must be constantly updated, changed or created to meet the growing and changing recreation and leisure needs of the public. This is reflected in Martin et al.'s study of professional competencies in sport and recreation students that identified enthusiastic participation, self sufficiency, initiative, and ability and willingness to learn as important requirements for employability (2009, p.4). When recreation students participate in their internships they are expected to behave as professionals and demonstrate progress in character development. The purpose of internships is to give students opportunities to demonstrate professional characteristics in a realistic work environment. Supervisors felt students needed to demonstrate the same initiative expected of professionals during their academic training and internship experience.

Supervisors' belief that students need to become more proactive in their own professional development may influence a recreation professional's willingness to supervise interns or how they self-identify during a student's internship experience. These findings indicate that

internship experiences need to require that students assume a higher level of responsibility for their own learning.

Passion for the Profession

Community recreation professionals have a calling to improve the quality of people's lives and to improve the climate of communities by serving constituents' recreation and leisure needs. While the profession is rewarding, the downside includes odd hours, diverse expectations, the necessity to multi-task and juggle numerous responsibilities, and the responsibility to manage full-time, part-time, seasonal and volunteer staff. Community recreation professionals work in a human service industry that is customer driven and publicly funded. Service must be provided with a positive attitude and a smile. Passion, love for the profession and an intrinsic belief in its value are essential. Community recreation programs financially depend on public taxes, donations, grants, and usage fees paid by participants (Coles, 2000; Edginton et al., 2006). Community recreation professionals must have the ability to not only communicate their own passion for the benefits of the profession, but motivate others passion to support its existence. Over half of supervisors in this study supported the finding that recreation professionals must not only possess passion for their work, but be able to communicate it to staff, participants and stakeholders to be successful (Smale & Frisby, 1990). Student interns, as practicing and developing professionals were expected by professionals to demonstrate passion for the profession.

Passion also links to other concepts identified by supervisors as professional characteristics students interns need to develop such as advocacy, student initiative, the ability to relate to diverse groups of people, communication, and networking. Passion encompasses concepts of motivation and deep appreciation for the value/benefit of community recreation with

the ability to communicate it to others. Passion was identified as an important characteristic in a community recreation professionals' ability to self-motivate and advocate to others the benefits of recreation in their pursuit to manage staff and volunteers, recruit participants, and develop relationships. Supervisors felt recreation interns needed to be a part of the community for which they worked and to understand the needs, desires, passions, talents and challenges of the people for whom they were serving. Supervisors also felt that demonstration by interns of true passion or affection for the people whom they serve was crucial. No one person can be a perfect professional, but the majority of supervisors agreed that passion makes up for other inadequacies.

Influential Characteristics

Industry characteristics identified by supervisors, that have the ability to influence the development of other characteristics, include the ability to relate to diverse groups of people, self-awareness and the ability to be flexible. A professional working in community recreation works in a face-to-face "people business." Community recreation professionals must genuinely like interacting with a variety of people. A student's ability to work effectively people may influence their professional development by (1) the choice/choices of projects they choose to complete; (2) communication and their ability or desire to advocate for their participants and community members; (3) their own initiative to learn and succeed in a human service in which they may not be comfortable; (4) demonstration of passion in a people-centered industry; (5) the relationship with their supervisor/ supervisor role; (6) their impact on the people, programs, and culture of the agency; and (7) the amount of time they will be willing to invest in their own development.

Supervisors identified self-awareness as an important professional characteristic. In order to develop as a professional, students must have the ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, to accept and process feedback, and the capacity to motivate themselves. A student's level of self-awareness could affect (1) the amount, variety, or complexity of opportunities offered to them during their internship; (2) communication and their ability or desire to advocate for their participants and community members; (3) the relationship with their supervisor/ supervisor role; (4) their impact on the people, programs, and culture of the agency; and (5) the amount of time they will be willing to invest in their own development.

The provision of community recreation services is accomplished through a variety of different organizational formats, and because these services span a variety of environments, people, needs and objectives students preparing to work in the field must develop flexibility. A student's ability to be flexible could affect (1) the amount, variety, or complexity of opportunities offered to them during their internship; (2) the number of people willing to work with them due to their level of scope and adaptability; (3) the amount of responsibility or trust given them by current professionals; and (4) the impact they have on the people, programs and culture of the agency.

Internship Project Focus

Supervisors expressed concern that because most education programs include a culminating individual project as a large part of student intern's final grade, students were too narrowly focused and not giving themselves the opportunity to experience everything the internship had to offer. The majority of supervisors expressed the need for students to have various experiences during their internships. Supervisors believed students needed to develop

flexibility, networking, understanding of culture, to learn how to accept criticism and feedback, and to observe advocacy and passion as demonstrated by multi professionals in multiple settings.

Internships, as a type of experiential learning, are inherently designed with the purpose to allow experience to guide the process of learning. Kolb and Kolb (2008) contend that the way individuals process the possibilities of each new experience determines the range of choices and decisions. The choices and decisions made to some extent, determine events and influence future choices. Thus, people create themselves through the choice of actual occasions through which they live (2008, p. 3). Student interns need to be encouraged to seek and participate in a variety of experiences, programs, activities and objectives during their internship instead of putting too much emphasis on one culminating project. Community recreation standards, literature, and now this study supports the need for community recreation professionals to demonstrate the ability to multi-task, interact with various groups of people, to be flexible, to develop a strong network, and to be able to communicate and advocate with diverse groups for numerous purposes (Busser & Bannon, 1987; Hurd, 2001; Jamieson, 1987; NRPA, 2010; Smale & Frisby, 1992). Experiential learners experience a journey through [a range of] learning spaces which have the power to define experience and thus define personal “reality” and knowledge. Internships as experiential learning spaces supports ELT theory that person and environment are interdependent variables and that educators need to help student intentionally tie them together in order for real learning to take place (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2008; Lewin, 1999). Internships are meant to introduce and expose students to the field of community recreation, not just one component or service area. Students need a range of experiences that reflect the real working world of community recreation. When students put too much focus on one project or outcome

they run the risk of missing out on other opportunities, thus limiting their capacity to develop essential professional characteristics.

Supervisor Roles

The purpose of recreation, parks and leisure education is to develop service professionals with the competencies necessary to become successful recreation providers. In the recreation industry, assumptions that students are not fully prepared for a full-time job until they go through a culminating internship exist (Hurd & Schlatter, 2007). As a result, internship experiences were required for all accredited parks and recreation education programs for over thirty years (NRPA/AALR Council on Accreditation, 2004). The purpose of internships is to provide a planned transition from the classroom to the job because internships are a natural bridge between college and the work world (Brooks & Greene, 1998; Coco, 2000).

Many academic recreation programs depend on internship experiences and the participation of internship supervisors to help students develop and refine professional characteristics. Supervisors reported minimal communication between academic faculty and themselves regarding supervisor skills and experience supervising interns, motivation for working with interns, beliefs about professional characteristics, and expectations related to the student's internship experience. This study showed that while the majority of internship agreement documents contained learning objectives for student interns, very few contain direct language regarding supervisor responsibilities, roles or expectations. The lack of communication and training between recreation faculty and recreation practitioners has resulted in a gap between perceptions of educational needs, outcomes, and roles of internship supervisors (Longsdorf, 2004).

The results of this study indicate that internship supervisors self-identify as *advisors* and *role models*. While supervisors acknowledged their participation in an educational experience for students, they did not identify as *educators*. Internship supervisors were not trained as educators, nor were they a part of the recreation education program from which they received student interns. While supervisors understood the purpose of the internship was to develop and educate students as part of their formal education, supervisors also viewed interns as additions to their staff. Instead of relating to an overall educational outcome and self-identifying as *educators*, supervisors self-identified in relation to their daily interactions with students. As recreation practitioners, supervisors advised students in a similar manner as they would new or young staff, which may in turn influenced their self-identified roles as *advisors*.

All supervisors reported engaging in advising sessions with interns and described these sessions as opportunities to touch base with interns regarding project status and to give feedback. A large majority of supervisors also used the time to discuss student life/career goals, visions, future plans and motivation. As practitioners, supervisors indicated the desire to lead by example and use meeting times with students to discuss student actions and behavior choices. The supervisor's role as an advisor was defined more by opportunities for discussion that focused on processing of feelings, confidence and culture rather than logistics and job tasks. This study demonstrated that supervisors embrace the concept of experiential learning as a process whereby development and learning is created through a combination of applied experience, reflection, and transformation (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Learning theorists argue that skills learned only in a classroom are not parallel to real-life application (Dewey, 1916; Kelley, 2004; Lewin, 1999; Piaget, 1976). Through their approaches and actions, supervisors supported the concept of people learn best when thought is challenged through application to concrete

experiences (Lewin, 1999). Instead of just telling interns what they should do regarding skills or behaviors, as practitioners, supervisors identified with the opportunity to offer students real-life experience and “teachable moments.”

Interestingly, supervisors also used the term *challenge* when discussing opportunities they offered interns. The majority of supervisors’ intentionally created experiences void of direction in order to push students outside of their comfort zones. Supervisors identified challenging students as an opportunity intentionally created to professionally develop students. As a result of his research, Lewin encouraged learning environments that promote inter-personal challenge because he believed people must interact in a realistic environment that presented true-life problems and decision-making requirements in the pursuit of developed understanding. He believed it inadequate to learn in isolation that did not allow for “applied experience, the generation of abstract thought and the evaluation of consequences” (1999, p. 261). Supervisor’s expressed that their responsibility was to guide students through their decisions and choices and to create the most realistic environment possible by placing them in situations that create some challenge and uncertainty. Supervisor’s intentions were to push students outside of their comfort zones and sometimes let them fail in a safe environment where they could reflect and learn from mistakes, in order to prepare them for higher expectations and consequences when they hold professional positions in the field. Community recreation intern supervisors not only support the experiential learning process through their approach to working with interns, but also self-identify as *challenging advisors*. Identifying that practitioners approach their roles as *challenging advisors* will help educators clarify supervisors’ expectations and better prepare students for their internships.

The role supervisor's play and the consequential experiences they provide significantly impact the quality of the internship and learning outcomes for students. Until this study, community recreation faculty responsible for designing educational programs and internship guidelines/requirements did not have information regarding how supervisors perceived or approached their role in this process. Understanding supervisors perceptions of their roles as *challenging advisors* in the development of student professional characteristics helps fill in the gap of missing information between recreation educators and supervisors, which may in turn, help improve internship experiential learning outcomes. This study has demonstrated a connection between the way supervisors perceive their roles and the opportunities they offer student interns, therefore, recreation education programs should improve their communication regarding the roles, expectations and approaches that all parties involved in the internship processes play.

Impact of Interns

The second research question in this study focused on building understanding regarding how internship supervisors interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Supervisors' perceptions of student impact could either positively or negatively affect supervisors' attitudes and approaches in the guidance of the development of student professional characteristics. Supervisor perceptions of students' impact may influence professional's motivation to work with interns, how supervisors self-identify their role and what opportunities supervisors may or may not offer to students. Community recreation faculty and internship coordinators need to communicate more effectively with internship supervisors to gage their perceptions of intern impact.

Based on the findings, this study suggests that while working with student interns involves some risk, interns have an overall positive impact on the supervisors with whom they work. The majority of supervisors commented that they enjoyed knowing that they had an opportunity to teach students and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the field through helping to develop new professionals. The majority of supervisors also shared their belief that the internship experience and working with professionals were important parts of student's educational experiences and that without the internship, students would not be prepared.

Supervisor J commented:

I think it's important that they have those characteristics or they have the willingness and the ability to learn them. Because we all know you don't go into a field having all those tools. But I think the internship gives you that, that possibility and ability to learn those skills more and us the ability to teach them what we know.

Interns impact supervisors both professionally and personally. Interns' tendencies to bring energy, excitement, fresh ideas and new knowledge was a positive contribution to community recreation agencies. Supervisors enjoyed the chance to share their opinions, values, thoughts, experience, and advice. What concerned supervisors was the possibility that poor performance by a student could negatively affect their own professional reputation or the reputation of the agency in which they worked. However, supervisors concerns regarding their reputation were not significant enough to negate the positive impact of interns.

Length of Internship

CAPRA/NRPA (2004) accreditation requirements for RPL education programs stipulate a minimum of a 10 week - 40 hour per week internship, but this study concluded that internship supervisors believed students were more likely to build professional characteristics in an

internship that lasted longer than 15 weeks. The majority of participants supported an internship with 30 weeks of full-time experience. Supervisors supported a longer internship time frame because they believed more time enabled students the opportunity to experience and work in various departments or programs of community recreation. Community recreation programs tend to be seasonal in nature and planning for programs takes place months before implementation. Supervisors viewed longer internships as providing better opportunities for students to become fully engrained into a process from start to finish. Supervisors perceived this follow-through as important in the development of professional characteristics because students process not only the logistics, but more importantly the communication, relationships, networks, advocacy and the culture of agencies/departments.

Supervisors identified passion and networking as important professional characteristics and believed developing these characteristics was more pronounced with a longer internship timeframe. The California Parks and Recreation Society identified “the use of relationships and partnerships to accomplish goals... through self-awareness, giving feedback, and personal support” as competencies needed to succeed in the field of recreation (2008, p. 54). These characteristics drive potential for growth and success in people-centered environments such as the field of recreation where success depends on how people relate and negotiate with each other, their environments and the consequences of their reactions, behavior or decisions. Supervisor E gave this example:

To really get a true result I'd feel more comfortable if I had somebody for a [school] year...because I think sometimes when interns [begin to] groom a relationship and they leave too soon [I wonder] “how are they doing in that relationship?” Because it feels like [with shorter internships] interns move on and don't ever have that relationship

afterwards. But...we have a different relationship with 30 week [interns]...I can see [interns] continuing their relationships with [staff and professionals] but less than 15 weeks? Poof they are done because they cut off the professional resource network too soon. I don't think any of that [networking] continues. Which is fine, people do go on, but creating your network of professional colleagues? I can see that connection with [interns] here for 30 weeks and those relationships continuing.

Supervisors believed extended internships allowed for enhanced development of professional characteristics. This conclusion relates the discrepancy between educators and practitioners regarding critical educational standards undergraduates need to become successful professionals (Longsdorf, 2004).

Implications for Professional Application

The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics. This study expanded understanding regarding how recreation educators and practitioners can improve learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics and better educate students. The following section presents implications for professional application including advocacy training for students, increased student initiative, fostering passion in students, development of influential characteristics, multiple evenly-weighted internship projects, acknowledgement of the impact of interns, and increased requirements for minimum length of internships.

Advocacy Training for Students

The survival of nonprofit community recreation agencies depends on the ability of professionals to effectively advocate for community recreation and the people they serve. Recreation education programs, including both degree and industry professional development opportunities need to increase offerings to develop advocacy skills. While the concept of the necessity for recreation professionals to be skilled as advocates is supported through national standards in both university curriculum and professional certification, more training and education is needed for new, young professionals.

National and state community recreation associations need to create and promote professional development programs that specifically focus on advocacy for the field. National and state conferences should offer sessions and continuing education credit for sessions that focus on current issues/topics crucial for promoting benefits of services, communication strategies that promote advocacy, and training in personal advocacy approaches such as public speaking, motivation outlines, and interpersonal and public communication. Supervisor C commented “the fact that I’ve spent one of the 100%’s of my time at community meetings and advocating trying to create that connection... That was something that I hadn’t had to do when I first got into the field.” Current professionals must obtain, retain, and model advocacy characteristics – especially when working with student interns whom they are advising and transforming into the field.

Community recreation educators need to increase emphasis on the development of concepts and skills of advocacy in their curriculum. Many education programs require students to participate in classroom projects that promote concepts of advocacy such as issues presentations and papers, the formation of vision and mission statements for the profession, and

to observe publicly conducted meetings. However, supervisors that work with student interns believed a higher level of intentionality regarding advocacy needs to be incorporated. Internship programs should require students to demonstrate involvement with advocacy of community recreation programs or services. Student intern involvement in advocacy pieces such as conducting community meetings, stakeholder presentations, designing/producing media campaigns and facilitating staff/volunteer trainings regarding service benefits should be included as required objectives in all internship agreements/contracts.

Community recreation graduation requirements should stipulate undergraduate involvement and a minimum amount of work or volunteer hours with local, regional, state or national associations' advocacy campaigns before students begin their internship experience. This could be accomplished and monitored through academic credit or graduation requirements and facilitated through involvement with student organizations, as student members of professional associations or as volunteers with local recreation programs.

Another approach to build advocacy skills in students interns could be required student membership and active participation in both a university-based student recreation association and larger regional/state/national professional recreation association. Exposure to and participation in these associations would promote networking and enable students to witness and participate in advocacy related activities with current professionals. Recreation associations also provide educational workshops, research, and literature regarding current issues and needs related to community recreation which is necessary for effective advocacy. Student discounts for individual memberships are offered by almost every association and national and state branches could consider a group membership for student organizations or groups.

One education program at a university in the Midwest has instituted a graduation requirement that students must sit for the “Certified Park & Recreation Professional” (CPRP) exam in the final semester of their program. Among other reasons for this requirement, faculty from this institution felt the emphasis on advocacy in the exam materials and the necessity to network with professionals at educational/professional development sessions to remain certified would encourage future industry communication, passion, networking and advocacy. All students earning community recreation degrees from accredited university programs should be required to sit for the CPRP exam.

Increase Student Initiative

Providing quality services requires that professionals continuously step outside the box, find new creative programs, solutions to problems and constantly seek feedback from the people whom they serve. Staying ahead of trends and producing programs and services for diverse population’s demands self-initiative and a willingness to constantly develop as a professional and seek new information. Community recreation professionals cannot simply regurgitate the same program or services over and over again. Offerings must be constantly updated, changed or created to meet the growing and changing recreation and leisure needs of the public. Students must increase their ability to self-motivate and initiate their own development as professionals.

Students should be required to develop specific learning objectives focused on the development of professional characteristics before they interview for internship placement. Students can work with university faculty advisors and internship advisors to identify a list of professional characteristic strengths and weakness. An assessment tool such as the Recreation Management Competency Assessment (RCMA) could be applied to assess student preparedness in relation to their awareness of and ability to demonstrate professional characteristics in

professional internships (Hurd & Schlatter, 2007). The pre, during and post test model requires that students take the RMCA and discuss the results with their academic internship advisor so that students have a better understanding regarding expectations of performance and behavior of their internship experience. Students could use knowledge gained from an assessment tool such as the RCMA to identify strengths, weaknesses and develop learning objectives. Once identified, students could specify specific types of opportunities they would like to experience during their internship to promote/strengthen professional characteristics. Internship agreements should contain a blank section that is negotiated and completed by the prospective internship advisor and student intern. Students should also be required to identify professional development opportunities in which they will participate during their internship. Active participation in professional development opportunities should be included as a graded project experience. A portion of internship evaluations should reflect student interns' willingness, ability, and demonstration of learning initiative.

Foster Passion in Students

Those involved in the education of community recreation professionals need to foster passion. Recreation educators often emphasize that students should choose a career in community recreation based on their desire to make an impact and the rewards of the profession beyond their earned salary. The challenges of the profession include odd hours, diverse expectations, the necessity to multi-task and juggle numerous responsibilities, and the responsibility to manage full-time, part-time, seasonal and volunteer staff. Supervisors believed that performance outcomes were higher quality from professionals and interns who demonstrated passion than from individuals who did not demonstrate passion.

Passion is not something that comes falsely or can be taught. Passion is a feeling that can only be identified and encouraged. However, the expression of passion as a professional characteristic can be demonstrated through professional choices and behavior. Passion can be demonstrated by the way professionals communicate during staff trainings, community presentations, strategic planning, program facilitation, and daily interaction with customers. Therefore, recreation educators and intern supervisors must learn how to identify passion in potential future professionals, cultivate that passion and encourage students to exhibit passion in a variety of situations, environments and relationships.

Students also need to take the initiative to learn about the expression of passion from the demonstration of professionals, recreation faculty, and applied experiences. Participation in regional, state and national recreation conferences should be graduation or internship requirements as they may influence students' level of passion for the field because of the exposure conferences offer students to professionals, other students, speakers, programs, education workshops. Passion may also be encouraged through volunteer hours working in recreation agencies interacting with participants and benefactors of services, undergraduate class projects and student involvement with recreation organizations.

Development of Influential Characteristics

Educational faculty and academic program advisors need to be very clear with potential students that the community recreation industry is a human-service industry that demands high levels of interaction with customers, stakeholders and the public. Emphasis regarding the importance of positive interaction with various groups of people needs to be included in all advising sessions and course discussions. Students should be required to volunteer in various community recreation settings that necessitate interaction with various customers, staff, and

stakeholders. Students need to understand their own capacity and level of desire regarding frequent personal interaction.

Educational faculty and intern supervisors must provide opportunities for students to discuss performance/work evaluations and strategies for improvement. Students need to become comfortable with feedback, understand how to process it, learn how to communicate appropriate responses, and implement action. Evaluation tools and strategies in both academic settings and internships should include components that require students to evaluate their own performances and projects. Self-evaluations should require students to develop action plans, strategies, and identify self-motivations to promote self-awareness and student achievement.

Educational faculty must also require students' mastery of organizational strategies and tools in program curriculum. Internships should include work in a variety of environments and programs that provide students realistic experiences of the demands that require them to be flexible and adaptable. Educators, professionals, and students need too not only identify as a *people person* and demonstrate flexibility, but to also understand how all professional characteristics influence the development of the other.

Multiple Evenly-Weighted Internship Projects

Community recreation faculty need to incorporate internship requirements for multiple projects instead of weighting one project as a substantial percentage of the internship grade. Internship experiences should require equally-weighted multiple projects in numerous settings that promote the development of crucial professional development skills identified in this study such as advocacy, networking, flexibility, passion, and educational initiative. Internship requirements should stipulate involvement in learning opportunities such as multi-department work assignments, attendance at conferences, active involvement on a professional association

committee, community presentations, program facilitation, and volunteer/staff training. Experiential learning opportunities are meant to provide real-life experiences and teachable moments. Community recreation professionals never have the option to focus on just one large project or area of responsibility and this study suggests that we should not be training interns to do so.

Increase Communication

This study, as well as the literature, supports the necessity to increase intentional and direct communication in order to close the gap regarding perceptions of educational needs, expectations and outcomes between recreation faculty advisors and internship supervisors (Beggs & Hurd, 2010; Longsdorf, 2004; Williams, 2004).

First, university faculty need to be clear with internship supervisors regarding expectations for student development of professional characteristics. Recreation educators need to communicate that while the internship is an opportunity to apply hard-skills students have learned in the classroom, they are counting on the internship, as managed by the professional acting as the on-site internship supervisor, to give students opportunities to develop and demonstrate professional characteristics. Both recreation educators and internship supervisors need to understand a supervisors ability to provide opportunities and advising, the realistic amount of time they will be able to commit to internship supervision, and the level of organizational commitment to the development of students, and in this case, the development of professional characteristics.

The majority of internship agreements do not contain language that defines roles and responsibilities beyond learning objectives for students. In order to increase understanding of supervisor, faculty, and student perceptions, all internship contracts should clearly define the

roles of student interns, internship supervisors, and internship faculty advisors. Language should be included that describes roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. A review of agreed upon responsibilities should be conducted by the internship faculty advisor throughout the internship process as part of the overall evaluation process.

Second, recreation faculty need to remember that internship supervisors are not educators, nor do most of them receive any training regarding their role in student internships. Faculty advisors need to become more intentional about communicating the importance of the role supervisor's play as educators during the internship experience. While most university programs have designated faculty advisors that are available as resources for internship supervisor concerns or questions, most of them do not have the time or resources to communicate on a regular, personal basis. University internship programs need to develop, at the minimum, communication strategies to consistently communicate expectations, roles, and tips for effective internship supervision and development.

Ideally, university internship programs should develop an orientation program for new internship supervisors. While it may be challenging for busy community recreation professionals to attend a live training, it would be ideal for them to meet experienced supervisors, other new supervisors, faculty and possibly students. Orientation programs should review expectations, roles, policies, supervision strategies/suggestions, job descriptions, suggestions for providing student opportunities, and other pertinent information. At a minimum, university recreation programs should develop internship supervisor orientation information that could either be hard copy or posted on their department website. Approved internship supervisors could receive authorization to benefit from an interactive website. The website could offer information such as example forms they will be expected to use, internship agreements,

internship placement data bases, contact information of other current or past professionals who had supervised interns willing to mentor or advise new supervisors, and discussion boards.

Recreation faculty could implement a similar online approach to highlight updates of major curriculum covered, curriculum changes, overviews of student projects, and other information pertinent to the development of student professional characteristics. Other strategies to promote communication and training for internship supervisors could include written materials, email newsletters, and conference workshops or round tables developed by recreation faculty and/or professional recreation associations as a way to support the development of future and practicing recreation professionals.

Acknowledgement of the Impact of Interns

Community recreation faculty and internship coordinators need to communicate more effectively to monitor internship supervisor perceptions of intern impact. This information should be used to promote agency and supervisor participation, encourage the development of relationships between interns and supervisors, and motivate students to more readily express their passion and proactively demonstrate their talents and skills.

Recreation educators and recreation professionals need to intentionally communicate the positive impact of student interns because impact may influence recreation professionals motivation to work with interns, how supervisors self-identify their role and what opportunities supervisors may or may not offer to students. Intern supervisor perceptions, stories, and recommendations should be documented and shared with other internship supervisors, recreation faculty, industry professionals and students.

The National Recreation and Park Association should also further acknowledge the importance of internship supervisor contribution to the field by allowing certified recreation

professionals to earn continuing education units (CEU's) for internship supervision. Professionals must earn CEU's to renew their certification every two years. Along with attendance at educational conferences and workshops, professionals can currently earn continuing education credits for active participation in state/national committees. Internship supervisors contribute as much, if not more time and significant impact on the industry through the development of new professionals as do professionals active in state/national committees.

Lengthen Internships

Recreation education programs need to extend the minimum length of community recreation internships to 30 weeks/6 month full-time experiences. Recreation educators need to consider the importance they place on internship experiences and make certain timelines substantiate the best chance to produce intended results. Community recreation services tend to be seasonal in nature and programs are planned months before implementation. Community recreation internships must encompass at least one complete cycle of programming in order for students to gain optimal benefits of their learning experience. Internship supervisors need to be very clear in their communication with potential student interns and their faculty advisors regarding their expectations and the learning opportunities they can provide within allotted timeframes. Students need to communicate their strengths and weaknesses so that faculty advisors and internship supervisors can consider the timeframe needed to develop professional characteristics.

The Council on Accreditation for Recreation, Parks Resources and Leisure Services (COA) oversees academic accreditation for institutions of higher learning that award baccalaureate degree programs in recreation, parks and leisure services. COA states that students must experience an internship consisting of "full-time continuing experience in one

appropriate professional recreation organization/agency of at least 400 clock hours over an extended period of time, not less than 10 weeks” (NRPA-COA Criteria, 2004, p. 16). However, this study concluded that recreation professionals working in the field as internship supervisors recommended doubling the requirement of a full-time internship to a minimum of 20 weeks but favored 30 week internships to effectively develop student intern professional characteristics. The COA and academic recreation programs need to revisit their policies governing student internships and extend the minimum length to 30 weeks. One accredited university program does require a 30-week internship program for students earning a degree in community recreation. Universities with minimum internship time requirements should consult with faculty from longer internship programs and examine their curriculum and graduation requirements. By working together, higher education programs and national accreditation boards could increase requirements for internships while maintaining all desired and required educational outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was the first to examine community recreation internship supervisor perceptions regarding their influence on the development of student intern professional characteristics and demonstrates the need for further research of both the influence of internship supervisors on student learning and the development of student intern professional characteristics. This section of the chapter presents potential directions for future research by first addressing limitations of the study and the implications for future research and secondly, discussing additional opportunities for future research.

Revisiting limitations

This study was purposefully delimited to a narrow field of community recreation professionals who participated as internship supervisors in both 15 and 30 week internship programs with one, mid-sized public institution and focused only on community recreation. Supervisors were also required to have worked in the field for a minimum of five years. As a result, a delimitation of this study was the small sample size of internship supervisors. This study should be expanded on a regional, state, and national level to include professionals working with community recreation students from other educational institutions. The study could also stretch outside the scope of community recreation to document or compare internship supervisor perceptions of professional characteristics when working with students from other recreation major concentrations such as commercial and tourism, outdoor, or faith-based.

Another limitation of the study was a lack of diversity regarding gender and race of interviewees. All but two participants appeared to be Caucasian and only one-third of participants were males. Additional studies including a more diverse interview pool is recommended.

This study also only examined supervisors' perceptions of their roles in the development of professional characteristics. Success in the field of community recreation depends largely on student's abilities to master professional characteristics, but interviewees had a hard time focusing on characteristics instead of commenting about hard skills. This is partially due to the fact that no one had ever interviewed professionals regarding their perceptions and experiences as internship supervisors and they appreciated the opportunity to comment and share their perceptions. Focusing on personal skills may have also been a challenge for interviewees because this is a new, intentional area of focus that had not been previously emphasized with

these supervisors. Future inquiries should include a mixed-method approach that first applies a written survey and is then followed up with a personal interview. This would not only help inform and focus interviewees on professional characteristics, but could promote triangulation and credibility.

Opportunities for Additional Research

This study examined community recreation internship supervisor perceptions of their role in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Results of this study indicate a need for additional research and are presented in seven recommendations in the following section.

First, community recreation supervisors tended to self-identify their roles based on the experiential learning opportunities they offered student interns. Recreation educators need to understand how supervisor self-perceptions may affect their actions, choices and intentionality in relation to the provision of a quality internship experience. Further research is recommended to examine the relationship between recreation supervisor self-identification and provided intern experiential learning opportunities.

Second, further inquiry into barriers or motivations influencing community recreation professionals' decision to work with recreation students is needed. While only a minority of supervisors reported a concern for their reputations in relationship to current or future student performance, there is a need for deeper understanding of community recreation supervisor perceptions of intern impact, from both current and past participating supervisors and agencies. Findings could help universities recruit, train and retain supervisors and participating agencies.

Third, additional research should examine the concept of “networking” and “passion” in relation to community recreation student exposure to professional development opportunities.

Supervisors in this study commented on the differences they saw in student interns' passion and motivation after their attendance at a professional conference or workshop. Supervisors contributed the change to the passion, drive and personal connections students witnessed and experienced from interacting with other professionals. Future research regarding the influence of student participation in community recreation professional development is recommended.

Fourth, the concept of *challenging advisors* should be further investigated. Supervisors self-reported as advisors who purposely omitted information and resources or placed student interns into situations that historically presented challenges without warning. Further inquiries regarding the level of intentionality of guidance through absence, how challenge may influence perceptions of positive or negative intern impact and outcomes/perceptions of student interns is recommended.

Fifth, this study concluded that supervisors perceived student interns participating in longer 30 week internships developed stronger professional characteristics than students completing shorter internships. Recreation educators need to further examine the impact of length on the development of professional characteristics when considering the time requirements for student internships. Inquiries regarding student perceptions of the impact of length of internship on their own professional development would also add new information to the field and help reduce the gap of expectations that exists between supervisors, students and faculty.

Sixth, further examinations are needed to increase understanding regarding the impact of the length of community recreation internships on the development of student professional characteristics as well as development of other skill sets. Research regarding the relationship between length of internship and impact on community recreation student development, as well

as other recreation major concentrations is limited. Findings could help educators and professionals who determine internship educational accreditation requirements increase quality and learning outcomes for recreation students.

Seventh, additional research should examine the concept of internship supervisor roles and the influence of length of internship in other professions beyond community recreation. Internship programs are implemented in many professional education programs. Findings from this study should be examined in the context of other environments and areas of study.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and learning opportunities in regards to the development of student intern professional characteristics. Additionally, this study addressed how internship supervisors perceive the importance of length of student internship in relationship to student development of personal characteristics. Results of this study suggest that community recreation professionals identify communication, self-awareness, passion, having the ability to relate to diverse groups of people, credibility, and flexibility as important characteristics that contribute to professional success. The study also concluded (1) the need for students to continue to develop communication and advocacy characteristics, (2) internship supervisors' desire for students to take more initiative in their own development, (3) the importance for students, as well as professionals, to demonstrate passion for the profession, (4) the identification of influential characteristics, (5) a concern for too much emphasis in regards to one, large, internship project, (6) supervisors self-identification as "challenging advisors", (7) the overall positive impact of student interns, and (8) the need for longer internships to better develop student intern professional characteristics.

The undergraduate internship is intended to provide students with an opportunity to not only apply classroom-acquired skills in real-world settings, but to also cultivate personal characteristics that can be difficult to develop in a classroom setting. This study contributed knowledge to the subject of community recreation internships from the perspective of current recreation professionals in their role as internships supervisors. Results of this study highlight professional characteristics supervisors identified important for success in the field of community recreation; opportunities offered interns in relation to the development of those identified professional characteristics, self- perceptions of supervisors' roles, supervisor perceptions regarding the impact of interns, and supervisor perceptions of length of internship in the development of student intern professional characteristics. The findings advance the field of inquiry in the field of community recreation and also expand understanding regarding how university faculty and current professionals can improve experiential learning opportunities for students in community recreation settings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Date

Participant Name & Information

Dear _____:

I am writing to request your participation in a research study seeking to understand the development of community recreation student intern professional characteristics. This study is a part of my dissertation as a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Central Michigan University and is supervised by Dr. Sarah Marshall. As a result of this study I hope to increase understanding regarding the development of community recreation student professional characteristic by gathering in-depth insights directly from professionals who supervise community recreation students while they complete their 15-to-30 week internships.

As a recreation professional, I am very interested in your views and perceptions regarding your experience supervising community recreation student interns. I am asking for one hour of time, at your convenience, to interview you regarding your thoughts, experiences, and interactions in regards to student intern professional characteristics as demonstrated through students' performance and behavior.

I will contact you within the next week to discuss details of this study and to answer any questions. If you agree to participate in the study I need you to please sign and return the enclosed consent form to the address listed below. Upon signed consent I will contact you to schedule an interview. An interview guide highlighting questions/issues included in the interview will be provided to you at least one-week before the scheduled interview for your review. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. Please feel free to contact either myself at the information listed below or my dissertation chairperson, Sarah Marshall, at marsh4sm@cmich.edu.

Sincerely,

Lori Irwin
Doctoral Candidate – Department of Educational Leadership
Recreation, Parks and Leisure Services Administration
107 Finch Fieldhouse
Central Michigan University
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989-775-1952

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

- Classification of agency
- Location of agency
- Professional experience/length of time in the field of community recreation
- Number, dates and length of internships of internships supervised

Research Questions #1

(Perception regarding importance of students who wish to work in the field of community recreation to develop professional characteristics)

- Would you please tell me your interpretation of “professional characteristics”
- Would you please define the term “soft skills?”
- What are your beliefs about the demonstration of professional characteristics/soft skills in practicing recreation professionals/staff?

Research Question #2

(Interpretation of their role in providing guidance and opportunities in development of student professional characteristics)

- What are your beliefs about the demonstration of professional characteristics/soft skills in RPL student interns?
- What expectations do you have regarding student interns professional behavior?
- How do you see internship supervisor roles in the development of student intern professional characteristics?

Research Question #3

(Importance of internship length in the development of professional characteristics)

- What are the perceptions of internship supervisors in regards to a minimal amount of time needed for students to develop professional characteristics during an internship?
- How do internship supervisors perceive students’ level of professionalism at the beginning of their internship?
- How do internship supervisors perceive students’ level of professionalism at the end of their internship?
- What are the perceptions of internship supervisors in regards to an optimum amount of time needed for students to develop professional characteristics during an internship?
- How do internship supervisors in community recreation agencies perceive the benefits or challenges of 10 week to 30 week internships when considering a students’ opportunity to develop professional skills?

Interview Summary

- What final comments do you have for me to consider as a part of this study?
- Is there anything we haven’t mentioned regarding student intern professionalism that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Development of Community Recreation Student Intern Professional Characteristics

Researcher: Lori Irwin, M.S., CPRP
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This research study seeks to understand how internship supervisors at community recreation agencies interpret their roles in providing guidance and opportunities in the development of student intern professional characteristics. Obtaining this information will expand understanding regarding how educators can improve experiential learning opportunities in the development of professional characteristics for RPL students in community recreation. Results of this study will be published in a doctoral dissertation and may be submitted in article format for future publication such as scholarly or professional journals.

As a participant in the study you agree to participate in a 60 minute interview. This face-to-face interview will be conducted at a place and time at your convenience. If a face-to-face interview is not possible you will be asked to conduct a phone interview. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. Please be assured that your participation and responses will be held in the strictest confidence. Both you and your agency will not be identified and the information collected will not be accredited back to any specific agency. All data from this study will be confidential. If you agree to be audio-taped, the tape, transcripts, and all interview will be kept locked with access only to the researcher. All effort will be employed to insure that no details will be provided in any verbal or written reports that could identify you. Your participation is

completely voluntary, and you may decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may also withdrawal your participation from this study at any time without penalty.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any complaints to the Institutional Review Board by calling 989-774-6777, or addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, 251 Foust Hall Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

Please check one of the statements below:

_____ I agree to participate and I give consent for the interview to be audio taped. At any time, I may ask for the audio-recording to be stopped.

_____ I agree to participate, but do not give my permission for the interview to be audio-taped.

My signature below indicates that all my questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the project as described above.

Signature of Subject

Date Signed

A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____ Subject's Initials

Signature of Responsible Investigator

Date Signed

APPENDIX D

COA Seven Professional Competencies

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding of the conceptual foundations of play, recreation and leisure.2. Understanding of the significance of play, recreation and leisure in contemporary society.3. Understanding of the significance of play, recreation and leisure throughout the life span.4. Understanding of the interrelationship between leisure behavior and the natural environment.5. Understanding of environmental ethics and its relationship to leisure behavior.
PROFESSION
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding of the following as they relate to recreation, park resources, and leisure services:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. History and development of the professionb. Professional organizationsc. Current issues and trends in profession.2. Understanding of ethical principles and professionalism.3. Understanding of the importance of maintaining professional competence and the available resources for professional development.
DELIVERY SYSTEMS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the roles, interrelationships, and use of diverse delivery systems addressing recreation, park resources, and leisure.2. Understanding the importance of leisure service delivery systems for diverse populations.3. Understanding the inclusive practices as they apply to operating programs/services and design of areas/facilities.4. Understanding the roles, interrelationships, and use of diverse leisure delivery systems promoting community and economic development.
PROGRAM AND EVENT PLANNING
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the variety of programs and services to enhance individual, group, and community quality of life.2. Ability to implement the following principles and procedures related to program/event planning for individual, group, and community quality of life:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Assessment of needsb. Development of outcome-oriented goals and objectivesc. Selection and coordination of programs, events, and resourcesd. Marketing, implementation, evaluation of programs/eventse. Preparation, operation, and maintenance of venuesf. Understanding of group dynamics and processesg. Ability to use various leadership techniques to enhance individual, group, and community experiences.
LEGAL ASPECTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding of the following related to recreation, parks resources, and leisure services:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Legal foundations and the legislative process

- b. Contracts and tort law
- c. Regulatory agents and methods of compliance
- 2. Understanding the principles and practices of safety, emergency, and risk management related to RPL.

ADMINISTRATION / MANAGEMENT

- 1. Ability to apply basic principles of research and data analysis related to recreation, park resources, and leisure services.
- 2. Understanding of fundamental principles and procedures of management.
- 3. Understanding the principles and procedures of human resource management.
- 4. Understanding of the principles and procedures of supervisory leadership.
- 5. Understanding of the principles and procedures of budgeting and financial management.
- 6. Understanding of the principles and procedures related to agency marketing techniques and strategies.
- 7. Ability to utilize the tools of professional communication.
- 8. Ability to apply current technology to professional practice.
- 9. Knowledge of principles and procedures of developing areas and facilities including:
 - a. Assessment
 - b. Planning
 - c. Functional design
 - d. Evaluation
 - e. Operation and maintenance

FIELD EXPERIENCES

- 1. Formal field experience(s) of at least 100 total documented clock hours in appropriate professional recreation organizations/agencies prior to internship.
- 2. Internship, full-time continuing experience in one appropriate professional recreation organization/agency of at least 400 clock hours over an extended period of time, not less than 10 weeks.

APPENDIX E

Hurd's CEO Competency Framework

BUSINESS ACUMEN
<p>Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of business and administrative practices • Ability to effectively manage contracts • Ability to manage projects <p>Financial management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound budgetary skills • Sound financial management skills • Ability to raise funds (where applicable) <p>Human resource management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of human resource management • Understanding of personnel law • Ability to recruit, hire and train knowledgeable staff • Understand and maintain labor relations • <i>Ability to treat people fairly and with respect *</i> <p>Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of computers and technology and their roles in the organization
COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING
<p>Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Possess effective public speaking skills</i> • <i>Posses effective written and verbal communication skills</i> • <i>Possess good listening skills</i> • <i>Ability to be an effective facilitator</i> <p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of marketing • Ability to work effectively with the media
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
<p>Customer service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess an understanding of customer service practices <p>Community relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish positive public relations • <i>Ability to assess the needs of the community</i> • <i>Ability to work with the public</i> • Have an understanding of the community and its cultural dynamics • Ability to build partnerships and collaborations within the community • <i>Be actively involved in the community*</i> • <i>Ability to be accountable to the public</i>
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT
<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Be open minded and receptive to new ideas*</i> • <i>Knowledge of leadership principles*</i> • <i>Ability to lead by example*</i> • <i>Ability to motivate employees*</i> • <i>Ability to recognize/reward employee achievement*</i>

- *Ability to see the organization and its employees as a team**
- *Be accessible to employees**
- *Willing to take risks**
- *Ability to encourage creativity and innovation**
- *Ability to encourage high performance from employees**
- *Enable staff to do their job**

Management

- Understand organizational dynamics
- Ability to effectively delegate responsibilities
- *Possess knowledge of management principles**
- Ability to manage multiple tasks
- Ability to utilize effective organizational skills
- Ability to utilize effective time management skills

Interpersonal skills

- *Be diplomatic in dealing with the public and staff**
- *Embrace diversity**
- *Be enthusiastic and have a positive attitude**
- *Be flexible and adaptable**
- *Have a sense of humor**

Conflict resolution and decision making

- *Ability to resolve conflicts and solve problems*
- *Ability to make decisions*
- *Ability to build consensus*
- Ability to be analytical
- *Ability to use good judgment**
- *Possess effective negotiation skills*

PLANNING AND EVALUATION

Goals, objectives, and mission

- Ability to set goals and objectives
- *Ability to operate according to the agency's mission*

Planning

- Effective long range planning skills
- Ability to establish priorities

Evaluation

- Ability to evaluate programs and services

Visioning and trends

- Be current with professional trends
- Ability to create a vision or direction for the agency

POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE ACUMEN

- Ability to work effectively with a board/elected officials
- Have an understanding of the law, the legislative process, and governance

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Experience

- Have 5+ years experience
- Have a formal education
- Have comprehensive knowledge of the parks and recreation profession

Knowledge of technical areas

- Knowledge of facility design, construction, and management
- Knowledge of risk management

Professionalism

- *To be honest and ethical**
- *Be involved in professional organizations**
- *Be committed to the profession**
- *Ability to network within and outside of the profession**

APPENDIX F

Entry Level Competency Framework

General competency categories	Primary competency categories	Specific categories
Communications	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ability to clearly communicate with customers</i> ○ <i>Ability to clearly communicate with staff</i> ○ <i>Posses effective public speaking skills</i> ○ Possess effective oral and written communication ○ <i>Have the ability to listen to staff and customers</i> ○ Ability to give good instructions as a job gets done right the first time.
Community Relations	Community Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knowledge of the community and its composition
	Community Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Know how to assess the needs of the community
	Customer Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The need and want to help children and the community ○ Possess an understanding of customer service practices ○ <i>Have an ability to deal with the public</i>
Interpersonal Skills	Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ability to be creative and innovative</i> ○ <i>Be flexible</i> ○ <i>Have patience</i> ○ <i>Be enthusiastic and have a positive attitude</i> ○ <i>Ability to work well with people</i> ○ <i>Be open-minded</i> ○ <i>Be able to deal with personality conflicts</i> ○ <i>Have fun in your career</i> ○ <i>Understanding the concept of criticism and being able to accept it</i> ○ <i>Be a self-starter</i> ○ <i>Ability to take initiative</i> ○ <i>Ability to deal with office politics</i>
Leadership/Management	Conflict Resolution & Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ability to resolve conflict and solve problems</i> ○ <i>Ability to think quickly</i> ○ <i>Ability to make ethical decisions</i>
	Fiscal Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding of financial processes ○ Ability to develop and stay within budget
	HRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding hiring process ○ Ability to discipline and/or fire staff
	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ability to motivate employees</i> ○ <i>Have leadership skills and abilities</i> ○ <i>Be able to work in a team</i>
	Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Possess knowledge of mgt principles ○ Ability to supervise staff ○ Ability to supervise diverse staff ○ Be willing to work long, odd hours

	Tasking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ability to utilize effective organization skills ○ Ability to manage multiple tasks ○ Ability to prioritize tasks ○ Ability to utilize effective time mgt skills ○ Ability to set priorities
Professional Practice	Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to learn about the field through educational opportunities ○ <i>How to be able to position yourself for career growth</i>
	Technical Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ability to use computers and different software ○ Ability to program ○ Ability to conduct program evaluations ○ Ability to schedule programs, leagues, and staff
	Professional Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have a basic knowledge of the field in several areas (i.e. sports, event, instruction classes) ○ Have knowledge of the P&R profession
	Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ability to network within and outside the profession</i> ○ <i>Know how to act professionally</i>

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