Research and the Management of Campus Recreation

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Material for this paper was obtained from four sources: past presidents of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association, past chairpersons of the Research Committee of NIRSA, leading publishers of research in the field of campus recreation in Canada, and the annual proceedings of NIRSA. Information about research was elicited from the first three sources through a questionnaire asking respondents to indicate on a checklist the research in 22 areas of administration they had done, were doing, or planned to do. The second part of the questionnaire asked them to list completed research they knew about that had a special significance for the body of knowledge in the field. The third part asked which research topics should be addressed in the future because of their special significance to the profession. The survey findings indicate there is a growing concern about participants' attitudes toward programs, a need to determine the sociological and psychological effects of the programming, and an awareness that program managers are moving away from traditional offerings of competitive sports and are emphasizing the concept of total wellness.

In the years before 1968, research on the management of campus recreation (intramural-recreational sports) primarily dealt with topics such as numbers of participants, types of equipment to use, legal liability, officiating, and publicity (Van Hoff, 1970). The great majority of studies published or presented at conferences since that time have not shown any really startling changes in the concerns they have addressed. However, some rather significant evidence since 1968 shows that those persons who are researching various aspects of management in campus recreation are dealing more and more with quality of programming, and not just with quantity (e.g., Allison, 1977; Butler, 1970; Edmonston, 1978; Kallina, 1977; Kamen, 1976; Maas, 1978; Maurer, 1972; Peterson, 1970a, 1970b; Pollack, 1972; Zeisner, 1975).

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To me this means that we managers in the field of campus recreation are apparently becoming more concerned with the effects our programming has on the users/participants. We are also trying to find out what is happening to the sport program managers as they spend their professional lives administering programs.

Relative to the first group of persons being researched, studies within the past 5 years have been undertaken (Brown, 1983; Hisaka, 1982; Kieffer, 1984; McGuire, Mihalik, & Pope, 1985; Pittenger, 1984) to determine the effects of participation on students in colleges and universities. For instance, the study by Pittenger attempted to discover how race influences the meanings of leisure among university students, while Kieffer wanted to find out more about pregame emotional stress in intramural basketball players. In a similar vein, Brown (1983) conducted research to ascertain how game results increase the hostility level of collegiate intramural softball players. Such studies are becoming the rule rather than the exception, and well they should be. As sport managers, we must gain a better understanding of how our programming affects the psychological, sociological, and physical welfare of our principal clients, the students.

Second, the proceedings of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association and the journal of that same association have reflected, since 1977, a growing interest in managers at all levels as human beings. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs are (a) physiological, (b) security (safety), (c) social (affiliation), (d) esteem (ego), and (e) self-actualization. In view of this hierarchy, a great deal of research and writing has focused on how sport managers’ basic human needs can be met. The numerous studies on job satisfaction/dissatisfaction that have been completed in recent years are an indication of a concern (i.e., the happiness and mental well-being of administrators and their co-workers) that is being expressed by a number of people.

Cleave (1986) has taken a look at worker motivation by studying theories and models that are considered essential tools for understanding human motivation. She proposes that “one of the primary roles of a leader in any group is to motivate the individuals to behave in such a way that the group goals are achieved” (p. 1). She discusses Herzberg’s two-factor theory, known as the Motivator-Hygiene Theory, as well as works outside the field of campus recreation that have significance to the profession; those books are based on research by Silver (1983), Hellriegel and Slocum (1979), Hunt and Hill (1979), and Hampton, Summer, and Webber (1978).

Although in general the research done by recreation program managers on motivation factors has been scarce, a few persons have written articles about burnout, job satisfaction, job rotation, and motivating personnel. These individuals have borrowed from the findings of the social scientists and educational psychologists who have researched and published in the field of motivation. Perhaps the main contribution these articles have made to the field of campus recreation management has been to stimulate graduate students and working professionals to conduct more research on motivation.

Another interesting area that is getting some needed research attention is the one dealing with ethics and morality as program participants interact with others in game situations. A closely related topic that should be further investigated by researchers concerns the attitudes of students and faculty toward other
participants. There is a need to find out about biases and past experiences that lead to violence or cheating in intramural games and contests.

Relative to the first of these, ethics and morality, Rail (1986) has researched the behavioral intentions of intramural basketball players, both male and female, toward the rule-violating behaviors of cheating and violence. This study is similar to one by Brown (1983), who set out to determine how the outcomes of games affect the feelings opponents have toward each other. According to these studies, hostility created by the score of the game can cause cheating during the contest and violence during or after the contest.

The second of the above-listed areas needing further investigation, that of attitude formation and attitude change, has been researched by few campus recreation managers. Iso-Ahola and Allen (1983) investigated the dynamics of leisure motivation, which led them to consider attitudes people had toward participation in programs. Chestnutt and Haney (1984) studied the psychologically motivated attitudes toward participation in recreational sport activities, and Chestnutt, Nadeau, and Taylor (1985) analyzed what attitudes prevented students from participating in campus recreation activities. Stobart (1985) devised a scale to measure attitudes toward intramural sports.

As I stated in the opening paragraph of this article, most of the research done before 1968 had been on the “nuts and bolts” operations of managing a campus recreation program in a higher education setting in North America. In the ensuing years there has been a growing interest in finding out what happens to people when they participate in campus recreation activities. This increasing emphasis on sociological and psychological research is an encouraging sign, I think, that directors of campus recreation programs are becoming more involved in an holistic approach to the management of their programs.

Recent conference presentations and published papers dealing with programming for the handicapped, the wellness approach to participation, music and dance, fitness, outdoor programs, and lifetime sports are evidence that campus recreation programs are making a sharp break from emphasizing only the traditional highly competitive sport tournaments.

The need for information about how to enhance the quality of the recreation experiences of two groups, students and faculty, becomes greater every day. We find that these two groups of participants in our programs are moving away from the point-system-and-award programs and are instead investing their time and efforts in self-scheduled activities of vital interest to them. This should suggest to campus recreation managers that they must obtain information, through research, that will help them improve their management philosophies and practices. The end result will be to provide the users/participants the most desirable and beneficial programming.

I would suggest to master’s and doctoral students that they seriously consider the many possibilities for research in the field of recreational sports on the college campuses. Students as well as working professionals will find a large number of problems to investigate. Research in the future, I believe, will be more and more concentrated upon the sociological and psychological aspects of the effects of participation upon the participants. Managers of campus recreation programs should encourage and welcome such investigations.
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