Abstract

This literature review explores the necessity for change in Park, Recreation, Tourism and Leisure Studies curriculum design, as well as potential considerations and strategies for effectively implementing such change. The necessity for such restructuring is first presented, followed by an exploration of what university undergraduates should be learning through their academic studies. A summary of the literature regarding ways to support this learning is presented, as well as recommendations for designing the signature curriculum for undergraduate majors.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum, Higher Education, Park, Recreation, Tourism

Authors Note: Dr. Russell is a Professor in the Park, Recreation, and Tourism Studies Department at Indiana University. Correspondence can be directed to Dr. Russell at russellr@indiana.edu.
It is no doubt obvious to all of us that we are located at the crossroads of major transformation. University and college curricula and systems of student learning in recreation, park, tourism and leisure programs in North America, indeed undergraduate programs in most other disciplines as well, call for change. Among these programs are many that offer majors or study options in therapeutic recreation. We realize we must “do something different,” but have no idea of exactly what.

Following is a literature review that is intended to offer answers to how this change might implemented in an effective manner. It begins with an overview of the reasons behind the necessity for change at this time. Then, the literature on what university undergraduates should be learning is presented, followed by a summary of the literature on ways to support this learning. Finally, the current advice on how curricular design planning should be undertaken in higher education is reviewed. This report can hopefully serve as a starting point as we consider, create, and implement what I’d like to refer to as the “signature” curriculum and learning system for undergraduate majors in leisure.

**Undercurrents**

Higher education is undergoing unprecedented public scrutiny. This is not a new phenomenon. Coming along about every two decades, my first awareness of the concern was during the mid-1980s when various research studies, faculty unions, and think tanks converged to point out significant systemic problems. For example, at that time agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Institute of Education, the Association of American Colleges, and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published findings that endorsed the creation of systematic, effective changes in particularly undergraduate curricula and learning systems (Diamond, 1991).

Perhaps the most prominent among the hundreds of reports, books, and plans calling for change at that time was the “Boyer Report”—promoted particularly in the preface to the Carnegie Foundation’s *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* published in 1987. Boyer warned the changes necessary were not inconsequential: “The undergraduate college, the very heart of higher learning, is a troubled institution. In a society that makes different and contrary demands upon higher education, many of the nation’s colleges are more successful in credentialing than in providing a quality education for their students” (p. 2). Essentially, Boyer called for an integrated core curriculum leading from essential knowledge through interdisciplinary connections that integrate community service, political participation, and application of knowledge to life beyond the campus.

This call-to-arms of the 1980s itself relied on a lengthy historical legacy beginning when the Yale faculty in 1828 issued a report responding to challenges to the dominance of Latin, Greek, and mathematics by efforts to add modern languages, laboratory sciences, history, and literature to the curriculum (Kanter, Gamson & London, 1997). In 1945 Harvard’s “Red Book” sought to solve the unstructured and fragmented college curriculum with a call for a core general education. Then, in response to student protests in the 1960s and new labor markets in the 1970s, questions were raised by such entities as the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education about an apparent mismatch between what is learned in college and what is needed by students after they graduate (Levine, 1979).

The directives for increased rigor, assessment of student outcomes, continuous
quality improvement, and a shift in focus from teaching to learning are upon us again, as another wave of reports, books, and plans focus on creating new relevancies for undergraduate education. For example, in 2002 the Association of American Colleges and Universities charged institutions with providing educational environments that “…foster a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward life-long learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions” (p. xii).

Well-publicized studies have again provided evidence, however, that American colleges and universities are failing in providing educational quality. For example, Nathan’s *My Freshman Year* (2005) and Bok’s *Our Underachieving Colleges* (2006) paint pictures of student life as profoundly anti-intellectual, and of colleges as failing to pay much attention to learning.

Perhaps the biggest attention-getter at this time is the report of the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education (also known as the Spellings Commission) that proposed incentives for the adoption of standardized testing for purposes of making higher education accountable to consumers: “We believe that improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the … reforms we propose …” (2006, p. 4).

These various “macro” level alarms do translate directly to our efforts to create signature undergraduate curricula and learning systems in departments of recreation, park, tourism and leisure studies, as we too witness multiple pressures to take a critical and creative look at our undergraduate programs at our “micro” level. Familiar to all of us is the confluence of such instigators as organizational shifts in department and school/college structures; upcoming changes in standards required by the Council on Accreditation for Recreation, Park Resources and Leisure Services (COA); shifting campus-wide general education course requirements for undergraduate degree programs; ongoing strategic planning enterprises created by new fiscal mandates; and the varied academic specialty interests of our faculty, professional staff, and alumni.

Concomitantly, we are alert to the continuation of shifting pressures regarding faculty productivity standards (particularly in grants, contracts, and research) and faculty, student and curricular disparities in specialization options. At the same time our student bodies lack ethnic, age, and sometimes gender diversity, are typically admitted mid-way through their college experience, and seem increasingly less prepared for college level work. Meanwhile, employers of our graduates, and those graduates themselves, call for increased emphasis on field applications of a roster of more narrowly specified professional skills. In contrast, current student interests are for careers sometimes driven by media and social forces beyond our control.

These are no small mandates, and a close reading of these instigators reveals they can be contradictory. If we were to follow the new COA standards, for example, do we violate campus expectations for general education? Or, how do we prioritize results from an alumni survey if they cannot accommodate the new faculty and departments needed for a reconfigured college/school/university administrative structure? And, if we meet faculty productivity expectations in research grants and contracts, can we simultaneously focus on less prepared students? Perhaps stated most succinctly, even if we wanted to accommodate every undergraduate curricular pressure, do we have the faculty, space, fiscal, and student resources to do so—particularly in an era when these resources are diminished?
Conceivably the most fervent overall mandate that crosses all perspectives for improving the university experience for undergraduate students, ours included, is accountability. Also referred to in the higher education literature as “quality assurance,” “summative evaluation,” the “entrepreneurial university,” and even “accreditation,” accountability means being answerable, and is typically defined as “the public presentation and communication of evidence about performance in relation to goals” (Deming, 1987, p. 5). When accountability operates effectively, it leads to continuous quality improvement. Whatever its label or definition, we must do it.

Following are options for how - by way of summaries of the research literature. In the first section, studies and policy perspectives are reviewed that address undergraduate curriculum itself. It includes recommendations for designing and delivering courses and course instruction. What should students learn? In the second section, studies and policy stances are reviewed that address undergraduate success systems. It includes recommendations for accountability and quality improvement for students that go beyond the formal curriculum. How shall student learning be enhanced? Finally, the third section summarizes the literature on how the process of curricular change and reform planning might be handled within a higher education context. How shall we proceed?

Undergraduate Learning

To locate a comprehensive perspective for how college students learn, and how they should therefore be taught, we begin by reviewing the literature on what John Tagg originally referred to as the learning paradigm versus the instruction paradigm. Building on a well-known article published in Change magazine with Robert Barr in 1995, and again in 2003 with the publication of The Learning Paradigm College, Tagg continues to argue for a complete transformation of the ways in which teaching and learning are both perceived and practiced throughout higher education. In essence, Tagg recommends we overturn the “Instruction Paradigm” that dominates colleges, and replace it with the “Learning Paradigm.”

The Learning Paradigm

Tagg’s fundamental critique of the instruction paradigm was that 1) there are no practices and structures that require students to connect what they learn in one context (e.g., academic course work, sport participation, volunteer service) to what they learn in others, and 2) it rarely promotes integrated, sustained, and lasting student learning. In contrast, Tagg asked “what if the purpose of the university was learning?” (2003, p. 334), and argued that it is not sufficient simply for individual teachers to focus on learning rather than instruction, but also institutions themselves must be transformed to provide appropriate contexts for student learning. To accomplish this Tagg (2003) identified five characteristics of the learning paradigm. Curricular programs should:

1. Support students in pursuing their own goals
2. Require frequent student performances
3. Provide frequent and ongoing feedback
4. Assure a long time horizon for learning
5. Provide for stable communities of practice (p. 124)

A great deal of the contemporary research reported about how we should teach and how courses should be constructed is inspired by Tagg’s learning paradigm ideas. Most specifically, studies about critical thinking, active learning, learner-centered environments, service learning,
learning as social change, and internships and practica are plentiful.

For example, the 28th International Conference on Critical Thinking (2008) continued a 25 year tradition of emphasizing the importance of teaching for critical thinking. Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it. While there is also an active counter argument to the critical thinking movement, contemporary literature continues to advocate that a liberal education is the process of inquiry and thinking rather than an accumulation of disjointed skills and senescent information (Bissell & Lemons, 2006).

A landmark study published in 1990 by Facione (The Delphi Report) initially laid out the specific critical thinking skills curricula needed to emphasize. These were interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-correction. In a subsequent report Facione, Facione, and Giancarlo (2000) maintained that in addition to focusing on critical thinking skills, curricula must also seek to develop a critical thinking predisposition in students, which includes being inquisitive, judicious, truth seeking, confident in reasoning, open-minded, analytical, and systematic.

Following these lines of development, numerous articles and books provide suggestions for how to design courses and teach for the improvement of students’ critical thinking. For example, a recent book by Facione and Facione (2008) provides strategies for health science educators that include using problem-based learning, clinical cases, think-aloud activities, reflective role-play, team problem-solving, and reflective journaling. In a report by ten Dam and Volman (2004), characteristics of instruction in critical thinking were: paying attention to the development of the epistemological beliefs of students, promoting active learning, a problem-based curriculum, stimulating interaction between students, and learning on the basis of real-life situations.

Research, however, is inconclusive about the effectiveness of programs especially devised to improve critical thinking skills. On the one hand are studies similar to that reported by Mazer, Hunt and Kuzneffok (2007) that examined critical thinking instruction in a required introductory communication course. Experimental group participants received enhanced instruction using various active learning strategies, activities, and assignments. Results indicated significant improvement in their critical thinking skills. A study by Tiwari, Lai, So, and Yuen (2006) similarly demonstrated that when compared to the lecturing approach, critical thinking development focused teaching produced significant improvements in truth-seeking, analyticity, critical thinking self confidence, and systematicity.

On the other hand, despite interest among many faculty in critical thinking as a learning goal, many also believe it cannot be assessed adequately (Bissell & Lemons, 2006). For example, a 1995 study from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in California and the Center for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University (Paul, Elder, & Bartell, 1997) found that although 89% of the faculty surveyed claimed critical thinking is a primary objective in their courses, only 19% could explain what critical thinking is. It appears, however, that teachers are not the only ones who struggle with the messy problems of learning critical thinking. In a 2008 study of a finance curriculum (Carrithers, Ling, & Bean), when asked to address open-ended finance problems, students revealed numerous critical thinking difficulties, including a failure to address the client’s problem, use analytical tools systematically, construct rhetorically useful graphics, or translate finance concepts and methods into lay language.
Based on the popularity of the critical thinking movement, nonetheless, other curricular approaches have emerged. For example, the concept of active learning itself has received considerable attention over the past several years. Active learning is generally defined as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process (Prince, 2004). It requires students to do meaningful learning activities in the classroom as well as think about what they are doing. Ways of doing this include promoting collaborative learning, cooperative learning, self-directed learning, and problem-based learning.

Collaborative learning refers to any instructional method in which students work together in small groups toward a common goal (Prince, 2004), whereas cooperative learning is usually defined as a structured form of group work where students pursue common goals while being assessed individually (Feden & Vogel, 2003). Learner-directed approaches view learners as responsible owners and managers of their own learning process—that is they self-monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning strategies (Garrison, 1997). Then, problem-based learning is an instructional method where relevant problems are introduced at the beginning of the instruction cycle and used to provide the context and motivation for the learning that follows (Prince, 2004).

The empirical support for active learning methods is extensive. Earlier, Bonwell and Eison (1991) summarized this literature and concluded that these approaches lead to better student attitudes and improvements in students’ thinking and writing. Similarly, meta-analyses by Lipsey and Wilson (1993) and Norman and Schmidt (2000) pointed out that having students work in small teams has a positive effect on academic achievement, whereas self-directed learning has a slight negative effect on academic achievement. Instruction that included opportunities for reflection, active learning, and perspective-taking, and that provided students with opportunities for positively interacting with diverse peers was found to enhance life-long learning orientations of students (Mayhew, Wolniak & Pascarella, 2008).

Yet, not all of the support for active learning approaches is compelling. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), Scorcelli (1991), and McKeachie (2002) there is simply not enough data confirming beneficial effects of various kinds of active learning. Indeed, this is the crux of the problem. There are a variety of instructional methods labeled as active learning, and thus it is not always clear what is being promoted, and accordingly what outcomes are being assessed. For example, a learner- (or self-) directed approach places the responsibility for learning on the student and may or may not include active learning methods. Since this approach strives to be individualistic, flexible, and competency-based both collaborative group discovery activities as well as individual distance learning task criterion workbooks are included in the instructional delivery (Arizona Faculties Council, 2000).

In addition to critical thinking and active learning, other approaches have been promoted that adhere to Tagg’s learning paradigm ideas, including sentipensante pedagogy; teaching for social change, diversity and globalization; and service learning and community engaged scholarship. For example, in a new book by Rendon (2008) a sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy of wholeness is embraced that “transforms our schools and academies by reclaiming them as soulful places of relationship-centered learning and teaching rooted in social justice and equity ... so that students are helped to transcend limiting views of themselves in order to become social change agents” (p. 10).
Actually, curricula that assume leadership in creating social change have been promoted by others (Astin & Astin, 2000). As with community-engaged scholarship, this means the content of a curriculum focuses on knowledge that can be responsibly applied to consequential problems (Boyer, 1990), including issues of diversity, globalization, leadership training, civic engagement, and other pressing social, economic, and moral problems. One model for accomplishing this is labeled service learning. Service learning is an approach that combines course and/or curriculum with meaningful service (frequently youth service) throughout the community. Its goal is to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, encourage lifelong civic engagement, and strengthen communities for the common good (National Youth Leadership Council, 2008). All studies published on service learning and other community-engaged courses and curricula support its value for positively affecting the values, attitudes, and understanding of social issues as self-reported by college students (e.g., Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2003; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997).

Classroom technology is also beginning to apply learning paradigm strategies. For example, in workshops sponsored by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on several campuses last spring (2009), John Seeley Brown emphasized that learning in the digital age means the net-generation student of today is a culture of participating (they want to build, tinker, share, and remix). Therefore, the college curriculum needs to ask students to know, make, and play by using such technologies as You Tube, Wikipedia, I tunes, blogs, texting, and twittering as the basis for collaborative study groups and learner-as-teacher approaches. An example within leisure studies curricula is the use of an online spin-off of the popular television show “The Apprentice” to teach recreation management (Young & Myllykangas, 2006). This reality-based learning method integrated technology with popular culture in an attempt to build student competency, and to encourage them to be more responsible for their learning by drawing upon knowledge and skills beyond the classroom, and transferring their learning to real life situations.

The Instruction Paradigm

At the other end of the spectrum from Tagg’s learning paradigm, that is, the end that focuses on the instruction paradigm, are studies about specific competencies and skills required in a college curriculum. Even though more studies have been reported according to the learning paradigm, multiple political and economic pressures today expect more of a commodified orientation in higher education, and thus undergraduate students in particular are pressured to primarily learn only the information that is vocationally useful (Rose & Dustin, 2009). Typically, the studies available from the instruction paradigm perspective evaluate university programs—often according to professional academic accreditation bodies, such as the Council on Accreditation for Recreation, Park Resources and Leisure Services sponsored by the National Recreation and Park Association.

From this vantage point education and work are interrelated; that is, education is a tool for the world of work. Students (and their curricula) are expected to provide applied skills, certifications, and the know-how to the professional employment market. For example, a study of college students themselves found that despite the technological changes occurring in places of work, skills in oral communication, written communication, public speaking, motivating and managing others, and effective group leadership are most essential for career improvement.
A common method for assessing education’s ability to teach relevant job skills is through alumni and employer studies (Borden, 2005; Longsdorf, 2004). As Hoey and Gardner (1999) stipulated, conducting alumni and employer surveys not only evaluates the relative importance of the knowledge and skills taught in a curriculum, but also provides feedback for accreditation purposes.

A recent study of this sort pertaining, specifically to leisure and recreation curricula, used questionnaires administered separately to alumni and employers working in parks, recreation, and non-profit agencies to evaluate the relevancy of a university program in a midwestern university (Msengi, Farland, Pedescleaux, McGloster, & Yang, 2007). The job competencies considered most important by employers were ethics, budget management, computer applications, writing skills, public speaking, fundraising, and partnership; and for alumni respondents ethics, budget management, computer applications, writing skills, marketing/PR, risk management, and event planning were judged to be the most important skills to gain from a college curriculum.

A unique twist on this line of inquiry is a study by Obenour, Lengfelder and Cuneen (2005) that compared the tourism course titles offered at National Recreation and Park Association accredited universities and colleges in the U.S. and Canada with the course offerings selected as most important by tourism professionals themselves. The highest agreement (60.7 %) between the accredited tourism programs and tourism professionals was for the course “Introduction to Travel and Tourism.” Other matches were for the courses: “Planning Management in Tourism” (57%), “Economics” (50%), “Administration of Tourism” (47.6%), and “Tourism Policies” (41.7%). For the remaining 19 tourism courses offered at accredited universities, the match with what tourism professionals thought important ranged from 38% to 1.2% agreement.

Indeed, there has been a great deal of debate in the literature regarding the value of accreditation as a measure of the value of a university curriculum (Kennedy, 2003; McDonald, 2003). One recent and direct inquiry about this asked if students in National Recreation and Park Association accredited programs were more academically prepared (Cole & Cole, 2008). Although the effect sizes were small, students in accredited programs reported significantly higher levels on these variables: level of academic challenge (intellectual and creative work), active and collaborative learning (solving problems and initiating own learning), student-faculty interaction (inside and outside the classroom), supportive campus environment (other students, faculty, and administrative offices), gains in general education (writing, speaking, critical thinking), and gains in practical competence (career related knowledge and skills). No significant differences were found for how satisfied students were with their educational experience.

Perhaps the most common course available in leisure studies undergraduate curricula is the internship. Targeting the future employment of students directly, internships provide students access to job sources, build confidence in their job search, as well as provide an opportunity to learn new skills, develop work related problem solving abilities, and foster the social savvy necessary in the employment interview (French, 1998). While the literature lacks an evaluation of the effectiveness of the internship for student learning, an assessment of student and practitioner differences about internship roles, intern skills, and agency provisions was conducted by Beggs, Ross and Knapp (2006). Per-
haps not surprising, students and practitioners differed significantly on the majority of items on the survey, that is, practitioners believed students should be stronger in developing, leading, and budgeting programs and students felt internship agencies should be willing to hire interns full-time and provide greater assistance in job placement.

Signature Pedagogies

A 2009 SoTL publication entitled Exploring Signature Pedagogies (Gurung, Chick, & Haynie) proposed that there should be a consistent connection between the way a discipline creates or discovers new knowledge and the way it apprentices new learners. Instead of a college “major” being a collection of credit-bearing experiences, the learning of the discipline ought to be a coherent set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help students participate meaningfully in the experience of that discipline. Such a “signature pedagogy” is unique for each field. For example, critical reading is the signature pedagogy of an English literature major, medical rounds comprise medical education, teaching physics works from phenomena to principles, on-the-spot questioning is the pedagogy in law school, history students develop arguments from artifacts, and in architecture students are given a problem to address via design and classmates and teachers orally critique the results. The curriculum, says the book, should reflect the “defining characteristics that, when explicated, reveal the deepest beliefs and practices of professional apprenticeship” (p. xv). Teaching and learning in geography, for example, emphasizes spatial cognition skill development rather than what specific content should be taught. That is, students learn to think and do as disciplinary experts; the curriculum is both instruction and socialization.

According to the literature, the concept of signature pedagogies builds on widely accepted assumptions about what leads to significant learning (Gurung et al., 2009). Accordingly, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) and Fink (2003) proposed a “backwards curricular design” in which educators first identify significant and lasting learning goals, then design assessments by which students demonstrate evidence of this learning, and finally generate learning activities (such as courses, practica, etc.) that guide students to develop and demonstrate this learning.

Learning Support Systems

So, once we determine an ideal, perhaps even signature curriculum, how can we enhance students’ experience in it? Much has been written about the necessary environment for undergraduate student success in college. In fact, it is pretty safe to conclude that based on years of research, the one thing we know for sure about what keeps students in school is that involvement matters. The more academically and socially involved individuals are—that is, the more they interact with other students and faculty—the more they are to see themselves as integrated into the institution and as valued members of it, the more likely it is they will persist (cf. Tinto, 1998).

A good place to begin verifying this is with a prominent and long-standing line of literature focusing on student academic engagement. Primarily developed and tested by George Kuh (Policy Center on the First Year College), the idea of student academic engagement asserts the more undergraduate students are exposed to and involved in effective educational practices, the more they will succeed in college. That is, students learn from what they do in college.

The concept of student academic engagement continues to carry cache as studies report that students entering college today exhibit all-time high levels of academic disengagement. During their high
school experience they more frequently report “feeling bored” in class, missing class, and spending little time on their studies outside of class (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Sax, Hurtado, Lindholm, Astin, & Korn, 2005). These characteristics apparently carry over to college, as evidenced by a national survey of educators of first-year students who were asked to rank 18 different factors in terms of their “level of impact” on students’ academic performance. “Lack of student motivation” was ranked as the number-one factor (Policy Center on the First Year College, 2003).

Since the 1980s Kuh and his colleagues have used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), and its successor, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to continuously measure student academic engagement. As conceptualized on the NSSE website, academic engagement includes five dimensions:

1. **Active/collaborative learning** – including asking questions in class, contributing to class discussion, making class presentations, working with other students on projects during class, working with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments, tutoring or teaching other students, participating in community-based projects outside of class, and discussing ideas from reading outside of class

2. **Student-faculty contact** – including allowing students to see how subject matter experts think about and solve problems, discussing grades and assignments with instructors, talking about career plans with instructors, receiving prompt feedback on performance, and working with a faculty member on a research project

3. **Level of academic challenge** – including working hard to meet instructors’ expectations, preparing for class ahead of time, mastering most of the reading assigned, writing papers of 20 pages or more, making independent judgments about course materials, applying theories and concepts to practical problems or new situations, and emphasizing analysis and synthesis as a part of course work

4. **Enriching educational experiences** – including talking with students from different backgrounds, political beliefs, or religious commitments; using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments; participating in internships, community service, study abroad, independent study, learning communities, and senior culminating experiences

5. **Supportive campus environment** – including satisfaction with student services and academic support services, recreational and cultural art opportunities, and quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

Studies using CSEQ and NSSE have contributed substantially to understanding the undergraduate experience across majors and institutions (Brint, Cantwell & Hanneman, 2008). For example, the five dimensions (above) are considered “good educational practices” that traditionally appear to be less available for commuting students (Kuh & Hu, 2001), part-time students (Kuh, 2003), first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005), male students (Kuh, 2003), native students (not international students; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2004), and students attending research universities (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Researchers have also found that exposure to and participation in these good educational practices do not vary significantly according to membership in sororities or fraternities (Pike, 2003), participation in non-revenue producing
Sports (Umbach, Kuh, & Stage, 2004), or for students who are highly involved in spiritual activities (Kuh & Gonyea, 2004).

What is the effectiveness of systems of academic engagement on student performance in college? Studies are available that confirm participation in freshmen support systems (such as learning communities) improves academic performance (Hotchkiss, Moore & Pitts, 2005); however, efforts to enhance academic engagement in general appear to be indirect—that is, more influential for keeping students in college rather than on classroom success itself. But, of course, staying in school directly impacts retention through to graduation (Aitken, 1982). For example, in studying direct admittance of freshmen to an academic program (in contrast to junior year admission), students’ connection with the program was increased, and hence their success and retention, as well (Dittmar, 2000).

For a direct effect of academic engagement on performance, the small amount of research available seems equivocal. For example, a correlational study (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990) examined relationships between student motivational orientation, self-regulated learning, and classroom academic performance. Findings suggested individual differences in motivational orientation and self-regulation were better predictors of performance. As well, a study of nursing students considered three outcomes of academic engagement (homework completion, lecture attendance, and study hours) to identify predictors of grades (Salamonson, Andrew & Everett, 2009). Homework completion emerged as the strongest positive predictor of academic performance, followed by lecture attendance—again having to do with individual student factors rather than institutional efforts to provide learning support systems.

Perhaps part of the problem in measuring the effect of academic engagement on course performance is that of grade inflation. For example, a study by Gray (2008) confirmed that while faculty know about grade inflation a lack of training, worries about job security, student behavior, and the necessity of good teaching evaluations pressured them to award higher grades than perhaps warranted. Thus, there may be insufficient deviation in grades to detect effect differences.

One particular performance application of the student academic engagement perspective is the newer work focused on unprepared undergraduate students. The number of academically unprepared and at-risk students enrolling in colleges and universities is increasing. Results from the American College Testing Program (ACT) supported that perception already held by professors by determining that 49% of high school graduates do not have the reading skills they need to succeed in college (reported by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006). Further, about 25% of first-generation students in 4-year colleges and universities require at least 1 year of remedial courses (Adelman, 2004).

To accommodate this many colleges have increased their tutoring center services, hired retention specialists, offered developmental courses for unprepared students, and expanded first-year experience programs—including campus recreation opportunities. Still the statistics of success are bleak. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and associates (2005) reported that 70% of students who took at least one remedial reading course in college do not obtain a degree within 8 years of enrollment. Therefore, the most recent advice is that faculty themselves must make the difference. As Gabriel (2008) argues, college instructors working with unprepared students will have the greatest effectiveness by using
active learning and collaborative learning strategies, and by having frequent and meaningful direct contact with them in and out of class.

Leaving the question of effectiveness for the moment, what do we actually do to enhance student academic engagement? Across the studies it is argued that college programs can expand the number of students who are exposed to good educational practices through the introduction of such institutional influenced factors as learning communities, honors colleges, opportunities for diversity experiences, and transition-to-college experiences (Kuh, 1995; Kuh 2003a; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). To illustrate the learning community practice, Indiana University’s “Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs)” were established in 1997 based directly on Kuh’s work on academic engagement. FIGs is a program for entering freshmen that extends learning in the classroom to the residence hall. The goal is to thematically take advantage of existing course content connections, and to help students explore academic and career interests.

A FIG consists of a group of 10-15 students who take 2-3 courses together, and also enroll in a one-credit seminar that is built around a common theme. Seminars are discussion-based and led by trained graduate students. The theme of the seminar is also extended to topics in the 2-3 courses for that FIG. For example, in the fall 2009 term, FIGs were offered in 27 different themes, including:

1. Get Your Game On (TEL T160 – History & Effects of Video Games; EDUC F401 – Survey of Serious Games: History, Industry, and Instructional Design; and COLL X111 – FIGs Seminar)
2. One World, After All? (INTL I100 – Introduction to International Studies; ANTH E105 – Culture and Society; and COLL X111 – FIGs Seminar)
3. Marketing and Managing Sport (HPER P211 – Introduction to Sport Management; BUS X100 – Business Administration: Introduction; and COLL X111 – FIGs Seminar)

Students in a FIG also live together in the same residential hall and have an undergraduate peer mentor that attends the seminar, lives on the same floor as the FIG members, and engages them in outside-of-class activities related to the theme of that FIG. Thus, the FIGs program encourages students to be academically engaged by making connections between courses, among their peers, with their faculty, and with other resources on campus. So far the effectiveness of FIGs has been measured in terms of freshman to sophomore retention which rose from 80% to 85% for all FIGs students, and from 64% to 82% for minority FIGs students (Barovick & Baron, 2001).

A more traditional mechanism for helping students strengthen their academic engagement is the Honors program. Created to nurture individual student interests and career choices, and provide a more intimate avenue to connect students with faculty, honors programs typically include specific course requirements, service projects, residential learning communities, dinners, book discussions, and special seminars. In a 2006 study on the effectiveness of its “Academic Engagement Module,” the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) found that students who took honors courses felt they benefitted from having a unique and prestigious educational experience (UCLA, 2006). These students also completed a higher proportion of course reading assignments, were more likely to attend summer sessions, more frequently brought up ideas from different courses in class, and more often contributed to a class discussion.

Other examples of systems that apply the various mechanisms for strengthening academic engagement are available. For
example, Georgia College and State University through its Office of Academic Engagement offers an “Academic Outreach” program. Within the program students participate in a Community Action Team for Service (CATS) by leading programming for P-12 students, serving as facilitators for environmental studies field trips, making educational presentations in local schools, and working with the Boys and Girls Club to organize and run camps. Also included is the GEM program, which matches outstanding students with prominent state leaders in fields such as business, education, politics, healthcare, law, and industry. These executives serve as mentors for participating students. There is also a Leadership Certificate Program that provides ongoing leadership training and development opportunities. Accompanying and integrating all this is the “experiential transcript” that records student achievements in service learning, community service, creative endeavors, international experiences, cross cultural endeavors, internships, undergraduate research participation and rewards, and campus leadership.

Other examples include the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences at California Polytechnic Institute’s program labeled CAFES, which provides academic and personal support to students by paying student peer advisors to provide free tutoring to other students enrolled in their degree programs. At the University of South Florida a two credit seminar course titled “Advanced Learning Systems” is required of students to assist in their becoming self-regulated learners by focusing on motivation, attitude, goal planning, and the process of knowledge acquisition.

Process for Curricular and Learning Systems Development

Despite overwhelming signals for change in a university or even a department’s curriculum and learning system content and design, the higher education literature confirms efforts to change are hampered by uncertainty about how to make orderly change (Diamond, 1991). Primary are uncertainties about where to begin and what roles faculty, curriculum committees, and administrators should play.

For example, calls for increased rigor, assessment of student outcomes, continuous quality improvement, and a shift in focus from teaching to learning have been accompanied by critiques of excessive faculty individualism in planning and delivering curricula (e.g., Astin, 1993). Therefore, efforts to improve undergraduate curricula have challenged faculty members to coordinate courses and programs to an extent unprecedented on many campuses (Association of American Colleges, 1994).

Indeed, it is now widely believed that curricular change leadership must come from genuine collaboration by faculty. In addition to meeting with each other to discuss and decide curricular changes, other examples of collaboration include co-teaching courses, peer evaluation of teaching, common syllabi for multi-section courses, faculty research inserted into others’ classes, development of course clusters, monitored consistency among courses, retooling faculty as a group, coordination of textbook adoptions, jointly writing curriculum-development grants, etc. (Briggs, 2007).

But once a commitment to working together is made, universities are still vulnerable to the vagaries of unsystematically made decisions. This is why books on the subject of planning in higher education (e.g., Hernon, Dugan, & Schwartz, 2006) depend on the extent to which the processes are linked to achieving stated outcomes about student learning. According to Peggy L. Maki (2004), a higher education consultant, the curricular planning process should be “transparent and address how academic programs foster a collaborative
effort. That effort involves not only discussion and negotiation among all of the interested parties, but also investigation and reflection about what students learned and how to translate those results into action” (p. 89). As rephrased by Dugan and Herndon (2006), this means academic programs need to develop a strong and sustainable commitment to ongoing assessment as a means to improve learning. That is, a total culture of student learning based on accountability must be fostered.

To summarize multiple sources (Diamond, 1991; Fremerey & Pletsch-Betancourt, 2006; Kanter et al., 1997; Levine, 1979), the undertaking of designing a signature curriculum and systems to support it must include these characteristics:

- Thinking in ideal terms (what is an “ideal” curriculum)
- Based on learning outcomes (how will students become better citizens and/or professionals?)
- Use of diagrams (to show structure, interrelationships, and sequence)
- Heavy reliance on data (accurate information helps to clarify the problems and determine utility of the solution)
- Team approach (faculty, evaluators, instructional developers, administrators)
- Politically sensitive (buy-in by students and other “publics”)
- Conclusion

A wide swipe of the landscape on student learning in college, both at macro and micro levels, was undertaken in this literature review. There are instigators for curricular reform from trends in the research literature, as well as from mandates by our specific profession, universities, and school/colleges. Drawing from all this, it appears we must begin a planning process focused on undergraduate curriculum in recreation, park, tourism and leisure studies that:

1. Is rigorous for students and continuously managed for quality improvement by faculty
2. Is accountable by being based on an assessment of student learning outcomes
3. Enhances student body diversity, program admission, retention and graduation
4. Emphasizes the principles of the learning paradigm
5. Is sensitive to multiple and contemporary political and economic pressures on students, our society, and the world
6. Is accompanied by a system of practices focused on student academic engagement
7. Results from a coordinated commitment by departmental faculty, administrators, instructional experts, and staff
8. Represents a signature pedagogy for our profession

REFERENCES


RUSSELL 199


---

**Selected Internet Resources**

http://www.aacu.org/  
(Association of American Colleges and Universities)

http://www.aacu.org/resources/curriculum/index.cfm  
(Curricular Resources from AACU)

http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/  
(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)

(Undergraduate Education Initiatives from Carnegie Foundation)

http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/  
(The Boyer Report)

http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html  
(Secretary of Education, Commission of Future of Higher Education)

http://www.cpr.iub.edu/index.cfm  
(Center for Post Secondary Research, Indiana University)

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/staff.cfm?uid=kuh  
(National Survey of Student Engagement)

http://figs.indiana.edu/student  
(FIGs at Indiana University)
Leisure studies is a branch of the social sciences that focuses on understanding and analyzing leisure. Recreation and tourism are common topics of leisure research. The National Recreation and Park Association is the national organization in the United States for leisure studies, and offers accreditation to many universities to offer courses of study (degree programs) in leisure studies. The undergraduate curriculum leading to a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences provides students with an education in recreation, park and tourism sciences, with an emphasis on problem-solving skills, development of an international perspective and the application of scientific principles to managerial problems. An education in recreation, park and tourism sciences prepares students to become professionals with the capacity to learn from life and throughout life. Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences majors must complete at least one of the following certificate options: Community Recreation and Park Administration Certificate. Management of recreation, park and leisure-service agencies requires expertise in Why study Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation & Tourism? The skills you’ll develop include organisational, communication and operational expertise, equipping you with the confidence to be able to shape situations and deliver success. Read our five reasons to study Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation & Tourism for more information on why you might choose to study this subject area. What jobs can you get as a Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation & Tourism graduate? The second table shows the average salaries of undergraduate Hospitality, Leisure, Recreation & Tourism students entering employment. The three skill levels â€“ high, medium and low â€“ reflect the UK’s Standard Occupational Classification’s major groups 1â€“3, 4â€“6 and 7â€“9 respectively.