

WHAT ARE RECREATION GRADUATES DOING?

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The rapid expansion of public recreation in Canada after World War II created a demand for trained people in the field (Searle & Brayley, 1993). The Province of Nova Scotia led the way in 1946 with an eight-month study to prepare returned service personnel for positions in community recreation (MacFarland, 1970). During the 1950's when parks and recreation curriculum were being initiated in the United States, many Canadians began traveling to the United States for educational programs in recreation. It was not until the 1960's, in Canada that university and community college programs were established at the Universities of Alberta, Waterloo, Ottawa, Brock, Concordia, Acadia, British Columbia, Lakehead, Moncton and Dalhousie. Community college recreation programs were developed in Alberta (i.e., Red Deer), Ontario (i.e., Seneca, Fanshaw, and Algonquin), Prince Edward Island (i.e. Holland College), Newfoundland (i.e. College of the North Atlantic) and Nova Scotia (i.e. Nova Scotia Community College). The focus of recreation education, in the early stages, dealt with the delivery of community recreation.

However, as the recreation profession evolved, the curriculum in universities reflected the diversity of recreation service delivery, including commercial recreation, tourism, therapeutic recreation, outdoor recreation, arts and culture, sports administration and leisure and aging. The curriculum reflected the emerging trends in society and the development of recreation as a profession. But what do graduates of recreation programs do once they complete their university education? Bolla and Cousineau (1989) surveyed the graduates of the University of Ottawa recreation program and found that the majority of their graduates (37.0%) were employed in quasi-government services (such as health, education or correctional institutions), followed by municipal recreation (28.6%), provincial (9.1%) and federal government (2.6%) and the private sector (3.9%). Then, they regrouped the positions into eight employment categories. The categories were community recreation (32.0%), therapeutic recreation (20.7%), tourism (12.7%), education (9.3%), sports (6.0%), outdoor recreation (5.3%) arts and culture (5.3%) and other (8.7%). Smale and Frisby (1990) surveyed the graduates of the University of Waterloo program and found that the majority of their graduates were employed in the public sector (62.0%), followed by private sector (27.9%) and finally by the quasi-public or not for profit sector (10.1%). Singleton, Ipson, Dwyer, Ibbertson, Wheeler, and Dobbs (1992) conducted a survey of the Dalhousie University Alumni and found the majority of respondents were employed in Arts and Administration (5.5%), Municipal Administration (20.9%), Sports Administration (11.7%), Therapeutic Recreation/Leisure and Special Populations (33.1%), Youth Education/Outdoor Education (8.0%), and Generalist (20.9%). Leblanc, Ouelette and Singleton (2004) found that the graduates of the Université de Moncton, "Quant aux responsabilités professionnelles, 51,5 % des répondants ont des responsabilités qui relèvent surtout de l'administration. Parmi les employeurs actuels, il est intéressant de noter la présence des districts scolaires (13,8 %) et notamment des écoles primaires (12,3 %). Pour ce qui est des autres employeurs importants, on retrouve les entreprises privées (13,1 %), les organismes

gouvernementaux (12,3 %) et les organismes à but non lucratif (10,0 %)”. It appears the majority of employment opportunities in recreation have been in the area of public recreation followed by quasi-public recreation and therapeutic recreation. According to the Canada Career Consortium, the job of a Recreation Administrator was described as, “Planning, organizing and co-coordinating recreational, cultural and athletic activities for people of all ages”. The Canadian Government suggests that with these skills, an entry level Recreation Administrator (with a degree in recreation/sport management or leisure studies) has an average salary range of \$30,149 to \$45,000 per year. Therapeutic Recreation Specialists use treatment, education, and recreation services to help people with illnesses, disabilities, and other conditions, develop and use their leisure in ways that enhance their health, functional abilities, independence, and quality of life (Stumbo and Peterson, 2004). The Canadian Government suggests that an entry-level recreation therapist (with a degree in therapeutic recreation) who possesses these skills has an average salary range of \$30,000 to \$53,000 per year. Graduates who are accredited with their Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) certification will be in the higher end of the average salary bracket. According to Statistics Canada (2003), there are approximately 704,500 people employed in the recreation field across Canada, with 52.5% of the employees being male, and 47.5% being female. The gender distribution for Recreation Managers in Canada shows that approximately 51% are male and 49% are female, and the average age of the position is forty-one years old. The gender distribution for Therapeutic Recreation Specialists shows that approximately 81% are female, while 19% are male, and the average age of the position is thirty-seven years old. The purpose of this study was to assess the current employment of graduates, how graduates obtained their positions, how the internship/volunteer experience assisted in obtaining employment, and whether graduates found a recreation job after graduating.

Methodology

The sample consisted of alumni of the Recreation program in Eastern Canada. The researchers gained permission from the Alumni Office for the use of the current mailing list for this study. Interested participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that would take approximately 20 to 25 minutes of their time. Questions were developed regarding current employment of the graduates, qualifications for obtaining a recreation job, how they obtained a recreation job, and how the recreation program prepared them for their current occupation. The leisure studies faculty reviewed the survey and provided input and clarification of questions. The resultant questionnaire was reviewed by members of the Recreation Alumni Committee for clarification of any questions in the survey and changes were made accordingly. The survey questionnaire was pretested with five students enrolled in the Recreation degree program, which would not fall into the sample but would be familiar with criteria in the survey. The Dillman (1978) Total Design Method (TDM) was utilized, a three-wave process for increasing responses rate, the first step consisted of the initial questionnaire packet being sent out to all potential respondents, and with it there was a self-addressed stamped envelope. The second step was an email sent out to the alumni with a reminder note attached. The third consisted of a postcard being sent out to all remaining respondents who had not replied. The project population consisted of 447 alumni with all participants living in Canada.

From this population, a sample of 150 participants was randomly selected resulting in fair representation from each of the provinces.

Results

The response for the survey was 58 per cent. The majority of respondents were female (65%) and had a partner (73). The majority (60.5%) had children. The respondents had specialized during their academic careers in Arts and Administration (3.5%), Municipal Administration (19.8%), Sports Administration (20.0%) Therapeutic Recreation/Leisure and Special Populations (40.0%), and Youth Education/Outdoor Education (4.7%). Most of the respondents (73.3%) found a recreation job after graduation. The majority (89.5%) felt the Bachelor of Recreation degree prepared them for their job. When the alumni were asked how they found their job, the following sources were identified: contact with prospective employer (29.1%), continuation of employment (7.0%) newspaper advertisement (22.1%), professional contacts (11.6%), and other methods (7.0%). When asked what prepared them for the job, the alumni responded work experience (47.1%), volunteer experience from classes (10%), internship experience (15.7%), personality (7.1%), and other (20.0%). The majority of the respondents (84.9%) volunteered during their undergraduate education. In terms of current job income, 29.1% earned under \$39,999, 44.2% earned between \$40,000 to \$59,999 and 27% earned over \$60,000.

Summary and Discussion

In terms of relative job income, Dalhousie graduates are making an above average salary, compared to the national standard of \$30,149 to \$45,000 per year for a Recreation Administrator, and \$30,000 to \$53,000 per year for a Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (Statistics Canada, 2003). The average salary for a Recreation graduate at Dalhousie is between \$40,000 and \$49,999. Also, Recreation graduates are living a high standard of living, with the highest number of respondents reporting an annual family income of \$90,000 or more which is above the national average family income (Statistics Canada, 2003). The results of this investigation are similar to other studies in relation to career opportunities of the graduates of other recreation programs in Canada (Beland, Ouellette and Singleton, 2004; Bolla & Cousineau, 1989; Ipson et al., 1994; Smale & Frisby, 1990). It is interesting to note career opportunities appear to be stable over the ten years from the last Dalhousie alumni survey in 1992. Recreation careers appear to be divided into two streams: Recreation Administration and Therapeutic Recreation. Future research should explore whether a similar trend is occurring at other educational institutions preparing recreation graduates. Are there two main streams, Recreation Administration (Sport, Tourism, Municipal, Youth/Outdoor, Festival, Event) and Therapeutic Recreation, driving our programs of study or were they unique to the Dalhousie University alumni? Recreation programs across Canada and the United States have developed programs titled Sports, Festival, Event, and Tourism as degrees. The question arises, are these not outcomes of a Management focus that enable students to provide recreation services in a wide variety of environments? To answer this question future alumni surveys may want to use job competencies to measure what current professionals are doing and relate the findings to educational competencies for students entering the profession of recreation (Career Canada, 2003). This may provide insights to

the skills and competencies graduates of recreation programs will need in a changing economic society.

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