

Focus on Leisure

Lee J. deLisle PhD
Western Michigan University

Introduction

The constant challenge of actively involving students in the world outside the confines of the university classroom must be met with creativity and enthusiasm. This is particularly important in introductory courses in leisure services. Informal surveys of students reveal a wide range of motivations for taking a 100 level recreation/leisure course. Some are committed to the academic major, others are remotely interested due to their own positive experiences with park and recreational services, while others are under the impression that the course would be easy; “my coach told me to take it”. While the motivations may vary, and past experience can be quite limited, it is paramount that the students understand the pervasive role that leisure assumes in society.

The **Focus on Leisure** activity attempts to have the students explore leisure in their lives and the lives of the community. Using the arts, and photography in particular, has proven to be an effective, interactive learning tool in school settings and in service learning projects. Major producers of photographic equipment and supplies such as Kodak and Polaroid provide web-based support for photography related learning strategies.

Description of the Activity

The students in HPER 170 Introduction to Leisure and Recreational Service are first asked to keep a one-week record of all of their daily activities, identifying both required and voluntary activities, recorded on an hourly basis. These charts are then used to assist the student in differentiating between leisure and non-leisure behavior. This exercise introduces time management, a new concept for many students.

Having developed an initial experiential basis for an understanding of leisure in their own lives, the students are then challenged to look beyond their experience, and beyond the university, to the lives of those living in the city of Kalamazoo. This is accomplished by requiring the students to take photographs of residents involved in leisure activities.

Working in pairs, the students must plan their approach to recording community involvement in leisure activities. The students must include photos of youth, young adult, family and older adult activities. The study must also include both indoor and outdoor, group and individual and special population activities.

The students are provided with guidelines concerning the taking of photographs of strangers, with a review of pertinent laws and the need for etiquette. The students are encouraged to learn more about their subjects: why they are participating in a particular activity and what do they perceive to be the benefits of their participation.

Material and Costs

Disposable twelve shot cameras are provided free of charge by a local photographic supply store. The students must pay for the development of the photos at the same store. The students must also invest time, provide for their own transportation, and commit to the project.

Intended Outcomes

The following outcomes are discussed with the students prior to the exercise so that they are aware of the intended results:

Cognitive

The students identify and increase their understanding of the diversity of leisure behavior in their community. The students synthesize their personal observations and experiences with their photos in order to effectively present their findings to the class.

Teamwork and Planning

The students must coordinate the project by developing a plan to identify sites and the participants to be photographed. If photos are to be taken on private property, permission must be obtained prior to the photo shoot. Individual release forms must be made available if participants are identifiable in the photos.

Social Awareness

The students will be away from the university environment and will need to take an active role in meeting and relating to individuals of varying age, gender, race, ability and economic backgrounds. The students must use social skills in presenting a positive image of the university and in their ability to successfully interact with the subjects.

Technical Skills

The students will develop some proficiency in photography and will interface with digital technology through the scanning and presentation of their photos.

Management

The students will understand the relationship between the sponsorship support provided by the company supplying the cameras and the benefits inherent in this type of mutually beneficial relationship. Building relationships is an important element in the success of a leisure service organization. The project presents several opportunities to experience this with classmates, sponsors, social agencies and the subjects of their study.