RECREATION AND LEISURE STUDIES: FINAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW, JUNE 2012

Review Process
This was the second formal review of the undergraduate program of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RLS). The first was carried out in 2005. The review team at that time made a number of recommendations especially with regard to undergraduate recruitment, collaboration with other units within the Faculty and elsewhere on campus, and enhancing the learning experience for students. The graduate program was last reviewed by OCGS on June 24, 2005.

In response, the Department developed a comprehensive plan for undergraduate recruitment. Also the number of cross-listed courses with a diverse range of other Departments expanded and the number of Joint Honours programs and Interdisciplinary programs and Minors grew and broadened in scope. The result is that students now have greater opportunities to design program plans with their RLS degrees that better meet their personal and professional educational needs.

The self-study for the present review was prepared by one faculty member with input from the Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies and the Associate Chair, Graduate Studies, of RLS. The Chair was regularly consulted and all faculty members had an opportunity to review a draft of the report. Their insights and suggestions were incorporated into the final report. Aspects of the report were also discussed at departmental meetings. In addition, student input was received from representatives at departmental meetings and selected sections were discussed with student leaders.

The self-study of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies was completed October 2011 as part of an augmented review of the Department whereby both graduate and undergraduate programs are reviewed together. The site visit was conducted 13 and 14 February, 2012; the review team’s report was received 12 March, 2012; and the Department’s and Dean’s responses were received 24 May, 2012. The undergraduate component of the Final Assessment report was discussed at Senate Undergraduate Council on June 12, and at Senate Graduate and Research Council on June 11. The combined report will be presented to Senate for information in September 2012.

Senate Undergraduate Council did not have specific recommendations. The Senate Graduate and Research Council view was that the program is of good quality, but there are minor concerns. Particular areas to be addressed at the two-year review are:

1. That the Department review the variety of courses and programs offered, with a view to streamlining;
2. That the Department consider admitting fewer graduate students until some of the issues of resources/diversity of offerings are fixed; and
3. That graduate students be encouraged to track more quickly through the program, and that offering a Major Research Paper option and/or making the Tourism program more explicitly a professional program be considered.
Characteristics of the Program

Historical Review

In the spring of 1967, the Ontario Ministry of Education requested that both the University of Waterloo (UW) and the University of Ottawa initiate a degree program in recreation. Initially, the Department of Recreation was formed within the jurisdiction of the School of Physical and Health Education. In 1968, the Department of Recreation offered, for the first time, an academic program combined with co-operative education (co-op), and in 1970, a regular stream of study was added. Since 1968, approximately 2,800 students have graduated with an undergraduate degree from RLS.

In the first decade of its existence, the Department of Recreation had to be moved off campus to a building on Phillip Street to accommodate the growth expected, both in the number of students and the number of faculty members. In 1984, the Department, now named Recreation and Leisure Studies, settled into its permanent home in Burt Matthews Hall. In 1972, the Department offered four elective areas of concentration – leisure studies, therapeutic recreation, recreation administration, and outdoor recreation and education. In 1975, the Business Option was formed with the School of Business at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU). Several Joint Honours degree programs followed, highlighting the emerging multidisciplinary approach of the Department. In 1985, the areas of concentration grew to include cultural recreation, leisure and the humanities, tourism and cultural recreation, and urban and municipal recreation. By early 1990s, three Options were developed in parks, therapeutic recreation, and recreation. In 2002, the Department elevated the two most popular Options to degree status. The Department in 2010 offered degrees in Recreation and Leisure Studies, Therapeutic Recreation, and Recreation and Business. A Four-Year General BA degree was added to assist in the retention of students who fell below the Honours level minimum requirements. In 2011, the Options in parks and tourism have been merged into a new degree in Tourism and Parks Management.

Program Objectives

The goal of RLS is to explore recreation and leisure’s impact on and interrelationships with key areas including health and well-being, community, service and policy, identity and diversity, and the environment.

The five learning outcomes related to RLS which also align with UW’s undergraduate degree level expectations are as follows: knowledge and understanding of the recreation and leisure studies field; critical and analytical thinking; research understanding and research skills; communication; professional development.

Specific Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding of the RLS field:

- knowledge of central concepts and theories in Leisure Studies and related disciplines;
- an understanding of individual differences, economic and socio-cultural influences on leisure behaviour, meanings, constraints, outcomes, and resources;
• understanding the role of leisure in people’s lives, and its relationship to work, family, and community;
• the ability to apply concepts and theories to a variety of specific contexts and situations;
• an understanding of individual leisure in relation to larger societal issues such as travel, tourism, and business.

Critical and Analytical Thinking:
• the ability to think analytically and to develop logical arguments;
• the ability to think critically and to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions;
• the development of reflective thinking practices;
• the ability to resolve creatively problems with innovative solutions.

Research Understanding and Research Skills;
• an appreciation for different methodical approaches in Leisure Studies research and Social Science research more broadly;
• the ability to read and critique research in the Leisure Studies field;
• the development of research skills through exposure to designing and conducting research studies;
• the ability to collect information, analyse it, and offer innovative solutions based on sound interpretations.

Communication:
• oral communication skills, including the ability to present ideas, arguments, and research findings effectively;
• good writing skills and the ability to communicate effectively in written form;
• to foster interpersonal communication amongst peers.

Professional Development:
• the ability to work independently as well as in a group or collective setting;
• the ability to lead as well as to listen to others;
• the ability to think flexibly and to ask creative questions;
• the development of a sense of identity and commitment to the RLS profession;
• to expose and connect students to professionals and alumni;
• the ability to become leaders in the recreation and leisure field;
• the development of a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development within their profession.

In an effort to enhance the undergraduate learning experience, the Department is implementing a strategy to integrate graduate student resources into the undergraduate educational environment. For fall 2011, the Department created an undergraduate “writing lab” which will be staffed by selected graduate students as part of their teaching assistant responsibilities. The writing lab provides undergraduate students with such resources and
workshops as the “Guerilla Grammar Project” developed in the Faculty of Arts, a priori advice on assignments and papers during the development process, and assistance on technical issues such as grammar and composition. The writing lab also is integrated whenever possible with various campus-wide student support programs. This initiative provides significant support to undergraduate students, enhances the teaching experiences of graduate students, and supplements the in-class activities of instructors.

Distinctiveness
The Department is the highest ranking Leisure Studies Department among the top 41 of 213 North American institutions offering similar programs by number of authorships in major peer-reviewed leisure journals, by the percentage of authorships, and by the average number of publications from data from 2003 to 2008. In addition, on a world ranking using data for the past five years, the Department has been judged 8th among 200 institutions based on publications in selected academic outlets.

Academic Programs Offered: Undergraduate
The Department offers the following undergraduate programs:
Four-Year General BA Recreation and Leisure Studies (regular);
Honours BA Recreation and Leisure Studies (co-op and regular);
Honours BA Recreation and Sport Business (co-op and regular);
Honours BA Therapeutic Recreation (co-op and regular);
Honours BA Tourism and Parks Management (co-op and regular);
Honours BA Recreation and Business and Therapeutic Recreation (co-op and regular);
Joint Honours BA Recreation and Leisure Studies and Department X¹;
Joint Honours BA Recreation and Sport Business and Department Y²;
Joint Honours BA Therapeutic Recreation and Psychology;
Parks Option;
Tourism Option.
X¹ - Drama; English; Environment and Resource Studies; Geography and Environmental Management; History; Music; Political Science; Psychology; Social Development Studies; Sociology and Legal Studies; Speech Communication.
Y² - Speech Communication; Environment and Resource Studies.

Academic Programs Offered: Graduate
The Masters in Recreation and Leisure Studies admitted its first students in 1976, and the PhD in Recreation and Leisure Studies in 1994 (the first such PhD in Canada). A collaborative Masters in Tourism Planning admitted its first students in 2002 (this program will be reviewed along with other Planning programs in 2014-5. The Department also participates in two collaborative PhD programs offered in conjunction with the other two Departments in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences; these programs are in Aging, Health and Wellbeing, and in Work and Health respectively. These two collaborative doctoral programs were also reviewed in 2011-12, and the two Final Assessment Reports were presented to Senate in winter 2012.
Students: Undergraduate
From 2004 to 2010 inclusive, the annual average number of applicants to the Department was 547 of whom 340 applied to the co-op program. Of these 547, 87 formally registered in the Department and, of these, 70% were in co-op programs. During the same period, 61.5% of first-year students were female, and only 2% were international students. Over 70% and 60% of first-year registrants in co-op and regular programs respectively had entrance averages of between 75 and 84%.

The number of scholarships nearly tripled and the amounts nearly doubled from the 2005-06 academic year to the 2007-08 academic year. This increase was due to the implementation of a program at UW where students having specific entrance averages were automatically awarded a scholarship. In addition to the entrance scholarships, numerous other awards are available at the University, Faculty, and Department levels for students in all years of study in RLS. In 2009-10 there were 51 scholarships amounting to $37,000 granted to RLS students. Among the undergraduates the most noticeable initiatives available to support them adjust to University life are the Living Learning Community in the residences and the Mentorship program, where senior students provide guidance and support.

A total of 53 courses in RLS is available to students – six core courses and the remainder as electives. Of the 53 courses, two are first-year courses; 11 are second-year courses; 18 are third-year courses; and 22 are fourth-year courses. All 53 have been offered at least once in the last three years.

The average course enrolment for the six mandatory courses over the last three years was:

- REC 100 - 300 students;
- REC 101 – 186 students;
- REC 205 – 132 students;
- REC 220 – 99 students;
- REC 270 – 102 students;
- REC 371 – 86 students.

A total of 8,063 students have enrolled in RLS courses over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 inclusive, and interestingly REC 280, an elective course entitled “Introduction to Tourism” has, at each offering, the largest enrolment - on average, 342 students. This course attracts students from all Faculties in the University.

Of the Universities with which UW has exchange agreements, three offer courses related to RLS, as well as electives in a variety of disciplines that may be transferred to a student’s degree at UW. These are:

- School of Leisure Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia;
- Department of Leisure Studies at Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands;
- Department of Sport, Coaching and Exercise Sciences, The University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, Lincoln, England.
The percentage of first-year students registered in the co-op program has steadily increased over the past seven years. In 2004-05, 60.9% of first-year students were enrolled in co-op and by 2010-11 this had risen to 87%. Co-op students have to complete four acceptable work terms, write four acceptable work reports in addition to completing successfully four professional development courses. In the past five years, for 10 of the 15 total work terms, no eligible co-op students were unemployed.

Both the employers of RLS students and the students themselves rate the work term experience very highly. On average, over the past five years, 66.1% of employers rated their co-op students as either “excellent” or “outstanding”. Over 93% of employers reported their co-op students as at least “very good” in quality. Co-op students worked in a variety of fields including marketing, athletics, and recreation. Similarly co-op students rated their employers and work experiences extremely highly. Over the past five years, 80% of co-op students rated their employers as eight or higher on a 10-point scale where 10 equals “outstanding”.

In addition to co-op, experiential learning is most evident in the Therapeutic Recreation program where two courses, one a practicum and the other an internship, are available to students. Also REC 356, “Recreation and Community Development” has a mandatory volunteer placement embedded in the course requirements.

Over the period 2002-03 to 2008-09 inclusive, the percentage of students who did not continue onto second year averaged approximately 10 to 12% of the first-year class. Retention rates of students through to graduation over the past seven years have averaged about 80% for all students. The retention rates are slightly higher among co-op students (81.0%) than for regular students (77.7%).

Over the past three years the majority of courses and instructors were rated very highly by the students, with scores exceeding four on a five-point scale where five is deemed to be “excellent”. Core faculty members received an average of 4.5 over the three years and their courses a rating of 4.2. Adjunct faculty members and their courses scored on average 0.5 to 0.7 points lower. These lower ratings are a function of inexperience and the steep learning curve for new instructors.

In response, the Department has developed two strategies: (1) a memorandum of key messages for doctoral students appointed to teach undergraduate courses that highlights the main principles and practices associated with the learning experience; and (2) a mentoring protocol for definite-term Lecturers to assist them in their teaching responsibilities. On average, over the period 2003 to 2009 inclusive, the annual number of undergraduate degrees granted by RLS was 83, with a high of 107 in 2007 and a low of 59 in 2005. Of an annual average graduate total of 83, 18.8% were on the Dean’s Honours List.

Post graduate activity of RLS graduates in recent years has included both professional employment in the recreation field (averaging 60.8% over the period 2003 to 2010 inclusive) as
well as continued advanced education (averaging 33.0% over the 2003 to 2010 inclusive) in such areas as Business, Counselling, Education, Social Work, Human Resource Management, as well as Leisure Studies, Recreation and Tourism Management, Event Management, Outdoor Education, Tourism Policy and Planning.

**Students: Graduate**
The Department admitted on average 7 students per year to the Masters in the years 2001 to 2006 inclusive. They admitted an average of 14 per year between 2007 and 2010 inclusive (however, these numbers include students in the Master of Tourism Planning, which was not intended to be covered in this review). They admitted 5.5 doctoral students on average per year between 2001 and 2010 inclusive. Masters students who entered in 2001 or thereafter completed in around 2.4 years on average, and doctoral students in somewhere between 4 and 5 years. The majority of students are domestic, with a modest number of international students in the Master of Tourism Policy and Planning.

Students are encouraged to publish and present their work. The average number of publications/presentations per year per student is around 1 (one-third being conference presentations, one-third being journal articles or book chapters, and the rest conference proceedings and other publications). Doctoral students publish/present more than Masters students, but Masters students also do publish successfully.

Graduates from the Masters program have gone on to careers in the health and social sector, as well as in tourism (the latter are more likely from the Master of Tourism Planning). Graduates from the PhD program have typically gone into academic careers at universities across Canada, and at least four to universities internationally (three to the US, one to Hong Kong).

**Faculty**
The Department, at the time of the self-study, had 15 faculty members of whom eight were Full Professors, four were Associate Professors, one was an Assistant Professor and two were Lecturers. Since 2003, there have been five retirements and two more are scheduled in each of the next two years. More retirements are expected in the near future since about half of the faculty members are now over 55 years of age. Also since 2003, six faculty members have been hired.

From 2003 to 2011 inclusive, faculty members in RLS published 264 peer-reviewed journal articles, 85 books of book chapters, 147 refereed conference proceedings, 65 technical reports, and 44 other publications. This represents for each faculty member for the period 2003 to 2011, 20.3 per-reviewed journal articles, 6.5 books or book chapters, 11.5 conference proceedings, 5 technical reports, and 3.4 other types of publications. This averages 6.7 contributions per year by each faculty member. Over the period 2000 to 2008 the Department has had 368 authorships in major peer-reviewed leisure journals, the highest in North America. Faculty members have received the following awards and honours:

- Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Research Excellence Award
(two faculty members);
- Allen V. Sapora Research Award (two faculty members);
- Special recognition Award for Excellence in Research, Alzheimer Society of Canada;
- Fellow of the Academy of Leisure Sciences (four faculty members);
- Rose Dobrof Award, Best Article in *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*
- Fellow of the International Statistical Institute;
- Fellow of the international Academy for the Study of Tourism.

Several faculty members sit on the Boards and/or Advising Councils of a number of the most important scholarly and professional organizations related to leisure, for example: the Canadian Association for Leisure Studies; the Ontario Research Council of Leisure Studies; Canada Mental Health Association; Alzheimer Society of Canada; Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. Every faculty member in RLS serves as either an Editor or an Associate Editor for a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. In total, faculty members currently serve on 23 Editorial Boards. Journals represented are *Leisure Science; Journal of Leisure Research; Leisure/Loisir; Annals of Tourism Research*.

Faculty members also act as reviewers for peer-reviewed scholarly journals both within Leisure Studies and in other areas such as Health, Geography, Gerontology, Sociology, Psychology, and Planning as well as all the Tri-Council Agencies of Canada. Most (72.4%) of the $1.16 million in grants obtained by faculty members, over the period 2003-04 to 2009-10 inclusive, came from the Tri-Councils of Canada. The faculty are supported by two full-time staff members.

**Concerns /Opportunities for Improvement**

The reviewers were impressed with the quality of teaching within the Department, the level of community involvement of faculty members, and their level of research productivity.

The reviewers’ assessment revealed two inter-related challenges facing the Department, its staff and faculty members, and its programs:

- the sustainability of offering such a diversity of degree programs and by implication, curriculum options; and
- limitations associated with being under-resourced and their implications for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the programs.

The level of diversity in degree programs available to undergraduate students is impressive. However, reviewers were concerned that RLS, in its effort to serve the needs, may have too much diversity, resulting in too many courses (a total of 53 courses for five different degree Specializations and three Options) and a limited core in recreation and leisure that is common to all RLS students (presently there are six core courses). In addition the self-study calls for new courses to be developed.

Similar issues exist at the graduate level, where there are 27 distinct graduate courses and 5 degree foci. The reviewers recommended that graduate students should not start to instruct
courses prior to completing their comprehensives, and the graduate students should instruct fewer courses – which would improve completion times and also address an issue with undergraduates who prefer contact with permanent faculty.

As such, in the name of “diversification”, the RLS Department appears, with all good intentions, to be endeavouring to be all things for the marketplace of students. The Department may need to reconsider this strategy by focussing on a limited number of high quality programs, rather than many programs at an unsustainable level. Students interviewed stated that they were often challenged because courses were not always offered. The unavailability of certain courses was further exacerbated if they were in the co-op program.

Furthermore, students expressed disappointment in the delivery of courses where these were taught by sessionals and/or doctoral students when these students expected the experts (i.e., faculty members) to teach the courses. In fact, the undergraduate program, in the opinion of the reviewers, appears to be dependent on doctoral students to cover courses. The reviewers also noted “In light of student feedback, we are concerned about the absence of specific reference to students (undergraduate or graduate) in the concluding comments of the RLS Strategic Plan.”

As noted earlier, the introduction of selected new faculty resources already underway also will serve to alleviate student concerns about the number of sessional instructors being used to teach, especially, core courses.

The reviewers are of the opinion that some flexibility in the admission standards could be considered for high school students to make room for the ones with potential for academic success who have demonstrated important leadership qualities, but may not quite reach the required 80% average to be admitted. In order to achieve and maintain a truly diverse population of students qualities beside intellectual achievement should be appreciated suggest the reviewers.

The review team noted the need for more staff and faculty members. If the quality of programs, performance, and productivity of faculty members is to be sustained, let alone be expanded, there is a need to increase staff and faculty resources. Indeed, the single most frequently expressed concern in the self-study and throughout the review was the need for resources.

**Departmental Response**
The Department was in general happy with the positive comments by the reviewers. They commented overall as follows:

“The External Review Committee report clearly identifies two inter-related challenges RLS is facing as we move forward:

1. sustainability of offering such a diversity of degree programmes – and by implication, curriculum options – especially at the undergraduate level, and
2. limitations associated with being under-resourced and their implications for the
maintenance and enhancement of the quality of our undergraduate and graduate
programmes."

To address issues concerning co-op such as quality, diversity, and consistency of co-op
experiences the Department will:

- Ensure more regular communication with the department of Co-operative Education
  and Career Action (CECA);
- Each term, request more data from CECA concerning those students on their work
  placements, including the types and nature of their positions, the context of their
  positions, and their salaries;
- Communicate better with co-op recruiters the nature of what RLS students are learning
  and capable of doing in the workplace;
- The Department will investigate the feasibility of conducting a survey of first-year
  students to develop a better sense of the types of positions that they are anticipating.

Some specific steps contemplated at the graduate level are:

1. reconsidering the curriculum, utilizing the comparison to the Graduate Degree Level
   Expectations: some special topics courses could be moved to independent studies which
   would reduce the number of offerings;
2. identifying and reaffirming the commitment to collaborative graduate programs (note
   the Recreation and Leisure Studies has played only a modest role in the two
   collaborative doctoral programs, with 4 students registering from the Department in
   Aging, Health and Wellbeing, and 1 student in Work and Health):
3. considering balancing supervisory loads by allocating Masters students a supervisor on
   admission; and
4. advising doctoral students that they should normally not instruct more than two courses
   during their program; and ensuring that their supervisors are informed if a student is
   being offered a teaching opportunity to be sure that it is compatible with their studies.

Two-Year Plan
The Department proposes a visioning process which will go beyond the Recreation and Leisure
Studies Strategic Plan (currently in development), using a process of “appreciative inquiry”.
Appreciative inquiry involves four stages: discovery (identify strengths); dream (vision for
future); design (plan next steps), and delivery (which the Department felt would only occur near
the end of the second year of the process). The Department also proposes to takes the
following actions over the two years:

1) The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will continue to monitor the level of
   applications and admissions by degree, and will document the retention and graduation
   rates by degree, in order to better evaluate the status of each degree.
2) The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will undertake an overall curriculum review,
   including preparing a five year plan for course offerings.
3) The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will undertake discussions with Co-operative Education and Career Action in regards to the issue of the relevance of co-operative employment opportunities to the curriculum.

4) RLS will request that the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies reconstitute the AHS Co-operative Education Advisory Group.

5) Specifically, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will address the challenges of offering and sequencing course in the spring term to address the co-op classes of 2B and 4A.

6) The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will undertake in 2012 to survey first year students in regards to their expectations for co-op employment. This data can help better match expectations to outcomes of this program.

7) In regard to the addition of new faculty resources to address sustainability issues the Department will evaluate the contribution of the new hire in Leisure Management to the course offerings, before requesting the second hire anticipated in the Strategic Plan.

8) The Graduate Studies Committee will better distribute and manage supervisory loads through assigning Master’s students to advisors upon admission, starting in 2012.

9) Departmental policy will be clarified for graduate students that an opportunity to teach a course is their choice and not a requirement.

10) Departmental policy will be clarified so that doctoral supervisors will be given an opportunity to comment on the impacts of doctoral students being offered a teaching opportunity in the department.

11) The Departmental policy for teaching by graduate students will become that, normally, once they must have completed their comprehensive exams, they will teach no more than two courses during their programme of study.

12) In the long term the Graduate Studies Committee and the Department will explore the option of a course-based Master’s degree.

As described on page 1, the Senate Graduate and Research Council included the following requirements into the two-year plan:

1. That the Department review the variety of courses and programs offered, with a view to streamlining;

2. That the Department consider admitting fewer graduate students until some of the issues of resources/diversity of offerings are fixed; and

3. That graduate students be encouraged to track more quickly through the program, and that offering a Major Research Paper option and/or making the Tourism program more explicitly a professional program be considered.