



Education and Training in the Canadian Parks and Recreation Sector

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How do we define the recreation sector in Canada? According to the Framework for Recreation our sector includes stakeholders [or actors] in sport, physical activity, health, urban planning, Aboriginal affairs, infrastructure development, rural development, natural resources and conservation, arts and culture, social development, tourism, justice, heritage, child development, and active aging.¹ With such a diverse profession and field of practice do we have a collective understanding of the training and education required to be successful?

We are at a crossroads. Never in the history of the recreation field have practitioners been faced with so many challenges and societal pressures; thus it is most essential to start a conversation around education. Specifically, the value, prevalence, and relevance of education and training in the Canadian recreation sector needs to be considered. Even before the pandemic, recreation practitioners were being called on to contribute to their communities in ever-expanding ways. The Covid-19 health pandemic has increased these challenges and added new ones. The current community, societal, and financial pressures require diverse and high levels of expertise to ensure practitioners can effectively deal with what is being asked

of them and to deal with the upheaval communities are facing. This dynamic has implications for both current and future recreation professionals, our federal, provincial and territorial organizations and associations along with our educational institutions, all of whom have significant roles to play. The recent Alberta Labour Market Study (2020) found that younger individuals, under 30, are 22% more likely to be unsure about pursuing a career in recreation. The longevity of qualified and dedicated professionals is therefore jeopardized. Now is the time to invest in and improve the career and education awareness marketing for the sector to young people and those that may be looking to change careers.²

Recreation focused education

Depending on your generation, your cultural background, your family experiences, and personal preferences traditional four-year university degrees may or may not be an expectation you hold for yourself or your staff. In today's world there are a variety of options across the country for recreation sector training. These include but are not limited to specialized courses and training programs, 1 and 2 year college diploma programs, 4 and 5 year undergraduate degree programs, 1 and 2 year graduate certificates, and graduate level degrees of varying lengths (master's and PhD). Within these opportunities there is a range of foundational knowledge such as programing planning, leisure/recreation education, community development, outdoor recreation skills, facility management, marketing, fund raising and budgeting, and leadership.

To the earlier point of professionalism, there exists one university in Canada with an accredited recreation undergraduate degree. The Dalhousie University Recreation Management degree is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism (COAPRT). The Council seeks to provide accreditation for undergraduate higher education programs providing quality education that empowers students to succeed in parks, recreation, tourism and related specialization professions. There are a total of 84 accredited programs across 65

North American institutions and yet only 1 in Canada. While it is great to see this accreditation, the questions remain, are our educational opportunities providing the necessary skills and experiences to meet the needs of an ever-changing sector? What opportunities exist for those who do not have a formal (traditional) education focused on recreation and leisure studies? Whose responsibility is it to ensure that future leaders in our sector are prepared and ready to move recreation into the next era?

Sector leaders in western Canada hope students with a major in recreation can prepare themselves with problem-solving and communication skills before starting internships and entering into the workforce. Similarly, a recent study conducted in Nova Scotia found that many recreation practitioners required additional education and training in strategic thinking, project planning and political acuity.⁵ Universities, colleges, and even high school systems have significant opportunities to work with federal (national), provincial, territorial, and municipal partners to shape undergraduate degrees and courses to ensure graduates are prepared to meet the ever changing needs (demands) of Canada's recreation sector.



The role of continuing education and professional development

There are currently only a handful of online (remote/part-time) post-graduate certificate, diploma, and professional development programs that offer opportunities for industry professionals to enhance management, leadership skills, and update or increase their formal education.

The *Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Professional Development Certificate* (PDC) is Canada's national professional development certification program for recreation and parks practitioners. This program follows a set of core competencies put forward in 2012. While the intention was to revisit these competencies (as per the Core Competencies in Recreation and Parks 1.0 report) they appear to still be highly relevant. Core competencies include:

1. Foundational knowledge
2. Leadership
3. Community building
4. Service development
5. Organizational management

The University of Alberta Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation Graduate Certificate Programs are currently the only fully remote (part-time) graduate certificate opportunities available in Canada. Through these certificates students gain core knowledge focused on Indigenous sport and

recreation, adapted physical activity, and sport and recreation management. Certificates also provide the opportunity to connect and learn with others in the industry while continuing to work full or part-time. There is a huge need for programs such as these across the country and the opportunity for Canada to be leaders in the international recreation community

Many provincial recreation associations have strategic plans and missions to support the ongoing development of industry knowledge and professional development of members. We recommend increasing these opportunities, looking for strategic partnerships with post-secondary institutions, and continuing to develop and deliver in person, hybrid, and virtual seminars/webinars, workshops, symposiums, and conferences. Recreation North, a partnership of the Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon, NWT Recreation and Parks Association, and Recreation and Parks Association of Nunavut is working to strengthen recreation capacity across the North.⁶ Through this partnership and in collaboration with CPRA they have developed 3 northern specific training opportunities. These include recreation leadership, management, and youth leadership. Similarly, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) in partnership with York University offers a 3 part certificate (non-degree) focusing on communication, strategic management, and political acuity.⁷



Next steps

Our sector is changing, as such our education and training likely needs to evolve along side. We have seen, read, and heard about drivers and changes and next practices.⁸ How will we prepare the next generation (as well as the current leaders) for the future? Our academic programs must consider the needs of diverse students and equity denied groups; plan for how climate change will impact our sector and our learning; embrace digital and remote learning opportunities; and focus on the role of recreation for aging well. Of course, these are not the only topics that need our attention, this is a vibrant community that has excellent ideas and visions for the future. We are excited about the work that CPRA has done and continues to do through the PDC and *The Bench* online community and knowledge hub. Universities across Canada have been incredibly resilient over the past two and half years and continue to innovate and look for ways to grow. Our provincial and territorial associations are hosting webinars, events, and conferences but also actively engaging with college and university partners to support their members and grow the sector. There is tremendous value in the pursuit of knowledge, and we are committed to being lifelong learners.

References

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- 4 Karlis, G. (2016) *Leisure and Recreation in Canadian Society: An Introduction* (3rd Edition). Thompson
- 5 Recreation Nova Scotia (2021). Training and Development Needs Assessment.
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- 7 https://www.prontario.org/public/training/PRMC-Spring2022/PRMC%20Brochure%202022_virtual%20spring.pdf
- 8 Bhatt, N. (2021). Next practices for the post-pandemic 2000s. Retrieved from: <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2022/january/next-practices-for-the-post-pandemic-2020s/#:~:text=Next%20Practices%20in%20Placemaking&text=A%20welcome%20change%20during%20the,among%20the%20top%20priorities%20nationally.>