Educational Policies Committee Program Proposal, College of Natural Resources, March 3, 2012

Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/fs_edpol

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/fs_edpol/581

This Program Proposal is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Senate at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Policies Committee by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
Discontinuation of the Doctor of Philosophy in Recreation Resource Management
Effective Spring 2012

Section I: Request

The Department of Environment and Society, in the College of Natural Resources at Utah State University, requests discontinuation of the PhD in Recreation Resource Management. This request is intended to eliminate redundancy in graduate programs.

The field of Recreation Resource Management combines elements of the social and natural sciences to explore topics related to the management of parks, protected areas, and other natural settings in a way that offers visitors opportunities for desired outdoor experiences while protecting the land for future generations and other uses. Students interested in studying these topics may do so within a more broadly focused doctoral program, Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Science and Management. Therefore it is proposed to eliminate the more specialized, but less popular PhD in Recreation Resource Management. The department will retain the Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in this subject, and will continue to offer the graduate courses. There will not be any reassignment of faculty.

Section II: Need

Outdoor recreation management for public lands has been taught at Utah State University since the 1930s, when a course on that topic in the Forestry curriculum is believed to have been the first of its kind in the western U.S. The university cemented its leadership in this field with the establishment of the Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism and the creation of graduate degrees in the 1960s. The program’s graduate students went on to become many of the field’s leading scholars during the past 40 years.

Times have changed, however. Recreation resource management scholars of the 1980s and 1990s helped to pioneer a new approach to studying how people interact with natural settings, which included recreation use as part of a spectrum of activities and processes connecting humans with the environment. By the end of the last century a new field of study, often called “human dimensions of natural resources,” had emerged. Again Utah State has been a leader in this area, creating an Environment and Society Department in 2002 that was the first of its kind in western land-grant universities, and the following year establishing MS and PhD degrees in Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Science and Management (HDESM). The latter program grew faster than anticipated in the R401 application submitted in 2003.

At the same time, while enrollments in the Recreation Resource Management master’s program have held steady over the past few years, doctoral enrollments have not. No PhD student has completed this degree since 2000. Instead, those interested in recreation use of natural lands have opted to matriculate in HDESM, thereby gaining a broader perspective on the society-environment interrelationship and graduating with a degree that qualifies them for a wider range of positions in academia, research, and land management. Currently 6 of the department’s 15 doctoral students are conducting dissertation research that incorporates recreation resources as a major component, but none has opted to pursue the PhD in Recreation Resource Management. Therefore this degree
can be discontinued without harm to current or future students, and without abdicating USU’s leadership position in study of wildland recreation and its impacts.

Other universities in the western U.S. that offer students an opportunity to pursue doctoral studies in this field are: Colorado State University, Northern Arizona University, Oregon State University, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, the University of Idaho, and the University of Montana. None offers a PhD in Recreation Resource Management, and aside from USU only Colorado State and Oregon State offer doctorates focused solely on the human dimensions of environment and natural resources.

Section III: Institutional Impact

The Environment and Society Department includes three tenured or tenure-track faculty whose areas of emphasis are in recreation resources and nature-based tourism. These faculty members will continue to teach courses, direct undergraduate and master's-level research, and obtain extramural funding to work on these topics. They also participate in the HDESM doctoral program. No change in their roles would occur with discontinuation of the Recreation Resource Management doctorate.

Section IV: Finances

No additional costs or cost savings associated with eliminating the PhD in Recreation Resource Management are anticipated. The principal benefit will lie in streamlining the graduate programs in Environment and Society and eliminating potential confusion among prospective graduate students.