

Early Challenges for the Department of Recreation and
Park Administration
Clemson University

Narrative by:

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Probably the first challenge to the Recreation and Park Administration [Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management - PRTM - at this writing] program was the rapid increase in enrollment, from zero to over 500 majors in just a couple of years. This presented staffing challenges, classroom space challenges and scheduling challenges, as we had to share space with other College of Education programs in Godfrey and Tillman Halls. Keep in mind that we also served non-majors who were taking some of our courses as electives or to satisfy the University's General Education Requirements.

Fortunately, the Department had the full support of the Dean of the College of Education, Harold Landrith, and President Robert Edwards. This support provided the Department with a firm base from which it grew and flourished, particularly in the ability to hire faculty and gain access to other needed resources.

While Dr. Edwards and Dean Landrith were our supporters, many of the campus, faculty and students alike, were prejudiced toward our program. They held the belief that recreation and park programs have low standards for academic performance and its majors are substandard scholars. This is a prejudice across academia which presents the same challenges to recreation and park programs and their majors as do racism (and other ". . .isms") to individuals.

Our students bore the brunt of this prejudice which they experienced from fellow students and some faculty.

Here are a few examples:

Original Sin: Originally, the members of South Carolina Recreation and Park Society had asked the president of the University of South Carolina to install a professional preparation program for recreation and park professionals as there was none in South Carolina. He turned down the request. So, the Society asked Dr. Robert Cook Edwards, Clemson President, if he would offer such a program. Dr. Edwards thought that it would help meet the needs of South Carolinians and set about establishing the program that became known, initially, as the Department of Recreation and Park Administration. It became the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management in 1982, as I recall.

Athletes: The second year of our program, I attended the South Carolina Recreation and Park Society convention. One of the professionals, who had been actively involved in getting our program started at Clemson, asked me if the rumor was true that the Department was "the happy home for athletes". The implication of the rumor was that some athletes could get special treatment in the form of low standards of academic performance rewarded by grades sufficiently high to maintain eligibility for participation in their sport. I told him I had not been informed that was our program's purpose. He was relieved.

Sometime in my early years, about 1970-71, Athletic Director Frank Howard (no relation to me on this side of the Atlantic Ocean- he and I compared notes) referred to Dr. Larry Gahan and myself as "the Harvard and Yale boys", implying that we were strong educators with high standards. He was correct, but he was not happy about it.

At one time I checked the enrollment of grant-in-aid athletes in our program. Only about 30% of all grant-in-aid athletes were majors in our program. This is not an over abundance when one considers a history of sports participation may signal an interest in the recreation and park profession.

College Level. From the start, the Department had the full support of University President, Dr. Robert Edwards, and the College of Education's Dean, Dr. Harold Landrith. The College of Education was the Department's first college. In the late 1960s the Department ran head-on into a wall of prejudice. The Department of Recreation and Park Administration was seeking access to some land in the Clemson Experimental Forest for a special needs children's camp (Jaycee Camp Hope)/ outdoor laboratory proposed by RPA Assistant Professor Marvin Owen Keith. Also, it was in a space crunch as it had grown to about 500 majors. It needed more offices and classrooms. At the same time, the Department of Forestry was requesting a new building for its programs, but did not have the student enrollment to justify a building unto itself. President Edwards thought that placing the Department of Recreation and Park Administration and the Department of Forestry into a new college, the College of Forest and Recreation Resources, was the ideal solution to each department's needs and would justify a new building.

The head of the Department of Forestry, Dr. Koloman Lehotsky, was vehemently opposed to being associated with the Department of Recreation and Park Administration in any manner what-so-ever. His prejudice created such an impediment to the resolution of the problems stated above that President Edwards removed him as department head. Unfortunately, that created great enmity among the Forestry faculty and staff. Lehotsky retired. The new college and new building were created and Marvin Keith's special needs Camp Hope / outdoor laboratory on Clemson Forest lands came to fruition.

State Agency. The Department faculty wished to expand its educational program to offer a Master's degree to practicing professionals who had requested post-graduate education opportunities. The application was not well received by the Executive Director, a staff position, of the South Carolina Higher Education Commission, notwithstanding that it had been approved by the President Edwards and the Clemson Board of Trustees. The other staff of the Commission had no substantive problems with the application. The final decision would come from the Board of the Higher Education Commission.

Upon hearing of Executive Director's less than favorable attitude toward our application, I acquired the South Carolina Legislative Manual, a book which lists legislators and members of boards, among other government agency executives and decision makers. I took the book to my classes. I stated that if any of the students wished to continue on at Clemson at the Master's level, they would should contact the Higher Education Commission board members and ask them to approve our application. Dr. Larry Gahan did the same. Other faculty may have participated, but that information is lost to time. I read the list of Commission board members to the classes.

Here are two responses from students in my classes:

"My dad buys fertilizer from Mr. X".

"Mr. Y is my mother's attorney".

And so it went. At that time, South Carolina was a "small" state where people knew each other, or their kin, across the State.

Department Head Herbert Brantley and Dr. Gahan represented us before the Commission's Board when it reviewed our application. They were told we had a very strong support out in the public, almost as much as the librarians. The Commission approved our application for a Master's of Recreation and Park Administration, a professional degree.

Unfortunately, Dr. Brantley caught hell for lobbying. But, he was innocent. I did not ask his permission and he had no idea what Dr. Gahan and I asked the students to lobby for us. That said, we went back to the Commission two more times for a Master of Science degree program and Doctor of Philosophy degree program, which were approved.

Campus¹. Prejudice on campus toward our department has diminished over the years but persisted to the time of my retirement (2005), and was expressed by various students from time to time. For example. Back in the 1990's, I was teaching a General Education course in personal health. This was a 200 level course (freshman/sophomore level). When he turned in a test a student loudly proclaimed to the students that my course was harder than his senior level Political Science courses. Clearly, he expected a low standard course based on his prejudiced beliefs that PRTM courses were easy. Most of the students in the room looked at him and smiled; they knew better. Later, he made the same complaint to my department head who told the student that he was not going to apologize for the high quality of our instruction.

Campus2. Another example of this prejudice was reported to me a year or so before my retirement in 2005. Some student's from one program had printed t-shirts that said: "I'm in . . . because I could not get into PRTM". At that time, PRTM did not have admission limits or criteria.[I have not cited the college / department as I did not see the t-shirt.]

Campus3. As our graduates achieved various career successes, some would send notices of a success to the Clemson Alumni Association which would published the information in The Clemson World - University Magazine. That magazine had a section devoted to alumni activities and successes. It was the practice of that magazine to place the graduate's major in parenthesis after the graduate's name such as Mary Doe (HIST). Over the years I noticed that, almost always, when a graduate of RPA/PRTM's activity or success was mentioned, the major was omitted. This omission was not the case for other majors. Those omissions denied the Department of recognition for its successes leaving the reader to assume that RPA/PRTM graduates did nothing worthwhile with their education. I did complain, but to no avail before my retirement.

This prejudice against RPA/PRTM students is not unlike those referred to as racism, sexism, and so on. It hurts the people against whom the prejudice is focused. In our case, it was particularly harmful to our majors and minors. Some students left the program because of it. The expression of that prejudice stressed their self-esteem and detracted from their Clemson experience. Unfortunately, at the time of my retirement (2005), the University had not taken any steps to deal with that type of prejudice among students and some faculty.

All that said, our faculty, staff, students and graduates have placed the Recreation and Park Administration / Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management program on the world stage by the quality of their performance, notwithstanding those prejudiced individuals. Our Department attracts students from all over the United States and all continents, other than Antarctica. It is recognized as a leader, offering high quality education and research programs nationally and internationally.

Toward the end of his career at Clemson, President Edwards [retired 1979], in a presentation to either the Higher Education Commission or the State Budget and Control Board - I have forgotten which, stated that **there was no program at Clemson that related more to the daily lives and well being of South Carolinians than the Recreation and Park Administration program.**

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