

**REVIEW OF THE B.S. IN RECREATION AND PARK ADMINISTRATION**

Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 31.0301  
 Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Facilities Management, General

**OVERVIEW**

The **B.S., in Recreation and Park Administration** program at Illinois State University is housed in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation within the College of Applied Science and Technology. The School of Kinesiology and Recreation houses five degree programs: a B.S., in Recreation and Park Administration, a B.S. or B.S.Ed. in Physical Education, a B.S. in Exercise Science, an M.S. in Kinesiology and Recreation, and a Masters of Athletic Training (M.A.T.). In addition, the school offers minors in Athletic Coaching, Exercise Science, and Recreation and Park Administration. Students enrolling in the B.S., in Recreation and Park Administration select either the Recreation Management sequence or the Therapeutic Recreation sequence.

**Enrollment, Fall Census Day, 2014-2021**

**B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration, Illinois State University**  
 First Majors Only

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Recreation Management sequence	205	207	198	191	178	171	159	131
Therapeutic Recreation sequence	101	100	88	72	72	74	56	42
No-subplan				1				
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>173</b>

**Degrees Conferred, Graduating Fiscal Year, 2015-2022**

**B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration, Illinois State University**  
 First Majors Only

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>75</b>

Table notes:

Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2019 consists of the following terms: summer 2017, fall 2017, and spring 2018.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT**

**Self-Study Process**

The Recreation and Park Administration (RPA) Assessment Committee led the RPA faculty through its usual student learning outcome data process throughout the 2022-2023 school year, which helped to inform this self-study. Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, the Program Director used regular RPA faculty meetings to collect data and discuss topics related to the self-study. In addition, data was collected from a variety of sources such as the office of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis; Research and Sponsored Programs; the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT); and similar academic programs at other universities. As RPA’s 7-year review for our accrediting body, COAPRT, was completed in the 2021-2022 school year, we also relied heavily on the data and analysis represented in that self-study report, where appropriate. Others who contributed to this report include RPA undergraduate students, the School Director, academic advisors, and the Milner library liaison. RPA Advisory Council members also provided input on several issues during our Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 meetings.

## **Program Curriculum**

The curriculum for the program is strongly influenced by standards established by COAPRT and the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC). There are two sequences in the RPA program that are both within the 120-credit hour graduation limit: Recreation Management (RM) and Therapeutic Recreation (TR). The RM sequence requires 55 credit hours and students graduating from that sequence are eligible to sit for the Certified Parks and Recreation Professional exam. Students in the TR sequence take 70 total hours and are eligible to sit for the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist exam. Standards for progress in both sequences include a minimum 2.00 cumulative GPA and completion of all required courses with a grade of C or better.

## **Program Faculty**

The RPA faculty currently consists of eleven full-time faculty. Of these eleven positions, four are non-tenure track faculty lines and seven are tenure-track faculty lines. The RPA faculty has seen considerable change during the review cycle due to retirements, people moving into administrative positions at ISU, and individuals moving on to new positions. RPA faculty continue to be productive scholars, student-centered instructors, active service contributors, and continual learners via substantial professional development activity.

## **Program Goals and Quality Indices**

The RPA program goals are an extension of strategic plans of Illinois State University, the College of Applied Science and Technology, and the School of Kinesiology and Recreation, and are reflected in the RPA Strategic Plan. The goals are to: 1) Foster a positive culture within RPA that promotes collegiality, professional growth, and internal & external relationships; 2) Prioritize commitment to diversity, inclusion, and social justice; 3) Ensure the success of a new generation of students with diverse interests and academic needs; 4) Cultivate innovative curriculum, excellent teaching, and high-impact research across all academic programs; and 5) Create opportunities to enhance external relationships. During the program review process, RPA faculty identified four aspirational programs from which to learn: Clemson University, SUNY Cortland, University of New Hampshire, and University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. ISU RPA offers the fewest number of concentrations and minors, compared to the aspirational institutions, which has motivated the RPA faculty to consider the feasibility and utility of introducing similar features to increase student demand. Examining the aspirational programs' websites has generated a variety of ideas for the ISU RPA program to use in our planned update of our own website, with the aim to increase the visibility of our program in web searches to reach more prospective students and parents. An examination of state peer programs indicated that the RPA program has experienced a smaller percentage of decline in enrollments than all but one of the IBHE comparator programs. The RPA program remains the second largest recreation degree program in Illinois, as well as the program conferring the second highest number of degrees in Illinois.

## **Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan and Process**

The RPA student learning outcomes (SLOs) assessment plan incorporates student learning outcomes established by COAPRT. This plan includes details of the learning goals measured, assessment methods and metrics used, and actions taken from data analysis. The COAPRT SLOs include a series of four standards designed to elicit evidence of student learning in foundations of the profession, provision of services and experience opportunities, and management/administration. Since the last RPA program review, assessment outcomes have resulted in multiple curriculum changes, as well as updates to the metrics and measures themselves. In addition to the COAPRT provided SLOs, the RPA faculty have identified five other SLOs we plan on incorporating into the RPA assessment plan during the next review cycle including advocacy for our field, professional etiquette, being an inclusive and equity-minded professional, technology skills, and facilitation skills. The RPA faculty also aim to add measures related to students' sense of belonging, sense of transferability of their skills, and sense of professional connections to the assessment plan as well, to obtain a more complete picture of whether the program is enacting our newly developed definition of student success.

### **Specialized Accreditation**

The RPA program is accredited through COAPRT. Both the RPA core and the Therapeutic Recreation sequence were granted continuing accreditation on October 28, 2022. The RPA program received the commendations in a variety of areas including recognition of 37 years of continued accreditation, being a campus leader in assessment and using assessment to enhance student learning, having collaborative and student-centered faculty, fostering a deeply committed network of stakeholders, and deep understanding of the assessment of SLOs. The re-accreditation process will next take place in 2029.

### **Responses to Recommendations Resulting from the Previous Program Review**

The 2015 program review resulted in a variety of recommendations for program improvement. During the review cycle, the RPA program saw a significant drop in the student to faculty ratio, an increase in the racial/ethnic diversity of its faculty and students, and a complete overhaul in the assessment data collection, analysis, and action process. RPA initiated a number of strategies to address other recommendations such as curriculum changes to allow students to move more quickly through our required courses, the creation of an assessment committee, and the development of an undergraduate recruitment plan. The RPA faculty will be continuing to find solutions to increase and better document student research and Honors involvement, to increase the percentage of students graduating in four years, and to more systematically collaborate with the library on information fluency.

### **Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand**

During the review period, the most significant external factor that impacted the program was the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the availability of agencies for student service learning and internship opportunities, the enrollment in recreation programs nationwide, and the use of technology-enhanced learning. The NCTRC also made changes during the review cycle that necessitated a full review of TR learning outcomes and where they appear in the RPA curriculum, as well as the addition of a new 3-credit course to the TR curriculum. Recent employment data projects a steady or increasing job outlook for several of the career sectors RPA students enter after graduation. Despite the alarming decline experienced by most other comparator programs in Illinois, RPA experienced a markedly slower slope and remains the second strongest program in Illinois in our discipline.

### **Major Findings of the Program Review Self-Study**

This program review process affirmed for RPA faculty the multitude of strengths that exist in our program. These strengths include, but aren't limited to, the dedication of the RPA faculty to student success and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) -related initiatives, an enthusiastic and engaged alumni base, a robust and continuous plan to collect and use SLO data, a focus on applied and experiential learning that allows students to gain the knowledge and skills they need in their future jobs, and high student retention rate once students start their major courses with us.

In preparing the self-study for this review process, the RPA faculty saw four themes emerge in terms of areas we need to, and need support to, build upon.

- The need to focus on enrollment and recruitment to bring numbers closer to our target enrollment numbers.
- The need to focus on student belongingness and inclusion, making sure students feel like they belong and that the unique needs of historically underserved students are met. Further, we need to continue to consider the time-to-degree for our program and the retention of FTIC students who declare early for our program but will not take our classes right away.
- The need for a comprehensive curriculum review. This program review process has highlighted it is the right time for a curriculum review to identify where and how we are addressing our SLOs, how course content is sequenced across the curriculum, what overlaps might exist, and what gaps might need to be filled.
- The need to locate or generate data that can support our program's strong focus on continual program improvement. This program review underlined certain areas of data we currently do not have regular access to and new data we need to collect including data on new SLOs and student success indicators, data related to EDI efforts, internal transfer student enrollment and graduation numbers, civic engagement and student research activities, and post-graduation employment rates and paths.

### **Initiatives and Plans for the Next Program Review Cycle**

The findings of the RPA program review have highlighted additional initiatives that will become a focus of the strategic plan over the span of the next review period.

- Collect data from students regarding belongingness and inclusion.
- Explore opportunities to expand partnerships with on-campus units to support RPA strategic initiatives to avoid faculty burnout.
- Investigate best practices in student recruitment targeted toward increasing student diversity.
- Collect data to better understand the needs and experiences of historically underserved student populations while in our program.
- Develop more robust methods to assess the infusion of EDI-related content into the RPA curriculum.
- Research best practices in tracking data regarding the effectiveness of EDI-related recruitment and retention efforts.
- Explore opportunities for off-campus recruitment efforts in partnership with high schools and community colleges.
- Discuss barriers to and strategies to support decreasing time-to-degree for RPA students.
- Develop strategies to better retain FTIC students who have declared RPA as their major but have yet to start RPA courses.
- Communicate the name change to Recreation and Sport Management to internal and external stakeholders.
- Establish access to reliable data regarding enrollment and recruitment of internal transfer students.
- Explore the expansion of RPA-specific scholarship opportunities.
- Investigate options for RPA-specific funding opportunities for declared RPA students in their first and second year at ISU.
- Redesign the RPA website to increase the visibility and appeal of our program in prospective student and parent web searches.
- Complete full curriculum review.
- Incorporate the newly developed SLOs and student success definition into the RPA assessment plan.
- Develop methods to track student participation in civic engagement, research activities, and other high impact practices.
- Investigate the feasibility of introducing concentrations, minors, and/or certificates into the RPA curriculum.
- Establish process to regularly collect post-graduation employment rates and paths.

Develop more formal methods to connect with the RPA alumni base.

### **PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**Review Outcome.** The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee commends the program on the development of a thorough self-study report that substantiates claims with insightful evidence. The committee thanks the program for a comprehensive and critical self-study report that included input from multiple stakeholders.

The Academic Planning Committee commends the program for its strategic planning efforts, particularly for annual monitoring of plan implementation. The committee also commends work done by faculty to compile a student learning outcomes assessment plan that includes learning outcomes that align with outcomes established by Council on Accreditation for Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT), direct and indirect assessment methods, rubrics, and a process for analyzing data and making program modifications. The committee congratulates the program on its ongoing relationship with the COAPRT and for recent reaccreditation of the

program by the council for an extended seven-year period. This accreditation evidences the quality of the program and ultimately benefits students seeking employment in recreation management or therapeutic recreation.

The committee commends the program faculty for their in-depth analysis of enrollments during the period of review. We note that the program's enrollment during the program review cycle has been in decline (from 306 in 2015 to 181 in 2023). We note that the COVID-19 pandemic had a large impact on employment sectors (e.g., resorts, events, etc.) associated with the occupations sought after by program graduates. We commend the development of an undergraduate recruitment plan in 2021 and are encouraged that the plan is revisited annually. The committee notes the school faculty's efforts to increase the racial/ethnic diversity among its students. The percentage of undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has also increased (from 19.6 percent in fall 2015 to 34.1 percent in fall 2022).

The committee was impressed with the program faculty's collaborative work to formalize a definition and metrics of student success. Plans to integrate student success into the program's learning outcomes along with the development of key performance indicators to measure impact was also noteworthy. We applaud the program faculty for establishing student inclusion and belongingness as a priority. The number and quality of co-curricular and civic engagement experiences for students were also recognized by the committee. The committee commends the program for retention rates at or above institutional averages. We also note that licensure rates for CPRP exam rates have been on the increase.

The committee commends the program for the review of the significant curricular work that had been done during the previous eight years. The analysis highlighted not only what changes were made, but also why they were made and how they impacted broader program-level changes. Several of these curricular changes were outlined in the report, including curriculum mapping.

The committee recognizes efforts to provide flexibility for students and the program as well as to integrate and infuse Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Access issues into several curricular changes. We further commend the program faculty for the numerous civic and community engagement opportunities that have been embedded within courses as well as in required fieldwork experiences.

The committee concurs with the COARPT review findings that the School of Kinesiology and Recreation is a campus leader in assessment. This program has a clearly developed assessment plan and goals, with demonstrated evidence of considerable work being done in this area since the last review. The committee recognizes the mix of direct and indirect measures used within the assessment plan. We applaud the development and inclusion of additional learning objectives not required by the program accreditor but deemed critical by the program faculty for evaluating student success. We also commend the development of new strategies implemented to encourage collection, management, and analysis of student learning outcomes data to be more consistent and actionable.

The committee recognizes the faculty members of the program for their scholarly contributions to the School of Kinesiology and Recreation. Faculty members are active researchers who publish peer-reviewed journals articles and present at national and international professional conferences. The committee commended faculty for their engagement across numerous professional development experiences that spanned a variety of topics.

The committee appreciates the analysis of comparator and aspirational programs. As part of this analysis, the program faculty identified multiple institutions with similar programs that excel in ways that our program may aspire to. The committee also recognizes that faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives to improve the program at Illinois State University. Actions planned as a result of these analyses include the development of new concentrations, a future analysis of the current minor, and a plan for redesigning of the program webpages and other recruiting materials to attract students to the program earlier.

**Recommendations.** The Academic Planning Committee appreciates the work of the Recreation and Park Administration faculty and staff in developing this self-study report. Overall, the report was well-written, thorough, and provided insightful information about the program's current initiatives and future plans. The committee congratulates the B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration program on a successful eight years.

In addition to the program's noteworthy efforts and accomplishments, the Academic Planning Committee provided recommendations for consideration. The committee's recommendations outlined below are to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. Details describing the actions and outcomes associated with each of the committee's recommendations should be included in the next program review self-study report that is tentatively due October 1, 2031.

**Continue to refine your plan for enrollment management.** The committee notes that, consistent with national trends, enrollment in the program declined over the period of review. We recognize the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts and streamlining the curriculum, which have resulted in an increase in the Fall 2023 program enrollments. We support the program faculty's proposed initiatives that resulted from their analysis of aspirational programs designed to continue controlled growth of the program. Furthermore, we recognize that further faculty resources may be required if such growth were to be sustained.

**Continue to focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access.** The committee recognizes the efforts that have resulted in increasing the diversity of faculty and students within the program and encourages the program to continue to pursue its goals related to further developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds.

**Continue to focus on student success and retention.** The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around "student success" by defining the program's goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). We suggest that the program faculty consider developing more touch points for contacting first-time-in-college students during their first year. The committee recommends that the program continue monitoring student retention and graduation rates and student participation in research and scholarly activities; we further recommend that the program collaborate with the Center for Civic Engagement on campus in the future to track such student participation.

**Continue to review and revise the curriculum.** The committee recognizes substantial work by former and current faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field, including assessing the impact of recent revisions.

**Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan.** The committee encourages faculty to continue their implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program during the next program review cycle, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

**Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library.** We recommend that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to develop a tiered approach for information fluency learning outcomes for the department, align those outcomes to the curricula, and integrate those outcomes into the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program.

Further, the committee recommends that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to examine and evaluate the library's journals and monograph collection to aid in both the selection and deselection process of these sources. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in distance and hybrid courses, we encourage the department and library to further collaborate to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among faculty and students.