

**Academic Program Review**  
**External Reviewer Report**

**Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Recreation Education**

**Lehman College**

**250 Bedford Park Blvd W, The Bronx, NY 10468**

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### **Purpose of Program Review**

This Program Review is intended to provide your academic units and administrators an external, objective summary of the programs' strengths, deficiencies, and goals. Routine assessment, such as this, is utilized to ensure success in meeting the program goals and objectives. Below, strengths, opportunities and potential threats to programs are discussed in the areas of student experience, curriculum and instruction, and faculty development.

### **Student experience findings**

The learning environment is supportive. However, there is little student engagement outside of require class sessions. Student clubs, mixers, or living learning communities that are available at other four-year schools are not active at Lehman College. These experiences benefit some students, however, the composition of Lemman students as older and more committed to family and community outside of school does not lend itself to the growth and development of "majors clubs" or social gatherings. Instead, I recommend higher stakes opportunities for student involvement outside the classroom such as special sessions for Lehman students for related certifications (CPR, First Aid, aquatic therapy, certified youth sports official) and professional networking. These are likely to be more valuable to the Lehman student and worth the time investment.

The internship is a significant draw to the program and is a cornerstone of the curriculum and central to students' interest in this field. A dedicated staff member, preferably non-tenure earning, is needed to facilitate the internship program. Also, ongoing memorandum of agreements with frequent host sites can and should be used. Any effort to standardize this process is going to be time consuming but likely to pay dividends.

Students noted that assessments in the courses are appropriate and relevant to course material.

Students feel valued and known by their faculty.

Lehman faculty provide a stimulating and challenging learning environment.

The Recreation Management faculty and program are the most student-centered I have seen in my 20 years in academia.

The mixture of PhD terminal degree and practitioner faculty is appreciated by students.

The value of a Lehman education was perceived as very good among alumni and current students. The cost of obtaining the degree is much more reasonable than that of other four-year universities that have comparable coursework and opportunities.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

### ***Undergraduate program***

The enrollment in the Bachelor of Science in Recreation Education (BSRE) showed steady and modest upward enrollment prior to the interruptions from COVID-19. Similarly, graduation rates were strong among enrolled students. It is notable that time to graduation is a key goal for Lehman and the BSRE should be commended on its contribution to facilitating rapid progress toward graduation without unnecessary barriers. It is expected that these enrollment trends will continue or rebound post COVID and are not areas for concern at this time. Students reported feeling supported and seen by their faculty. While students missed the casual interactions that arise with face-to-face classes, they reported that full time and adjunct faculty were responsive, caring, and communicative. This will support these goals.

The articulation agreement that exists is bearing fruit for Lehman and efforts to develop additional articulation agreements as planned should remain a high priority.

Analysis of the curriculum offerings suggests the BSRE is in a period of transition from the previous leadership and faculty. Previous faculty leaned heavily on traditional community recreation administration curricula. The exception to this is the focus on recreational therapy

particularly as it relates to elder care and nursing home support. Current full-time faculty are invested in revising the curriculum and have already begun this process. These efforts are likely to be very important in maintaining student interest in the BSRE as a shift to youth sport and recreation and away from general recreation administration which, while still important, is not the sole area of employment or interest among students.

The symbiotic relationship for minors and supporting courses in the college is a model that should be adopted elsewhere. It is commendable.

There appears to be growth opportunities in student course enrollments by encouraging students from other units in the college to add Recreation Education as a minor to their degree plan.

The review indicated a convergence of student interest in therapeutic recreation and exercise and sport, and administration in student numbers. The core coursework that all students must take is five classes that equals 15 credits. The core classes offer foundational courses in recreation education as well as introductions to therapeutic recreation (REC 321) and Recreation Administration (REC 401). However, there is no similar introduction to exercise and sport within the core curriculum in the BSRE. Since the value of 15 is relatively low value for core course requirements, there is an opportunity to add a survey or foundations course in sport and recreation in the core requirements. Similarly, the newly developed course in inclusion and diversity could be added to the core requirements. The more courses that can be taught to all students will create efficiencies for faculty workload.

There is opportunity for expansion in student course numbers by expanding the number of courses required in the BSRE. The program is attuned to the need to graduate students on time and recognize that most students arrive at Lehman BSRE with an associate degree. As such, the BSRE requires forty of the sixty hours that students must take while at Lehman. Since electives are built into this forty-hour degree requirement, there is still room to increase the number of required major courses. Faculty expressed some interest in this as part of their continued curriculum revision and I believe this is a good avenue to pursue for credit hour growth.

The internship courses and experiences in the BSRE need continued attention. Across the United States providing internship experiences in the BSRE is a cornerstone of curriculum and very valued by students. However, this is a labor-intensive process. Some requirements and paperwork can be standardized but individual and agency matching, and supervision will always require significant faculty and staff time and energy. I recommend providing new academic credits in the expanded BSRE requirements for students to develop job seeking materials and secure an internship site. Students can complete interviews, write professional cover letters and compile an internship file in an academic course. This provides the structure and information that students crave about their forthcoming internship and provides a dedicated funding stream for one step of the internship coordination process. This is not the only way that this can be achieved. Resources are needed to provide adequate oversight to this complicated but necessary process. Along these same lines, the internship program would benefit from clear differentiation between the therapeutic recreation internship requirements and the internships in other areas. Ideally, different faculty or staff member will be identified to manage these two distinct sets of requirements.

Although perhaps not an immediate area of emphasis, the faculty in the BSRE may consider pursuing credit for one or more courses as part of the Pathways curriculum at Lehman. Colleges across the United States rely on recreation education programs to meet college or university-wide requirements for social science general education, basic management training or domestic diversity course requirements through BSRE offerings. Existing faculty have the skills to do this although it would be a further demand on workload. The balance between student credit generation and faculty workload must remain in the forefront of any discussion.

Students in the therapeutic recreation concentration have room to improve their passing rate on national certification test. Attention to certification requirements and an updated curriculum in therapeutic recreation are critical to the continued success of this part of the program. Further, there is a movement in therapeutic recreation education nationwide to transition the degree to a masters-level credential. Similar to changes have been seen in athletic training—athletic training has tightened restrictions for accreditation and shifted requirements to the masters' level. The potential for this to occur in therapeutic recreation also exists. Right now, there is a national

credential offered by the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA), but individual states have legislation that requires additional, more rigorous legal requirements state by state. Legislation relating to certification in New York or New Jersey as well as the national trend toward a Master of Science requirement are both potential threats to the long-term future of the BSRE emphasis in therapeutic recreation. This simply bears watching and staying up to date on developments in the field.

Lehman has an opportunity to achieve national program accreditation for the Bachelor of Science in Recreation Administration with the National Recreation and Park Association. This non-profit governing body and advocate for recreation and park professionals offers the most widely recognized academic accreditation. Accreditation with NRPA (called COAPRT -Council on Accreditation for Park, Recreation and Tourism) requires significant assessment, documentation and annual expense. However successful accreditation has many benefits. Accredited programs are listed on a centralized website and there is broad recognition of its value among professional colleagues. Further, graduates of accredited programs to sit for the Certified Park and Recreation (CPRP) credential at the time of graduation. Without accreditation graduates must acquire a minimum of two years of full-time work experience before sitting for the certification exam. The CPRP credential is increasingly valued among hiring authorities. Based on the current curriculum, faculty size (minimum 3 full time faculty), and ongoing assessment happening at Lehman, I would expect the BSRE to be approved for accreditation if this would be consistent with the program's goals.

Provide academic credit in the expanded BSRE requirements for developing job seeking materials and securing an internship site. Students can complete interviews, write professional cover letters and compile and internship file in an academic course. This provides the structure and information that students crave about their forthcoming internship and provides a dedicated funding stream for one step of the internship coordination process.

The internship program would benefit from clear differentiation between the therapeutic recreation internship requirements and the internships in other areas. Ideally different faculty or staff member will be identified to manage these two distinct sets of requirements.

The BSRE self-study indicated an interest in developing a recreation lab for opportunities for experiential learning. My review of the program and its needs suggests this is not a key need or priority for student learning. The principles and lessons that students can learn with a recreation lab could be practiced without those specific tools and could be accessed through community partnerships without the long-term investment in purchasing and storage space. The desire for an equipment room reflects more old-fashioned training techniques of “old school” traditional recreation programs. Instead, putting energy into field experiences through practicums and volunteer hours will generate a much greater yield for students.

### ***Graduate program***

The graduate program has a healthy enrollment in the Master of Science in Recreation Education (MSRE). Current leadership is hard working, passionate and focused on improving students’ understanding of recreation education and their understanding of the research process. This program, and its curriculum, however, are challenged by the need to serve very different audiences within the same classes and degree program. Many of the student who pursue the MSRE are recent alumni of the undergraduate program. Other MSRE candidates are graduates from Lehman or other four-year universities who have entered the Recreation Education field with no previous training but as “lateral entry” students into the profession. Finally, there are a notable number of students who are seeking professional advancement and commensurate salary increases through the completion of a MS degree. These very different students are all captured under the same curricular umbrella. The final piece to this curricular challenge is that the MS, as designed now, has a fairly significant emphasis on research. While often appropriate in a MS, the MSRE has mostly students enrolled to advance in their chosen profession. This results in a disconnect in some foundational courses between course objectives and student goals.

The student-curriculum disconnect is very noticeable for one cohort of students. For example, there is a sizeable proportion of students enrolled in the MS who are currently physical education teachers. These professionals are seeking career and pay advancement thorough the completion of a MS. Some of these students have a genuine interest in recreation administration and others

are simply looking to earn the MS for the pay bump. The reality, however, is that this is a large enough subgroup that it demands attention. They are unsatisfied with the current curriculum. An attempt should be made to make their experience in the MS more valuable or to communicate better options for these students before they begin their MS degree program. Let unattended, this subgroup of students has the potential to reduce morale and enjoyment among the other MS students in the major.

Scheduling conflicts within the college need to be avoided as this delays students time to completion. Since the MS is interdisciplinary this is a particular concern.

The challenges outlined above are in no way unique to Lehman College. The tenure track faculty and adjunct faculty are doing their best and are widely lauded and appreciated by the students. Small niche pockets of students in one MS program are a common challenge in Recreation Education. Selecting a target market or honing the degree to suit student needs are options.

### **Faculty Development**

Tenure track faculty are well trained and committed to their students. However, each member of the tenure earning faculty is a relatively recent hire and there is little institutional knowledge that exists in this group. They have adapted quickly, however, as an institution, I would encourage Lehman to invest more in training and mentoring so that the next generation of young faculty have more guidance to find their way in the teaching, service and administrative tasks they will take on. A center for faculty excellence and online training series should be developed and available as resources at Lehman College. These either do not exist or are not known and sought by faculty at this time. Also, every effort should be made to retain current faculty as they have begun to build this institutional knowledge and connect with community partners and alumni in the area. Any consistency that can be achieved in the Department Chair and Dean's office will also benefit these faculty.



Advising is completed by full time tenure track faculty as well as a staff member. Advising occurs throughout the academic year and during the summer. While students are assigned an advisor, whomever is available and has requisite knowledge helps students using a team approach. This is working for students right now but as the program continues to grow this could lead to an imbalanced workload based on faculty expertise and responsiveness.

Administrators are encouraged to continue formalizing advising. It is recommended that adjunct faculty serve as mentors for students while full time tenure earning faculty and Lehman staff have formal roles in course recommendation and degree planning with students.

Adjunct faculty are definite strength of the curricular offerings. The hands-on teaching and war stories that are employed in the curriculum ground the students in the field broadly and give them an applied focus for their learning.

Most adjunct faculty trace their roots directly to Lehman or are retired faculty from Lehman. In many ways, this has benefitted the program as the transition to new tenure track faculty has been supported by institutional history that these adjuncts have. As current adjunct faculty phase out of their positions it will be important for Lehman to identify thought leaders with more diverse backgrounds and perspectives who can model success for their students in newer areas in the field. Lehman administration should make every effort to seek and hire faculty and adjunct faculty who better reflect the race, ethnicity, and international backgrounds of Lehman students. This is a difficult task in higher education broadly and in Recreation Education specifically. Whenever able, MS graduates may be nurtured and mentored into these roles as current adjunct faculty select new roles or experiences outside of Lehman.

Adjunct faculty share one office space in each of the two main educational buildings that Lehman uses in the BSRE and MS programs. This seems to meet adjunct faculty needs. However, current full-time faculty are sharing an office. This hampers productivity, concentration and ability to have private mentoring sessions or phone conferences. Adequate personal space is needed for each full-time faculty member.

Lehman faculty are living and working in a higher education environment that seems to suggest that university faculty can, and should, all excel in teaching, service, and research. While the faculty at Lehman have very strong research training, I think the mission of Lehman is focused on student development and student success. While academic inquiry should not be ignored, I think a purposeful and visible shift to embrace the role of Lehman in professional student preparation would give the young faculty explicit guidance and expectations for what they need to do to continue to be successful at Lehman. Given the considerable teaching, advising and service workload faculty are completing, I think it is appropriate that scholarly research expectations be minimal, and that this expectation is made clear to tenure earning faculty.

### **Final Thoughts**

Lehman is a dynamic and energized liberal arts college that serves a diverse group of students in the Bronx. The BSRE and MSRE programs reflect the positive energy and hard work that characterizes Lehman overall. The students are committed and happy to be enrolled at Lehman and learning from scholars and practitioners alike. Lehman offers a valuable, applied education in Recreation Education and is an exceptional value in the landscape of higher education. There are opportunities and areas for improvement as outlined in this external review. Given the current level of physical, financial and personnel resources available, the BSRE and MSRE programs are excelling and have significant potential to grow and flourish as they continue to remake themselves with the current, next generation of faculty and administrators.