

OPINIONS OF CAL POLY RECREATION, PARKS, & TOURISM
ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS AND ALUMNI REGARDING THE RPTA SENIOR
PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

A Senior Project
presented to
the Faculty of the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration Department
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Cristina de Ocampo

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ABSTRACT

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CRISTINA DE OCAMPO
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Senior projects are designed to provide college seniors with a capstone educational experience. While some colleges and universities require students to take on a thesis format of a senior project, others require an applied physical product, such as fieldwork. Studies recognize benefits and downfalls to both types of senior project formats. California Polytechnic State University's Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration Department requires that students within the major complete a two-quarter research and development thesis assignment to fulfill a senior project. In May of 2010, 90 students and alumni completed a questionnaire that measured the opinions of Cal Poly RPTA's senior project requirements. Based on the findings from the survey, alumni rated 19 agreement items higher than current students, ultimately agreeing that the RPTA senior project adequately prepares graduates of the major. Key conclusions made from this study include the fact that after students finish the senior project process and begin their careers, they may be able to appreciate the senior project.

Keywords: opinions, senior project, active learning, thesis project

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of the Study

A senior project is designed to serve as a student's final opportunity to display knowledge, problem solving, critical thinking skills, and the ability to conduct research upon graduating from a university. It is the student's responsibility to commit to this project, putting their accumulated knowledge, skills, and abilities to use. Generally, a topic is either chosen or assigned as a focus for a senior project. If a topic is not assigned, students are responsible for selecting an area of study that relates to their academic and career and interests. Through the senior project, students should gain skills and attributes that will benefit them in their future careers. In some majors, the senior project takes on a thesis format, in which students are required to focus on a particular topic, conduct research on that topic, and effectively create a written document regarding the subject. In other cases, students are instructed to construct their senior project as an applied experience, through which learned skills and knowledge are put into action through a practical and useful form of study. Many differing and opposing views exist regarding the different forms of senior projects.

According to McGoldrick (2008), colleges and universities across the world believe that research and written skills are a beneficial form of learning and applying one's knowledge to the very fullest. Yet, others argue that a more dynamic form of development is necessary to fully leave an imprint on the student's life (Bushong 2009). Certain senior project requirements at the college level do not always correspond with a

college or department's vision. Take, for example, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo's Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration Department. The Cal Poly RPTA vision statement reads, "Healthy lifestyles, memorable places, life enhancing experiences" (Recreation). Senior Project requirements for the Cal Poly RPTA students include research design, literature review, questionnaire and interview structuring, sampling methods, data analysis, computer applications, and a final formal report.

While examining the RPTA department's vision statement, it is important to question whether or not the senior project requirements sufficiently correspond with the department vision. Some, such as Parker (2009), may argue that this particular requirement could be altered to adequately suit the RPTA department's vision, specifically through enhancement of active learning and a more applied structure for the senior project. Others, like McGoldrick (2008), may argue that a research paper does fit the RPTA vision through report writing, evaluation of materials, synthesis of findings, and independent study work. The information gathered from this study should be examined by Cal Poly to reassess the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration senior project requirements.

Review of Literature

The review of literature was conducted through online databases provided by the Robert E. Kennedy Library, located on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo. The review of literature was presented by dividing the subject matter into topic sections. The sections appeared in the following order

beginning with active learning and senior projects. In order to successfully answer the proposed research questions, the literature addresses views and opinions regarding successful learning styles through senior projects or theses.

Active learning. Active learning addresses the style of processing education in a more dynamic way than other forms of learning. This section covers literature and completed research that focuses on different forms of learning to compare proactive and passive education.

Bonwell and Elison (1991) conducted a study that suggested that strategies encouraging active learning can be defined as instructional activities involving students putting their knowledge to use actively, while thinking about what they are doing. Several additional strategies promoting active learning have been similarly shown to favorably influence students' attitudes and achievements. Active learning can also occur outside the classroom. In accordance to Chickering and Gamson (1987), there are thousands of internships, independent studies, and cooperative job opportunities across the country in various fields, colleges, and universities, for students to pursue. Furthermore, in a recent study of the influence of active learning on college students, it was found that students who rarely experience active learning in their courses might become socially isolated in order to focus solely on their pedagogical performance (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan 2000). Active learning promotes social networking and interaction with others, directly setting students up for work in the real world. When thinking about the future, students focus on self-development, holding importance to society, meeting the needs of others, and choosing a higher form of education, such as active learning, within communities (Solbrekke, 2006).

Active learning goes hand in hand with the idea of ‘learning by doing.’ In a recent study of integrated approaches for preparing graduates, Haynes (1994) suggested that the idea of learn by doing was beneficial in receiving image-building publicity of involvement in educational leadership. Developing graduates who are effective as change agents, leaders, facilitators, and team builders with a clear vision and focus on critical issues is another way in which ‘learn by doing’ is valuable. In order for students to fully apply what they have learned throughout their college careers, research suggests they must literally put their education to action. Sorcinelli (1987) conducted a study that listed active learning as one of the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, arguing that students must make what they learn part of themselves and apply it to their daily lives.

Studies have shown that taking on active learning directly prepares the student before entering the workforce. In an article published in the Taranaki Daily News in New Zealand, The Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki provides a six-month to one-year course that involves practical time in a workplace or simulated work environment (O’Dowd, 2009). This opportunity ensures that students not only master the theory, but also apply it in a practical way. Although active learning can take on many forms, senior theses represent a type of education programming that can serve as an active or passive learning opportunity.

Senior projects. Prior to graduation, senior college students are commonly given one last chance to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through a senior project or senior thesis. Numerous studies have been conducted to measure the benefits, opinions,

and educational gains of senior projects. This section will present the findings of senior thesis assignments and the benefits or downfalls of various senior project requirements.

Although research paper requirements among seniors in college have existed for centuries, McGoldrick (2008) recently conducted a study suggesting that while a majority of departments require writing assignments, students are writing more term papers than they did 15 years ago. Senior projects commonly require a written assignment involving research and analysis of a certain topic. This type of assignment is generally known as a senior thesis or dissertation, made up of a compilation of written documents. However, in another study (Bushong, 2009), it was found that senior projects should apply to much more than writing ability or expertise in computer code. When analyzing ways in which a written senior thesis requirement benefits a student down the line in the professional business world, several studies suggest a lack of educational gain from this form of senior project. Parker (2009) explained:

Reviewing what people have written in the past might be a legitimate way to learn how their positions might have formed and evolved, but surely there should be a statute of limitations on being held accountable for those thoughts. Few of us would want our college papers from 20, 30 or 40 years ago construed as representing our current thinking. (p. 23a)

The purpose of a senior project ultimately is to help students in post-graduation life. If written requirements do not aid the student after graduation, then the purpose and value of the senior project are questionable (Parker 2009). In order to fully prepare students for the real world after graduation, a more hands-on approach to senior project requirements is suggested by several studies.

Nance and Mackey-Kallis (1997) indicated that senior projects fit into the category of cooperative learning. The mission of a senior project involves not only a student's ability to complete the required work individually, but also the student's ability to work with others. A collaborative as well as active effort allows for more experience in working alongside other individuals and readying students for professional life. In a recent study evaluating undergraduate theses, it was found that senior theses and other capstone research projects are standard features of many curricula, but typically participation has been limited to only the highly motivated and most advanced students. Furthermore, the recent trend to engage more students in research has caused faculty to discover their typical approach to thesis writing less effective (Reynolds, Smith, Moskovitz, & Sayle, 2009). Active learning approaches to senior projects may draw students in and enhance the learning experience through memorable pedagogical encounters. Nance and Mackey-Kallis' study (1997) noted that for many students, the senior project is their first and last academic project. The lessons learned and skills developed are meant to help students in their careers as communicative professionals and as creative citizens in the world at large.

Summary. This review of literature covered two topic areas: active learning and senior projects. Active learning encourages dynamic participation and a direct understanding of a subject. The idea of 'learn by doing' further explains active learning as a style of education. In order for college students to fully grasp the concepts learned in their field of study, several sources have indicated that active learning successfully prepares undergraduate students for the 'real' world by taking the knowledge, problem

solving skills, and critical thinking skills and actually applying them to both work and home life.

Senior projects take on several different approaches, including written and dynamic forms. The written format of a senior project, more commonly known as a thesis or dissertation, remains a general feature among many colleges. Dynamic forms of senior projects, however, take on a more hands-on approach and encourage active participation in the project. The different requirements bring about varying opinions of which style is most beneficial to the student both during the senior project process as well as in the future professional world. Several studies suggest that thesis-writing requirements sufficiently prepare students for the post-graduation realm. Others argue against the norm of writing a research paper, instead promoting a more memorable and practical experience. By attaining valuable experiences through an applied senior project, students can embark on the working world and put into practice the obtained knowledge and understanding.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA Senior Project requirements.

Research Questions

This study is attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Do RPTA students and alumni think the current senior project is an appropriate learning experience for students in the major?
2. Do students and alumni differ on their opinions regarding the appropriateness of a senior project learning experience?
3. Does the RPTA senior project support the major's tagline 'Live it, Protect it, Explore it'?
4. Do the senior project requirements support the major's vision? "Healthy lifestyles, memorable places, life-enhancing experiences"
5. Do the senior project requirements support the major's mission to advance knowledge and leadership in RPTA?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on the RPTA senior project was gathered from Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni.
2. The opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the senior project requirements were measured.
3. The data were collected during the Spring of 2010.
4. Information for this study was gathered using an online survey method.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. Not all recipients have access to the Internet, thus some subjects may not have been able to participate in the study.
2. Email may have entered SPAM mail, thus instruments may not have been received.
3. Email addresses may have been changed or been spelled incorrectly.
4. Recipients may not check their email on a regular basis.

Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The subjects responded to the online survey honestly and to the best of their ability.
2. All respondents had Internet access, an email address, and check their email on a regular basis.
3. The person who completed the survey was the actual owner of the email address.
4. The instrument was understandable and comprehensible.
5. Respondents completed and returned the survey.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Active Learning. a form of learning designed to enhance the educational experience through innovative, hands-on, and engaging pedagogy that stresses inquiry from a student's own questions and inquisitive nature rather than top-down transmission of knowledge by authority figures (Corey, 2010).

Opinion. a personal view, belief, or outlook

Senior project. a common assignment focusing on integration (pulling together the four years of college), breadth (taking students beyond the increasing specialization of the major by offering a final general education experience), application (using student expert knowledge to examine a discrete issue and produce a substantial product), and transition (preparing students to move from college to the world beyond) (Sill, Harward, & Cooper, 2009).

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA Senior Project requirements. The following sections describe the subjects, the instrument, the procedures, and the method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

California Polytechnic State University students and alumni within the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration Department were the subjects of the study. Students who have completed RPTA 460 or were enrolled in RPTA 460 in Spring 2010 at minimum were surveyed. After experiencing RPTA courses and attaining a basic knowledge of the department's mission and vision, 379 subjects were qualified to answer questions based on their perceptions of the RPTA Senior Project requirements. Purposive sampling was used to survey Cal Poly RPTA alumni and students who at a minimum have completed RPTA 460 or were enrolled in RPTA 460 in Spring 2010. Subjects were selected through a list of email addresses of students and alumni who meet the subject requirements.

Description of Instrument

The instrument, created by the researcher, measured the opinions of RPTA students and alumni with five questions. It was administered as an Internet survey through the electronic Web-based survey program, Zoomerang. Question one consisted of 19 separate statements that were rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Subjects were asked to select the number, one through four, that best represented their level of agreement with

specified statements regarding the RPTA Senior Project requirements. A rating of 1 signified “strongly disagree” and a rating of 4 signified “strongly agree.” Question two asked for gender as a closed-ended item. Question three, for alumni only, asked what year the participant graduated from Cal Poly. Item four inquired about senior project classes the student participant has taken. Students had the option to choose from currently enrolled in RPTA 460: Research in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration, completed RPTA 460, currently enrolled in RPTA 461: Senior Project, completed RPTA 460 and RPTA 461, or other, which required the participant to specify their reason for selecting ‘other’ as an open-ended question. Items three and four presented demographic-based questions; year in school and gender were closed-ended items, while year graduated was asked using fill in the blank.

An informed consent to participate in the study was attached to the email. The consent form notified the subjects of the background of the study and the instrument, including approximate time to complete the questionnaire and assurance of privacy. A copy of the instrument and the informed consent to participate in this study, created by the researcher, can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. Human Approval for the study was attained from the Cal Poly Human Subjects Review Committee.

Description of Procedures

On Thursday, April 1, 2010, the researcher contacted Bill Hendricks, Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration department head, and discussed how and when to

distribute the survey to RPTA students and alumni. The researcher forwarded the electronic mail to 379 subjects through a list of email addresses of students and alumni requested from Dr. Bill Hendricks. On Monday, April 5, 2010, the researcher forwarded the electronic mail cover letter and link to the questionnaire to the 379 subjects.

The cover letter instructed the subjects to open the link to the electronic survey attachment and complete the questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, the finished questionnaires were automatically sent back to the researcher, through the electronic Web-based survey program, Zoomerang. Returned questionnaires signified the subjects' consent to participate in the study. If subjects declined to participate, they did not complete the questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were downloaded from Zoomerang and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. These variables included opinions about senior project requirements, enrollment in RPTA senior project courses, year graduated, and gender. The findings answered the research questions addressing the pertinence of the RPTA senior project requirements to the department's vision, mission, and tagline. These research questions were answered using Likert-type scale responses found within question one on the instrument. The mean and standard deviation scores were tabulated for each item within the question. A t-test was tabulated between alumni and student opinions from the 19 items in question 1. This data comparing alumni and student opinions answered the research question regarding differences in opinions concerning the RPTA Senior Project requirements among students and alumni.

Item four in the instrument asked the subjects if they were enrolled in either of the senior project courses or completed both courses during the time of completing the survey. The data extracted from this item was tabulated for frequency and percentage. Frequency and percentage was derived from the data pertaining to the remaining item of the survey, indicating the subject's gender.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA senior project requirements. The questionnaire was sent electronically to 296 RPTA alumni and 83 RPTA students who had completed RPTA 460 or were enrolled in RPTA 460 during Spring Quarter of 2010 at a minimum. Of the 296 alumni, 10 emails were returned as non-deliverable. Ninety questionnaires were returned representing 24.0% of the entire sample. The following sections present the findings from the survey.

Subject Characteristics

Of the 90 respondents, 68 (75.6%) were female and 22 (24.4%) were male. All of the student respondents had at a minimum completed RPTA 460: Research in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration or were enrolled in RPTA 460 in Spring 2010. Fifteen of the student subjects (48.39%) were currently enrolled in RPTA 461 and 10 (32.25%) were currently enrolled in RPTA 460 (see Table 1). Furthermore, 55 (61.2%) of the 90 participants were alumni, and 35 (38.8%) were current students. Of the 55 alumni who responded, nine graduated in 2003, seven in 2006, and six in 2008 (see Table 2).

Opinions Regarding RPTA Senior Project

All 19 agreement statements listed in item one received a mean score between 2.28 and 3.56. "Prepares graduates of the major to work productively in groups" received

the lowest score of 2.28. The highest mean score of 3.56 addressed whether or not the senior project “prepares graduates of the major with research skills.”

Differences in Opinions Between Students and Alumni

An analysis of the differences between student and alumni mean scores was conducted using a t-test. Of the 19 statements, significant differences were present for 12 items at the 0.05 p-value. In all cases, for these 12 statements, alumni rated the statements higher than current students. As shown in Table 4, students rate 7 of the 19 statements below 2.5, but alumni rate none of the 19 items below 2.5.

Among the 12 significant statements from the 19 statements listed in item one included the RPTA senior project supporting RPTA’s mission, vision, and tagline, and prepares graduated to think critically and creatively. Both alumni and students strongly agree that the RPTA senior project prepares graduates to think creatively, with the highest mean score from all subjects. The lowest mean score was given to the statement declaring the RPTA senior project prepares graduates to work in groups. The student mean for this item was 1.88 (see Table 4).

The findings provide information regarding opinions about the RPTA senior project requirements. Alumni rated all 19 items higher than current students, ultimately agreeing that the RPTA senior project adequately prepares graduates of the major. Many conclusions can be drawn from this data, which eventually can lead to potential suggestions, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, to the RPTA department. Chapter 4 includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Table 1

Completed Senior Project Classes According to Frequency and Percentage

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Currently enrolled in RPTA 460	10	32.25
Completed RPTA 460, currently enrolled in RPTA 461	15	48.39
Completed RPTA 460 and RPTA 461	6	19.35

Table 2
Years Alumni Graduated According to Frequency and Percentage

Year Graduated	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1996	2	0.04

1997	1	0.02
1998	2	0.04
1999	3	0.05
2000	2	0.04
2001	2	0.04
2002	3	0.05
2003	9	0.20
2004	4	0.07
2005	2	0.04
2006	7	0.13
2007	6	0.11
2008	5	0.09
2009	6	0.11
Totals	54	1.03

Table 3
Agreement with Statements About the RPTA Senior Project

<u>Event Elements</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Relevant experience to RPTA	2.82	0.82
Valuable experience to RPTA	2.92	0.78

Supports RPTA's vision	2.70	0.85
Supports RPTA's mission	3.19	0.67
Supports RPTA's tagline	2.60	0.83
Prepares graduates to think critically	3.24	0.68
Prepares graduates to think creatively	2.87	0.85
Expertise in graduates discipline	2.97	0.88
Prepares graduates with research skills	3.56	0.56
Prepares graduates with skills to evaluate problems	3.16	0.70
Prepares graduates to work as individuals	3.31	0.66
Prepares graduates to work in groups	2.28	0.94
Encourages engagement in lifelong learning	2.64	0.84
To make reasoned decisions based on ethics	2.74	0.71
To make reasoned decisions based on diversity	2.50	0.75
To make reasoned decisions based on sustainability	2.52	0.72
Prepares graduates to synthesize information	3.20	0.62
Would be effective as a hands-on project	3.29	0.80
Is a benefit to my current career	2.89	0.97

Table 4
Difference in Opinion Among Students and Alumni Regarding the RPTA Senior Project Learning Experience

Event Elements	Student Mean	Alumni Mean	P-Value
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Relevant Experience to RPTA	2.38	3.09	0.001*
Valuable Experience to RPTA	2.53	3.15	0.001*
Supports RPTA's Vision	2.18	3.04	0.002*
Supports RPTA's Mission	2.88	3.41	0.002*
Supports RPTA's Tagline	2.09	2.92	0.005*
Prepares graduates to think critically	3.15	3.29	0.009*
Prepares graduates to think creatively	2.44	3.13	0.016*
Expertise in graduates discipline	2.64	3.14	0.017*
Prepares graduates with research skills	3.47	3.59	0.033*
Prepares graduates with skills to evaluate problems	2.94	3.27	0.054
Prepares graduates to work as individuals	3.20	3.38	0.039*
Prepares graduates to work in groups	1.88	2.51	0.050*
Encourages engagement in lifelong learning	2.50	2.72	0.041*
To make reasoned decisions based on ethics	2.53	2.87	0.056
To make reasoned decisions based on diversity	2.26	2.65	0.076
To make reasoned decisions based on sustainability	2.05	2.81	0.123
Prepares graduates to synthesize information	3.00	3.31	0.171
Would be effective as a hands-on project	3.14	3.37	0.061

*Significant at an alpha level of .05

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Senior projects are a common way to provide graduating students an opportunity to demonstrate attained skills and knowledge in a field of expertise. There are several forms of senior projects, including thesis and research compilation, fieldwork, and hands-on experiences. Each of these types of projects takes on a different criterion, providing the student with various learning experiences. Thesis writing, for instance, involves intricate analysis and research development, while active, hands-on projects produce a more 'learn by doing' experience.

The Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration department at Cal Poly requires students within the major to partake in research development of a desired topic within the field, surveying and data analysis, and ultimately thesis writing to explain findings and conclusions. The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA senior project requirements. By understanding the views of the students and alumni, administrators and professors within RPTA and Cal Poly may take note of the benefits or the downfalls to the current senior project requirements. Senior project is one of the last chances for students to express expertise and knowledge within an area of study. Therefore, the more fitting the requirements to the student's wants and needs, the more effort and drive will be implemented throughout the project.

With the constant desire to improve teaching and discover new ways of learning, research has been performed concerning benefits and downfalls obtained from different learning styles. Studies have shown that active learning has been proven to positively influence students' attitudes and achievements. On the other hand, many studies have shown that students gain analytical and critical thinking skills by writing a thesis.

According to research, the senior project serves as the first and last academic project in a

student's life. The skills and knowledge developed from the senior project are meant to aid the students in their post-graduation careers.

On April 27, 2010, 379 Cal Poly students and alumni who at a minimum completed RPTA 460: Research in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration or were enrolled in RPTA 460 in Spring 2010, were sent an electronic mail survey. The questionnaire, preceded by an informed consent to participate, analyzed the opinions of alumni and students regarding the RPTA senior project requirements.

Of the 379 students and alumni who were sent the questionnaire, 90 responded, representing 24.0% of the sample. Each of the 19 agreement statements measured received a mean score above a 2.5 on a 4-point Likert scale. Various insights can be made about the opinions of RPTA students and alumni regarding agreement or disagreement with the senior project requirements.

Discussion

After examining the findings from this study, RPTA students and alumni think the current senior project is an appropriate learning experience. Participants agree that the senior project requirements provide a relevant and valuable experience to the RPTA field. Students and alumni show some differences in their opinions regarding the appropriateness of the senior project learning experience. Alumni rate all of the statements about the RPTA senior project's preparation of graduates of the major higher than students, meaning that the alumni more strongly agree with the statements. The majority of respondents agree that the RPTA senior project requirements support the major's tagline, vision, and mission. Of the three, however, respondents most strongly

agree that the senior project supports RPTA's mission: "To advance knowledge and leadership in RPTA."

Based on previous research, the findings relate to the literature review in several ways. In terms of active learning, the respondents agree that the RPTA senior project would be effective as a hands-on project. This directly relates to the research indicating that active learning is a favored form of pedagogy among students. On the other hand, the findings support previous research in that the senior project prepares graduates of the major with research and critical thinking skills that are most beneficial in educational learning (McGoldrick, 2008). When examining the relationship between the findings and previous research regarding the purpose of a senior project, the majority of respondents agree that the senior project encourages graduates of the major to engage in lifelong learning. Nance and Mackey-Kallis (1997) argue that a main purpose of the senior project is to prepare the student for post-graduate life. Only about half of the respondents agree that the RPTA senior project encourages graduates to engage in lifelong learning. Two explanations can be made for this discrepancy. The students in the major assume they will not gain any lifelong benefits from the senior project, and some alumni fail to see a significant beneficiary growth from the senior project in their current line of work. However, the majority of alumni do feel the RPTA senior project provides lifelong benefits, as the alumni mean score for this item is a 2.72. Therefore, it is possible that after students finish the senior project process and begin their careers, they may be able to appreciate the senior project on a new level.

Although the overall mean scores of the 19 agreement statements are high, various additional threats to the validity and reliability of the study must be considered. The researcher assumes that subjects respond honestly and to the best of their ability.

However, students currently enrolled in either of the senior project courses could potentially feel more negatively toward the survey if they have developed stress or frustration with their individual project. Furthermore, for certain alumni, subjects have to rely on their long-term memory, recalling their experience from years prior, to respond to the survey.

Ultimately, the 90 respondents are satisfied with the RPTA senior project requirements, feel that it adequately relates to the field, and prepares graduates for life after college. If, however, the system is changed and students are required to take on a more hands-on approach to senior project, students would potentially thrive off the idea and take on the project. Additional research and continued follow-up on student and alumni opinions regarding RPTA's senior project requirements would ultimately help provide additional information to assess the appropriateness of the senior project requirement.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. RPTA students and alumni think the current senior project is an appropriate learning experience for students in the major.
2. Students and alumni differ on their opinions regarding the appropriateness of a senior project learning experience, with the alumni more strongly agreeing with the agreement statements concerning preparedness of graduates through the senior project experience.

3. The RPTA senior project supports the major's tagline 'Live it, Protect it, Explore it.'
4. The senior project requirements support the major's vision "Healthy lifestyles, memorable places, life-enhancing experiences."
5. The senior project requirements support the major's mission to advance knowledge and leadership in RPTA.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Continue to offer RPTA's senior project within the same format however provide a more hands-on component to the project.
2. Consider further research pertaining to the benefits of active learning versus thesis writing.
3. Consider implementing an alumni-student seminar to encourage current students that senior project will leave a more lasting learning experience on the student, as it has for alumni.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Questionnaire

RPTA Senior Project Survey

This survey is designed to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA senior project. All respondents will remain anonymous. Thank you for participating in this survey!

1. For each item listed below, please indicate the extent you agree or disagree (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree) with statements about the RPTA senior project's preparation of graduates of the major:

Provides a relevant experience to the RPTA field	1	2	3	4
Provides a valuable experience to the RPTA field	1	2	3	4
Supports RPTA's vision: "Healthy lifestyles, memorable places, life-enhancing experiences"	1	2	3	4
Supports RPTA's mission: "To advance knowledge and leadership in RPTA"	1	2	3	4
Supports RPTA's tagline: "Live it, Protect it, Explore it"	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to think critically	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to think creatively	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to demonstrate expertise in their discipline	1	2	3	4
Prepare graduates of the major with research skills	1	2	3	4
Prepare graduates of the major with skills to evaluate problems	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to work productively as individuals	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to work productively in groups	1	2	3	4
Encourages graduates of the major to engage in lifelong learning	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to make reasoned decisions based on an understanding of ethics	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to make reasoned decisions based on respect for diversity	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates of the major to make reasoned decisions based on an awareness of issues related to sustainability	1	2	3	4
Prepares graduates in the major with the ability to synthesize information	1	2	3	4
Would be effective as a hands-on active project	1	2	3	4
Is a benefit to my current career (for alumni only)	1	2	3	4

2. Gender M F

3. Year graduated from Cal Poly (alumni only) _____
4. What senior project classes have you taken? (Students only)
- a. currently enrolled in RPTA 460
 - b. completed RPTA 460, currently enrolled in RPTA 461
 - c. Completed RPTA 460 and RPTA 461
 - d. Other, please specify _____

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey! Have a nice day!

Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY OF OPINION OF CAL POLY RECREATION, PARKS, AND TOURISM ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS AND ALUMNI REGARDING THE RPTA SENIOR PROJECT REQUIREMENTS.

A research project on senior projects is being conducted by Cristina de Ocampo, in the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. The purpose of the study is to examine the opinions of Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration students and alumni regarding the RPTA senior project requirements.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire. Please read the questions and respond to the best of your ability and as accurately as possible. Your participation will take approximately 3-5 minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks associated with participation in this study. Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy. Potential benefits associated with the study include the revision of the senior project for Cal Poly Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration students.

If you have any question regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Cristina de Ocampo at (650) 766-2268 or by email at cdeocamp@calpoly.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the manner in which this study is conducted, you may contact Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at (805) 756-1508, sopava@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing and returning the attached questionnaire. Please retain this consent cover form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.