

MOTIVATIONS OF RECREATION, PARKS, AND TOURISM ADMINISTRATION
STUDENTS TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

MOTIVATIONS OF RECREATION, PARKS, AND TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

STUDENTS TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

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Associations have increasingly been holding professional conferences globally. The California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), San Luis Obispo Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration (RPTA) department offers students the chance to attend various professional conferences annually. The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attend professional conferences. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire on the Cal Poly campus. The findings from 80 subjects indicated a high interest in attending conferences; the top motivating factors to attend professional conferences were networking with professionals, job opportunities, and the relation of the conference to the respondents' concentration. The lowest motivational factors were educational sessions, past experiences at conferences, and getting away from school. The RPTA department should offer more details to students about conferences to provide students the opportunity to draft their own budget and research attendees of a conference.

Keywords: Cal Poly, RPTA, motivations, college students, professional conferences, professional associations

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of the Study

Professional associations were created to advance professions and for the development of individuals associated with those professions. Astroff and Abbey (1998) found that there were “about 5,000 national and international associations in the United States and about 15,000 state and regional associations” (as cited in Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001, p. 46). These national, international, and regional associations have a wide range of fields that they represent. Associations include general topic areas relating to tourism, business, dental, law, and so on. Various professional associations traditionally hold annual conferences for their members. Fenich (2008) reported that yearly conference attendance generates about 33% of the annual budget for professional associations. However, these conferences are not only beneficial to the associations but are also important to the attendees.

Fjelstul, Severt, and Breiter (2009) indicated that four generations of professionals make up the current workforce and the members of professional associations. Therefore, the motivating factors to attend conferences may vary. One generation attending these conferences is Generation Y, also known as the Millennial Generation (born after 1980). The majority of the people within this generation are either new to the workforce or students.

Students attending California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), San Luis Obispo are educated based upon the university motto of “learn by doing.” This motto has

established core values throughout all majors. The Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration (RPTA) department at Cal Poly reflects this motto by providing opportunities for their students to attend professional conferences.

With the current economic climate, job opportunities are limited and networking increasingly has emerged as a key method of receiving a job prospect after graduation. RPTA students are given the opportunity and are encouraged to attend professional conferences in California and around the nation. At these conferences their networking skills can be developed and refined. However, the RPTA department has not completed any evaluations of conference attendance. With an assortment of benefits that emerge from attending professional conferences, the purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attend professional conferences.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: EBSCOHost, Expanded Academic ASAP, Google Scholar, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, Interlibrary Loan, psycINFO, and ScienceDirect. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: motivations and benefits of professional associations and conference attendance and motivation of college students.

Motivations and benefits of professional associations and conference attendance.

Professional associations have rapidly increased on an international basis the past few

decades. These professional associations along with corporate groups, governments, intergovernmental organizations, religious groups, and trade unions have become the main supplier of annual conferences globally (Smith, 1998). This section will address the three benefactors of conferences and research the four general factors motivating attendees of professional conferences.

On a local, regional, national, and international level these organizations are supplying their members and the public with annual conferences and meetings with a variety of benefits. Oppermann and Chon (1997) segment the association annual conferences and meetings market into three benefactors including “the organizing association, the host location, and the potential attendees” (p. 179). Potential attendees are the main focus given that without the attendees a conference would not exist.

Oppermann and Chon (1997) found that “more than 1 million association and corporate meetings are held annually in the United States alone, yielding an estimated 85 million attendees who spend more than US \$75 billion annually” (p. 178). There are many inhibitors and facilitators that can contribute to the decision making process of these attendees. Oppermann and Chon adequately classify four factors that contribute to the wants and needs of conference attendees including: personal/business factors, association/conference factors, location factors, and intervening opportunities.

Personal and business factors including health, money, family, and time are significant motivators to attend a conference. A lack of family obligations and an increased availability of time have been a motivation for professional association members to attend conferences (Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001).

However, one of the main personal and business factors affecting member attendance is financial support.

According to Mohammadi and Mohamed (2010), “Most of participants in an association meeting have to fund their travel expenses themselves or obtain funding from a third party” (p. 54). These third parties usually include an attendee’s company or academic organization and can be the deciding factor for attendance. Conference participation is influenced by income levels, travel costs, and registration fees; thus, attendance becomes constricted to only those who can afford to attend (Witt, Sykes, & Dartus, 1995). Since funding for travel expenses is a primary motivational factor, organizations financial support for individuals to attend conferences is critical.

Conference and association factors are among the highest motivating and benefiting factors when deciding to attend a conference. Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) found that four of the top five conference motivators were related to conference and association factors. The four elements Rittichainuwat et al. established included: education, networking, conference programs, and career enhancement. These conference and association factors are beneficial to those attending a conference. Networking and developing business relationships for career advancement is also an important skill to have and use during professional association conferences.

Many of the benefits of attending a professional conference can be classified as location factors. The general location of the conference is often a motivator. Traveling to a desirable place is included in Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) top five conference motivators. However, as Rittichainuwat et al. stated, “Travel motivations alone do not guarantee that association members will attend a meeting” (p. 47). The attractiveness of

the conference location is reflected by the cost of travel and accessibility of the location to the attendee. If the location is a large city the traveler spends less time commuting and reduces the overall length of the trip (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). However, external factors such as climate and the destination's image also contribute to the location factors. Var, Casario, and Mauser agree that a conference in a large urban area creates more opportunity for attendance than conferences in areas where commuting from home is not possible (as cited in Oppermann & Chon). Making sure that the location is an ideal one that motivates enough people and the right groups of people is very important to conference planning.

The last factor that contributes to conference attendance motivations and benefits is intervening opportunities. Zhang, Leung, and Qu (2006) explained intervening opportunities as the attendee asking themselves which convention they should attend. Oppermann and Chon (1997) supported this by stating that association members hold multiple memberships and they do not attend every associations convention therefore they have to decide which one they want to attend that year (as cited in Zhang et al. 2006). This relates to competing conferences and past experiences with conferences. It is difficult for the associations to determine the correct time to host a conference with multiple professional associations around the world and other conflicting opportunities for people. Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) stated that:

Affordable conference packages and annual conferences can be used to promote attendance. Moreover, meeting planners should check annual conference dates of other associations in order to avoid time conflicts. Several associations publish their annual conferences in newsletters and academic and trade journals. (p. 54)

It is difficult for an attendee to be present at several conferences available annually. Therefore, their past experiences and unique incentives for each conference become a primary motivational factor.

The strength of motivation for personal and business factors, location factors, conference and association factors, and intervening opportunities vary depending on the person and circumstances. However, with each person being unique the top motivational factors can be categorized within the four general factors presented by Oppermann and Chon (1997).

Motivations of college students. College students have a wide variety of motivators in their lives that affect their decision making process. This section will present intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of college students.

To become a college student, high school graduates must be motivated to continue their education. Secondly, the students must have a stimulus that makes them go through the rigorous application process, testing, and classes to be accepted into a college. Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, and Senécal (2007) stated that high school students must shift gears and acquire more motivation because (a) they are not obligated to pursue their studies, (b) they can choose their academic program, and (c) they can choose their courses and their schedule (p. 742).

When it comes to education, a student's motivation is one of the most important concepts affecting their psychological processes (Yoshida et al., 2008). According to Lei (2010), "Motivation often determines whether and to what extent students actually learn a challenging task, especially if the cognitive and behavioral processes necessary for learning are voluntary and under their control" (p. 153). Ratelle et al. (2007) defined motivation as "underlying behavior" and related it to the self-determination theory

(p.734). Self-determination theory presents the idea that a student's motivations are dependent on the individual's behaviors and life characteristics (Ratelle et al.). The self-determination theory, along with other theories, assesses a student's motivation through intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

Intrinsic motivation involves the person being motivated by their own behavior and guided by their own enjoyment of the task (Lei, 2010; Ratelle et al., 2007). College students must possess some level of intrinsic and self motivation to be successful. Intrinsically motivated students have been shown to have autonomous intentions and work on specific tasks because they take pleasure in the task and find it interesting (Lei; Ratelle et al.). Yoshida et al. (2010) stated, "Students who extend their work beyond the requirements appear to have higher motivation for accomplishment in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction and feel competent" (p. 1402). Intrinsic motivation has become a positive source of motivation acquired by college students. Lei expressed that "intrinsically motivated individuals have been able to develop high regards for teaming various types of course information without the inclusion of external rewards or reinforcements" (p. 153).

External rewards, also known as extrinsic motivation, are another type of motivator for college students. Extrinsic motivation has been defined as a student being motivated by an external source to themselves or the activity (Ratelle et al., 2007). Extrinsic motivations for college students usually consist of money, grades, recognition, or other tangible and intangible products. Ratelle et al. refers to extrinsic motivations as controlled and outlines extrinsic motivations as external, interjected, and identified regulations. With external regulations, obtaining a reward becomes the motivator, while interjected regulations deal with receiving controlled guilt. In addition, identified

regulations relate the task to a possible external outcome (Ratelle et al.). Lei (2010) confirms and rephrases this by stating “learning for recognition is the pleasure in receiving a tangible form of recognition for success in learning” (p. 156).

In 2011, college students’ extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are being affected and constructed by the recent economic recession, which has resulted in a lack of jobs in the market. Lewin (2011) reported, “The economy has only added to the stress, not just because of financial pressures on their parents but also because the students are worried about their own college debt and job prospects when they graduate” (para. 5). Stress related to finding a job after graduation is increasing and has resulted in affecting the motivations of students. The unstable economy has produced negative consequences in students’ emotional health, which has affected their intrinsic motivations as well (Lewin). This external motivation of the economy has created an assortment of anxiety on students and has changed their motivations of succeeding in school to motivations for finding a job.

The underlying behavior of college students is being shaped by their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. With success being directly affected by students’ intrinsic motivations, it is important to provide opportunities that they will be interested in on their own. However, it is imperative to keep the external motivators like money, time, grades, and the economy in mind when deciding what opportunities to present to college students.

Summary. The increasing success and growth of the professional conference market around the world is apparent. Many conference attendees are finding themselves attracted to attending a specific conference because of the four different motivational

factors. Personal and business factors such as health, money, family, and time are influencing conference attendees. Association and conference factors along with the location have made the general topic and content of each conference an attendance draw for potential attendees. Lastly, intervening opportunities like competing conferences and past experiences at conferences also affect a potential attendee's decision to attend a conference.

College students make up a portion of the attendees at these conferences and their motivations to attend can be classified intrinsically or extrinsically. With autonomous and controlled motivations affecting their everyday decisions, college students' motivations are influenced within themselves or by their external environment or sources. The current economic climate has become a relevant extrinsic motivator and has also affected many students' intrinsic motivations as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attend professional conferences.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the motivating factors influencing Cal Poly RPTA students to attend professional conferences?

2. Is there a relationship between the cost of the conference and the motivation to attend a professional conference?
3. Does the concentration of the respondents have an influence on future plans of conference attendance?
4. Does the decision to attend based on cost affect any motivational factors of attending professional conferences?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on conference attendance was gathered from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration students.
2. College student motivations, experiences, and opinions of conference attendance were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during the spring of 2011.
4. Information for this study was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. The instrument used in this study was not tested for validity or reliability.

2. Social desirability bias may have been involved since RPTA professors and other students were present in the same room while the questionnaire was completed.
3. Convenience sampling and a limited sample size may have affected the ability to generalize the findings to all RPTA students.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that subjects would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
2. It was assumed that subjects knew the definition of professional associations and conferences.
3. It was assumed that subjects were aware that the RPTA department encourages and assists students to attend professional conferences.
4. It was assumed that subjects were RPTA majors.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Extrinsic motivation. A person being motivated by an external source to themselves or the activity (Ratelle et al., 2007).

Intrinsic motivation. A person being motivated by their own behavior and guided by their own enjoyment of the task (Ratelle et al., 2007; Lei, 2010).

Motivation. underlying behavior (Ratelle et al., 2007, p. 734)

Professional associations. A group of people within the same profession grouped together to further that specific field and build relationships.

Professional conferences. Meetings held around the world by professional associations consisting of multiple-day educational, networking and socializing sessions. Usually held annually by each professional association.

Self-motivation theory. The idea that a person's motivations are dependant on individual behavior and characteristics (Ratelle et al., 2007).

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attend professional conferences. This chapter is organized by the following sections: description of subjects, description of instruments, description of procedures, and method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

The subjects of this study were undergraduate and graduate Cal Poly State University of San Luis Obispo, Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration (RPTA) students. Subjects included RPTA students enrolled in RPTA classes during spring quarter of 2011. Subjects were both male and females of various ages and class standing at Cal Poly. Subjects' previous conference attendance varied from non-attendees to subjects who had attended multiple conferences. These subjects qualified for this study because they were possible attendees at conferences with the RPTA department and were enrolled as RPTA students.

Description of Instrument

The instrument for this study was a two-page, self-administered questionnaire developed to assess the motivations of Cal Poly RPTA students' to attend professional conferences. The questionnaire consisted of 10 open and close-ended questions with 21 items relating to demographics, motivations, experiences, and opinions. Question one

addressed past attendance at conferences. If question one was answered with a yes, question two, three, and four were used as experience questions asking about past conference experiences. For question two a check-all-that-apply format was used to identify which conferences the subject had attended. Questions three and four were open-ended items used to determine the number of educational and networking sessions attended on average at each conference. If question one was answered with a no, subjects were directed to question five with a categorical analysis (i.e., yes, no, or maybe) assessing if the subjects planned on or would be interested in attending professional conferences.

For question six, a 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the importance of each motivational factor to attend professional conferences. The scale to rate the importance of each factor was listed from one to five, one representing not important at all and five representing very important. Question seven, a multiple-choice question, was used to analyze the importance of cost on conference attendance. Questions 8 and 10 used a multiple-choice format and question 9 was an open-ended format to analyze demographic questions to determine each subject's concentration, year at Cal Poly, and gender respectively.

The researcher developed the instrument with basic instructions indicating that the questionnaire was voluntary and responses would remain anonymous. The instrument was field tested by two college students in a college class. It was also pilot tested by 20 upper class Cal Poly RPTA students during the 2011 winter quarter. The instrument and procedures were submitted and approved by Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. An informed consent to participate letter was

provided with each questionnaire as well. A copy of the informed consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Description of Procedures

Permission to evaluate the students of the RPTA department was granted by Dr. Bill Hendricks, the department head. An e-mail was delivered by the researcher to the entire RPTA faculty during the week of March 28-April 2 of 2011 asking for permission to administer the questionnaire in their RPTA courses during the Spring 2011 quarter. After permission was received, the researcher attended each RPTA course with the questionnaires and informed consent letters. Throughout the week of April 4-8 and April 11-15 of 2011 the researcher distributed and collected self-administered questionnaires. These questionnaires were administered in lower division and upper division RPTA classes on the Cal Poly campus. The researcher explained to each class the purpose of the survey and the benefits to the RPTA department. The researcher also conveyed to the class that participation was voluntary and anonymous. A script was not utilized, however clarification was provided to subjects as necessary. The researcher played the role of a facilitator by being available to answer questions and distribute the questionnaire. After the subjects finished the questionnaire, they were asked to pass all completed and incomplete questionnaires to the front of the room. The researcher collected all questionnaires and thanked the subjects for their participation in the study.

Method of Data Analysis

After all the questionnaires were completed and collected, data were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to interpret the results. To answer research questions one through four, various statistical analyses were conducted.

For the research question determining motivating factors influencing subjects to attend professional conferences, a 5-point Likert scale was used. For the Likert scale data, measures of central tendency (i.e., mean and standard deviation) were utilized, and the scores for each were compared.

To answer the research question comparing cost and conference attendance, categorical data analysis was used. The frequency and percentage of the various results were calculated. For the research question relating to the subjects' concentration and its direct relation on future conference plans categorical data (i.e., frequency and percentage) was used for a comparison of questions five and eight.

To answer the research question related to the decision to attend a conference based on cost and the affect on any motivational factors for attending conferences, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. A post-hoc tukey procedure was used determine significant differences of motivational factors and between the yes, no, and maybe responses to attend a conference based on cost.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attending professional conferences. Data were gathered in various Cal Poly RPTA courses during the spring quarter of 2011 throughout the weeks of April 4-8 and April 11-15 of 2011. The researcher contacted RPTA faculty for permission to administer the survey in various classes and after permission was received the researcher distributed the questionnaire in three RPTA courses. A sample size of 80 participants represented the population of approximately 300 RPTA students (26.67%).

Demographics

Demographics measured included gender, year in school, and concentration. Of the 80 students in the study, there were more females respondents (n = 63, 78.75%) than male respondents (n = 17, 21.25%). Third year students (n = 33, 41.77%), first year students (n = 17, 21.51%), and fourth year students (n = 16, 20.25%) had the highest response rates. See Table 1 for frequency and percentage of respondents for all years in school.

The top three concentrations represented were Event Planning and Management (n = 40, 45.98%), Tourism Planning and Management (n = 22, 25.29%), and Outdoor, Adventure, and Resource Recreation (n = 15, 17.24%). See Table 2 for the frequency and percentage of all concentrations.

Table 1
Year in School According to Frequency and Percentage

Year in School	<i>f</i>	%
1 st year	17	21.51
2 nd year	11	13.92
3 rd year	33	41.77
4 th year	16	20.25
5 th year	0	0.00
Graduate Student	1	1.27
7 th year	1	1.27
Total	79	100.00

Table 2
Concentration According to Frequency and Percentage

Concentration	<i>f</i>	%
Community Service Management	2	2.30
Event Planning and Management	40	45.98
Outdoor, Adventure, and Resource Recreation	15	17.24
Sports Management	8	9.20
Tourism Planning and Management	22	25.29
Minor	0	0.00
Total	87	100.00

Note. Some subjects selected more than one response.

Attendance at Professional Conferences

Of the 80 respondents 52 subjects (65.00%) had not attended a conference since being enrolled at Cal Poly while 28 subjects (35.00%) had attended a conference. The majority of respondents who had attended a professional conference attended the CPRS (California Park and Recreation Society) Statewide conference (n= 10, 30.30%) and the CPRS District 8 conference (n = 10, 30.30%). See Table 3 for frequency and percentage of all conferences attended during the respondents' time at Cal Poly.

Table 3
Conference Attended During Time at Cal Poly According to Frequency and Percentage

<u>Conference Attended</u>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
CPRS Statewide	10	30.30
CPRS District 8	10	30.30
CalTIA	2	6.06
California Sustainable Tourism Summit	3	9.09
Other	6	18.18
Total	33	100.00

Note. Some subjects selected more than one response.

Of the respondents who attended professional conferences during their time at Cal Poly, the majority attended three educational sessions at the last conference they attended (n = 16, 57.14%). See Table 4 for the frequency and percentage of educational sessions attended during the respondents' last conference.

Table 4
Number of Educational Sessions Attended at the Last Conference According to Frequency and Percentage

Educational Sessions	<i>f</i>	%
1	2	7.14
2	3	10.71
3	16	57.14
4	4	14.29
8	1	3.57
5	2	7.14
Total	28	100.00

Of the respondents who attended professional conferences during their time at Cal Poly, the majority attended no networking sessions at the last conference they attended (n=9, 32.14%) or one networking session at the last conference they attended (n=8, 28.17%). See Table 5 for the frequency and percentage of networking sessions attended during the respondents' last conference.

Most respondents had plans or were interested in attending a professional conference during their time at Cal Poly (n = 61, 77.22%). Other respondents were maybe interested (n = 13, 16.46%) and were not interested (n = 5, 6.33%) in attending a professional conference during their time at Cal Poly. All concentrations had respondents' who were interested in attending a conference in the future. However, Tourism Planning and Management (yes = 63.64%, no = 18.18%, maybe = 18.18%) students showed a significant disinterest in attending conferences. Table 6 represents the relationship of the respondents' concentration to their plans of attending a conference in the future.

Table 5
Number of Networking Sessions Attended at the Last Conference According to Frequency and Percentage

Networking Sessions	<i>f</i>	%
0	8	28.57
1	9	32.14
2	6	21.43
3	3	10.71
4	1	3.75
5	1	3.75
Total	28	100.00

Table 6
Decision to Attend Conferences in the Future and Relation to Concentration According to Frequency and Percentage

Decision to Attend Conferences in the Future							
Concentration	Yes		No		Maybe		Total
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	%
Community Service Management	2	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	100.00
Event Planning and Management	34	87.18	0	0.00	5	12.82	100.00
Outdoor, Adventure, and Resource Recreation	10	66.67	1	6.67	4	26.67	100.00
Sports Management	7	87.50	0	0.00	1	12.50	100.00
Tourism Planning and Management	14	63.64	4	18.18	4	18.18	100.00

Motivational Factors to Attend Professional Conferences

The top three motivations for attending professional conferences was determined by the highest mean score on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 indicating not important at all and 5 indicating very important. The motivation with the highest mean and lowest standard deviation was networking with professionals (mean = 4.59, SD = .589). The next two highest rated motivating factors were job opportunities (mean = 4.49, SD = .693) and relation to concentration (mean = 4.37, SD = .700). The lowest motivating factors to attend professional conferences included educational sessions (mean = 3.44, SD = .777), past experiences at conferences (mean = 3.16, SD = .883), and getting away from school (mean = 3.14, SD = 1.064). See Table 7 for the ascending presentation of mean and standard deviation results for all motivating factors.

Cost Relation to Conference Attendance

Of the 80 respondents most reported that the cost of the conference itself does affect their decision to attend (n = 50, 62.50%). Other respondents reported that cost maybe affects their decision to attend (n = 16, 20.00%) and that cost does not affect their decision to attend professional conferences (n = 14, 17.50%). An ANOVA was used to determine significant differences in mean scores and motivational factors. The effect of the decision to attend a conference based on cost on the motivational factors was statistically significant for location of the conference and the discounted rate. Relating to location, subjects whose cost affected their decision for attending conferences resulted in a mean of 3.88 (SD = .773) and for subjects whose cost didn't affect their decision to attend resulted in a mean of 3.14 (SD = 1.027). For the motivational factor of discounted rate subjects whose cost did affect their decision to attend showed a mean of 4.40 (SD =

.756) while subjects whose cost didn't affect their decision to attend resulted in a mean of 3.43 (SD = 1.089). See Table 8 for the display of the mean and standard deviation for the conference motivational factors.

Table 7
Motivations for Attending Professional Conferences According to Mean and Standard Deviation

Motivations for Attending	Mean	SD
Networking with professionals	4.59	.589
Job opportunities	4.49	.693
Relation to concentration	4.37	.700
Student discounted rate	4.13	.933
Recreational programs	3.77	.862
Location of the conference	3.70	.877
Encouraged by faculty to attend	3.67	.746
Socializing with students	3.67	.883
Other students attending	3.52	.981
Time of year	3.51	.994
Educational sessions	3.44	.777
Past experiences at conferences	3.16	.883
Getting away from school	3.14	1.064

Table 8
Decision to Attend Conferences Based on Cost and the Affect on Motivational Factors According to Mean and Standard Deviation

Motivational Factor	Decision to Attend Based On Cost					
	Yes		No		Maybe	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Location of conference	3.88 [□]	.773	3.14 [□]	1.027	3.63	.885
Job opportunities	4.48	.707	4.57	.173	4.44	.727
Discounted rate	4.40 [□]	.756	3.43 [□]	1.089	3.88	.957
Time of year	3.48	1.054	3.14	.864	3.94	.772
Other students attending	3.56	.907	3.57	.852	3.38	1.310
Educational sessions	3.44	.812	3.36	.745	3.50	.730
Relation to concentration	4.38	.667	4.29	.825	4.44	.727
Networking with professionals	4.60	.606	4.57	.646	4.56	.512
Recreational activities	3.78	.815	4.00	.913	3.56	.964
Past experiences at conferences	3.22	.798	3.21	1.051	2.94	.998
Encouraged by faculty to attend	3.74	.694	3.54	.519	3.56	1.031
Socializing with students	3.68	.794	3.57	1.089	3.75	1.000
Getting away from school	3.22	1.130	3.14	.864	2.88	1.025

Note. Superscript [□] indicates a significant difference between numbers.

Summary

The majority of respondents were female, third year, event planning students. Respondents were interested or had plans to attend professional conferences and the cost of the conference did affect their decision to attend. Networking with professionals, job opportunities, and relation to concentration were the highest rated motivation factors for attending professional conferences while the lowest motivating factors were educational

sessions, past experience at conferences, and getting away from school. Subjects concentrating Tourism Planning and Management showed that their concentration had a significant influence on their decisions not to attend a conference in the future. See Chapter 4 for a complete analysis and summary of the results.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Professional conferences provide an opportunity for industry professionals to gather and discuss relevant issues and trends in an industry. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's RPTA department follows the "learn by doing" motto by providing opportunities for students to attend various professional conferences at a discounted student rate. Because of the dedication of the department to provide and organize these opportunities for students it is important to analyze the motivations of the Cal Poly RPTA students to attend professional conferences. This concluding chapter will include the following: A summary of the study, a discussion of the findings including limitations, conclusions based on the research questions, recommendations for the RPTA department, and future research.

Summary

The Cal Poly RPTA department offers students an opportunity to attend various professional conferences annually at a discounted student rate. These are major conferences in the tourism, recreation, and parks industries hosted by various professional associations. College students' motivations are shaped through their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. General motivations for attending professional conferences have been classified as personal and business factors, association and conference factors, location factors, and intervening opportunities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was

to assess the motivations of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo RPTA students to attend professional conferences.

The subjects included Cal Poly San Luis Obispo RPTA students of all grade levels, gender, and concentrations. A two page self-administered questionnaire was distributed in various Cal Poly RPTA courses. The questionnaire was administered during the spring quarter of 2011.

The results showed that most subjects were female, third year, special event concentration students. Most of respondents had not attended a professional conference while attending Cal Poly. The majority of respondents who had attended conferences primarily attended the CPRS statewide and CPRS District 8 conferences. Most respondents were interested or planned on attending professional conferences during their time at Cal Poly. The most important motivations for attending professional conferences included networking with professionals, job opportunities, and the relation to a concentration. The cost of the conference affected the decision to attend a conference.

Discussion

Some students in the past have taken the opportunity to attend professional conferences with the Cal Poly RPTA department, with a majority of these students attending the CPRS statewide conference and the CPRS District 8 conference. The students who have not attended a professional conference during their time at Cal Poly show a high interest level in attending in the future. The top three motivational factors for attending professional conferences in order are networking with professionals, job opportunities, and the relation to the respondent's concentration. The lowest motivating

factors to attend professional conferences are educational sessions, past experiences at conferences, and getting away from school. Relation to the respondents' concentration was among the top motivating factors to attend conferences, the results showed that all concentrations were interested in attending a conference in the future. However, Tourism Planning and Management students showed a significant disinterest in attending conferences.

Cost is the fourth highest rated motivational factor to attend professional conferences. Cost is an issue when attending conferences and most students report that the cost of the conference (e.g., registration, travel, lodging, and conference costs) is a major factor when deciding to attend a conference or not. The conference rate and travel prices are usually the biggest cost commitment for students to attend conferences. There is a significant difference in the results of subjects who answer based on cost and being motivated by the location of a conference and a discounted rate.

Based on previous research Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) classified the top four motivating factors to attend professional conferences as traveling to a desirable place, education, networking, conference programs, and career enhancement. The findings show consistent results for the top motivating factors and inconsistent results for the lowest motivating factors. The top motivating factors of networking with professionals and job opportunities relate to the top factors presented in earlier research of networking and career enhancement. The relationship to the concentration is also consistent with earlier research as a motivational factor. There is an inconsistent finding with the lowest motivational factor of educational sessions with earlier research showing that education is

a top motivating factor. College students may have their unique intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that differ from subjects that are non-students.

There are several limitations present in the study. Convenience sampling has been conducted resulting in a sample size of 80 subjects. Because of the small sample size and convenience sampling, a generalization to all Cal Poly RPTA students cannot be made. In order to get more accurate data probability sampling needs to be undertaken.

The results show that Cal Poly RPTA students are interested in attending professional conferences. A significant amount of money is spent on planning and attending various conferences every year. These findings indicate that it is worthwhile for the RPTA department to invest in this experience. Students have high motivations to attend and are attending for beneficial reasons. Findings show that this opportunity is truly a “learn by doing” experience and is allowing students to connect to the people in the industries of their interest while building their careers.

To increase attendance at conferences the RPTA department should highlight the people and companies that will be present at the conference and encourage students to research the conference and people attending on the respective conference websites before they attend. This will allow students to see who they will have an opportunity to build a relationship with, ask for a job or internship from, and be educated by at these conferences. Another way to increase attendance would be to have students contact the various people or companies attending these conferences and ask if they have any jobs or internship positions they are looking to fill at that time or in the near future. This will provide a list to all students of direct opportunities available from the people at the

conference and will possibly allow them to set up interviews or meeting times at these conferences which will reduce the need to travel to an interview in the future.

The total student expenses to attend a conference are also a major factor when deciding to attend a conference or not. Registration, the location of the conference, the travel costs, lodging, and possible extra spending is important to possible attendees. Therefore, students should calculate an estimated budget for a conference prior to making a decision to attend. This should include all costs associated with being at the conference. The RPTA department should ask previous students who have attended conferences to make a spreadsheet of the money they spent during their time at the conference to provide guidance for the students interested in attending in the future. A scholarship should also be provided to one student from the department to fund the cost of the conference. This will allow students who do not have the funding to attend a chance to be sponsored or use the scholarship awarded to attend the conference they desire.

This research gives the department insight regarding what students are looking for when attending conferences and if they are motivated to attend. With a portion of the RPTA departments' budget from discretionary funding being spent on taking students to conferences every year, this study allows the faculty to see that this money spent on conferences is worthwhile and does not need to be directed to a different area where funding may be needed.

Conclusions

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

1. The highest rated motivating factors to attending professional conferences were networking with professionals, job opportunities, and relation to concentration.
2. The cost of the conference does affect the decision to attend a professional conference.
3. Subjects concentrating in Outdoor, Adventure, and Resource Recreation and Tourism Planning and Management showed a significant influence on future plans of conference attendance or not.
4. The decision to attend professional conferences based on cost effects respondents' answers related to location of the conference and a discounted rate.

Recommendations

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

1. Inform students of the benefits of networking at a conference. Students should investigate conference attendees and companies on the respective conference websites.
2. Students should contact attendees before a conference and ask if there are any jobs or internships they want to advertise to students planning on attending the conference.
3. Advertise the traditional subsidies provided by the RPTA department and the discounted student rate compared to the regular rate paid by an attendee for the conference.
4. The RPTA department should ask previous student attendees at conferences to make a spreadsheet of their budget and how much they spent at the conference.

With previous attendees' budget as a guide students interested in attending should create a proposed budget of the trip including all expenses (e.g., gas, lodging, food, and conference prices).

5. Continue providing opportunities for students to attend professional conferences.
6. A scholarship should be awarded to one student which would fund their conference expenses.
7. Future research should examine the topics that students desire at future conferences.
8. Increase the emphasis on educational opportunities at conferences so students are aware of the primary reasons that most conferences exist.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Questionnaire



RTPA Students and Professional Conferences

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Filling out this questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous. Responses will help the RTPA department analyze and understand professional conference attendance by students.

1. Have you attended a professional conference since being enrolled at Cal Poly?
 Yes No

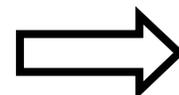
If you answered YES please answer questions 2, 3, and 4. If you answered NO skip to question 5.

2. Which conferences have you attended? (Check all that apply)
 CPRS Statewide Conference (California Parks & Recreation Society)
 CPRS District 8 Conference (California Parks & Recreation Society)
 CalTIA (The California Travel Industry Association)
 California Sustainable Tourism Conference
Others: _____

3. How many educational sessions did you attend at the last conference you attended? _____

4. How many networking sessions did you attend at the last conference you attended? _____

5. Do you plan to attend or are you interested in attending a professional conference within your time at Cal Poly?
 Yes No Maybe



6. For the following list of factors, please indicate the importance of each as a motivational factor to attend professional conferences?

	Not important at all	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
Location of the conference	1	2	3	4	5
Job and internship opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Discounted rate	1	2	3	4	5
Time of year	1	2	3	4	5
Other students attending	1	2	3	4	5
Education	1	2	3	4	5
Relation to concentration	1	2	3	4	5
Networking with professionals	1	2	3	4	5
Extra programs	1	2	3	4	5
Past experiences at conferences	1	2	3	4	5
Socializing with students	1	2	3	4	5
Getting away from school	1	2	3	4	5

7. Does the cost of the conference itself (not the extra money you spend on personal purchases of food, drinks, etc) affect your decision to attend?

Yes No Maybe

8. Intended or declared concentration, emphasis area, and/or minor?

- Community Services Management (Emphasis Area)
- Event Planning and Management (Concentration)
- Outdoor, Adventure, and Resource Recreation (Concentration)
- Sport Management (Emphasis Area)
- Tourism Planning and Management (Concentration)
- Minor: _____

9. Year in school: _____

10. Gender: Male Female

Appendix B
Informed Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT OF RPTA STUDENTS MOTIVATIONS TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

A research project on students and professional conferences is being conducted by Nika Jalali as a senior project in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration (RPTA) under the direct supervision of Dr. Bill Hendricks. The purpose of this research is to assess the motivations of Cal Poly RPTA students in attending professional conferences.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing a self-administered questionnaire. Your participation will take approximately 3 to 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 omit any items you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study.

Your anonymity will be protected through an anonymous questionnaire. Please ensure anonymity by not writing your name on the questionnaire. Potential benefits associated with the study include increased knowledge for the RPTA department of why RPTA students attend conferences.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Nika Jalali at (858)472-4459 or at nikajalali@yahoo.com. If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at 756-1508, sopava@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing the attached questionnaire. Please keep one copy of this form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.
