

PARKS AND RECREATION EMPLOYMENT STATUS: IMPLICATIONS FROM A CIVIL SERVICE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Current research on the credentialing process in parks, recreation and leisure services has focused primarily on accreditation and certification and has largely ignored the civil service exam as a credentialing toll or condition of employment in many state and municipal parks and recreation departments. It is the experience of the researchers of this study that a significant number of students are stunned when seeking many state and municipal parks and recreation jobs. This is so because they are usually confronted with the need to be tested and perform well on civil service examination as a condition of employment or a condition for retaining their position after provisional status has ended. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent of public recreation employment and wages at the state and municipal levels and draw inferences as to the extent employees and potential employees are subject to the civil service examination process. The results indicated that: 1) recreation employment at both the state and municipal levels is significant, 2) many prospective employees will inevitably be impacted by the need to take & successfully pass civil service examinations, since state & municipal departments are subject to this process, 3) although employment in terms of numbers & payroll amount is significant, public sector recreation employment is small compared to total public sector employment, 4) both within a region and among regions some inference can be drawn as to the recreation & leisure values held by elected officials and the population in general, and 5) Students will continue to acquire little knowledge of the civil service employment system because there are no current curriculum accreditation standards that require recreation programs to specifically address civil service employment issues.

Introduction

The U.S. Census Bureau (1998) reported that there were approximately 45,584 state and 202,888 municipal recreation employees in the United States. Approximately 5,000 state and 16,000 municipal employees were in the Northeast region. State recreation employee payroll was \$90,623,678 and the municipal payroll was \$455,558,562. It is assumed that recreation programs across the country want their graduates to secure good and well paying jobs, many of them in the public sector. Therefore, investigation

of the public sector employment process as it relates to recreation and parks professionals is important.

The vast majority of public sector jobs (state and municipal) are controlled and regulated by state departments of civil service. They provide a wide range of services to ensure that state and municipal agencies meet their human resource needs in a timely manner. These departments determine salaries, classify job titles, recruit and test prospective employees, and certify eligibility lists. This study only begins to scratch the surface of the public sector employment process, therefore the researchers decided to segment their research into three phases and restrict data collection in phase one primarily to the Northeast region of the United States. The three phases of research cover: 1) a pre-census directory survey of all 87,000 local governments. It will include extensive legal research into government structure by state, as well as a mail survey, and will produce an updated list of all local governments and selected data, 2) all state governments, and will expand the census year annual finance survey from about 14,000 to all 87,000 local governments. It will use on-site data collection for many of the state and largest local governments, consolidated data submissions (usually electronic files) for about 55,000 local governments, and a mail survey of the remaining governments, and 3) all of the state governments and expands the census-year annual employment survey from about 10,000 to all 87,000 local governments. It relies on consolidated submissions for a limited number of state respondents, but is primarily a mail survey. The purpose the initial phase (phase 1), as presented in this paper, is to examine the extent of public recreation employment and wages at the state and municipal levels and draw inferences as to the extent employees and potential employees are subject to the civil service examination process.

Methodology

Data for phase one was collected from two secondary sources: 1) 1998 U. S. Census data (on-line via the Internet), and 2) state government civil service web sites. United States Census data was down loaded from the Census Bureau web site (<http://www.census.gov/govs/www/apesstl.html>) into MS Excel spreadsheet software. It was decided to group the data into regions for analysis at a later date. The state groupings are: Northeast (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, New York Connecticut), Mid-Atlantic (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia), Southeast (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida), South (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri), Mid-West (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa), Great Plains, (North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska), Rocky Mountain (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Nevada), Southwest (New Mexico, Arizona, Texas), West (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii).

The data that were collected from the U. S. Census Bureau web site included: 1) number of part time and full time state recreation employees, 2) number of all part time and

full time state employees, 3) total state recreation employee payroll, 4) total state employee payroll, 5) number of full time municipal recreation employees, 6) number of all municipal employees, 7) total full time municipal recreation payroll, 8) total payroll for all municipal employees, and 9) number of municipal recreation employees per ten thousand of population. The number of part time employees and payroll information for the municipal sector was not available. Job descriptions and job classifications were collected from the Northeast region via web sites. The State of Maine does not permit access to this type of information by the general public. The data for the remainder of the states was downloaded into word processing software for later analysis. Employment data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of raw scores, rank ordering and percentages.

Results

As Table 1 indicates, the total state recreation employment payroll was \$90,623,678, and total municipal recreation payroll was \$455,558,529. It is important to note that the Southeast region had the largest municipal payroll

(\$18,060,443) while the Northeast region had the third largest (\$13,501,027). The West region had the highest state payroll (\$104,140,492) while the Northeast region had the fifth largest (\$41,243,059). Additionally, Table 1 shows the ratio of regional state payroll to regional municipal payroll. The region with the lowest ratio of state payroll to municipal payroll was the Mid-West and the region with the highest ratio of state to municipal payroll was the Great Plains.

Table 2 shows the percentage of regional state recreation payroll to total regional state payroll. The Northeast regional ranked fourth with a share of total state recreation payroll of .86%. The region with the largest share of total state recreation payroll was the Great Plains (2.11%), while the Mid-West held the smallest share (.38%).

As Table 3 indicates, the recreation employment share of total payroll for the Northeast region was 9.3% of the national recreation payroll. The West region had the highest percentage of total national payroll (23.4%), while the Great Plains reported the least (3%).

Table 1. State & Municipal Payroll by Region, 1998

REGION	STATE RECREATION PAYROLL	MUNICIPAL RECREATION PAYROLL	RATIO STATE TO MUNICIPAL PAYROLL
Northeast	\$13,501,027	\$ 41,243,059	.325
Mid-Atlantic	\$14,144,925	\$ 47,424,467	.298
Southeast	\$18,060,443	\$ 53,491,833	.351
South	\$10,585,421	\$ 30,180,578	.350
Mid-West	\$ 7,987,682	\$ 93,768,383	.085
Great Plains	\$ 8,438,440	\$ 13,227,816	.637
Rocky Mountain	\$ 2,926,491	\$ 25,347,225	.115
Southwest	\$ 3,953,000	\$ 36,734,679	.107
West	\$11,026,249	\$104,140,492	.105
TOTAL	\$90,623,678	\$445,558,529	

Table 2. Percent of Regional State Recreation Payroll to Total State Payroll, 1998

REGION	% RECREATION PAYROLL
Northeast	.86%
Mid-Atlantic	.87%
Southeast	1.37%
South	.82%
Mid-West	.38%
Great Plains	2.11%
Rocky Mountain	.55%
Southwest	.39%
West	.56%

Table 3. Percentage of Regional Municipal Recreation Payroll to National Recreation Payroll, 1998

REGION	PERCENTAGE
Northeast	9.3%
Mid-Atlantic	10.6%
Southeast	12.0%
South	6.8%
Mid-West	21.0%
Great Plains	3.0%
Rocky Mountain	5.7%
Southwest	8.2%
West	23.4%

Whereas job classifications were available for most states, for the purpose of phase 1 of this study, such information was only collected for the Northeast at the state level. It was found that the majority of civil service classifications for recreation positions were grouped into two categories: 1) park operations and 2) therapeutic recreation. Table 4 illustrates job classifications for the state of Connecticut. Although the other states in the Northeast were not presented in this paper, the patterns that are indicated in Table 4 are typical.

As indicated in Table 5, the data was rank-ordered from the most number of employees to the least number of employees. It shows that for the Northeast region the State of Connecticut possessed the highest ratio (6.7:10,000) of municipal recreation employees to the general population and the State of New Hampshire had the lowest (2.5:10,000).

Table 6 depicts the ratios of states with the highest and lowest municipal recreation employees to the general population within a region. The State of Hawaii possessed the highest ratio (15.7:10,000) and the State of New Hampshire the lowest (2.5:10,000).

Table 7 indicates that the Rocky Mountain region had the highest average number (9.52:10,000) of recreation employees per ten thousand of population, while the Northeast region had the lowest (3.87:10,000).

Table 4. Job Classifications for Connecticut

PARK OPERATIONS
Park Operations Environmental Protection Operations Supervisor
Environmental Protection Park and Recreation Supervisor 1
Environmental Protection Park and Recreation Supervisor 2
Environmental Protection Park and Recreation Supervisor 3
Environmental Protection Recreational and Resource Coordinator
THERAPEUTIC RECREATION
Rehabilitation Therapist 1
Rehabilitation Therapist 2
Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant 1
Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant 2
Rehabilitation Therapy Supervisor 1

Table 5. Number of Municipal Recreation Employees per 10k of Population: Northeast Region, 1998

STATE	EMPLOYEES
Connecticut	6.7
New York	5.9
Maine	4.8
Massachusetts	3.5
Rhode Island	3.4
Vermont	3.1
New Hampshire	2.5

Discussion and Conclusions

Recreation employment at both the state and municipal levels is significant even though, at face value, it is a small fraction of total public sector employment. When examined in the context of the volume of total public sector jobs, the raw numbers are vital as a marketing tool for attracting prospective parks and recreation students. In addition, many prospective employees will inevitably be impacted by the need to take & successfully pass civil service examinations, since state & municipal departments are subject to this process, as evidenced by the job classifications.

The data reveals very interesting information about each region and within regions. Payroll data suggests how

Table 6. Number of Employees per 10k of Population High/Low All Regions, 1998

REGION	STATE	EMPLOYEES
Northeast	Connecticut	6.7
	New Hampshire	2.5
Mid-Atlantic	Maryland	12.1
	Pennsylvania	2.9
Southeast	Florida	10.8
	North Carolina	5.7
South	Alabama	7.8
	Mississippi	3.5
Mid-West	Illinois	12.4
	Michigan	4.8
Great Plains	North Dakota	13.1
	Oklahoma	6.3
Rocky Mountain	Colorado	14.4
	Montana	4.4
Southwest	New Mexico	10.5
	Texas	6.5
West	Hawaii	15.7
	Alaska	5.6

Table 7. Regional Mean of Number of Employees per 10k of Population, 1998

REGION	MEAN
Rocky Mountain	9.52
West	9.48
Southwest	8.4
Great Plains	8.34
Mid-West	7.27
Southeast	7.2
Mid-Atlantic	6.82
South	5.91
Northeast	3.87

evenly/unevenly employment is divided. The region with the most even employment is the Great Plains. This may suggest the lack of state parks as tourist destinations and more use of these state parks by the local population. Therefore, the distribution of services between state and localities is more evenly divided. While the region with the most uneven distribution between state and municipal employment payroll (Mid-West) may indicate a different set of issues. The Mid-West (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa) has a much greater number of high population cities than the Great Plains which may indicate a higher concentration of municipal recreation services. Additionally, the organization of park districts in Illinois may skew the data, as it is not known how the U.S. Census Bureau categorized employment in special districts.

Other data that stands out is the information concerning the Northeast region. The Northeast (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island) possesses the highest concentration of people in the United States. Yet in total recreation payroll (state & municipal) the Northeast is ranked 6th, in state payroll it is ranked 3rd, in municipal payroll it is ranked 5th, in percent of regional state payroll to total state payroll it is ranked 4th, in percentage of regional municipal payroll to national municipal payroll it is ranked 5th, and lastly the Northeast region is ranked 9th or last in the number of municipal employees per 10,000 of population.

This data covering the number of municipal employees per 10,000 of general population both within a region and among regions indicate that some inference can be drawn as to the recreation & leisure values held by elected officials and the population in general. Full data is provided for the Northeast region in Table 5. For example the states/regions which seem to be the most conservative possess the highest number of municipal employees per 10,000 of population. Does this mean that residents of these regions place a high value on local recreation services that counter balances their belief in small government?

The regions and states with the highest ratio of municipal recreation employees are places with a great number of outdoor recreation opportunities and tourist destinations. Does this mean that municipalities are taking a greater roll in supporting tourist activities? One example that one of the researchers observed during a 1997 trip to Colorado was the community recreation center in Breckenridge. It was built with a dual role. First, to provide community recreation for its residents. Second to provide winter tourists to the area an alternate location to enjoy family indoor recreation in the evening and when the weather was poor, providing a secondary recreation opportunity.

Public sector employment in the United States is a very complicated and regulated process. Each state controls public employment through their respective civil service organizations, and each lower level of government (county, city) has its own civil service organization. Research suggests that like many government agencies, civil service organizations are subject to political stress (Desai &

Hamman, 1994; Kellogg, 2000; Kellough, 1999; and West & Durant, 2000). In New York State, for example, prospective employees of recreation positions have responded in interviews (B. Emelson, personal communication, April 3, 2000) that the tests they recently took, for the most part, do not reflect what is being taught in the recreation programs that they received their undergraduate degrees from. This implies the need to examine the congruence between education preparation and the competencies necessary to successfully complete the civil service examination. Currently there are no NRPA/AALR accreditation standards regarding the civil service process for undergraduate degree programs. Without a standard addressing the civil service process and testing, or a systematic plan by educational institutions to address civil service competencies, students will be inadequately prepared for the entry process to public sector employment.

Areas for Further Study

As mentioned in the introduction, the researchers realized that the subjects of the civil service process, credentialing and accreditation is a very large area for study, and that the researchers decided to segment the research into three phases. Phase one, determining the importance of the subject presented here. Phase two of the research process will encompass the following: collecting data from all of the state governments, and expand the census year annual finance survey from about 14,000 to all 87,000 local governments. It will use on-site data collection for many of the state and largest local governments, consolidated data submissions (usually electronic files) for about 55,000 local governments, and a mail survey of the remaining governments.

Phase 3 will cover all of the state governments and expands the census-year annual employment survey from about 10,000 to all 87,000 local governments. It relies on consolidated submissions for a limited number of state respondents, but is primarily a mail survey.

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