

Academy of Leisure Sciences: Reflections on the History from 1980-2013 **Karla Henderson, Historian (June 2013)**

The Academy of Leisure Sciences (ALS) was founded in 1980 with its central purpose as the intellectual advancement of leisure sciences (10th Anniversary Publication). This purpose was carried out by recognizing outstanding scholars elected as Fellows within the Academy, establishing meetings and activities to exchange ideas and advance the intellectual understanding of leisure, and to promote research and the scholarly study of leisure among individuals [Fellows] who demonstrated interest, potential, and competence.

In 2011, the mission was expanded to include all interested individuals in addition to the Fellows. This larger organization aims to bring together people from diverse backgrounds who share a mutual interest in better understanding the roles of leisure in life, including various contexts of recreation, park, tourism, outdoor adventure, health, therapy, and sport. All individuals are invited to take responsibility for the academy's growth and development by volunteering to serve on its committees, stand for its governing offices, and otherwise help create the Academy's future. The goal is to build a caring and connected professional community.

This short history provides an interpretation of the evolution of this organization. Additional documentation as noted is available to show the activities and undertakings of the organization. Although many of the records of the first 20 years of the organization are incomplete, this summary addresses an interpretation of the events along with a chronological timeline of major events within ALS.

Based on my interpretation of the events within the Academy, I suggest that four eras have marked the organization and development of ALS. Each of these periods is described briefly:

- Formation (1978-1989)
- Action (1990-1995)
- Status Quo (1996-2010)
- Re-invention (2011-present)

Formation Era

The principal impetus for the Academy of Leisure Sciences (ALS) came from a group of former Presidents of the Society of Park and Recreation Educators (SPRE). At a meeting in Miami in 1978, Professors Edward Heath and Leslie Reid (Texas A&M), Alan Sapora (Illinois), and Douglas Sessoms (North Carolina) began formulating the Academy's goals and structure. A list of seventy candidates for Fellows was identified and a panel of thirty-six scholars was invited to complete a series of ballots on the candidate list. As a result of that balloting, thirty candidates, elected by simple majority, were chosen as Founding ALS Fellows. The candidates were chosen because of their "exceptional scholarly and intellectual contributions" to the study of leisure. The first meeting of the Academy was October 18, 1980, in Tempe, Arizona.

The Academy operated under a Constitution that provided for the election or appointment of

Officers and Committees. The President, Secretary-Treasurer, Historian, and Nominations and Elections Committee were elected by the Fellows via mailed ballots. Members of other Standing Committees (on-going) and President's Committees (single-purpose and temporary) were appointed by the President.

ALS Business was conducted at the annual business meeting held in conjunction with the NRPA Congress. In the interim between meetings, the President in concert with other officers and committees, conducted business and acted for the Academy. Academy Fellows paid annual dues as well as a fee to offset annual program and business meeting expenses.

1982 was when the first solicitation and induction of new Fellows was undertaken. Names of candidates for Fellow membership were placed in nomination by a formal letter from a current Fellow, which was accompanied by a biographical summary including the nominee's professional experience, significant publications, invited presentations, professional affiliations including offices/awards/honors, and professional activities. The ballot was sent to all active Fellows. Election required a two-thirds majority of votes cast.

Criteria for nominating and electing new Fellows were: (a) direct engagement in the leisure sciences professions; (b) demonstrated competence for a period of not less than ten years, as evidenced by quality as well as quantity of contributions to the scholarly literature of the field, recognized leadership and extensive, significant participation in professional associations and organizations, and acknowledged outstanding performance as a teacher, leader, administrator, practitioner, or researcher in the field of leisure; and (c) willingness to further the goals of the Academy and participate actively in its affairs.

Many of the Founding Fellows were administrators as much as scholars. In addition, at that time, most Fellows were associated with parks and recreation, although some discipline areas were represented. Tourism did not have much salience in the organization then, or even into the next few years.

During the formation years, systems for operating the Academy were institutionalized. In addition to the annual business meeting, a luncheon or dinner became part of the NRPA activities as a means to foster fellowship. According to the summary offered in the 10th Year Anniversary publication, most people believed that the ALS was meant to be honorary in nature and the organization was kept "comparatively speaking, simple and informal...[with] no organizational imperatives beyond carrying out its purpose." Fellows believed that each of them spent every day promoting the purposes of the Academy without needing to be formally associated with collective ALS activities. Authors of the 10th anniversary publication stated that during the first 10 years, the Academy did not publish any books but Fellows published over 200 books. The Academy was believed to be a genesis for ideas.

The activities of the Academy were kept informal with speakers (i.e., Fellows and visitors) invited to annual meetings to share their ideas about research and the future. Each year the Fellows discussed how to best meet their purposes. No records seem to be available of the annual programs that were held but the 10th Anniversary program indicated that international speakers

had been invited to the meetings on four occasions. Some individuals had big plans for the organization such as establishing a journal, but no funding was ever forthcoming beyond the dues assessed during those early years.

Action Era

Although the 15th Anniversary Publication did not provide much detail about the organization, two significant projects were undertaken in the early 1990s, which appeared to be the *action* era. Many people had agreed that ALS was an honorary organization, but some individuals saw the potential for much more than recognizing achievement. The American Academy of Park and Recreation Administrators (AAPRA) was founded at the same time as ALS in 1980 and was an action oriented group. AAPRA was founded as a means to give individuals who had previously been leaders in NRPA a chance to continue to influence the profession. Some individuals in ALS desired a mandate similar to AAPRA, which was more than just an honorary organization. Several of the Founding Fellows of ALS (e.g., Bannon, Reid, Sessoms) were also Fellows of AAPRA.

Therefore, the early 1990s saw the establishment of the Future Scholars (FS) Program as well as the publication of White Papers. The purpose of FS was to provide graduate students who were interested in pursuing a doctorate in an area related to recreation and leisure studies the opportunity to meet some of the outstanding researchers and scholars in this field by attending the NRPA Congress and participating in ALS and SPRE events. Eligibility and selection criteria were established (see FS History and website), and a committee selected the first five FS in 1991. Since that time, 84 individuals have been selected as Future Scholars. Although records are not accurate, it appears that almost one-third of those individuals are now active faculty members at universities around the world. As of June 2013 another one-fourth of the FS are students currently seeking degrees in higher education.

The FS program was initially funded by donations from ALS Fellows and SPRE members with some supplementation from ALS dues. Over time, the enthusiasm for donating seemed to wane. Daniel Dustin stepped up to fund up to four FS students each year beginning in 1998 and the program was re-named the Lucille and Derby Dustin Future Scholars Program. Rather than covering expenses, the scholarship was set at \$1000 to be used to cover expenses in attending the NRPA Congress. By 2006, Fellows of the Academy recognized that a permanent source of FS funding was needed. The last year that Dustin funded scholars was 2009. A Future Scholars Endowment was set up in 2009 through the efforts of individuals such as Doug Kleiber. See FS proposal documents. As of 2013, the Endowment is halfway to its goal of raising \$80,000, which would fund 3-4 students each year as Future Scholars.

A second major action item that came to fruition in 1993 was the White Papers. See White Papers file. The White Papers were developed as an attempt to communicate with the public about diverse issues surrounding leisure that might be of interest. They were also designed to provide information for media and public consumption. Each paper was drafted by an ALS

Fellow with critique from the membership. The documents were made available for any journalistic purpose as long as ALS was given credit. Geof Godbey spearheaded the efforts in developing the White Papers. These papers were available on the website until about 2005 when they were deemed outdated.

Status Quo Era

After the mid-1990s and for the next decade and a half, the Academy seemed to return to its honorary nature. Although several Academy presidents during that time attempted to promote initiatives, little happened beyond maintaining the *status quo*. The FS program continued and from time to time ALS was involved with efforts to promote the field through, for example, the 1997 Curriculum Conference held in Salt Lake City, which was spearheaded by Doug Sessoms. ALS Fellows continued to debate their purpose with most people believing that they did not wish to participate beyond paying dues and attending the annual meetings. A number of individuals served as officers, but carried out the basic duties.

One innovation that did occur by this time was championed by Gary Ellis. The George Butler Lecture was established as a joint venture between ALS, SPRE, and Leisure Research Symposium. See Lecture Proposal. The lecture was named after one of the Founding Members of the Academy, George Butler. He was one of the first to recognize the importance of parks and recreation to human development. His book, *Introduction to Community Recreation*, challenged governments to accept responsibility for public provision of park and recreation facilities and services. Further, Butler was Director of Research for the National Recreation Association (now NRPA) for 43 years (1919-1962), and one of the first and most persistent proponents of research in the field. To date, nine George Butler Lectures have been made with most of the lectures available on the ALS website.

Re-invention

ALS went through a profound change in 2011 when Fellows voted to open membership in ALS to all interested individuals. This *re-invention* came as a result of NRPA's decision to eliminate all Branches within the organization. The Society of Park and Recreation Educators (SPRE) was disbanded based on the NRPA philosophy that individuals should belong to one organization, not organized related interest societies/associations. NRPA had become largely an organization focused on parks and recreation so membership in SPRE had been declining due to the breadth of specialties found in higher education. Since a mechanism already existed to incorporate more members in addition to Fellows, the ALS Fellows voted to make these changes. A counter proposal was offered to have ALS serve as a facilitator for developing a new "SPRE-like" organization independent of any existing body, but this proposal was defeated in deference to an expansion of the current organization.

The new ALS allows for a general membership and a group of elected Fellows. The criteria for Fellows remains the same but the organizational structure has expanded to include all other

leadership opportunities available to any member. The decision was also made that in the near future, ALS would continue to meet in conjunction with the NRPA Congress. ALS would not be an organization to compete with NRPA but one that would provide a home for faculty in higher education interested in leisure, parks, recreation, tourism, sports, and related areas. NRPA retained the LRS as well as the research journals: *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Schole*, and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*. Therefore, the idea was that ALS would work in partnership with NRPA, but would sponsor previous SPRE activities not retained by NRPA such as the Teaching Institute, teaching awards, and the annual Department Heads/Chairs meeting.

In 2013 ALS established a contract with Sagamore Publishing to assist with the association management of the Academy. As of June 2013, about 150 people had joined ALS with efforts underway to recruit more members.

Ongoing Concerns

As ALS evolves, concerns will continue to arise that to some extent have been ongoing and in other cases are new. One issue relates to “who we are.” The new description of who can be members of ALS indicates that people from diverse backgrounds who share a mutual interest in better understanding the roles of leisure in life are invited including the various contexts of recreation, park, tourism, outdoor adventure, health, therapy, and sport. This description is quite broad and the challenge is to engage individuals in specialty areas who may not realize they are addressing areas of leisure behavior. Related to these ideas are questions around what issues the ALS members coalesce. Leisure behavior is central but many believe that this behavior is related to larger issues of health, tourism, sustainability, and diversity. Yet, to be too broad may be counterproductive in encouraging membership. Who we are is a big philosophical issue that has many practical implications for the future.

The issue about being an honorary organization versus a service organization has largely been resolved by the re-invention of ALS. However, the role that the Fellows play into the future in providing leadership for the organization remains important regarding the success. The roles of members as well as Fellows should be considered as the organization evolves.

A concern for any organization relates to the leadership that it can offer the broader movement. Whether ALS continues to provide a forum for what is in addition to providing leadership to move the field forward is ongoing. To reflect the field as it is defined, or to lead the field is the challenge.

Further, the future is likely to be successful if individuals and organizations create the right partnerships. ALS has great opportunities as well as challenges in working with NRPA in a mutually compatible future as well as working with the burgeoning number of international organizations (e.g., Leisure Studies Association, Australian New Zealand Association of Leisure Studies, World Leisure) well as specialty associations (e.g. Travel Tourism Research Association, Wilderness Education Association, American Therapeutic Recreation Association,

North American Sport Management Association). The future will depend on establishing working relationships and partnerships with a variety of other groups and individuals around the world.

Time Line (Chronological)

1978 ALS First Conceived

1980 ALS Founded

1980 American Academy of Park and Recreation Administrators (AAPRA) also founded

1980-81 David Gray, President

1981-82 Diana Dunn, President

1982-83 John Neulinger, President

1983-84 Leslie Reid, President

1984-85 Doug Sessoms, President

1985-86 Ed Heath, President 1986-87 Bert Brantley, President

1987-88 Geof Godbey, President

1988-89 Tony Tinsley, President

1989-90 Tom Goodale, President

1990 Proposal Approved for Future Scholars Program

1990-91 Bob Ditton, President

1991 First Class of Future Scholars Chosen and attend NRPA Conference

1991-92 Bev Driver, President

1992 ALS receives tax exempt status

1992-93 Peter Witt, President

1993 White Papers Published

1993-94 Doug Kleiber, President

1994 White Papers posted on Website, thanks to Ed Jackson

1994-95 Larry Allen, President

1995-96 Ed Jackson, President

1995 Webpage uploaded by President Jackson

1995 Listserv established by Doug Kleiber

1996-97 Karla Henderson, President

1997 National Curriculum Conference held at NRPA, co-sponsored by ALS

1997-98 Dan Dustin, President

1998 Future Scholars Program renamed “Lucille and Derby Dustin Future Scholars” due to the generosity of Dan Dustin who funded the program through 2009

1998-99 Alan Ewert, President

1999-2000 John Crompton, President

2000-01 Dave Austin, President

2001-02 Sue Shaw, President

2002-03 Mark Havitz, President

2003-04 Gary Ellis, President

2004 Electronic voting begins

2004 Discussion about electing international Fellows

2004-05 Roger Mannell, President

2004 First Butler Lecture delivered at NRPA (sponsored by LRS, SPRE, and ALS)

2005-06 John Hultsman, President

2006-07 Bill Hammitt, President

2007-08 Deb Bialeschki, President

2008-09 Jim Murphy, President

2009 Future Scholars Endowment Established, Doug Kleiber Chair

2009-10 Linda Caldwell, President

2010-11 Diane Samdahl, President

2011 ALS Fellows Vote to become an OPEN membership organization

2011-12 David Scott, President

2012 Best Student Paper from LRS sponsored by ALS

2012-2013 Alan Ewert, President

2013 Contract signed with Sagamore Publishing to provide Association Management services