

LEADERSHIP AMONG FEMALE NATIONAL INTRAMURAL –  
RECREATIONAL SPORTS ASSOCIATION DIRECTORS

by

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Under the Supervision of Professor Barbara Y. LaCost

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Leadership Among Female National

Intramural-Recreational Sports Association Directors

BY

Christie L. Oelling

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

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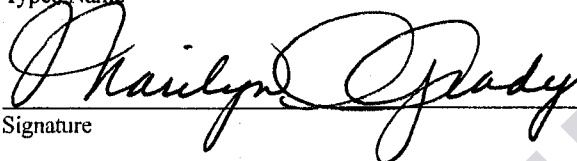
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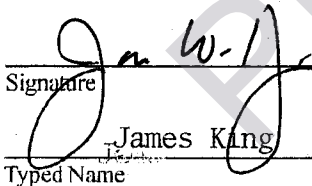
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Nebraska UNIVERSITY OF GRADUATE COLLEGE

# LEADERSHIP AMONG FEMALE NATIONAL INTRAMURAL-RECREATIONAL SPORTS ASSOCIATION DIRECTORS

Christie L. Oelling, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2004

Advisor: Barbara Y. LaCost

The purpose of this study was to survey female National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) directors to determine what best reflected their perceptions of leadership dimensions within the field of recreation at four divisions of postsecondary institutions. This study used a quantitative methodological approach through a survey instrument to determine the most common leadership characteristics and qualities that define the current female NIRSA director. The population consisted of 215 women directors in the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).

The findings of the study included: (a) The female NIRSA directors hold high standards of leadership with attitudes of passion, credibility, vision, and belief, with attributes of being prepared, being responsible, and being positive, and with skills/abilities to communicate, lead, and listen. (b) The female NIRSA directors have faced professional challenges of negative environments, equality issues, financial difficulties, and expectations of being a workaholic. (c) The female NIRSA director's leadership style is about being respectful towards their staff, empowering their staff, being good role models, taking the time to work one-on-one, fixing problems of their staff, and being demanding of their staff. (d) The female NIRSA director's purpose is about making a contribution to their institution, impacting students, leaving things better, providing opportunities to their staff, developing professional relationships, using their

professional talents, instilling values, advancing the field of recreation, and working to make things happen.

The goal of the research was to inform the NIRSA membership (both men and women), current NIRSA leaders, and future female directors through various publications and presentations. The research results may also assist women in leadership roles guide and mentor young female professionals for future leadership.

PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.”  
Proverbs 3:13-15

It took courage and faith for me to step out and pursue this degree, but throughout the journey, I was fortunate enough to have very special people to help me reach this destination. I must first thank my mentor, my advisor, and my friend; Dr. Barbara LaCost. I would not have made it to this point were it not for her. Dr. LaCost, you are an amazing woman and have given me so much wisdom, guidance, and support along the way. You even pulled me out of my comfort zone a few times, only to make me better and stronger in this educational pursuit. I thank you for the countless hours you have spent with me to help me achieve this educational goal. I will be forever indebted to you. I am blessed because you have been a part of my life.

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And lastly, I want to take the opportunity to thank my family. I must first thank God for blessing me with an incredible family who has done nothing but love and support me through all my endeavors.

To my mother, you are such a beautiful person to me. You were always there to listen and encourage me. You have truly showed me what unconditional love is all about. I thank you for being such a beautiful role model in my life. Your faith, unselfishness, and grace are inspirational to me.

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There are many other friends and family, too many to list, who have been a blessing to my life. Each has added a little more to my life giving me a more complete life and making me the person that I am today. I thank each of you for their continual love and support.

To each and every one of you, I thank you!

Chris

PREVIEW

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## PRELUDE

The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) values excellence in quality leaders who continue to move forward and stay on the leading edge in the field of recreation, sport, and leisure activity. Previously, the researcher conducted a qualitative study for the purpose of exploring characteristics and qualities of some of the field's top female leaders.

Nine female directors were purposefully selected from Division I NIRSA organizations. They were selected based on their reputation for being strong leaders and for their involvement in the field. Reputation-case sampling was used to select information-rich cases for in-depth study (Merriam, 1998; Schumaker & McMillan, 1993).

A focus group was utilized to collect information from nine NIRSA women directors. The focus group was conducted at the NIRSA National Conference in San Antonio, TX in April 2002. The discussion centered on leadership and purpose within the field of recreation. The researcher audiotaped and transcribed the 2 1/2 hour discussion.

### Qualitative Research Question

How do women directors describe their career paths and leadership characteristics that have allowed them to make their professional mark in the field of recreational sport?

### Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your pathway to the director position at your respective university.
2. Describe yourself as a leader.
3. Share some of your successes as well as challenges as a director.
4. How has being a director opened doors for you?
5. How have you, being a director, opened doors for other women in the field of recreation?
6. What does the future hold for women in leadership in the field of recreation and NIRSA?
7. What research would you like to see done with women and leadership in the field of recreation?

Through this qualitative research, the women showed their leader-bound qualities, shared their uphill battles, gave keys to their leadership styles, and showed the impact they make with their purpose as a director. The results of the qualitative study are presented in Appendix A.

The researcher, based on the findings of the qualitative study, was interested in taking the research a step further. The researcher designed a survey instrument based on the analysis of data from the qualitative study. The researcher sought to expand the study of women in leadership within the NIRSA organization by quantitatively studying the remainder of the female director population and their perceptions of leadership dimensions.

## Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, women have been a part of a new leadership movement. Bennis and Nanus (1985) shared, “The new leader is one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3). Women have become agents of change as they have broken through one glass ceiling after another on their way to leadership positions at the top of various fields. As women continue to break into a greater number of leadership positions, their stories and successes need to be explored and shared with those who desire to be future leaders.

Women always have had natural abilities to lead, whether in raising families, organizing events, or running departments. These natural abilities have added something special to the movement of leaders and leadership. This is not the male-dominated leadership of the past but a new and exciting female contribution. What are the characteristics that best reflect female leadership? What are important qualities that allow women to succeed? Do women think or operate in similar manners to their male counterparts? These are the new questions of leadership that need to be answered.

Some of the women breaking through the glass ceiling are women who have played a vital role in making contributions to the field of recreational sports. Kouzes and Posner (1995) stated, “The most significant contributions leaders make are not to today’s bottom line; they are to the long-term development of people and institutions who adapt, prosper, and grow” (p. xxv). Current recreational leaders and future leaders, both men and women, would benefit to learn and understand the leadership characteristics of the

current women leaders and how they have enhanced their careers and opened new doors within recreational field. Hoferek (1986) shared,

The absence of women from the language and content of courses is a serious omission, which may leave students with the belief that women did not contribute to the formation of physical activity professions, and that they do not have a rich heritage...When the contributions of women, past and present, are included in the curriculum, the female students' interest in and future contributions to the field may be enhanced by reinforcing an image of women, as a group, actively participating for the advancement of the profession (p. 21).

Responsibility lies with those in the field to unveil the contributions of women, both past and present. This will allow the doors of the recreational world to open to young women so they might have a better insight as to what characteristics and qualities are important for future leadership. Women are traveling paths that previously have not been traveled in recreational sports. As the paths becomes more visible, young women will desire to follow in their footsteps.

Our world is full of opportunities and experiences, both positive and negative. It is essential to help future leaders that will someday travel that same path, to see the good with the bad, and the success with the failure because without failing, we cannot succeed. It is through these successes and failures that we celebrate the progression of women in leadership. Women have been opening doors in all professions; our responsibility is to look and learn from those who have made it happen and who are currently making it happen in the field of recreational sports. This quest is to look particularly at the characteristics and qualities of women in the field of recreational sport who have displayed a new way of leading. In this section, the researcher discusses the statement of



problem, provides the purpose of the study and the research question, gives definitions, states delimitations and limitations, and shares the significance of the study.

### Statement of the Problem

Although there is a substantial body of information on the subject of leadership as well as women in leadership, there has been limited research done on leadership within the field of recreation, particularly women in those leadership positions. Bower and Hums (2003) shared,

While scholars have focused attention on the careers of women working in management positions in several of these segments, almost no work has been done in the recreational sport segment. One specialized area within recreational sport is campus recreation. In this particular area, there is limited research on women working in administrative positions. (p. 21)

The primary focus of recreational leadership research is about men at the helm. Although men have been the foundation of the recreational field, an additional foundation is being laid. Over the past few decades, women in recreation have increased the number of leadership positions held – most notably, the campus recreation director position. Yet, there is very little research to accompany this new direction of leadership.

The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) is the professional organization for postsecondary campus recreation departments. NIRSA is an organization of 50 years plus that started with 22 individuals and has grown to over 4,000 members. Nine years after its origination, women were no longer allowed to be members of the organization. During the next twelve years, many barriers had to be broken to eventually include women. Once women were included, NIRSA blossomed. NIRSA members have recorded some of the history of the origin of women, however, minimal research has been conducted regarding the leadership of women through the last decades

of the twentieth century. In their investigation of women working in the administration of campus recreation, Bower and Hums again stated,

The investigators in the study at hand were able to locate two scholarly works dealing with women in the administration of campus recreation. . . . Besides these two scholarly works, no additional research was found focusing on careers of women working in campus recreation administration. (p. 24)

Women have been and are making a strong and positive impact to the organization overall. It is necessary to learn and research more about the leadership movement and women's contributions to the field of recreation through their leadership characteristics and qualities. This need also supports the NIRSA's "ongoing work to promote diversity in leadership positions" (p. 23). It becomes the NIRSA member's responsibility to share the experiences and stories of those leading in order to build on the foundation for the future.

#### Purpose of Study

In this study, the researcher explored the leadership of women directors who were members of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA). The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) values excellence in quality leaders who continue to move forward and stay on the leading edge within the field of recreation, sport, and leisure activity. The purpose of this study was to survey female NIRSA directors to determine what best reflected their perceptions of leadership dimensions within the field of recreation at four divisions of postsecondary institutions. This study used a quantitative methodological approach through a survey instrument to determine the most common leadership characteristics and qualities that define the current female NIRSA director. The study gave every female director who is a member

of the NIRSA organization a chance to share her perceptions so that the field might better understand female leadership.

### Research Question

#### *Quantitative Research Question*

What are the perceptions about leadership dimensions held by female NIRSA directors at four divisions of postsecondary institutions?

#### *Hypotheses*

The following four hypotheses were tested:

- HR<sub>1</sub>: No difference exists among female NIRSA directors at four athletic divisions (NCAA Division I, NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and Other) with regard to leadership characteristics.
- HR<sub>2</sub>: Differences exist among female NIRSA directors at four athletic divisions (NCAA Division I, NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and Other) with regard to professional challenges they have faced.
- HR<sub>3</sub>: No difference exists among female NIRSA directors at four athletic divisions (NCAA Division I, NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and Other) with regard to leadership style.
- HR<sub>4</sub>: Differences exist among female NIRSA directors at four athletic divisions (NCAA Division I, NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and Other) with regard to purpose as a director.

### Definitions

The following definitions offered are for increased clarification and understanding of the study.

**Division:** a distinction of postsecondary athletic levels based on legislative and competition sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA).

*NCAA Division I:* Established in 1973, Division I member institutions have to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender. Each playing season has to be represented by each gender as well. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria. (NCAA Online)

*NCAA Division II:* Established in 1973, Division II institutions have to sponsor at least four sports for men and four for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria. (NCAA Online)

*NCAA Division III:* Established in 1973, Division III institutions have to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are minimum contest and participant minimums for each sport. Division III athletics features student-athletes who receive no financial aid related to their athletic ability and athletic departments are staffed and funded like any other department in the university. (NCAA Online)

*NAIA (Other):* Established in 1952 (from the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball (NAIB)), membership consist of four-year colleges and universities, and upper-level, two-year institutions in the United States and Canada that award the bachelor's (baccalaureate) degree, or its equivalent. Active member institutions (United States) must be not-for-profit organizations and fully accredited by one of the six regional accrediting bodies. (NAIA Constitution)

*NJCAA (Other)*: Established in 1938, members consist of two-year colleges and institutions accredited by the appropriate state and/or regional accrediting agency. (NJCAA Membership Directories)

**National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)**: a non-profit professional organization dedicated to the establishment and development of quality intramural/recreational sports and fitness programs and services.

**NIRSA Membership**: a network of highly trained professional in the recreational sports field throughout the United States, Canada and other countries around the world. Representing thousands of individuals and organizations, NIRSA serves as the leading advocate for excellence in recreational sports programming and services.

**Campus Recreation Facility**: a facility at the postsecondary level that houses programming and equipment, that offers quality intramural/recreational sports and fitness programs and services.

**Campus Recreation Director**: the person responsible for the operation of the Campus Recreation facility and programming at the postsecondary level. The director position is in charge of coordinating staff to operate facilities and programs.

**Characteristic**: a feature that helps to identify, tell apart, or describe recognizably, a distinguishing mark or trait (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

**Leadership**: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart: these are the leadership practices that emerge from personal-best cases . . . Leadership is a reciprocal process between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p.23).

**Qualities:** an inherent or distinguishing characteristic, a property; a personal trait, especially a character trait (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

### Delimitations

According to Creswell (1994), delimitations “address how the study will be narrowed in scope” (p.110). A delimitation of this research was the restriction of studying only leadership characteristics of female leaders at the director level within the NIRSA organization. There are different aspects of leadership, women in leadership, and other areas of recreation that can be explored, however, the researcher chose to focus specifically on female directors who are members within the NIRSA organization.

### Limitations

Limitations, on the other hand, “identify potential weaknesses of the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 110). Although quality candidates were surveyed, the findings were specific to the female NIRSA director and their leadership characteristics and qualities. Survey questions were based on interviews with female NIRSA directors and, thus, may not be comprehensive nor reflect the general knowledge bases associated with leadership. Kouzes and Posner (1999) stated, “Leadership is not about a position or place. It’s an attitude and a sense of responsibility for making a difference” (p. xvii). This researcher did respect that each and every woman leads in her own unique way but needed understanding of the similarities and differences of how these women lead. The researcher herself was a limitation as she had been a female member in the NIRSA organization for several years and was the primary interpreter of the qualitative information upon which the survey was based.

### Significance of the Study

“Titles are granted, but leadership is earned; it is your behavior that earns you respect” (Kouzes & Posner, 2000, p. 6). This study sought to understand what best reflects the characteristics and qualities of the female NIRSA director. NIRSA values excellence in building quality leaders who continue to move forward and stay on the leading edge within the field of recreation, sport, and leisure activity. Although there are many studies on leadership and leadership characteristics, there are few studies done on women leaders and fewer yet, on women leaders within the NIRSA organization and the field of recreation. The goal of the researcher was to share the findings of this study with the NIRSA membership (both men and women), current NIRSA leaders, and future female directors through various publications and presentations. The research may also assist women in leadership roles guide and mentor young NIRSA female professionals for future leadership.

PREVIEW

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) values excellence in quality leaders who continue to move forward and stay on the leading edge within the field of recreation, sport, and leisure activity. “Leadership is the pivotal force behind successful organizations, and that successful organizations must conduct a number of activities that lead to organizational success and survival” (Weese, 1994, p. 52). Leadership is valuable to the success of any organization, but as mentioned; leadership is changing, both in theory and in practice. The purpose of this study was to survey female NIRSA directors to determine what best reflected their perceptions of leadership dimensions within the field of recreation at four divisions of postsecondary institutions. This study used a quantitative methodological approach through a survey instrument to determine the most common leadership characteristics and qualities that define the current female NIRSA director. The study gave every female director who is a member of the NIRSA organization a chance to share her perceptions so that the field might better understand female leadership. In this section, the researcher discussed general leadership theories and practices, a campus recreation leadership study, the history of NIRSA, and women in the NIRSA.

#### General Leadership Theories and Practice

##### *Leadership Theories*

The study of leadership and the theory of leadership have evolved over time. Weese (1990) stated, “Throughout the years, there have been various approaches to leadership and contemporary theories appear to have come full-circle with respect to the