

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

RECREATION & PARKS LEADERSHIP STUDIES

Student Handbook

Department of Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies
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Welcome to the RPLS Program

The RPLS Family

Welcome and congratulations on being a part of the Minnesota State University, Mankato Department of Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies (RPLS)! You are officially part of an exclusive club, with members scattered across the country, in leadership positions spanning the spectrum of the recreation world.

Connecting RPLS Emphases

In RPLS, there are two areas of emphasis: Recreation Leadership Management (RLM) and Cultural and Natural Resource Management (CNRM). These emphases allow students to focus on classes/topics they prefer while still infusing an understanding of nature, programs and events, and inclusion. Regardless of emphasis, students will leave the program prepared for a wide variety of professional opportunities.

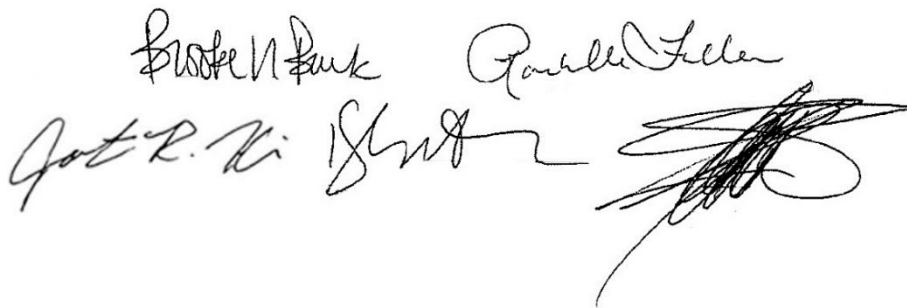
RPLS Pride

We often meet people who were unaware the career opportunities that stem from the RPLS Major. What others do not often realize is that statistically speaking, RPLS graduates are among the most highly employable, adaptable, and personally fulfilled students on the job market. The RPLS industry is the largest single industry in the world. It is significant for its ability to encourage economic development and for physical, psychological, and community well-being. Moreover, it spans the public, not-for-profit, and private sectors and breadth, from small neighborhood-based organizations to large multinational corporations.

The RPLS Vision

In addition to revenue streams and planning implications, we are ultimately tied together by one often overlooked thing: PEOPLE. We are in the business of people. No matter what aspect of RPLS we emphasize in, we are ultimately connected by people. Being a part of the RPLS field means you have the most important job in the world: helping people lead high quality lives. We do that something that no other major can brag about... we show people how to pursue a better, happier existence. Whether it is cheering on their favorite team with their friends, traveling the world with their spouse, or paddling the Grand Canyon all alone, we give people the tools to find happiness that they would not otherwise have.

We make the world better. By being in RPLS, YOU make the world better... and we are so happy to have you.



Brooke Park Rachel Feller
Jodi R. Ki

Careers in RPLS

The RPLS industry is among the most stable, well-paying industries on earth. This is not metaphor: Travel and tourism alone account for 7.6% of global GDP – higher than any other sector. In the United States, people spend more on recreation than anything other than health care. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the RPLS industry has grown by as much as 22% annually, and continues to be in demand even as AI, VR, and other technologies emerge. Below is a very abbreviated list of careers you can have with an RPLS degree. If you want to know about others, contact any RPLS professor or email RPLS@mnsu.edu.



RPLS History and Legacy

The Department of Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies has a long and distinguished history. The RPLS department was created in 1968 and the Bachelor of Science degree in the major has been continuously conferred ever since. The department is the only nationally accredited undergraduate RPLS program in the state of Minnesota. RPLS is situated within the College of Allied Health and Nursing at Minnesota State University, Mankato, as we have long recognized the health-based benefits of leisure services.

In 2023, RPLS celebrated its 55th Anniversary. Over the course of the last five-plus decades, the RPLS Department has emerged as a vital contributor and leader in the field, with its influence spanning not only the state, but the region, and the nation. The RPLS Department currently boasts five faculty members each of whom focus on excelling as teachers and fostering student development. Faculty members have real-world experience in numerous areas – from event planning, to natural resource management, to therapeutic recreation programming, and all points in between.

Current Faculty

RPLS faculty are committed to strong advising and academic support. We look forward to meetings with students and take pride in ensuring that you will graduate on time and as efficiently as possible. Feel encouraged to contact any one of us at any time.



[RPLS faculty member profiles are available on the RPLS Website.](#)

Dr. Brooke Burk |
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Dr. Rachelle Fuller |
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Dr. Jonathan Hicks |
Jonathan.hicks@mnsu.edu

Dr. Kristi Montandon |
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Dr. Jim Wise |
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Candace Hottinger |
Administrative Assistant |
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Pictured (L-R): Dr. Wise, Dr. Montandon, Dr. Fuller, Dr. Burk, Dr. Hicks

RPLS Coursework and Emphasis Areas

MSU Mankato General Education Curriculum

Completion of the MSU Mankato General Education Curriculum is a vital part of your education and allows you the important opportunity to explore multiple areas of study. Many students choose to complete their GenEds during their first two years on campus, often integrating RPLS courses along the way. Many RPLS courses count toward your GenEd requirements. For a complete list, please visit the [MNSU GenEd Course Catalog](#).

RPLS Professional Core Coursework

To [complete your degree in RPLS](#), you must successfully complete both the RPLS core courses and at least one emphasis. All RPLS students will take the following courses, which comprise the RPLS Professional Core:

RPLS 100	Introduction to Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies	3 credits	Goal Area 9
RPLS 175	Natural Resources and Conservation in RPLS	3 credits	Goal Area 3B
RPLS 276	Recreation Leadership	3 credits	Goal Area 1B
RPLS 293	Leisure, Recreation, Play, and Well-Being	3 credits	Goal Area 11
RPLS 373	Operations and Facility Management in RPLS	3 credits	
RPLS 376	Program Planning in RPLS	3 credits	
RPLS 393W	Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in RPLS	3 credits	
RPLS 483	Personnel Leadership in RPLS	3 credits	
RPLS 493	History and Philosophy in RPLS	3 credits	
RPLS 495	Senior Internship	9 credits	

RPLS Emphasis Coursework

There are two emphasis in the RPLS Major: [Recreation Leadership and Management \(RLM\)](#) and [Cultural and Natural Resource Management \(CNRM\)](#). In addition to completing your professional core classes, RPLS students choose at least one of the two emphasis areas. Students should select their emphasis column, then choose four (4) courses from that column to complete requirements for the major.

Recreation Leadership and Management	Cultural and Natural Resource Management
RLM Emphasis Restricted Electives Choose Four Courses:	CNRM Emphasis Restricted Electives Choose Four Courses:
RPLS 325 Experiential Education and Outdoor Programming	RPLS 325 Experiential Education and Outdoor Programming
RPLS 341W Research Methods in RPLS	RPLS 350 Methods of Interpretation in RPLS
RPLS 350 Methods of Interpretation in RPLS	RPLS 450 Therapeutic Recreation Techniques
RPLS 365 Commercial Recreation and Tourism	RPLS 460 Sustainable Tourism
RPLS 450 Therapeutic Recreation Techniques	RPLS 475 Public Land Use Policies
RPLS 451 RPLS Across the Lifespan	RPLS 476 Advanced Leadership in RPLS
RPLS 465 Event Planning and Design	RPLS 478 Multicultural Perspectives in Outdoor Recreation
RPLS 466 Event Implementation and Evaluation	RPLS 479 Field Techniques in CNRM
RPLS 476 Advanced Leadership in RPLS	RPLS 481 Park Planning
RPLS 481 Park Planning	

Tourism and Event Management Certificate

For students who want to plan events or oversee touristic assets as part of their career, the Tourism and Event Management Certificate (TEM) is an effective way to set yourself apart from other job candidates. The TEM Certificate is comprised of 16 total credits/5 classes and may be completed within two semesters. Online course offerings are often available; please [check the academic catalog](#) or email RPLS@mnsu.edu for more information.

REQUIRED

RPLS 165 Introduction to Community Tourism and Travel
RPLS 377 Public Relations

SELECT THREE BELOW (one from each line)

RPLS 376 | Program Planning in RPLS* or **RPLS 365** | Commercial Recreation
RPLS 465 | Event Planning and Design* or **RPLS 460** | Sustainable Tourism
RPLS 497 | Internship (4 credits) or **RPLS 499** | Individual Study (4 credits)

*Denotes in-person only offerings

CPRP Certification

You do not need to do anything extra to be eligible to take the Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) Exam... just complete your RPLS degree and you are all set! CPRP certification is a great way to set yourself apart from other job candidates. The RPLS Program at MSU is the only nationally accredited recreation program in Minnesota; by completing your degree you are deemed to automatically be eligible to test for certification. Full details on becoming a CPRP are available on the [National Recreation and Park Association](#) website.

Minoring in RPLS

The RPLS Minor is beneficial to students aspiring to a wide range of careers. Historically, the RPLS Minor has regularly been utilized as a tool to bolster the resumes of students in Aviation, Criminal Justice, Sport Management, Business, Biology, Environmental Science, and many more.

A Minor in RPLS is comprised of 21 total credits. All minors must take the following classes:

RPLS 100 Introduction to Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies
RPLS 276 Recreation Leadership
RPLS 376 Program Planning in RPLS
RPLS 393W Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in RPLS

In addition, you need to take 9 credits (3 courses) of upper division restricted electives. See list at bottom of page 6.

Senior Internship & Field Experience

More than 96% of students who graduate with a degree in Recreation and Parks Leadership Studies find work in the RPLS field. One of the ways we ensure this high degree of success is by bolstering your education with required professional experience. This occurs in two ways:

- 1) **Field Experience** | Field Experiences take place outside of class settings prior to your senior year. These field experiences may consist of work or volunteer experience, preferably at the operational level (i.e., face-to-face leadership, park maintenance, camp counselor, assistant to full time staff, etc.) in a leisure services agency. You can enroll to earn credit for your Field Experience, but it is not required. A minimum of 150 documented and verified hours of experience are required as prerequisites to the senior practicum (RPLS 495).
[The Field Experience Verification Form is available on the RPLS website.](#)
- 2) **Senior Internship** | Your Senior Internship (RPLS 495) represents the final nine credits of your bachelor's degree in RPLS and is considered your capstone experience. The Senior Internship should be at least 400 hours in length, though the best experiences are often longer. Your Senior Internship does not have to be an 'internship,' it can be a job. In fact, nearly all of our students are compensated for their positions. However, your position must be approved by your RPLS academic advisor prior to acceptance. To pass RPLS 495, your agency supervisor will complete a mid-term and a final evaluation form and discuss each of them with you. Your faculty advisor will base final Pass (P) or Fail (F) largely, but not exclusively, on these evaluations, your periodic reports, and other assignments.

Prior to enrolling in RPLS 495, you need to collaborate with your RPLS academic advisor to complete the [Senior Internship Application Form.](#)



REC CLUB

**FLOURISHING
SINCE 1977**

The Recreation Majors Club

The Recreation Majors Club – or REC CLUB – began in 1977 in an effort to provide students with additional professional support during their time in the program. Over the last 40+ years, it has transformed into a social outlet and a way to connect people. To learn more about or to join Rec Club, visit [MavCentral](#), follow the [Rec Club Instagram page](#) or email faculty advisor Jonathan Hicks <Jonathan.hicks@mnsu.edu>

Conferences and Professional Development

In the RPLS field, there are numerous associations with specific foci that allow students an additional window into the professional world. Membership can have valuable perks such as information on career opportunities and trends in the field. Moreover, many of these associations host annual conferences where members gather to network and learn from each other. If you are unsure how to prioritize or where to begin, consider speaking with your RPLS faculty advisor to help you get started.



Parks and Recreation

- Minnesota Parks and Recreation Association | Conference
- Southern Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association
- National Recreation and Park Association | Conference
- World Leisure and Recreation Association



Tourism and Commercial Recreation

- Travel and Tourism Research Association | Conference
- Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference
- World Travel and Tourism Council
- World Tourism Organization
- Resort and Commercial Recreation Association



Special Event Management

- International Festivals and Events Association
- International Association of Assembly Managers
- International Special Events Society
- Professional Convention Management Association



Therapeutic Recreation

- American Therapeutic Recreation Association
- National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification



Outdoor Recreation

- American Camp Association
- Association for Experiential Education
- National Association for Interpretation
- Student Conservation Association
- Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education



Scholarship Opportunities

There are many scholarships associated with the RPLS Department. Scholarships are a potentially valuable way to help subsidize your tuition, as well as develop professional relationships with individuals inside and outside the department. A few are identified below. Information about lots of other scholarships can be found on the [MSU Scholarship Finder](#).

[Joanne Ardolf Decker Scholarship](#)

The namesake of Dr. Decker, a professor emeritus of therapeutic recreation, this scholarship requires students have at least one of the following: significant, relevant community service, RPLS professional experience, service to the RPLS department or service to the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association.

[Southern Minnesota Recreation and Park Association Scholarship](#)

The SMRPA Scholarship was established to recognize those students pursuing a degree in the field of Recreation, Parks and/or leisure studies at Minnesota State University-Mankato or Winona State University. One scholarship recipient will be selected from each University equaling \$1,500 each. Funds will be distributed each academic year, following the recommendation by the Review Committee. Faculty will share SMRPA scholarship announcements, usually in late Spring.

[Minnesota Recreation and Park Foundation Scholarships](#)

This scholarship was created to provide financial assistance to juniors, seniors and graduate students who are majoring in a Minnesota four-year curriculum with a park and recreation emphasis. Permanent residents of Minnesota, attending a college or university in a neighboring state (majoring in parks and recreation) are also eligible to apply. Up to three \$2,000 scholarships are awarded each year.

[National Park and Recreation Association Scholarships](#)

Several scholarship opportunities exist for recreation professionals at all levels, including students. The Student Scholarship recognizes an outstanding undergraduate or graduate student for community service or contributions to the parks and recreation field. The scholarship provides selected students (up to 2) with the opportunity to explore the operation of the field at the NRPA Annual Conference. Participants will meet with mentors, be recognized at the awards ceremony and attend various conference sessions and meetings. A primary focus of the program is to inspire future participation and leadership in NRPA and to develop contacts.



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<https://ahn.mnsu.edu/academic-programs/recreation-parks-leadership-studies/>