Statement on Research, Teaching & Service
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My Scholarship

My scholarship related to teaching, research, and service is focused on understanding human behavior within the context of nature. This work falls within the broad field of the human dimensions of natural resources. The field is interdisciplinary and is occupied by scientists that have training in the full spectrum of social science. My scholarship, in particular, is informed by theories ground in psychology and is driven by questions related to humans’ relationship with nature and their influence on natural systems. In the discussion that follows, I provide an overview of my conceptual orientation toward teaching, research, and service as they each relate to this central theme of my scholarship.

My Research

My conceptual orientation for understanding the human dimensions of natural resource management draws on the meanings people associate with nature and natural resource areas. This work often falls within the rubric of concepts related to place attachment and sense of place. Because an understanding of the meanings that people ascribe to a specific landscape provides insight on why (or why not) they value the setting, natural resource management agencies are able to utilize this information to better implement resource management policy. Beyond the applied utility these investigations have for public land management agencies the world over, my work also has implications for psychological theory in the area of environmental and conservation psychology. These theories have been central for conceptualizing and designing the investigations. For example, to understand processes that shape place meaning I have drawn on symbolic interactionism to explore social influences on meaning formation and maintenance. Theory related to identity has provided insight on the influence of the physical environment for self-conceptualization. I have also drawn on identity theory to understand individual motivation relative to the physical world. Last, theory on social judgment has shaped the manner in which I have examined place meaning/attachment’s effect on agency policy and action, individual/social conflict, and responses to varied setting conditions. A sub-dimension of this research has also included conceptual and measurement-related investigations of enduring leisure involvement—a close correlate of place attachment.

With regard to methods for examining the human dimensions of natural resource management, most of my work has employed survey research techniques and tools. The use of survey research methods has been driven by agencies’ need to understand all constituents’ attitudes and behavior related to issues impacting their resources. As such, drawing samples that are representative of key populations has been imperative. My data is often used by agencies to construct and implement policy that has the potential to limit access or the mode of use among some stakeholders. The affected individuals/groups will often challenge policy that has a perceived detrimental impact. Consequently, agencies rely on our data and interpretation to defend their actions. Having said this, I will occasionally use in-depth interviews with key informants to explore and better understand individual perspectives and focus groups among stakeholders to explore the breadth and depth of perspectives.

My analysis of quantitative data relies primarily on latent variable modeling techniques (i.e., confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling). I use these techniques to examine; (a) anomalies within the data (e.g., departures from normality, missing data) and implement corrective
action (b) the psychometric properties of our measures (e.g., multiple forms of validity and reliability), and (c) causal models illustrating the influence of key variables on respondents’ attitudes and behavior. The models I test have both theoretical and applied implications. Given that latent variable modeling is a theory-based technique where hypothesized models are constructed from the tenets of a specific theory or theories, the emergent findings have direct implications for the tenability of the theory. For practice, the models provide insight on ways agencies can influence or manipulate conditions that result in the shifting of attitudes and behavior. These models often reflect processes that shape human behavior. As such, they illustrate factors that can potentially be manipulated by agencies to achieve desired outcomes.

**My Teaching**

The opportunity to share my work and learn from others underlies my intrinsic interest in teaching. This is true for both undergraduate and graduate level instruction. My current research interests, past teaching experience, and the knowledge acquired from my peers (in both formal and informal instructional contexts) have prepared me well for sharing content related to; (a) the human dimensions of natural resource management (e.g., RENR400: Study Abroad in Natural Resources), (b) applications of social psychological theory for understanding human behavior (RPTS602: Social Science Foundations of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences), and (c) social science-based methods (RPTS678: Latent Variable Model Applications for the Leisure Sciences). From the commencement of my formal teaching experience as a graduate student, I have found that teaching is most enjoyable and beneficial when there is close alignment between my research interests and the content of the classes that I am charged with instructing. This is evidenced in my own enthusiasm for teaching and my formal student evaluations.

The synthesis of my research and teaching is evidenced in both formal classroom contexts and through students’ involvement on my research projects. For example, the use of latent variable modeling to refine measurement and develop causal models has been the cornerstone of my published work. In my RPTS678 class (Latent Variable Model Applications for the Leisure Sciences), I structure the class exercises, examples, and homework around my own data and test models that were developed from theory guiding these studies. Students learn the program syntax (LISREL) and the process used to develop and test models in applied contexts. Their grasp of the course material is evidenced in their ability to run the analyses, describe the substantive meaning of their findings, and develop and test their theoretically derived models.

Graduate student involvement in my research has been an imperative. As part of my Human Dimensions of Natural Resources (HDNR) Laboratory (www.humandimensionslab.org), my research both supports students financially and actively engages them in the conduct of this research. They play an active role in all stages of the research process; from the development of proposals, data collection, analyses, the production of technical reports, and the development of peer-reviewed presentations and manuscripts. From this, along HDNR Lab staff and collaborators, we have presented findings at national and international symposia across the globe and published findings in both tier-1 refereed outlets and applied journals.

Last, all of my graduate students are intimately involved in assisting with the coordination and instruction of my RENR400 class (Study Abroad in Natural Resources). Their involvement is an integral part of their scholarly development. Their participation benefits them in several ways: a) they are exposed issues related to the human dimensions of natural resources in contrasting socio-political and
ecological contexts; b) they begin establish an international professional network; and c) they are provided opportunities to conduct their own research within the host countries. To date, I have had three doctoral students collect their dissertation data in northern Australia.

My Service

Given that all of my research is applied, it has implications for practice and society. For example, with regard to my studies of social carrying capacity on Texas’ inland waterways, this work saves lives. The growth around amenity-rich areas, such as lakes and rivers, has resulted in dramatic increases in recreational uses of these areas. The increased use has raised concern among the public over the deterioration in resource condition and safety stemming from crowding and incompatible modes of use. These issues are further exacerbated by the limited availability of public lands and water resources within Texas and the state’s rapid population growth. The Texas public agencies with whom I work (e.g., Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, various river management authorities) are challenged to provide access to all while preserving the ecological integrity of the resource. My research provides these agencies with guidance to establish resource management plans that: (a) ensure the safety of visitors, (b) preserves the recreational experience, and (c) protects the resource for future generations. To date I have developed plans for 11 lakes within Texas.

My other research also has implications that benefit society. Like the example I provided above, most of this work has been sponsored by state and federal agencies that have identified a human dimensions-related issue effecting their resource or users of the resource. They will contract me to collect and analyze data from relevant stakeholders and offer guidance enabling them to address the issue of interest. Depending on the agency, I then work with them to implement and monitor policy directives. As noted above, my graduate students are also intimately involved in this work. Through their engagement, they develop an understanding of how the development of theory and scientific rigor has direct applied implications.

Other dimensions of my service are reflected in my committee work within the department and university and professional involvement through journal editorship. With regard to service within the department/university, I consider these activities opportunities to help improve the educational experience of undergraduate and graduate students. Given the plethora of changes occurring across the academic landscape both within the university and broader academic community, constant attention is required to monitor and, in some instances modify policy, modes of instruction, and expectations of faculty. For my editorial involvement, beyond the contribution of maintaining the scientific rigor of the work submitted to these journals, I also enjoy the opportunity to learn from my colleagues the latest innovations in research. Finally, guest editing special issues has also provided me an opportunity to “shine a light" on salient issues impacting the human dimensions of natural resources.