

Invited Paper

Evolution of the Therapeutic Recreation Profession Correlates with NCTRC Certification Standards

Anne Richard

Abstract: To gain feedback from practitioners, NCTRC conducts the Job Analysis on a regular basis and uses that data to evaluate exam content and the relationship between certification standards and professional practice. Although it has remained fairly consistent, there have been minor shifts in the classification of the knowledge areas as well as the deemed importance of content areas. The NCTRC Board of Directors has been responsive to industry changes and the evolution of recreation therapy practice, resulting in refinement of the certification standards over time.

Keywords: *Certification standards, job analysis, NCTRC, therapeutic recreation*

Acknowledgments: The author wishes to express appreciation to the NCTRC credentialing staff for sharing their knowledge of organizational history and certification standards; their help was invaluable in the preparation of this piece.

Editor's Note: This paper was invited to summarize the curriculum changes that have occurred in the certification standards since the inception of NCTRC in 1981. The significance of the APIED or TR process has become apparent with the updating of standards from the four job analyses. The practice perspective that follows this paper illustrates application of this professional center piece in a residential center with youth. The perspective also illustrates how theory guides practice and how professionals might gather evidence to document outcomes.

Anne Richard is the executive director of NCTRC. Please send correspondence to arichard@nctrc.org

There is little doubt that the field of therapeutic recreation has changed over the past 35 years, both in day-to-day practice as well as within the academic preparation of recreation therapists. Through a concerted effort to maintain geographic and practice diversity on its board of directors and regular completion of the job analysis to gain feedback from those in the field, NCTRC has sought to support the continued growth and maturation of the profession.

Since its inception, NCTRC has completed job analyses on a regular basis and uses that data to evaluate exam content and the relationship between the certification standards and professional practice. As stated in the *NCTRC 2014 CTRS Job Analysis Report*: “A benchmark for any profession is its ability to routinely monitor its own practice through an ongoing process of self-regulation” (Rationale, para. 1). That report goes on to say that

The establishment of a valid job analysis is essential to the integrity of a credentialing program and its associated exam program. The job analysis translates practice into a usable format for test development. It delineates the important tasks and knowledge deemed necessary for competent practice. (Rationale, para. 2)

The data for each NCTRC Job Analysis have been gathered via a well-constructed research study cosponsored by NCTRC and its testing company, Prometric. Over the years, the job analysis has been completed four times, occurring roughly every 7 to 10 years, which is consistent with industry standards. The

analysis of the collected data has resulted in slight shifts in the classification of the knowledge areas as well as the deemed importance of content areas.

NCTRC is dedicated to professional excellence for the protection of consumers through the certification of recreation therapists. The NCTRC board of directors continues to refine the certification standards, as data become available, to ensure that individuals who hold the CTRS credential have the knowledge deemed necessary for competent practice. Table 1 provides a summary of the changes to the standards relating to academic degree, therapeutic recreation/recreation coursework, supportive coursework, and internship/field placement since 1981.

As can be seen by review of Table 1, the definition of a degree in the field has become more specialized by identifying specific content areas to be included in the TR/recreation coursework. Support coursework now encompasses electives from the social sciences and humanities. With time, the internship experience has been more clearly defined by outlining not only the number of hours and weeks, but also inclusion of the TR process during the experience as well as criteria for the agency and academic supervisors who manage the experience. The importance of the TR process to practice is evident as both the internship and the TR/recreation coursework require exposure and experience with APIED—assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and documentation—the TR process. Since 1981 when NCTRC became a reality, certification standards changes have defined the degree by identifying specific content and experiences while also introducing and requiring an examination to measure entry-level professional competence.

Table 1*Timeline of NCTRC Standards Changes*

Degree Requirement	TR/Recreation Content Coursework	Supportive Coursework	Internship/Field Placement
<p>1989 – A baccalaureate degree or higher from an accredited college/university with a major in TR or major in Recreation with an option in TR is required to sit for the exam</p> <p>2005 – Degree or major in TR (RT), Recreation, or Leisure with an option in TR; or TR, Recreation or Leisure in combination with other fields of study is now required</p> <p>2008 – Academic Path Degree Pending is implemented</p>	<p>1988 – Only 1 “swing” course will be accepted out of the 6 TR content courses</p> <p>1989 – For Professional Equivalency path an individual must complete 9 semester credits (12 quarter credits) of upper-level or graduate-level coursework in TR (3 content courses of 3 credits each) and 9 semester credits (12 quarter credits) in general recreation content courses</p> <p>1991 – Complete minimum of 18 credits (24 quarter credits) in TR and general recreation coursework with no less than a minimum of 9 credits (12 quarter credits) of these completed in TR content</p> <p>1998 – No longer allow “swing” course</p>	<p>1986 – Supportive coursework must include a minimum of 18 semester (27 quarter hours) from 3 of the 6 areas</p> <p>1988 – CTRS Equivalency Standard #1 now reads that a bachelors degree or higher from an accredited college or university which includes a minimum of 24 semester hours (36 quarter hours) from 3 of the following 6 areas (adapted PE, biological/physical sciences, human services, psychology, sociology, or special education)</p> <p>1989 – Academic path requires 18 semester credits (27 quarter credits) from 3 of the following 6 areas: adapted PE, biological/physical sciences, human services, psychology, sociology, or special education</p>	<p>1983 – Field experience completed after 1/1/86 must be under NCTRC certified TRS-Professional level individual</p> <p>1985 – Field placement minimum of 360 hours completed at one site, and the candidate must receive course credit for the placement</p> <p>1985 – Completion of a minimum of a 10 consecutive weeks, 360 hours field placement effective 1/1/88</p> <p>1987 – Extensive full –time involvement is defined as 36-40 hours per work week (maximum of 40 hours/week)</p>

cont.

Table 1 (cont.)

	<p>to count toward TR coursework</p> <p>2003 – Minimum of 4 TR content courses required</p> <p>2010 – An applicant can submit thesis or dissertation coursework to count toward the TR content coursework</p> <p>2013 – A minimum of 18 semester or 24 quarter credit hours in TR and general recreation content coursework with no less than a minimum of 15 semester or 20 quarter credit hours in TR content. A minimum of 5 courses in TR is required and each course must be a minimum of 3 credit hours</p> <p>2013 – Content specific TR coursework will include assessment, TR process, and advancement of the profession.</p>	<p>1991 – Supportive coursework must include 3 credits of anatomy and physiology, 3 credits of abnormal psychology, 3 credits of human growth and development, with the remaining credits in human service content area</p> <p>1999 – The standard for Human Growth and Development is revised to reflect across the lifespan</p> <p>2004 – The Anatomy and Physiology requirement is revised to state that entry level Human Biology would not meet the standard</p> <p>2012 –Social science and humanities electives are now accepted as supportive coursework</p>	<p>1991 – The internship is completed after the majority of the TR and recreation coursework has been completed</p> <p>1992 – Agency supervisor must be certified as a CTRS on the 1st day of the applicant’s internship</p> <p>1995 – Completion of a majority of coursework prior to internship is defined as completion of 12 semester hours of content coursework with no less than 6 semester hours in TR</p> <p>1998 – The 360 hour, 10 consecutive week internship requirement is changed to 480 hour, 12 consecutive weeks</p>
--	--	--	---

Table 1 (cont.)

			<p>2003 – A maximum of 45 hours per week is accepted</p> <p>2005 – The field placement supervisor’s duties must be at least 50% in TR</p> <p>2009 – The field placement must have a minimum of 20 hours/week and a maximum of 45 hours/week</p> <p>2010 – The full-time, on-site agency supervisor must be currently NCTRC CTRS certified and possess the CTRS credential for one year prior to supervising an internship student</p> <p>2013 – The Academic Field Placement Supervisor must be an active CTRS at the start of the field placement experience</p>
--	--	--	--

Table 1 (cont.)

		<p>2013 – The same individual can't serve as both the academic and agency supervisor during a field placement experience</p> <p>2013 – A minimum 560-hour, 14 consecutive week field placement experience in TR services that uses the TR process as defined by the current NCTRC Job Analysis.</p>
--	--	---

As evidenced by the refinement of the standards over the years, the therapeutic recreation profession continues to evolve in response to the changes in the health care environment, new technology, research, and funding. It is critically important that all certified therapeutic recreation specialists complete the NCTRC Job Analysis and Profile Studies in the upcoming years to assure the

strong correlation between certification standards and actual practice. NCTRC wishes to express its appreciation for the continued professional support of the credentialing program and encourages those holding active certification to become involved in NCTRC through a committee or board position. Please contact the office (nctrc@nctrc.org) if interested.

Reference

National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification. (2015). *2014 CTRS Job Analysis report, NCTRC report on the international job analysis of certified therapeutic recreation specialists*. New York, NY: Author.