

NRPA and IFEA Event Management School at Oglebay Resort
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences
Texas A&M University

Linda Co and Jordan Woosley, MS Candidates

About the Program

Festivals and events have become a valuable resource to communities. It has created a commonality among differences and brought communities together time and time again. Over the years, events have also evolved and became more complex, demanding extensive skills and knowledge for the safety and value of each participant's experience. As a result, the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA) and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) have partnered to create the Event Management School at Oglebay National Training Center in West Virginia. It is a two-year professional development program geared towards bringing new and mid-career industry professionals together with some of the most highly-respected and experienced professionals in the field, for a comprehensive, educational, and networking opportunity. The program occurs one-week per year and it is a two year continuing education program. It covers critical basics of successful event management and then put students in an applied-knowledge project environment to test and further what they have learned. Anyone looking to learn new event management skills and expand their expertise are welcome to register for the program. Park and recreation managers and staff responsible for the successful design, development and execution of events of any size are highly encouraged to attend.

Curriculum

During the two year program that takes place one-week per year, the first year includes intensive, interactive, classroom pathway through 24 hrs of topical training and the second year involves a more hands on approach through applied workshop settings for event concept design.

- The Event Management School first-year curriculum was created with the goal of providing a strong basic understanding and awareness of the multiple, critical components involved in event planning and management. Topics during year 1 include:
 - How to Build a Successful Event and Business Plans
 - Event Budgeting and Budget Management
 - Building a Strong Volunteer Program
 - Sponsorship Sales and Service
 - Food and Beverage Programs
 - Merchandise Programs
 - Event Administration and Legal Considerations
 - Marketing and Media
 - Social Media Marketing
 - Operations
 - Risk Management

- Surveys, Evaluations and Economic Impact Studies
- Community Building through Proactive Events Management
- Open Forum Discussions
- The second-year curriculum builds upon that first-year knowledge-base by providing more applied workshop-styled opportunities in specific areas, together with a project-based opportunity to help bring the “real world” a little closer to the classroom. While attending classes, students were also required to work with different groups to develop an appropriate event proposal for their client within three days. Topics for workshops during year 2 include:
 - Application of Project Management to Events
 - Applied Program and Event Development, Budget Development, Sponsorship Research, Sponsorship Proposals and Follow-up Reports
 - What Cities Want from Events and How To Strengthen Those Partnerships
 - Advanced Risk Management & Contingency Planning
 - Case Study: The Development of a World Class Programmable Park
 - City Event Concept Project
 - Open Forum Discussions

Benefits of the Program

The program offers a wide variety of classes and workshops that help practitioners gain more experience and training in event planning. It prepares event planners for real life application in any situation and allows participants to network with many renowned professionals in the field. The certificate awarded for those who complete the program opens new pathways and increases their reputation in the field. The professional letters added behind participants' names, CFEA (Certified Festival & Event Associate), separate Event Management school students from others in the industry and especially in the pool for job candidates. With the CFEA, participants can continue to advance towards the CFEE (Certified Festival & Event Executive), which recognizes an industry-focused combination of top-level experience and continued education.

Interviews about IFEA Event Management School

We interviewed Melyssa-Anne Stricklin and Debe Shafer, two Texas A&M Recreation, Park and Tourism faculty members, who attended the IFEA Event Management School in previous years. They both talked about their experiences and highly recommended the event management school for those aspiring to become event planners. When asked what the event management school is like, they used the words, “fun” and “knowledgeable.” Debe explained that while at the school for the first year, students are only expected to attend their classes and make connections with their speakers and classmates. In the second year, students are still expected to attend classes, but they must also work with an assigned group for three days to come up with a program plan for an event and present it to clients at the school. This client represents a city in the United States and he/she is looking for new and exciting events for his/her community. Debe and Melyssa-Anne both regarded this project as “very fun and very stressful. We had to work very long hours on the project, sometimes into the early morning. But

it was completely worth it for the experience.” Another aspect of the event management school that Debe and Melyssa-Anne enjoyed was that the presenters and students all represented diverse areas of event planning. Every person brought their own experiences and ideas. This is important because they could all share information, tools, and tips with each other based on those experiences in event planning. This has created a large network for Melyssa-Anne and Debe, who both claimed they stay connected to their classmates to this day after attending the event management school almost 5-6 years ago. Debe told us that she is still learning tips and skills from other event planners in her group and even uses her classmates from the school as resources for her event management classes. Another benefit to the network that this school provides is the opportunities for employment and internships for those who attended the school, their colleagues, and in Debe’s case, her students looking for internships in event management. Since the students and speakers all represent different areas of event planning all over the world, there’s lots of conversation about job openings or internship possibilities for various organizations, businesses and venues across the globe. The last benefit to the event management school is that those who successfully complete the school and gain the professional certification, will receive professional letters behind their names: CFEA, or ‘Certified Festival & Event Associate.’ CFEA is the first phase toward future attainment of your ‘Certified Festival & Event Executive’ (CFEE) designation, which recognizes an industry-focused combination of top-level experience and continued education. These certifications separate Event Management school students from others in the industry and especially in the pool for job candidates.

(All Interview Questions and Answers for Debe Shafer and Melyssa-Anne can be found in the Appendix below.)

Conclusion

The IFEA Event Management School at Oglebay is clearly an effective program for aspiring event managers. Students at the school follow an intensive, interactive, classroom pathway for four days, practice their knowledge and skills in multiple, real-life scenarios and learn about every aspect of event planning, down to the smallest details. The event management school also provides a vast network for students and speakers attending. Even after finishing the program, students never stop learning about tools or opportunities to become highly affective event planners. Speakers at the event are among the top event management professionals in the industry, planning events like Macy’s Day Parade or bits and pieces of the Olympics. The curriculum includes key aspects of successful events like: business plans, budgeting, legal documents and considerations, operations, risk management and so much more. The IFEA event management school is vital to aspiring event planners and offers so many opportunities for students beyond the classroom. We hope that after reading this and learning about the event management school, event planners will want to attend in the future.

- Attachments/Links
 - <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/0c1737ce09eb4b6790da9994ce39ad63/event-school-brochure-2020.pdf>

APPENDIX

Interview Questions for Mrs. Shafer:

What was the event management school like?

2 year program

1 year - attending classes and making connections

2 year - attending presentations/working with assigned group

Project

Client - what city needed

New event for community

Demographics

Worked in different group to come up with event

Good because in group with people she didn't know

Different personalities - not smooth sailing - group work

3 days to finish project + attend classes

Oglebay - fun

Much more stressful 2 year - very short time to finish project

Became very good friends, brought different strengths and talents

Good networking

Loved the courses - interesting and diverse in event field

Lots of different areas of event planning

All wanted to get more training in event management

Share everything - wonderful colleagues - people want you to succeed at events

Diverse ages, surprisingly large number of men who attended

CVBS, zoos, home associations, big community of event planners, retirement communities

What kind of connections/networks did you gain?

Through Group connections - keep up with them still

Keep up with new members attending the school

Job opening networks

Internship opportunities for RPTS students

What do you remember most from the school or classes?

Stuck at resort so easier to make connections

2nd year was stressful with project

Learning so much - international experiences from speakers

Passed really good and solid info that Debe incorporated into classes

Do you still keep in touch with your instructors/classmates?

Yes

What was your biggest takeaway from the school?

Felt really good about RPTS 320 class curriculum

RPTS 320 classes prepare students for events

Fun to feel like you were on a cutting edge of what's going on in the event industry

Keeping students current with industry

Do you recommend the school for aspiring event planners?

Yes

Any additional information you would like to add for the research brief?

Huge thing on building sponsorships

Legal contracts and papers

Conferences are good for IFEA - continuing Ed is important

Relatively new for event planning certificate

Credential aspect of it was beneficial

Interview Questions for Melyssa-Anne Stricklin:

What was the event management school like?

A wealth of knowledge

Super fun

Wonderful networking opportunity - still talks to classmates even after 4-5 years

Added to event management school facebook

Lots of sharing of documents and ideas

What kind of connections/networks did you gain?

So much

Teachers + students

Presenters

One-on-one time with them, like lunch

Mostly practitioners attending

How big were your classes?

Decently small - 60 people at least

What do you remember most from the school or classes?

The networking piece

Comradery

Sharing resources with fellow planners - you don't have to reinvent the wheel

Memories are amazing

What was your biggest takeaway from the school?

Such a massive detailed field that is so creative, fun and hard,
and knowledge is irreplaceable

Not for faint of heart

Do you recommend the school for aspiring event planners?

YES - going to conferences as well (scholarships provided)

Any additional information you would like to add for the research brief?

Some intimidation from being only from academia

No judgement felt from classmates or group members for having less experience

Opens up world of what you can do

Different groups if participants are from same organization

Evening for networking and hanging out with others

Become a member of IFEA once you complete training

Certifications behind you and letters behind you

School helps you get letters faster - so many classes and workshops

Once you complete the school you get the letters, CFE behind your name

More experience and training gets you CFEE