I certify that this assignment is my own work by placing my initials at the end of this statement. I have not plagiarized any of its contents, nor have I collaborated with other students in the writing of this paper.

Introduction:

“Simulation of disabilities can be effective in changing attitudes . . .” (Dattilo, 2002, p. 59). I had read this quote several times before participating in my wheelchair simulation. It seemed pretty straightforward and simple at first. However, the experience I received by actually participating in the simulation was immensely greater than just a simple attitude change. I picked up my wheelchair in 801 Ford around 8:30am on Friday, September 30th. Upon sitting down in the seemingly comfortable seat of the chair, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I wheeled cautiously over to the elevator, as I became oriented with the chair and its maneuverability. I had planned to wheel down to the library, but it did not take long for me to realize I was not in the physical shape to make the trip all the way back up to the Keller Building by my 11:15am class. I turned around, and headed straight for the Keller Building, nearly an hour and a half before my class was scheduled to start. It took me nearly 15 minutes to get there, and after I wheeled up the ramp and into the main lobby, I was exhausted. I spent the next hour reading a book in the main lobby, waiting for the classroom to open. After class, I had my roommate pick me up outside the Nittany Lion Inn around 12:10pm. When we arrived back at the apartment, He assisted me by getting my chair out and placing it beside the passenger side of the car. I then took the elevator up to my room several floors above. I spent the next hour in my apartment eating lunch and watching television with my roommate. Both of us had class at 2:30, and I knew that if I was going to get there on
time I would have to leave much earlier than I was accustomed to. So my roommate Chad volunteered
to walk along side me to class. Since we left shortly after 1 pm, we had some time to just enjoy the
beautiful fall day. We took the longer route, which brought us by Old Main, and then we split ways and I
headed back to the Ford Building to return my chair. By the time I had returned my chair, it was nearly
2:30pm, and I had to rush to get to class on time.

**Environmental Barriers:**

When participating in a wheelchair simulation, it is very important to take environmental
barriers into consideration, (Dattilo, 2002, p. 64). Although I had walked my planned routes several
times before participating in the simulation, I soon realized that things I did not consider to be barriers
on foot, became so in a wheelchair. I had originally planned with go down to the library before class,
but after becoming very tired in a short period of time, I realized that I would not have the strength to
wheel both down, and back up the relatively steep grade of the sidewalk. When I arrived at the Keller
Building, I spotted the wheelchair ramp, and was able to get up the ramp fairly easy. Although for a
beginner such as myself, the ramp was a fairly tight on both sides, and I did not have much room to
maneuver. As I was sitting in the lobby, I realized that my entire morning had been altered by the fact
that it would have been very difficult for me to accomplish what I wanted to while being in a wheelchair.
My plan to go to the library and get some work done on the computer was nullified by the fact that I
was not in the physical shape to get there and back to class in the time allotted. This was really the first
time during the day that I realized the constant amount of barriers that persons with disabilities, and
particularly those who use wheelchairs, must encounter every day.

Another Environmental barrier I noticed while taking part in the simulation occurred while I was
in my apartment. I noticed that the doors to my bedroom and bathroom where not much wider than
the wheels of my chair. It made it relatively difficult to move from room to room in the apartment, and I
knocked my hands on the door frame several times. Finally after several minor struggles of moving around the apartment, I found it easier just to stay in one place. This again was an eye opening realization, because it made me understand how much I take my mobility for granted. To those who use wheelchairs, tasks as simple as going to the rest room, or moving from room to room can take great effort.

Social Reactions:

Once I left the Ford Building on that Friday Morning, I almost immediately noticed that I was being perceived differently than I was used to. A man in a suit walked by me without saying hello, or even making eye contact. It was as if I didn’t even exist. At first, I didn’t think anything of it. Maybe it was just that I didn’t notice these types of social interactions while I was able to walk. My thoughts quickly changed however, when it happened several more times over the next hour I spent in the Keller Building. I sat there reading my book and thinking about the simulation I was taking part in. How had I reacted towards people who use wheelchairs in the past? Did I do what most people seemed to do, which was just turn their shoulder, and act as if I wasn’t there at all?

As I was pondering this thought, an older man came up to me and said, “Was it easy for you to get into the building this morning?” Shocked at the sudden attention I received, I looked up eagerly from my chair. I told him yes, and explained to him that the ramp out front was fairly easy to see and use, and that the automatic doors made it easy for me to enter the building. “That’s great”, he responded. Just as I was about to explain to him that I was doing a simulation for a class I was taking, he wandered back through the corridor. This was a refreshing moment for me during the day, because up to this point I hadn’t talked to anyone since I left the eighth floor of the Ford Building that morning. Although the man was brief, he seemed truly interested in whether I was able to get where I needed to be, and that make me happy. This man showed me how important it is to make direct contact with
those with disabilities. This is something we have spent a great deal of class time talking about. “Evans (1976) observed that a strain in social interactions, including uneasiness, inhibition, and uncertainty experienced by people with disabilities appeared to be a strong factor in development and maintenance of negative attitudes” (Dattilo, 2002, p. 60). Even though I only spent a miniscule amount of time in a wheelchair, I almost immediately noticed a difference in the way I was perceived by people on campus. It was not until the kind gentleman approached me, that I realized how important making direct contact can be to those who use a wheelchair.

**Ethical Considerations:**

As I mentioned above, a man who I perceived to be in his early 60’s approached me outside of the classroom while doing my simulation. He spoke with a very kind tone, and seemed to genuinely care about my well being. Having never been in such a situation before, I did not know how to handle this interaction. Soon after he left, I felt that it was wrong I did not explain to him that I was not actually disabled, and I was simply engaging in simulation for a class that I was taking. From then on, I told myself that I would explain my situation to anyone who confronted me the rest of the day.

There are definite ethical issues that could be raised by people with disabilities in conjunction with a simulation assignment such as this one. The text outlines the limitations that a simulation can have by relaying the following, “After completing the simulation, participants will not know what it is like to actually have the particular disability, due to many physical and psychological factors that exist in actual disabling conditions. However, they will enhance awareness of disability and attitudinal and physical barriers.” (Dattilo, 2002, p. 63). In other words, although this particular simulation gave me a small sense of what it is like to use a wheelchair, I still am still largely unaware of what it is really like to have to use a wheelchair on a daily basis. It is important that everyone who takes part in a simulation is aware of this fact, because there is no other way to experience what people with disabilities go through,
without actually having a disability, and doing so would be unethical. However, simulations can be very valuable for people with and without disabilities. A passage from the text reads, “Through disability simulations, participants can develop some sensitivity to the experience that people with disabilities encounter on a regular basis.” (Dattilo, 2002, p.59) As long as those who participate do so by following the guidelines outlined in class, including staying in character, being honest with those who confront you, knowing your limitations, and remaining safe, simulations can remain ethical and beneficial for both people with and without disabilities. Those who partake in the simulation develop a greater understanding and appreciation for those who use wheelchairs on a daily basis. Because of this developed awareness, hopefully these people act as a positive influence on people with disabilities as a result.

**Advocacy Implications:**

I was very skeptical of the wheelchair simulation before I took part in it. I believe this was because I thought that I would never have to use one ever again in my life, and I didn’t see the point of participating in such an activity. However my viewpoint changed dramatically after I began the simulation. I realized that I was arrogant. It was not that I had treated people who use wheelchairs badly in the past; it was just that I simply did not understand what they have to go through on a daily basis. I still do not know what it is like, since I only participated in such a small sampled simulation, but it was a very powerful experience. I developed an awareness and appreciation to some of the difficulties and barriers that those who use wheelchairs face every day. I also learned not to take for granted how lucky I am to be able to walk from place to place, whenever I want, and wherever I want.

When discussing how we can become advocates, the text states, “Since advocacy is an important component of professional behavior it may be helpful to consider ways to advocate for people who have been oppressed in various ways.” (Dattilo, 2002, p.275) Becoming a professional is a
common goal for most college students today. Advocating for people with disabilities is a great step in that direction. It is because of this that I believe that everyone who is enrolled in college should have to take some form of class that teaches students about disabilities. This class should include a simulation such as the one in RPTM 277. Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management students are not the only people who are going to come in contact with persons with disabilities later in life. College is a time that students are to be prepared for the real world, and people with disabilities are everywhere in the real world. I believe it is up to the young generations to help facilitate and enforce the guidelines set by the American’s with Disabilities Act, so that people with disabilities can continue to live their lives with as little restrictions as possible.

Advocating for such a class would greatly enhance the awareness of every single college student, rather than just those enrolled in RPTM 277, or classes like it. Department and Curriculum heads would be very powerful people to advocate such a request to.

**Professional Implications:**

One day, I hope to be a Park Manager at a major State or National Park. Until taking this class, and completing the simulation, I never once thought about inclusive leisure services as part of my responsibilities. I was completely unaware of whose responsibility it was at all, or that it was even an issue. I now realize that in order to be successful in my desired field, I need to be very familiar with ADA regulations, and all the methods that inclusive leisure entails. After participating in this simulation, I feel more aware of barriers and obstacles that people with disabilities face. National and State Parks have a tremendous opportunity for inclusion, and I would take pride in making sure that trails, facilities and other facets of the park were more than accessible for people with disabilities. One of the main topics we have discussed in class, is whose responsibility it is to provide inclusive leisure services for people with disabilities. The text is very clear on this point when saying, “The responsibility for advocating for
and facilitating inclusion must shift from parents to leisure service providers.” (Dattilo, 2002, p.30) This is something that I was almost completely unaware of before taking this class, and participating in the simulation. However, it is now something that I look forward to taking pride in! Inclusion is something that must be looked at as the norm in today’s society, and this simulation has greatly enhanced my knowledge and outlook on the issue.

Conclusion:

Simulations do not provide a complete outlook on what it is like to have a particular disability. However, they do give those who participate a sense of awareness that can be used to do great things. There are many things that I have taken from this assignment. No matter how difficult I thought the assignment was, there is no way to truly experience what a person with a disability goes through on a daily basis. The most important thing that I have learned through taking part in the simulation is that once I become a professional, I am responsible for creating inclusive environments for persons with disabilities. This simulation has enabled me to develop an awareness and appreciation for such issues. As a professional I will strive to meet the needs of persons with and without disabilities in my career field.
Works Cited