

Bringing Life to Scholarship: Service Learning in Sport Management

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2:30 PM - 2:55 PM

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, institutions of higher education are charged with preparing students to face the challenges of the 21st century as responsible, active global citizens. Students who participate in sport are taught to face and solve challenges by acquiring knowledge and skill outside of the classroom, like teamwork, self-discipline, sportsmanship, leadership, and socialization. With the growth of sports as a major industry, there is an increased need and opportunity to better train students who study sport by providing them with the kinds of learning environments necessary to produce citizens with the capacity to solve real-world problems by connecting hands-on learning with classroom knowledge.

Service-Learning participation can have a positive impact on students. The literature on service-learning suggests that the benefits of engaging students in service-learning activities can provide a number of benefits similar to those derived from sport participation, including increased academic learning, civic responsibility, personal and social development, psychological benefits, and opportunities for career exploration (Prentice & Garcia, 2000).

Service learning is a form of experiential education that goes beyond the traditional classroom lecture, reading, and writing format. It offers students the opportunity to learn by being actively involved in a cycle of community action and related reflection (Furco, 1996). According to Geleta & Gilliam (2003), service learning is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted to meet the needs of communities. One of the major benefits of service learning is to help foster civic responsibility. It is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled. It also provides a structured link for students or participants to reflect on their service experience (Prentice & Garcia, 2000).

Students can benefit tremendously from an educational experience that combines service learning and sport management. A well planned and executed service learning project can expand the student's sport management experience well beyond events, contests, and classroom lectures. It can bridge the gap between the school and the global community by providing a way for students and community organizations to come together for a worthy cause and make the learning experience more meaningful.

The concept of service learning has been around for centuries and has become an increasingly popular pedagogical practice in the past few years (Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, little is known about the use of sport as a vehicle to help solve a global community health issue.

Malaria is one of the world's most important public health concerns, causing over a million deaths and up to 500 million clinical cases each year. Africa experiences about 3,000 deaths from malaria each day and 10 new cases every second. More than a third of the world's total population now lives in malaria endemic areas. The disease also takes a high toll on households and health care systems, impeding development. It is estimated that malaria reduces Gross Domestic Product growth by approximately one full percentage point per year (World Economic Forum, 2006). The poor are affected most as they have less access to services, information and protective measures, and less power to avoid living or working in malaria-affected areas. A vaccine is not on the immediate horizon. Drug resistance to affordable anti-malarial drugs, such as chloroquine, is on the rise and while more effective anti-malarials are available, they come at a significantly higher cost. One of the most cost-effective interventions against malaria today is the use of insecticide-treated bednets. The burden of malaria can be reduced significantly using existing preventive and treatment strategies (World Health Organization, 2005). For \$10, an insecticide-treated bednet can be purchased and delivered to families at risk. Bednets work by creating a protective barrier against mosquitoes at night, when the vast majority of transmission occurs. An entire family can sleep under a bednet for up to four years, safe from malaria. The benefits of bednets extend even further than the family. When enough nets are used in an area, the insecticide used to deter mosquitoes makes entire communities safer --- even for those individuals who do not have nets (De La Cruz et al, 2006).

The disease is a self-perpetuating problem. Malaria accounts for up to half of all hospital admissions and outpatient visits in Africa, costing over \$12 billion a year. The effects permeate almost every sector. Malaria increases school absenteeism, decreases

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tourism, inhibits foreign investment, and even affects the type of crops that are grown (World Economic Forum, 2006).

The purpose of this research was to examine how students can use knowledge and skills learned in sport management classes to design and implement service learning projects that help solve critical health challenges. Specifically, this study addresses service learning design that could be applied to any health problem. The example used here is fundraising for malaria mitigation projects that utilize bednets as a low cost means of prevention. This presentation will discuss the research on service learning and will show how service learning is a sound teaching strategy grounded in solid theoretical and philosophical frameworks (Geleta & Gilliam, 2003). The presentation will also highlight the advantages that make service learning an ideal teaching strategy for the sport management curriculum. It describes the actual process of how students used sport as a vehicle to procure over 500 bednets for families at-risk in Africa. It also discusses ways to encourage students to become more fully involved in civic engagement to meet critical community and global needs. Subjects for this research project were sport management majors enrolled at a research university in the Midwest.