

A Guide to Service Learning in Sport Management

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Session 29: Teaching Presentation (25-minute)

Saturday, June 2, 2007

1:30 PM - 1:55 PM

Ernest Boyer, in his famous 1994 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Creating the New American College", has called for American higher education to return to its historic commitment to service. He stated that in order to prosper, higher education institutions must celebrate teaching and connect theory to practical action. Although Boyer leads the educational revolution, others such as Stanford President Donald Kennedy and University of Pennsylvania President Sheldon Hackney have also called for reform (Zlotkowski, 1998). Although there is no single strategy to this new model of educational excellence, service learning meets the requirements for academic reform that brings the academy closer to the community.

Service learning is an issue at the forefront of concern in higher education, as many professors and colleges attempt to use service learning as another learning tool for their student clientele. This topic is being written about extensively in professional journals, as educators grapple with how to implement this effective means of learning into class content. One of the major benefits of service learning is that the experience affords students the opportunity for cultural exposure and the ability to serve in the "real world".

According to Drane (2000), service learning is "is an academically based educational encounter in which students participate in organized service activities related to course concepts that meet predetermined community needs." In other words, service learning is a way for students to learn from a guided volunteer experience that allows them to integrate classroom concepts while serving the community. The students develop social conscientiousness while developing a better understanding of theory through practical application of concepts. According to Fellows-Bennett (1999), service learning opportunities are increasing as professors realize the benefits of enabling their students to learn classroom principles while serving the community. The experience assists the students in making the transition from theoretical understanding to practical application of course concepts. Conversely, service learning presents students the opportunity to first learn by doing, and then develop a critical understanding of course content through classroom discussions.

The benefits of service learning are multi-faceted. A well-designed service learning component of a course can benefit the students, participating agencies, and class instructor (Acton, 2005). Students benefit primarily through the opportunity to practice newly learned skills in a functional environment. Secondary benefits for students may be of greater importance and include improved social interaction skills, enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, increased awareness of career choices, enhanced awareness of the real world and social responsibility, opportunities for growth through interaction with people from diverse cultures, and additional opportunities to "pad" a resume with necessary applicable work experiences so desired by employers. Although student comprehension is a major goal of service learning, the community, instructors, local agencies, and universities can also benefit from this educational component. The community and agencies garner free support from students and faculty. The instructors get a chance to evaluate current theories and new approaches to sport management. The universities can enhance their public image by fulfilling moral obligations to the community (Zlotkowski, 2003).

Most educators agree that we must be able to prove our worth to the community and that service learning is a great way to accomplish this task. The dilemma we face is the process of implementing a service learning program. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the utilization of service learning in the sport management curriculum. The author will present a conceptual framework that includes the philosophical basis, rationale, and critical components of a service learning program. A case example of how service learning has been integrated into a sport management curriculum will be presented. Sample syllabi and agency agreements will also be presented and discussed.

Service learning is an excellent approach in the enhancement of student understanding. It also provides benefits to the faculty, educational institution, and the community. The goal of the author is to use their experience with service learning to simplify the process for others that choose to utilize this innovative method of scholarship.