

Event Management: From the Classroom to the Real World - a Case Study

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Effective event management skills are invariably required for success in all facets of business. Crowd control, operations, leadership, fund-raising, scheduling, marketing, concessions, and security, are but a few examples of numerous tasks, skills and traits required of facility and/or event managers (Ammon, 1998; Graham, Goldblatt & Delpy, 1995; Russo, 1985; Sawyer & Smith, 1999; Stier, 1994). Many sport management students are involved with a variety of sporting events, from tournament management to organizing fundraising events, all which require vast skill sets to successfully manage these activities (Gladden, McDonald & Barr, 2005). Although these skills are also addressed in a wide range of college coursework, event management has long been connected to college curricula related to sport and/or recreation management (Sport Management Program Review Council, 2000). Kovalski (2006), reported that events have become significant corporate marketing tools and the need to make an impression when planning an event has become increasingly important.

This paper outlines an event management class model, suitable for a variety of majors related to sport, leisure, and recreation management over a traditional 14 week semester. The specific goals and philosophy outlined can be adjusted to suit individual or institutional needs. This outline is but one way of teaching an applied class that is likely to suit skill sets required of many curricula in sport and recreation management, as well as address numerous competencies required by NASPE/NASSM (Sport Management Program Review Council, 2000).

Event Management Course Mission

This course model provides a practical and engaged process that encourages civic responsibility and autonomy among learners. According to students, enhanced learning is reported when experiential opportunities are provided in their classes (Zeigler and Bowie, 1995). This course as presented is best suited for a higher level undergraduate college course, with class preparation in business, communication, sales, and marketing, however, it can also serve as a foundational class, extending the opportunity for younger students to embrace a wide range of subjects to be addressed in future program offerings. The class could also be taught at the graduate level, as experience with event management skill development, can benefit any learner.

Weeks 1-3

The first three weeks of this fourteen week class involve extensive discussion and interaction on topics related to an exploration of personal philosophies, past leadership experiences, self assessment (personal strengths and weaknesses), and interactive group activities. This can involve techniques and approaches including personality assessments, team-building, a ropes course experience, or interactive class and group bonding activities.

Week 4

In small groups, class members are next asked to brainstorm various special event ideas for the semester. Event ideas are instructed to include additional information including facility use, reservation policies (including contracts), date options, a summary of expected costs, target participants, resources needed, and relevant related factors. Suggestions are then discussed as a class and through a democratic process specific ideas are either included or excluded for continued consideration. Following the event determination, class members are then instructed to select a community non-profit agency to support. When selected, an agency representative is invited to speak to class members and articulate the goals and mission of the philanthropy. A fundraising/sponsorship element is then added to the goals of the process. All funds raised in the execution of the planned event, are then pledged to the class chosen philanthropy.

Weeks 5-11

The instructor extends a specific week during the semester within which the activity must be planned (in this 14 week example the event takes place during week 12). Approximately half the allotted course time is set aside for student-centered event planning activities.

An experiential instructional approach is suggested. College students are certainly capable of following instructions however a key element of this engaged process is to make the students responsible for the event outcome. For this model, the following suggestions are offered:

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

A community agency is chosen by the group to serve as a sponsor of the event/s and all proceeds directly support the selected agency

Event/s must break-even, or earn a profit, for the chosen philanthropy

The community agency is infused into the event and the event planning process.

Execution of a professional event!

Committee structures are recommended. Committees are encouraged to address the following areas: operations, logistics, budgeting, sponsorship, marketing, promotions and advertising.

Week 12

Event week! A 7-day span is recommended for scheduling of the planned event in the class syllabus. This allows some flexibility for date selection, permitting events on any day of the week. Some college campuses with active schedules may warrant the pre-scheduling of specified facilities, however, event options can vary and this quickly becomes yet another obstacle for students in the real life planning of a special event.

Weeks 13-14

Allowing a minimum of two full weeks, post-event, allows time for class evaluation, feedback, reflection, budget resolution, completion of class assignments, and event closure. The class immediately following the event is reserved for open discussion about the event, unless this can occur on-site, immediately after the event. This is followed in the next class by the submission and discussion of individual event diaries and personal reflections.

Committees then meet to discuss group presentations, on the 3rd or 4th day, post event. This involves a PowerPoint (or similar) formal presentation, including suggested time-lines, committee duties and responsibilities, reflections, literature support, and strengths and weaknesses of the group's efforts. These formal presentations are then shared with all class members, such that all event planning components and information of all committee activities are available.

Summary

Over 4 years, this class model has raised more than \$15,000 for various local non-profit agencies. Student feedback has been very positive, student engagement in the process has been outstanding, and students comment frequently on the benefits of the skills learned and practiced.