

An Analysis of an International Educational Experience for Sport Management Students

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**Other
Abstract 2009-174**

**May 30, 2009
3:00 PM**

**Poster
(Lexington/Carolina Prefunction)**

Today, it has become vital that Sport Management curriculum include learning experiences for the students, beyond the classroom. Skinner and Gilbert (2007) stated that in a time when the management of sport is becoming increasingly global and complex, it is vital for Sport Management Programs to ensure a high quality education that encourages students to develop beyond a standardized way of thinking and acting, and challenges their perspectives to begin to make sound and ethical decisions both as individuals and as Sport Management professionals. The importance of an internship in the Sport Management curriculum is both understood and expected, however one recent development is the importance of practical experience throughout the curriculum including international experience. One challenge facing educators is how to include this experience into a Sport Management curriculum. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to examine the addition of an international educational experience in the Sport Management curriculum for its ability to generate a value-added learning experience that directly translated to students' understanding of their professional development.

This case study examined how to include an international learning experience for students beyond the traditional internship/practicum into the Sport Management curriculum. The model/program was developed surrounding a volunteer experience at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and included three intensive courses. Students were enrolled in three separate academic courses, including Conversational Mandarin, Modern Olympic Games and the Olympic Experience. Each of these courses involved both theoretical and practical experiences and assignments. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences during and following the courses as well as prior to and following the trip/volunteer experience. The assignments and materials were assessed with specific regard to the students learning and practical application of their learning as related to their professional development. This is an application of educational components which has been called for in recent literature, specifically with regards to adaptations to Sport Management curriculum which ensure that students are developing the critical thinking and life-long learning skills to be prepared for the global sport marketplace (Light & Dixon, 2007; Lilenthal & Grappendorf, 2006; Masteralexis & McDonald, 1997; Papamarcos, 2005; and Skinner & Gilbert, 2007).

Recent literature as examined the need to explain and reflect on the Sport Management field in order to make the necessary improvements and refinements to the curriculum to ensure that students are being adequately prepared for careers in Global Sport Marketplace (Chalip, 2006; Frisby, 2005; and Pastore, 2003). The need to develop new approaches to teaching and learning and the importance of developing Sport Management students into critical thinkers is vital in the students' development as lifelong learners (Light & Dixon, 2007; Skinner & Gilbert, 2007). Similarly, research has indicated that, as sport continues to operate in global markets the inclusion of international dimensions into the curriculum are vital to the success of both the students and their development into sport professionals (Masteralexis, et al. 1997). A challenge facing faculty today is how to develop an understanding of the concept of what is the value-added for the student learners through an educational experience in a foreign learning context/environment. One way to do this is through the development of critical thinking and reflective thinking. Critical thinking is a way for students to explicitly bring their own views and experience into the learning environment (Skinner & Gilbert, 2007). While, reflective thinking is a process which begins when the student examines and develops an understanding of themselves, their thought processes, and their life experiences from the basis of self-reflection (Zakus et al., 2007). Therefore, the international experience presented in this case study utilized each of these educational components to assist the students in their development; specifically it encouraged and developed critical thinking skills through the use of reflective analysis and other pedagogical methods.

The combination of these pedagogies with this unique educational experience of volunteering at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, demonstrates a program which allows the students to develop a comprehensive understanding of the international experience and transpose this into a value-added learning process. This is something which has been suggested in the literature as being important to the development of students (Light & Dixon, 2007). Overall, this experience demonstrated a way students can apply learning from the classroom to a practical international setting. As well, this program offers sport management educators a useful means through which they can make their curriculum more meaningful and effective, by closing the gap between abstract knowledge and the practices of professionals (Light & Dixon, 2007). Throughout this experience, students were challenged on a personal and professional level and were able to understand the value-added to their professional development, specifically they were able to articulate how this experience helped to shape them into future sport management professionals. As stated the importance of this case study demonstrates an example of an international experience based

2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

learning program which is needed throughout Sport Management Curriculum to ensure that we are educating and preparing managers for the Global Sport Marketplace.