Assessing the Use of Technology in the Leisure and Sport Management Curriculum

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Today’s students, often described as Millennials or the net-generation, are media literate and experientially grounded (Carlson, 2005; DeBlois & Oblinger, 2007; McNeely, 2005; Windham, 2005). Contemporary research indicates that today’s learners tend to prefer to learn by doing, as opposed to learning by listening (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007; DeBlois & Oblinger, 2007; McNeely, 2005; Windham, 2005). Sport management scholars and educators have addressed the importance of integrating technology into sport management programs to enhance student learning experiences (Bridges, & Roquemore, 2000; Mahoney & Howard, 2001). However, researchers debate the benefits technology can have on students’ ability to learn course content (Ehrumann & Greenberg, 1997; Young, 2004).

The primary purpose of this exploratory study is to use classroom assignments, student reflections, faculty notes and observations in addition to semi-structured student interviews to examine student learning when the use of technology is required for coursework assignments in the leisure and sport management curriculum. The study will also assess faculty perceptions and observations regarding the use of technology and whether the technological component enhanced students’ comprehension of specific course content.

This study is structured in two phases. The first phase will require students (n=80) from a liberal arts institution in two sections of an introduction to sport management course and one section of a sport marketing course to utilize technology to complete assignments and reflections that are typical instruction of the course content. For example, in one sport marketing course, technology will be included in a marketing plan project that all students complete. Once the project is completed students will be asked to reflect on their use of technology to complete the assignment. Students will be asked to reflect on the possible connection between technology and learning course content, as well as questions related to their previous experience with technology and additional interaction with other members of the college community.

Additional data will be collected from three sport management faculty that are teaching the targeted courses. Faculty journals will be used to capture faculty attitudes, feelings, perceptions and strategies for utilizing technology in the classroom. Journals will also be used to record faculty observations of their students before, during and after the technology assignment.

The second phase will include interviews conducted following the completion of the course which will allow subjects the opportunity to discuss the use of technology as a learning tool for understanding theoretical applications. Interview participants (n~12-15) will be asked to answer questions from a structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The tool contains questions about students’ perception of the use of technology in the course. Follow up probing questions will follow which are aimed at gathering more specific, detailed information about the process of implementing and utilizing technology.

Content analysis of student reflections and faculty observations revealed several preliminary themes. Students entered the course with a wide range of previous technology experience ranging from basic Microsoft Office applications to the use of video editing software and webpage development software. Previous experience impacted the type of technology used for the course assignments. Students differed on whether the technology assignment helped with learning course content, but interestingly students believed the technology allowed for students to be creative and the originality may have helped other students learn. Finally, students believed that the technology assignment provided additional opportunities for interaction with students, faculty and other departments outside of the classroom. Faculty journals and observations revealed several preliminary themes as well. Faculty expected students to have different backgrounds in technology and therefore could not assume that all students will be
capable of producing high quality technological products. Therefore, designing assignments and providing opportunities to incorporate technology was difficult, requiring faculty to spend more time developing syllabi.

Preliminary study results have pedagogical significance. This study adds to the scholarly debate about the use of technology in the classroom (Ehrumman & Greenberg, 1997; Mahoney & Howard, 2001; Russell, 2001). Initially, it appears that students do not believe that technology helps them learn course material. However, students do appreciate the creativity of the technological assignments, and believe that the product created assists fellow classmates comprehend course materials due to a more enjoyable learning environment (Warger & Dobbin, 2009). The final phase of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews with students, will capture more data related to their specific experiences and perceptions about using technology in the classroom.