In the past 30 years in higher education there has been a renewed focus on the need and importance of civic engagement. Since its founding in 1985, the number of colleges and universities involved in Campus Compact, a national association dedicated to campus-based civic engagement, has risen to over 1,100 institutional members. These institutional members include public, private, 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education. A 2006 Campus Compact survey of its member schools indicated that service learning initiatives are widespread. “Nearly a third of students participated in volunteer and service-learning work coordinated by campuses, performing an average of 5.6 hours of work each week, for a total of 377 million hours of service” (p. 2). In addition, the 2006 survey results demonstrate that there is strong institutional commitment to service learning as “service to the community was the most commonly cited outcome, included in the strategic plan at 90% of member institutions” (p. 3).

The important role college and universities play in forming students to be civically engaged citizens in a democratic society cannot be overstated. Indeed, Sullivan and Rosin (2008) argue that “the purpose [of higher education] is to produce engaged and consequential persons who will take up a place and a stance in the ongoing formation of their society and culture” (p. 130). Until recently this formation of “engaged and consequential persons” was thought to be the responsibility of the liberal arts. However as professional schools and programs, even in traditional liberal arts institutions, have increased in number and size there has come a realization that the liberal arts cannot sustain this formation alone. “For an increasing proportion of the American population, the most important preparation for career, citizenship, and life in general takes place in institutions of higher education, especially professional and pre-professional schools but also programs in the liberal arts and sciences” (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008, p. 3). Thus, learning experiences and approaches that contribute to this formation must be integrated throughout a student’s academic career.

As faculty members in professional schools, sport management faculty are grappling with how best to contribute to this integration and also “teach” the discipline’s knowledge base to students. Rather than a focus on transferring knowledge to students through passive learning experiences, some sport management scholars have begun to advocate for a different approach. For example, Light and Dixon (2007) suggest that “given the increasingly rapid pace of social and economic change arising from advances in information technology, the traditional emphasis on content or what we feel our students should learn has become less important than helping them to learn how to learn, critically analyse, and adapt to changing conditions” (p. 160). Further, Skinner and Gilbert (2007) argue for a “critical thinking and issues based approach to teaching and learning” in sport management education. They suggest that the challenges of implementing such an approach would be “…outweighed by the potential benefits this would have in terms of developing sport management students’ interest, understanding and ability to engage with the sport management environment of today and of the future” (p. 126).

Civic engagement and service learning seem ideally suited to contribute to both the formation of “engaged and consequential persons” and sport management professionals who can think critically about complex issues regarding sport. Yet, because of the natural built in (or perceived) constraints usually associated with courses involving service learning activities (i.e. lack of time, resources, and clear outcomes for both students and faculty) faculty sometime shy away from pursuing such activities because of the sheer ‘dimension’ of all that is involved. In other words, for many faculty members concerned about issues of tenure and promotion, engaging in service learning projects can seem like an overwhelming process and one that is more work than it is worth.

Thus, the purpose of this symposium is to: 1) clarify, explore and inquire into beliefs (both known and hidden) that faculty may have around civic engagement and service learning, its role, objectives and forms (what it ‘should’ look like); 2) explore both the expected and unexpected (or unintended) consequences of holding those beliefs as they relate to students’ experiences; and, 3) challenge sport management faculty to think more creatively about opportunities to fulfill the purpose of civic engagement and service learning from inside the classroom. What we are
suggesting is not a teaching innovation per se in that it is not a new method or a new technology, instead it is an invitation for instructors to look at their own beliefs and frameworks around the specific concepts of civic engagement and service learning and start to become aware of the impact their personal beliefs and frameworks have on course design as well as the inclusion of opportunities for civic engagement and service learning. In this presentation we will discuss the potential impact this shift in perspective can have on the learning quality as experienced by students.

Student feedback relative to their learning and experience in classrooms using the proposed approach will be discussed. We will identify and explore activities, experiences, contexts, and exercises that can be incorporated on an ongoing and consistent basis into sport management courses and classroom activities. We will discuss how these activities and experiences can be a means for sport management faculty members to begin fulfilling the purpose and intention of civic engagement and service learning. Further, presentation participants will have a chance to reflect on, brainstorm and identify ways to quickly and easily incorporate exercises that foster civic engagement and engaged learning into their classroom independent of the course content. This final part of the presentation will be interactive in nature.

References


