Service Learning Outcomes for Management of Sport Event Students

Carina King, Indiana University - Indianapolis
Jinmoo Heo, Indiana University - Indianapolis
Hyung Min Kim, Indiana University - Bloomington

Teaching Abstract 2011-133

Friday, June 3, 2011 1:15 PM Poster (Alumni Hall)

The U.S. Department of Labor (2009) reported that 63.4 million people volunteered for an organization at least once a week during 2009. The spirit of civic engagement is also prevalent in higher education. Campus Compact, a national coalition of more than 1200 member institutions representing some 6 million students, helps faculty members integrate community work into higher education. In a Campus Compact 2009 report, approximately 6% of higher education faculty, across a broad spectrum of disciplines, offered service learning courses and an estimated 366 million hours of service were committed to local communities during the 2008-2009 academic year. Kuh (2008) reported that service learning, a form of experiential education, has gained prominence in higher education as a type of high impact educational practice.

The first service learning conference convened in Atlanta, Georgia in 1969. To date, service learning research agendas include student learning, community impact, historical research, effect on practice, etc. Student learning outcomes have been investigated in many disciplines and the topics range from openness to diversity (Pascarella et. al., 1996) to responsibility for improving society (Nelson, Laird, Engerg, & Hurtado (2005). Relatively little research has been done on student learning outcomes in the sport event management field. For example, Overton and Malinauskas (2007) investigated sport management student perceptions regarding Special Olympics and reported that students had positive perceptions and concluded that service learning could be successfully implemented into a sport management curriculum. Specific student outcomes were not identified. In particular, service learning outcomes of students involved with the Senior Games have not been investigated. Hence the purpose of the qualitative study was to investigate the learning outcomes of sport management students who volunteered at the Indiana Senior Games.

The annual Indiana Senior Games is facilitated by the Hamilton County Sports Authority (HCSA) which is tasked by the Hamilton County Convention and Visitors Bureau to tap the estimated $1.85 million local sport tourism industry. Partnering with the HCSA for service learning courses allows for the expansion of sport tourism efforts in Indianapolis, provides sport event administrators access to volunteers interested in event management, etc. Qualitative data was collected over the summers of 2008 and 2009 from students enrolled in the Management of Sport Event courses. The students participated in structured service learning opportunities at the Indiana Senior Games and were asked to write reflection papers at the end of the semester. A total of N=77 papers were analyzed. The analysis used in this study was a content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis is a generic name for various textual analyses that involve comparison, contrast, and categorization of a set of data. In the analysis, the investigators analyzed the student reports independently and manually. Each investigator identified coding categories which they then brought together and identified a final categorization scheme.

Qualitative data in the form of 77 service learning reflection papers were investigated via content analysis. Four themes were identified.

Through volunteerism, students gained opportunities to interact with older adults which fostered friendships across generations. Their reflections included: “I really enjoyed my experience volunteering. My favorite part of the experience was interacting with the athletes”; “I must confess, this was a pleasant surprise”; “I met some really nice people, including staff members, volunteers, and participants”; “I spoke with a few of the competitors while I was there and they really enjoyed themselves and were very thankful to the volunteers because the event could not have happened without us”; “I am glad I did the event and enjoyed meeting and interacting with the participants.”

A number of students noted that they were accustomed to seeing inactive and sedentary older adults, and watching those athletic participants seemed to be a surprise. As a result, their image of older adults changed positively and students’ reflections included: “Seeing a man over fifty run the 100m dash in under 13 seconds, a women break a 6 mile average, and an eighty five year old man pass runners 20 years younger than him was absolutely astonishing”; “It gave me a goal of how in shape I want to be when I get older as well as an understanding of the great thighs in life.”; “I am hopeful that I will be that healthy in my later years and might even be able to compete in the event myself at some point”.

Students indicated that their volunteering experience inspired them to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and they learned the importance of staying fit. The following passages demonstrate this finding: “It was great to meet the senior athletes and see people in an older generation staying active and taking care of their health”; “It made me think how I need to work out and be
in shape like the runners I saw on this day”; “This can lead to a longer, healthier life. I wish there were more events like this around so more seniors could get active”; “The involvement of the older generation that stays active is beyond impressive”.

Students critiqued how the event was managed and provided recommendations on how to improve the event administration. Some of their suggestions included “the event needs to be publicized and marketed better” and “there was only a small sign with Indiana Senior Games which sat really low to the ground towards the entrance to the hotel.”

This study highlighted that service learning opportunity with older adults is a promising practice for students in sport management field. Students were able to collaborate with a local professional agency, and took on an important role of organizing an event which provided intergenerational learning opportunities. Through this role, students demonstrated some of the learning outcomes (e.g., deeper understanding of subject matter, enhanced problem analysis abilities, and applied class materials to real problems) identified by Eyler and Giles’s (1999) national study. Future study should investigate long term impact of service learning on student outcomes as well as to examine the impact of students on the Senior Games participants.