

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

### Managing Class Based Projects with Industry Partners in Sport Courses

*John Tower, Victoria University Melbourne*

**Teaching**

**Thursday, May 30, 2013**

**20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)**

**Abstract 2013-074**

**4:15 PM**

**(Room 410)**

#### Background

Experiential learning (Dewey, 1963) provides the foundation for work based learning that has evolved over the decades (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Common terms to describe work based learning include cooperative education, professional practicum, industry experience, internships, and work placements (Ferkins, 2002). Within sport courses, students' involvement with an industry partner as part of their course is quite common and considered a key feature of many courses (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005). Industry based learning can take many forms beyond the placement / internship aspect. Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) use the term work integrated learning (WiL) as a concept that includes all aspects of students' learning activities with industry partners whether it is in the workplace or community setting.

A key feature of WiL for sport students is the breadth of opportunities for them to engage with sport service providers. A review of the recent NASSM Conferences Teaching stream presentations reveals that WiL activities continue to be a feature of the conference. The research in WiL has moved from the earlier focus of 'what is' WiL to 'how to' better deliver WiL experiences (Cooper, et al., 2010).

The School of Sport and Exercise Science (SSES) at Victoria University delivers WiL activities via career placements, industry-based information seeking and class based projects. Although there has been increasingly more literature about sport based WiL there has been limited information about the role of class based projects (CBPs) in sport courses. CBPs require students to work in small groups, or as the whole class, on projects with industry partners to deliver a particular outcome. Victoria University sport management CBPs have included delivering on campus events and activities; developing sport organisation marketing strategies; conducting sport industry research projects; developing sport sponsorship proposals; planning, organising, delivering and evaluating sport events; and conducting sport industry projects.

A feature of the Victoria University sport CBPs has been the opportunity to work with community and professional sport organisations as the industry partners. State sport associations, community sporting clubs, local government sport and recreation departments, sport and aquatic centres, professional sporting teams, and campus based sport clubs are common settings for the CBPs to occur. Although the value of WiL in sport courses is well recognised (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005; Morton, 2012), there is limited research that has investigated the delivery of sport CBPs. Consequently, a research project was conducted to review sport CBPs to assist staff, students and industry partners to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these WiL activities.

#### Method

Initially a SSES reference group was established to oversee and provide advice about the project. The reference group consisted of three experienced lecturers who were familiar with the courses, subjects and WiL requirements.

The three stakeholders in the delivery of the CBPs are university staff, students and industry partners. It was important to gain insights from each of these stakeholders, so relevant staff, students and industry partners were identified to participate in the research. Online surveys were conducted with the staff and students. These surveys were designed with contributions from the reference group and the application of relevant literature. The industry partners were invited to participate in an interview about their CBP experiences. The three groups of respondents were asked to address common aspects about their involvement in the CBP experience but the surveys / interviews were adapted to focus on each stakeholder's particular role in the CBP.

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### Results and Discussion

The sample for the research included 59 students, ten staff and nine industry partners. Overall, there is clear evidence to support the value of CBPs in the sport courses. Students gained valuable 'real world' experiences, staff were able to make a stronger connection between relevant sport theory and practice, and industry partners were able to achieve outcomes beyond what they could achieve without involvement in the CBP. There were also specific insights for each of the stakeholder groups.

Students identified that the CBP improved their effectiveness for work capacity building and competency development. They were able to build their capacity by being environmentally, socially and culturally responsible workers; and to develop, apply and extend their skills. Students also indicated that CBP assessments were clearly aligned with the subject's objectives.

Staff acknowledged the value of the CBPs but indicated that there was a greater demand on them for these types of learning activities. The planning and management of sport CBPs demanded more resources from staff because they did not receive any additional administrative support and workload recognition.

Industry partners recognised that the CBPs allowed them to get programs and services delivered that they would not be able to achieve without the sport course involvement. The most significant issue was the need to improve the communication with the university and the need for 'some' students to adopt a more professional approach. Some of the industry partners also wanted more involvement in the planning and development of the projects.

Sport CBPs were meeting their objectives but there was scope to make a range of improvements for all the stakeholders. Sport management courses that utilise CBPs can enhance WiL so they provide more industry experiences for their students, develop student learning, and universities can build better relationships with industry partners.