From Classroom to Community: Sport-based Service Learning in a Sport Management Curriculum

M. Katie Flanagan, Florida State University
Wilma Proctor, Florida State University
Neal Ternes, Florida State University
Ibrahim Toure, Florida State University

Service learning courses and the addition of service learning activities into curricula are gradually increasing (Billing & Eyler, 2003; Kinzie et al., 2008). The benefits of service learning activities are documented: students, instructors, and community partners report positive outcomes (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, & Davi, 2007; Enfeld & Collins, 2008; Iverson & James, 2010). Among sport management courses, sport-based service learning activities are gaining attention (Bruening et al., 2015; Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2014; Fuller et al., 2015). The prominent place of sport in society is conducive to connecting college students, non-profit organizations, and marginalized populations (Burnett, 2006). Sport’s role as a unifier can create common ground between people who may never interact if not for their relationship to sport. While the benefits of service learning are clear, the logistical details of implementing service learning are less clear. The purpose of this presentation is to detail both the philosophical and practical perspectives of sport-based service learning in a sport management curriculum. This presentation will provide the details surrounding the logistics of the establishment and sustenance of a service learning program. The presentation will focus on the placement of over 100 students in service learning activities during the 2015 fall semester. This program was first establish in 2011, spurred by Hums (2010) and further motivated by Doherty (2013). In their Zeigler lectures Hums and Doherty each call for the sport management field to turn its attention toward social problems and to expose sport management students to these problems, then create experiences that enable them to make their own discoveries regarding sport and social change. Service learning activities have the potential to answer this call. Pedagogical and experiential learning literature refers to service learning as a High Impact Practice (Kuh, 2008), that is an activity that engages students in active learning by encouraging students to make their own discoveries, ask questions, and grapple with complex problems.

In taking sport management from the classroom to community, a high impact experience can be created. This is done through an intentional process comprised of multiple phases: Education, Observation, Participation & Interaction, Critical Analysis, Exploration and Application, and - within and alongside this process - Ongoing Reflection. This presentation will provide examples of each of these phases but will also detail the logistics involved in the creation of these experiences. While much of the service learning literature and sport-based service learning literature focuses on the positive outcomes, this presentation will share not only the positives but many of the challenges and some failures- with a specific emphasis on the demands and difficulties the coordination of 100 service learning placements present. Over the past four years the program has transitioned from a charity model to a social justice model of service learning (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). The transition to a social justice model has gradually come about as a result of university resources such as grants, graduate assistant support, and service learning expertise, as well as the deepening of community partnerships and just as often, trial and error across multiple semesters. This presentation provides information about establishing relationships with community partners, introducing the idea of sport-based service learning to students, and evaluating its effectiveness. It will also address the many logistics associated with the implementation of service learning in a course such as scheduling, conflicts, and uninterested students. Further, it will identify best practices in maintaining the relationships with community partners and maximizing student impact such as the use of social media, technology, and student initiated projects. These practical and philosophical perspectives can assist those interested in the implementation and development of a sport-based service learning program in a sport management curriculum.