Using Narrative Techniques to Increase Engagement in Sport Management Online Courses

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Purpose
The purpose of this research is to explore narrative techniques in distance education (DE) as a strategy to increase engagement and satisfaction amongst graduate students in sport management online courses. Two different narrative techniques will be implemented in a sport management online course for one seven-week semester, and the effectiveness of these techniques will be examined at the conclusion of the semester. The effectiveness of the narrative techniques course will be compared to the effectiveness of a similar course taught without narrative techniques.

Literature Review
Distance education (DE) in sport management is still in its infancy. According to the Guide to Online Schools (2015), only 16 accredited schools offer online education for students in sport management. The vast majority (12 schools) offer master’s programs in this area. The number of schools like University of Miami and Texas A&M University offering non-accredited online sport management programs is growing, so DE in this field is becoming of greater significance. Some of the reasons cited for the growth in business-related DE programs are increasing class sizes, new revenue streams, and learning objectives amongst a diverse cohort of students (Seethamraju, 2014). As DE in sport management continues to grow and evolve, greater emphasis should be placed on research that examines this method of pedagogy. Currently, a paucity exists with regard to sport management DE research, and more specifically, the examination of effective online instructional methodologies in sport management.

Traditional DE models assume a behavioristic pedagogical approach to student learning whereby the student is a passive participant in his or her learning endeavor primarily gaining knowledge from the professor (Huang, 2002). Contemporary DE models take a constructivist approach where students are active learners and create new knowledge based on past experiences and interaction with the environment. With constructivism, the professor acts as a guide rather than a director in order to help students think critically and creatively and learn how to solve real-world problems (Dewey, 1916). Problem-solving and self-discovery are critical components of the constructivist theory of pedagogy (Huang, 2002). An extension of this theory is social constructivism, or the idea that interaction and engagement with other learners fosters further cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the professor should not only guide students through the educational process, but also facilitate communication and collaboration with their peers in the learning environment.

Narrative techniques are constructivist pedagogical strategies. These techniques are designed to foster interactivity and engagement among students while facilitating learning through critical and creative thinking. There are a variety of narrative techniques including: Storytelling, Open-ended problems, Role-playing, Case studies, Student-generated media, and Simple simulations. Each technique has its own advantages depending on the course in which it is implemented and the content that is being taught (Personal communication, Allan Gyorke, August, 2015).

Storytelling requires faculty and students to recount their experiences through first-hand knowledge and situations. Open-ended problems are activities, often done in groups, where students analyze issues or challenges and work through the best ways to solve them (often there is no “right” answer). Role-playing exercises have students assume the roles of key stakeholders in a real-world scenario and act out that scenario to its conclusion. Case studies provide students with information or data on an actual situation and allow them to work through the situation in a consultant-style format. Student-generated media projects allow students to create original media pieces, or utilize existing media, to form a creative project or supplement an existing assignment. Simple simulations establish a
fictional environment for students and ask them to accomplish various tasks they might encounter in real-world situations (Personal communication, Allan Gyorke, August, 2015).

Narrative techniques provide a multitude of ways to engage students with the professor and increase interactivity with each other which is the basis of a constructive learning environment. The purpose of this research is to explore narrative techniques in distance education (DE) as a strategy to increase engagement and satisfaction amongst graduate students in sport management online courses. To do this, the following method is being employed:

Method

Students enrolled in a graduate sport management online program will be evaluated. Approximately 25 students in one online cohort will take a Sport Marketing course in Fall 2015 which currently does not employ narrative techniques. The students will be surveyed regarding their levels of engagement and satisfaction with the course upon completion. The same cohort of 25 students will then take a Sport Sponsorship course with the same instructor in Spring 2016 which will employ two new narrative techniques: Case studies and Student-generated media. The students will be administered the same survey regarding their levels of engagement and satisfaction with the course upon completion. The results of the surveys will be compared to determine what type of impact the narrative techniques had, if any, on students’ engagement in the course and their overall satisfaction with the class. Since the classes have similar topical areas (Marketing and Sponsorship), have the same instructor, and utilize the same syllabus structure and grading format, they should provide a consistent learning environment with the exception of the implementation of the non-narrative versus narrative techniques.

Results and Implications

Explanation of the survey instrument, results of the research, and implications for DE instructors and program directors will be discussed. Future research will also be a focus. This pilot study is part of a two-year longitudinal analysis of the sport management online program which focuses on the impact of narrative techniques on faculty and student success.

References


