Enhancing Students Public Speaking and Critical Thinking about Current Issues in Sport Management through Class Debates and Research Project

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Teaching/Learning - Teaching strategies/methods (Other)  
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While Sport and Recreation Management discipline growing nationally and globally, research and literature in the field are also proliferating rapidly. The struggle of closing the gap between research and practice, however, has been a concern for decades in the field of sport management (Pedersen, Parks, Quartermann, et al., 2010). In addition, a new generation of learners has adopted more pop culture and visual learning (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). In order to make better connection between theoretical and practical usage of information, to develop students’ critical thinking, analytical abilities, public speaking, and information literacy, the study was to investigate if utilizing class debates and research project could be beneficial for undergraduate students in Current Issues in Sport Management seminar. The current issues seminar is a common upper level undergraduate class in sport management curriculum. Any junior and senior students who are interested in forefront concerns sport managers face in sport management could take the course. The study was conducted in a private, liberal art, and four-year college in Northern Eastern portion of the United States. Qualitative data was collected through student reflections and interviews over three years while the course was offered. Data was triangulated with instructor notes and class observations.

To evaluate the impact of the projects on students’ educational experiences, the following research questions were investigated:
1. Could debating papers and class debates that were implemented over the course of a single semester broaden junior or senior students’ understanding about controversial or current issues in sports?
2. Could weekly debating papers and class debates develop the foundation of well-rounded essay related to controversial or current issues in sports?
3. Could debating papers and research project develop students’ information literacy? Specially, develop the ability to research, cite, or quote scholarly journal articles in their writing assignments appropriately?
4. What strength and weakness did students and instructors perceive about the use of debate and research projects as course assignments?

The benefits and challenges utilizing class debates and research projects on students learning in an undergraduate Current Issues in Sport Management course were discussed. The investigator found the assignments enhanced student learning in public speaking and critical thinking. Other strengths include encouraging student participation in class, enhancing active learning, advancing class enjoyment, and promoting student commitments outside of class. Challenges are off topic discussion during debates, clear definition of mediator responsibilities, negative impact when missing students in class, and application of debates for a bigger group or different group dynamics. Overall, the implementation of class debates was a success and a fun way to engage and promote student learning, participation in and out of class, public speaking and critical thinking skills about controversial and current issue in sport. Suggested future instructors use scaffolding, facilitating, and modification while implementing debate and research project in teaching to enhance student learning.