Show and Tell: Blending and Expanding Credit by Exam and Competency-Based Credit

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The number of Sport Management programs and students has grown significantly over the past two decades (Mondello, Mahony, Hums, & Moorman, 2002; Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001). With this growth in higher education and an array of circumstances meriting considerations for change including the demographic make-up of today’s undergraduate student and the flexibility of course availability in multiple formats (Anderson, 2016), the purpose of this roundtable discussion is to examine innovative and competency-based forms of credit. Accordingly, this roundtable discussion will present Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), Experiential Learning Credit (ELC), Credit by Exam (CBE), Individualized Progress Sections (IPS), and develop the role of each within a Sport Management curriculum.

PLA has become a common strategy in higher education whereby institutions “evaluate for academic credit the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom” (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2010, p. 6). In essence, PLA recognizes and legitimizes the meaningful learning that takes place in a variety of other settings including prior/current employment, advanced secondary education, civic activities, volunteer services, and even hobbies. While institutional PLA methods vary, more common methods include individualized student portfolio assessment (e.g., experiential learning credit), evaluation of corporate or military training (e.g., American Council on Education Guides), and standardized exams (e.g., Credit By Exam [CBE] programs) (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2010).

While critics of PLA emphasize their non-traditional educational characteristics, research indicates several student success benefits. For instance, research by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2010, 2011) revealed that students with PLA demonstrated better academic outcomes than students without PLA as evidenced by higher graduation rates, increased persistence, and lower time to degree. Specifically, standardized exams in the form of CBE are central PLA methods to many higher learning institutions (Haynie, 2013). Such programs provide students the opportunity to demonstrate competency—and thus test out—of both lower- and upper-level degree coursework. Research specific to CBE has also revealed a variety of student success benefits including higher GPA (Barry, 2013; Scammacca & Dodd, 2005), better course performance (Moulder, Abdulla, & Morgan, 2005; Scammacca & Dodd, 2005), higher graduation rates (The College Board, 2004), and lower educational costs (The College Board, 2004). One of the models to be discussed will involve a hybrid of PLA, CBE, and an IPS. This model has been used to increase completion of coursework, which has led to an increase in graduation, especially for non-traditional students and/or those students who are considered at-risk for non-degree completion because of a lapse in enrollment. Past work on ELC within Sport Management has suggested a competency-based model that involved collaboration with other programs involving technology (Walker & Haffner, 2012) that was based on business education and Human Performance Technology literature (Klein & Cox, 2004). While the previous models had targeted at-risk students, the development of this model was to increase the technology abilities and improve marketability of students. Results suggested increases in student learning, skill development, and student personal growth, and a general increase in teaching quality (Walker & Haffner, 2012).

Discussions on this topic will address how these innovative methods can impact teaching quality, learning retention, student workforce readiness, and student retention and graduation.