Teaching Distributive Justice Through Extended Role Play

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Abstract 2019-257 Room: Napoleon A2

Role play can be an effective pedagogical tool in sport management classes (Armstrong, 2003; Gillentine & Schulz, 2001; Lower, Jones, Hutton, & Jarnagin, 2018). Research indicates that role playing creates an active learning environment where students demonstrate application of skills based on a context designed for the course (Armstrong, 2003; Higbee, 2009).

Research (Southall, et al., 2003) often focuses on active and experiential activities completed in conjunction with external partners. However, role play activities provide an opportunity to include similar pedagogical benefits without relying on external organizations. Our research centers on the use of a six-week role play simulation that teaches students the concepts necessary to develop a holistic view of how an organization allocates resources and attempts to achieve multi-faceted goals.

Reacting to the Past (RTTP) is a series of historical role playing simulations published by Barnard College. We adopted a RTTP simulation based on Title IX for a Sport Governance course. This course is required for all majors and is typically taken during a student's sophomore or junior year. The course is comprised of between 25-30 students and is co-taught by two faculty members to better assist students’ understanding of the nuances of each role. Students are required to write three papers of 4-5 pages, give a 5 minute speech, and engage in routine exchanges between the characters. The course objectives include familiarizing students with the role of power in organizational resource distribution, the past and current challenges with Title IX, and how organizational structures evolve in a non-determinant manner based on historical conditions.

The simulation is set in the mid-1990s at a fictional university struggling to comply with Title IX. Characters played by students include a university president, faculty, male and female athletes, coaches, boosters, board of directors, students, and media members. Each character has goals related to their situation in the game and various methods for influencing the outcome. Based on a description of the character background and speeches, protests, and deals made during the game, students maneuver the university towards achieving individual goals. The game concludes with a final board meeting where the university decides on potential remedies to comply with Title IX as parties impacted by this shift in resources determine whether litigation is necessary to force a different outcome.

Across two semesters, students participating in this course were surveyed (n=55) to determine the impact of the simulation on their learning and the enjoyment derived from the activity. Surveys were based on past research on role play pedagogy; seeking to evaluate students’ skill development, engagement with the game, and perceptions of the game (Armstrong, 2003; Higbee, 2009; Lightcap, 2009, Oberle, 2004). Results suggest that students were more likely to include conflicting perspectives in their work, contribute to class discussions and gain exposure to ideas on different subjects. We will share the final results of the survey as well as recommendations for implementation of similar exercises. Results have implications for departments seeking to include additional active learning opportunities in their sport curricula.