

PEDAGOGY

Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum Considerations for a Study Away Course in Sport

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Abstract

As academic programs relative to sport continue to grow and evolve, college and university faculty are tasked with developing innovative curricula to enhance the overall experiences of their students. A viable option to facilitate this charge is complementing traditional courses with domestic study away opportunities. This article adds to the limited literature on domestic study away courses in sport by detailing pedagogical approaches and curriculum design strategies utilized in a faculty-led study away course within an academic program in sport. Several theories including constructivism, cooperative learning, discovery learning, and experiential learning made up the theoretical framework and were adopted for pedagogical and curriculum planning purposes. A variety of course assignments, assessments, and experiences were implemented and integrated with student-centered and active learning concepts. Practical implications from this paper include encouraging openness to new instructional methods, integrating active learning theories into study away activities, and the importance of well-designed course assignments and assessments. This paper establishes a foundation for future investigations on the topic and presents recommendations for further research.

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The concept of study away, as opposed to international study abroad, acknowledges that students can have positive, career-altering experiences domestically. Students are increasingly seeking ways to enhance their overall competency and marketability. Additionally, students have a need for learning that provides opportunities for participating in the practices of sport management (Light & Dixon, 2007). Developing and administering domestic study away courses can facilitate influential experiences for students, such as growing their professional network and securing internships (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009).

Typically, academic programs within sport comprise a curriculum consisting of courses in administration, facility management, fiscal practices, legal issues, public relations, and other relative areas. Ideally, these course offerings within the program add to the students' knowledge base and ultimately prepare them for their future career endeavors. Study away courses and experiences could add a new dimension to the curriculum by helping students in a variety of ways. By structuring a sport-specific study away course effectively, faculty can provide their students with experiences in which they will have the opportunity to meet personally with a broad spectrum of industry professionals, add to their professional network, and enhance their career opportunities—outcomes that are difficult to duplicate in a traditional classroom setting.

As the sport sector continues to evolve, faculty in college and university academic programs must regularly perform curriculum reviews to ensure that their graduates are adequately prepared for the increasing career opportunities in the industry. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), employment opportunities in recreation and sport are anticipated to grow by 11% through the year 2024. This statistic makes it more important for the academic curriculum to foster skills necessary for today's sports industry in a practical manner through real-world experiences (King, 2009). An innovative enhancement to be considered by appropriate academic departments is the addition of a study away component for program students.

Pedagogical approaches within study abroad courses have been well documented in the literature (Bai, Larimer, & Riner, 2016; Gonsalvez, 2013; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002) and provide

a myriad of teaching guidelines for faculty. Although some instructional techniques used for these international courses can also suffice for domestic-focused programs, there is seemingly a shortage of literature specific to study away teaching strategies. As in traditional classroom settings, faculty can facilitate student learning opportunities in study away courses with effective and compelling methods of instruction that will hopefully lead to transformative experiences for students.

Striving to keep the Master of Science in Recreation and Sport Administration degree program innovative and practitioner focused, the School of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport (KRS) at Western Kentucky University (WKU) has coordinated and administered an annual faculty-led study away course. The course facilitates continued professional growth for students pursuing a career in recreation or sport. Specifically, the course gives students an understanding of the facility planning, design, and management aspects in recreation and sport venues. Although the course has a venue management focus, it also provides an opportunity for students to network with industry professionals from a variety of sectors and improve their job search strategies and techniques.

Collaborating with the WKU Study Away Office, KRS faculty developed this practical-based course. The WKU Study Away Office (2016) offers innovative teaching and learning opportunities in partnership with WKU's academic departments and faculty who seek to provide their students and the community differing perspectives of America. A blended approach allowed for adequate student preparation for the experience and, as noted by Wicks, Craft, Mason, Gritter, and Bolding (2015), integrates a combination of traditional learning with Web-based online techniques.

As previously expressed, there have been fewer accounts of domestic study away courses in the literature compared to international study abroad programs. Literature regarding sport-specific study away courses is even less apparent. This article seeks to add to the literature by detailing pedagogical practices and curriculum design strategies utilized in a faculty-led study away course within a sport management academic program.

Rasch (2001) noted that faculty serve in a variety of roles when leading courses outside of the traditional classroom setting. Although administrative and counseling duties are important, the core functionality of faculty should be that of teacher. This article provides a template of instructional and curriculum design strategies for sport management faculty who are contemplating leading a study away course to consider when teaching a comparable course.

Curriculum Design

To ensure the course met specific academic purposes, program faculty came up with the learning objectives using the backward design method, inclusive of three stages. The first stage, identifying desired results, prompted faculty to identify the goals of the course clearly. Faculty determined student learning outcomes and planned for purposeful student transformation to occur by the end of the course. The remaining stages in the backward design method cued faculty to determine acceptable evidence of understanding and to plan learning experiences and means of instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Planning, developing, and managing recreation and sport facilities were the focal points of the course and facilitated the student learning objectives and outcomes. Although the facility aspect of the course was the primary emphasis, strategic objectives regarding student professional development were stressed as well. It was anticipated that after successful course completion, students would have the ability to

- explain the master plan, site selection, and development phases;
- plan venues for safety and risk management;
- describe sustainable design, construction, and building operations;
- apply universal and accessible design strategies;
- discuss design variables that influence ancillary areas;
- strategize for effective graphics and signage;
- understand the development of specialized recreation and sport spaces;

- identify recent design trends in arenas, stadiums, and recreational sport venues;
- assess personal skills and abilities for meaningful employment; and
- specify strategies and techniques for conducting a successful job search.

Sawyer's (2013) textbook was used for the course and aided in the development of specific course objectives. After determining the course objectives, program faculty wanted to craft a unique combination of assessments and learning experiences to make sure the stated learning objectives were met. To ensure active engagement and learning effectiveness, faculty employed an array of learning theories to help frame the instructional and assessment components of the course.

Theoretical Framework

A variety of learning theories were adopted for pedagogical and overall course planning purposes. This section provides an overview of the various theories including constructivism, cooperative learning, discovery learning, and experiential learning.

Constructivism

Student-centered instruction and active learning are grounded in constructivism, a theory of learning based on the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Pass, 2007). Constructivist learning is based on the belief that learning is brought about as a process of active, individual construction of knowledge (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998, p. 35). Teaching grounded in this theory centers on student learners actively constructing knowledge, instead of passively receiving information (Stage et al., 1998). The underlying principle behind constructivist learning is that learning is constructed by doing as opposed to passively absorbing information.

Student-centered instructional methods make it imperative for the student to be at the center of learning by shifting the focus of activity away from the instructor (Felder & Brent, 1996). Thus, student-centered instruction calls for student engagement, immersion, and personal responsibility. Instructors, although still leaned on, are more so facilitators and apply a coaching-like approach

to their students. Felder and Brent (1996) also surmise that student self-reliance is promoted through a variety of action-oriented instructional formats that either replace or support traditional lectures. Therefore, student-centered instruction was the foundation that the instructors utilized for the pedagogical planning and overall structure of the course.

Lowerison, Sclater, Schmid, and Abrami (2006) concluded that perhaps the most profound overall impression that emerged from data was students' overwhelming support for constructivist (active learning) approaches to instruction. Faculty reasoned that to plan and implement engaging and effective learning activities, they needed more-intentional pedagogical approaches for the study away course. Faculty organized course activities and assessments around the following active learning theories: cooperative learning, discovery learning, and experiential learning.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small student groups working together to maximize their own and their classmates' learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). In the Johnson and Johnson model of cooperative learning, the essential elements are (1) positive interdependence, (2) promotive interaction, (3) individual accountability, (4) group processing, and (5) social skills. In cooperative learning, students work together in small groups on a structured activity and, ideally, learn how to work cooperatively with others, compete for fun and enjoyment, and work autonomously on their own (Johnson et al., 2014).

Discovery Learning

Discovery learning theory suggests that learners are encouraged to build on past experiences and knowledge, creatively use their intuition, and search for new information to discover facts and correlations (Klahr & Nigam, 2004). Although discovery learning definitions vary, it is commonly accepted that its principal aim concludes that target information must be discovered primarily by the learner (Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, & Tenenbaum, 2011).

Learning does not equal absorbing what was said or read, but involves actively seeking out answers and solutions. Discovery learning assignments involve collaboration and internalization, with the

support of the instructor throughout the experience. Ormond (2003) believes that students learn better through discovery than through accumulation via a textbook, as acquiring knowledge is a process.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory provides a holistic model of the learning process. This theory correlates with what is known about how people learn and develop (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). The core of experiential learning theory is the premise that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984).

Experiential learning is a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting. As McCarthy (2016) noted, for learning to be considered experiential, it must contain the elements of reflection and critical analysis; opportunities for students to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for results; and options for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially, or physically.

Experiential learning emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process, an emphasis that distinguishes this theory from other learning theories (Kolb et al., 2001). In experiential learning, the instructor guides, rather than directs, the process where students are naturally interested in learning (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009). Experiential learning requires students to actively participate in and have a personal role in the direction of their own learning (University of California, Davis, 2011). Therefore, faculty integrated these principles when structuring assignments, assessments, and overall experiences to be undertaken in the course, which are discussed in the next section.

Course Assignments and Experiences

Because the first two weeks of the course were administered in a Web-based format, a course site through the learning management system Blackboard was developed for organizational and instructional purposes. The Blackboard site, used as a course management mechanism, was organized into the sections of general information, academic content, and student resources.

The general information section included announcements by program leaders, faculty biographical and contact information, the course syllabus, and material regarding logistical information and scheduling specifics. Academic content was comprised of a discussion board thread facilitated by the faculty, assignment information and guidelines, and detailed profiles and Web links of the selected venues on the trip itinerary. Access to information technology assistance, library services and databases, and a multitude of tools made up the student resources section on the course site.

Pre-Departure Assignments

Prior to departure, students were required to complete two exams for the purpose of establishing a foundation for what was to come in the course. The first exam consisted of 40 questions in a variety of formats including fill in the blank, multiple choice, and short answer. Students were given a glossary of key terms relative to the facility planning and design process to study and learn. This activity enhanced student vocabulary specific to the industry and allowed them to “speak the same language” as the seasoned industry professionals who would be presenting to them during the scheduled site visits.

The focus of the second exam was familiarizing students with the venues they were scheduled to visit. This exam consisted of 25 questions in a variety of formats and was developed so that students would be equipped with knowledge of each venue. Venue facts, figures, and operational information were distributed to each student. Aside from checking student comprehension of the materials issued, the exam also served as a means of ensuring better student preparation for the scheduled site visits.

To help confirm student preparedness for the exams, instructors placed a time limit on the online exam and required those who made below an 85% to retake the exam until they achieved above the required score level. Only the score received on the first exam attempt was recorded as the official exam grade. Instructors emphasized to students the need to thoroughly review and study the information and lectures that were placed on the course site, pertaining to the exams.

Site Visits

The focal point of the study away course, and a vital piece of the experiential learning objective, was the site visit component. The site visits showcased a sampling of outstanding recreation and sport facilities, in addition to introducing students to industry professional. The innovative experience offered students an intimate look at the planning, design, and management aspects in a variety of professional, collegiate, scholastic, and recreational sport venues. In consultation with various partnering organizations, the School of KRS coordinated an ambitious slate of site visits in the selected city.

The site visits consisted of comprehensive tours and generous access to each venue. Typically, upper-level venue management staff led the tours and facilitated interactive, engaging discussion sessions with students. Although the primary intent of the site visits involved exposing students to the management and operational aspects of the specialized facilities, ancillary benefits also arose. A significant added bonus for the students included presentations from industry professionals, who offered excellent advice regarding the job search process, networking, and résumé preparation. Many of the industry professionals shared personal stories that spotlighted their own start in the field and practices that kept them on the cutting edge in their specialization area.

Another intriguing experience for the students typically involved a visit to a professional association within the industry. For example, during a study away in Indianapolis, program faculty coordinated a seminar at the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) corporate office. NCAA staff conducted presentations and visited with students in the course. Holle (2012) noted that effective and sustainable partnerships begin with a dialogue that establishes a common vision and shared goals. Additionally, the building of partnerships has provided the opportunity for program faculty to maintain an appropriate and enabling environment in which educational and training activities can take place. Partnering organizations have played a pivotal role in each of the study away courses conducted.

Site visit profile documents were provided to industry professionals as a way of adding structure and encouraging interactive sessions during the site visits. The site visit profile document con-

tained approximately 20 key components of venue planning, design, and management, in addition to questions relative to career and professional development. Students were provided with the site visit profile documents and were required to complete them during each visit to selected venues. The profile documents were designed to allow students to collect data on each venue and served as a notable means of keeping students engaged during the site visits. A significant component of the overall course grade involved students fully completing and submitting the site visit profile documents. The site visit profile document facilitated interactive sessions with each industry professional who led his or her respective tour and correlated with experiential and discovery learning.

Course Blog

The blog assignment allowed a forum for students to put terms and knowledge into practice. Additionally, the blog assignment forced students to demonstrate their competency in showing that what they had learned theoretically was being applied practically. Students were required to complete a blog post and were instructed to think about what they had learned, to share their experiences, and unveil new knowledge attained in a reflective yet creative way. Finally, the blog assignment served as a means of data collection. Faculty could use the visual and written content for future promotion of the academic program and additional study away courses.

Culminating Activity

A culminating activity in the form of a group presentation rounded out the curricular aspect of the study away course and allowed faculty to implement cooperative learning. Culminating activities are summary exercises that are carried out with a high degree of independence (Fenner, 2015). Specific information regarding the culminating activity was posted on the Blackboard course site and was discussed with students during the pre-departure meeting. Prior to departure, faculty formed groups of students based on the course enrollment and the overall scope of the culminating activity.

One example of a culminating activity included a presentation in which students summarized data collected at each venue visited during the course. The student group was given a specific compo-

ment of the site visit profile document regarding venue planning, design, or management that would serve as the topic of their presentation to be conducted on the final day of the course. Students were expected to work on the presentation throughout the week by reviewing resources provided by the instructors, conducting outside research, and collecting data on the assigned topic at each site visit via the site visit profile document. On the final day of the course, students presented their findings to their classmates and faculty. This activity proved to be effective as it allowed for detailed presentations on a multitude of important industry topics.

Other effective culminating activities included student groups conducting mock interviews that provided a synopsis of what was learned during the study away experience, a presentation that detailed facility design and management trends noticed during site visits, and an activity that highlighted meaningful career practices attained from meeting with industry professionals while taking the course. Students were given a detailed grading rubric that specified faculty expectations regarding the culminating activity. The rubric detailed presentation guidelines concerning the group's ability to follow instructions, show full understanding of the topic, effectively deliver the presentation or activity, and accurately answer questions from faculty and other students.

The aforementioned activities and assessments were a result of faculty integrating student-centered instruction and active learning concepts. When a course is designed using the previously stated activities, assessments, and learning theories, it creates opportunities for students to participate actively. This prompts students to have a personal role in their learning and allows instructors to guide the discovery process instead of directing it.

Discussion

This article adds to the literature pertaining to pedagogical practices and curriculum design strategies in study away courses. Spence, Hess, McDonald, and Sheehan (2009) assert that educators in sport management programs should intentionally examine and assess their pedagogical practices. Three key implications for educators can be drawn from this article. These implications include (a) an openness to new student-centered instructional methods, (b) integrating

active learning theory into course activities, and (c) the importance of well-designed course assignments and assessments.

The first implication is that this article adds to the literature relative to instructional strategies and study away courses. Faculty can utilize this information in their efforts toward improving or introducing their own sport study away class. Understanding specific pedagogical approaches, at least from one program's perspective, could allow faculty to assess their current practices and possibly implement new ones to further strengthen their own course.

Next, it is essential that instructors integrate active learning into courses with a domestic study away scope. Incorporating active learning theory is known to promote deep and lasting student learning effectively, bolsters interactive engagement, increases test scores, and fosters positive student attitudes (Eison, 2010; Prince, 2004). As Adler (1982) noted, all genuine learning is active and involves the use of the mind, not only for memory purposes, but also for the process of discovery.

Finally, well-designed course assignments and assessments are imperative for maximizing student learning. Students cannot effectively learn by being idle. Rather, they benefit intellectually by discussing what they have learned, as well as by writing and reflecting about their experiences. Faculty should embrace the practice of employing student-centered and active learning instructional strategies to maximize student learning. This implication is important as it can help faculty to connect the overall purpose of the course, assignments, and assessments effectively and strategically.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This article reports pedagogical approaches in a study away course within an academic program in sport at one institution. Because of this, the content is not pertinent to all sport management academic programs at all colleges and universities. Institutional structure, mission, human and financial resources, and other variables may render the outlined pedagogical approaches as not applicable. Additionally, this study away program is relatively new to the curriculum, with only three courses having been conducted. However, general feedback from participants and student inquiries regarding future study away courses have been positive indicators of the overall course delivery and format.

Program faculty ensured that every component of course design, instruction, and student assessments was theory driven. However, because no evaluative data were collected, it cannot be assumed that this was an effective design for a study away course. Although anecdotal evidence from students, faculty, and professionals points toward learning objectives being met, empirical research should determine if these instructional strategies were influential in student engagement, affected student academic performance, and played a positive role in overall student attitude toward learning. It is recommended that future research employ a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess student levels of interaction, engagement and retention of course content, student learning preferences, and instructor's design of course assignments and learning activities.

Because this article focused on a single institution's pedagogical techniques in a study away program, it is recommended that other sport academic programs that lead similarly structured courses be identified and explored. Survey research that provides an assessment of utilized instructional strategies could be conducted. In addition, researchers could interview lead faculty to gain additional insight on the topic. Conducting this research would ideally lead to a summary of dynamic practices regarding pedagogy in study away courses and could provide useful breakthroughs to other faculty members.

Another area of future research could center on learning from past mistakes regarding instructional practices within a study away course. Findings from a "lessons learned" research project could proactively aid faculty in strengthening their overall teaching effectiveness. Faculty preparation and training, specifically on pedagogical techniques in a study away course, could be identified and analyzed as a part of this research area.

Conclusion

Study away courses can be viable additions to the curriculum for sport academic departments. Domestic off-campus programs complement traditional means of academic instruction and can give students the skills that employers seek (Fischer, 2015). While each learning activity and assessment theory has limitations, program fac-

ulty used multiple approaches to minimize potential shortcomings in the overall course design. Effectiveness data were not collected, and although well-intended instructional strategies were applied, program faculty could not definitively conclude that the said strategies were effective.

The study away course administered by the WKU School of KRS facilitated continued professional growth for students pursuing a career in recreation or sport. The course gave students an understanding of the facility planning, design, and management processes, provided the opportunity for students to network with industry professionals from a variety of sectors, and improved their job search strategies and techniques. Pauline and Pauline (2008) deem it essential for faculty members to share successful models and instructional paradigms. Hopefully, the background information, pedagogical practices, and curriculum design considerations detailed in this article will assist other sport management academicians who currently lead, or aspire to lead, similarly formatted courses.

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