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## 12 Cooperative Education in Sport Studies

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This chapter details the nature and scope of cooperative education in the field of sport studies. The focus is limited to four selected locations, that is, New Zealand, Australia, Europe, and North America. While an investigation of these regions has provided the background for this chapter, it is acknowledged that cooperative education in sport is practiced globally. This chapter begins with a brief background to the development of sports studies in these four countries and the place of cooperative education within study programs. In addition, the value brought to the sport industry by cooperative education is examined alongside the issues faced by the partners involved.

### DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN SPORT STUDIES

Cooperative education and sport are natural partners. Cooperative education is recognized for its contribution to learning in the practical, workplace setting (Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes 1996). The style of sport curriculum content and delivery found in most tertiary institutions around the world has a vocational and applied flavor (Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001). Whether it is the study of human movement in a laboratory setting, the teaching of coaching pedagogy techniques in the gymnasium, or the marketing of a sport organization utilizing the case study method, sport studies at the tertiary level has an affinity with applied learning. Further, within the sport management domain, there is a strong body of literature that considers this type of learning to be an essential component of the professional qualifications of sport management students (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1994; DeSensi, Kelly, Blanton, & Beitel, 1990; Parkhouse, 1987; Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001; Parks & Zanger, 1990). Cooperative education in sport studies allows students to apply the practical skills learnt in the institutional setting in a genuine workplace environment.

The study of sport arguably has its roots in the USA, where claims of the first programs in sport management have been made; however, this claim is unsupported by historical research (Pitts, 2000). There are multiple claims to the first academic program in sport administration: one at Ohio University in 1966 (Mason, Higgins, & Owen, 1981), and one at Florida Southern University who offered Baseball Business Administration between 1949 and 1959 (Issacs, 1964). In addition, Zeigler (1987) suggests that there have been courses in physical education and athletics at tertiary level since 1890. In other countries like New Zealand and Australia, the development of sport studies curricula and sport programs at the tertiary level is recent in comparison to what is claimed in the USA. Again, there appears to be little consensus as to when and who first developed such programs. There is agreement, however, that a focus on sport studies curricula coincides with the professionalization and bureaucratization of sport management in Australasia in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Shilbury & Deane, 2001).

In North America, the study of sport appears to have developed from the discipline of physical education, while in Australasia and the UK, recreation and leisure studies as an offshoot of sociology provided an early platform for the study of sport management

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(Ferkins, 2002). Contemporary sport studies now includes a range of disciplines such as sport science (e.g., exercise science, exercise physiology, biomechanics, sport psychology), sport sociology, sport coaching (e.g., physical education, sport pedagogy), fitness and recreation (e.g., recreation programming, leisure studies), and sport management (e.g., event and facility management, sport marketing).

In the 1980s, studies by Parkhouse (1987) and others examined sport management curricula in the USA. During this time the results of these studies encouraged the North American Society for Sport Management and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education to develop approved curriculum standards (Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001). This curriculum includes an experiential component and provides minimum guidelines for undertaking courses relating to “field experience”. In their discussion of the guidelines, Cuneen and Sidwell (1994) define field experiences as credit-bearing and distinguish between “...practica, which constitute part-time placement at external agencies and internships, which are full-time job commitments” (p. 5). The terminology for such courses in sport studies varies around the globe and does not necessarily follow the distinctions made by Cuneen and Sidwell. Such titles include *cooperative education, professional practicum, industry experience, sport practicum, work-based cooperative practicum, internship, field experiences, work-based learning* and *work-integrated learning*. In setting the definitional parameters for this chapter, an inclusive approach to this style of learning has been adopted. Much of the above terminology is used interchangeably throughout and is consistent with the generic definition of cooperative education (see Groenewald, chpt. 2 for a fuller discussion of this issue).

The study of sport at the tertiary level has attempted to keep pace with the development of the vocational opportunities in the sport sector. As sport has become increasingly professionalized and commercialized, there has been a corresponding expansion in the opportunities for employment (Le Roux, Chantelat, & Camy, 1999; Slack, 1996). Hindson (1999) considers that sport has been subject to a market-orientated focus leading to sport becoming more closely entwined with the economy which “...has forced the transformation of sport from amateur management to an industry driven by commercial management principles...” (p. 32). The growth of sporting activities and their contribution to national economies has been well documented, and as a collective group the work of sport organizations is variously described around the globe, as a sector, profession, system, and industry (Le Roux, Chantelat, & Camy, 1999; Slack, 1997; Trenberth & Collins, 1999; Westerbeek, Shilbury, & Deane, 1995). It is interesting to note regional differences in the terminology used in providing an understanding of what constitutes the “practice” of sport. As this chapter examines cooperative education in four different locations around the world an overview of what each location interprets as the sport industry is set out below.

### *Sport in Europe, Including the United Kingdom*

In Europe and the UK the sport industry is made up of:

1. Sport sector including specific sport codes operating within federated associations, and
2. Sport-related sectors including construction of facilities, sports goods, clothing, food, health care services, information, and communication.  
(Le Roux, Chantelat, & Camy, 1999)

### *Sport in North America*

In North America the sport industry is made up of:

1. Sport industry made up of public, private and voluntary sport organizations
2. All organizations involved in the provision of sports products, and services
3. Range of examples includes sporting goods manufacturer and retailer, professional team, national governing body, health and fitness clubs, regional, and state and club codes, and
4. Sport organization defined as a social entity, goal-directed focus, structured activity system, and identifiable boundaries.  
(Slack, 1997)

### *Sport in New Zealand*

In New Zealand the sport industry is made up of:

1. Sport in the community and not-for-profit sector including local clubs, sport interest groups, private clubs, and local and national associations
2. Sport in the commercial sector including facilities, services, materials and equipment, leisure centers, sponsors, and events, and
3. Sport in the public sector including national and local government servicing and funding of sport.  
(Trenberth & Collins, 1999)

### *Sport in Australia*

In Australia the sport industry is made up of:

1. Government sector sport including federal, state, and local levels
2. Corporate sport including team franchises and individual professional sport, and
3. Association-based sport including national, regional, and clubs.  
(Westerbeek, Shilbury, & Deane, 1995)

The range of sport organizations in the three sectors, commercial, government, and non-profit, provides diverse opportunities for work-integrated learning partnerships between tertiary institutions and students, which are now discussed.

## NATURE AND SCOPE OF CURRENT CO-OP PRACTICE IN SPORT STUDIES

This section describes program features in cooperative education in selected tertiary institutions in New Zealand, Australia, North America, and the United Kingdom in order to provide a basis for understanding the issues involved in this specific context.

### *Placement Settings*

Sport students can undertake work integrated learning opportunities in a broad range of settings in commercial, government, and non-profit organizations. These include:

1. National, regional, and local sport organizations

2. Private and public sector health and fitness clubs
3. Local authorities
4. Professional sports clubs
5. Sports marketing and event management companies
6. Sports media
7. Education including schools and tertiary institutions, and
8. Sport performance and sport science organizations.

In most courses, students are expected to find their own placement, supported by academic staff. This process helps students develop skills necessary for gaining future employment.

#### *Course Structure and Size*

There appears to be no consistency in the four countries studied with regard to placement course structure. In most programs, placements begin in the student's second year with many students having more than one placement opportunity during their qualification. The amount of hours allocated per placement varies and ranges from 30 hours to 750 hours (10% – 60% of a full-time year). This reflects the amount of credits contributed by the placement.

Placements in sport organizations are completed either continuously, that is, full-time, or simultaneously with other courses over a number of days per week. Some placements are carried out only during term-time while others are conducted during the vacation period. These different options accommodate the seasonal nature of sport. In some situations, a placement component is included as one of several components of a course. For example, a coaching placement is carried out in conjunction with other academic work.

#### *Course Aims and Assessment*

There is significant commonality among course aims and learning outcomes desired within the sport cooperative programs studied. These include:

1. Apply and integrate theoretical concepts to the work environment
2. Analyze the role of the organization and its relationships within the industry
3. Identify skills and attitudes required for success within the sport industry
4. Enable students to work in a professional manner and in a team environment
5. Enable students to critically reflect on their own practice
6. Provide the student with a "hands-on" learning experience
7. Develop generic skills such as communication, time management, planning, critical analysis, reflective thinking, initiative, and creativity
8. Identify and develop potential career opportunities, and
9. Develop problem-solving, research, project design, and management skills relevant to the industry.

Assessment occurs at different phases of the experience. Almost all programs require an assessment relating to the initial set-up of the placement that includes learning contracts or proposals. This is followed by a range of assessment methods that encompass portfolios, reflective essays or journals, and logbooks to record the experience. Often, final assessment focuses on evaluating the experience utilizing methods such as project reports, employer feedback, and evaluation reports. Project work, both practical and research-based, is a common model used to achieve the learning outcomes. As a result, project-based assessment methods link "real-life" application with academic theory.

### *Supervision*

Academic supervision is a well-established part of the placement process in sport studies and is undertaken in a range of ways according to program structure. These include one-on-one time and mentoring with academic staff, group supervision in a seminar setting, one-off or regular site visits, and distance communication via email, phone, or web-based interaction. This supervision involves single or multiple staff relationships. An important part of the supervision process includes communication with the industry supervisor facilitating active and applied links with the industry for the university staff.

The affinity between the academic study of sport and its application in the industry environment makes cooperative education and sport natural partners. The parameters of practica and work placements described in this section are examples of how sport education is applied. In addition there is a strong philosophy running through all subdiscipline areas that involves students extending their experience outside of the cooperative education requirements. This can be achieved through volunteer or part-time work in related areas such as coaching, fitness instruction, program management, event marketing, and so on. Many of the other courses within the sport curricula involve other modes of applied learning such as case study work, live projects, and assessments utilizing “real” organizations.

### VALUE OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN SPORT STUDIES

As cooperative education is commonly described as a tripartite collaboration (Taylor, 2001), the value to each partner, that is the sport organization, student, and educational institution, needs to be explored. The overall benefits of cooperative education in many domains are well documented (e.g., Dubick, McNerney, & Potts, 1996; Somers, 1995; Wessels & Pumphrey, 1995, and the chpts. in section III). However, there is very little research with specific reference to the value of cooperative education within the sport studies sector.

#### *For the Sport Industry*

In one of the few studies done on the industry perspective of work placements in New Zealand, Ferkins (2002) found that 90 % of those organizations surveyed cited energy and enthusiasm alongside a new perspective offered by the student joining their organization as the major benefits.

The second most cited benefit identified by industry was access to “volunteers” who were partially trained in the work required of them. Most sport organizations are familiar with the utilization of volunteer support. However, students, although only partially trained, bring qualities such as objectivity, technical skills (such as coaching of sport skills, planning techniques), and problem-solving skills not necessarily found in all volunteers. Another significant benefit identified by industry was the accomplishment of important projects undertaken by the student that may not otherwise have been completed. This was considered to be “value added” work for the organization (Ferkins, 2002).

Many sport and recreation organizations use cooperative education and work placement programs to identify potential employees. The costs (financial and emotional) associated with managing an appointment that does not work for either the employer or employee are well documented in human resource literature (Cuskelly & Auld, 1999; Smith & Stewart, 1999). The cooperative education model allows students to train or develop skills during unpaid work experience, which are suitable for future employment. For example, fitness organizations like the YMCA regularly recruit part-time and full-time staff from students on placement. It also gives them a “feel” for the quality they should expect

from new graduate employees. Tertiary qualifications in sport are relatively new and therefore employers are often unaware of the knowledge and skills the graduates are equipped with.

Cooperative education partnerships provide access for sport organizations to nearby institutions that they may not otherwise have contact with. While there is a general awareness of the expertise and resources of the tertiary institutions offering sport-related courses, some uncertainty relating to access exists (Ferkins, 2002). This is not surprising, as many sport courses are considered relatively new to the market place (4-8 years old).

Overall, for many sport organizations the value of cooperative education can be achieved through the sense of contribution to the development of the sport industry. Some organizations have also expressed sentiments such as the “feel good factor” in being able to “give something back” (Ferkins, 2002, p. 32).

#### *For the Students*

Career pathways in sport are often not well defined (Hayes & Gunson, 1999; Le Roux, Chantelat, & Camy, 1999) and therefore the placement experience is a vital stepping-stone to career guidance and future full-time employment. The placement experience exposes the students to a wider variety of options that they may not have considered previously. Careers in sport have, in many countries, traditionally centered on physical education teaching or fitness instruction. As a consequence of their cooperative education experience, students may instead find themselves prepared for a position such as marketing and sponsorship coordinator for a sporting goods company, community recreation advisor for a local council, sport development officer for a regional sport organization, or strength and conditioning trainer for a franchised sports team. In addition, the work experience provides a valuable component to their résumé. Many jobs or postgraduate training courses in sport will not even consider applicants unless they have this experience to add to their qualification.

For some sport students their study at university has been funded through a “sports scholarship” which has been awarded by an organization such as, in New Zealand, the Auckland Rugby Football Union, or a regional sports trust. The inclusion of a work placement component not only provides the student with the opportunity to “pay back” their sponsor, but provides the sponsor with interaction with the student and valuable feedback on their investment.

Overall the benefit of cooperative education to sport students is consistent with other disciplines. It has been shown that cooperative education enhances student learning (Eames, 2003) and provides an opportunity for the development of both “hard” or technical skills and “soft skills” such as confidence, initiative, teamwork, and relationship building (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2002). However, as employment opportunities in some areas of sport, such as sport performance and exercise science, are limited, transferable skills are essential for creating expanded opportunities in related vocations.

#### *For the Tertiary Institution*

The benefits of cooperative education programs to the educational institutions providing sport programs includes program enhancement, promoting links with industry and feedback on current issues facing sport organizations and the community.

Cooperative education in sport has important links with community activities and non-profit organizations. In New Zealand, Australia, and the UK the non-profit context dominates placement choices. This enhances the institutional profile across the sectors and positions the institutions as contributors to the community.

Work-integrated learning is a “win-win” situation for all three partners. Physical activity, and health is promoted within the community through empowering the students, adding value to community programs, and bringing tertiary institutions closer to their communities.

## ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS

Research and anecdotal evidence highlights the considerable success of cooperative education programs in sport since they were first developed (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1994; Ferkins, 2002). However, it is acknowledged that some major issues and constraints exist in the delivery of programs globally. An awareness of these areas will allow positive steps to be taken to minimize the impact of these on the three-way partnership. The effective matching of skills, needs, and expectations; negotiating the placement of students; the quality of supervision; and the program structure are prominent issues for sport co-op programs in the four regions investigated.

### *Effective Matching*

The effectiveness of a placement can be dependent on a successful match between a student’s skills, aspirations, and attributes and the needs of the organization. It is often not possible to predict the capabilities of the student in the applied setting. A student who has a high level of achievement in the academic environment may not be as effective as a practitioner in their chosen areas, for example, as a coach, fitness instructor or event manager. In some instances industry supervisors expect unrealistic outcomes from the student. Equally, the opposite situation can occur where the student is not sufficiently challenged. It has been established that matching and managing expectations from both the student and industry perspective is critical for optimizing success (Coll & Eames, 2000). Strategies to achieve this include the three-way set-up meeting between organization, institution, and student; written guidelines and handbooks for organizations and students; and a preplacement negotiation period between student and organization.

### *Negotiating the Placement*

The majority of institutions investigated for this chapter required the student to seek their own placement. This is a deliberate strategy tied to the development of job seeking, communication, and negotiation skills for the student. Sport studies is a “young” sector of educational endeavor world-wide (Ferkins, 2002). As cooperative education in sport grows, so too will the demand placed on organizations to host students. To illustrate, a strategy adopted by competing institutions in the Auckland region of New Zealand is a collaborative approach to the placement of students. This aims to ensure that the benefits these students bring to the many non-profit sport organizations are fairly distributed and organizations are not unduly pressured. However, placement opportunities are a concern in other parts of the world where the tertiary institution is located away from the major centers where national or regional sport organizations are located. In order to reduce some of the onus on the student to secure their own role, a useful strategy is to draw on faculty industry networks and provide students with a range of organizations willing to support the program. This can be done via placement advertisements on dedicated web pages, notice boards, and in-class presentations by organizations.



### *Supervision*

The quality of the supervision, both industry and academic, is also instrumental in maximizing the value of the learning experience. Where programs are not adequately supported by one-on-one supervision, many of the key benefits can be lost.

It is important to establish a sound framework for supervision as many students are involved in small sport organizations with poorly defined management structures. This is often a consequence of the reliance on volunteers who have minimal management training (Shilbury & Deane, 2001). In sport organizations, not all staff involved in the work integrated learning experience have had the opportunity to study a sport-specific tertiary qualification. This may contribute to a lack of understanding of the nature and concepts of the programs the students are undertaking.

In light of these factors which are germane to sport organizations, the role of the placement coordinator in preparing the student, and providing on going monitoring and evaluation of the overall experience is critical to achieving a high level of satisfaction for all three partners. Similarly, the institute must acknowledge the limitations within some sports organizations and seek to provide additional guidance for the industry supervisor. Such strategies can include industry supervision training seminars and efforts to bring the organizations closer to the work of the institution, such as invitations for guest lecturing and advisory committee roles.

### *Program Structure*

The structure of many cooperative education programs in sport can be driven by timetabling and academic requirements. However, it has been shown that students need enough time within the organization to develop trust and build relationships that facilitate their enculturation into the workplace (Fleming & Eames, 2003). More learning may occur with increased time in the workplace and this benefit must be considered in relation to resource issues and program constraints. The activities within sports related organizations often involve a specific event or a season which requires academic programs to be flexible to allow the student to fully experience these opportunities. Achieving the balance between a well-designed program structure where those involved are clear about their roles and expectations, and allowing flexibility especially regarding placement length and timing is a difficult but essential strategy.

Overall the major issues and constraints in sport studies cooperative education in can be minimized by establishing a sound but flexible program structure where the opportunity exists to allow for an appropriate match between organization and students who are supported in finding a placement where supervision is controlled. Development of an academic program where careful management of these variables occurs maximizes the benefits of this special partnership.

### **SUMMARY**

This chapter has examined the nature and scope of cooperative education in sport in selected countries around the world. It has been established that cooperative education in sport studies is well developed and placement opportunities are considered by researchers as an essential component of sport education at the tertiary level (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1994; Ferkins, 2002). The chapter also argued that there is significant value gained from programs in cooperative education for student learning, in the delivery of sport products and services for sports organizations, and in bringing tertiary institutions closer to their communities. As

an established style of program delivery around the world, there is much to learn from the experiences of course coordinators in tertiary institutions involved in work-based learning activity. This chapter has summarized the wisdom of cooperative education coordinators in sport studies courses from four different locations globally, discussing the value, issues, and constraints to all partners involved in sport programs.

Cooperative education in sport appears a popular and effective method of program delivery. Tertiary institutions need to build on the natural affinity between sport studies, an applied, vocational discipline, and cooperative education, a style of learning grounded in the practical, workplace setting. By understanding the specific value, issues, and constraints of cooperative education, the study of sport at the tertiary level will be in a strong position to reap the considerable benefits of these sporting partnerships.

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