

Athanassios Strigas

*Assistant Professor in Recreation & Sport Management,
Indiana State University*

Teaching Note

Today, a great percentage of college professors design courses around lecturing; these courses are usually content-driven, emphasizing abstract concepts over concrete examples and applications (Duch, Groh, and Allen, 2001). This approach to teaching is no longer sufficient to develop the skills and abilities college graduates need to possess today in the workforce. The reason is simple: lectures fail to cultivate higher cognitive levels of understanding.

Lecturing has survived as the traditional information delivery system in classroom not because of its documented success, but because professors are familiar with this teaching approach (this is how they learned). It is relatively easy to construct, but does little to foster the development of process skills to complement content knowledge. In addition, assessment techniques used in the classroom, like quizzes, mid term and final exams, lead students to a dry memorization of facts, with minimum or no effort to challenge their higher cognitive levels of understanding, and critically think and resolve problems with an increased level of complexity.

This approach to learning reinforces false student attitudes regarding learning; for them the sole responsibility for creating a learning environment lies with the instructor, who is responsible of delivering content, provide the information needed, lead the learning process, be a great story teller, and eventually assume a role that resembles that of an entertainer. As a result of this perception, students see themselves as a passive receiver of information; their only responsibility is how to excel in midterm and finals.

John Dewey observed that «true learning is based on discovery guided by mentoring rather the transmission of

knowledge» (Boyer, 1998, p. 15). There are teaching practices that do foster skill development without forsaking content. Problem-based learning is one of these powerful learning processes, because it uses real world problems to help students identify and apply research concepts and information, work collaboratively, and communicate effectively; In addition, it is a teaching strategy that promotes life-long habit of learning.

The Project Idea

The project to be presented was closely related to the purposes of two graduate recreation and sport management courses: a course dedicated to financial applications in sport and recreation, and a marketing management course. Its purpose was to assist second-year graduate students at the development of a feasibility study for attracting a minor league baseball franchise to a medium-size Midwestern city in the United States of America. The scenario for this exercise was developed under the assumption the franchise was going to be controlled by a three-party alliance involving a group of private investors, the city governance, and the State University.

The project required the cooperation and assistance of a number of community partners, mainly from: a) the Office of the Mayor, b) the Visitors Convention Bureau and Chamber of Commerce for that city, c) a number of professional baseball clubs in minor leagues in selected cities, and d) various media outlets in that region. In addition to these partners, certain university departments were also involved in assisting with the project management and collection of vital, to the students, information.

Students participating in this project—and after completing course requirements—were expected to be able to: a) explain in detail key public sources of revenue for sport organizations; more specifically, students will understand appropriate property tax nomenclature and how to structure the sale for various forms of general obligation and revenue bonds for capitalizing major development projects; b) understand how to effectively establish joint venture arrangements between public sector entities and private sector organizations; c) explain the principles upon which the legitimacy and validity of economic impact analyses for sport franchises, facilities and events are based; d) enhance their understanding and ability to develop a feasibility study for sport management operations; and e) enhance their ability to work with financial professionals in the understanding, administration, and application of fiscal operations.

In order to achieve the objectives above, students should also perform a number of research activities, and apply a variety of principles and techniques learned during their graduate studies as: a) assessing the public support of the citizens to an endeavor, b) exploring the psychic income and image benefits associated with a professional baseball club for the city, c) designing and eventually executing an economic impact study to assess the economic ben-

efits (jobs to be created, additional money to the local economy, proximate development, etc.), and d) developing a marketing plan needed to land a major private investment for this joint partnership.

For the purposes of this exercise, students divided in six groups. Each group consisted of four to six student members. Each of the groups worked under the direct supervision of a community partner or a university administrator, and had the following responsibilities:

- a) Group A operated under the direction of the Office of the Mayor in order to collect all appropriate data for a feasibility study to attract a minor league baseball franchise to the city. The Office shared information regarding the city's capability to finance a part of the project, attract a private investor, permit and zoning issues, etc. Demographic trends and psychographic data was also collected and assessed. The same group sought advice from city historians and the heritage society regarding the local baseball traditions.
- b) Group B operated under the direction of the Vice President of Academic Affairs for the State University, with the purpose to investigate the benefits the university would secure for teaming up with the city in its attempt to attract a professional sport franchise.
- c) Group C operated under the direct guidance of the university's athletic director, who—in this case—had a lifelong interest in professional baseball, connections in the field, and significant experience in baseball operations. The group members explored and substantiated the benefits for the university's baseball and softball teams from this project (ex. a new baseball facility would be a necessity to attract a professional club), and examined similar cases of universities partnering with private investors in attracting professional teams to the area while sharing facilities, and splitting facility operating costs.
- d) Group D sought the advice and expertise of minor league sport franchises from cities that were able to attract and successfully operate minor league franchises at the past. In this case, students visited four minor league franchises in two neighboring States, in cities with similar size markets and cultural identities. The purpose of these visits was to learn more about the strategic approaches to marketing from those clubs, and scrutinize various operational and financial issues.
- e) Group E contacted the city's Visitors and Convention Bureau, as well as the local Chamber of Commerce, to seek advice, collect and discuss demographic and psychographic data of visitors, and explore the agencies' intentions (concerns, or even opposition) regarding this project.
- f) Group F teamed up with local media to investigate citizen's opinions and level of support for the project. A combination of quantitative and qualitative measures (like surveys and focus groups) employed to determine these levels of support.

All student groups developed sets of questions for their community partners in order to collect and further assess information regarding the project. Group D, for example, responsible to assess the operational status of minor league baseball franchises in Midwestern States, grouped its inquiries into seven (7) major categories in order to develop a greater understanding in the following areas: a) the marketplace, b) the sport facility c) franchise logistics, d) franchise relationship with the local government, e) franchise relationship with the local community, f) attitudes and perspectives regarding the proposed new franchise, g) proposals, suggestions and recommendations. A sample of these questions is provided here:

- 1. The marketplace**
 - Did you conduct a market analysis to determine your target market(s), and if not, what methods were used to determine your target customer groups?
 - What are your existing fans' demographics?
 - Is there any potential for growth?
- 2. The sport facility**
 - What was the approximate cost for building/renovating your facility?
 - How is the maintenance of your city financed?
 - If given the chance, what improvement/changes would you make to your facility?
- 3. Franchise logistics**
 - What is your main source of revenue?
 - What kind of expenses do you have in your annual budget?
 - How many employees (full and part-time) the franchise employs?
- 4. Relationship with the local government**
 - Can you explain your business relationship with the local government?
 - Do you share revenue and/or expenses with the city government?
 - Was your franchise part of a revitalization project?
- 5. Relationship with the local community**
 - What kind of impact does the franchise have upon the local community?
 - How do you rate your fan support?
 - Do you have any programs to maintain/grow this relationship?
- 6. Perspectives, attitudes**
 - Do you think that City X would be able to support a professional sports team?
 - What kind of activities would be essential to keep a start-up team financially viable?
 - What are your thoughts on marketing a new team to this area?
- 7. Suggestions, proposals, recommendations**
 - Are there questions (necessary to be asked) that the group left out?
 - Are the questions we've asked relevant to our stated purpose?
 - What would you recommend to ensure this study is conducted and presented competently and professionally?

Student groups met with their community partner liaisons in a regular basis, and executed a predetermined action plan in collecting all necessary information for approximately 8 weeks. A project debate took place towards the end of the fall semester, where the groups presented and debated their findings. As a follow-up, an extensive report was developed by the students assessing all obstacles, and proposing a course of action to process with the project objectives. This report passed to the student body the marketing course in order to continue the work on the feasibility study and the marketing plan (addressing issues like new product development, sponsorship, and sport promotions). The feasibility study and marketing plan scheduled to be delivered to the Office of the Mayor at the end of the spring semester.

Project Assessment

The assessment process took place as follows:

- a) Thorough progress reports and final evaluation reports from all community partners provided throughout the semester for the six student groups participating at this project. A structured survey instrument assessed student learning, cooperation levels, leadership style, professionalism, and work ethic.
- b) The financial debate exercise evaluated by the university's Center of Teaching and Learning (CTL). The Center provided recommendations for future improvements regarding this piece of the project.
- c) Students participated in focus groups in an attempt to document and critically evaluate student experiences and project outcomes. The outcome of this research also contributed towards the development of a research study on problem-based learning.
- d) The products of this project (financial debate and feasibility study) evaluated university professors (selected faculty from the School of Business and the course instructor), to determine the degree of achieving the project objectives for the community partners.
- e) In addition to above, each of the students participated in the project provided assessment reports throughout the semester, where they were explaining the impact the project had on their learning experiences. A sample of the questions used in these diaries is following:

Student Diary

1. Describe the learning process within the group; what were the major problems you have encountered so far in your interaction with your project partners? You need to address issues like:

- a) group dynamics
- b) personal ability to work in groups

- c) strategies employed to resolve issues and problems that evolve in team-based learning
2. How your analytical skills and critical thinking ability has changed over time?
 3. What progress you have made in terms of knowledge? Identify the research questions that apply to your group, and provide feedback:
 - Dealing with demographic data
 - Dealing with psychographic data
 - Identifying sources of information
 - Understanding survey instrument research
 - Understanding minor league baseball business
 - Explaining in detail key public sources of revenue for sport organizations
 - Understanding how to effectively establish joint venture arrangements between public sector entities and private sector organizations for the joint development and/or operations of sport facilities
 - Assessing the public support of the citizens to an endeavor like this
 - Exploring the psychic income and image benefits associated with a professional baseball club for the city.
 4. How you have come to understand the scope of this project? Provide your personal opinion regarding problem-based learning and how it helped you shape your attitude towards learning, increase your knowledge at this content area, develop your interpersonal skills, and enhance your critical thinking ability.

Students received the outcome of all evaluation reports at the end of the academic year during a formal ceremony organized by the Department of Recreation & Sport Management, a division of the State University.

References

- Duch, B., Groh, S. & Allen, D. (Eds.) (2001). *The power of problem-based learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing LLC
- Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1998). *Reinventing Undergraduate education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*. URL <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>

Address for correspondence:

Athanassios Strigas
 Sport management
 Emphasis Coordinator
 Indiana State University
 e-mail: astrigas@instate.edu

Aims and Scope

XOPHΓIA is a peer-reviewed journal published every six months. The Journal welcomes articles with a national and an international perspective.

XOPHΓIA publishes original research and scholarly review articles that focus on theoretical and applied issues and trends in Sport Management at they evolve in the areas of sport, exercise, recreation, competitive sports, and any type of physical activity.

XOPHΓIA covers (a) book reviews, (b) reports on test development, and (c) renovated approaches that generate a new input in the dynamic field of Sport Management and Administration.

XOPHΓIA welcomes articles in all areas of sport science that their research findings stimulate study, research, and professional development in the area of Sport Management.

Professionals and young researchers are also encouraged to submit manuscripts focusing on other perspectives in sport management.

Submission Guidelines

Manuscripts submitted for publication in XOPHΓIA should be prepared according to the guidelines in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.). Copies of this publication may be available in libraries or can be ordered from American Psychological Association, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 8LU, England or APA Order Department, P.O. Box 92984, Washington DC, 20090-2984 USA.

Articles are evaluated on (a) originality and contribution to present knowledge, (b) adequacy of literature review, methodology and design of the study, (c) appropriateness of statistical (qualitative or quantitative) analysis of the results, (d) coherence and integration of discussion and interpretation of the results that reveal the relevance between research hypotheses, theory and practical implications, (e) clarity of presentation, and (f) correct use of language.

All articles should be written in English.

Authors should submit four (4) copies of the manuscript to the Editor in Chief: Apostolos Stergioulas; Department of Sport Management, University of Peloponnese, 3 Lyssandrou Street, 23100 Sparta, Greece or send an electronic version of the manuscript to: asterg@uop.gr

Articles should contain a title page (name of the author(s), institutional affiliation, address of correspondence, e-mail address, telephone and fax number), a blind title page (title of the manuscript, only), an abstract and key words page (abstract-no more than 250 words, and up to five key words, and up to five key words that are not included in the title), text (start with the title of the manuscript and continue without the word introduction), references, author notes, tables, figure captions, and figures. To facilitate the review process, authors should use double-spaced type, and include line numbers.