

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VOLUNTEER AND SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS IN SPORT MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

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Context

Due to an increased interest in volunteerism in the sport industry, there are many opportunities available for undergraduate and graduate sport management students in service learning projects, practical experiences that assist the student/volunteer in preparing for careers in their respective field of interest. Suitable curricula must be established at university level.

Project/Partners

The project was investigated interest in a Special Olympics sport event to be managed by undergraduate sport management students at Virginia State University, forming a required practical part of the students' Sport Facility class. In addition one student would be selected to complete their Sport Management Internship by working with the project, and one would obtain permanent employment with the Special Olympics.

Methods

51 undergraduate sport management majors at VSU were divided into 10 teams, which each selected a captain responsible for delegating responsibilities within that group. Tasks were assigned to each team based on the needs of the Special Olympics permanent event staff of 9 professionals (such as event set up, security, equipment/inventory, concessions, event management, promotions, entertainment, traffic control, event break down, and follow-up evaluation). Forty-nine Special Olympics athletes in 16 teams from the Richmond area participated in the event with a spectator attendance of 200 at VSU.

Results

Virginia State University students received practical service learning experience in all aspects of sport volunteerism and with the management of special needs groups. In addition, plans to establish the Special Olympics track and field competition as an annual event at Virginia State University with Sport Management Majors as the primary event management staff is a reality. Results also indicated that the students learned how to work as a dynamic unit in managing a facility project. Communication skills were learned and applied by each student in working individually, within a group, and within an organization. The communication skills were applied through use of the Internet and also with personal contact with Special Olympic and Virginia State University Officials.

Discussion

Students require education and background information before implementing such an undertaking. A structured format is needed in order to use the talents and abilities of each student volunteer. The Special Olympics committee and the Virginia State University Sport Management Department provided these guidelines and also developed measurable objectives. Many students were assigned as mentors to Special Olympics Athletes in which coaching and motivational techniques were applied. Sport Management students can and have obtained internships and permanent jobs in sport volunteer organizations (Special Olympics) through involvement in structured practical service learning projects.

References

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