

CREATION OF AN ONLINE MASTERS PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce to the audience the methods taken to create a 100% online masters degree in the area of Facility and Event Management at Western Kentucky University. Several years earlier, the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, & Sport (KRS) at Western Kentucky University (WKU) created, in conjunction with the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA), a 100% online masters degree program targeting coaches, athletic administrators, or other professionals working in the field of interscholastic athletics who desired a masters degree but could not afford to quit their jobs, relocate, and begin taking classes at a university. Currently, that program is admitting approximately 100 new students each year.

Recently, interest in the areas of facility and event management has peaked in the undergrad programs at Western Kentucky University. Feeding off this interest, the graduate faculty of the Recreation and Sport Administration program decided to examine the possibility of creating a new masters concentration in Facility and Event Management. Several steps were then taken in order to create this new graduate concentration.

First, the faculty examined the course offerings that currently existed in the program and compared those offerings to the educational needs being expressed by professionals working in the field. Second, courses were constructed where needed to provide students with the skill sets needed by employers in the field. The final step required the faculty to examine the professional organizations in the area of facility and event management. After a thorough review, the International Association of Venue Managers (IAVM) was determined to be the one most closely paired with KRS goals and objectives. Three faculty members then arranged a

meeting and traveled to the IAVM headquarters in Dallas, Texas to discuss the possibility of collaborating with each other to the mutual benefit of both organizations. As a result of the meeting, IAVM and KRS entered into a written agreement that established a mutually beneficial, nonbinding relationship between the two organizations. Each agency would promote the other agency in any marketing, internet advertisements, or other sources used for promoting the organizations. To form stronger bonds between the agencies, they agreed to assist each other in developing programs and workshops that would be mutually beneficial to the KRS student population and the IAVM professional membership. KRS agreed to use a text already in publication by IAVM. It was also mutually agreed that KRS faculty will assist in the development of future texts. IAVM agreed to advertise to their membership, which consists of an international audience of professionals in the field, of the existence of WKU's 100% online masters program that has been created with them in mind. The organizations also agreed to work together to create study away opportunities so that students could gain a more broad perspective of venue management, assisting one another with hosting regional meetings, creation of an entry level professional certification through IAVM for graduates of the programs, as well as working together on research efforts that will be mutually beneficial.

Other areas that KRS needs to address prior to the start of this new program are the scheduling of courses and determination of how students will work through the program requirements. Similar programs at WKU work through a cohort system where students enter as a group and proceed through all the classes required as a unit. The existing faculty who teach in KRS programs are already at maximum teaching loads. Another issue that confronts the program will be locating and hiring highly qualified instructors to teach the courses for the program. Both IAVM and KRS agree that the quality of the facility and event management program took precedence over the quantity of students graduating from the program. Ultimately, the goal is to have graduates from this program be highly desired due to their expertise and knowledge in the area of sport facility and event management.

