

“The International Year of Cuba” at Western Kentucky University

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Aim

This is a submission for the Sport Management Education session. My aim for this presentation is to share my experiences regarding steps to internationalize the sport management curriculum at Western Kentucky University. I am currently part of a program called the “International Year Of,” where a different country is selected and highlighted each year at our university. Cuba has been chosen as the country for 2018. The International Year Of (IYO) program is intended to provide the WKU campus and surrounding community with a rich complex sense of place and interconnectedness through a year-long celebration of a single country. Throughout the school year, exploration of and interaction with the country occurs in multiple ways—including, but not limited to: enhanced course work featuring country-specific content, co-curricular activities, research projects, education abroad program offerings, visiting scholars, performers and specialists, new institutional partnerships, campus and community events with a country-specific focus, cultural events, exhibits, and lectures. (<https://www.wku.edu/iyo/>). Faculty and the programs they represent are selected through an intense application process. This year I was selected to participate in the seminar and the upcoming trip to Cuba representing the sport management program. I will initially spend approximately 2 weeks in Cuba (May 2018) meeting with sport academics, coaches and professionals in Cuba. While a year is spent in celebration of the country, the planning phase and resulting changes are much longer and become embedded in the sport curriculum. The goals for the program include: engagement in interdisciplinary dialogue centering on the target country/region and discipline, creation of new courses, modules in existing courses, assignments and references as a result of this experience, strengthening of existing or development of new international partnerships for research, teaching, or exchange, and finally the internationalization of the curriculum, especially freshman/sophomore courses. I hope to share my experience, successes and challenges at the conference.

Literature and Background

Study abroad is the main way to promote and increase student knowledge with another country, however, most students, less than 2%, actually travel internationally (Macready & Tucker, 2011). Therefore, for students to benefit from international knowledge faculty must be willing to internationalize the curriculum. Benefits of an international education include political, economic and sociocultural, and are widely accepted in a broad education community (Agnew & Kahn, 2017). This concept is something well understood by sport educators. The globalization of sport is not a new concept. The Olympic Games, World Cup soccer, the Ryder Cup, Cricket competitions, and even NFL games in Europe are just a few examples of the global consumption of sport. The concept known as Internationalization-at-Home (IaH) was actually introduced at Malmo University in the 1990s by Bengt Nilsson. In 2010, de Hann and Sherry implemented a research project/case study using IaH in their respective sport programs. They showed benefits and the applicability to sport management. However, there were challenges based on institutional support and student reactions related to the assignments. I hope to present my experience in IaH as supported by and in conjunction with the IYO program at Western Kentucky University. As part of a multidisciplinary program and an in-country collaboration, this should provide a unique case for exploration and discussion.

Implications

This presentation would benefit sport scholars from around the world with an opportunity to discuss best practices in regards to international aspects of the sport curricula. As this is an ongoing project, with the visit to Cuba in May, and implementation starting in the summer and fall, the presentation will focus on initial insights and programmatic changes. However, the implications of examining sport in the political and socioeconomic context of Cuba should also be appreciated. The international focus in sport management, at least for North American programs, has focused mainly on Europe and Asia. However, sport in the context of communism and socialist nations deserves more attention. Cuba uses the “soft” power of sport both as sport development and sport for development (Huish, Carter & Darnell, 2013). Impacts of the revolution on sport, baseball and relations with the US, and sport tourism will all be considered. It is also a historical time in Cuban history, with a regime change and a Castro no longer in power, all aspects of Cuban life may change, including sport.

References

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