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Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste

Sport business and marketing collaboration in higher education[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Curriculum
Sport business
Sport marketing
Sport media
Academic collaboration

ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2014, steps were taken at a southeastern university to overhaul an existing Sport Administration curriculum that functioned more as a general physical education and sport program instead of a sport business and leadership program. An almost entirely new major was created, curriculum was designed, and the program was approved by a southeastern university's curriculum committee in May of 2014. Since then, the new Sport Administration major has undergone revisions to continue to enhance the sport business and leadership focus, but also the program has partnered the last two years with the School of Business and Journalism and Mass Communication Department to form sport business, marketing and media partnerships. These unique academic collaborations have allowed for incredible student experiences, shared curriculum, common guest speakers, and increased campus "buy-in" related to sport business initiatives and emphases.

1. Introduction

The sport industry continues to grow and evolve into an American and international business industry that is unique, ever changing, and requires well-trained and focused workers who can adapt to technological shifts and consumer demands. [Soderman and Dolles \(2013\)](#) articulated these realities well when they said: "sport has today emerged as an industrial sector in its own right...it makes a major contribution to economic and commercial activity both within and across national boundaries" (p. 36). Students and young professionals who want to work in the sport industry are aided by specific types of training, technological exposure, and expertise to not only engage American sport business, but international sport business demands and customer needs. [Westerbeek and Smith \(2003\)](#) affirmed this global sport industry educational reality when they wrote: "sport and entrainment will continue to blur together into indistinguishable commodities...driven by the inexorable progress of technology, and held together by the glue of a changing emotion-based economy" (p. 3).

In 2017, the sport industry is global and the business, communication, and leadership skills often used to engage this particular occupational sector are particular, varied, and crucial for obtaining employment and adding value ([Westerbeek & Smith, 2003](#)). The global sport industry as a whole and specifically the American sport industry is helped by young professionals who have been trained in clearly defined and well thought out sport business and leadership undergraduate and graduate programs. These programs would do well to have robust and purposeful curriculum foundations, realistic internship opportunities, exposure to industry-trained and experienced guest speakers, and tangible student experiences where the teaching and training is exemplified and realized. [Borland,](#)

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Kane, and Burton (2015) described this type of program well when they wrote: “sport management students need both the theoretical and practical pieces” (p. xvii). Detailed sport business programs prepare students to be great communicators, thinkers, decision makers, and even risk takers. The global and American sport industries will only grow as successful business segments if the men and women working within their structures understand sound decision making, appropriate motivational methods, and possess effective relational and communication skills used to positively engage and impact stakeholders (Borland et al., 2015; Foster, O’Reilly, & Davila, 2016; Hopwood, Kitchin, & Skinner, 2010). Thus, there is a continued opportunity for well-equipped and resourced sport business and leadership undergraduate and graduate programs both globally, and in the United States in order to train and produce professionals who understand that the sport industry is unique and requires specific financial and human capital investments to thrive (Dietl, Grossmann, & Lang, 2011; Zimbalist, 2003).

The faculty and administration at this southeastern university sought to be an institution where sport business and leadership training could take place within the academic framework of concentrations, minors, and majors. These individuals saw the opportunity for continued growth in the area of sport business and marketing focused curriculum, especially in the southeastern region of the United States. The sport industry is a business and businesses in general as well as business leaders are impacted by the ripple effects of sport consumption, products, and even leadership principles (Burnes & O’Donnell, 2011). The sport business faculty at this university understood that the sport industry is “motivated by profits, public attention, winning, and community impact”, and the university wanted to design curriculum and focused training that could prepare undergraduate students to engage and navigate these areas of sport business (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011, p. 3). However, these individuals also wanted to design curriculum and programs that were preparing students to uniquely engage these sport business areas as men and women who have been equipped to serve, love, and bring unity through hard work, knowledgeable and capable minds, and soft hearts toward others. This foundation is what the current sport business collaboration at this southeastern university is built upon and it is what continues to drive the passions on this campus for meaningful sport business and leadership impact.

2. Revising the sport administration program

A Sport Administration program coordinator (with a sport industry and sport business background) was hired in the winter of 2012 and started at this southeastern university in the summer of 2013. At that time, the Department of Kinesiology housed an existing Sport Administration major that was much more of a physical education and sport program. The existing curriculum allowed students to choose a focus in physical education, business, or a couple sport related classes, but the program was not a clear sport business and leadership program. The curriculum was designed to turn a former physical education major into a more fluid major with options and it served a positive purpose in that way. However, when the university and the Department of Kinesiology decided they wanted a clear, focused, sport business and leadership academic major, this program coordinator was charged with overhauling and revising the entire program (curriculum creation, program objectives, learning outcomes, internship requirements, job placement projections, etc.). In the early spring of 2014, the program coordinator started putting together an entirely new academic major centered on sport business and leadership curriculum with a focus on career calling, servanthood, and cultivating love and unity through highly skilled and competent work. The program’s heartbeat was to prepare students with specific and targeted sport business knowledge and skills while helping them grow into effective leaders and communicators that saw their careers as opportunities to serve others.

The old curriculum was almost entirely removed, and the “new” Sport Administration undergraduate major featured eight new sport business and leadership classes while only retaining one previous sport related class: “Contemporary Issues in Sport”. An introductory research class was also added to the new major with a focus on undergraduate and graduate level research aimed at adding value to the sport industry. Finally, the former internship class (which was 12 credits and 450 internship hours) was overhauled as well, split into two classes, and reduced to two 4 credit classes. The original thinking behind these steps was generated from sport industry professional feedback, which expressed a desire to see undergraduate students have multiple, diverse internship opportunities on their resume before they enter the job, market full time.

In addition to the eleven total classes housed in the Department of Kinesiology, there was a belief that a sport business and leadership major needed focused speaking and interpersonal training to better sharpen students’ communication and relationship skills. Thus, the program coordinator reached out to the Communication Studies Department at this university and asked if the Sport Administration major could partner with their department so two “Communication Studies” classes could be included as part of the Sport Administration major. They agreed, and two courses focused on public speaking and interpersonal communication were added to the new major.

In the late spring of 2014, the Sport Administration program coordinator reached out to the School of Business at this university to help put the final changes on the curriculum for the new major. The School of Business was high on the list of potential partners and collaborators, and more specifically, already possessed a Sport Marketing Concentration (four academic classes) within their Department of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Marketing. A School of Business faculty member created and coordinated the sport marketing concentration, which focused on corporate sponsorships, marketing activation, and social media marketing in sport, and this specific concentration possessed an introductory sport marketing class that was open to all students from all majors. After some very positive conversations with this School of Business faculty member, the introductory sport marketing class (housed in the School of Business) became a requirement for all Sport Administration majors as well and served as the final core course for the new Sport Administration major. This sport marketing course was the only upper level course in the School of Business without any prerequisites and that was intentionally designed in order to facilitate Sport Administration students taking the course. This partnership with this School of Business faculty member and the School of Business as a whole became the cornerstone of a wonderful,

Table 1
Sport Administration Major (2014–2016).

Course	Credits
Introduction to Sport Administration	3
Sport Facility and Event Operations	3
Sport and Communication	3
Legal and Contractual Aspects of Sport	3
Contemporary Issues in Sport	3
Christian Leadership and Ethics in Sport	3
Internship in Sport Administration (I)	4
Scientific Inquiry	2
Sport Governance and the NCAA	3
Financial Operations in Sport	3
Internship in Sport Administration (II)	4
Public Speaking	4
Interpersonal Communication	4
Sports Marketing	3

Note. Table 1 shows the original Sport Administration major from 2014 to 2016.

budding friendship and sport business and marketing partnership, and allowed for greater sport marketing learning to be included in the new sport business major.

Once the new Sport Administration Program was created, the entire academic major and curriculum changes were submitted to the university's curriculum committee for approval. The major was approved in May of 2014 and the new program's catalog was officially launched in at this southeastern university in the fall semester of 2014. (see Table 1).

A second Sport Administration faculty member was hired in the spring of 2015 to serve as the second full time faculty member in the Sport Administration program. His hiring was prompted, in part, by the increased emphasis placed on sports marketing, branding, and sponsorship in the job market for today's graduates. This Sport Administration faculty member trained as a doctoral student under prominent scholars in the areas of sport sponsorship, branding, and consumer behavior, and his education background helped to expand the faculty's expertise in areas of increased demand. To compliment his sport marketing education, his area of research encompassed the area of new media in sports, and is aimed at understanding the impact of new media on consumers' interaction with, and consumption of, sport products and services.

In addition to his education, he expanded the sport administration major's faculty experience in the sport industry. His professional experience in sport media relations, social media marketing, and sponsorship sales at both the professional and collegiate levels has helped support the program by connecting classroom content to areas of the sport industry in high demand for well-trained graduates.

3. Sport business and marketing collaboration

The sport business and marketing collaboration that was created at this southeastern university in the spring of 2014 happened because of teamwork and necessity. The School of Business faculty member had been growing a very successful Sport Marketing Concentration for a few years at this point and was having great success with student internship placements in the marketing side of the sport industry. However, this concentration was only four classes, available only to school of business students, and intentionally was focused on small numbers. Thus, this concentration by itself did not provide school of business students with a plethora of sport business and leadership related classes, nor was it open to any student outside of the School of Business. Many Sport Marketing Concentration students wanted to take more sport business and leadership classes as electives, and in turn, many students in the Sport Administration Major wanted more training and experience in sport marketing or general business. Consequently, multiple problems were solved through great teamwork by the faculty members and administrators from both the School of Business and the Department of Kinesiology within the School of Health Professions.

The first new aspect of the sport business collaboration had already been in place once the new Sport Administration major was created and approved in the spring of 2014. Sport Administration students started to take the "Sports Marketing" class in the School of Business as part of the core class list for their major. In addition, the School of Business faculty member was also very influential in the strategic recommendation for Sport Administration students to use their elective space to minor either in Marketing or General Business. The typical elective space of the Sport Administration Major provided enough room for a purposeful minor (typically 18–24 credits) and faculty from both programs worked together to craft scenarios where Sport Administration students could minor in Marketing and take two additional sport marketing connected or related classes (Marketing Research, and Advanced Theory and Practice in Sports Marketing). Thus, even though Sport Administration majors could not declare the full Sports Marketing Concentration, if they minored in Marketing, they could still essentially take three of the four Sports Marketing Concentration classes. This strategic partnership between these faculty (and School of Health Professions and the School of Business) allowed Sport Administration students the opportunity to still receive additional sports marketing teaching and training from the most qualified faculty on campus.

Second, School of Business students in general, and Sports Marketing Concentration students in particular were encouraged by

these faculty members to take new Sport Administration classes as electives. This was a new opportunity for School of Business students who previously had no sport industry related class options outside of their school or the Sports Marketing Concentration. This relationship between students, faculty, and sport business programs of the School of Health Professions and School of Business has only grown over the last two years, with a direct carry over showing in the collaboration of recruiting and hosting guest speakers. The Sport Administration major has recruited guest speakers from among the following sport industry companies and organizations over the last two years:

AL.com, Bruno Event Team, ESPN, Hibbett Sports, Knight-Eady Sports Group, The SEC Network, Talladega Super Speedway, The Southeastern Conference Office, The University of Alabama Athletic Department, and Vanderbilt University Athletics.

The School of Business has often generously provided facility space to host these speakers. In addition, School of Business faculty and administrators have encouraged their students to attend these events and the Dean's office has offered "Professional Development" credit to their students for attending many of these sport industry talks. "Professional Development" credit, or "PD", is part of the School of Business's graduation requirement for all students. Each school of business student must earn 10 "PD" credits to pass the "Professional Development" requirement for graduation (Professional Development, 2016). Thus, the School of Business has collaborated with the Sport Administration Major in not only hosting and supporting guest speakers, but also helping aid student attendance through the offering of "Professional Development" credit.

Third, the Sport Administration program coordinator and the School of Business faculty member agreed early on in their programs' sport business collaboration that they also wanted to share constant information regarding internship and volunteer opportunities for all their students. Instead of these programs competing, internship and job opportunities are consistently shared amongst faculty in order for all students to benefit from each faculty members' sport industry relationships, expertise, and professional connections. To date, Sport Marketing Concentration and Sport Administration students have been able to land sport marketing, sport sales, sport analytics, sport fundraising, social media marketing, and other related sport business internships at places such as: Birmingham Southern College Athletic Department, ESPN, Knight Eady Sports Marketing and Management Group, The Atlanta Falcons, The Birmingham Barons, The Gulf South Conference, and the University of Alabama-Birmingham Athletic Department along with other private sport business companies. In addition, this sport business and marketing collaboration has led to countless volunteer opportunities for university students at events such as: Atlanta Falcons home football games, The Southeastern Conference Baseball Championship, The Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Championship, Talladega Superspeedway races, Alabama High School Football games, and many other related events.

4. Collaboration with journalism and mass communication

In January of 2016, this southeastern university's Journalism and Mass Communication Department launched a new Sports Media Minor consisting of four core courses and twenty-one to twenty-two total credits counting electives. This department had been supportive of the existing sport business collaborations happening on campus and they saw an opportunity for a purposeful minor devoted to sport media, sport journalism, and the varied sport communication methods throughout this industry. This new minor was targeted to meet student demand for further sport media training and aligned with Lee and Ross (2012) assertion that "sport media exposure was the most influential factor" in terms of sport industry impact on a global scale (abstract). The Sport Administration program coordinator along with the second faculty member (both Sport Administration Program) and the School of Business faculty member (Sports Marketing Concentration) had a front row seat for the creation of this program based on many positive and productive talks with faculty from Journalism and Mass Communication. As the minor's curriculum came to fruition the possibility of sport business collaboration with all three entities quickly emerged.

First, the School of Business faculty member and the Sports Marketing Concentration agreed to let "Sports Marketing" be used as an elective for the Sports Media Minor. Second, the Sport Administration faculty members quickly implemented the Sports Media Minor into the Sport Administration's "Introduction to Sport Administration" class by promoting the minor to freshmen and transfers and officially including the minor as one of five that are strongly recommended for Sport Administration students. Thus, in a very short time, Journalism and Mass Communication not only created a new sport industry related academic avenue for the university and its students, but it also helped form a three-way sport business partnership between the Sport Administration Program, Sports Marketing Concentration, and Sports Media Minor (all housed in different schools).

5. Sport business and media collaboration

The university's Sport Administration Program, Sports Marketing Concentration, and Sports Media Minor have also collaborated on large scale sport industry events such as the "Women in Sport" Panel hosted in the School of Business building in the Fall of 2015. The event was created by the two faculty members in the Sport Administration program, but the event was supported and attended by Sports Marketing Concentration and Sports Media Minor students. Female Journalism and Mass Communication faculty members served as advisors and promoters of the event, as well as one female faculty member serving as the moderator for the panel discussion. The event was designed to be a platform for female sport industry professionals to share their personal and professional stories, give advice to aspiring female sport industry professionals, and share how their faith informs their work within the sport industry. There were five female sport industry professionals who served as panelists representing: Hibbett Sports Corporation, Knight-Eady Sports Group, the host university athletic department, The Southeastern Conference Office, and Vanderbilt University Athletics. The event was attended by over one hundred university students, faculty, and staff, and was a great encouragement to many aspiring female sport industry professionals. Thus, the event was created by the Sport Administration Program, promoted by

the Journalism and Mass Communication Department and Sports Media Minor, and hosted by the School of Business and Sports Marketing Concentration.

Another unique sport business and media collaboration took place on the university's campus in the spring of 2016. One faculty member in Sport Administration, one faculty member in the Sports Marketing Concentration, and one faculty member in the Sports Media Minor led a faculty development seminar focused on the use of social media and how that informs our world, our work, and their roles as academicians in the sport industry. This was attended by multiple faculty and was so popular that a second seminar with the same faculty speakers was scheduled and promoted.

6. The 2016–2017 academic year and beyond

As the sport industry has continued to evolve and require more learned skills and awareness from aspiring young sport industry professionals, the Sport Administration Program at this southeastern university has desired to adapt to meet these industry demands. The Sport Administration program coordinator and second faculty member spoke with sport industry professionals in professional sporting areas, intercollegiate athletic leadership positions, and sport business settings regarding what enhancements could be made to the new program to continue to meet industry demands and needs. It was quickly realized that three new specific classes were needed in order to enhance the sport business and leadership major.

First, “Sport Sponsorship and Sales” was created. The new major needed a sport sales focused class in order to prepare students well for the vast amounts of entry level sales, fundraising, development, and relationship-based jobs in all areas of the sport industry. In addition, the program needed a sales class that emphasized the continued importance of understanding sport sponsorship prospecting, relationship building, negotiating, and activation and how these crucial parts of revenue generation relate to sport marketing and advertising. This class was officially added to the major for the Fall of 2016 and was designed largely with sport marketing, sales, and sponsorship feedback from a key industry professional at ESPN and The SEC Network, along with another faculty member in the School of Business who oversees the university's Sales Concentration.

Second, “History of Sport” was created first as a special topics elective and then approved in 2016 as another core course in the Sport Administration major. This class was recommended to the Sport Administration program coordinator by a college athletic conference commissioner and provided a thorough and much-needed background of how the sport industry has grown in the United States from 1900-present day. This class was historically crucial for millennials who as a general rule, may not have had a great understanding of how sport has impacted American culture, politics, race, gender, and now has grown into a billions of dollar business industry in 2016. In addition, this type of specific class has helped current students make sense of current issues and events in sport (such as protests around the American National Anthem) with an historical context that these types of events have previously intersected the American sport scene.

Third, a Sport Administration faculty member created “International Sport Business” in order to expand current and future Sport Administration students' understanding of the sport industry on a global perspective. This class was much needed in that it helped aspiring sport industry professionals learn about business operations, job and internship possibilities, and evolving trends related to: international professional sport organizations, international sport sponsorship agreements, international sport businesses, and international events such as the Olympics and World Cup. In addition, this global sport business course was also created as a connecting point with study abroad programs (including this university's own program) that emphasize sport business coursework, experiential learning, and international sport internships.

Finally, both Sport Administration faculty members, along with the department chair in the Kinesiology Department decided to improve the way Sport Administration internships and undergraduate research were structured. In the spring of 2016, curriculum changes were made first to the internship process. The required two internships were broken up into one required internship and one internship as an elective that possessed a GPA requirement of a 3.0. The purpose behind revising the internships centered on the idea of trying to make a second internship a privilege and reward for hard work in the classroom as opposed to keeping it as a requirement even for students who were producing average or marginal work. This revision was important and helpful in that students who excelled both in the classroom and in their first internship now had the opportunity to be rewarded with another sport industry experience that counted for class credit. Thus, this incentive has helped students see the value in and connection between higher academic performance and increased opportunities for sport industry work experiences, relationship building, and career preparation.

There was also an enhanced desire to expose undergraduate Sport Administration students to more industry related research opportunities, which would better prepare them for both entry-level sport industry careers as well as graduate programs in sport business. A two semester, senior research class sequence was added back into the major (they had been core Kinesiology Department courses for many years) with a focus on helping students learn about and seek out sport industry related research opportunities that would help solve existing problems and add value to current sport industry professionals' work (see [Table 2](#)).

7. Conclusion

The last three years have been quite a whirlwind for sport industry programs, concentrations, and minors at this southeastern university, and the growth and collaboration has been both exciting and refreshing. The Sport Administration Program is situated in a positive place (as are both the concentration in sports marketing and minor in sports media) given that it is currently comprised of: eleven sport business, marketing, and leadership classes, three research based classes, and two communication classes included in the major from outside the School of Health Professions. The Sport Administration Program seeks to continue to be a sport business and

Table 2
Sport Administration Major (2016–2017-Present).

Course	Credits
Introduction to Sport Administration	3
Sport Facility and Event Operations	3
Sport and Communication	3
Legal and Contractual Aspects of Sport	3
Contemporary Issues in Sport	3
Christian Leadership and Ethics in Sport	3
Internship in Sport Administration	4
Scientific Inquiry	2
Sponsorship and Sales (New)	3
History of Sport (New)	3
Sport Governance and the NCAA	3
Financial Operations in Sport	3
International Sport Business (New)	3
Research Methods (Returned)	2
Senior Seminar (Returned)	2
Public Speaking	4
Interpersonal Communication	4
Sports Marketing	3

Note. Table 2 shows the expanded Sport Administration Major after 2016.

leadership major that trains and prepares students exceptionally well to work in the sport industry and use their abilities as opportunities to serve others. In addition, the hope is that the sport business and marketing collaboration on campus between the Sport Administration Program, Sports Marketing Concentration, and Sports Media Minor can continue to flourish and inspire creative ways to help prepare all interested university students to work in various sport business and leadership settings (Borland et al., 2015).

All sport business and marketing faculty on this university's campus continue to actively engage in ongoing conversations with sport industry professionals on ways to better adapt and improve our curriculum, teaching methods, internships, and industry training so that this university is sending out highly prepared and competent aspiring sport business leaders (Burnes & O'Donnell, 2011). Based on sport industry professional feedback, class content and curriculum improvements for the university's future center around pertinent sport industry areas such as: sponsorship and sales, fan experiences, sport analytics, and technology expectations for fans (Foster et al., 2016). Specifically, there has been recent discussion about the creation of a Sport Sales Minor that would include Sport Administration major classes (in the School of Health Professions) and Sales Concentration classes (in the School of Business) in order to offer the entire student body further sponsorship and sales training and experiences in the sport industry. In addition, there is great focus being placed on future sport analytic research and collaborative efforts amongst faculty and students across campus connected to a new university-wide Center for Sports Analytics. In addition, there is the potential for an emerging sport analytics course sequence (one introductory sport analytic course and one advanced sport analytic research course) so that students are better equipped with statistical analysis exposure prior to working in the sport industry (Fried & Mumcu, 2016; Roeder, 2015). These larger avenues for sponsorship, sales, and sport analytics training will only help the students at this university be better equipped to work in the sport industry in 2017 and beyond in terms of having competent skills often required for entry level professional positions. In addition, these avenues will also continue to draw faculty together from across disciplines and schools so that collaboration and teamwork are paramount to the university's overall health and success (Roeder, 2015).

These helpful areas for sport industry training and student learning will continue to be pursued as the possibility for new classes and enhanced experiences emerges. Most importantly, the success to date for this university and its academically geared sport industry endeavors would not have happened without collaboration fueled by selflessness, vision, hard work, and a sense of community. These are all special things, and this university, its students, and faculty have all benefitted greatly from the vast sport business collaborations that have taken place over the last three years. The hope is that this sport business and marketing collaboration can serve as both encouragement and a possible road map for other institutions seeking to either start or grow sport business programs that emphasize the growing need for sport business, marketing, sales, analytics, leadership, and professional communication skills amongst aspiring sport industry professionals.

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