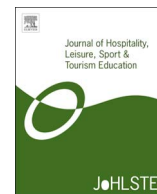


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## Sport business and marketing collaboration in higher education<sup>☆</sup>

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### 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,

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