

American Outsourcing Idol: A Teaching-Related Session on Sports Marketing and Sales in Intercollegiate Athletics

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While the standard sport management program will include a sports marketing class, most of these courses tend to ignore the issue of outsourcing in intercollegiate athletics. Required student readings may focus on sales strategies, atmospherics and means to fill the seats, but little is devoted to how athletic departments decide on whether to keep their sales efforts in-house versus utilization of a third party firm. This session will share how educators can create a compelling class project that yields calculated discussion, strategic thinking and competition amongst students while also alerting them of potential high paying career opportunities frequently ignored in most textbooks.

Beginning with the instructor assigning students to respective outsourced sports marketing firms in intercollegiate athletics, the competition commences at the Request for Proposal process. After the RFP is issued the student-led groups bid why their company should earn the rights to sell for the school's athletic department. Competition amongst the groups can also be for the right to sell for an athletic conference, bowl games or NCAA post-season play. Groups can represent IMG, ISP, Learfield, Nelligan, CBS Collegiate Sports Properties and newcomers Front Row and Fenway Sports Group. Additional local firms can be added at the instructor's discretion.

Each group touts their companies' respective strengths and minimizes potential weaknesses in their bid efforts. Students' research examines the topics of categories, inventories, fair market value, sticker shock, clutter, leaving money on the table, in-kind, return on investment, ambush marketing, financial guarantees, revenue sharing models and cost cutting measures in submitting their bid proposal. Students should also discuss the impact of outsourcing on Olympic Sports, women's athletics and Title IX implications.

The educator can share the history of outsourced marketing in intercollegiate athletics, student-athlete overcommercialization, landmark deals including the University of Kentucky partnership with Host Communications, the March Madness relationship with a third party firm and other unique case studies including the University of North Carolina's limited signage arrangement. Discussion can also be paid to what rights outsourced marketing firms would like to acquire in the future, as well as the sensitive nature of sponsorships involving alcohol and gambling via state lotteries or casinos. In addition, comparison of the pros and cons of maintaining sales in-house versus outsourcing provides valuable instruction pieces. And dialogue can be facilitated on the importance of communication and relationships with outsourced firms, particularly through the eyes of key higher administration figures including presidents and chancellors.