

EXPLORING WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL): A CASE STUDY IN COURSE-DRIVEN MANAGEMENT OF A NOT-FOR-PROFIT SPORTING EVENT

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INTRODUCTION

The Emeritus Memorial Golf Tournament and Auction (EMGTA) is an annual event, held each fall at the Southeastern University Golf Course. The not-for-profit event was named after a well-respected, Southeastern University professor upon his passing. Coinciding with the event, a scholarship fund for Southeastern University sport management students was established in the professor's name. A golf tournament was chosen as the primary fundraising mechanism for the scholarship given the professor's penchant for playing the sport of golf. Upper division Sport Management students from Southeastern University participate in its management. The event has been incorporated into the Fall offerings of two courses—Facility and Event Management and Sport Marketing—to prepare students for their management roles.

Each year, the EMGTA has seen increases in both participation and fund generation. However, faculty turnover within the sport management program has forced a change in faculty event oversight. Therefore, the future growth of the event is uncertain. An assessment of the event's immediate future—in the form of the 2018 EMGTA—is being undertaken through the lens of work-integrated learning (WIL) and stakeholder theory, with additional consideration to interorganizational theory research.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

Work-integrated learning involves a combination of classroom-based instruction and related experiential learning in an industry-based (i.e. work) off campus setting (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). The learning that occurs on campus is integrated with that occurring off campus (Groenewald, Drysdale, Chiupka & Johnston, 2011). For these programs to be successful, scholars argue that a stakeholder-integrated approach must be adopted (Cooper, Orell, & Bowden, 2010). Stakeholder theory asserts that organizations perform better and are more sustainable by meeting stakeholders' interests (Freeman, 1984; 2010). Moreover, Smith and Betts (2000) suggest that the observation of tangible returns from work-based learning programs may encourage stakeholders to perceive them as future investments rather than costs. When considering the importance of interorganizational relationships (IORs)—or, long-term collaborations between organizations—within the sport industry, it is imperative for sport management programs to develop and maintain effective WIL or cooperative education programs as part of their curriculum (Babiak, 2007).

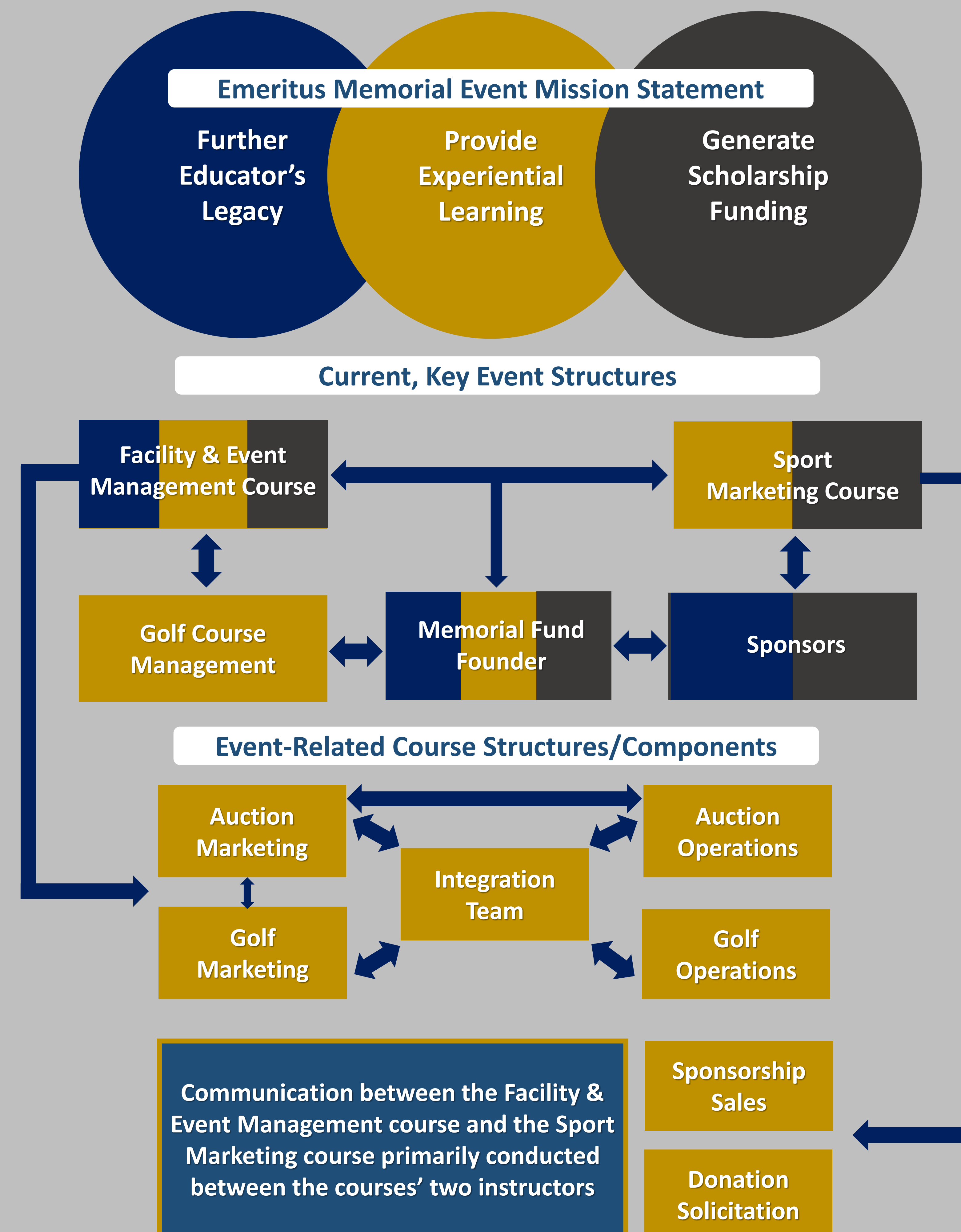
Interorganizational Relationships (IORs)

A conceptual framework by Oliver (1990) proposed that six critical contingencies—necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy—prompt organizations to form IORs. Three of these contingencies (i.e. reciprocity, efficiency, and legitimacy) and “synergy” were identified as themes in forming cooperative education partnerships between a sport management program and sport industry not-for-profit organizations in New Zealand (Fleming & Hickey, 2013). The study considered end-of-degree work placements as a sport tertiary education environment. While more course-driven than work placement, the EMGTA functions as a WIL program; offering students an opportunity to engage with various on- and off-campus stakeholders as managers of a not-for-profit sport event. Moreover, with the management of the event being course-driven, there is an inherent integration of classroom teaching and out-of-class experiential learning.

Research Questions

Recognizing the value of developing the EMGTA as an effective WIL program and the necessity of establishing strategic, long-term IORs to achieve this objective, the following research questions were developed:

- RQ1: How are the interests of the various EMGTA stakeholders aligned?
- RQ2: How are the interests of the various EMGTA stakeholders misaligned?
- RQ3: What contingencies for forming strong cooperative education partnerships exist?
- RQ4: What strategic changes would help the EMGTA better achieve its mission?



A CASE STUDY METHOD

The high contextual variability among work-integrated learning programs lends such research to case study investigation (Coll & Chapman, 2000). Therefore, a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2003) that applies a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014) is used to understand stakeholders' experiences and perceptions. The primary form of investigative inquiry will be semi-structured interviews using a purposive sampling approach. Representatives from each identified stakeholder group are being interviewed. Other sources of analysis include an open-ended Qualtrics survey that was emailed to stakeholders, and event documentation. NVivo software is being used for coding both a-priori (based on IOR theory) and inductively generated codes.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Stakeholders' interviewed, regardless of whether they had possessed a personal relationship with the memorialized professor, found the “memorial” aspect of the event essential to its long-term success. Most suggested that sharing the life of the professor and his legacy in the sport management program provided a natural conduit for personal connection with the event
- There was a general consensus among students and faculty event managers interviewed that the inclusion of the event within the Facility and Event Management course was valuable and should remain a major component of the course. That said, these stakeholders also expressed the necessity for some event-related marketing and infrastructure activities to occur prior to the course—particularly, marketing focused on golf tournament participation
- Based on feedback, important experiential learning components for students included event document development and practical, “hands on” event execution

KPIs	2016	2017	2018
Funding Secured	\$6,000	\$8,000	\$10,000
Golf Participants	37	48	44

FUTURE STRATEGIES

- Consider implementing program-supervised practicum positions for managing the EMGTA activities best conducted in the Spring and Summer semesters
- Infrastructure building (e.g. back-end payment portals, updated landing pages, videos) in support of auction item solicitation and golf marketing are recommended activities for Spring and Summer management
- Resources and marketing collateral that share the life of—and communicate the legacy of—the memorialized professor should be further developed and implemented in branding and marketing efforts to engage and connect with school and local community populations
- Maintaining contact with past event stakeholders is now possible with documentation processes developed for the most recent EMGTA. Active efforts to promote stakeholder retention is recommended

Future Research

To validate interpretation of findings, future versions of the EMGTA will measure and monitor the performance of recommended, strategic changes while continuing to collect data from identified event stakeholders.

It is recommended that following the study of several EMGTA events, quantitative measures be developed for any event findings that are being identified by current inductive methods. These measures would then be used to help generalize findings for testing in different cooperative education settings.

Limitations

With a qualitatively-driven investigation of the phenomenon, research findings from this study are not generalizable. However, findings are anticipated to be transferable to similar not-for-profit events managed by sport management students in program-related courses. A paucity of data from previous events and a change in faculty instructors creates challenges in developing minimally biased comparisons between the most recent event and the two prior. As an inductive process applying a constant comparative approach, there is still an active data collection occurring. While current findings include faculty and student data, there is still a need to collect data from other stakeholders'. Given the constant comparative method being utilized, new and different themes may arise as data from other stakeholders is collected and analyzed.



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