EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN GLOBAL CULTURE: THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES AS AN IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM FRAMEWORK

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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MASTERS OF ARTS

BY

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I. Problem

Classrooms run by one-on-one, instructor driven lectures, which are the foundation of education, should be reevaluated in a modern technological society. Whether it is Plato teaching Aristotle or university history professors lecturing freshman students, the process has remained relatively static for millennia. The modern classroom experience has become stale, while technology and new media form a digital society.

Information filled PowerPoint slide shows have replaced chalk boards and whiteboards, but students still sit separated from the lecturer. Tiered seating offers unobstructed views of the stage from where professors enlighten students. Lecturers speak at students, with questions and responses as the only interaction. Books upon books are ordered each semester for students to read their way to deeper knowledge. Classrooms can range from 20 to 300 or more students, with no close association with fellow classmates or the instructor. Quizzes and exams simply test students’ ability to memorize information. This environment is typical for university lecture halls, but what professional fields use similar environments?

Paulo Friere (1974) describes traditional education environments as banks.
Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of actions allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (p. 58).

With traditional learning, the process is often one-way where only teachers share knowledge. The approach is passive in a sense the students do not actively participate in their own learning process. Knowledge is given to them, instead of students seeking out knowledge through their own method and experience. According to Darlene Weingand (1984), “it is a popularly held belief – particularly in higher education – that learning occurs within a classroom setting, in face-to-face contact between student and instructor, is superior to other possible education models” (p. 4). This classroom experience is the traditional model of education.

The focus on content is a defining factor of traditional education. Teaching content results in lectures filled with facts and quizzes to assess memorization. “Some educators insist that education consists of content and that selecting content is the most consequential decision that a professor can make. Others demur and argue that in a diverse society the most appropriate goal revolves around process” (Karabell, 1998, p. 18).

Theorist David Kolb (1984) points to a reason this approach is used in
institutions, which often want definitive learning outcomes from professors.

It is the notion of constant, fixed elements of thought that has had such a profound effect on prevailing approaches to learning and education, resulting in a tendency to define learning in terms of its outcomes, whether these be knowledge in an accumulated storehouse of facts or habits representing behavioral responses to specific stimulus conditions (26).

To change this convention, universities can institute experiential learning courses and environments, giving students a more active role in the learning process. To shift the classroom focus to process rather than content allows for changes to entire landscapes of the experience. Kolb (1984) defines learning in these terms: “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38).

Experiential learning blends learning, training, and implementing skills to give students career preparation and life long learning habits. The focus of the experiential classrooms becomes learning processes rather than content. According to Roger Schank (2001), “learning by doing is an educational philosophy nearly impossible to implement in the traditional classroom” (p. 22). Classrooms can become hybrids of experience and lectures.

During the summer of 2012, I participated in an experiential learning course, titled *BSU at the Games*, traveling to the London Olympic Games with 35 undergraduate students to journalistically cover the events and environment of the XXX Olympiad. The goal of this project was to create a learning environment outside of a classroom, where students learn through experience, working alongside instructors and professionals. One of the outcomes of the project was an hour-long television program, featuring student-produced videos. I served as executive producer of the program as well as advisor to
students as they produced individual stories. This paper will explore the process of this learning experience and study how a location and professional-based experience can translate into an experiential classroom.
II. Review of Literature

The foundation of all higher education is learning, but the pedagogy and philosophies behind the process differ among academics. Hamilton (1980) broadly defines learning and education: “I believe the aim of education should be human development” (p. 188). This development in higher education occurs traditionally in a very controlled environment by “a relatively limited number of administrators and educator specialists, whose interests and perspectives have dominated institution choice of objectives” (Keeton, 1979, p. 246). However, McClellan and Hyle (2012) contend, “the goal of higher education should be to facilitate learning through experiences” (p. 240). The basis of all learning should be “society and in social experiences” (Scarce, 1997, p. 219).

Historically institutions have not focused on this type of education, and while some are slow to conform, others are embracing this type of learning. Experiential learning radically differs from traditional teaching modes. “Experiential learning involves observing a concept of phenomenon and actually doing something with it” (Millenbah &
Millspaugh, 2003, p. 127). Hamilton best describes experiential learning as “educational programs functioning outside of conventional school classrooms that place participants in responsible roles and engage them in cooperative, goal-directed activities with other youth, with adults, or both” (Hamilton, 1980, p. 180).

Experiential learning is also referred to as “project-based,” “problem-based,” “active,” and “immersive learning.” Each variation brings minute differences, but the overall concept of process-focused learning remains intact.

Helle, Tyanjälä, and Olkinoura (2006) state one major distinction experiential learning has over traditional learning: “the most distinctive feature of project-based learning is problem orientation, that is, the idea that a problem or question serves to drive learning activities” (p. 290). Traditional learning focuses on the inverse, in which learning activities serve to solve a problem.

Experiential learning’s characteristics make the classroom environment radically different from lecture halls with which most scholars identify. Instead “students view the problem-based learning as preparing them for ‘the real thing’” (Barron, Schwartz, Vye, Moore, Petrosino, Zech, Bransford & Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1998, p. 278).

What does the experiential classroom look like then? In reality, no such thing as an experiential classroom exists. Experiential learning, while not specific to an environment, must foster specific characteristics. Johari and Bradshaw (2008) define seven keys to experiential learning, whereas the project must (1) be collaborative, (2) be doable, (3) be genuine, (4) span an extended time frame, (5) be challenging, (6) allow option and differing opinions, (7) and build toward a capstone project (p. 343). This
format allows for a different flow of communication than typically occurs in a college classroom, “instructors receive constant feedback about what students do and do not understand” (Salemi, 2002, p. 726). The format also allows students of all skill levels and learning styles to collectively learn through their personal style. “The strength of project-based approaches… lies in that they afford students the possibility and the motive to work their way to the solution in their own idiosyncratic way” (Helle, Tyanjälä & Olkinoura, 2006, p. 292). Salemi (2002) describes an environment in which any student becomes a teacher, helping others.

During exercises, fast learners can be used as teachers. When instructors realize that some group members understand a problem, they can ask them to explain their understanding to others. Helpers learn different ways to get their point across and deepen their understanding by verbalizing it. Those being helped receive more attention than the instructor alone can give and pay lower emotional cost because they are helped by a peer (p. 727).

Students operating in an experiential learning environment invest more of their capacities in actively learning (Hamilton, 1980, p. 183). This concept of students teaching themselves differs from traditional classrooms in which students passively intake knowledge as an instructor presents it to them. Hamilton (1980) describes the differing environment: “the will to learn in an experiential learning situation flows from the learner's response to the situation, not from externally imposed rewards or sanctions. Immediate application also serves as a motivator” (p. 183).

The rewards students gain from experiential learning continue beyond the classroom, creating life-skills for participants. Some aspects Hickcox (2002) points out are “life-planning strategies; improving writing skills; learning how to work in small groups and understanding group processes; acquiring information about power and
influence; and learning effective listening and non-verbal communication skills” (p. 126).

Another important skill experiential learning provides is critical thinking, “[students] learn to listen critically, to question what they do not understand and to challenge when they disagree” (Salemi, 2002, p. 728).

These skills all account for a positive outcome from experiential learning, but most importantly to an academic setting knowledge retention becomes more effective than typical classrooms. Dustin (1981) states:

By applying the planning and management concepts to direct experience, the students were more inclined to retain the applied knowledge. The application was not, therefore, just an abstract or academic exercise. It had particular meaning for the students because of their shared experiential background (p. 168).

Even with these benefits many authors disagree on the role of experiential learning. Hamilton (1980) believes experiential learning should compliment classroom teaching, expanding upon lectures by increasing other skills (p.191). Sedlak, Doheny, Panthofer, and Anaya (2003) remain focused on course outcomes stating, “first, the experience should meet course objectives and the needs of the agency…Service learning and academic learning share an equal focus ” (p. 103).

Why do very few authors believe experiential learning can be the primary focus of a college course? Most academics site the devotion of time and energy away from typical learning environments as a reason to avoid experiential learning. Salemi (2002) especially cautions about the costs of experiential/active learning, citing three reasons for traditional learning: 1) the time taken to teach new concepts favors lectures and traditional learning, meaning less content is covered in experiential learning; 2) some students may become overwhelmed by the information overload from experiential
learning; and 3) it takes more time to develop a new teaching method for experiential learning compared to revising old syllabi (p. 730). Millenbah and Millspaugh (2003) agree with Salemi, stating the time consumed through the repetition of experiential learning before students understand lessons and abstractions is far more than traditional classrooms (p. 129). The concern over time devoted to small amounts of material covered in experiential learning compared to lectures becomes problematic for academics (Millenbah & Millspaugh, 2003, p. 134; Hickcox, 2002, p. 124). However Dustin (1981) cites another conflict: “opponents counter that while it [experiential learning] may be rich in substance, it fails to provide a structure which can give the substance meaning” (p. 166).

For all these conflicts, a major contention is control of the classroom. In experiential learning, students become the focus of courses. Hamilton (1980) shrugs this power play as being unnecessary because learning outcomes still remain relevant: “control of a program seems more important than whether it was initiated by adults or youth. There is no reason to believe that youth learn more about making decisions or feel more committed to a program that was started by youth than one that was started by adults” (p. 192).

The struggle for course control is inherent in experiential learning environments. Typical hierarchies of the classroom no longer exist, and communication structure demonstrates this shift. Hickcox (2002) cites personal interactions as a new opportunity experiential learning gives students and teachers (p. 123). “Open dialogue with students is important so they are aware of teaching goals and motivations behind the use of
experiential learning exercises” (Millenbah & Millspaugh, 2003, p. 134). Not only is the dialogue an important change, the content of conversations in experiential learning environments changes from strictly academic to much more casual. Hickcox (2002) describes the psychiatric role teachers sometimes fill, mentoring students about anxiety, doubt of ability and competency, and other such problems (p. 123). No matter what the dialogue becomes “the instructor must be ready to react in a productive way to whatever sort of answer, question, or contribution students come up with” (Salemi, 2002, p. 729). This by no means is a negative aspect. Creating a bond between teachers and students in this environment builds professional atmospheres. “[The experiences] bring faculty members and students closer together, reducing the inherent status barriers found in most teaching situations and allowing some insight into the “backstage behavior” behind the roles of “instructor” and “student” (Scarce, 1997, p. 224).

Academic roles still remain intact to an extent. The teacher assists in the learning experience, while also constructing the framework for the experience (Hamilton, 1980, p. 184). Hickcox concurs stating the faculty still must “provide students with what they need at the moment to help them adapt to the issues they face. It may be advice on how to handle a conflict in a field site” (Hickcox, 2002, p. 128). Johari and Bradshaw (2008) provide a more concrete definition to these roles:

Role of learner: (a) finding value and interest in the problem and the elements of the project (b) believing project goals can be accomplished, and (c) being self-competent…Site mentor role… (a) believes in learner beyond innate abilities, (b) focuses on both process and product, (c) provides encouragement, and (d) provides feedback (343-344).
Experiential learning brings great opportunity for new styles of educational growth for students and teachers alike by creating an environment unmatched in any traditional classroom. While detractors cite some disadvantages, overall, experiential learning builds life-long professional skills, which students can apply to any career outside of their field of study.
III. Method

This paper stands as a case study of experiential learning by evaluating and assessing the *BSU at the Games* project. The *BSU at the Games* project is an excellent example of experiential learning because the primary content of the project took place in England, far from Ball State University classrooms.

I will examine and discuss three primary areas of the project and how they were applied to experiential learning: the project overall (including planning, roles of instructors and my role as an advisor, and execution of student work); examples of work and the media outlets that used the work; and the challenges overcome and lessons learned to better conduct future projects. These areas will be evaluated because documenting this project will allow future projects to learn and adapt the processes of *BSU at the Games*.

I will also present analytics and numbers demonstrating this program had a great impact on media and online interaction. These analytics include social media interactions, published story counts, video views, and number of involved athletes. Highlighting these
numbers allows the reader to see a numerical representation of students’ work. These numbers also will validate students’ abilities to create content for professional media outlets (Barron, Schwartz, Vye, Moore, Petrosino, Zech, Bransford & Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1998, p. 278). The project also highlights collaboration among students from varied backgrounds to create professional work (Johari & Bradshaw, 2008, p. 343). I will define why this project exemplifies experiential learning, and what goals should be set for future experiential learning projects.
IV. Results & Discussion

A. Project Overview

This experiential learning project, titled *BSU at the Games*, included three parts. First a class during the spring semester planned the trip to the London 2012 London Olympic Games. Second was the trip to England. Finally, one of the projects from the trip was an hour-long program for multiple deliveries, which was produced to showcase the entire project. This program was produced throughout the entire trip and aired a month after returning to Ball State University. Working on the project were 35 students, three graduate assistants, four instructors, and one professional expert. Students across six disciplines collaborated in a way rarely seen before at Ball State University.

From the beginning, the lead instructor Ryan Sparrow designed *BSU at the Games* to be a media creator and production studio, providing content to professional media outlets seeking stories from the London Games. The produced content ranged from photographs to written stories; from video pieces to information graphics. The course did not focus on a final project turned in to evaluate student work. Instead grades were
determined by students’ participation throughout the project, both in planning and executing their story ideas. Instructors collaborated with students to find story ideas throughout the duration. Students strove to create quality stories, some of which were published by one of several media outlets. Instructors worked alongside students, collaborating and advising during the project (see Appendix A for Learning Outcomes and Appendix B for syllabus).

The class was divided into several groups, all tasked with different beats. Photography, graphic design/reporting, features reporting, sports reporting, and public relations were the working student groups. I worked alongside the sports reporting team as a graduate assistant. Each team sought ideas for stories and began contacting potential subjects throughout the spring.

The semester of planning culminated in a trip to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Team USA Media Summit in Dallas during May, in which five students and two instructors reported from and interviewed more than 150 athletes for stories to use throughout the summer. BSU at the Games worked alongside every major news outlet in America during the summit. The students acted and worked as professionals during the entire summit. The video team worked alongside WebMD and the Armed Forces network in the private interview room, while reporters worked alongside major newspaper reporters while interviewing athletes.

The interviews from the USOC Team USA Media Summit became the backbone of daily features throughout the entire summer. Beginning in June, the sports reporters began editing and releasing daily feature videos on individual athletes, which continued
throughout the Games. These videos were released on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and the BSU at the Games website (see Appendix C).

The Internet became the outlet for videos, photos, and stories to be released. Teaching students the value of new media and the importance of cross-platform distribution became a key component to examine the changing face of modern journalism. Social media played the most important role in developing a consumer base for the project. The public relations team of students monitored social media interactions and developed the team strategy for releasing content, interacting with followers, and collecting analytics from web traffic: all roles professional public relations experts practice daily for major companies.

Creating contacts throughout the spring became vital to the success of the project. This allowed students to contact athletes directly before the national media began to prepare for their Olympic coverage. The sports team reached out to several Olympic hopefuls long before the London Games. Athletes included eventual gold medal diver David Boudia, United States synchronized swimmers, USA Boxing’s Errol Spence Jr., USA Boxing’s Rau’shee Warren, future USA Diving Olympic hopefuls, former USA Diving Olympian Thomas Finchum, and USA Wrestling’s Ben Provisor. By learning the importance of communicating early and often, students were able to have access with these athletes long after their first meetings.

While in London, students met with several athletes. Students visited and reported from various training centers throughout England, including USA Track & Field, USA Archery, USA Boxing, USA Wrestling, and USA Men’s Basketball.
The process of reporting from London mirrored a professional newsroom. Student reporters traveled the city daily to report on local activities. Faculty members allowed students to create their own stories, assuming advisory roles. My role balanced between advisor and participant. Often, I stayed in a central location where students could reach me for help, guidance, or advice. Other times I went with students to produce stories and create content. Specifically my role as an advisor was to work with students with shooting and editing videos. I went on location and instructed students how to run a camera by giving them short tutorials before they began their stories. I sometimes operated the camera while journalism students conducted interviews to make sure the students had a fulfilling experience. I also worked alongside students while editing, teaching them editing techniques. This task varied from a hands-on instructing role, in which I sat with a student during editing and instructed them while they worked, to students editing their own work after which I reviewed their finished project. Some students asked to watch me edit to learn techniques. In this teaching method I talked them through why I made edits and processes I have discovered. I offered my tips and advice to get the best possible story, whether during or after the student productions.

Students on *BSU at the Games* were able to explore their own storytelling techniques at all hours of the day, instead of working during a designated class time on campus. Faculty members did not oversee every aspect of reporting either, allowing students to experience the process themselves and learn their individual styles. Faculty members acted as editors when stories were completed, evaluating stories and making necessary changes before the stories were published. Faculty members used the editing
process as a primary teaching time, mentoring students on the positives and negatives of their work.

The process of allowing student autonomy also creates the need to engineer a communication workflow. The public relations team developed a workflow in which reporters knew exactly who to send their stories to, and instructors sent finished stories to the public relations team for scheduled publication across various media. The teams from sports, photography, public relations, feature stories, and graphics – each selected a student leader who reported daily activities to instructors and each other in order to collaborate. Developing the threads of communication was important for instructors to see what students were doing on a daily basis, giving insight as to possible stories and overall participation.

B. Examples & Media Outlets

Twitter became a valuable tool, since many Olympians and Ball State students did not have working telephones. Twitter was the outlet for students to interact with readers and viewers of their stories. Student leaders tweeted from the official *BSU at the Games* account, to engage fans across the social medium. The public relations team contacted professional media outlets on a daily basis to deliver content or receive story assignments from sources. For example the Huffington Post asked for a video interview with USA Boxing’s Joseph Diaz, Jr. The sports team along with a feature reporter and photographer contacted USA Boxing to attend a training session and interview Diaz.

Beyond the *BSU at the Games* web channels, professional media outlets used content created by students on a daily basis. *The Tribune Company*, the NBC affiliate in
Indianapolis (WTHR), Huffington Post, USA Today, three Indiana radio stations (WMDH, WLBC, and WIBC), and Ludis Sports published student-produced content. These outlets combined to release 51 stories, 191 photos, nine videos, and ten graphics created completely by students.

In total, students produced 275 total stories, including 32 photo galleries, 73 written pieces, and 70 published videos. Videos were viewed more than 65,000 times on YouTube (See Appendix C). The social media outlets also flourished under the public relations team. One thousand ten people followed the BSU at the Games Twitter account, while the Facebook page reached more than 882,000 people (See Appendix C). The public relations team accounted for more than 2,000 tweets during the 17 days of the 2012 London Olympic Games.

As a showcase of the entire project, I, along with sports reporting student Emily Barker, produced and edited an hour-long program. We evaluated videos created by students throughout the games, and selected the content featured in the final program. As the graduate assistant, I examined student videos throughout the Olympic Games, giving students advice for future productions. This evaluation process allowed me to find the best stories to highlight in the hour-long program. My criteria for evaluation occurred during the Olympic Games. I first looked for good video and audio in the production. If either the audio or video was not great quality, the story was possibly reedited for the show. Second, I sought stories that had depth beyond introducing an athlete; stories that provided several layers of storytelling. These stories revealed deeper character and history of athletes. Using these criteria as a basis, I also advised students in making
changes, even if it meant shooting or editing them again.

I also worked with students outside of our sports group to produce a documentary about the BSU at the Games project. The student, Taylor Bussick, shot video throughout the entire project. As the executive producer I had to make sure his work fit into the show. He sent me rough edits of the documentary, to which I advised him of edits to make for a more focused story. As an example, one particular edit I instructed him to make was to cut footage from the Gold Medal Women’s Soccer match, because of media rights owned by NBC; something that I needed to know in my role as an advisor, that an undergraduate in the program might not necessarily be required to know.

We also recorded introductions to every story with students throughout London in front of various landmarks. Students Pat Boylan and Josh Blessing hosted the show, with Emily Barker, Michael Nauman, and Brandon Pope also reporting. The program showcased a collection of content produced from the project. The *BSU at the Games Olympic Special* aired locally in Muncie on WIPB-TV and nationally on Fox College Sports. This became one of the few programs on Fox College Sports produced, shot, and edited entirely by students. The entire program also is available online for others to view (http://youtu.be/MJwbRVfhREI).

Students still share their memories of this trip, not simply because they traveled abroad, but because they reported from the largest sporting event in the world. Their work appeared across the nation on professional media outlets; work they produced, with professors serving as only advisors. The working environment also changed the attitudes of students. Nightly, the flat in London bustled with students typing, frantically editing,
and working on their stories, instead of partying or whatever else might occur in a typical college environment. Putting students in a working environment allowed them to learn outside of the four walls and PowerPoints of a classroom. Instead they learned on the biggest sporting stage of the world, without being lectured by a professor.

The theme became collaboration, whether cross discipline or instructor to student. Academic roles were not present in daily production, breaking the barriers sometimes associated with instructor-student communication (Scarce, 1997, p. 224). Instructors befriended and worked alongside students. Peers instructed peers on storytelling techniques, while instructors smiled at the collaboration. This method of learning and collaboration highlights the research from Michael Salemi (2002) about the benefits of peer-to-peer instruction (p. 727).

Students worked each day to produce content for real world clients, treating each opportunity as training for their careers. This opportunity became the “real thing” for students (Barron, Schwartz, Vye, Moore, Petrosino, Zech, Bransford & Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1998, p. 278). Photography majors traveled with sports reporters to interviews, while graphics artists worked with a Chicago Tribune graphic designer to create full-page graphics for the following day’s publication. As a graduate assistant I found myself mixed between these roles. As Millenbah and Millsapough (2003) point out, this type of open dialogue between students and advisors helps both parties learn new methods of learning and teaching (p. 134). I helped students edit and record stories, while also taking a leading role on my own stories. I shared my own experience with students while also learning myself.
IV. Final Overview & Recommendations

While the final result of the project includes a video production and a website full of stories, the lasting impression on students will be the greatest result. Student centered learning, like BSU at the Games, drives every aspect of a project toward the student experience. BSU at the Games demonstrates a successful experiential learning project because it fulfills four primary outcomes:

1). Process centered teaching and learning (Karabell, 1998, p. 18)
2). Student-centered and student-designed project (Helle, Tyanjälä & Olkinoura, 2006, p. 292)
3). Experience rather than lectures teach students (McClellan & Hyle, 2012, p. 240)
4). A capstone project or collection of projects as the goal (Hamilton, 1980, p. 180)

The project focused on processes by instructors mentoring students on how to complete stories rather than teaching specific topics. Instead of teaching students what their stories foci should be, I mentored students how to shoot and edit in order to tell the story their way. Never did we quiz students on specific facts of the Olympic Games. By allowing students to discover knowledge, the experience became more valuable.
Second, students were the center of designing their own stories. Instructors focused on helping students discover stories they were passionate about telling. Instructors worked to help students realize their visions. Instructors did not focus on conducting research and producing stories of their own. I was able to both instruct and tell my own stories because I was a graduate student. I offered my knowledge to help students produce quality work.

In the future I would change my role slightly. In the months leading up an event, I would conduct more teaching and tutorial sessions to teach students editing, shooting, and storytelling techniques. This will allow a more hands-off approach on location because I will have taught students the processes of video production in advance. I wish I had also been more involved with story development during our semester of preparation. During this project students presented their story ideas to the instructors, but there was never a detailed plan for execution put into place. In the future I would help students brainstorm story ideas and also be more involved in teaching and helping to execute storytelling techniques.

I would also emphasize the importance of intergroup communication from the beginning of the project. Students also should learn the value and techniques of social media, both in contacting story subjects and in releasing finished content. If I worked on this project again I would not work as hands-on with equipment, and allow students to have more experience working cameras and editing. Because I have had this experience already, I don’t feel the desire to advise during every step of the storytelling process after experiencing this project.
Some of these methods apply to the role of a future graduate assistant. I encourage future assistants to conduct training sessions prior to the event. However, I would encourage future graduate assistants to maintain a hands-on approach throughout the project. This gives the assistant the experience of creating content and work in the fast-paced environment of deadline journalism. Future graduate assistants should follow many of the processes I went through while instructing students and working alongside students.

Experiential learning focuses on experience itself. Students in these types of projects learn by doing, not by being told facts. Creating a valuable experience is the course outcome, not test scores. Instructors on BSU at the Games used examples from daily life at the Olympic Games to highlight lessons to students. Students learned by exploring their own journalistic styles and implementing these discoveries into their storytelling.

Finally, both an hour-long program and collection of work were primary goals of BSU at the Games. Throughout the Olympic Games, we published written, video, graphic, and photo stories to our website and social media. The website is still active for anyone to view the entire collection. The hour-long television special is a capstone to the entire experience. It highlights work from the project and also is a retrospective for students to remember their time in England. By setting goals for experiences, students strive to create quality work and take pride in the final project.

While considered a successful project, many aspects could be improved upon. Communication, while stressed as important to students, was not always handled
correctly. Many mornings, student leaders failed to report what team activities were, which in turn hindered cross-discipline collaboration. The sports team in particular did not always offer to bring a photographer with them on trips to training facilities. At one point during the trip there also was a dispute about the handling of social media. Practices and execution of social media postings were not defined until halfway through the trip, at which point it became too late to instill a universal standard. From day one, standards needed to be in place, just as they are at a news agency. Communication structures should also be defined in advance, so students know before the trip exactly who to report to and where stories should be sent. This all goes back to creating a communication structure in advance. In doing so, students, while learning through the experience, know who to ask for guidance when they stumble along the way. Finally, clear goals should be created early in the planning process. This will drive every student to work hard to achieve the goals, and also will guide instructors to make contacts with professional networks.

Planning the entire project is a mammoth task, but detailed planning in advance will only breed success for the project and every student involved.

Experiential learning does not have to be at the scale of the Olympic games, but by focusing on student experience, instructors will mentor rather than teach, allowing students to learn by their own methods. Experiential learning also builds habits and lifelong learning techniques for students to continue using in every aspect of their lives. *BSU at the Games* left a lasting impression on every student not because it was a fun trip overseas, but because students were able to discover their own abilities while producing content for professional outlets. The goal of creating professional work drives students to
learn beyond their classroom lessons. Every student should be able to participate in a course designed around their own experience because students are the focal point of educational institutions. Without the hierarchical structure of a traditional classroom, experiential learning benefits everyone involved.
References


Appendix A: Course Objectives

Course Description
NEWS 397 Immersion: Special Topics (3)
Participation in an off-campus, immersive experience designed to enhance racial, socio-economic, gender or cultural awareness. Extensive on-campus preparation and presentation of significant multimedia project. May not be taken concurrently with NEWS 497.

Prerequisite:
NEWS 221, 233 or 234 or 235, junior standing and permission of department chairperson.

Course Objectives
This class allows students to acquire in-depth knowledge of a special topic as they build advanced reporting and multimedia skills. Students also will collaborate with news organizations and other community partners and classmates in locations with which they may not be familiar.

Learning Outcomes
Students will be able to:
- Prepare for and cover in-depth, off-campus assignments.
- Create multimedia product using materials gathered during the immersion experience.
- Tailor story packages to student media and other outlets.
- Work with community partners.
- Evaluate classmates’ projects.
Appendix B: Syllabus

Ball State University / Special Topics Immersion: Olympics / NEWS 397 / SPRING 2011
Instructor: Ryan J. Sparrow/ Instructor, Journalism Graphics, Department of Journalism
Office: AJ 350
Office Ph: 765-285-3560
Email: rjsparrow@bsu.edu
Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesday 9:30 a.m. – noon, open door and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The Summer Olympic Games are unquestionably the biggest sporting event in the world and covering the games has become one of the biggest media events in the world. But just like the athletes participating in the games, preparing for and participating in the coverage of the games takes a journalist prepared and at the top of their game.

This class will focus on two specific goals: Understanding how the media organizes and pre-reports on the games and covering the games themselves. During the regular semester of the class, students will talk to professional journalists about their experiences covering the games. This will also be doing research for information graphics, pre-reporting their own stories and generally organizing equipment and plans for a three-week period in England for the Games themselves.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Understand how the media covers the Olympics
- Covering events w/out passes
- Pre-reporting & resource gathering/development
- Operations & Planning International Coverage
- Multimedia skills and understanding alternative ways of covering
- In-Depth research of events, sports and venues
- Working in teams with a variety of talents
- Cultural awareness of England and the English people

COURSE CONTENT & FORMAT
This class will be a combination of lectures and visiting lecturers and team work and collaboration with your various teammates.
**GRADING**

- 93% +  \( \rightarrow \)  A
- 90 – 92.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  A-
- 87 – 89.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  B+
- 84 – 86.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  B
- 80 – 83.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  B -
- 77 – 79.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  C+
- 74 – 76.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  C
- 70 – 73.9%  \( \rightarrow \)  C-
- 60 – 70%  \( \rightarrow \)  D
- Below 60  \( \rightarrow \)  F

**Research/Olympics - 20%**

**Research/Plan - 15%**

**Olympics stories - 65%**

This class is an immersive experience. While part of that is immersing your self in the experience, another part allows the students to take charge of their own learning goals and progress. And because there is so much variety in the types of students in the class, it will be up to each student to come up with a grading goal. This means that you will set appropriate goals and story deadlines.

**Attendance, Participation & Weekly Assignments:**
The study of public relations demands strict discipline, therefore, attendance at each class session is mandatory. T/TH students may miss two classes without penalty, however, you will be responsible for the information from that session. More than two absences will affect your grade negatively. You must be present on the day that you are to do presentation of your project. If you know ahead of time you will not be in class, do not volunteer to present on that day. We will remain on schedule according to the syllabus to the extent possible. Emergency situations will be dealt with on a one-on-one basis, but keep in mind that emergency can be subject to interpretation. I expect to see you in class each week.

**Teams - As part of this class, there will be a variety of teams that you will be placed in to do work. These will include - Research teams, skills/area teams, story teams. Your work will be evaluated on how much to bring to each team.**
Schedule

January 11 - Initial grading plan due

January 18 - General sport information due

March 2 - Maps, Communication and equipment plans due

May 4 - Revised grading plan, access and reporter's plan due

July 24 - Leave for England

August 14 - Return from England
Appendix C: Website and Social Media Screenshots

BSU at the Games website:
http://www.bsuatthegames.com
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN GLOBAL CULTURE

BSU at the Games Twitter feed
http://www.twitter.com/bsuattthegames

BSU at the Games Facebook page
http://www.facebook.com/bsuattthegames
BSU at the Games Youtube page
http://www.youtube.com/bsuatthegames
Appendix D: Grant Proposal Narrative Excerpt

Special Topics Immersion: Olympics reporting and stories from the 2012 Summer Games

Person(s) responsible for implementation

Ryan J. Sparrow, Graphics, Instructor of Journalism

Chris Taylor, Director, Sports Link, Instructor of Telecommunication

Jennifer George-Palilonis, George & Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Multimedia

Suzy Smith, Assistant Professor of Telecommunications

Abstract

In the summer of 2012, students from eight different majors and four departments will travel to England to cover the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London. This proposal outlines a two-stage immersive experience to be conducted across three classes and over two semesters, working on a variety of projects culminating in a three-week trip to England for the games. In stage one, 30-40 students will prepare for the Summer games by researching events and venues, interviewing veteran Olympic reporters and producing detailed plans of action for coverage. During stage two, in late July, students will travel to England for the games to produce multimedia content using multiple platforms. The student-produced content will be showcased in a variety of mediums through multiple media partners, including major newspaper, broadcast and web platforms.

Media partners with confirmed agreements to publish student content include local and national media outlets such as the Tribune Company, CNN, ESPN-U, Fox College Sports, The Indianapolis Star, The Star Press and Indiana Public Radio.

Narrative

Immersive learning lies at the crux of the dynamic new Ball State news curriculum, instituted in 2010. NEWS 397 - Special Topics was created to allow students to study a specific niche area of the world of journalism and to have an immersive experience to hone their skills in this particular field. The hope was also to include a travel component
to the class. Using this model, the current proposal for NEWS 397 - Immersion: Olympics Reporting was designed.

Students will also research Olympic events and venues, interview veteran Olympic reporters and produce detailed plans of action for coverage.

Exemplary students from multiple majors, led by two instructors, will create a student news agency to plan, produce and publish work in professional media outlets (across the country as well as across Indiana). Students from the Departments of Journalism (News and Public Relations), Telecommunications, Sports Administration and Art, and possibly students from Communication Studies, International Travel and History will be recruited.

The nine-month immersive project will take place across two semesters, allowing students to get up to six hours of credit. Spring 2012 will be devoted to planning the trip, contacting professionals and creating a blueprint for stories to be covered when students travel to England at the end of the summer. Student outcomes for this class include: researching relevant story ideas for print, broadcast and web; producing advanced news and feature articles; creating interactive information graphics and animated motion graphics for community media partners; finding, negotiating and planning the logistics of sharing work with interested media outlets at home; and coming up with a plan of action for the Olympic Games.

This class will importantly focus on understanding many of the “behind-the-scenes” details of major media coverage of the games. Students will responsible for finding professional reporters, photographers, producers and other journalists who have covered past games to come into the classroom - either by Skype or in person - to discuss their own experiences with the games. These professionals will provide insight into important details that students will need during the games, such as the types of stories to cover, equipment and packing details, workflow issues and project management.

At the end of the course in the spring, students will create a handbook for covering the games. This handbook will include information on the venues, credentials, the United Kingdom, events and history of the Olympic games.

Phase two will include the coverage of the Olympic Games in London. For three weeks, from a home and work base at the University of Worcester, small teams of student photographers, reporters, videographers and illustrators will make decisions of what stories to cover, the best means by which to cover the stories and take turns traveling to
London to cover the stories. Stories might include the Olympic events, the lives of Indiana athletes in the Olympic Village or the carnival atmosphere on the streets. When not gathering information in London, these students will produce work on deadline for the professional partners at home and be responsible for working with their editors in story direction and editing.

At the same time, another group of approximately 3-5 strategic communication students will hone their promotional skills by documenting the experience of the students in the other group. These strategic communication students will be charged with planning and producing their own materials that will ultimately be used to showcase the innovative NEWS curriculum at Ball State.

**Student information - See following page for a breakdown of the classes and timeline**

**Projected number of students that will participate:** Approximately 30-40

**Statement of how students will be recruited:** Professors in each discipline will actively recruit their best students for the project. Professors will seek upper-level students who already have completed a strong foundation of related coursework in their fields.

**Statement of how credit will be awarded:** Students will be awarded 3 hours of credit for their involvement in the Spring 2012 semester portion of the project. Individual students may be able to work out course substitutions, depending on the demands and requirements of their individual majors.

**Disciplinary fields and skill sets of those students who will be recruited to complete the project:** Journalism graphics and art students will work on information graphics for print, web and mobile devices. NEWS students from journalism and the Department of Telecommunication and photojournalism students will do original reporting. Sports administration and international travel students will assist with research and planning. Public relation and advertising students will work on a strategic plan to promote the efforts.
All students enrolled in the classes listed below will also be travelling to England for the duration of the Olympics. Students will arrive in England on July 23 and leave on August 14th. The Summer games are held from July 27th to August 12th.

**Spring 2012**

**NEWS 397 - Special Topics Immersion: 2012 Summer Olympics**

*Instructors: Ryan Sparrow and Chris Taylor*

*Number of students: 30*

*Number of credits: 3*

Class will focus on building plans for the three-week period surrounding the Olympics, producing a handbook to assist and detail summer plans, researching events and venues, and researching and constructing information graphics for our media partners.

This class will also have guest speakers from media organizations to talk about their Olympic experiences, their access and the types of stories they produced.

Three to five Strategic Communications students may work with this class in coordination with another class in their curriculum or as an independent study.

**Summer 2012**

**NEWS 397 - Special Topics Immersion: 2012 Summer Olympics**

*Instructor: Jennifer George-Palilonis*

*Number of students: 10*

*Number of credits: 3*

Class will continue work from previous Spring, but will be available for those students unable to take the class in the spring.

**NEWS or TCOM 485 - Independent Studies**

*Instructor: Chris Taylor*

*Number of students: 10-15*

*Number of credits: 3*

Class will focus on researching and writing stories for the Olympics. This class will be offered as a way for some students to get 6 hours of credit for the experience and will take the place of other classes offered through the News sequence, such as sports writing and niche reporting.

**Olympics**

2012 Summer Olympics Field Study, July 23 - August 14, 2012

*Directors: Ryan Sparrow and Chris Taylor*

*Additional instructors: Jennifer George-Palilonis and Suzy Smith*

*Number of students: 35-40*

This class is the culmination of all of the other classes. At the end of the spring and summer semesters, students will get an ’EC’ or ’I’ grade (enrollment continued or incomplete) and will complete the class at the end of the Olympics.

Field studies only allow for two directors, no matter the number of students. Because of the number of students, the logistics of international travel and the work being conducted with such a large number of community partners, two additional instructors have volunteered to assist.
**Budget**

Please note that the original intent was to keep this field study as inexpensive as possible for students. But since the original conception of the class, the sheer number of students wanting to participate and plans that were developed with the partners that have agreed to work with the class have changed what we need to properly execute this experience. This is not an attempt for an equipment grab or to fund vacations for as many faculty members as possible.

**Camera equipment - $16,500**

Due to the professional caliber of our community partners who will help the class get access to athletes, coaches and possibly events, there is a need to have high-end DSLRs for sports photography. While both of the primary departments involved and some students will have some equipment, it is not of the caliber needed for Olympic photography.

A new type of mirrorless cameras will be purchased for both print and video. This new technology has a fast enough frame rate to shoot broadcast-ready video and their compact size make them perfect for traveling. The cameras are also similar to DSLRs in that they allow for interchangeable lenses.

*DSLR and mirrorless camera bodies - $5000*

*DSLR Lenses - $4500*

*Broadcast video camera - $3500*

*Tripods, filters, memory cards and other misc. - $3500*

**Computer equipment - $6000**

While students and faculty members have some equipment, there is a need for additional, necessary devices. The iPads will be used for internet access without the need for wi-fi or mobile phone contracts. In addition, the iPads could be used for quick media editing and Skype access. The Drobo is an expandable storage device so that materials can be backed up easily and additional storage could be purchased and installed quickly.
3-5 iPads (64 gb/3g) for traveling teams - $3000

Drobo storage device and hard drives - $2000

Macbook Air - $1000

**Equipment rental - $2500**

There is a need for specialized equipment for a short period of time. Specifically, the cost of buying a large telephoto lens needed for many sports is approximately $6000. There also might be a need for a computer for video editing. In addition, this equipment would be costly and cumbersome to travel with. To keep costs down, instructors will look to rent some equipment rather than purchase it.

**Travel and accommodations - $12,000**

This project needs addition support for travel for a few reasons. With the increased expectations from such highly-regarded partners such as Tribune Newspapers, ESPN and Fox College Sports, it will be necessary to meet and plan with editors and producers from these companies to ensure their needs are being met. Students and faculty may need to travel to these companies to meet with editors for planning and strategy sessions.

And because of such a high number of students and to help edit the material coming in from students, two assisting faculty members and a graduate student will be needed to help oversee the project.

And finally, because athletes and events to be covered will not be completely known until closer to the games, it may be necessary to travel to locations not in London. Student accommodations have been figured into the field study budget, but only for London and Worcester accommodations.

* Rail passes and travel within England - $2500

* US travel for professionals - $1500

* Air travel for assisting professors - $4000

* Other English accommodations besides London - $1500
Accommodations for assisting graduate assistant - $1000

Student/faculty travel to community partners - $1500

Class buyouts - $4000

Both of the primary instructors (Sparrow and Taylor) have other classes that are typically covered. The overload credit will ensure that both instructors can lead the class through the spring semester.

Miscellaneous and supply costs - $1500

As the semester and summer progresses, multiple supplies and travel-related costs will no doubt arise.

The student teams will also be given pay-as-you mobile phones to help keep them connected with other team members, graduate assistants or the faculty leader while on locations.

Camera equipment - $16,500

Computer equipment - $6000

Equipment rental - $2500

Travel & accommodations - $12,000

Two class buyouts - $4000

Miscellaneous and supplies costs - $1500

Total - $42,500
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Departments of Journalism &amp; Telecommunications</th>
<th>Field study budget or student</th>
<th>Potential Provost Immersive Learning Grant</th>
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<td>Student accommodations (Worcester)</td>
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<td>Student travel within England</td>
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<td>Equipment rental</td>
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Assessment Plan

Just like working in the real world, working as part of this project will require an immense amount of teamwork. Students will be graded on how well they work as part of the team. They will also be assessed on their preparation, the ability to follow through with plans and their level of engagement with the project. Once covering stories, they will be graded just as they would in any other course, on the product produced. Because the desire of this project is to produce professional quality material, students will be judged on the professional level of their work.

Sustainability Plan

This project will be used as a model for future news and sporting event coverage and has the potential of becoming a model for students assisting major media at sporting and news events in the future. Once students create and develop plans for coverage of major sporting events like the Olympics, the experiences and lessons learned will be invaluable to future events. The work samples coming out of these media partnerships will act as a portfolio to promote student work to other media organizations. In addition, the marketing and public relations material from the project will allow the Departments of Journalism and Telecommunications to showcase the news curriculum to incoming students and their parents. The equipment purchased can be used in other journalism, telecommunications or news curriculum-based classes.

Community Partners

Attached are letters of commitment from The Tribune Company (which oversees newspapers and news websites in Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Hartford, Orlando and Fort Lauderdale) and The Star Press. We are also in discussions with CNN, Fox Sports and ESPN as they plan their Olympics coverage and how we might play a part. Other partners will be sought throughout the duration of this project.
**Immersive Learning Characteristics of this Project:**

**Academic Credit** – Students will enroll in a 3-credit hour class, Special Topics Immersion (NEWS 397). In addition, there will be independent study credit offered for majors in public relations, art and other students whose needs and direction don’t exactly match up with the NEWS class. Depending on the numbers, an additional 3-credit class may be available for students to take. This class would be in replacement to another class in the NEWS curriculum but help focus on a particular skill set (sports or feature writing) needed for this project. And finally, depending on the numbers and needs, an additional NEWS 397 might be offered during the summer semester for students unable to take the class in the spring.

**Student-driven learning process** – The Spring NEWS 397 will primarily focus on students planning their course of action for their own Summer Olympics reporting. Students will identify stories, track down those stories, complete the research and pre-reporting necessary for their time on the ground, and produce stories. Students will also be in charge of contacting professionals to Skype or come into the classroom in person for Q & A's. The instructors will assist in story direction, editing and working on the logistics of the trip.

**Tangible outcome or product** – In the end, there will be a variety of tangible outcomes. The first and foremost product is the content itself. Students will walk away from this experience with a variety of stories, graphics, videos, audio stories and more for their own portfolios, published in reputable and well-known news outlets. Most of the stories will be published or broadcast by our community partners and other media organizations. Another group of students will document the class for promotional use within the College of Communication, Information and Media. There will also be a sizable website with blogs, links and other resources for the group to share students’ efforts and stories back at home.

**Interdisciplinary projects** – This class showcases the NEWS curriculum’s underlying interdisciplinary philosophy of news convergence. In addition to news stories, interactive and animated graphics will be produced for our community partners from a team of journalism graphics and news, art and sports administration students. The promotional team will be made up of a variety of students from the Departments of Journalism and Telecommunication.
**Community partners** – In addition to The Tribune Company, Fox College Sports, ESPN-U, Indiana Public Radio and The Star Press, we also have a verbal commitment from CNN about doing a variety of stories across a variety of mediums. Our students will produce content to be aired/published by each of these news organizations. There will also be ripe opportunity to reach out to media organizations on the spot as we find stories that might interest particular markets.

**Student learning outcomes** – Students will be learning a variety of journalistic skills, not the least of which is the ability to find stories and opportunities in a large, chaotic environment such as the Summer Olympic games. Organization and research skills will play a key role in their success for this project. This project should also exercise their ability to find and tell good stories. And because of the travel aspect of this project, students will be immersed in British society and will gain new insight into different cultures.

**Career path** – Not only will this project build students portfolios, this project will provide students with experience in understanding how the media covers a large scale event. The students will interact with professionals as professionals – from talking to editors about their own individual stories, to interacting with other reporters in the Olympic media center, to cold-calling editors and producers in the hope to sell them stories. Students will leave this project with an in-depth knowledge of the behind the scenes workings of high-level sports reporting as well as what it takes to manage the media during such a renowned event.