

Utilizing Students: The Ball State Sports Link Model

*Presented by Chris Taylor | Ball State University's College of Communication, Media & Information
Instructor of Telecommunications/Sports Immersion & Media*

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About The Program:

Ball State Sports Link is an immersive learning experience. The program allows students to write, report, shoot, produce and host a variety of sports programs.

The program is the first and only program in the nation where students are totally immersed (for class credit) in sports and electronic media.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, each student logged nearly 1,000 "real-life" sports experience to combine for well over 14,000 student hours for sports media and production.

As a whole, in three semesters students have dedicated nearly 20,000 hours for sports production.

Ball State Sports Link is supervised by a TCOM faculty member (Chris Taylor), graduate assistant (Steven Albritton) and a Teleplex professional staff member (Bill Bryant).

During the semester, students produce a broad range of media from live remote productions, live-to-tape events, television programs for statewide and regional distribution, student-athlete features and webcasts. Other facets of the immersion program include radio, newspapers, podcasts and the use of mobile technology and interactivity via the web.

In 2010-11, the program will partner with the University's Emerging Media and iMedia program to create the school's first iPhone and iPad sports applications for BSU Athletics.

TCOM is a member of one of the largest undergraduate communication colleges in the country -- the College of Communication, Information and Media.

The Sports Link offices and studios are located in the Ball Communications Building, while the David Letterman Communication and Media Building is a world-class facility offering state-of-the-art options for all students.



CoSIDA Digital Summit Day Presentation Points --

The Three 'O's' To Utilizing Students

1. **Opportunity:**
2. **Ownership:**
3. **Obligation:**



Ball State Immersion Program Creates Next Generation of Sports-Production Pros

By: Ken Kerschbaumer, Sports Video Group Editorial Director | Published: February 3, 2010 | www.sportsvideo.org

In 2008, Ball State University launched an innovative TV-sports-production program called Sports Link. To gain real-world experience in all aspects of sports production, university telecommunications students rotate among different disciplines from one production to the next in an effort to prepare for a career. Less than two years later, the program is an unqualified success, giving students an advantage in a competitive job market, the athletic department greater exposure, and local and national media outlets access to highlights, feature stories, game coverage, and more.

"Within a short amount of time, the number of students signing up for the program grew, and, when we began this past fall semester, the students knew they were part of something special," says Chris Taylor, instructor in Telecommunications/Sports Immersion and Media. "This immersive learning experience is a real cornerstone and differentiates us from other telecommunications programs. It's unique for students to be able to earn college credits while working on sports productions."

Taylor was hired last year on a full-time basis to run a program that, in 2009-10, produced over 200 features and 18 live productions. Currently, 17 students are signed up for the spring semester, up from 10 in the fall. Students have a chance to sample a number of job duties, working the same position for two consecutive productions. That allows them to get their feet wet on one production and have a chance to apply lessons learned to a second.

"The challenge is scheduling the remotes so there is an opportunity for proper learning in class between the events," says Taylor. "The students meet as a class twice a week for two hours and then pull together story ideas, schedule guests, cover press conferences, and work on the remotes."

Priceless Experience

Producing all that content gives the students a tremendous amount of real-world experience. Last semester, the 10 students logged more than 5,000 hours during the 14-week program.

Rick Johnston, a senior telecommunications major currently in the program, says the experience has been priceless, giving students a chance to work in such diverse positions as EVS replay, cameraperson, audio mixer, and more. His career goal is to be a play-by-play announcer, but his skill set has him ready for any potential opening.

"When I graduate in May, I am going to be head and shoulders above others who are graduating, no questions asked," he says. A typical live-remote day involves getting on-site at 7 a.m. for pre-production and to set up cameras. Then, it's off to class and back to the venue at 3 p.m. to begin working on the show.

"We can also practice as much as we want out at the truck and build up our comfort level and work experience," he says. "We really have the outlets to do what we want."

Taylor says it isn't only the program's students who learn. Because the athletes get interviewed on camera more often, they become more accustomed to answering questions, an important skill for future professional athletes. "The experience this

provides our students on a daily basis and the exposure it creates for the athletes and university make it worth any school to try and figure out how to do a sports program."

The exposure extends well beyond campus, with content seen across Indiana and across the country. Content is streamed via the Internet nationally, but the local campus PBS station broadcasts programming. Content is also available on-demand via the local Comcast system. And a network of TV stations across the state receive highlight reels via FTP (File Transfer Protocol), and audio reports are heard on 18 radio stations in Indiana.

"Students learn that this is a deadline-oriented profession as they work late making melt reels for local TV stations," Taylor adds.

And even ESPN has tapped into the Ball State program. On Jan. 14, *The Malik Perry Story*, a program produced by Ball State Sports Link seniors Seth Tanner and Nick Yeoman and sophomore Ben Wagner, aired on the network.

"We've built a strong relationship with ESPN, and, from the production side, we can send them and any of the networks events as needed," says Taylor. ESPN on-air talent, including Linda Cohn and Andy Katz, have also stopped by to teach students about a career in broadcasting.

Starting a Program

He believes that every college or university with a telecommunications department and an athletic department could offer a similar program. The key is finding believers at the top ranks of the school.

"You need an AD who sees this as important and also a dean and a president who think it is important," he explains, noting, "Sports is one of the most consistent PR and marketing tools a school has throughout the entire year."

Taylor's background working in an athletic department makes him a believer in the power of electronic media. As more and more departments move towards electronic online media guides, for example, video and audio content will become a necessity.

"With the exception of the majors and a few mid majors, most schools don't have the resources or a video department that can create that content," he explains. "But we've been able to put together 60 athlete profiles that have been viewed more than 10,000 times."

In most cases, Taylor believes it is best for the Athletic Department to reach out to the educational side because it is ultimately the Athletic Department that has the need for content.

Perhaps most important, there is a revenue component to a properly run program. First Merchants Bank has stepped up as a corporate sponsor, and the students support the effort by building video billboards and other content.

"First Merchants Bank has been blown away by what the students do for them," says Taylor. "And that makes the athletic department look great but also fulfills the academic mission. It's a win-win, and we see that continuing."