



National Association for
Sport and Physical Education

an association of the American Alliance for Health,
Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

NASPE Sets the Standard

GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Guidelines for Teaching Undergraduate Sport Sociology

Introduction

Sport sociology is a subdiscipline of sociology that, since the late 1960s, has produced knowledge about sports as social phenomena in a wide range of societies. It may be included as a major specialization area in graduate programs in kinesiology, sports studies and physical education departments, and is widely offered as a single undergraduate course for students with varied interests and majors. In the latter case, prerequisites for taking the course seldom exist, and departments may list it as suited for lower- or upper-division students.

The general goal of the sport sociology course is to systematically investigate the complex connections among sports, society and cultures. Because research in the field examines the validity of widely held ideas and beliefs about sports in society and has found them to be inaccurate or oversimplifications of reality, courses often are organized around critical thinking.

The instructor's task often is to assist students as they ask questions about many aspects of sports that they and others have long taken for granted. In part, that involves a critical examination of why so many people perceive sports as essentially pure and wholesome activities when, in fact, they are multifaceted activities that come in many different forms and create possibilities for many different experiences.

The content of a sport sociology course varies, depending on the department offering it. The topics below provide an overview of what such a course might cover. They're presented as a course-planning aid, rather than a list of required topics for all courses.

Sports Are Social Phenomena

- Students should understand what it means to say that sports are *social constructions* and *contested activities*; that is, they're created and sustained by people as they interact with others, and organize and make sense of their lives.
- Students should understand what it means to say that sports are *institutionalized* social and cultural practices.

Guidelines for Teaching Undergraduate Sport Sociology (cont.)

- Students should be able to identify in organizational terms the differences between organized, competitive sports and other forms of physical activities, including play, individual contests, movement games and expressive performances.
- Students should know that historical variations exist in the ways that sports have been organized and played in the United States and other societies, and that these variations are related to issues of power and authority at particular points in time.

Using Sociology to Study Sports

Students should understand the focus of a sociological approach and know why it's important to study social patterns as well as individual actions in connection with sports in society.

- Students should be familiar with the basic research methods and theories that sociologists use to study sports and other aspects of social life.
- Students should understand the difference between knowledge based on scientific research and theory and statements based on individual opinions and observations.

Sports and Culture

- Students should understand that sports not only reflect other aspects of culture and society, but they also play an important role in producing, reproducing and transforming culture and society.
- Students should understand the meaning of ideology and be able to identify basic ideas and beliefs that constitute dominant ideologies related to sports, gender and sexuality, race/ethnicity/skin color, social class, and (dis)ability in American society.

Sports and Social Organization

- Students should be able to identify the ways that sports are connected with other major spheres of social life, such as family, education, the economy, media, politics and religion.
- Students should know that interscholastic sports as they are played in the United States are unique and based on the belief that sports and sport participation serve educational functions.
- Students should be familiar with the ways that social, political and economic factors influence the growth, visibility and popularity of sports in society.

Sports and Social Interaction

- Students should be familiar with the concept of socialization and how social learning occurs through social interaction.
- Students should be familiar with research that shows why people become involved in sports, what happens in connection with their involvement, and why people discontinue that participation.
- Students should understand that all sport participation does not produce the same results in terms of character traits, education-related achievement and occupational success, and that the outcomes of sport participation can be positive or negative, depending on the conditions under which they occur.
- Students should be able to identify the conditions under which sport participation promotes health and personal well-being and the conditions under which it has negative health outcomes.
- Students should understand why wide variations exist in the ways that sport participation is related to developmental processes that occur in the lives of children and youths, and they should be able to identify some of the conditions under which sport participation is most and least likely to have positive socialization effects on young people and family dynamics.
- Students should be able to explain how social factors related to gender, race and ethnicity, social class, and (dis)abilities influence youth sport experiences.

Gender, Race and Ethnicity, Social Class, and (Dis)ability

- Students should understand the ways that power relations related to gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and (dis)ability have influenced sports and sport participation in the United States.
- Students should be familiar with Title IX, why it became law and the extent to which gender inequities continue to exist in sport participation opportunities, support for athletes and jobs for women in sports.
- Students should understand gender ideology and the ways that sports serve as sites for the celebration of dominant forms of masculinity and why some people define girls, women, gay men and lesbians as invaders in sports.
- Students should be able to distinguish between race and ethnicity, should understand and that the idea of *race* is a social construction and should know how racial categories are grounded in social meanings given to skin color.
- Students should be familiar with dominant *racial ideology* and how it has

Guidelines for Teaching Undergraduate Sport Sociology (cont.)

influenced ideas about the relationship between skin color and performance in sports.

- Students should be familiar with major ethnic groups in the United States — African Americans, native Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans — and factors that influence their participation in sport.
- Students should be familiar with how and why sport participation varies with social class.
- Students should be familiar with how and why (dis)ability influences sport participation.

Deviance and Violence in Sports

- Students should understand that many factors influence people's actions associated with sport, and that sport serves as a site where many people view deviance and violence differently than they do in other spheres of social life.
- Students should understand the concepts of norms and social control so that they can critically assess issues of deviance and violence with an eye toward making sports humane and healthy physical activities.
- Students should be familiar with and be able to critically assess the criteria that athletes, coaches, spectators and others use to define and regulate deviance and violence on and off the field.
- Students should be familiar with basic research findings on deviance among athletes, both on and off the field, especially in connection with delinquency rates, academic cheating, alcohol use, binge drinking, assaults and sexual assault.
- Students should be familiar with the use of performance-enhancing substances in sport, the issues related to drug testing and why it is difficult to control substance use among athletes today.
- Students should be familiar with factors related to spectator violence and when crowd violence is most likely to occur at sport events.

Sports and Global Processes

- Students should understand the basic economic and political factors that influence sport on a global level.
- Students should be familiar with athletes as global migrant workers.

- Students should be familiar with the ways that governments support and regulate sport at the local, national and global levels.

Social Change and Sports

- Students should understand the ways that social change occurs in connection with sport.
- Students should be familiar with factors that are most crucial to creating the future of sport.

Suggested Textbooks

Coakley, Jay. 2009. *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (10th edition). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Coakley, Jay, and Peter Donnelly, eds. 1999. *Inside Sports*. London/New York: Routledge, 1999.

Coakley, Jay, and Eric Dunning, eds. 2000. *Handbook of Sports Studies*. London: Sage Publications Inc.

Dunning, Eric. 1999. *Sport matters: Sociological studies of sport, violence and civilization*. London/New York: Routledge.*

Eitzen, D. Stanley, and George H. Sage. 2007. *Sociology of North American Sport* (8th edition). New York: Paradigm.

Eitzen, D. Stanley. 2005. *Sport in Contemporary Society* (7th edition). Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Eitzen, D. Stanley. 2006. *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport* (3rd edition). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Jarvie, Grant. 2006. *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction*. London/New York: Routledge.

Maguire, Joseph, Grant Jarvie, Louise Mansfield, and Joe Bradley. 2002. *Sport Worlds: A Sociological Perspective*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.*

Leonard, W.M. II. 1998. *A Sociological Perspective of Sport* (5th edition). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Messner, Michael A. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Prettyman, Sandra Spickard, and Brian Lampman. 2006. *Learning Culture Through Sports: Exploring the Role of Sports in Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Nixon, Howard L., II. 2008. *Sport in a Changing World*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Sage, George H. 1998. *Power and Ideology in American Sport: A Critical Perspective* (2nd edition). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Scrambler, Graham. 2005. *Sport and Society: History, Power and Culture*. Maidenhead, UK/New York, NY: Open University Press.*

Earl Smith. 2007. *Race, Sport and the American Dream*. Raleigh, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Torr, James D., ed. 2004. *Sports and Athletes: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press.

Woods, Ronald B. 2007. *Social Issues in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Yiannakis, Andrew, and Merrill J. Melnick, eds. 2001. *Contemporary Issues in American Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

* *Focuses primarily on the United Kingdom.*

Examples of Class Activities

Sportography Ice Breaker: Students bring to class outlines of their involvement (or lack thereof) in physical play, informal games and organized sport. The outline identifies personal experiences related to family relationships/dynamics, friends, school, teachers and coaches; key moments (at least one negative and one positive moment), intense memories, current situation and anticipated future. The outlines can spark discussion on the range of sport experiences among the students, helping students become acquainted with one another.

Sport Observations and Data Collection: Attend a sport event — youth, high school, college or professional game or meet — collect data on the event's social aspects and discuss in class. Talk with parents at youth sports, observe student relationships and who sits where at high school games, describe weekend activities associated with a college football game, interview fans about what they pay for pro sport tickets and why.

Parents and Grandparents: Students interview parents and/or grandparents about their sport participation experiences or why they had none. Discuss interview data in class.

Media Coverage: Students bring newspapers to class, and groups analyze different features of the coverage as it relates to gender, social class, disability, race/ethnicity and other factors.

Title IX: Gather data related to men's and women's sports on campus to see if the university/college is in compliance.

Guidelines for Teaching Undergraduate Sport Sociology (cont.)

College Athlete Experiences: Students interview athletes on campus about their experiences to see how playing college sports is connected with academic and other experiences. Also, ask about playing with pain/injuries, the violence in particular sports, how scholarships are awarded and who has them, etc.

Community Study: Conduct a sport-participation inventory to see who has easy access to community programs. *Examples:* people with disabilities, older people, people in certain neighborhoods, people in certain racial or ethnic populations, etc.

Guest speakers: Depending on issue, invite guests from the athletic department, intramural sport program on campus or in local high school; Fellowship of Christian Athletes; local parks and recreation department; youth club sport program; local referees; fitness center; YMCA; Boys and Girls Club; boxing gym; martial arts dojo; owner of local skateboard shop; etc.

Discussion Worksheets for Reading Assignment: Provide students with worksheets containing questions about the upcoming reading assignment and have them take notes for each question so that they're ready to discuss the questions in class.

Syllabi and Class Assignments: The American Sociological Association publishes a book for people in need of resources on teaching the sociology of sport: Longest, Kyle C., ed. 2008. *ASA Teaching Resources: Sociology of Sport* (4th edition). Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association. It can be ordered online at <http://www.e-noah.net/ASA/ASAShopOnlineService/productslist.aspx?CategoryID=ASASS&selection=10>

Contributing Authors

Jay Coakley, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, Emeritus
 Brenda Riemer, Eastern Michigan University
 Gary Sailes, Indiana University
 Louis Harrison, University of Texas at Austin
 Beverly Pittman, Pennsylvania State University- University Park

Approved by:

The History, Philosophy, Sociology Academy Committee and
 The Professional Preparation and Research Steering Committee of the
 National Association for Sport and Physical Education

Suggested Citation:

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2009). *Guidelines for teaching undergraduate sport sociology* [Guidance document]. Reston, VA: Author.