

Online Training for Sport Professionals: Lessons Learned from an Inaugural Initiative

Jill Fjelstul

Assistant Professor
Rosen College of Hospitality Management
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida 32819
USA
fjelstul@mail.ucf.edu

Dana Tesone

Associate Professor
Rosen College of Hospitality Management
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida 32819
USA
dtesone@mail.ucf.edu

Abstract

The article provides a report of an inaugural training intervention that was conducted to prepare professional golf instructors to successfully complete certification testing. The intervention was a collaborative venture involving university educators and representatives from the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). The article identifies the background, purpose, and methodology of the online initiative. The authors present the findings of the study with emphasis on lessons learned from their experiences. The article concludes with suggestions for educators to enhance the effectiveness of future collaborative training initiatives.

Key Words: Distance learning, sport training, sport organizations

Introduction

Many professional sport organizations require a process of training and testing in order for members to earn certifications. Tennis professionals are certified by two major organizations; the United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) and the Professional Tennis Registry (PTR). The United States Sports Academy offers continuing education and certifications in Bodybuilding, Coaching, Fitness Management, and Human Performance. Similar professional preparation and certification programs were sought as alternative career paths for physical educators (Zak and Sullivan, 1992). The American Council on Exercise, the Association for Fitness in Business, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association offer credentialing in areas of exercise and sport. Lastly, the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) provides certifications for athletic trainers. One study reported findings concerning specialty certification within the athletic training credential (Wiksten , 2004). Another focused on processes used to

prepare athletic trainers to manage emergencies (Biddington et al., 2005). Many professional associations serve constituencies on a national level, which suggests that distance learning methods may be appropriate for providing certain aspects of certification training.

Distance Learning

A vast body of distance learning literature has emerged over recent years (Schrum, 2002). This could suggest that these programs have achieved “mainstream” status in many academic institutions. A number of studies address issues such as faculty compensation, incentives, course evaluation, and pedagogy in online learning environments. It is commonly reported that the shift from traditional teaching to online learning environments (OLE) requires ‘change’ on the part of the instructor. It is likely that the concept of change may serve as both a catalyst and a cause of resistance on the part of educators based on varied perceptions concerning OLE instruction. One study reports that online education has created a new paradigm, which has fostered new modes of learning that involve innovative views of pedagogy and requires internal change on the part of participating faculty members (Rahman, 2001).

Journal articles addressing the issues of pedagogy and OLE began to appear in the leisure and hospitality literature during the latter 1990s (Rimington, 1999). It was predicted that the frequency of such contributions would continue to escalate into the new millennium (Cho, 2000), which does seem to be the situation today. Professional associations and commercial enterprises also appear to be adopting OLE training programs.

Ladies Professional Golf Association Certification

A number of individuals seek professional certification through the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). The LPGA Teaching and Club Professional Membership (LPGA T & CP) offers certification evaluations to ensure high quality professional standards among its approximately 1,200 members. The certification process and testing programs provide required skills in areas of teaching, coaching, and club professional activities for LPGA T & CP members. The certification process features four levels of classification, culminating with a ‘Class A’ credential. The first level requires the successful completion of the playing ability test, as well as submitting letters of recommendation, verification of employment in the golf industry, and education history. Application approval results in “an LPGA T & CP Individual in the Application Process” credential. The second level, “Apprentice”, must be completed within 12 months; successful completion of the LPGA orientation, National Education Program I, and written evaluation. “Class B” classification, the third level of classification for LPGA T & CP members, is awarded after the successful completion of the National Education Program II, accumulation of required certification units, completion of a two-year cycle, and successfully passing the Class B written evaluation. Lastly, to receive “Class A” classification, the LPGA T & CP member must complete a two-year cycle as a Class B professional, complete the National Education Program III, accumulate the required certification units, and successfully pass the Class A written evaluation. A study was conducted to provide learning reinforcement for candidates pursuing Class A certification.

The Study

The study focused on a seemingly high proportion of LPGA T & CP members who do not pass the Class A written evaluation on the first attempt. The researchers noted the absence of review sessions, as well as a time gap of many months between training completion and certification evaluation sessions. The researchers hypothesized that review sessions could reinforce prior learning of training content. They chose to develop an online review session to assist candidates in their preparation for the Class A written examination. It was felt that an online format would reinforce prior learning and also reduce travel, lodging, and maintenance expenses associated with in-person seminar attendance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine if participation in the online review session impacted academic performance on the Class A written evaluation. The Class A written evaluation consisted of 100 questions. A score of 80 or higher indicated a successful pass completion score. The study compared the pass rate percentage of the participants in the online review session with the pass rate percentage of those who did not participate in the online review session.

The LPGA T & CP Membership has traditionally delivered educational material through face-to-face (F2F) interaction. Creating alternative educational opportunities for personal, professional, and academic enhancement was the motive for the study.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To compare the pass rate percentage of the participants in the online review session and the pass rate percentage of those not receiving academic intervention.
2. To provide feedback for improving academic performance on written evaluations.
3. To provide feedback and implications to instructors for future online educational offerings for the LPGA T & CP Membership.

The objectives provided the foundation for the development and implementation of the inaugural online review session for the LPGA T & CP Membership. Components of the review session included communication, learner-responsibility, self-evaluation, discussion postings, and practice tests.

The Intervention

The intervention consisted of the design and delivery of a structured online certification review program. The program was designed to include eight specific lessons designed in modules representing intended learning outcomes. The first lesson included an orientation of the eight-week review session, a suggested timeline, a self-evaluation, and a discussion thread composed of participant introductions. Each lesson, thereafter, highlighted a topic of review and related reference material for the LPGA T & CP Class 'A' written evaluation; overview of the LPGA, communication, LPGA T & CP student-centered swing model, club fitting, motor learning and control research, and expert teaching. Each lesson requested participation in an asynchronous (anytime/anywhere) discussion format and the completion of an online quiz. Asynchronous formatting seemed most conducive as the purpose of the intervention was to review and reinforce previously learned knowledge through interactive discussions that overcame the barriers of time and place constraints. The eighth week learning module included a summative evaluation of the program completed by the participants to determine perceptions concerning program participation.

Participants

The online review session for the Class A evaluation had a maximum enrollment of thirty participants. The Senior Certification Coordinator of the LPGA T & CP Membership identified and notified the 46 eligible Class B LPGA T & CP members about the online review session opportunity. Eligibility included the completion of a two-year cycle as a Class B LPGA T & CP member. Additionally, participants were required to have completed all educational requirements within this timeframe and must have been first time test takers for the Class A written evaluation. Finally, participants were required to test during one of three national test site dates, and have "active" membership status. Each eligible Class B LPGA T & CP member was informed that participation in the online review session was voluntary, self-paced, and was designed with an

eight-week timeline. Participants in the LPGA T & CP Class A online review session received an email from the Senior Certification Coordinator of the LPGA T & CP Membership prior to the start date of the online review session. The email outlined the purpose, course content, and login procedures for the online review program. The sample for this study was determined on a first come, first serve basis and were registered by the Senior Certification Coordinator of the LPGA T & CP Membership.

Procedures

Forty-six LPGA T & CP Class B professionals were eligible to participate in the online review session. Twenty-seven of the eligible 46 LPGA T & CP professionals registered for the online review session (59%). Twenty-two of the 27 registered LPGA T & CP professionals logged into the course at least once during the eight-week online review session (81%). Sixteen of the 22 LPGA T & CP members who logged in at least once (73%) tested for Class A certification. Table 1 provides a summary of this information.

Table 1. Summary of Eligible Participants, LPGA T & CP Class A Online Review Session

	Actual	Potential # of Participants	% of Total
Eligible Participants		46	
Registered for Online Review Session	27	46	59%
Logged Into Online Review Session	22	27	81%
Tested For Class A Written Evaluation	16	22	73%
Participated in Online Review Session and Tested for Class A Written Evaluation	13	16	81%

Data Analysis

A test of proportions was utilized for this study (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998). The experimental treatment group consisted of the 13 LPGA T & CP members who participated in the online review session for the Class A written evaluation. The control group was the 49 LPGA T & CP Class A test takers who did not receive educational intervention. The test of proportions determined if there was a difference between the pass percentage rate of the Class A first time test takers who participated in the online review session and the pass percentage rate of the Class A first time test takers who did not participate in the intervention.

Results

Test scores for the 13 online review session participants and the 49 first time test takers who did not participate in the intervention are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. LPGA T & CP Class A Written Evaluation

	Mean Test Score	SD	Passed Successfully	Unsuccessful in Passing	Total Test Takers	% Passed
Review Session	80.8	4.9	8	5	13	62%
No Educational Intervention	78.1	7.9	23	26	49	47%

* 100 Questions

** Score of 80+ indicates successful completion of written evaluation

Eight of the 13 participants from the online review session (62%) were successful in passing the LPGA T & CP Class A written evaluation. Twenty-three of the 49 first time test takers in 2005 who did not receive educational intervention (47%) successfully passed the LPGA T & CP Class A written evaluation. A test of proportions of independent samples (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998) determined there was not a statistically significant increase ($z=.94$, $p>.05$) in the pass percentage rate of the online review session participants (62%) when compared to the pass percentage rate of the test takers who did not receive educational intervention (47%).

Lesson

The study provided a strong foundation for improving pass rate percentages and academic performances of the LPGA T & CP Membership written evaluation. Observed behaviors of participants and extensive time lapse documentations serve as vital learning tools that may be used to establish a foundation for future interventions. Conclusions drawn from observations may serve the LPGA T & CP intention to expand online training to its membership. This long-term intention warrants additional discussion.

Discussion

Pass rate percentage and average test scores were higher for online review session participants as compared to the same for test takers not participating in the educational intervention (Table 2). The higher pass rate percentage and average test scores, however, were not of statistical significance. Additionally, the online review session participants who did not successfully pass the Class A written evaluation missed the passing score, on average, by a smaller number of points when compared to the number of points associated with those not receiving intervention. The online review session participants missed a passing score on average by 4 points, and test takers not receiving intervention missed a passing score on average by 7.6 points.

Twenty-seven of 46 eligible LPGA T & CP members voluntarily signed up to participate in the online review session, 22 logged in at least once, 19 logged in only twice, and 13 actively participated and tested for the Class A written evaluation, a requirement for the study. Unexpectedly, only 48% of the registered participants followed through with their intentions to fully participate in the sessions. This low number seemingly supports McLaughlin and Berman's (1997) claim that the best educational products in unmotivated hands are unlikely to fulfill their promise.

The study's online review session incorporated self-regulatory variables known to improve academic performance; self-evaluations, discussion postings, and practice tests. A self-evaluation was recommended at the beginning (formative) and at the end (summative) of the online review program. Research has shown that self-evaluation activities positively influence academic pursuits (Bandura & Locke, 2003, Schunk, 1991, Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1991). The self-evaluation at the beginning of the eight-week session requested participants to share their expectations, goals, fears and/or concerns for the online review session. The self-evaluation at the end of the eight-week online review session requested reflection on their online review session experience. All participants submitted a self-evaluation at the beginning of the online review session; however, only four of the 13 participants submitted their final self-evaluation exercise (31%). Of the four final self-evaluation submissions, two were submitted by successful test takers, and two were submitted by unsuccessful test takers.

The present study also included discussion postings. Discussion postings incorporated topics of time management, study tips, and specific Class 'A' written test course-related content. Findings from the study discovered that, of the five participants who were not successful in passing the Class A written evaluation, three participated in only 20% of the discussion postings and two participated in 50%. Furthermore, two of the participants who were unsuccessful at passing the Class A written evaluation were two points shy of a passing score, and one participant was one point shy of achieving a passing score. Online education typically offers learners more control over their study level, involvement, and time performing tasks. Minority and adult populations,

reflected in the sample of participants, have external responsibilities and are at a greater risk of underachievement (William, Goldstein, and Goldstein, 2002). Unfortunately, a possible explanation for some participants not successfully passing the Class A written evaluation may be consistent with William, Goldstein, and Goldstein (2002) and Brown (2001). Brown (2001) found learners skipped vital practice areas critical for building understanding of the material, moved quickly through training, and completed less than 70% of the recommended practice. There is no shortcut to success as shown by the unsuccessful test takers in the study who submitted minimal discussion postings (Fullan & Watson, 2000). Successful participants reported the following number of discussion postings; one posted 86%, three posted 75%, two posted 50%, and two posted 38% of the recommended discussion postings.

Overall participation in the discussion portion of the review session was lower than expected given the specific test-related review material offered and review session protocol provided to each participant prior to registering. It appears that participants utilized the modules for information gathering rather than interaction; participants read the majority of posts but had only 10% participation in the discussion threads. Additionally, the review session instructor posted six messages of encouragement during the eight-week session, requesting active participation in the discussion threads.

Participants in the study were also offered practice tests after each unit of study. Research has indicated practice tests positively impact academic performances (Glenberg et al., 1987, Balch, 1998, Zimmerman, 2000, Dihoff et. al., 2004). Participants in the present study completed 90% of the practice tests. Surprisingly, one unsuccessful participant only completed four of the six practice tests during the online review session, not allowing for feedback to occur for academic performance assessment. Conversely, seven of the eight successful test takers who participated in the study completed all of the practice tests. Zimmerman (2000) reported feedback from practice tests established standards of performance and subsequently motivated students to invest additional time, effort, and potential strategy refinement to achieve academic success.

Three of the 16 online review session participants, all of whom tested on one of the three designated test dates, did not participate in the six discussion postings and had only partial participation in the six practice quizzes. For the purpose of determining if participation in the online review would increase the pass rate percentage when compared to the 2005 first time test takers who did not receive intervention, the results of the 13 LPGA T & CP members who participated in discussions and practice quizzes were used for analysis and discussion. The results of the three LPGA T & CP members who did not participate in the discussion postings and had only partial participation in the practice quizzes were included in the results of the first time test takers who did not receive the intervention. Thus, the pass rate of the 13 online review session participants was compared to the pass rate of the forty-nine first time test takers in 2005 who did not receive educational intervention.

Finally, and with great concern, an LPGA T & CP member may experience a gap of time between their final National Education Program (NEP) seminar and their personally selected date of testing for the Class A written evaluation. The NEP, a required in-person seminar, provides valuable test preparatory materials for the Class A written evaluation. The participants in the study encountered extensive time lapses between their last educational seminar attendance and their chosen Class A written evaluation test date. Those unsuccessful at passing the Class A written evaluation experienced an average time lapse of 11 months. First time Class A test takers who did not receive the educational intervention averaged a 15 month gap between their seminar attendance and national test date.

Implications

The current state of technological resource development creates boundless opportunities for education and career enhancement for the LPGA T & CP Membership. The study proved successful in that it resulted in improving pass rates and academic performances on written

evaluations. The following recommendations were rendered by lessons learned from the inaugural online educational offering for the LPGA sport organization.

Future online review sessions should allow all test takers an opportunity to participate in the online review session, not limiting participation to first time test takers. Results from the 2005 LPGA T & CP Class A written evaluations indicated a 36% pass rate for second attempts, a 14% pass rate for third attempts, and an 8% pass rate for all others. In addition, online review sessions should be created and implemented for Class B and Apprentice written evaluation test takers.

Interestingly, an unexpected large number of LPGA T & CP members registered for the online sessions, but only 48% of the registered participants logged in, participated, and tested for the Class A written evaluation. This attrition rate should be addressed. Additionally, there was an unexpected, but critical finding of low levels of participation during the eight-week session. The authors believe non-existent posting and reply requirements impacted such levels. Thus, recommendations for future online review sessions would include a required number of postings and replies during the discussion component and a minimum recorded proficiency on practice quizzes prior to the participant's advancement to the next unit of study.

Finally, time lapses between formal education and actual test date averaged up to 15 months. Future online review sessions should be strategically offered within time interval considerations. Study strategies and suggested timelines for test preparation activities could also be offered to participants incurring a lengthy time period before their selected test date. This type of structure could assist those members who demonstrate procrastination tendencies. An overwhelming 77% of the online review session participants in the study expressed procrastination tendencies.

The study provided a strong foundation for improving pass rate percentages and academic performances of the LPGA T & CP Membership. Findings resulted in a 15% increase in pass rate percentage, a higher average test score for participants, and fewer points shy of a passing score by the unsuccessful test takers. The recommendations discussed would be complimentary to the findings of the study and influential to future academic performances on LPGA T & CP written evaluations.

References

- Balch, W. R. (1998). Practice versus review exams and final exam performance. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25(3), pp. 181-185.
- Bandura, A. & Locke, E. A. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(1), pp. 87-99.
- Biddington, C., Popovich, M., Kupczyk, N., & Roh, J. (2005). Certified athletic trainers' management of emergencies. *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation*, 14(2), pp. 185-94.
- Brown, K. G. (2001). Using computers to deliver training: Which employees learn and why? *Personnel Psychology*, 54(2), pp. 271-295.
- Cho, W. (2000). Just-in-time education: Tools for hospitality managers of the future?; *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12(1), pp. 31-40.
- Dihoff, R. E., Brosvic, G. M., Epstein, M. L., & Cook, M. J. (2004). Provision of feedback during preparation for academic testing: Learning is enhanced by immediate but not delayed feedback. *Psychological Record*, 54(2), pp. 207-231.

- Fullan, M. & Watson, N. (2000). School-based management: Reconceptualizing to improve learning outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 11(4), pp. 453-473.
- Glenberg, A. M., Sanocki, T., Epstein, W., & Morris, C. (1987). Enhancing calibration of comprehension. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*: 116, pp. 119-136.
- Hinkle, D. E., Wiersma, W., & Jurs, S. G. (1998). *Applied Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*, 4th ed., Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- McLaughlin, M. W. & Berman, P. (1997). Implementation as mutual adaptation: Change in classroom organization. In D. J. T. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The Curriculum Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Rahman, M. (2001). Faculty Recruitment Strategies for Online Programs. *Journal Of Distance Learning Administration*. IV (IV).
- Rimington, M. (1999). Vocational education: Challenges for hospitality Management in the new millennium. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 11(4), pp. 186-191.
- Schunk, D. H. (1991). Self-efficacy and academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 26, pp. 207-231.
- Schrum, L. (2002) Dimension and Strategies for Online Success: Voices from Experienced Educators. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*. 6(1). Accessed from the WWW: http://www.aln.org/alnweb/journal/Vol6_issue1/6_1schrum.htm
- Wiksten, D. (2004). Specialty certifications in athletic training. *Athletic Therapy Today*, 9(4), p. 1
- Williams, K., Goldstein, D., & Goldstein, J. (2002). Improving the study habits of minority students through web-based courses. *TechTrends*, 46(2), pp. 21-28.
- Zak, J. L. & Sullivan, P. (1992). Alternative career paths in physical education: Fitness and Exercise. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., (ED351320).
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich, & M. Seidner (Eds.). *Self-regulation: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 13-39). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Zimmerman, B. J. & Kitsantas, A. (1999). Acquiring writing revision skill: Shifting from process to outcome self-regulatory goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(2), pp. 241-250.

Manuscript received 29 Aug 2006; revision received 23 Oct 2006



This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)