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**CIS Major Proposal**  
***Sports Journalism: The Meaning of Sport***

*Description:*

Sports can be used as a vehicle to explore societal patterns and values. This has been suggested in recent years, as both broadcast and print journalists have tackled ethical and sensitive issues such as steroid use and recruiting scandals. No longer is the sports journalist present only to dissect box scores, analyze statistics and produce game recaps. The role of these journalists is changing. Sports talk radio, podcasts, television shows devoted to sports commentary as well as regular columnists who are committed to discussing sports topics are relatively new societal notions. The idea that sports can provoke expanded learning on societal standards begins with one person – the sports journalist.

*Rationale:*

Sports in society are no longer simply diversions for a Saturday afternoon but have evolved to become a true cultural phenomenon. Why do fans become so enthralled by their team's performance? How and why is emotion captivated to the extreme after a spectacular catch or shot? Emotion begins and ends with the sports journalist; without them, sports in our society would not be nearly as entertaining.

The liberal arts education stresses one to be open-minded while being creative at the same time. I believe that looking through the lens of sports journalism in order to zoom in on greater societal values is the best way I can seek greater understanding in an increasingly diverse and complex society. Another prevalent aspect of the liberal arts education is the acquiring of knowledge from several disciplines for a single, broader goal. I plan on utilizing St. Olaf resources, which will fit into three distinct sub-areas: the writing, sociological, and media aspects of sport. This will lead to further understanding.

*Inspiration and Preparation:*

Sports have been part of my daily life ever since I was a child and knew how to turn on ESPN. Every day begins with the sports section of the newspaper and typically ends with a glance at ESPN.com to research any developing stories. I have been involved in sports journalism in any way possible over the years – whether it be frequent calls to KFAN (the Minneapolis-St. Paul ESPN radio affiliate) to discuss sports or writing about them whenever I had the chance. For me, I follow the writers and the commentators often more than the players because it is the journalists that I have shared a special relationship with for twenty years.

Even after relocating to Minnesota from the Los Angeles area when I was in third grade, I still listened to Vince Scully, the legendary Dodgers' commentator of 50 years nearly every night via the internet. It was him that wished me a "very pleasant good

evening to you, wherever you may be” time and time again. No matter what grade I may have received on a test that day, it didn’t matter; the evening was now pleasant.

Another example is Jim Murray, the late Los Angeles Times beat writer who captured the essence of sport every time he wrote. Such profound quotes as, “Willie Mays' glove is where triples go to die,” and “baseball is a game where a curve is an optical illusion, a screwball can be a pitch or a person, stealing is legal and you can spit anywhere you like except in the umpire's eye or on the ball.” Murray said it best when he described the role of the journalist, “I find most people hate to be informed. People need to be amused, shocked... or angered.” The language of sport, as Murray demonstrates, is profound, poetic and insightful.

I am prepared to tackle the challenge of an independent, exploratory course of study. In the first two weeks at St. Olaf my first year, I began to write for the Manitou Messenger sports section. After writing three articles, I was promoted to Sports Editor, a job that prompted my creation of this proposal. Being a part of the newspaper has showed me the dedication and patience that an editor must embrace. I also have learned the layout process, the copy-editing process as well as many computer skills necessary to be successful in the journalism industry.

I also plan to utilize off-campus resources to participate in an internship to gain some vital experience and plan to either carry out my duties as Messenger Sports Editor or as Executive Editor my entire time at St. Olaf. Following my undergraduate education, I’d like to further my study of sports journalism at the graduate and professional level.

*Course List:*

\*\* Completed

\* In progress

Writing aspect

- GE 111I (FYW-Writing to Change the World)\*\*  
This course stressed the idea of using writing to try to influence others, which is a principal theme of sports journalism. We also were required to write one piece in which we took the standpoint that we didn’t personally believe in, which can be a valuable tool in writing about ideas you *do* believe in because understanding the opposing viewpoint is essential. Every paper I wrote, I had the freedom to choose our topic and every one of mine was sports related. I was able to write about my viewpoint of steroids in baseball, the controversy surrounding big time college athletic scandals, as well as my admiration for Vince Scully, whom I mentioned above.
- ENG 255 (Journalistic Writing)  
This course will provide a broad overview of the journalism world. The focus of topics will range from hard news, features, editorials, art and entertainment reviews, business as well as sports. Not only will I have the opportunity to write and explore sports related pieces, I will also learn about the other “sections” of a newspaper and the similarities and differences that exist within them. In addition, proper copy editing techniques and UPI/AP Style will be addressed.
- ENG 251 (Creative Writing: Nonfiction)\*

One of the key components of sports writing is the inspiration and personal reflection that directly affects the finished product. In this course, I will create personal essays, memoirs and book and film reviews, all relevant to sports literature. Another part of this course is the cultural criticism aspect. Effective sports writers tie culture in with larger issues in sport they find relevant, and pose questions and attempt to find answers. I will have the option of choosing my writing topics.

- ENG 373 (Advanced Nonfiction Writing Workshop)  
The purpose of this course is to explore the personal essay through advanced writing strategies that involve lyrical prose and creative journalism. This course will build on ENG 251 (Creative Writing: Nonfiction) and also allow freedom of choice of sports related topics.

#### Societal aspect

- IS 202 (Top: Sports in Society)\*  
This course examines the heavy influence that sport has on culture. In this course, we have discussed images of sport that surround us every day. This idea of sport images is relevant in sports journalism because these images often start and end with the journalist. Most importantly, this course provides a theoretical framework for analyzing sport and understanding the widespread influence of sport. Ideas for sports journalists are sparked from these types of questions that are related to larger societal influences.
- AMST 100 (Perspectives of American Culture)  
This course provides a broad framework for analyzing various topics of American culture. Nearly every aspect of American culture can be applied to sport in some way, and this course will allow myself to see how certain aspects of culture affect sport and vice versa. Part of this course is about how we define culture and how we experience culture every day. This course will also allow me to take advantage of writing opportunities so I can draw connections between sport and American culture.
- PED 290 (Sport Ethic in Society)  
This course will focus on ethical decision making and the analysis of ethical issues related to the world of sport. Many relevant sports-related questions will be addressed. Journalism opportunities will be available as the course is writing-intensive.
- SOAN 264 (Race & Class in America Culture)  
In this course, the focus will be on the increasingly diverse U.S., and the influence of race and class on American culture. The significance of color is discussed; how much of an influence does color still play into contemporary sport? Class is addressed; is sport available to those that are members of the lower class? Last, immigration is a focus; is sport influencing immigration decisions?

NOTE: Depending on the topic, American Studies 200 may fall under the “societal” category. The topic has yet to be determined. If sport connections can be drawn, the course will be a part of the CIS sequence.

#### Media aspect

- MEDIA 160 (Mass Media)  
This course provides a framework of looking at media (print and electronic forms) from the perspective that we often consume media unethically and uninformed. By examining the influence of media, I will be able to better understand how and why

people are influenced by certain types of styles of media and not others. As a journalist, the goal is to affect a widespread audience that carries multiple perspectives. This will be possible with the understanding and framework for how society interprets media.

- MEDIA 260 (Media and Contemporary Culture)  
This course builds on the ideas and interpretations from MEDIA 160. The primary focus of this class is on film and television, although there is overlap with print forms. Televised sport dominates television coverage all week long and every week of the year. Hundreds of networks are devoted to covering sports 24 hours a day. What does this indicate about American culture? One of the primary questions of this course is how this type of media provides numerous questions about society and opportunities for cultural negotiation.
- ART 117 (Foundation for Digital Media)  
Our society is moving away from traditional newspaper journalism and moving towards digital media via graphics and the ever-changing opportunities via the internet. This course explores graphic design, digital reproduction and representation and how traditional media has changed. In addition, web page design is a factor of the course, which is beneficial because of the freedom of expression, sport-related or not, on the internet (e.g., blogging)
- IS 391 – Possible internship with newspaper or television network. Senior Project, see below.
- IS 392 – Senior Project, see below.

NOTE: I'd like to pursue an independent study related to how sports journalism has changed in the last five to ten years. Ideally, this will occur Interim 2008.

#### *Web Portfolio:*

The contents of the CIS Major in sports journalism will be displayed on the CIS Web Portfolio website. Because many of the courses I have chosen are writing intensive, I plan on having coursework available for viewing. Each piece of writing will have a separate document in .PDF format. In addition, there will be access to each article I have written for the newspaper on a separate page. On the index (home) page, I will have a link to my proposal, rationale, and a list of courses. You will be able to click on those courses and see coursework from each course. Also, a link to my senior project will be available, as well as useful links related to sports journalism.

#### *Senior Project:*

For my senior project, I would like to “be” a sports journalist. I would begin with picking a sport (based on the season in which I would do this) and then picking a team, college or pro, within that sport. I would cover the team as a beat writer would, tracking their every move (acquisitions, injury report, statistics, game recaps, etc.). In addition to my beat responsibilities, I would write an article once a week about an overarching issue or an issue within the sport in general. This would be along the lines of commentary and opinion, whereas a beat writer typically only reports fact. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this project would be to gain the insight of a ESPN sports anchor, whom I know

personally, who has critiqued my writing before. The idea would be to understand and demonstrate “what it takes” to become a journalist at the highest level. Our formal communication would be done through e-mail and attachments, so I would have a before and after visual.