

## Secret Behind the Success

By: Amanda Brungs, AVCA Awards & Membership Specialist

One may wonder who takes the time to stuff all the registration bags at the AVCA Convention or who the people are that introduce convention speakers, collect evaluations and check badges at parties and receptions. These small details may go unnoticed, but to the instructors and select group of students in the sport management program at Wayne State College, it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

Wayne State and the AVCA have developed a partnership in selecting the elite group of students that receive the opportunity to volunteer the AVCA Annual Convention. Jeff Meyer, instructor of sport management at Wayne State, has been bringing students to work at the AVCA Convention since 2003 in Dallas. Since its origin in the early 1990's, the sport management program at Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska has been deemed as one of the top majors on campus. Created by Dr. Lenny Klaver, the Sport Management major boasts a membership of 115 students, not including minors, and 34 in the graduate program.

The undergraduate program, typically completed in four years, provides a bachelor of science in sport management. The total program is 125 hours, 55 specifically towards sport management, and students must maintain an average grade point average of 2.5 or higher. Students are required to complete a practicum of 60 hours and the program culminates with a 15-16 week internship with a minimum of 600 hours of work.

Students enrolled in the graduate program, a program that can be completed primarily online, work to obtain a master of science degree in organizational management with a specialization in sports and recreation management. Although the program titles differ, they both follow the curriculum posted by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), an organization that "promotes, stimulates, and encourages study, research, scholarly writing, and professional development in the area of sport management – both theoretical and applied aspects" (<http://www.nassm.com>).

Once a student at Wayne State himself, Meyer completed his master of science degree in sport management, knowing it was an up-and-coming field, and wanting to stay actively involved with athletics. Upon graduation, he ventured to the University of Wyoming where he obtained the title of Associate Athletics Counselor. In this position, he worked with the volleyball team and the assistant coach at that time, former AVCA Senior Director of Membership and Event Services, Mark McCloskey. When McCloskey left Wyoming to work with the AVCA, he contacted Meyer with an opportunity that Meyer couldn't resist. "Mark had a chance for our kids to work hard and in return have something great to add to their resumes," Meyer said.

Along with the standard resume and cover letter, students within the sport management program are encouraged to be actively involved beyond the classroom, performing tasks such as game-day operations through Wayne State Athletics, working with local charities and providing food for the local food pantries. "It isn't just class work," Meyer explained. "We ask you to go beyond that."

The signature opportunity for students in the program to go beyond class work is the AVCA Convention. The number of applicants varies from year to year, but on average 20-25 students try for the opportunity, and 4-5 are selected to attend.

"Very rarely can you find a long-term partnership that is a picture of 'win-win', but the AVCA has it with Wayne State College," says Kathy DeBoer, AVCA Executive Director. "The help we get from the students is critical to the success of the AVCA Convention, and the experience of a 'boot-on-the-ground' event is invaluable for them."

When asked what kinds of expectations are set for the chosen students, Meyer expressed the importance of not being afraid to get “outside the box”. He tells his students: “You will introduce speakers. You will shag balls on courts, indoor or sand. Meet new people and do not be afraid to jump in and help. Any task is an important task. You get to see the intricacies of how the AVCA works with volleyball coaches from all over the country. We, in some small part, are a volunteer and through how we work and greet people, helps makes the convention very worthwhile for the attendees.”

Garrett Biller volunteered in 2005 in San Antonio, and was able to gain a wealth of information that has impacted his career today as the assistant men’s soccer coach at Northern Illinois University. “Helping out with the AVCA in conjunction with Wayne State College was a very fulfilling experience teaching me not only lessons about self-excellence but also the drive to run a top-class event with the highest of standards,” Biller said.

Each convention experience provides great memories for both Meyer, as well as the students who volunteer. “My favorite part of the convention is meeting and rekindling of the friendships of people that you meet,” Meyer reflected. “I think when you meet new folks and coaches and working with people that want the opportunity to make their event better than it was the year before, gives you a sense that what you’re teaching the students in the classroom is valuable and worthwhile.”

For the students, Meyer believes the most enjoyable part is gaining the experience that often gives them an advantage when interviewing for jobs. “We brought a student to the AVCA Convention who is now the clubhouse manager for the Palm Beach Cardinals. He had an opportunity to work a championship event and now he’s got a World Series ring with the Cardinals, the same ring that Albert Pujols has! It’s hands-on, puts you with corporate sponsors and banquet events, but also forces you to interact, and I hope the development of interpersonal skills that Wayne State and sport management provides them is a continuance for the students.”

One former student, Dixie Davis III, currently interning as the Director of Operations for women’s basketball at Creighton University, said the following about his experience working at the AVCA Annual Convention: “The AVCA has given me ample experience in all aspects in the production of a convention within the field of sport. It has instilled qualities and traits that I am putting towards an internship right now at Creighton.”

Many students have walked away from this opportunity with a knowledge that has helped them in their careers today. Jeremy Foote volunteered at the 2007 AVCA Annual Convention in Sacramento. “Working with the AVCA gave me great experience in knowing how much hard work and how many people it takes to pull off such a great event,” said Foote. “The knowledge I gained helps me in my current position as a media relations contact for the University of Nebraska track and field team.”

Some students choose to enter a field outside of sports, but can still apply the convention experience in some facet. “Working with the AVCA not only sent me to some of the best volleyball games I will ever see, but it also taught me how to put together a really great event. Working with the AVCA prepared me for my career as the Blood Drive Recruiter at the Nebraska Community Blood Bank,” said former student Ashlee Deeds.

As the popularity and success of the sport management program continues to grow, so do the numbers. Currently, Meyer, Chad Maas and Cameron Geisert make up the sport management faculty, but as students continue to pursue this field of study, the number of faculty will also increase. “I think the sports industry, as ever-changing as it is, there is a niche for everyone and the job opportunities are there if you’re willing to work,” Meyer said. “If someone says, ‘No, I don’t want to do this’, there are 99 people behind him that will step in and do it.”

The future of this program is limitless as to how the AVCA and Wayne State College can assist each other. "The rewards, I hope they're financial, but the networking that's available for students will continue to grow in all aspects of this. The future with the AVCA, we hope to keep this partnership going for as long as the AVCA will have us because I think it's ever-changing and I think Wayne State College has something to offer," said Meyer. "The volunteers who help with the AVCA Convention are, without question, the lifeblood of the event, and the Wayne State program is a key component of that endeavor," said Will Engle, AVCA Assistant Director of Public Relations and Events, who is the staff liaison to the convention volunteer program. "There's no question it's vital to the success of our convention that Jeff and his crew are part of it in the years to come."

Having this group assist in the day-to-day functions of the AVCA Convention is vital to its continued successes, and Meyer realizes how it shapes their sport management program. "To be able to see the details behind a championship convention on a Division I volleyball level is an experience that you'll remember being a part of forever. It just makes our program viable and kids come to us because they know we do things for them."

*For more information about the AVCA, please visit [www.avca.org](http://www.avca.org).*

*For more information about Wayne State College and the Sport Management Program, please visit [http://www.wsc.edu/schools/nss/academic\\_programs/hhps/sm/](http://www.wsc.edu/schools/nss/academic_programs/hhps/sm/)*