



Sports Empowerment: From Volunteer to Host

Senior Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Esther G. Maynor Honors College
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

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Abstract

The Sports Empowerment Program (SEP) is a program that invites local high school students placed in the exceptional children classrooms to go out and participate in various sports with other members of the Robeson County community at the University of North Carolina Pembroke (UNCP) campus. I was introduced to the SEP as a freshman through the Honors College and loved the experience. Junior year, I decided to I wanted to team up with the Office of Civic and Community Engagement and host the SEP for my senior project. I working alongside Abigail Foster from the CCE to prepare for the event on March 18th. After months of planning I was not able to follow through with hosting the event but I took away a lot from this experience.

Sports Empowerment

The Sports Empowerment Program (SEP) is a program that invites local high school students placed in the exceptional children classrooms to go out and participate in various sports with other members of the Robeson County community at the University of North Carolina Pembroke (UNCP) campus. The SEP started out as an Honors College (HC) senior project and is maintained by the Office of Civic and Community Engagement at UNCP with the help of student volunteers and faculty. I wanted to focus my senior project on understanding what goes into putting on a large event and on what I could do to continue its existence and make sure it is successful. In the future, I would also like to see other students step up and keep this project linked to the Honors College as that is where its roots began.

My journey started as a freshman when I was first introduced to SEP through a service-learning class in the Honors College. Looking back on it, I enjoyed immensely that the HC is willing to support all its students in their educational opportunities. The program was in its infancy and had yet to become what it is today. It was based around the sport of softball, as there were running, throwing, catching, and hitting stations; at the end, we would all come together and play a game of softball. As just a volunteer I was instructed to guide the students through the hitting station. I would toss a whiffle ball to the students and they would swing their plastic bats to hit the ball. There were other volunteers rotating stations with the students to help those who needed it for certain tasks, making their experience as pleasant as possible. When we all came together to play the softball game, I was the pitcher for both teams to keep the consistent toss pattern they practiced with at my station.

My sophomore year I regrettably missed out on the SEP, however, my junior year I was able to volunteer again and that's when I realized how much it had changed. We were no longer playing just softball, rather we had several stations which had many different sports. There was a station for football throwing, basketball shooting, and soccer kicking. The stations were also operated and designed by the adaptive physical education class here on campus as a part of their project. The SEP had expanded so much in just a couple of years and now has other programs on campus involved. My junior year, I was at the football station where we showed the students how to throw and catch a football and had them in two lines throwing back and forth to each other. After all the students had rotated through every station, we took a break for lunch before handing out medals to all the participants before returned to their schools.

At the end of the SEP my junior year, I began talking to Sandy Jacobs about possibly having a larger role in the SEP my senior year for my senior project. Once he put me in touch with Abigail Foster, the student service leader, I began to contact her and Dr. Sandefur to be my mentor. I chose Dr. Sandefur because he was my genetics professor for that semester which also a service-learning class.

The semester of 2019 I had Dr. Sandefur again for my professor which made it easy to set up check in with him over the semester on the progress of the project as I had biweekly meetings with Abigail. Over the semester Abigail and I met with teachers of the special population class in local high schools. We called and emailed the teachers to set up days that we could drop in and talk to them and the students. The purpose of these school visits was to show our faces and become familiar with the teachers and students. We talked to the students about the field day to get them excited for it and we spoke with

the teachers about permission slips and shirt sizes for the students. Over the following weeks we received shirt sizes and a head count from each school of the students that were attending. I also met with Dr. Trendowski, a professor for the adaptive physical education class, and his students to present the project to them and their involvement. While Abigail and I set up these meetings, Sandy Jacobs was working on donations from local businesses to pay for the t-shirts for the students and lunch for the volunteers.

Unfortunately, I was unable to host the long-awaited event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. School was cancelled the week the event was supposed to take place. This was a major disappointment because of all the time put into planning the event. The most heart-breaking part of it all was that we had built up student excitement about coming to campus but could not follow through due to unforeseeable circumstances. However, this was a learning experience for me because I was able to understand what it takes to put together such a large event. It takes months of planning and working around everyone's schedule to obtain a final product that we were satisfied with. It taught me time management, teamwork, scheduling, responsibility, personability, and empathy.