

**CLEMSON UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES**  
**REQUESTING TO OFFER A NEW DEGREE PROGRAM**  
**BACHELOR OF ARTS**  
**IN**  
**SPORTS COMMUNICATION**

Submitted to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education  
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## Bachelor of Arts in Sports Communication

Academic Unit: College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

Name of Program: Sports Communication

Name of Degree: Bachelor of Arts

CIP Code: 090906

Implementation Date: August 2013

Number of Credit Hours: 120

Program Length: 4 years

STEM Applicability: No

Site: Clemson University campus, traditional delivery

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### **Justification of need for the proposed program:**

Presently, students may earn a degree in Communication Studies with an unofficial emphasis in sports communication, or non-majors may earn a minor in Sports Communication. Courses such as COMM 326 may serve as electives for students majoring in PRTM or Marketing. Unfortunately, demand regularly far exceeds available courses. Recent analyses of the department's student course request log data reveal that every sports communication-related course currently offered by the Department of Communication Studies maintains a waiting list of over 50 students each semester. Clearly, current student interest and demand indicates a timely opportunity for Clemson University to expand its course offerings in sports communication. The Department of Communication Studies is seeking to implement a new undergraduate degree program in sports communication, not only to serve the unmet needs and demand among our current students, but also to provide a more formal and concentrated emphasis in sports communication that will serve our students.

A formal degree designation is needed to reflect the importance of communication in the sports world, as sports professionals must have a comprehensive communicative foundation to be successful and competitive in today's job market. For example, media relations and public relations personnel must understand how to construct and craft persuasive and well-written messages, anticipate audience reactions, and plan and evaluate campaigns. Additionally, social media is fast becoming a dominant platform for message dissemination in the sports world, and understanding how to utilize these media channels is imperative. Understanding fan behavior and how to cultivate fans also is a crucial task for these sports professionals. These competencies extend well beyond the handful of sports communication-related courses we currently offer and are able to support on an ongoing basis with existing resources.

The new major would provide a broad-based curriculum that would prepare our students to work as sports media analysts, public relations practitioners in sports organizations, sports media relations professionals, and more. Additionally, Clemson University's recent launch of the Social Media Listening Center (SMLC), of which our department is a founding partner and collaborator, coupled with recent and planned faculty hires in the areas of social media and sports communication, interpersonal sports communication, and sports marketing communication, would allow us to provide endless opportunities for students and faculty to pursue their interests in sports communication. Whereas mass media as a whole constitutes an essential part of sports communication, it is far from the only slice of the pie. Communication also plays an integral role in the *management* of sports organizations. For example, professionals in these fields must be able to effectively assess and resolve employee communication issues, manage dissent and actively participate in policy development. Such communication skills are also central to the success of many sports careers, including coaching and directing an athletic program. Sports communication also has significant applied value in family communication settings; for example, we would address

family communication issues such as parent-child relationships and family involvement in youth sports in one of our proposed courses. Our program would also include an examination of communication and emotion in sports—for example, new studies have looked at how coaches use communication to regulate players' emotion to increase performance. Other programs that focus on training students in sports journalism or marketing fail to address these important real-life sports communication contexts. Our goal with regard to our curriculum would be to fill the gaps that are clear when looking at other institutions in creating a program that would be informative about, and applicable to, a broad range of real-world sports communication contexts and activities.

Clemson University is ideally situated between two major sports markets: Charlotte and Atlanta. Within these two markets, there are seven professional sports teams as well as racing teams and NASCAR. Our faculty will work to build relationships with these professional sports organizations to provide students with internships and other opportunities. Such relationships would enable our students to build connections that will assist them in obtaining employment after graduation. Our collaborative efforts would further extend in the coming years to other sports communication professionals as well as community youth sports agencies, providing students with multiple, diverse internship and career opportunities.

**Anticipated program demand and productivity:**

The Department of Communication Studies maintains a very popular minor in Sports Communication and an unofficial emphasis area in Sports Communication. A significant number of Communication Studies majors seek Sports Communication courses, while students from other programs with interests in sports, media, and society enroll in our Sports Communication courses to fulfill elective requirements. Many new, in- and out-of-state students consistently inquire about opportunities to study sports communication at Clemson University.

Sports hold a significant place in American culture and connect people globally. It is not surprising that many students gravitate towards sports-related courses and want to work in the sports industry. Although there are degree programs to meet some of this demand in highly specialized areas such as sports journalism, these offerings do not make communication in a broader sense the overall focus—a foundation that is critical for sports professionals. Accordingly, Clemson University's program would be one of the few programs in the country to fully equip students with the communication competencies necessary to succeed in all aspects of the sports industry and in sports communities.

Indeed, solid communication skills are essential for success in virtually every profession. According to the Job Outlook 2012 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE), among the skills, attributes, and qualities employers prize most are communication skills, a strong work ethic, ability to work in a team, and initiative (retrieved March 21, 2012 from [http://www.naceweb.org/s10262011/candidate\\_skills\\_employer\\_qualities/](http://www.naceweb.org/s10262011/candidate_skills_employer_qualities/)). We are confident that, given the current unmet demand for our major as a whole, our plans to create a program that is unmatched by any other sports communication program in the country, and students' interests and requests for all of our sports-related courses, there would be high demand from the beginning for students to enroll in the program, and for us to attract the best faculty who will share our innovative vision and ambition.

To illustrate, as our program would include the examination of the effects and use of both mass media and communication technologies as primary foci, it would offer students a unique outlet to apply their digital communication skills to answer important sports communication questions for future clients or employers. For example, in researching how a professional athlete is using Twitter as part of a required class activity, a student could identify successful and unsuccessful communication strategies, supporting the analysis with communication theory and credible, reliable research methods. Such a student could then use this experience as a selling point when interviewing for internships and jobs.

Sports communication is in its infancy, and more recognition is being given to this area of study. For example, the Communication and Sport Summit (whose annual conference Clemson hosted in 2008), an international organization, recently announced its expansion and re-formation as a non-profit organization: the International Association for Communication and Sport. Thus, sports communication, both as a professional field and an academic discipline, appears to be at a "tipping" point. In establishing our major in Sports Communication, Clemson University, already in many ways a pioneer in the sports communication movement, would be well-positioned to stand as the exemplar for Sports Communication undergraduate programs.

**Assessment of extent to which the proposed program duplicates existing programs in the state:**

To our knowledge, this new program would not duplicate any existing programs in the state. No other four-year institution in South Carolina currently offers an undergraduate major in Sports Communication.

**Relationship of the proposed program to existing programs at the proposing institution:**

The most closely related program at Clemson University is one concentration area associated with the BS degree in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management and another emphasis area in the Department of Marketing. The PRTM concentration area in Community Recreation, Sport and Camp Management (CRSCM) focuses on preparing students for programming and managerial positions in a wide variety of recreation related fields including the public and non-profit sectors such as municipal parks and recreation, state and national agencies, voluntary youth serving agencies, religious-affiliated social agencies, and university campus recreation programs. Clemson University's BS degree in Marketing features a Sports Marketing emphasis. Students pursuing this emphasis area take courses in sports marketing, services marketing, and professional selling or promotional strategy. This emphasis area prepares students for marketing careers, as graduates may pursue careers in sponsorship development, ticket sales, and community-related initiatives. Marketing is not the principal focus of the proposed program.

Faculty in our department will continue to work with the Social Media Listening Center (SMLC) to promote research and build relationships with external audiences. For example, faculty affiliated with the SMLC could work with the Clemson University Athletic Department to track discussions about Clemson athletics and summarize this data in reports to the Athletic Department. Clemson University also maintains a student-chapter of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), and the Sports Communication major could connect with this group to tackle organizational communication issues in sports (e.g., drafting social media policies for athletes and team employees, framing collective bargaining negotiations to the public, using social media to screen prospective athletes and student-athletes).

Finally, our sports communication program faculty could also partner with the Business School in offering electives that would provide students with a communicative underpinning. For example, students pursuing a BS degree in Marketing with a Sports Marketing emphasis could take electives on social media and sports marketing. We anticipate that such a course would focus on how these technologies can be used to increase ticket sales and profits as well as to help understand communication processes such as fan behavior and identification.

**Relationship of the proposed program to other institutions:**

Sports media classes have become increasingly popular at schools such as Indiana University, Michigan State, Penn State, and the University of Texas. One school, Oklahoma State University, offers an actual degree program in sports media, supported by the Welch-Bridgewater Chair of Sports Media in the School of Media and Strategic Communications. Sport-related courses at each of the universities mentioned above are offered in the context of journalism and mass communication. Auburn University offers one graduate seminar in "Sports, Media, and Culture"; Michigan State (College of Communication Arts and Sciences) offers three courses for undergraduate journalism majors: "Sports in Contemporary Media," "Contemporary Sports Reporting," and "Contemporary Sports Editing"; and the University of Nebraska (College of Journalism and Mass Communication) offers two undergraduate courses, one in "Sports Reporting" and one in "Sports Media Relations."

**Total new costs associated with implementing the proposed program:**

The program implementation would require three new faculty members hired with one new hire for each of the first three years of the program and twenty-five percent time for a program director and administrative/student support staff. Laboratory fees would be used to upgrade needed facilities and equipment for the program, and tuition return would provide the resources for faculty positions. A total of \$215,000 new allocations would be required by year 3 (phased in as (95,000 year 1; \$155,000 year 2; and \$215,000 year 3). The department would reallocate \$122,000 toward the implementation with two current faculty teaching 100% in this major.