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Kinesiology 199

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UIUC Women's Crew: Origins, History, and Progress

At the beginning of the semester, I was really excited to do this research project because I thought that I was going to get to learn more about sports injuries in athletes here at the University. I have great interest in this particular subject because I have gone through two knee surgeries in the past two years. This experience greatly changed the way I live my life. I went from doing gymnastics every day to going to physical therapy sessions three times a week. I no longer got to see my teammates and friends in the gym that I had grown accustomed to sharing my entire life with. Getting injured not only affected me physically, but emotionally, socially, and mentally as well. Because this incident has such a great effect on my life, I wanted to research how athletes at the college level dealt with injury. I wanted to discover if they felt similar feelings as I did when in the same situation.

Throughout the semester however, I learned what being a true ethnographic researcher requires and decided that my topic would not accomplish these goals. Ian Borden's article *Skateboarding, Space and the City* and Susan Brownell's article *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* really showed me how a good ethnographic researcher gathers their information. Both authors got very involved in their studies and were able to reveal a lot of inside information within their respective topics because of this. They also showed me that it is possible to do an ethnographic research on a sport, and not analyze the

mechanics behind it, which was what I was attempting to do. This gave me ideas for a new topic altogether and outlined a good plan to help me gather my data.

After learning what ethnographic research requires, I decided that I would need to steer my project away from sports injury. However, I still wanted to study some type of sport because I have been an athlete my entire life and everything about sports fascinates me. I did not want to study a common sport such as football or basketball that many people have a lot of knowledge about. Then I remembered that I have a friend that is on the rowing team at the University of Iowa. I was very surprised to learn that Universities in the Big Ten had rowing teams, and had not even heard about them before my friend informed what the sport actually is. My only exposure to the sport was seeing in the Olympics every four years and even then I had very little knowledge about it. I then learned that we have a rowing team here at the University of Illinois. I became aware of this fact on quad day, when I saw the team attempting to recruit members. One of my good friends here actually joined the team and became one of the inspirations to my ethnographic research.

Once deciding on my topic, I developed a couple of questions that would lead me during my research. I asked the following questions: When was the women's crew team established at the University of Illinois? How do the athletes manage their time between the sport and their studies? Why did members of the team become interested in the sport? How many other students on campus are aware that we have a crew team? What are the physical aspects needed to become a successful crew athlete? These questions initially guided me throughout my research and field work, but as I answered each question, many more developed that I attempted to answer through interviews, observation, and research.

Initially, I wanted to research the sport of crew and discover its history. Coming from the suburbs of Chicago, the sport is not very popular so I am not familiar with it. First, I looked in the Student Life and Culture Program to find the history of crew on this particular campus. However, the only information on crew or rowing teams here on campus was one advertisement that was attempting to recruit men for the team. The poster was documented on August 26, 1981, and essentially states that the crew team liked to party. The ad reads:

Crew
The Sport of Preps

“No one can row crew and study and party: guess what has to go.” With this in mind, we founded Crew Illini. In only one short year we are #4 in the Big 10 and we are still looking for our first shell. How did we do it? “Drinking” was the key to our success.

This semester we are looking for a few good rowers, preferably from Holy Spirit in New Jersey to carry on the Crew Illini tradition. We are also looking for lots of prep women to cheer us on to victory and to attain that goal of #1 in the Big 10.

The team really focuses on drinking and partying, but reached #4 in the Big 10 only after one year. However, there is not men’s rowing in the Big 10 or NCAA Division I currently. I was unable to find any records that confirm the information in the advertisement. Because I was unable to find any history of crew at the University of Illinois, I decided to research the history of the sport as a whole and how it came to the United States and more importantly college campuses. I found that rowing is the oldest organized sport in the world and can be dated back to the ancient Egyptians in 1430 B.C. Initially, rowing was used by the working class to transport goods and people from one place to another. However, humans are competitive by nature and the process originally used to transport goods eventually became a sport. Rowing competitions date back to the fifteen hundreds, but the first documented race occurred in London in 1716.

Eventually, the sport moved to the United States in 1843 and the first collegiate sport in the country was rowing at Yale. The sport grew very quickly and by 1875 thirteen eastern

schools had teams. However, the colleges only had men's teams, and not women's. In 1877 Wellesly College had the first women's crew team in the United States. The sport continued to grow among women and the National Women's Rowing Association was established in 1962. Currently, women's crew is the fastest growing NCAA team sport.

After studying a brief history of the sport of crew, I began to learn about the present rowing team at the University of Illinois. I learned a lot of information about the team after interviewing the coach of the women's team and one of the athletes on the team. The rowing team here on campus is currently a registered student organization and started just a few years ago. Fall of 2006 to spring of 2007 was the first year of the program. The coaching staff is currently working on the necessary paperwork to make crew a club sport, and their ultimate goal is to get the team to the NCAA Division I. The women's coach is a graduate student at the university and has been coaching here for about a year and a half. Before coming to U of I she rowed for MIT in Boston and Cambridge University in England.

There are twenty girls on the team this season and they break into three different boats: eight open weight, eight light weight, and the remaining four in a four person boat. The team practices on Homer Lake (fifteen miles east of Champaign) four times a week and has two land practices a week during the fall and spring season. The practice starts at 5:15 a.m., but they usually leave campus around 4:55 a.m. A typical practice consists of a fifteen minute warm up and sprints for about forty minutes.

During the winter season, the team practices three times a week at the ARC. I was actually fortunate enough to go and observe and participate in one of the practices. I really wanted to watch a practice where the team was actually rowing on Homer Lake, but by the time I realized I wanted to do my ethnographic research on the crew team it was already too cold to be

on the water. Despite this fact, I still learned a lot about the way the team functions from watching one of their land practices. They begin with a mile warm up jog then split into different groups to work on core, endurance, and strength. A lot of the off season practices are independent, and it is up to each individual girl to keep up with the workouts.

The races that the girls compete in are called regattas. In the fall they compete in about four regattas, and four to five in the spring. Spring is the real collegiate rowing season however. This fall the team raced in the following races: the 2008 Head of the Eagle in Indianapolis, IN; the North Shore Channel Challenge in Skokie, IL; the Washington University Parents' Day Regatta in St. Louis, Missouri; and the 2008 Head of the Rock Regatta in Rockford IL. The team has placed really well in the novice events, which means that they have been rowing for less than one year. However, most of the teams that they currently race against are at the varsity or well established club level. Some of the schools include Washington University, Notre Dame, University of Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, St. Louis, University of Chicago, and the University of Iowa.

Although the crew program is still very young at the University of Illinois, it shows great promise for success in the future. The coaching staff is very excited and committed to the progress of the team, and the athletes are just as invested. Rowing at the collegiate level takes a lot of time and hard work, but has shown a lot of reward in the athletes' lives at the university. Hopefully the team will be able to reach their goal of becoming a club team, and eventually a NCAA Division I sport. By documenting the beginnings of the sport on campus, future generations will be able to discover how the team was established and how it has evolved over time at this university.

As I stated in the beginning of this process, I had no idea what ethnographic research required and everything that I was going to accomplish this semester. I believed that it was just like any other research process, where you do research primarily in the library and do not get connected to the information. However, I learned through the readings provided in class and film clips shown how the ethnographic process works. First, I did do some initial research in order to gain a better understanding of the particular subject I chose. Doing this project allowed me to discover the Student Life and Culture Achieves. If I ever need to find any information about the history of the University of Illinois, I now know where I can find it. Following my research about rowing, I got into the true ethnographic research. I got very involved in my research and my subjects. I interviewed an athlete on the team and the coach as well. This allowed me to get to know some of the people that make up the rowing team on campus. After doing this, I participated in one of the practices. Taking part in the practice allowed me to feel how a true crew athlete lives their life, from waking up at 5:00 am to going through an entire day of classes. Doing this ethnographic research project gave me the opportunity to learn a new type of research technique and connect with my topic.

I hope that students will wish to pursue the topic of women's rowing at the University of Illinois in the coming years after viewing my particular EUI project. I feel very lucky that I was able to document the beginning years of this growing club sport for future generations to view. It is necessary for the university to continue archiving the rowing team's development of the sport on campus and their results from the races. It is my hope that the coaches will also take initiative to send in their results to the university so that they can be viewed by students and faculty. I began documenting the University of Illinois women's rowing team, and hope that it

will aid others in the future with whatever type of research they may choose to pursue about our great university.

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2008 North Shore Channel Challenge

Skokie, Illinois

October 5, 2008

Women's Varsity 4

Place	Crew	Time
1	Washington University-Boat A	16:38
2	Michigan State-Boat A	16:57
3	North Park (exhb.)	16:58
4	Washington University-Boat B	17:05
5	Northwestern University-Boat A	17:17
6	University of Illinois-Boat A	18:02
7	Northwestern University-Boat B	18:07

Women's Varsity 8

Place	Crew	Time
1	Washington University-Boat A	15:04
2	Michigan State-Boat A	15:25
3	Northwestern University-Boat A	16:08
4	Augustana University-Boat A	17:19
5	University of Illinois-Boat A	17:52

Women's Novice 8

Place	Crew	Time
1	North Park University-Boat A	9:38
2	North Park University-Boat B	10:29
3	University of Illinois-Boat A	10:47
4	Washington University-Boat A	10:59

2008 Head of the Rock Regatta

Rockford, Illinois

October 12, 2008

Womens Collegiate Novice 4+

Place	Crew	Time
1	MU Rowing Club	21:11:80
2	Marquette University	21:33:60
3	University of Illinois Rowing	21:42:30
4	University of St. Thomas Crew- Boat A	21:55:60
5	University of Nebraska Lincoln	23:31:10
6	Macalester College Crew	23:39:90
7	University of St. Thomas Crew- Boat B	24:19:90

Womens Open Lightweight 4+

Place	Crew	Time
1	New Trier High School Rowing	19:13:90
2	Kansas University Crew Club	19:17:30
3	Ignatius Chicago Rowing Assoc.	20:49:90
4	Marquette University	21:17:30
5	MU Rowing Club	22:11:40
6	Iowa State University Crew	22:50:90
7	University of Illinois Crew	26:29:30

Womens Collegiate Novice 8+

Place	Crew	Time
1	University of Notre Dame-Boat A	17:29:50
2	University of Wisconsin-Boat A	17:33:70
3	University of Wisconsin-Boat B	18:14:00
4	University of Wisconsin-Boat C	18:23:70
5	University of Notre Dame-Boat B	19:29:50
6	University of Wisconsin-Boat D	19:43:60
7	Creighton Womens Rowing	20:08:30
8	Marquette University-Boat A	21:02:50
9	Kansas University Crew Club	21:37:30
10	Marquette University-Boat B	21:44:30
11	University of Illinois Rowing-Boat A	22:14:70
12	University of St. Thomas Crew-Boat A	22:18:90

13	University of Nebraska Lincoln	22:21:00
14	University of Notre Dame-Boat C	22:25:60
15	University of Illinois Rowing-Boat B	22:56:50
16	University of St. Thomas Crew-Boat B	24:08:80

Womens Collegiate 8+

Place	Crew	Time
1	University of Wisconsin-Boat A	15:51:40
2	University of Iowa-Boat A	16:16:40
3	University of Wisconsin-Boat B	16:19:00
4	University of Minnesota-Boat A	16:24:10
5	University of Notre Dame-Boat A	16:37:40
6	University of Notre Dame-Boat B	16:41:60
7	University of Wisconsin-Boat C	16:55:10
8	Purdue University-Boat A	16:56:70
9	University of Notre Dame-Boat C	16:58:80
10	University of Minnesota-Boat B	16:59:90
11	University of Wisconsin-Boat D	17:04:10
12	University of Wisconsin-Boat E	17:13:30
13	University of Iowa-Boat B	17:13:40
14	University of Minnesota-Boat C	17:25:80
15	University of Iowa-Boat C	17:49:80
16	Purdue University-Boat B	17:59:30
17	University of Notre Dame-Boat D	18:15:00
18	Creighton University	18:31:20
19	University of St. Thomas-Boat A	19:07:70
20	Kansas University	19:35:80
21	University of Chicago	19:48:80
22	Marquette University	19:51:60
23	Macalester College	20:24:00
24	University of Illinois	20:41:00
25	University of Notre Dame-Boat E	21:02:30
26	University of St. Thomas-Boat B	21:18:70
27	University of Notre Dame-Boat F	22:09:30

Washington University Parent's Day Regatta 2008

Creve Coeur Lake, Missouri

October 26, 2008

Womens 8

Place	Crew	Time
1	Washington University	13:38
2	University of Illinois	14:29
3	University of Chicago	15:26
4	University of Missouri	15:44

Womens 4+ (A)

Place	Crew	Time
1	Washington University	13:03
2	University of Illinois	14:38
3	University of Missouri	15:02
4	University of Chicago	16:10

Womens 4+ (B)

Place	Crew	Time
1	Washington University (B)	16:12
2 (Tie)	Washington University (A)	16:35
2 (Tie)	University of Missouri	16:35
4	University of Illinois	18:04

2008 Head of the Eagle Regatta

Indianapolis, Indiana

November 1, 2008

Women's Open 4+ A&B-Final

Place	Crew	Time
1	Grand Valley State University Rowing Team-Boat A	00:17:17:12
2	Drake University Womens Rowing-Boat A	00:17:57:13
3	Grand Valley State University Rowing Team-Boat B	00:18:00:79
4	University of Dayton Crew-Boat A	00:18:13:82
5	Drake University Womens Rowing-Boat B	00:18:14:78
6	University of Dayton Crew-Boat B	00:18:28:84
7	University of Chicago Crew-Boat A	00:19:31:89
8	Northwestern University Crew- Boat A	00:19:36:12
9	Rowing Club at Baylor University-Boat A	00:19:57:12
10	John Carroll University Crew- Boat A	00:20:03:29
11	Purdue University Crew-Boat A	00:20:11:04
12	Northwestern University Crew- Boat B	00:20:36:96
13	Purdue University Crew-Boat B	00:20:40:09
14	University of Illinois Rowing- Boat A	00:22:19:88
15	Butler University-Boat A	00:24:52:10