

UW Partners with Fierce to Give Students Real-World Skills

Background

Higher education has changed. Cutting-edge institutions know learners seek active participation. Today's students want to be involved—through candid discussions, real-world experience and strong in-person and online networks.

The University of Washington (UW) Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership (IAL) master's degree program epitomizes the new style of learning. Students begin with an intensive 8-week academic curriculum. Then gain relevant, real-world experience through internships in colleges, universities and sports organizations across the country.

The key to this non-traditional approach? Learning to communicate effectively—both in the classroom and in the workplace.

Challenges

Most master's programs take two years to complete. The IAL degree is completed in one. The first challenge for faculty and advisors is to help students establish a constructive learning cohort in a compressed timeframe.

"The Fierce models help [students] express [great] ideas and work well in groups—openly, honestly, and directly."

— Sara Lopez
Co-Director
Center for Leadership in Athletics

"Building trust and learning to communicate effectively in a short amount of time is critical," said Sara Lopez, Co-Director, Center for Leadership in Athletics. "There's no time to sit in the corner and take notes. Participation is immediate."

In addition, students need practical tools to use during their fieldwork. Like most industries, intercollegiate sports is about networking. *"Any conversation can make a huge difference," said Lopez. "Every guest speaker that comes to the classroom, people you meet in your internship—any one of*

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The University of Washington Masters of Education in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership (IAL) is a unique degree program that prepares those who aspire to leadership positions within intercollegiate sports.

CHALLENGES

- Establishing a constructive learning cohort in a compressed timeframe
- Sharpening networking skills prior to internship
- Preparing to connect effectively at every opportunity

SOLUTIONS

- Collective communication framework for classroom and fieldwork
- Current, real-world concepts, models and tools
- Professional peer network for ongoing support

WHAT CHANGED

- Improved professionalism among students
- Increased influence without authority
- Greater understanding of the potential of every conversation





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these people could teach you something new. They could be your mentor, your advocate...or open the door to your future."

Missing from the curriculum was real-world communication skills for engaging in honest, powerful conversations whenever and wherever the opportunity arose.

Solutions

To address the challenges, the UW IAL program decided to add "Fierce Conversations" to the first week of the curriculum. The language and framework provides a springboard for effective communication—first in the classroom where students push through a large volume of academic work, and then in the field where they forge new relationships.

"Students come from a variety of backgrounds, and they come in with a lot of great ideas," said Lopez. "The Fierce models help them express those ideas and work well in groups—openly, honestly and directly."

"Another major benefit is the concepts we teach students are the same concepts taught to executives around the world," said Jim Antony, Co-Director, Center for Leadership in Athletics and Founding Director, IAL program. "We don't just prepare our students for the classroom; we prepare them for the real world. We give them current tools for today's workforce that grow with them as they gain seniority."

Students learn to lead in entry-level positions as well as when they assume senior leadership roles. *"They learn to articulate ideas effectively and tactfully,"* said Antony. *"And to be true leaders—no matter what level they enter an organization."*

What is a learning cohort?

A learning cohort is a collaborative community made up of individuals going through the same educational experience. Learning cohorts humanize education and encourage diverse perspectives.



Because students have spent time building relationships within the learning cohort during summer session, they have an immediate community of practice—with a shared communication toolkit—when they begin their internships. Once students complete the program, the community becomes a professional peer network that provides ongoing support, guidance, and even recommendations as students take on professional positions in the industry.



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What Changed

Since Fierce joined the UW IAL curriculum in 2010, Lopez and Antony have received many compliments about the professionalism of their students. Interactions have improved and students are more comfortable seeking out diverse perspectives and asking tough questions.

"I use the Fierce techniques to confront the issues and not the people. The techniques have helped me have much calmer and more productive conversations and build more trusting relationships."

— Rebekah Ray
M. Ed., Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership
University of Washington

Lopez has also seen a vast improvement in students' ability to approach internship supervisors about taking on new tasks and opportunities. "Sometimes you have to be careful when you're low person on the totem pole," said Lopez. "You may not have a lot of authority but you can still influence and help people feel confident about you taking on more responsibility." Fierce tools help students clarify roles, build autonomy and expand opportunities.

Finally, students have a greater understanding of the potential of every conversation. They are prepared to connect, collaborate and challenge each other. Most importantly, they have a true understanding of the **Fierce philosophy**: "While no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a business, or a life, any single conversation can."

add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit fierceinc.com or contact us at 206.787.1100.

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