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Comparative physical education and sport in real life

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Shirley Reekie

As a Physical Education Graduate Teaching Assistant in the United States, I am able both to study the PE of another country and to work within it, thus gaining a first-hand knowledge of part of the North American sports system.

I was not aware of any university in England where an interest in comparative PE could be followed at doctoral level. This blessing in disguise forced me to look overseas. Now, in America, I am able to learn 'on the job', which is, of course, much more rewarding than gaining the information second-hand through books or lectures.

A GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) in PE at the Ohio State University teaches an average of 12 hours of classes per week in the basic instruction programme, and thus may find him or herself teaching tennis, swimming, archery, golf, etc. to college students, most of whom are undergraduates. For example, last quarter I taught courses in both beginners and intermediate tennis. This quarter I am teaching racquetball (similar to squash) and table tennis. Which activities a GTA teaches depends upon his/her competency areas, and the needs of and interests of

the students. Along with teaching, a GTA takes classes towards his/her degree, and in the larger universities there is a tremendous range of courses from which to choose (over 6,000 at Ohio State), including several advanced activity courses. It is usual to attend about 15 hours per week in these classes, success in which counts towards graduation requirements. Once a certain number of courses has been passed, the candidate sits an examination before starting to write a dissertation.

On the negative side, I have given up a secure teaching job in England and come to a very large institution where there is a danger of anonymity. Thus there is a drop in status from, perhaps, a Head of Department in a high school, to being one of 66 GTAs in PE, where one teaches what one is allocated. Needless to say, there is an accompanying fall in income.

Nevertheless, for me at least—now in my second quarter of studies—the necessary upheaval is proving worthwhile. As a GTA I receive a nine months' stipend (\$3,600 or c. £1,600) to cover my expenses, and have all my tuition fees paid. The latter results in a saving of about \$2,700 (approximately £1,200). If I remain at university over

the summer, tuition fees are paid again, but there is no stipend.

I much enjoy the constant change from student to teacher role, and find that each helps me to remain alert in the other. I have also been able to attend a wide variety of campus activities, from college football, through a performance by the Vienna Boys' Choir, to a lecture given by Moshe Dayan.

Most large American institutions of higher education employ GTAs who can be hired at less expense to the university than full-time instructors. The GTAs have the experience of teaching college students many different activities with (usually) excellent facilities. Where I am teaching, there are 20 racquetball courts, 58 tennis courts, 6 large gymnasiums and 3 swimming pools in the central campus area alone, with other facilities outlying. There is reasonably priced accommodation in graduate dormitories, if desired, with meals provided. Students from many foreign countries live in the dormitories, and there are numerous opportunities to talk with them about their respective education and sports systems. For me, then, the whole experience is one of comparative physical education—in real life.

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