

The role of the International Olympic Academyⁱ

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The International Olympic Academy has existed since the 1960s and has been the host to many international sporting and Olympic figures. It began and remains an educational institution, aiming to promote an understanding of Olympic Values.

Each year, it hosts an international post-graduate seminar as an attempt to further this mission. This paper is the closing speech of Andy Miah, co-ordinator for 9th Post-Graduate Seminar on Olympic Studies, 2001, International Olympic Academy.

It is customary on these occasions to begin by thanking the IOA and, in particular, Dr. Georgiadis for the opportunity to have been present these last six weeks. However, I would like to emphasise my congratulations to the IOA more broadly, for hosting another very successful Post-Graduate Seminar.

In so doing, I would like to convey my impression of how the seminar has been successful.

On the very first night of the Seminar, Dr. Georgiadis emphasised the principles of the Academy, stating that tolerance was a fundamental aspect of the atmosphere within the IOA. It is my impression that, in stating this principle, much was achieved very early on in the programme to set an atmosphere that would be friendly and enjoyable throughout the subsequent weeks.

During the seminar I have been asked on numerous occasions how this year compares to last, knowing that Dr. Georgiadis spoke very highly of the previous cohort. My answers have been similar throughout, which is to say that I have seen very little difference in terms of how you all have worked, played, and lived with each other. I have seen an ability to communicate that has been refreshing and that has made my time here for another six weeks thoroughly worthwhile.

With such diverse backgrounds, the potential for differences to become a reason for disagreement can be quite strong. However, in this group I have seen a very accepting tolerance and an interest to share impressions in a way that is not dogmatic, despite the ideas having been derived from strong culturally located ideas. It is my hope that each of you having learnt something about different ways of living, different approaches to life and human relationships, can be of some benefit to your lives back home.

I would like so say some words about the academic programme and highlight a couple of topics that I have considered to be of particular significance.

Initially, I would like to speak to the ideas about the International Olympic Committee during the seminar. I recall that Prof. Bruce Kidd and Prof. John Daly felt quite strongly that last year the group was much more pessimistic about the Olympic Movement than this year. Nevertheless, I have sensed the potential for a comparable negativity to surface depending on how the IOC evolves. It would seem that the group has been very concerned about the transparency of the IOC and that it has argued the need for the Committee to be publicly accountable or, at least, to make its decisions clear to the broader public. As well, and perhaps in

contradiction to this interest is that the IOC ought not operate in a way that is entirely comparable to a governmental office. For me, the Seminar has not derived conclusions about what should be the organisational model for the IOC to follow. Nevertheless, it has been identified that this is a matter of critical importance for the future flourishing of the Olympic Movement. Consequently, it has been very encouraging here to discuss such matters and to identify the need for more dialogue.



Participants at the 9th Postgraduate IOA Session (Olympia, 2001)

As well, in the second week a rather intense discussion surfaced about nationalism and the potential to love one's country in a way that is not at the expense of other nations. Speaking with some of you after the discussions, I was aware that the ideas shared in this session were personally relevant to you and realised that this was not simply an academic discussion.

Additionally, I considered that this discussion was far more relevant to the seminar than many others, although it was not explicitly about Olympism. The ability of each of you to speak openly about such matters that have strong emotional connections with you is a tribute to your academic credibility and your ability to engage in a reflective discourse about matters of utmost political sensitivity. Indeed, this kind of dialogue is precisely the kind that we would hope can take place in matters relating to the Olympic Movement regarding its values and ideals.

In writing this conclusion, I had wondered what would be its message. Often, closing speeches are placed in the archives of a conference proceedings never to be read since they often have a banality that is skipped by the reader. As such, I reflected upon my own experience here and, like you have done with your conclusions and, as you did with Prof. Bruce Kidd and Prof. John Daly last week, I have some personal recommendations based upon my 12 weeks here at the academy.

Thus, I would like to conclude with some recommendations for the International Olympic Academy. These recommendations have come about from the many personal discussions that I have had with each of you and so I cannot take

any credit for them, but simply hope that you will join me in sharing them.

1. The International Olympic Academy as the leader in open, critical discussion about the Olympic Movement.

Initially, I would like to propose that the International Olympic Academy promotes itself as a leader in open, and critical discussion about the Olympic Movement, where academics and students can debate current social issues. As John MacAloon noted, the IOA has aspired to such ambitions for some years. Nevertheless, it is my suggestion that the IOA formalises such principles within a statement of its missions and intentions and have these ratified formally by the Euphoria and the IOC.

In stating these ambitions, it is important to note that the connotation of the word 'critical' is not simply the discussion of negative aspects of the IOC or the Movement's weaknesses. Rather, it is to recognise the need for ongoing dialogue about these aspects of Olympism and to develop their coherency in a constructive manner.

2. Call for the IOA to foster international links comparable to the validation given by Loughborough.

My awareness of the Loughborough post-graduate credits has been very positive for a number of students that took the examination last year, including myself. I wholeheartedly congratulate the implementation of this credit scheme realising the opportunities it can provide for some students.

Additionally, I would like the IOA to work with other institutions to strengthen the utility of completing some formal assessment process. I recommend that the IOA develops similar links to that which it has with Loughborough to maximise the opportunities for students to utilise their work undertaken at the Academy. In effect, this would ensure the IOA maintains its international focus and, as well, that it maximises the opportunities for its delegates to continue working in academia.

3. Development of the Post-Graduate alumni through the Internet.

The utility of the Internet to link people together is beyond question for many countries now. Whilst accessibility is still an

issue for some countries, the possibilities are far greater for colleagues and friends to remain so, by using the benefits of the Internet and email. Last year, the post-graduate cohort created an electronic mail group, which has allowed the community to continue to flourish for an entire year after the close of the seminar.

I would recommend that the IOA seeks ways of developing its internet provision and provide a more present forum for debate through electronic media. I also recommend that one of you creates an email group for your colleagues upon returning to your country.

4. Olympic Research and the International Olympic Academy.

Finally, I would like to make a general comment on the state of Olympic research. Whilst this might seem somewhat irrelevant to the current seminar, it has been a matter of substantial consideration for me over the last year and, perhaps, it will become more relevant for you later. For over 30 years now, there have been researchers dedicating their work to study the Olympic Movement.

This cohort is strong, but my experience in the last two years is that it also suffers from a rather insular disposition. On

numerous occasions, I have spoken with colleagues, within and outside of sport, who have been negative about Olympic research for the presumed affiliations that such research can have.

It has been frustrating for me to learn of such impressions since my experience with many colleagues in the area of Olympic Research has been generally positive. During the last six months, I have found myself defending Olympic research, though have been faced with some degree of reticence to accept Olympic researchers as independent academics. It has been very clear to me that, in the majority of cases, this impression is unjustified. Indeed, it is simply that the Olympic researcher suffers from a rather serious case of bad image.

In summary, it has been my intention and ambition to broaden the Olympic research circles and to endeavour to challenge ideas about an Olympic researcher in a way that ensures greater credibility within academic networks. It is my hope that, in returning to your own networks, you will recall aspects of this course and the peers with which you have discussed Olympic matters with a strong sense of their being academic credibility in Olympic studies that can challenge parent disciplines.

Most definitely, I have felt a sense of each of you feeling that there is something about the Olympic Movement that must be nurtured, protected, and valued. This intangible characteristic of Olympism, is something that makes it worthwhile to tune into the games, to teach Olympic education, and to seek a clearer articulation of Olympic values and principles. I would hope that you will continue to problematise Olympism in your own research and challenge those who dismiss it as a remnant of Victorian fancy, as was described by one quote within the seminar. Many still believe it has relevance in contemporary society and that it can continue to enrich lives. I hope you will agree that, in the shadows of Olympism, this seminar and your interactions here are some evidence of this.

It just remains for me finally to thank the Euphoria of the IOA and, in particular Dr. Giorgiadis who I am very aware works hard to ensure that the Post-Graduate Seminar receives support from the Hellenic Olympic Committee and to wish my best wishes for the subsequent years. As well, I would like to thank each of you for your kind words, sincerity, and humour over the last six weeks.

ⁱ This paper was originally presented as the closing speech for the *9th Post-Graduate Session on Olympic Studies*, 2001, International Olympic Academy.