

The History of the International Olympic Academy, 1927-1961

NINA K. PAPPAS
University of Illinois-Chicago

The International Olympic Academy (IOA), the academic corollary to the Olympic Games, is located in ancient Olympia, Greece. Annual sessions are conducted, during which the theory and practice of the Olympic principles are synthesized. These sessions, attended by an internationally heterogeneous student body selected by the various National Olympic Committees, are an invitation to greater world understanding through the study of the deeper meaning of sport.

The Academy was conceived in April, 1927, during a visit to Olympia by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Following the ceremonial unveiling of a marble monument erected in his honor as the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Coubertin expressed his concerns regarding the future of the Games. Inspired by discussions with Coubertin, John Ketseas of Greece began his thirty-four year effort to establish the International Olympic Academy. Carl Diem of Germany subsequently became his collaborator.

Many problems were encountered which delayed the genesis of the Academy. Not the least among these was World War II when the countries of the principal figures involved in the creation of the IOA were mortal enemies. Additionally, lack of interest of the National Olympic Committees was also a major factor in the inordinate length of time required to establish the Academy.

During the years from 1927- 1961, proposed plans for the Academy underwent a series of changes. The United States, Olympia, and Athens were all suggested as sites, while a variety of time periods ranging from one year to two weeks were recommended for the duration of the Academy session. Approved by the IOC in 1939 and again in 1949, sessions of the Olympic Academy were planned and later cancelled for 1950, 1951, 1953, and 1954. Inspired by Coubertin in 1927, the Olympic Academy finally became manifest in a one week session in June, 1961, in Olympia, primarily through the dedicated efforts of Diem and Ketseas and the financial support of the German and Greek Olympic Committees.



NASSH participants attend one of the sessions.