

Proving Our Worth in Sport Management Professional Preparation Programs: The Case for Outcomes Assessment

Robert E. Baker, George Mason University
Richard Southall, University of Memphis

**Session 10: Professional Preparation
Presentation (25-minute)**

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Professional preparation in sport management has recently been called into question. In his blog, Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban (2005) referred to sport management programs as "a huge waste of time and resources." This powerful, albeit eccentric, industry executive considers sport management to be a dumping ground for under-qualified students, which provides them no relevant learning opportunities and little hope for employment in the sport industry (Wysong, 2006). A later Wall Street Journal article noted the exponential growth in the number of sport management programs, but posed the question, "Are they really the tickets to great sports jobs, or great profit centers for colleges?" (Helyar, 2006, p.R5).

Indeed, there are well over 250 sport management programs in North America alone (NASSM, 2006). Approximately 75 of these programs have been approved under the joint NASSM/NASPE process through the SMPRC. Helyar (2006) questions the validity of the approval process and indicts sport management professional preparation for having no accreditation process. While his arguments lack depth, they are reflective of some industry perspectives regarding sport management professional preparation. Toward rectifying the external perception that sport management programs lack evidence of quality, the approval process is undergoing review and possibly moving toward a true accreditation model.

Senge (1990) noted that every system is designed to produce the results we see. Toward that end, the accreditation of academic sport management programs should employ student outcomes assessment to determine the effectiveness of each program. In that student learning is central to professional sport management preparation; the focal point of assessment is on monitoring the effectiveness of the program in achieving "intended educational outcomes" in sport management (Nichols & Nichols, 2000). Thus, assessment provides essential feedback so that we might maximize our program's effectiveness (Angelo, 2000).

Measures of student outcomes provide evidence that we are doing what we say we are doing, that our students are learning. Our programs can utilize measurements of student outcomes to "close the loop," reflecting the effectiveness of the program in producing the student results we find. Data-driven decision-making, based in part upon the aggregate measurement of student outcomes, can be employed toward becoming a more effective program in achieving the desired results. However, there are a myriad of appropriate measures, which must be tied to the intended outcomes (Palomba, Banta, & Eder, 2000).

What evidence regarding our program's effectiveness should we be able to provide Cuban, Helyar, or Wysong? Helyar (2006) and Wysong (2006), focus on the inputs provided in sport management programs and suggest students look for (a) core business content such as economics, marketing, management, finance, and accounting; (b) practical field experiences, case studies, and current real world examples; (c) faculty with industry experience; and (d) job placement opportunities. However, focusing solely on inputs offers no assurance that students completing our programs will have appropriate skills.

While these authors make suggestions regarding necessary features in sport management programs, it is the responsibility of each program to ensure that it is indeed a relevant, challenging educational experience from which students emerge with appropriately marketable skills. In order to provide substantive evidence of the success of our professional preparation program, we must look at program outputs in the form of aggregate student outcomes.

Realizing that we are accountable for the performance of our academic sport management program, in the same way that an athletic team is accountable for wins and losses, we should recognize the value of outcomes measures. With that, we should commit to building evidence of our effectiveness through measuring actual outcomes relative to intended programmatic objectives. This is essential not only in documenting the effectiveness of each individual program, but also in justifying the existence of sport management professional preparation programs.

How can we assure that our professional preparation program in sport management is appropriately grooming our students? Every desired outcome can be measured. Therefore, the discussion will offer opportunities to clarify the intended outcomes of our individual programs; followed by opportunities to share the most appropriate measures of those outcomes. What kinds of measures can be employed in sport management professional preparation programs? Recommendations regarding the use of

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outcomes measures in sport management will be presented.

Examples of programmatic outcome measures will be provided, such as job placement rates, alumni evaluation of program effectiveness, and employer evaluation of graduate competencies. A discussion of desired program objectives will be followed by suggestions regarding appropriate outcome measures for selected objectives. Applied class projects, such as those often found in marketing or sales classes, provide fertile ground for measurement of student outcomes. Also, within the field experience, the use of an electronic portfolio could provide evidence of pre-established required student competencies.