

Sport Management Accreditation: Current Perceptions and Future Implications

Jo Williams, University of Southern Maine
Colleen Colles, Nichols College

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Changes in the higher education landscape, demands for accountability, and concerns over academic quality have brought increased scrutiny to accreditation agencies (Bollag, 2007; Eaton, 2006). Eaton (2006, p.6) noted, "in 1999, sixty-one specialized accrediting organizations were recognized and accredited more than 20,000 programs". Specialized accreditation standards across many of these disciplines have evolved from a reliance on measuring inputs to outcomes based models that recognize quality in a range of environments (Fox Garrity & Finney, 2007). The growth of specialized accreditation in a wide range of disciplines including medicine, aviation, business, law and education has created both opportunities and challenges for faculty and administrators (Prather, 2006). According to Dill (1998) and Tullis and Camey, (2007), institutions must assess if the investment required will provide significant benefits and contribute to greater public confidence. Over the last 40 years, recognition of the sport management discipline has continued to evolve along with increased numbers of programs and an expanding body of knowledge (Pitts, 2001). Faculty and scholars have emphasized the need to provide a quality and meaningful sport management curriculum that allows students to develop into well-qualified and prepared professionals (Chelladurai, 1992; Fielding, Pitts & Miller, 1991; Kelley, Beitel, DeSensi & Blanton, 1994; Masteralexis & McDonald, 1997; NASPE-NASSM Joint Taskforce, 1993; Ziegler, 1987).

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, a number of taskforces from NASPE-NASSM examined curriculum standards for the discipline (NASPE, 2008). Based on this work, curricula guidelines were developed and standards were endorsed by the members of NASPE and NASSM. An important step in quality control came with the formation of the Sport Management Review Council (a NASPE/NASSM collaboration) in 1993. The purpose of SMPRC was to review and approve sport management programs. The sport management discipline has recently launched a new specialized accreditation body, the Commission of Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA), and has begun the process of implementing an outcome-based and mission-driven model. It is likely that COSMA and the institutions it serves will experience numerous challenges as it attempts to establish credibility. The proposed presentation focuses on current perceptions of sport management faculty and administrators towards the potential opportunities, benefits, and challenges of accreditation.

Participants (N=322) included sport management faculty and administrators that were members of the NASSM in 2008. A database was created using the NASSM website listing of professional members from North American educational institutions and a survey was administered via email. Of the 322 potential respondents, 119 useable responses were obtained, resulting in a 37% response rate. The survey instrument was constructed to measure faculty perceptions and motivations as they related to sport management accreditation. The survey included 17 original items, and two 5-point likert scales adapted from the work of Roller, Andrews, and Bovee (2003), measuring the importance of program goals and the perceived benefits of accreditation.

Data was collected in the following area; demographic data (e.g., faculty/administrator status, length of service, etc), institutional and program data (e.g., enrollment, program offerings, SMPRC approval status), perceived importance of program goals and the perceived benefits of sport management accreditation. Participants also rated a variety of factors (e.g., cost control, CHEA recognition, mission-driven model) in terms of their importance in developing a credible accreditation model. Finally, a number of open-ended and closed question response categories were used to assess familiarity with the COSMA accreditation model, institutional position on pursuing accreditation and solicit additional feedback from the respondents. In general, respondents indicated support for the COSMA accreditation model but many also expressed concerns. Institutions that had joined or intended to join COSMA had different perspectives than those who had not, particularly in relation to the value of external benefits such as competitive advantages and increased marketing potential. Concerns such as costs, involvement of business professionals and the credibility of the organization were also considered. This presentation will highlight the potential opportunities and benefits of accreditation, as well as the challenges faced on the institutional level. Qualitative and quantitative research findings will be discussed and initial recommendations will be presented with regard to the potential development and growth of COSMA.