Opening the Doors to Grant Funding: The Role of Sport Management Scholars in Cross-disciplinary and Community Partnerships

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Most colleges and universities across the world are feeling the effects of the economic downturn. The financial climate at universities has made external funding even more of a focus than ever before and even more competitive (Hogan, 2009). Other sources of revenue, including private fund-raising and university entrepreneurial efforts (Rotheramel, Agung, & Jiang, 2007; Siegal, Wright, & Lockett, 2007) have taken on increased importance in academia. Coupled with the financial pressure and efforts to find new funding streams, colleges and universities are still being challenged by their leaders to be the best (Gee, 2009; Powers, 2009). Given the relative youth of the field of sport management compared to other academic disciplines and the historic perception that there is little grant money available in this field (Mahoney, 2008), sport management faculty find themselves in a tenuous position. How can individual faculty members play a role in the grant dollar acquisition that has taken on increasing importance? How can programs with little or no access to external funding contribute to the strategic plans for institutional survival in the current economic climate? And furthermore, how can these faculty and their programs contribute to the ascension of colleges and universities to the top? Sport management programs are popular with students and show no signs slowing in that popularity (Mahoney, 2008). But, the pressing reality is that universities and colleges need more than tuition dollars to survive, let alone prosper. And, without prospects for external funding, sport management programs and their faculty can be seen as a “very low priority in their home units” (Mahoney, 2008, 1).

In the 2007 Ziegler Award lecture, Dan Mahoney spoke to the availability of grant dollars in education and health, but the scarcity of those resources in sport management. A main reason for this disparity is the clear link between education and health and the improvement of human well-being (Smith & Works, 2006). Funding for both research and practice in these disciplines exists. In fact, in addition to the traditional granting institutions (e.g., Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Department of Education), charitable foundations in the United States with missions to support educational, humanitarian, and cultural efforts have grown exponentially in recent years (Porter & Kramer, 1999). Sport management, on the other hand, is not typically viewed with the same potential to improve human well-being, and, with that, sport management faculty do not typically apply for NIH grants or attract major funds from charitable foundations. But, through building cross-disciplinary and community partnerships, the potential for sport management scholars to gain access to more grant dollars exists.

In this presentation, we will examine the potential cross-disciplinary relationships that have been developed between sport management faculty and programs with the Schools of Education in which some are housed, with the Kinesiology, Exercise Science, Health, and Physical Education departments in which some are housed, and with the Schools of Business in which even others are housed. We will also discuss strategies for sport management faculty to begin new partnerships or become part of existing partnerships acknowledging that not all research or practical project ideas will be competitive for funding (Gitlin & Lyons, 2008). But, sport management faculty can bring the power of sport to the table in efforts by educators and health professionals to improve human well-being (e.g., Squashbusters and other sport based youth development education programs, Team Livestrong running the New York City Marathon and other cause-related fundraisers through sporting events). Grants are available for programs and events where sport contributes added value. Quality research results from these opportunities as well. We will outline both practical applications and research options for sport managers to attract funding. And, we will emphasize that engaging in the process of working with others to expand one’s own knowledge base of theoretical and practical work in other disciplines as well as making others aware of one’s current and long-term interests lays the groundwork for collaboration. Not only is this good academic practice and encouraged for faculty research productivity and advancement, but it potentially opens the doors to grant dollars that have been elusive in sport management.