Needs Assessment in Sport Management Education: Exploring the Latin American Market

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Abstract 2010-094
June 4, 2010 10:10 AM
25-minute oral presentation (Snowy Egret)

While currently there are no studies that can precisely show the growth of sport management academic programs across the world, anecdotal evidence, as well as the surge of sport management associations in different continents, suggest this discipline is growing at a fast pace as it becomes an accepted area of study within institutions of higher education (Chelladurai, 2005).

One of the regions that has recently received significant attention from the global sporting community is Latin America (LA). Latin American sports continuously make the news as their athletes have recently won major professional tournaments. Latin American athletes continue to fill the rosters in major professional leagues. Their success not only occurs outside of LA but within the continent as well, as two of the most important major games will both take place in LA soil: the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. Despite this rapid surge of the LA sport marketplace, little is known about how sport and recreational services are organized, funded, and delivered (Bravo et al., forthcoming). There is a dearth of literature concerning the education and training of human resources in this industry. In sum, little is known about the state of the art of sport management, both professionally as well as an academic discipline. Due to the paucity of research on this topic a needs assessment will be conducted aimed at providing preliminary information regarding answers as to whether LA countries have a need for Human Resource Development (HRD) and how prepared are they to develop sport management education programs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the state of the art of sport management education in LA.

Needs assessments (NA) refers to the systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be in regards to organizational and/or individual performances (Rouda & Kousy, 1995). It involves the identification of gaps of current and desired needs at the same time it conducts cost-benefit analysis of the organizational and/or societal impact when not fulfilling those needs (Kaufman, 1998). NA is a tool used to assess the need for implementing a wide array of programs, services and/or public policies. It occurs through the systematic recollection, review and analysis of critical information in regards to the problem in question. The process of identifying these needs involves numerous stakeholders and particularly those directly affected by the unsatisfied needs (Johnson, Meiller, Summers & Miller, 1987). As a result, critical information is typically gathered from the following stakeholders groups: non-recipients of beneficial services, recipients of ineffective services, recipients of inefficient services and recipients of inappropriate services (Stevens & Gilliam, 1998).

A comprehensive NA will involve at least five levels of analysis: Mega, examining societal needs; Macro achieving organizational needs; Micro, addressing individual and small group needs; Process, efforts and activities to achieve those needs; and Input, amount and type of resources needed to reach the desired objectives (Kaufman & Stakenas, 2003). In addition, most NA are conducted in three stages: (1) identification of problems, purpose of assessment, and target audiences; (2) determination of what and how data are to be collected and analyzed; and (3) recommendations to ameliorate situations related to these problems.

A web survey will be sent via email to 2,763 higher education administrators from 916 institutions of higher education in 19 countries and one territory of the United States (Puerto Rico) as listed in the BRAINTRACK directory of Universities in LA. Countries included in this study will be restricted to those in which Spanish and Portuguese is the primary language. The web survey will ask questions in three main areas: (a) development of human resource; (b) curricular needs; and (c) institutional positioning in regards to the establishment of sport management education programs. In addition, several phone interviews with governments and National Olympic Committees officers will be conducted. Finally, secondary data on economic and social indicators as well as the review of major public policies on higher education will be analyzed.

This study draws on NA theory to develop an assessment model of the state of the art of sport management education in LA. The results from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge of Sport Management as it will discuss the theory and practice of conducting a NA in the context of the sport industry. From a practical point of view...
view, it will contribute to creating a database of the existing sport management programs offered in higher education institutions and other government sponsored sport agencies in LA. Finally, it will shed light on variables that influence the development of sport management academic programs by examining the role of higher education institutions and the impact of selected public policies.