Service quality applied to academic programs asserts that the educator does not solely react to student-customer expectations, but also can shape the expectations of the customer (Scott, 1999). While a student's overall campus experience is arguably important, student-professor interactions have more to do with educating the customer than simply making the customer happy. While student enrollment and retention are critical concerns on many campuses, sport management has experienced enormous growth and is a highly desirable major (Dustin & Schwab, 2008; Wellman & Rea, 2008). Maintaining or increasing enrollment may not be a concern in many sport management programs, however the issue of service quality remains. To provide a desirable academic product, student expectations need to be identified and addressed.

Cuneen and Sidwell (1998) reported 180 sport management degree granting programs in America about a decade ago, and at last count, 277 programs currently exist in North American colleges and universities; 237 of which offer undergraduate degrees (North American Society for Sport Management Website, 2009). The discipline has increased globally as well (Martin & Leberman, 2005). Recognizing the competitive job market for the sport management graduate, Mahony (2007) cautioned sport management educators not to be overly focused on subject matter such as sport marketing, sport finance and sport law. He advocated a skills-based education where students develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. He stated, “…if we accept that many might not find the jobs they expect in the sport industry, then we need to be sure their preparation provides them with skills that will be useful in many other fields” (p. 8). While teaching skills and knowledge is necessary, identifying and addressing the expectations students bring into sport management programs can augment the requisite skills and knowledge when proactively addressed by faculty.

Students considering a sport management major should be apprised of the competitive environment of the sport industry, the enormous commitment necessary to prepare for employment in the field, and various career options in areas other than those with which they are most familiar (typically spectator sport such as men’s professional sport and high-level college sport). Although not the intention of sport management faculty, students may succeed in the classroom and not be fully prepared to gain and sustain employment in the field. When students focus only on obtaining their “dream job,” they may not consider occupational opportunities in a wide array of spectator sports or in participant sports, which account for more than 60% of the economic worth of the sport industry (Chelladurai, 2005).

To assess student expectations and beliefs about the sport management profession, a survey was administered to students on the first day of an introductory sport management class at two large public universities. While students new to any academic program are not expected to possess a great deal of knowledge about their major, results suggest that many students expressed expectations of high starting salaries and future earning potential, while others could not even provide an answer to questions about salary. Over half of those surveyed expected their first job to be in college or professional sport, or as a sport agent. Additionally, differences existed across race and gender and rationale for these differences will be provided.

When professors take student expectations, values, and attitudes into account, classroom lessons can be better planned to address essential content and correct faulty student perceptions. This allows students to make informed decisions about career goals or whether they are interested in pursuing a degree in sport management. To positively impact student experiences in this manner, a proposed curriculum that (a) informs students of expectations and opportunities within the sport industry, and (b) helps students develop professional competencies, will be presented. The following tactics align with this strategy:
2010 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2010)

Podcasts: A free podcast series was created to allow students to hear interviews with former students, graduate students, research professionals, and industry leaders about topics such as career opportunities, graduate school, current events, career paths, and other issues of interest. All podcasts are downloadable in MP3 format. Students are asked to offer suggestions on topics of interest, which can be added as the industry evolves. These podcasts may be accessed by sport management faculty and students at all universities.

Computer Simulated Career Counseling: A simulated career counseling process about sport management positions, ExSport II (Parks & Sun, 2001), provides students with an baseline understanding of sports related careers associated with their interests which can be discussed in class. Over the course of 4 semesters, student input on the process was collected to aid in updating and expanding the service. This career simulation program continues to be available to sport management faculty and students at all universities.

“Expectations” Survey: New sport management students share their expectations each semester and synthesized information is discussed with the class.

"Meet the Team" Day: At the beginning of each semester, all faculty in the program spend a class period visiting the introductory class to present to and interact with new students. Faculty members share information about their courses and discuss expectations they have of students. This message from a united sport management faculty makes a strong impression on the new sport management students, which they share in reaction papers and class discussion.

Student Professionalism: A focus on professional dress, appropriate written and oral communication with instructors and other professionals, punctuality, and a commitment to the program is emphasized in all sport management courses.

REFERENCES


