How will sport management programs measure personal development as part of the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation? The COSMA guidelines include personal development as one of five assessment areas that need to be addressed in the outcomes assessment plan of sport management programs applying for accreditation (COSMA, 2008). Fielding, Pitts, and Miller (1991) postulated that the field of sport management must resolve the issue of what constitutes quality education and must agree about how to assess quality. At this point in time, personal development has been agreed upon as constituting quality education in sport management. However, what are options for assessing personal development? Is personal development a well-defined objective in sport management programs? This topic is highly relevant and increasingly significant to the field of sport management as many programs embark upon the accreditation process.

In a review of the relevant literature, Seligman (2000) coined the term “positive psychology” to redirect attention from mental deficits to human strengths of flourishing. Levin (2009) discussed strengths necessary for success in college and life in addition to where these strengths should fit within academic programs. Levin provided a perspective of integrating personal development throughout an academic program rather than concentrating the development in one or two aspects of a program. Reivich (2009) developed empirically validated school based curriculum for personal development that included positive psychology strengths such as resilience, optimism, gratitude, creativity, and leadership. From a broader perspective, Randolph (2009) discussed the importance of approaching personal development through positive education with a strategic framework and extensive planning processes. The program culture as a whole would shift with implications on marketing to future students, professional development of faculty, and adjustments to student advising as improvements and changes occurred to the personal development framework.

This workshop was designed with the purpose and objective to provide an exploration of this conceptual framework as an option for outcome assessment of personal development, yet not to provide prescriptive or conclusive answers. The exploration and timeliness of this topic has arrived with the questions and concerns of the new accreditation process. The framework presents an opportunity to stimulate conversation regarding the issue of measuring personal development in sport management. A question remains as to how flexible and broadly personal development should be defined and assessed. This workshop provides a scientific approach to personal development applied to sport management through research and professional development as studied in relevant and related fields.

The quality of this conceptual framework is based on supported methods utilized by industrial and organizational psychologists attempting to predict job performance through personal characteristics (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). This conceptual framework also integrates a template developed by O’Connor and Paunonen (2007) as a predictive paradigm of personality predictors of academic achievement. As applied to sport management personal development outcomes assessment, first the program would conceptually specify the personal development criterion of interest. This may include specific components of personal development of interest to the sport management industry. For example, Lambrecht (1987) studied the desirable qualities of sports and athletic club managers, and these qualities may provide a starting point for criterion. Second, the positive variables would be identified that are conceptually and empirically grounded as most likely to predict success in the field of sport management. These could include but are not limited to self-discipline, effective communication, cooperation, and open-mindedness. Third, a program would choose a measurement strategy and process for personal development that conceptually fits chosen variables. For example in terms of implementation, faculty may rate students on a personal characteristics review form based on empirical literature that provides feedback to students that allows for quantitative and qualitative measurement of improvement personal characteristics over time. Fourth, an evaluation
process for the personal development assessment would provide an analysis of the predictor-criterion associations with potential for discovering mediator and moderator variables.

In discussion, the positive psychology framework is based on scientific methods applied to a historically non-scientific topic of personal development. The framework provides a way to engage faculty and students in a culture that supports the development of positive strengths for sport management student development within current methods of teaching and learning. The implications are numerous for this topic within sport management. Programs could teach both skills of sport management competency achievement and skills of personal development for sport management student success. Sport management programs would have measurement tools to enable students to flourish through specific approaches to teaching and learning progressive personal development through a positive strengths framework.

Future directions for this topic would include aggregated data collection on characteristics of effective personal development competencies for sport management students across programs. Sport management programs may also consider expanding the personal development program beyond sport management to include a holistic intervention within the school environment from general education classrooms to athletic department life skills programs. The principles could apply to academic, co-curricular, and athletic environments to increasingly develop greater levels of positive personal resources for student success. Examples of current strategic plans, measurement forms, and implementation processes of positive personal development outcomes assessment will be provided for workshop participants.