A Study of the Research Requirements in Sport Management Doctoral Programs in North America

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As a fairly young academic discipline in higher education, sport management has grown into a viable and legitimate area of study for students since the first sport management academic program was established at Ohio University in 1966. Since then, scholars have conducted research and written about the curriculum standards and issues of accreditation in sport management at the undergraduate and graduate levels (see Kelly, Beitel, DeSensi, Blanton, 1994; NASPE-NASSM Joint Task Force on Sport Management Curriculum and Accreditation, 1993; Parkhouse, 1987; Schneider & Stier, 2000); and essentially, the emphasis has been on the core areas and competencies that students coming out of sport management programs should have after they leave higher education and become sport management practitioners, educators, or scholars/researchers.

This above-mentioned scholarship has focused some on curriculum issues at the doctoral level, but a great deal of the attention has been on undergraduate programs (e.g., Fielding, Pitts, & Miller, 1991), and to some extent, master's programs (e.g., Schneider & Stier, 2000). Very little research has been conducted that focuses specifically on curriculum issues at the doctoral level. There have been a couple studies that have surveyed search committee chairs to gain their perceptions on graduate student preparation for faculty positions (Mondello, Mahony, Hums, & Moorman, 2002) and doctoral program faculty’s views on whether doctoral programs are meeting the needs of the faculty job market (Mahony, Mondello, Hums, and Judd, 2004); findings from these studies suggest that these programs were not supplying enough qualified sport management doctoral degree recipients to meet the needs of the job market.

Although the aforementioned research is certainly important, it is limited in the sense that it has not really focused in any substantial detail on arguably the most important aspect of professional preparation for doctoral students, i.e., the research requirements at colleges and universities with sport management doctoral programs (see Mahony, Mondello, Hums, and Judd, 2004). It is the heavy emphasis on research and research course requirements that distinguish doctoral programs from master’s and undergraduate level sport management curricula. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to provide a preliminary assessment of the research requirements for each of the programs in North America that have doctoral degree programs. This research is important because it provides the NASSM membership and other interested parties with some insight into what research paradigms, approaches, designs, and methods are being promoted and transmitted to current doctoral students in the sport management academic discipline. This certainly could have important implications for the future and direction of the sport management discipline and professoriate.

In order to examine the research training and requirements of sport management doctoral programs we first compiled the available online doctoral degree plans from schools in North America listed on the NASSM website as having doctoral level degrees in sport management. In efforts to gain additional insight into the content of these degree plans, we identified a purposive sample of possible interview participants (Patton, 1990), which consisted of graduate faculty members of sport management programs in North America. Among this sample were program chairs, former and current journal editors, and Zeigler Award winners. Through a preliminary content analysis of the online doctoral degree plans and the interview transcripts, we identified the following themes: 1) students should be exposed to both qualitative and quantitative research methods; 2) research questions should drive research methods; 3) United States programs require more quantitative research courses than qualitative courses; 4) Canadian programs have more faculty members and students specializing in qualitative research; 5) course requirements are more structured in the United States programs than in the Canadian programs.

Although tentative, the findings from this research have some potentially important research and teaching implications. Given calls in recent years by sport management scholars for us to expand our research horizons (e.g., Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005), it is certainly important to assess what our doctoral students are being taught and how they are being trained to carry out research. Are they being challenged to think critically about the research
Are they being given the opportunity to explore various approaches to research, and discover where they fit into the research process? These and many others questions are important for us to consider as we think about how best to guide and direct our doctoral students toward becoming scholars, researchers, and faculty members.