Doctoral Contracts: The Nexus to Bridge Doctoral Students & Faculty in Preparation For Future Success

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The field of sport management continues to grow in the United States. There are currently over 300 programs listed on the North American Society for Sport Management's (NASSM) website. This number is 125 more than was listed just 9 years ago (an increase of over 70%; Weese, 2002). What is particularly disturbing with this growth is the lack of institutions granting doctoral degrees. Only 25 of the 303 programs listed on the NASSM website claimed to have a doctoral program. With this imbalance, and the fact that the national attrition rate for all doctoral students is 50% (DiPietro, 2007), the training and preparation for future sport management faculty members is key for our field to continue to thrive. In his 2001 Dr. Earle F. Ziegler Lecture, Weese (2002) asked the all important question – “…where will we find faculty to teach our students?” (p. 4). The following year, in her 2002 Dr. Earle F. Zeigler Lecture, Pastore (2003) emphasized the importance of mentoring to keep sport management growing as a field.

As the number of faculty positions in sport management has continued to grow, so has the need to fill these positions. According to Mondello, Mahony, Hums, and Moor (2001), while some academic fields had few openings, there was an average of 83 open faculty positions in sport management each year from 1997-2000. Examining data from a year later, Pedersen and Schneider (2003) found 128 professorial advertisements that were available for the 2001-02 academic year. However, 38% of these openings went unfilled, likely because of few qualified candidates. Mahony, Mondello, Hums, and Judd (2004) found there were approximately 70 jobs announced in sport management each year, but only 15 students graduated from doctoral programs. While few studies have examined this topic recently, it is probably safe to say this discrepancy still exists today given the number of sport management programs mentioned above.

From 2008-2010, a total of seven NASSM presentations included mentoring in their title. These presentations ranged from doctoral students mentoring experiences to the examination of various mentoring relationships (e.g., coaches, advisor and advisees). Specifically, two sessions focused on doctoral student mentoring. In 2008, Braunstein, Dees, Greenwood, MacIntosh, Mercado, and Newman discussed moving from doctoral student to a first-year faculty member. In 2010, Peetz et al. discussed the mentor/protégé experience from the perspectives of first year doctoral students. This session builds upon previous presentations and focuses more specifically on the activities that an advisor can undertake to enhance a doctoral students’ experience and aligns with the comments made by Weese in 2002, “We must prepare future professors through quality educational and mentoring experiences” (p. 11). While all doctoral programs have, at a minimum, an informal system of mentoring their students, the current symposium proposes a more formal structure – a contract between the doctoral student and his/her advisor. This symposium will focus on the development of such a contract.

The doctoral contract used by the advisors in this symposium is comprised of two major sections: the student’s expectations of their advisor and the advisor’s expectations of their student. Furthermore, each of these sections is further broken into general and term-by-term expectations for both the student and advisor. Expectations can also be categorized in the traditional academic areas of teaching, scholarship/research, and service. Examples of student expectations include such things as regular meetings with their advisors, observing their teaching, and job search advice (including writing letters of recommendation). Advisor expectations include tasks such as assisting faculty on a research project, submitting a presentation to a national conference, becoming a member of NASSM, and developing a dissertation proposal by a certain date. Additionally, a timeline for developing the doctoral contract will be discussed.

Although many of the expectations (especially the advisor’s) will be the same (or at least very similar) for most students, the doctoral contract allows for some flexibility and personalization. For example, some students may have little or no teaching experience, particularly at the college level. These students may expect more mentoring in this area. Similarly, at any given time, an advisor may expect more assistance on a particular research project, especially if a student has a strong interest in that area.

The symposium will conclude with a discussion between advisors and doctoral students. The benefits and challenges of
developing a doctoral contract will be examined from both perspectives. Specific examples of doctoral contracts will be shared with the attendees. Additionally, potential consequences for not meeting the requirements/expectations will be proposed.