Enhancing Sport Management Education through Alumni Activation

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Established Sport Management programs (those in existence for five years or more) have the opportunity to enhance Sport Management student education by facilitating relationships between alumni of their programs and current students. Such relationships can offer students meaningful insights regarding professional life within various sport management settings and allow them to begin networking before they even graduate. Specifically, Finney et al. (2008) reveal that using alumni to share real-life experiences actually provides students a more realistic learning experience and increases their ability to demonstrate the relevance of business topics, applications to career interests, and integration of business functions. The longer a program has been in existence, the more opportunities exist for students to meet and gain insights from alumni in various stages of their careers, from entry-level employment through well-established leadership roles in the field. In fact, students can gain tremendous insight from alumni who are decades removed from a university (Sevier, 2002).

In general, university alumni play vital roles in supporting higher education and academic programs including charitable giving, which is the most visible. However, alumni can be called upon to volunteer in many ways such as participation in special events, and mentoring. The purpose of this presentation is to introduce ways of utilizing Sport Management alumni who are working in the sport marketplace to provide insights for students through a variety of functions, such as formal dinners featuring alumni as speakers; informal meet and greet socials; functions focused upon alumni; invited classroom presentations; and other planned sport and social gatherings such as charity golf events. Alumni can offer pros and cons of their profession, suggestions on how to break into the field, and often do so with amusing anecdotes about their own personal experiences (Barnes, 2000). In essence, such endeavors are of great value to Sport Management undergraduate and graduate students because they allow students to realistically envision themselves in professional settings, gain up-to-date information on the job market, and provide students with opportunities to network and practice informational interviewing techniques.

These alumni-student interactive events, however, require a time commitment and diligent planning on the part of Sport Management faculty. This presentation will offer suggestions for efficiently and effectively creating such interactive opportunities and will provide tips for ensuring they run smoothly. Some of the key topics addressed will include developing an alumni database, utilizing social media networks, planning and organizing functions, working with alumni boards, networking, and gaining administrative support for faculty to manage these endeavors. Furthermore, the presenters will report on feedback received from both students and alumni regarding the benefits involved with developing interactive alumni-student events.