An Examination of the Personal and Professional Factors Sport Management Faculty Value in a Mentoring Relationship

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Several scholars have identified the development of current and future sport management faculty as an area of importance for the growth of the field (Costa, 2005; Pastore, 2003; Weese, 2002). Mentoring is commonly cited as one of the methods to assist in the growth and training of faculty members (Pastore, 2003). While there is no consensus definition, Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) define mentoring “as a process in which a more experienced person serves as a role model, provides guidance and support to a developing novice, and sponsors that novice in his/her career progress” (p. 25). Weaver and Chelladurai also noted that mentored individuals are more likely to have higher salaries, to be promoted, and to be more confident and self-assured in their professional identity than their non-mentored counterparts (1999).

Scholars have also examined a variety of personal and professional factors impacting the quality of mentoring relationships. Both gender and race have been noted as key personal factors in mentoring relationships, including being identified as potential barriers to mentoring (Johnson, 2002; Kram, 1985; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). Additionally, the lack of gender and racial diversity has been identified as a concern in the field of sport management in the United States (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). Professionally, similarities regarding a mentor and mentee’s views on their field, the similarities in their research interests, and similarities in their approach to problem solving have been identified as factors in mentoring relationships in the fields of nursing and occupational therapy (Williams & Blackburn, 1988; Paul, Stein, Ottenbacher, Liu, 2002). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the importance of key personal and professional factors in the mentoring relationships of sport management faculty.

The target population for this study was the professional members of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM). At the time of data collection, the professional list included 483 members. The list was reduced to 440 members because those members affiliated with a company or the panel of experts was removed. Further, a pilot test of 40 members was conducted and this in turn reduced the list to 400 members. Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) recommended that “the estimate of interest will be with + 3 percentage points 95% of the time” (p. 56) and to meet this standard a random sample of a random sample of 291 sport management faculty was selected from the NASSM professional list. The response rate was 43% (n=126).

The instrument used in the current study was originally developed by Williams and Blackburn (1988) and updated by Paul et al. (2002). The instrument consisted of four sections (i.e., Part I - Mentoring Roles and Functions, Part II – Research Productivity, Part III - Institutional Factors and their influence on Research Productivity, and Part IV – Demographic Data). Due to the volume of information garnered from this instrument, this analysis is focused on items found in Part I of the instrument. Each of the personal and professional factors of a mentoring relationship was evaluated on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important).

Of the 126 respondents, 73 were involved in mentoring relationships and provided information for this part of the analysis. The personal factors addressed in this study were race and gender. The results indicate that neither mentors (M = 1.42, SD = 0.75) nor mentees (M = 1.57, SD = 0.926) found race to be an important factor in a mentoring relationship. Likewise, gender was not considered an important factor by mentors (M = 1.52, SD = 0.918) or mentees (M = 1.67, SD = 1.017).

There was less consensus in evaluating the professional factors in mentoring relationships. Mentors (M = 3.48, SD = 0.939) and mentees (M = 3.71, SD = 1.007) indicated that similar attitudes about the discipline were of moderate importance to the mentoring relationship. The results were similar in evaluating the importance of having similar research interests, with mentor reporting a mean of 3.06 (SD = 1.127) and mentees reporting a mean of 3.19 (SD = 1.030). Having the same approach to problem solving had a mean importance of 3.13 (SD = 0.95) among mentors and a mean of 3.24 (SD = 1.091) among mentees.
The results addressing the personal factors in a mentoring relationship highlight an ongoing issue in sport management – the lack of racial and gender diversity among faculty members (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). Respondents in the current study overwhelmingly reported that race and gender were not important characteristics in the mentoring relationship, however racial minorities (n = 10) and women (n = 31) were underrepresented in the final sample of mentors and mentees. In light of this fact, additional studies specifically targeting these groups will ascertain factors they consider important in a mentoring relationship. Additionally, the results are at odds with the academic literature addressing the impact race can have on our social interactions and mentoring relationships (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Doane, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994). It may behoove departments and institutions committed to mentoring programs to continually educate their faculty and encourage open dialogue regarding race and gender.

The results addressing the professional factors in a mentoring relationship suggest that the importance of these factors is specific to each mentoring relationship. As such, communication becomes central to a quality mentoring experience. If mentors and mentees do not clarify their needs and expectations of the relationship prior to engaging in the relationship, both parties run the risk of having an unfulfilling mentoring experience (Brown & Pastore, forthcoming). Furthermore, as the mentoring relationship is not a linear experience, continued communication will assist in ensuring both parties are satisfied with the quality of the mentoring relationship.

This poster session will also provide practical mentoring strategies for sport management programs and faculty based on the results of this study. Lastly, directions for future inquiries will be made.