I'm Here, Now What?: Mentoring Graduate Students in Sport Management

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60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop (North)

In 1966, the first master’s program in sport management was created at Ohio University. Almost 56 years later, sport management programs have become an integral part of academe, with over 200 undergraduate and graduate programs (Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001), and an established association of scholars, researchers, and practitioners (North American Society for Sport Management [NASSM], 2011). Particularly, the purpose of NASSM is to "promote, stimulate, and encourage study, research, scholarly writing, and professional development in the area of sport management - both theoretical and applied aspects." Due to the growth of sport programs since 1966, sport has flourished from grass roots, college and professional sports, to our current range of diverse sports, such as the X games, women’s professional leagues, and Gay Games. Thus, through sport management programs and its professional organization, faculty and professionals continue to develop current and future sport managers and researchers.

With the novelty and entertainment value in sport, some students may not have a clear understanding of the requirements and expectations for obtaining a degree in the field of sport management; and thus, this leaves some students expressing, "I'm here, now what?" and looking for guidance and support, or a mentor, to help them achieve their career of choice. Mentoring in higher education, however, is hit and miss.

Specific to mentoring in higher education, mentoring should focus on student productivity, classroom management, degree completion, career development (Watson, Clement, Blom, & Grindley, 2009); as well as, the recruitment and retention of diverse students of color (see Brown et al., 1999; Ku, Lahman, Yeh, & Cheng, 2008; Quarterman, 2008).

Thus, the benefits of mentoring are vast and entail two main components a) psychosocial support and b) career development (Kram, 1985).

The purpose of this symposium is to discuss the benefits of mentoring for students pursuing advanced degrees in sport management or sport administration, and to provide an understanding of the mentor-protégé relationship in aiding one's a) psychosocial development, b) career guidance, and c) modeling of behavior and skills through matriculation of the masters and/or doctorate degree. In addition, panelists will explicate how mentorship can benefit sport management programs (e.g., program advertisement, recruitment and retention of students of color and international students (Ku, Lahman, Yeh, & Cheng, 2008; Quarterman, 2008)).

Jowett and Stead (1994) suggest the need to understand how students matriculate and are supported through their respective academic programs. They explicate understanding how students are supported aids in the learning process; and thus, promote the use of mentoring to a) support students and b) aid students in obtaining a professional skill set. Moreover, Parker, Griffin, Placek, and Dodds (2000) explicate the need for graduate students to understand their academic program and advisor's expectations. More pointedly, Parker et al. (2000) purport graduate students should research academic programs to: a) examine the program reputation, b) examine the quality of available resources (e.g., libraries), c) understand the atmosphere and culture of the program, d) review the program requirements and course options, e) determine the amount and types of financial support, and f) determine the type of supervision and support which provided in reference to mentoring (e.g., faculty, peer). The
authors suggest that understanding these six factors will aid in balancing, surviving, and thriving in their respective graduate programs.

The lack of these understandings can prove disadvantageous to a graduate student. For example, Ku, Lahman, Yeh, and Cheng (2008) state, “matriculation into a doctoral program of study can be a difficult transition for many people” (p. 365); and, students “transitioning into graduate school have been shown to experience increased feelings of insecurity, decreased self-esteem, and high levels of stress and anxiety” (p. 365) due to unclear expectations, demographic characteristics (i.e., race, gender), and economic resources. Additionally, according to Roberts, Kavussanu, and Sprague (2001), mentoring in institutional environments that have a strong research culture could impact the nature and quality of mentoring students. For example, institutional academic programs which promote mastery-oriented research climates that focus on research and the education and career development of students compared to outcome-oriented research climates that focus on competition for grants and publications can impact the mentor-protégé relationship (Roberts et al., 2001). The authors suggests outcome-oriented research climates may create, or encourage, negative moral and ethical behaviors (e.g., cutting corners to secure grant funding) from faculty could create future researchers and scholars who do the same.

Acknowledging the potential questions, challenges, and discommodities graduate students could face, along with the ways in which mentors could aid in student transition is of importance. Thus, to address graduate students’ matriculation in sport management programs, this symposium will consist of graduate students, faculty, and industry representatives who will touch on the negative consequences of minimal professional guidance; but, more importantly, will address the benefits and importance of mentorship.