Synergies and Divergences Between the Sport Management Academic Job Market and Doctoral Students in 2010-11

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Past research on the sport management academic job market found an abundance of job openings and a lack of qualified individuals to fill these positions (e.g., Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008; Mahony, Mondello, Hums, & Judd, 2004; Pedersen, Fielding, & Vincent, 2007; Pedersen & Schneider, 2003; Pedersen, Whisenant, & Schneider, 2005). Despite the seemingly booming sport management academic job market, the U.S. and global economy took a downturn in 2008. According to a report by Cooper (2010), fewer faculty jobs in higher education were listed in 2008-2009 than any year in the previous decade, representing a 24% decrease in job listings from the 2007-2008 academic year. Additionally, the number of job openings in the social sciences was down 31% in 2008 (Cooper, 2010). Along with the decrease in faculty hiring, many universities across the country received less federal and state funding, and experienced university-wide budget cuts and/or salary freezes (Brainard, 2011; Kelderman, 2011).

The last study to examine both sport management academic job announcements and doctoral student preparation concurrently was Mahony et al. (2004), and both the economic and higher education climates have experienced drastic changes since that research was conducted. Because of the current global economic state, along with the trends of fewer faculty hires, smaller budgets, and faculty salary freezes, it is necessary to revisit these topics in order to assess the current sport management academic job market and the preparation of those hoping to fill open positions.

The purpose of this study was threefold: first, to understand the current sport management faculty job market; second, to understand the preparation and job expectations of current sport management doctoral students; and third, to examine this data together in order to understand how prepared current doctoral students are in relation to the current sport marketing jobs available, and how well their job expectations match the jobs currently available.

This study built upon Mahony et al.’s (2004) research, but differed in its methodology. Mahony et al. (2004) surveyed doctoral students’ faculty advisors, but stated that “it would be helpful to examine the views of doctoral students relative to their goals and how well programs are preparing them for the faculty job market” (p. 107). Therefore, this study surveyed current sport management doctoral students instead of faculty members in order to uncover the students’ sense of preparation, along with their personal job preferences and expectations upon completion of their doctoral program.

This study employed two research methodologies. First, content analysis was used to examine sport management job announcements over a one-year time period. This methodology mirrored that used by Pedersen et al. (2007). The researchers collected job announcements over a one-year time period from the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) listserv, North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) listserv, HigherEdJobs.com, and Chronicle.com. A total of 58 job advertisements were collected and subsequently coded. The codebook was modeled after that of Pedersen et al. (2007), and contained 48 variables. Results were analyzed using SPSS 19.

A survey methodology was utilized for data collection of current doctoral students’ experiences in their respective doctoral programs. The survey was developed by the researchers based on their own experiences and observations as former doctoral students and current university faculty members, as well as by adapting some of the questions from Jisha and Pitts’ (2004) Sport Management Program Choice Survey. The survey was distributed via email to the NASSM listserv and NASSS listserv in May 2011. A total of 81 complete responses were collected and analyzed using SPSS 19.

The results revealed that the once-strong sport management academic job market seemed to have fallen prey to the weakening U.S. economy and downward hiring trends in higher education. The number of academic sport
management job openings decreased significantly since the last known study to assess job announcements. In the 2005-06 academic year, Pedersen et al. (2007) found 155 open positions, while the current study found just 58 openings from 2010-11. Of the 81 doctoral student survey respondents, 54 indicated that they expected to earn their doctoral degree in 2011 or 2012, meaning that at least 54 students were likely pursuing the 58 open positions found in this study. Unlike Mahony’s (2008) assertion that the number of professorial positions in sport management was far greater than the number of doctoral graduates and “we can expect this to continue” (p. 2), the landscapes of sport management academic jobs and applicant pools have changed drastically in a very short period of time, revealing much greater parity between the number of open positions and the number of qualified applicants than ever before.

One of the major findings of the study was that doctoral students received much greater training and preparation in the area of research than in teaching, despite the fact that 84.5% of job announcements listed teaching experience as a preferred or required qualification. In terms of students’ research preparation, the average number of publications for ABD students was 1.00, and the average number of national conference presentations was 2.74, indicating that by the time doctoral students reach the ABD level, they are engaged in active research and have received training necessary for conducting research in an academic faculty position. Conversely, very few doctoral students received formal training pertaining to teaching. Only 12.3% of students received formal training through their department, while just 24.7% took a pedagogy course to learn to teach.

These results, as well as statistically significant correlations relating to job openings and doctoral student preparation, and the topics of salary expectations and areas of research and teaching expertise will be further examined in the presentation. Implications for current sport management doctoral students, faculty members, and the academic discipline as a whole will be discussed.