Harnessing the Power of Alumni in Leading a Sport Management Program

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Sport management programs have a great opportunity to develop one of their most important assets, their alumni. Alumni have a vested interest in the growth and enhanced standing of the program. Therefore, tapping into the alumni base is a mutually advantageous situation for both the sport management program and the alumni. Alumni who are actively involved in the professions and industries of sport management could bring rich real-world experience to the students of the university.

Alumni associations aim to keep former students connected with the university in a symbiotic relationship (Casinger, 2010). Dolan (2002) notes that “Alumni play many critical roles for the School – returning to teach, counseling graduating students, and serving on advisory boards to the School, and providing financial resources for the programs we need to execute our mission.” Another contribution of alumni groups is to serve as a source of necessary information about the requirements of potential hiring organizations in sport management that should be taken into consideration by the university in order to update the quality of education to the current requirements of society and to prepare specialists that are in demand (Parks, 1991). The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate strategies to build and maintain a quality relationship with alumni in addition to identifying specific teaching strategies involving alumni and enhancing the classroom experience for current students.

The notion seems simple, “Let’s start an alumni association,” but this initiative takes a significant amount of time and energy in order to build identification with a program (Wann & Somerville, 2000). Society is so mobile that keeping up with alumni is an arduous task. Shapiro et al. (2010) discussed communication as a barrier to student-athlete alumni donations. Tapping the power of an organized group requires high communication strategies. Newsletters, e-mail broadcasts, and mailings are a must. Webinars and conference calls are also useful. Setting up alumni by discipline sub-units is an effective way to organize alumni so that groups could be reached easily and economically.

One tactic that could benefit current students is having guest alumni speakers and presenters in class to share current job trends within the discipline. Students benefit from hearing stories from alumni. This technique provides them insight into their own future and potential jobs. Additionally, alumni participation is often viewed as a measurement of alumni satisfaction. When reaching out to alumni, there should be a predetermined and specifically defined purpose. Strategic communication is highly important with alumni. Sport management programs would aim to only make specific requests so that the alumni know the time commitment being requested.

Educators of sport management can also utilize alumni through specific assignments which relate directly to real-world scenarios within the sports industry. Examples of classroom assignments include case studies and interviews where students are required to interact with selected alumni. First, sport management professors could develop a group of alumni dedicated to enhancing the classroom experience. Alumni could be used as a source to create case studies that relate to their specific position and segment of the sports industry. Students could research the case study and demonstrate conclusions and decision making skills through interaction with the alumni who created the case study. Sport management graduates may work for professional sport franchises, college athletic programs, sport agencies, sport facilities, sporting goods companies, and many other sport career domains. An effective way for students to receive information on these types of jobs is to hear from alumni who are working in those positions. These teaching strategies may help students tailor their academic experience toward the specific type of job that they would like to accomplish.