

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

Online Learning is Here to Stay! Sport Management and Distance Education

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Teaching

Thursday, May 30, 2013

**60-minute symposium,
roundtable, or workshop
(Room 412)**

Abstract 2013-054

2:10 PM

Within these economic times, many universities have turned to online courses and distance education programs to increase student enrollment and to offset decreasing state funds (Foster & Carnevale, 2007). University administrators realize the distance learning environment can provide a distinct opportunity for learning beyond traditional classroom settings, and many students prefer or need online courses (i.e., working students). Almost 30% of all college and university students now take at least one online course (Sloan, 2011). Despite predictions that the growth of online education would level off, enrollments are increasing (21% increase in 2010) in online courses (Kaya, 2010). Within this upward shift in distance education, many sport management departments and programs are now providing online sport management courses and degrees. The purpose of this interactive symposium is to examine the current state of distance education within sport management by looking toward the future, to explore the differences in program evaluations, to discuss opportunities and challenges related to managing online courses and programs, and to present diverse experiences from unique universities.

This panel of distance education faculty and administrators will provide specific sport management examples on how current programs and universities are addressing distance education. This symposium will provide perspectives from varied university settings in terms of types of distance programs (undergraduate versus graduate), size of university, geographic location, and research involvement (low and high intensive research universities). The following questions will be addressed by our symposium panel:

What is the future of distance education in sport management?

Currently, the evidence points to a continued increase in online students and programs, yet “there may be some clouds on the horizon” (Sloan, 2010, pg. 4). The panelists agree the growth potential for distance education in sport management is tremendous. As more programs appear in the market, the opportunity for saturation increases. In the future, as competition increases, enrollments with current programs may decline as new ones are formed. While some panelists believe distance education will not replace all face to face programs, distance education programs have already replaced some traditional on-campus graduate programs. Quality online programs with administrative support will have the opportunity to thrive as long as student demand remains high.

How do we measure the quality of online educational programs in sport management?

The need for integrity of online programs, quality assurance, and accountability for universities has increased as the public scrutiny of higher education steadily increases (Wergin, 2005). As online programs are emerging, accreditation issues and quality measures are becoming increasingly important to universities and distance education researchers. Shelton (2011) reviewed published articles from 2000 to 2009 related to evaluating quality in online education programs and found specific themes emerged from the data: (a) institutional commitment, financial support, and leadership, (b) teaching and learning, (c) faculty support, student support, and course development, (d) technology, evaluation and assessment, (e) cost effectiveness, management, and planning, (f) faculty and student satisfaction, and (g) student retention.

Quality assessments of our online degrees are extremely important to sport management as an academic field. However, only one of the sport management programs represented within this panel is evaluating its online programs with a recommended distance education evaluation process. Some programs are using tools, evaluation forms, and questions used for face to face courses, while others are using general communication with current online

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students as their main form of evaluation. This issue will be addressed during the panel.

What are the biggest challenges and issues related to offering distance education sport management courses?

Researchers (e.g., Shale, 1990; Zhao, Lei, Yan, Lai, & Tan, 2005) have pointed out that the keys to successful online learning for students do not differ much from face to face learning. Nevertheless, as this new delivery method has grown within sport management, many challenges have risen for universities, programs, faculty, and students. Challenges for programs and universities include lack of support for departments (i.e., new faculty lines, lack of autonomy to spend revenue), attrition of students, and lack of faculty commitment to embrace change (i.e., technology, online learning). Faculty are facing challenges related to larger time commitments than anticipated, steep learning curves for instructors pertaining to online course delivery systems (i.e., Blackboard, Moodle), weak technical support, different perspectives and expectations between faculty and students (i.e., amount of coursework, expectation of constant communication), and issues of overload and compensation. Students are facing challenges including interaction with faculty, technical issues, lack of technical support, and students' lower expectations of the work load related to online courses. All stakeholders are faced with the challenge of cheating in online education. Within college education, Jones (2011) found that 92% of college students either cheated or knew someone who did. Within the online environment cheating is a major hurdle for acceptance and must be addressed (Meine & Dunn, 2009).

What have been the biggest rewards for offering distance education sport management courses?

Overwhelmingly, all panelists agree that the financial gains are the biggest reward and driving force for offering courses online. Specifically, many programs have been given the opportunity to have complete autonomy to use the revenue stream created by their distance education programs. Secondary rewards beyond revenue include increases in student diversity, knowledge and opportunities for the faculty, ability to collaborate with different and interesting people on campus, flexibility for students and faculty, and an increase in publicity and awareness of sport management programs.

This symposium will provide salient information on distance education in sport management. The topics outlined above will serve as a guide for the panelists, and audience input and interaction is welcome.