

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

The Myth of Work-Life Balance: A Round Table Discussion

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Professional preparation

Thursday, May 30, 2013

**60-minute symposium,
roundtable, or workshop
(Room 415)**

Abstract 2013-055

2:10 PM

In 2011, a round table discussion was held at the London, Ontario NASSM conference on Fatherhood and Work – Family Balance in Academia. Given the evident interest on the part of the audience, it was immediately clear that one session would not be adequate to cover the demand for information and discussion about this ever-present and important topic for sport management academics. Thus, a follow-up discussion is being proposed with the intent to expand conversations beyond just that of fatherhood; rather discussion would focus on the myth of work-life balance for all faculty members.

Growing pressure on faculty has arisen as the corporatization of universities continues. Tenure positions are becoming more competitive and faculties are charged with being more productive despite dwindling resources. Faculty work is peppered with competing time for advisees, service projects, committee responsibilities, writing, and increasing expectations to attract grant dollars. These, combined with universities' missions of improving application rates, retention, accountability for 4-year and 6-year graduation rates, and university rankings, create a situation in which faculty are confronted with the challenge to balance work and life outside work. In 2012, a survey was conducted with the entire population of doctoral students at the University of California-Berkeley. Results from the investigation indicated that more than 70 percent of women and 50 percent of men characterized faculty positions at research universities as too intense and unfriendly to family life (Mason, 2012). Both genders have observed the increase in intensity. One male Ph.D. student stated that he was "fed up with the narrow-mindedness of supposedly intelligent people who are largely workaholic and expect others to be so as well." A female peer also commented, "Since beginning my doctoral work, I have become convinced that very few, if any, female professors are able to have stable, fulfilling family lives of the sort that I wish for (a stable marriage and children)."

Mason and Eckman (2007) focused on the dilemma that many academics, particularly women, have faced in growing numbers. They are not opting out of their careers as professors nor are they rising to the top positions in their fields. They are instead caught in a "second tier," unlikely to return to the fast track. In "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter presents how she walked away from a high powered position at the State Department that she had worked her entire academic career to achieve, after realizing she was missing days and weeks of her sons' lives. Her decision to seek a higher degree of work-life balance came with consequences and she admits having to make compromises along the way. But ultimately, her message was that combining a fast track career with a truly satisfying family life is a challenge for which few are prepared. Instead, she asked is the fast track worth it? Rather, how can faculty achieve career satisfaction and success while maintaining a fulfilling life outside of work? Is one area of the work-life dichotomy destined to suffer? Is choosing to enrich one's home life over one's work devalued in the culture of academe? Finally, are there faculty positions within the academy that lend themselves to work-life balance better than others?

In response to Slaughter, some have suggested that work-life balance is a myth (Atlantic, 2012). In essence, it may be impossible to actually "have it all." Still others suggest that acceptance of one's place in life is essential to becoming comfortable with one's decisions to spend additional focus on family or work (Joyner, 2012). And still others suggest that only women feel guilt in association with choosing career over family at times during their lives (Spar, 2012).

The purpose of the proposed round table discussion is to develop a dialogue on the shared experiences of both male and female sport management faculty with respect to the efforts to balance career and life outside of work. This roundtable discussion will a) discuss the existence of work-life balance in academe, b) explore the realities of accepting one's choices related to work-life balance, c) identify those factors that make work-life balance more approachable. The panel members will be asked the following questions:

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In relation to your academic careers, what work-life balance struggles have you faced?
Have you developed a sense of acceptance that you cannot have or do it all at various stages of your career and family life?
What strategies have you used to develop a greater sense of work-life balance?

The panelists have been chosen based on their recognition as contributors to the sport management field while maintaining a full family life as partners and caretakers to children. Some have transitioned away from jobs in search of a greater degree of balance. Others have long tenures at their current universities, navigating more familiar territory. Each member will present their personal experience as it relates to the challenges and successes with work-family balance in sport management. Audience members will be encouraged to interact with panelists, ask questions and share personal experiences.