Enhancement of Sport Management Programs through Grant Writing

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Teaching Thursday, May 29, 2014 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2014-035 1:20 PM (Allegheny)

In sport management, as well as other academic disciplines, resources are needed to provide students, faculty, and staff with the best opportunities to be successful. Yet, unlike many other academic programs, sport management is lacking structure and resources in grant writing which is hindering the growth and development of the discipline (Jones, 2008). With sufficient structure and resources for grant writing, sport management programs could capitalize on the wealth of funds available through grants which exceeds $40 billion annually from over 90,000 different organizations (Blankenship, Jones, & Lovett, 2010; Devine, 2009). Further, grants and grant writing courses within the sport management major could be used to enrich both the student and faculty experience (Barnes & Brayley, 2006; Blankenship et al., 2010; Jones, 2008).

Breneman and Yakoboski (2011) defined grant-writing as fundraising conducted by institutions of higher education to support research, teaching, and other academic-based activities. The grant writing process encompasses proposals that contain project descriptions or narratives, rationales, budgets, and demographic information about the investigators and their previous grant activity along with their documented strengths (i.e., abridged curriculum vitae) that demonstrate their capacity to complete the proposed projects (Smith & Tremore, 2008). The location of grants may involve internal office sponsored-program opportunities or support offered by governments, associations, foundations, and/or other external agencies (Smith & Tremore, 2008).

Although some institutions have benefitted from establishing specific facilities and departments within colleges dedicated to grant writing, sport management grant writing remains limited and thus, there is an opportunity to provide a framework for the pursing of grants by sport management faculty and students. This idea is reinforced by the fact that recent economic trends have resulted in the need for institutions of higher learning to rely more on grant funding (Rikli, 2009) and facts that show about half of faculty members surveyed by Jones (2008) reported having secured no more than $500 in grant funding within a four-year time span. Mahoney (2008) also recognized the level of grant money available sport management is significantly less than other disciplines such as health and education, where interestingly many sport management programs reside (i.e., either in colleges, schools, or departments). Again, the lack of grant writing and procurement could lead to the decreased strength of sport management when competing for resources or support within their institution/college location.

As various institutions offer grant opportunities, the cost of tuition rises, and state appropriations decline, it is necessary for sport management scholars and practitioners not only to understand the intricacies of grant work but also the products and services associated with that work internal and external to sport management and universities. The purpose of this teaching presentation is to expose students and faculty to some critical areas of grant development/writing to help them understand the writing process and potential impact of grant obtainment for sport management. Within, faculty and students should see the opportunity for their own funded work, the viability and necessity of establishing networking connections, and the contribution of grants toward the branding, legitimacy, and development of sport management as an academic discipline housed in a variety of colleges. Topics such as the definition of grant writing, collaboration, preparation and/or institutional readiness, searching methods, technology, and writing tips associated with the grant writing process will be covered.

Importantly, the development of grant writing resources within sport management programs would allow for more collaboration opportunities. Collaboration opportunities could prove to be crucial to increasing research quality and answering research questions that require interdisciplinary approaches (Katz & Martin, 1997; Metzger & Zare, 1999; Rhoten & Parker, 2004). Notably, the incentive to collaborate for the purpose of securing grant funding could assist in decreasing misconceptions associated with sport management which supports a variety of differing opinions on what comprises a degree in sport management (Jones, 2008). One common misconception is that most sport management students are only pursuing a job in professional or collegiate sports. Conversely, the wide and diverse
range of employment opportunities associated with the production and management of sport products and services should be recognized as a major strength of our appeal. Sample careers identified by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) may involve: a) Administration; b) Communications; c) Facility and Event Management; d) Finance; e) Law; f) Marketing; g) Travel/Tourism; h) Officiating; and i) Coaching and certainly embrace contexts outside of collegiate or professional sport. Furthermore, many of these jobs and various contexts support initiatives or may require the pursuit of external funding (Barnes & Brayley, 2006).

Finally, this work suggests “Research is a faculty role, not only at doctoral-granting institutions, but also at comprehensive master’s colleges and universities. Even a casual examination of job advertisements supports the notion that all types of institutions have expectations for scholarship that include research and pursuit of external funding” (Solmon, 2009, p. 76). Furthermore, “Grant writing has evolved to become an essential skill in many, if not most, positions for which a doctoral degree is a requirement. The realities of the world of work are that identifying funding sources, learning to write proposals, and understanding the process of grant writing are competencies that doctoral students need to develop during their programs” (Solmon, 2009, p. 79). Overall, this presentation is intended to encourage the implementation of grant writing or special topics classes focusing on grants within sport management departments and highlight available resources for grant work available so that doctoral students, along with their supervising faculty, can be better prepared for a career in academia.