Three Examples of Program Assessment Development: Addressing Different Delivery Mediums, Demographics, and COSMA Requirements

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Relevance to Sport Management
As the discipline of sport management becomes more differentiated and defined, assessing student learning has become increasingly essential. Specialized accrediting bodies – such as the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) – include within their processes clearly defined methods for program-level assessment of student learning outcomes. Universities are also focused on outcomes assessment as tuition increases and job market realities demand a data-driven model of student learning and achievement to justify higher education. In this paper, we will explore how specialized accreditation and university-based assessments can complement one another and not double efforts. In addition, we will show how program-level outcomes assessment can be created to capture a variety of student populations and delivery modes. Last, we will use specific examples of challenges faced as we align our programs with both COSMA principles and university outcomes requirements.

Review of relevant literature
The focus in higher education today is on accountability (consumer protection) and institutional effectiveness (Head & Johnson, 2012, Kelderman, 2013, and Nelson, 2013). In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Obama put higher education “on notice” to reinforce the demand for accreditation as a mechanism by which to ensure institutions meet acceptable levels of quality and can demonstrate value for their students (consumers) (Lewin, 2013 & Nelson, 2013). As the focus in higher education turns toward accreditation at both the institution and program level as a means to examine and to enforce accountability and institutional effectiveness, agencies and programs are charged to understand and explain their programs in terms of outcomes and student success (Callahan, Strandholm & Dziekan, 2010, Krischnner, 2013 & Urciuoli, 2005). This combined with the changes in the focus of accreditation standards and the differences between programs can lead to a need to develop and understand both the process of accreditation and the implementation of program accreditation that can be used to strengthen the institution and program at any organization.

Clarity of Purpose/Objectives/Timeliness
The purpose and objectives of this paper are the following:

• To describe how sport management programs can align with their university assessment systems and with program-level COSMA and other specialized accreditors’ requirements.
• To demonstrate how to create program-level assessments for a variety of student populations, for different delivery modes, and align these with COSMA and other specialized accreditors’ requirements.
• To utilize real-world examples of the challenges faced by long-standing sport management programs as they respond to changing demographics, delivery modes, and accreditation requirements.

This paper is timely as more sport management programs are faced with demands from both specialized accreditors and university-based assessment offices. In addition, greater questioning of the relevance and cost effectiveness of higher education combined with shifting demographics of the undergraduate and graduate student populations and increased use of technology in delivering higher education means a greater emphasis on data-driven decisions, the collection and synthesis of student learning outcomes data, and more quickly shifting priorities within university departments.
Quality of Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The literature reveals a set of key elements that drive both a decision to pursue accreditation and to work within the system(s) selected. The elements are connected, yet distinct, and include: 1) Strategic decision making processes, 2) Quality and continuous improvement processes, 3) Stakeholder management, 4) Funding and support, and 5) Experiential learning. In a College of Business, strategic decision making processes are grounded in new pressures placed on College personnel that include industry expectations of students’ knowledge and abilities upon graduation, economic variability, and increased (inter)national competition for students, each of which makes planning accreditation processes a more difficult task (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Scherer, Javalgi, Bryant, & Tukel, 2005). Strategic decision-making needs to take place amidst reliable data. Accreditation processes develop these competencies and draw direct links between student development and knowledge and the upper level administration’s ability to correlate it with other operational needs. This aspect is closely related to the second area, quality and continuous improvement. Once accreditation is pursued and granted, the emphasis becomes focused on “closing the loop” in terms of collecting data and using the data to manage performance outcomes including curriculum changes and development (Miles, Hazeldine, & Munilla, 2004).

The third element, stakeholder management, specifically students, is complex as well. Technological changes (e.g., online courses) are changing the nature of what is a classroom and who is a student, which requires more rigorous processes for developing, delivering, and assessing the effectiveness of education. The student of today is more complicated and demanding and thus drives the need for a structured approach to managing operations, making third party evaluations of the quality of a program, and communicating its significance to stakeholders paramount to a College’s operations (Miles, Hazeldine, & Munilla, 2004). The fourth area of the lens relates to funding. Funding issues plague university and college administrators and is influenced by economic uncertainty and competition on a variety of levels (e.g., facilities, digital course offerings) (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006). The final aspect of the overall concept of this paper is that of experiential learning. Returning to one of the earlier points, industry personnel are finding modern university graduates lacking in many of the key skills and cognitive processes required in business (Bruett, 2006; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). The drive for an integrated curriculum that provides critical thinking abilities, demonstration of foundational skills, and other aspects of a connected curriculum require processes not only to define the structure, but also to develop data gathering and decision making measures to ensure graduates are entering the workforce with the necessary skills and abilities (Bruett, 2006; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). Accreditation offers both a process and a governing element to integrated curriculum design and development that students and industry personnel can understand.

Discussion/implications/future directions

Connecting COSMA outcomes assessment plans with institution-wide assessment requirements saves time and resources by avoiding unnecessary duplicative efforts and strengthens the assessments by integrating and supporting the institution’s mission and the mission and goals of the sport management department. Streamlining the process is more efficient and less time-consuming for all stakeholders.

By providing examples of successfully integrated program-level assessments of student learning outcomes with institution-wide assessment plans, the authors of this paper hope faculty and administrators who may be struggling with the accreditation process and implementation methods will feel empowered to move forward and know with whom to align on campus and how to tackle coordinated assessment efforts. Once in place, an integrated assessment plan allows an institution to adjust quickly to shifts in student population demographics and/or content delivery modes. If the assessment process is viewed as a less daunting and more manageable task, it is likely that more sport management programs will seek specialized accreditation along with institutional accreditation, thus leading to greater credibility and stronger educational outcomes within the sport management field.