An Examination of Work-Life Balance for Sport Management Doctoral Students

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The sport industry is expected to grow $145.3 billion between 2010 and 2015 (Belzer, 2014). As the sport industry grows, so does the number of people trying to break into the business of sport. There is a vast array of available careers in the sport industry (e.g., marketing, ticketing, administration, college athletics, event management), thus individuals are constantly searching for an opportunity to increase their attractiveness to employers in the midst of such a competitive job market. Many young professionals are considering obtaining a graduate degree in sport management to enhance their visibility to employers.

During the past two decades, the number of institutions offering sport management graduate degrees has seen exponential growth. For instance, according to the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), there are currently more than 200 master’s programs and 33 doctoral programs in sport management in the United States (NASSM, 2014). The majority of sport management students will graduate and pursue a career in the industry. However, most students receiving a Ph.D. in the field will pursue a career in academia.

Within higher education, individual colleges and universities have braced for the graying of the faculty (Cohen, 2008). Due to the generational gap that exists between faculty in the Baby Boomer generation and the young professionals in Generation Y, the landscape of higher education will dramatically shift during the next five years (Cohen, 2008). As such, those students working to obtain their doctorate degrees in hopes of joining the academy are in pursuit of teaching and/or research positions. These future sport management faculty members will replace the tenured and successful faculty who leave institutions to enjoy retirement.

Scholars have acknowledged the changing scope of the workforce, and in academia, literature shows that the number of individuals choosing tenure-tracked positions at research-intensive institutions is on a decline (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009). Also, doctoral attrition in the U.S. is nearly 50% (Cassuto, 2013). This means one out of every two doctoral students does not finish their degree. The culture or program environment of a graduate program may affect whether a student stays in the program (Cassuto, 2013).

Despite the literature on doctoral attrition focused primarily on the student-supervisor relationship (Fullick, 2013), the primary reason for the decline is attributed to extensive work hours that allow little time for family life (Mason et al., 2009). Likewise, it has also been discovered that personal problems may be a primary factor in why doctoral students leave the academy (Fullick, 2013). Therefore, after review, available literature describing the life of a sport management doctorate student and the challenges faced by these students is sparse. It was deemed significant to investigate the work-life balance of doctorate students.

Work-life balance is defined as “achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains” (Kirchmeyer, 2000, p. 81). It is argued that when individuals participate in one role, such as work, it is more difficult for graduate students to participate in another role, such as family. For sport management doctoral students, it may be challenging for students to participate in their role in academia while also participating in other roles (e.g., family, teaching, hobbies). This literature is timely, as the current generation of doctoral students also has different expectations and values from previous ones, primary among them the desire for flexibility and balance between career and other life goals (Mason et al., 2009).

In an effort to promote longevity in the sport management discipline, it is believed work-life balance of sport management doctoral students is important to consider. Both students and university programs may contribute to improvement of work-life balance. Research has shown a reduction in work hours and flextime options may lessen
the stressors associated with lack of work-life balance (Gregory & Milner, 2009), particularly when these options are seen as a choice by workers and not required by employers. Across many fields, there is strong support for role models and mentors who demonstrate work-life balance (Dabney & Tai, 2013; Deery, 2008; LaPan et al., 2013). Further, Brus (2006) provided specific strategies to be taken at the advisor and department levels, such as regular student-advisor interaction and community building programs.

Therefore, the purpose of this poster is to (a) share the completed research on doctoral students’ work-life balance, (b) offer work-life balance strategies for students and university programs to consider, and (c) provide future directions for research.