Are We Still Talking To Ourselves? A Symposium on the Impact of Sport Management Scholarship

Jacqueline McDowell, George Mason University
Damon Andrew, Louisiana State University
Robert Baker, George Mason University
Lisa Kihl, University of Minnesota
Daniel Mahony, Kent State University
Donna Pastore, The Ohio State University

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Nite and Singer (2012) surmised that sport management scholars should gauge whether their research has a positive impact on society, the social institution of sport, sport organizations, and a “positive and meaningful impact on the lives and groups of individuals who participate in, consume, and manage sport.” (p. 95). Perspectives on the impact of sport management scholarship have been previously advanced, where divergent views on sport management scholars’ academic charges are apparent. For instance, Weese (1995) asserted that sport management scholars need to be concerned with translating theory into practice; and admonished scholars for serving each other and being unsuccessful in meeting the needs and interests of practitioners. In response to Weese, Cuneen and Parks (1997) argued the focus of the North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM) and Journal of Sport Management (JSM) needs to remain on scholarship, as this approach will both contribute to improving the practice of sport management, but also positively impact the growth of NASSM and JSM and solidify sport management’s position “as a respected entity in the academy” (p. 126).

Nite and Singer (2012) similarly reiterated the importance of building the foundational knowledge in our field, but surmised it “could be viewed as irresponsible to not embrace and employ insightful ways to engage sport populations with the significant findings of sport management research” (p. 89). Hence the two charges (i.e. research and practice) should not be viewed as antithetical; and the field of sport management “must keep a healthy balance between the theoretical and the practical in its ongoing scholarship and research” (Ziegler, 2007, p. 301). Zeigler further cautioned against the tendency of sport management scholars “to speak to no one except each other” (p. 301).

Although the importance of ensuring our work has larger societal impacts has been emphasized repeatedly throughout the years, it is important to contextualize this issue. Institutional pressures, and corresponding tenure and promotion decisions, result in a narrow definition of what is deemed scholarly and what “counts.” Specifically, in research-oriented universities, tenure and promotion decision are made primarily by counting the number of publications in ranked journals—which are read primarily by other academicians (Nite & Singer, 2014; Shinn, 2014; Weese, 1995). Various models of scholarship and scholarly impact have been developed (e.g., Aguinis, Shapiro, Antonacopoulou, & Cummings, 2014; Boyer, 1997; Glassick, Taylor Huber, & Maeroff, 1997) and argued relating the value of community engaged scholarship, but they have gained limited traction. Shapiro (as cited in Shinn, 2014) noted the problematic nature of this approach, as it “does a poor job of measuring what kinds of impact faculty have on their students, their institutions, and the broader community through their research, teaching and service” (para. 7). Therefore, instead of being mindful of scholarly products and outlets that reach a broader audience, many professors play the game and publish where they can get the most credit.

As noted by Costa (2005), “because discussions and debates about the status, directions, and the future of a field are healthy and help scholarly work to advance, systematic inquiry into the parameters and implications of those discussions and debates can help a field to move itself forward” (p. 118). Hence the purpose of this symposium is to address these tensions between research and practice and discuss whether we can impact both research and practice when faced with institutional pressures. Do we have a duty to do so, and if so, how can we broaden the impact of our sport management research? Given the contextual issues highlighted earlier, a panel of experienced professors
and administrators with cumulative experiences in the roles of program coordinator, department chair/director, associate dean, dean, assistant provost and associate provost will address the aforementioned issues via specific questions posed by a moderator. The symposium will conclude with a discussion of recommendations for evaluating and highlighting the impact of sport management scholarship.

Although discussions about the impact and responsibility of sport management scholars have occurred in the past, sport management research has grown and continued to evolve in recent years. Moreover, expectations for sport management scholars are changing as universities revise standards for tenure and promotion, cut budgets and emphasize external grant funding more. This all combines to make this a timely discussion. We need to “actively demonstrate our worth, so we can safeguard our role in society. We want to leave not room for critics to question the investment in education that cultivates conscience…We begin by demonstrating how our scholarship has impact” (Shinn, 2014, para. 30).

References