I am Not a Tyrant: Sport Management Faculty Members’ Attitudes toward Students

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Research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of student-faculty relationships in regards to a variety of college student success factors, including impacting academic performance and retention (Baker & Griffin, 2010), persistence (Bordes-Edgar, Arrendondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011), effort, satisfaction, and learning (Kuh & Hu, 2001), sense of belonging and social interactions (Barnett, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Tovar, 2013; Tovar et al., 2009), and even correlating to higher grades in highly challenging courses (Micari & Pazos, 2012). Notably, this has also proven true for students from underrepresented backgrounds (Lundberg & Schriener, 2004; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009).

Simply put, in all types of courses, one of the greatest impacts on the success of students of all backgrounds is a caring instructor. Past literature has examined faculty perceptions of general education (Paulson, 2012), teaching evaluations (Gupta & Deeter-Schmelz, 2015), students with disabilities (Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008), student-athletes (Comeaux, 2011), and college student preparedness (Stevens & Miretzky, 2012). Dane-Staples (2013) believes that in sport management classrooms there is “an emphasis on teaching” (p. 25), yet, most faculty have never been required to take a pedagogical course.

Due to the significant role that faculty play in overall student success, faculty attitudes toward students must be better understood, since such perceptions can directly influence learning outcomes (Ng, 2002). Significant numbers of faculty feel students are lazy, unmotivated, and lack work ethic (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Ng, 2002). Many teachers who share such views regarding students are known as conservative-autocratic (Ng, 2002). Those that share the conservative-autocratic view often feel that hard work and meeting the goals outlined by the instructor is vital to learning (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Ng, 2002). Conservative-autocratic instructors believe students are expected to respect authority, and those who do not cooperate should be disciplined (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Ng, 2002). Research has demonstrated that students who are taught by conservative-autocratic instructors exhibit lower confidence, have a lower sense of self-worth, and have low rapport with their instructors (Ng, 2002; Ryan & Guardina, 1999; Zelina, Bohonyova, & Albertry, 1996).

Although some teachers exhibit traditional authority (i.e. conservative-autocratic) in the classroom, other teachers feel that students exist as individuals and should be free to utilize self-direction in meeting learning goals (Ng, 2002; Watt, 1989). This liberal-democratic attitude uses a personal approach to students and allows students to meet individual goals, assisting students in meeting their potential (Ng, 2002; Watt, 1989). Students who were taught using this method have been shown to be more creative, independent and enjoy being challenged (Ng, 2002; Ryan & Guardia, 1999; Zelina, Bohonyova, & Albertry, 1996). Previous research has examined the academic preparation of sport management faculty (e.g., Dittmore, Mahony, Andrew & Phelps, 2007; Mahony, Mondello, Hums & Judd, 2004). However, a paucity of research exists regarding sport management faculty perceptions and attitudes toward students, which can create tremendous impacts on learning outcomes.

Informed by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), the purpose of this study was to understand sport management faculty attitudes toward students. To answer the research question, researchers utilized the Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Students Scale (TATS), which consists of two separate subscales. The first subscale measured the conservative-autocratic teaching style, and the second subscale measured the liberal-democratic attitude of teachers. Each subscale consisted of eight items that were answered using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree. Both subscales have adequate reliabilities from .65 to .76. E-mail addresses of 1,200 faculty members from all NASSM-accredited sport management institutions were gathered. Researchers sent out the
invitational email containing an online survey link and invited faculty members to participate in this study. After sending one follow-up e-mail, 166 valid questionnaires were obtained and analyzed.

The mean age of faculty members who participated in this study was 46.58 years, 66.9% of the respondents were male, and the majority of the participants worked at public institutions (65.7%). Of the respondents, 63.9% worked at teaching institutions, and 80.7% were White. Using independent t-test, results indicated that sport management faculty members utilized the conservative-autocratic teaching style ($M = 2.69, SD = .81$) and had a liberal-democratic ($M = 3.32, SD = .56$) attitude toward students. The researchers examined if type of institution (i.e. teaching/research), gender (male/female), age groups (based on the mean), and tenure status influenced faculty attitudes. Results of independent t tests indicated that age was shown to be a significant factor as faculty members whose ages were above that of the mean ($n = 69, M = 2.19, SD = .092$) were more likely to exhibit conservative-autocratic attitudes toward students, $t(164) = 7.955, p < 0.01$, compared to younger faculty members ($n = 97, M = 3.04, SD = .063$). However, results of other independent t-tests did not show significant differences among faculty members in terms of gender, institution, and tenure status.

Attitudes can directly impact learning outcomes. Faculty members play large roles in the academic performance and retention of students (Baker & Griffin, 2010). This study strives to provide insight into the teaching style(s) utilized by sport management faculty members, as well as how that teaching style might impact students.