Issues in Sport Management Doctoral Programs: Perspectives from the Directors

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The research doctorate, usually referred to as the Ph.D., is universally regarded as representing the ‘pinnacle of scholarship’ (Gilbert, 2004). Arguably, the focus of doctoral work is producing a knowledgeable graduate. Projected and directed doctoral student outcomes include ‘stewards of the discipline’ (Golde & Walker, 2006), ‘knowledge workers’ (Usher, 2002), and ‘self-managing learners’ (Stephenson, Britten, Barry, Bradley, & Barber, 2006). The Ph.D. has traditionally been the training ground for ‘stewards of the discipline’ (Golde & Walker, 2006), and so its practices have been largely shaped by this purpose.

A major expansion in the numbers of doctoral graduates over the past two decades parallels a significant increase in the numbers of new disciplines and interdisciplinary specializations, including Sport Management. For example, according to the 2015 NASSM website, there are more than 30 programs presently claiming to offer a doctoral program. As a result of such changes, challenges exist for those who administer a doctoral program in Sport Management. These challenges include a variety of factors that influence student enrollment and attrition, progress towards the degree, and degree completion. The high student attrition rate from doctoral degree programs in the United States remains a troubling aspect of higher education. Several researchers have indicated that nearly 50% students who begin a doctoral program eventually do not complete their degree (Bair & Haworth, 2004; Gardner, 2008). Why does doctoral student attrition matter? In financial costs, doctoral student attrition is very expensive for institutions. A study at the University of Notre Dame found that the university would save $1 million a year in stipends alone if doctoral student attrition decreased by 10% (Smallwood, 2004).

A consistent factor across academic disciplines and institutions is the interaction between the individual student and faculty member. Doctoral students are more likely to persist to graduation and recount higher degrees of satisfaction with their program when they are involved in a professionally profound association with a faculty mentor or advisor (Bair & Haworth, 2004). Anderson and Shannon (1988) defined mentoring as “a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (p. 40). While doctoral students typically work with an advisor during the dissertation process, a mentoring relationship offers personal and professional support that surpasses traditional advising. Although supervising doctoral students often requires an extensive amount of time by the faculty, compensation for such supervision rarely takes a monetary form. Doctoral students in general desire mentors who serve as role models, value the students, are generous with their time, and provide research support (Bell-Ellison & Dedrick, 2008). Yet, Pyh’alt’o, Toom, Stubb, and Lonka (2012) reported the lack of sufficient funding or resources as being one of the most problematic conditions doctoral students face. As a result, another challenge of doctoral education is funding for students and faculty over an extended period of time.

Berelson (1960) indicated that early doctoral education served a population that was typically White, single, and male. More recent research has reported that the population has not changed significantly (Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, & Espinosa, 2009). Thus, the challenges of developing successful relationships can be especially challenging for women and minority students, who sometimes grapple to find faculty mentors and professional guidance (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Women seek professional as well as personal insights as part of such relationships (Rose, 2005). Additionally, women tend to look for acceptance and confirmation from mentors to a greater extent than their male peers (Rose, 2005). Minority doctoral students not only face many of the same hurdles as their majority-race peers, they also are more likely to experience feelings of isolation and a lack of minority role models (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Although higher education promotes inclusion and diversity among faculty and
students, the number of minority doctoral candidates who graduate has lagged behind their majority counterparts. For example, in 1978, 13 percent of individuals receiving their doctorates in education were people of color. Twenty years later, in 1998, the percentage increased by 6% to 19%. Additionally, in 1978 just 40% of those receiving doctorates in education were women. Twenty years later, 62% of those earning education doctorates were women (Sanderson, Dugoni, Hoffer, & Sefa, 1999). The dearth of diversity in graduate education has become an alarming issue in the United States, resulting in the development of several initiatives to study the recruitment and retention programs for women and students of color across disciplinary lines (National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, 2005; National Science Foundation, 2007). Yet, despite their growing presence in doctoral programs, people of color and women continue to be underrepresented among doctoral candidates (Hurtado et al., 2009).

Once the domain of an elite few, doctoral programs have become a rapidly expanding and changing phenomenon (Lee & Boud, 2009). Discussions, however, regarding the aforementioned issues faced by directors of doctoral programs in sport management have been relatively limited. A panel of four sport management doctoral program directors will lead this interactive discussion based on, but not limited to, the following issues: recruiting and retaining quality students including women and minorities, recruiting students with limited funding opportunities, time commitment relating to faculty involvement in student research and dissertations, justifying small seminars as well as limited number of students accepted per year, and online learning.

An important aim of this proposed roundtable symposium, therefore, is to inform a general audience interested in doctoral education on the nature of the challenges Sport Management doctoral program directors face. A moderator will lead the panel, as well as the audience, in this interactive session regarding a number of key questions to generate discussion. The presentation will also generate ideas about where doctoral education in Sport Management is going currently.

References


