Sustaining the Development of Sport Management: Perspectives of University Senior Administrators

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The realm of higher education in the world today is facing many challenges. Changing demographics of the student body, adopting to new modes of educational delivery, public pondering on the employability of graduates (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013; Board, 2013; Ebersole, 2014; Universities UK, n.d.; Strategic Issues Program, 2014), just to name a few, are some of such challenges that demand the undivided attention of administrators of higher education. In the US, institutions of higher learning are also battling additional circumstances unique to American colleges and universities. The continuing decline in state support of public higher education, and the growing concerns regarding the rising cost of tuition have forced many US institutions to take drastic fiscal measures as survival strategies (Anonymous, 2014; Davis Educational Foundation, 2012).

To cope with these challenges, institutions of higher learning in the world have tried to be innovative in the teaching and learning process. Cognitive science, MOOCs (massive open online classes), artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics are some new learning tools that have been gaining popularity in the past few years (Ahalt & Fecho, 2014; Baer & Campbell, 2012; Carvey, 2014; Fain, 2013; Oblinger, 2012; Yuan & Powell, 2013; Wood, 2014) due to the advancement in informational technology. Various innovations and ideas, such as competency-based education, self-paced learning, modular coursework, customized learning are also being contemplated and adopted by the academia (Ahalt & Fecho, 2014; Ebersole, 2014). It is believed that these tools and innovations will enable the delivery of the highest quality educational experience at a more affordable price (Mills, 2014).

The new paradigm as depicted above challenges the traditional ways of learning and teaching in a brick and mortar institution. It calls for new approaches to learning, new ways of thinking about knowledge transfer and delivery, and new understanding and shifting of the role of faculty (Bowen, 2013). What are the best ways to sustain the development of the sport management discipline in this new paradigm? What are our coping strategies? These are the key questions to be addressed by this panel at this symposium.

A key message that the panel wants to emphasize before discussing coping strategies is that the realities of higher education are with us. The sport management discipline must align if not lead in order to sustain its continuous development. The following are some coping strategies recommended by the panel.

• While sport management programs continue to focus on external research funding and tuition production, they must effectively communicate internal value to their peers within the institution in order to remain competitive for increasingly smaller pools of internal resources.

• Sport management programs must utilize the informational technology to deliver online programs, both in synchronous and asynchronous formats. In addition, they should take advantage the development of informational technology to accelerate its eventual foray into continuing education or even professional certification, as prospective employees try to differentiate themselves from competitors in a very competitive job market.

• Sport management administrators need to rationalize the cost benefit of every expenditure. Sport management academicians would be well served in tightening curriculum - heighten the efficiency and efficacy of their course offerings (i.e., eliminate the nice but not necessary); reduce or rotate offerings to ensure critical mass in classes to justify offering).

• Sport management programs must utilize value-added experiences and options to generate student interest (internships, international experiences, shared courses using alternative delivery vehicles) to maximize/grow
enrollments. In addition, they must engage their students in hands-on, experiential learning pedagogies, and active learning teaching methods.

• Sport management faculty must give renewed emphasis on experiential learning projects in most if not all the sport management courses. They must engage in scholarship that is both impactful to the sport management field and the sport industry, and contribute their time and talents to professional and community organizations.

• Sport management programs must effectively promote the tighter, more attractive program in formats or emerging technologies that contemporary students access (e.g., social media, Internet, Skype visits).

• Sport management programs must ensure that their programs are innovative. Particularly, their faculty must be committed to innovation and be willing to adopt innovative teaching pedagogy to enhance their students’ learning, and to explore new instructional technologies.

• Sport management programs must adopt alternative delivery systems to strengthen their viability. Such systems include accreditation of past training/education/work experience, workplace delivery options, expanding the application of contextual learning, and joint technical/academic programs (i.e., industry recognized certifications).

• Sport management programs must have good relationships with sport industry professionals and turn them into advocates for the sport management discipline. The virtual cycle of sustainable development theory provides a strong justification for building such relationships.

• Sport management programs must be impactful to ensure their sustainable development. They must show that they are making a difference and having impact on the lives of their students, the local communities, and the sport industry, etc. They must prepare and train their students with the knowledge, abilities and skill sets that are sought after by sports organizations (high percent placement rate). The sport management faculty and students must engage in research projects that are impactful to both the field and the sport industry – the produced research work is highly used by sport industry professionals and cited by other sport management educators and researchers.

Our panel consists of four senior administrators in both American and Canadian institutions of higher education. Together, they have had over 30 years of senior experiences in administration of higher education.