Defining and Describing Research Centers for Sport Management

Marcella Otto, Louisiana State University
Benjamin Downs, Louisiana State University
Yoseph Mamo, Louisiana State University
Chad Seifried (Advisor), Louisiana State University

Teaching/Learning - Teaching strategies/methods (Other) 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  Friday, June 2, 2017  2:15 PM  Room: Wilson

Abstract 2017-238

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century the evolution of colleges and universities in the United States and Canada included the emergence of academic and/or industry-driven research centers. Stahler and Tash (1994) defined research centers as special university activities dedicated to research and as capable of attracting important external funding made available for specific or general research topics. In addition to interest in attracting external funding, universities are often focused on establishing research centers to promote interdisciplinary or collaborative research. Interdisciplinary research may help realize institutional missions focused on answering important societal or scientific questions, developing products and/or services, and maximizing or marketing the achievement of other research milestones (Etzkowitz & Kemelgor, 1998; Geiger, 1990; Mallon, 2004). As of 2011, 17,000 research centers surfaced in the United States and Canada (Hall, 2011). Further, since 1965, Hall and the Research Center Directory found research centers have grown at an estimated rate of 5% to 10% per year, a growth rate expected to continue.

Successful research centers legitimize universities, their associated faculty, and their disciplines (Larson & Long, 2000; Mallon, 2004). Although most research centers are traditionally rooted in STEM disciplines (Breiner, Harkness, Johnson, & Koehler, 2012), findings of the Plunkett Research group (2015) demonstrated the sport industry is a viable place for current and future research centers (i.e., there is vast potential for industry support). For instance, they estimated the size of the sport industry in the United States at $498 billion for 2015 and $1.5 trillion globally. Interestingly, as an academic discipline interdisciplinary by nature, little to no work has been organized for the field of sport management to promote the potential of and explain how to develop research centers. Thus, an opportunity exists to expand the influence of sport management faculty on university campuses while furthering the sport industry through the establishment of sport management-led research centers that are academic and/or industry-focused.

The purpose of this teaching presentation is to provide information to sport management faculty and students about research centers to help them understand the potential impact that activity has for the field. The presentation is organized as follows; First, we aim to differentiate research centers from other types of organized research units (e.g., research groups and institutes). Second, we explain specific heuristic categories of university-based research centers based on resources (e.g., standard, adaptive, shadow) and relationships (e.g., university-industry, programmed/corporate alliance, for-profit spin-offs, technology transfer, etc.). Third, we review the different types of research opportunities available to research centers (e.g., research partnerships, human resource exchange and training, and contracted consulting and/or research). Fourth, we discuss administrative issues, offer strategies, and identify the characteristics necessary to develop and maintain a successful research center on a university campus.

This information is necessary because research centers differ in a variety of ways (Klein, 1996; Stahler & Tash, 1994; Vest, 2005). For instance, the size of support and research staff may be different along with the prominence of faculty and/or professional researchers. Further, the level of formal support or separation from academic departments and degree of interaction or integration within the university may differ based on the degree of inter- or multidisciplinary foci along with funding, missions, and emphasis on applied research. Next, according to Perkmann and Walsh (2007), university-industry links often rely on informal and formal social links that deserve understanding. For instance, collaborative behavior between university research centers and industry drives innovation processes (e.g., Geisler et al., 1990; Perkmam & Walsh, 2007; Ponomariov & Boardman, 2010; Santoro & Chakrabarti, 1999). Previous research also demonstrated collaborative opportunities increased research quality through interdisciplinary approaches (Katz & Martin, 1997; Metzger & Zare, 1999; Rhoten & Parker, 2004). Furthermore, partnership with
different stakeholders at various levels is paramount for the success of organized research centers (Hall, 2011; Ikenberry and Friedman, 1972; Mallon 2004; Sa, 2008). Partnership behavior reduces barriers such as competition between faculty members for research support, resources, and infrastructure (Boardman & Bozeman, 2007; Stahler & Tash, 1994). Moreover, organized interdisciplinary effort with partners is advantageous for the financial stability and academic credibility of centers (Larson & Long, 2000).

Additional rationale offered by Patterson (2014) and Toker and Gray (2008) highlighted the educational impact of centers in the growth of undergraduate student research experiences and enhancing faculty member publications. Students who are involved in undergraduate research activities benefit by developing research skills (Gilmore, Vieyra, Timmerman, Feldon, & Maher, 2015). Research centers have the potential to build junior faculty and expand human capital based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources (Ponomariov & Boardman, 2010). Additionally, Mallon (2006) identified benefits of interdisciplinary research that allows faculty members to collaborate with different fields, thus furthering productivity. This notion is supported by Sabharwal and Hu (2013) who found research productivity of senior, tenured faculty members affiliated with a research center is higher than non-center affiliated faculty.

Lastly, the effectiveness of center evaluation is more complicated and multifaceted than most research initiatives (Gray, 2008). The information provided in this teaching presentation could help future promotion and tenure decisions as that evaluation process is changing. In essence, evaluating the dimensions of effectiveness, efficiency, outcome, risk, and network are necessary to better understand research activities and the competencies of working collaboratively (Agostino, Arena, Azzone, Dal Molin, & Masella, 2012). Overall, it is our objective to explain and demonstrate how faculty, students, and sport industry partners can benefit from establishing collaborative relationships through research centers. Further, this teaching presentation is intended to encourage the implementation of sport management research centers focusing on cultivating mutually beneficial relationships between sport management academicians and sport management practitioners.