International Student Perspectives of Studying Sport Management in North America

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Internationalization is a highly relevant topic at universities around the world and has become an organizational priority, often contained within an institution’s mission statement or strategic plan (Tamburri, 2007). It has even attracted the attention of national governments and international governing bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2005). Over time, universities have grown increasingly aware of the benefits of diversifying their student body and providing students with an international perspective that will allow them to succeed in an increasingly globalized world (Danylchuk, 2011). The 21st century has realized a steady expansion of the flow of capital, goods, people, and services that lead to interaction, exchange, and integration of economies and societies toward linkages and partnerships (Hill & Vincent, 2006). There is an increasing need for today’s citizens to be world-minded. At the same time, many sport management academicians regard some focus on worldly and global issues as well as the global sport business industry as an important component in preparing the sport business management student (Danylchuk, Baker, Pitts, & Zhang, 2015). The regional sport management associations around the world—North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM), European Association of Sport Management (EASM), Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ), Asian Association for Sport Management (AASM), Latin Association for Sport Management (ALGEDE), and African Sport Management Association (ASMA)—have championed the international linkages and global partnerships among academicians. Additionally, groups of sport management scholars have developed global-related associations – Global Sport Business Association (GSBA) and World Association for Sport Management (WASM) – each developing conferences and literature focused on the global nature of sport business (GSBA, 2016; WASM, 2016). Hence, there is a need for sport management educators to infuse their curricula with global sport business content and experiences.

At the same time, there exists a need to examine the experiences and challenges of international students while studying abroad, as well as the experiences and challenges of academicians in their interactions with international students. Research by Danylchuk, Baker, Pitts, and Zhang (2015) addressed the latter need when they studied the perspectives of sport management academicians regarding their insights and practices used in the advising process. Fifteen sport management academicians with extensive experience with international students were interviewed and provided their perspectives on practices used in international student involvement—specifically, student identification, recruitment, acceptance, orientation, progress, and retention, and the inherent challenges and benefits. The primary challenges cited by the majority of participants were language and cultural differences in learning; however, all participants concurred that the benefits of supervising international students far outweighed the challenges. These benefits included, but were not limited to, bringing international and global perspectives into the learning environment, which was positive for both students and professors.

While the aforementioned study addressed the viewpoint of academicians, the authors recommended that future research investigate the perspectives of international students in order to provide a broader scope of the international student experience landscape. Therefore, this symposium will address such need through a panel of current and former international sport management students who will provide their viewpoints regarding their experiences and challenges while studying at North American universities. This symposium is directed at those academicians and students with either a beginning or extensive interest in internationalizing their curriculum, program, resources, content, opportunities, and experiences.