Sport Management Accreditation: Trends and Challenges

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Background
Over the past few years, more institutions are realizing the value of pursuing specialized accreditation in sport management and using it as a tool for self-evaluation and monitoring. In 2008, sport management moved from a program approval model (SMPRC) to a more comprehensive and complete evaluation of our programs through accreditation with the establishment of the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA). COSMA is currently in a unique position to review trends and challenges faced by member programs. As specialized accreditation in sport management is sought out by more programs, program directors and academic administrators will benefit from a comprehensive examination of the impact of COSMA accreditation.

Purpose
The purpose of this research was to examine trends and challenges in the COSMA accreditation process and to determine: Improvements within the program, department, and/or institution as a result of completing the accreditation process; the impact of accreditation on internal operations within the program, department, and/or institution; the perceived benefits COSMA accreditation provides for dual-accredited programs (AACSB/IACBE/ACBSP); and, areas of noncompliance cited by reviewers during accreditation site visits.

Methodology
The researcher analyzed the responses using qualitative methods by systematically identifying and categorizing various themes that emerged from the interviews. Specifically, the researcher extracted repeated themes that emerged from the interview process. After analyzing the themes, the researcher pulled direct quotes from each of the categories to provide additional clarification of the groupings of responses by the Program Directors.

Results
Many revealing themes and patterns emerged from the responses of Program Directors. Each of the following categories listed presents an emergent theme and pattern based on the responses of the participants: Challenges, opportunities and benefits, faculty involvement, on-campus perception, importance of accreditation, indirect and direct changes due to the COSMA accreditation process, internship, strategic planning and outcomes assessment, and enrollment.

Conclusions
The current findings mesh with the work of Elliott (2013) who found the areas of impact on accreditation for business schools to be: Enhanced reputation, leverage, increased management efficiencies, program revisions, increased focus on research, improved quality, and new programs/initiatives. It is evident that the COSMA accreditation process has initiated significant changes within the cohort of programs interviewed for this research. As many Program Directors indicated, the changes were influenced by the COSMA accreditation process and goal to achieve and/or maintain accreditation status. Based on the responses, the validation that is associated with COSMA accreditation was a strong motivator to take a deeper look into strengths of the programs from syllabi to SLOs to strategic planning to changing assessment measures to faculty teaching loads. In terms of departments with dual accreditation, only one sport management program was represented in this interview cohort and AACSB accreditation occurred prior to COSMA accreditation. Within the scope of this study, there was not a critical mass of dual accredited programs (AACSB/IACBE/ACBSP) to warrant any conclusive findings. For the programs that have been charged with undergoing program accreditation, they indicated that COSMA helped streamline outcomes assessment planning, as did the external accreditation for the institution as a whole.

Implications for Future Research
COSMA has been creating effective training to meet the needs of member programs to provide guidance and assistance as each Program Director manages the accreditation process. As the sport management discipline continues to evolve, it would be interesting to track the challenges and benefits associated with COSMA accreditation utilizing a greater pool of member programs. Educational quality increases when professionals engage to discuss “competencies, knowledge base, and curriculum concepts” (Fielding, Pitts, & Miller, 1991, p. 13). With the continued growth in sport management, more empirical research is needed to study the growth of programs earning COSMA accreditation.