Educating Doctoral Students to Teach More Effectively

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Teaching/Learning - Teaching strategies/methods (Other)  Thursday, June 7, 2018
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Doctoral programs expand candidates’ disciplinary knowledge, foster research methodological and statistical skills, and cultivate research abilities culminating in publications and dissertations, yet most do not require students to complete a course in college teaching. Even though typically doctoral students fund their studies by serving as graduate teaching assistants, often teaching undergraduate sport management courses, they seldom are prepared to teach effectively. Maybe faculty do believe doctoral students need formal preparation in teaching; others argue that only content delivery, rather than pedagogical content knowledge, matters. Possibly, some faculty discount any emphasis on learning how to teach because it might elongate programs of study. Other faculty may advise doctoral students not to spend much time on teaching lest it retard their scholarly productivity. However, it is a myth that a content expert, and especially a fledgling content expert, can effectively teach what they know. Is there any profession other than higher education for which its employees receive so little preparation for the work central to its mission (Gyurko, MacCormack, Bless, & Jodl, 2016)?

Effective instruction in well-developed courses that will advance the profession necessitates graduating doctoral students with the skills, abilities, and commitment to become competent teachers. The first purpose of this session is to explain why doctoral programs should educate doctoral students for teaching effectively. The second purpose is to offer alternative suggestions for how to prepare a more robust teaching cadre of doctoral graduates in sport management.

Why should doctoral students learn how to teach effectively? First, quality of instruction is central to student persistence in and graduation from college (Gyurko et al., 2016). That is, when taught by effective instructors, students learn more and develop essential life skills prior to graduation. Maybe because higher education faculties are only the educators not licensed specifically to teach they ignore the potential impact quality teaching has on students. This ignorance persists even though evidence abounds that professional development of teachers improves teacher satisfaction, classroom instruction, and student learning and overall achievement (Gyurko et al., 2016). Second, millions of students are unprepared for college (Gyurko et al., 2016). McGuire and McGuire (2015) advocate teaching students how to learn using metacognitive strategies, such as preparing for active reading by asking questions, using concept maps and outlines, and creating practice exams using homework and quizzes as clues. Doyle and Zakrjasek (2013) suggest that the science of learning depends on students employing seven key components, such as using patterns to improve learning, understanding, and recall and enhancing memory through sleep and not trying to multi-task. To help meet the challenges of teaching, doctoral students need opportunities to hone their skills. Benefits to the doctoral students would redouble with advantages to the home institution through enhanced teaching while the doctorate is completed.

How can sport management programs prepare college teachers to utilize the essential practices shown to improve student outcomes? Bain (2004), Barkley, Major, and Cross (2014), Bean (2011), Brookfield (2015), Svinicki and McKeachie (2014), and others provide a wealth of evidence and professional development content for improving course development, using active learning strategies, and employing a variety of assessments to deepen student learning. One option could be to require completion of the Association of College and University Educators’ (2017) Course in Effective Teaching Practices. This course’s effective practice framework teaches how to design an effective course and class, establish a productive learning environment, use active learning techniques, promote higher order thinking, and assess to inform instructional and promote learning. A second option could be to utilize a college teaching course currently offered on campus, such as Dr. Claire Howell’s at the University of Alabama, which emphasizes learning about the teaching and learning process, development of teaching skills, instructional methods, and assessing teaching and instructional practice. A third option could be to develop a pedagogy course specific to sport management using the framework of curriculum (i.e., what is taught), instruction (i.e., how content is taught), and assessment (i.e., did students learn). Briefly, this framework emphasizes: (1) setting daily learning objectives or
goals; (2) creating the specific content, including effective visuals (with limited text on each) and helpful handout and supplementary materials; (3) structuring each class, such as by using the Aristotelian Triptych (i.e., tell them what you will tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them); (4) demonstrating preparedness and professionalism; (5) generating interest and enthusiasm; (6) managing the classroom environment; (7) asking and answering questions effectively; and (8) providing closure (Howell, 2017).

Accountability for student learning in higher education is the new currency of state legislators, regional accrediting agencies, and parents, who believe learning depends significantly on the competence of teachers who can engage and motivate students. After teaching during their doctoral studies, most graduates will obtain faculty positions in regional universities and liberal arts colleges, resulting in these individuals teaching a high percentage of sport management practitioners. Rather than lacking preparation to teach college students effectively, the time to address this deficit in the ability to teach effectively is during doctoral students’ graduate studies (Robinson & Hope, 2013).