The Importance of Undergraduate Research: Implementation and Benefits for Sport Management Programs

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The increasing emphasis by higher education over the last decade has indicated a move to increase the research requirements placed on faculty at both nationally recognized and regional institutions (Petrella & Jung, 2008). Furthermore, the field of sport management is similar to its kinesiology counterpart of exercise science with its emphasis on research preparation in doctoral programming, yet without the heavy funding availability from entities like the National Institution of Health (NIH). This emphasis has resulted in an increased focus on the need for college classrooms to teach students critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and real-world application and problem-solving (Arum & Roska, 2011; Fink, 2013). Often a university’s goal for student engagement is not merely to progress through course content, but to increase and deepen the value of classroom learning via quality interactions with the instructor and student peers and engagement in relevant activities (e.g. through experiential learning, data supported problem solving, etc…) (Kuh, 2009).

Undergraduate research (UR) offers opportunities for deep engagement, and improved learning from, and interaction with, instructors in the chosen field. Moreover, research supports development of professional and cognitive growth in a chosen profession by engaging in undergraduate research (Osborn & Karukstis, 2009), which may be implemented as part of assigned course work (Johnson, 2013). Alternately, research opportunities may be part of departmental or university initiatives (Culp & Urtel, 2013). Undergraduate research not only aids in the development of critical thinking, but also in the development of professional behavior, potentially comparable to that of internships (Merkel & Baker, 2002). Beyond practical implications, additional benefits to students include eligibility for recognition at national and regional societies, thereby increasing their value and preparedness for graduate school or as professional job hires (Johnson, 2013). Student retention has become another focus of universities, in which faculty mentoring of undergraduate research has been illustrated as one means to accomplish retention goals (Blankenship & Ayers, 2013). Faculty should also consider broader career implications in that undergraduate research can increase ones potential for pilot study completion and the obtainment of internal and external grants (Robinson, 2013).

The presenters will first walk through the broad implementation of undergraduate research on a university and department level, as well as, via one-on-one mentorship. Emphasis will be placed on demonstrating the benefits of and strategies for students, faculty, and the academic institution leading to increased success. Furthermore, the development or expansion of an undergraduate research culture and the three stages of the effective “students as scholars” approach will be deliberated (Osborn, 2016). Finally, faculty skills required to mentor undergraduate research and recommendations for achieving faculty work balance while considering mentoring time constraints will be considered (Allyn, 2013).