A Comparison of Program Directors’ Perceptions of the Importance of Ethics Education in Graduate and Undergraduate Sport Management Curricula

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Introduction: Ethics Education has long been a part of both Liberal Arts and Professional degree programs in undergraduate and graduate education. In Sport Management professionals have long celebrated the works of DeSensi, Mintz, Rosenberg, Schneider and many others who have reminded educators of the value of Ethics Education. These works have promoted a goal of moral excellence in sport management. The purpose of this study is to examine and compare the perceived importance of Ethics Education in graduate and undergraduate Sport Management curricula as expressed by program directors.

Method

Two nationwide surveys of program directors for graduate (N=22) and undergraduate (N=57) Sport Management programs were conducted to examine the importance of Ethics Education within the curriculum. Participating Sport Management programs (N=79) responded to questions posed in the anonymous surveys. The surveys assessed the level of commitment to ethics education as demonstrated by the amount of time allocated as either a content component of a course or an entire course devoted to meeting the requirement of ethics education within the curriculum. The perceived importance of Ethics Education by the program director was surveyed in comparison to other content areas within the program. The department from which ethics education was offered was also examined. The survey reviewed the credentials, degrees and experience of the primary faculty member who delivers the ethics content. Last, program directors were asked to explain their criteria for selecting the primary faculty member who taught ethics in their respective programs.

Results

:In comparing undergraduate to graduate programs in Sport Management, eighty six percent (86%) of undergraduate programs require an ethics component while only 68.2% of graduate programs require an ethics component. Nearly 74% of undergraduate programs require an ethics course and 59% of graduate program require a course in ethics. When asked if ethics is as important as other content areas in your program, 59% of graduate program directors said “yes” while 82.5% of undergraduate program director felt it was as important as other content areas. The ethics courses for the undergraduate level programs are largely taught by following departments: Sport Management 65%, Business 17.5% and Philosophy 8.8%. The ethics courses for the graduate level programs are taught mainly by Sport Management 45.5%, Kinesiology 18.2%, and Business 18.2%. The highest degree earned by the primary faculty member who teaches Ethics course is the PhD/EdD at 71.9% in undergraduate programs and 95.5% graduate programs. The undergraduate programs had more faculty (12.3%) with a degree in ethics than the graduate programs (9.1%). The highest ranking criteria for selecting the primary faculty member to teach ethics for undergraduate programs was academic preparation (33%), experience (19%) and interest (14%). The highest ranking criteria for selecting the primary faculty member to teach ethics for the graduate programs was also academic preparation (50%), experience (23%) and interest (5%).

Discussion

Graduate and undergraduate program directors expressed differing opinions regarding the importance of Ethics education in the curriculum. This is seen in the course time allotted to Ethics Education, the qualifications of faculty who teach and the academic unit the faculty member represented. Faculty were selected based on academic preparation, experience and interest.