Mental Health of Sport Management Students

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In recent years, mental disorders have been documented in the college student population at an increasingly alarming rate (Mauere & Cramer Roh, 2015). Despite the increase, less than half of college students with diagnosable conditions will seek treatment (NAMI, 2018). Among those who do seek help, 50% struggle with anxiety, resulting in deleterious effect on their academic performance (Cox, 2015). The prevalence of mental illness may also be due to lack of access to mental health care, reduced on-campus stigma surrounding mental health, and academic rigor within institutions of higher learning (Wyatt and Oswalt, 2013). This barrier to success in the classroom can be overcome through proper support and care for such mental disorders (McConville et al., 2017; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). While previous literature has observed mental health in community colleges (Katz & Davison, 2017) and large public institutions (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009), few studies have focused on specific student populations. Informed by the Stress Buffering Model which implies that social support guards individuals from the deleterious effect of mental disorders on outcomes in the classroom (Rees & Freeman, 2007), the purpose of this study is to better understand the current mental health status of sport management graduate and undergraduate students.

The instrument utilized in this study was the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), which is comprised of 21 items that measures emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress. Scores ranging between 0-78 are regarded as ‘normal’, 78-87 are ‘mild’, 87-95 are ‘moderate’, 95-98 are ‘severe’, and 98 and above are ‘extremely severe’ (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS21 was distributed via email to all sport management students at a large land grant institution. Of the 120 (31.25% response rate) that completed the survey, 6.66% were freshman, 12.50% sophomores, 20% juniors, 36.67% seniors, and 24.17% were graduate students. The mean score on the DASS21 across all demographic groups was 23 (SD=21.25) which falls healthily within the ‘normal’ range. Juniors reported the highest DASS21 score at 28.80(SD=26.72). Graduate students exhibited the second highest mental health score at 27.79 (SD=20.05). Freshman (M=14.75, SD=17.50), sophomores (18.53, SD=23.62), and seniors (M=20.09, SD=17.78) reported better mental health conditions.

The low mean DASS21 scores indicate that students in the sampled Sport Management program exhibit ‘normal’ mental health scores. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the program; as participation in sport related offerings over time has shown to improve mental health (Biddle, 2016), and out of all students surveyed, only 17 reported no workout regimen. Future studies should include other college departments to determine if the nature of the program lends itself to better mental health scores or if there are extraneous variables at play.