R3Grouping – Establishing an Empowering Environment for Female Students In Sport Management

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Previous literature has revealed a lack of female students pursuing degrees in sport management (Hancock, Darwin & Walker, 2018; Sauder, Mudrick, & DeLuca, 2018). The same is true at the University of Kansas and to better support this group female doctoral students at KU have started a resource group. The goals for this student-led group are as follows: to better serve the female students in this major, to provide a space in which encouraging and supportive dialogue can take place, and to further determine practices which could increase the quality the educational experience for female students in the program. Using Sauder, Mudrick, and DeLuca’s (2018) findings, founders of the group have aimed to provide an empowering environment which incorporates open discussion regarding barriers experienced by females studying and working in sport, their “otherness”, and an often-perceived lack of credibility.

Initially, emails were sent to all undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in sport management courses. While the group was primarily developed to aid female-identifying students, male-identifying students were invited to learn more about the group and attend meetings as allies. Students were provided a brief description of the group as well as information pertaining to the first meeting. The initial meeting of the group was largely intended to gain an understanding of the wants and needs of students identifying as female. During the initial meeting, discussion ensued about the name of the group. Ultimately, attendees supported the term, R3Group, to serve as the representative name. This name was chosen to highlight three points of emphasis within the group: engagement, encouragement and empowerment.

Upon documenting the ideas representing the wants and needs of the attendees, the vision of the group was further developed. Input was sought by women with experience in organizational leadership. A core unit of leaders met to determine the direction of the group, meeting times, frequency of meetings, and topics that should be addressed. Currently, the group meets twice a month, providing opportunities for guest speakers as well as open discussion. Ultimately, the purpose of this group is to support the students through a peer network and to provide a place to meet and interact with mentors while creating a better climate for female students.

We are eager to present R3Group at NASSM to provide other sport management programs a practical model which may aid in improving the experience and retention of female-identifying students. In addition, we hope that the model we present will assist other programs which aim to provide an engaging, encouraging, and empowering environment for women in sport management.