Who Teaches the Teachers? An Exploratory Study of Pedagogy in North American Sport Management Doctoral Programs

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Concerned by a potential paucity in qualified professorial candidates, Mahony, Mondello, Hums, and Judd (2004, p. 91) pondered, “are sport management doctoral programs meeting the needs of the faculty job market?” Today, more than a decade later, one facet of this question remains largely unresolved, are doctoral students “being adequately prepared for their future roles in faculty positions” (p. 93), and, in particular, that of the teacher? Despite the benefits that may be derived from participating in pedagogical training (e.g., increased teaching effectiveness and self-efficacy, and eased acculturation into academia; DeNeff, 2002; Dimitrov et al., 2013), cross-disciplinary studies have found that significant proportions of doctoral students are not required to and/or do not utilize available teaching resources (e.g., Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, 2016, 2019; Robinson & Hope, 2013); do not feel as though they have received appropriate and/or sufficient preparation for post-secondary teaching (e.g., Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, 2019; Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004; Golde & Dore, 2004); and may be subject to programs that maintain anti-teaching cultures (Reneau, 2011). Given as much, a basic question related to those aforementioned arose, how is pedagogy integrated into the learning experiences of sport management doctoral students?

To answer this question, and begin to gather a deeper understanding of students’ career preparation, the researchers undertook a review of 37 North American sport management doctoral programs. The review, which drew upon the websites of doctoral-granting institutions, as listed by the North American Society for Sport Management (n.d.a; n.d.b; exclusions were made due to a redundancy, a lack of information, and alternate foci), accounted for, where possible, programs’ missions, degree requirements, curricula/calendars, student handbooks, and available information on assistantships and internal resources (e.g., centres for professional development). Each of the authors reviewed the websites of the pertinent programs and institutions, coded the material that was relevant to teaching and research, and collated their findings.

The review revealed that pedagogy is only marginally integrated into extant doctoral programs, and that there exist significant disparities between teaching- and research-centric provisions and requirements: for example, whereas 35 of 37 programs required the completion of at least one course in research methods, only five held a like stipulation for teaching; in a similar vein, where most every program employed courses, practica/assistantships, and mentoring (Silverman, 2013) to advance research competency and knowledge, only one did the same with teaching.

Although the completed review could not account for every ongoing program practice, particularly as they relate to mentorship, there is evidence to suggest that more may be done to foster pedagogical training and knowledge: in particular, programs may provide and/or direct students to formal seminars/courses on mentorship, course design, assessment, instruction, and learning (Nilson, 2010); and institute a development plan for teaching that is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice, and mirrors that which routinely exists in relation to research (Gardner & Jones, 2011). In these ways, doctoral students may yet be better prepared for their future roles in faculty positions.