PROGRAM CHOICE FACTORS OF SPORT MANAGEMENT DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN NORTH AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

Doctoral education in sport management has recently garnered attention from leading sport management scholars. The 2000 and 2001 North America Society for Sport Management Earle F. Zeigler Award winners have used the occasion of the Zeigler Lecture to voice concerns about doctoral education in sport management. The 2000 recipient of the Earle F. Zeigler award expressed a concern that the number of faculty in sport management has not kept pace with the increasing number of programs (Pitts, 2001). This point was reiterated by the 2001 Zeigler award winner Dr. James Weese. Weese (2002) contended that the existing doctoral programs in sport management are currently not producing enough graduates to fill faculty vacancies created by attrition, growth of existing programs, and the creation of new programs. Furthermore, he suggested that the most relevant question for the future of sport management is not how to recruit more students, but how to find and retain faculty members to teach these students.

Doctoral education in sport management is vital to the success and continued growth of our field. However, little is known about this topic. In her 2000 Ziegler address, Pitts (2001) indicated that that the literature on doctoral education in sport management is virtually nonexistent. Further, she declared that this area is in need of examination and urged sport management scholars to investigate this area. One logical place to start an examination of doctoral education in sport management is to investigate how students select an institution for their sport management doctoral education. In addition, it is constructive to identify characteristics of students enrolled in sport management doctoral programs. Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to examine the program choice and demographics of doctoral students enrolled in North American sport management doctoral programs. The significance of this study is to provide information that could be helpful to faculty and program administrators in sport management doctoral programs in the recruitment of doctoral candidates.

PROGRAM CHOICE LITERATURE

The terms "college choice" and "program choice" appear in the literature as terms describing factors influencing students' decisions on which institutions to attend. Poock (1997) suggests that since the choice process of graduate or doctoral students relates to specific programs as opposed to institutions in general for undergraduates, the term "program choice" should be used. There is little research on the program choice of graduate students in general and even less on doctoral students (Kallio, 1995). The existing literature on graduate students mainly has been limited to "special" populations such as women or minority groups (Malaney, 1987). An explanation for this is that graduate recruitment often times is not centralized in an admissions office like it is for undergraduate recruitment. Individual departments are responsible for communication with potential students. Some have sophisticated recruiting programs, while others do very little. Malaney (1987) suggested that academicians are not

trained admissions officers and many dislike the idea of recruiting. They often equate the practice with commercialism and are reluctant to engage in it.

Although program choice at the doctoral level is not a commonly studied topic, several studies have been conducted. Several common themes have emerged from the limited doctoral program choice literature. Reputation of the institution and the individual program, placement rate, financial assistance and faculty involvement all appear as primary factors in the choice process.

DOCTORAL PROGRAM CHOICE

Talbot, Maier and Rushlau (1996) identified philosophy of the program, reputation of the academic program, reputation of the faculty, and fellowship/assistantship opportunities as factors of great importance for doctoral students in student affairs.

Webb (1996) sampled doctoral students in business and identified reputation, specific programs, degree marketability, faculty contact time, accreditations, assistantships, financial aid, placement, completion time, and library size were all important in the choice process.

White and Hernandez (1990) sampled doctoral students in counselor education and found that academic reputation, faculty philosophy, and faculty approachability were the factors rated the highest.

Poock (1997) studied newly enrolled doctoral students from 24 institutions in the field of higher education administration. He found that location close to home, reputation of the institution, friendliness of faculty and staff. Availability of evening classes, flexible program requirements, and positive interaction with faculty were the highest rated factors in the choice process.

Poock (1999) also investigated the factors influencing students of color to apply to doctoral programs in higher education. He found that some factors were different for students of color as opposed to white students. Specifically, students of color tend to more thoroughly investigate the environment of an institution. This is accomplished by talking with other students in the program, visiting the campus, and ensuring that the institution is aware of and sensitive to their needs.

No studies were found in the literature on doctoral sport management program choice. Yet, we believed that faculty and administrators might benefit from this research. For instance, knowing what factors influence potential students' decision making process about applying to and attending a particular program would help in decisions concerning recruiting plans, program development plans, and student retention plans. Therefore, it was believed that there was a need for this research.

METHODOLOGY

FRAMEWORK

This study was based on the Hossler and Gallagher three-phase model of college choice (1987). That model was based on market research theory developed by Kotler (1976). The Hossler and Gallagher model evolved from earlier work in college choice by Chapman (1981) and Litten (1982). The phases of the Hossler and Gallagher model are the predisposition phase, the search for information phase, and a

choice phase. Specifically, this study will focus on phases I and II of the model. These phases align with the collection of demographic data and explanation of the choice process. This model has been used previously to study the matriculation decisions of foreign graduate students (Waters, 1992) and the program choice of doctoral students in higher education (Poock 1997).

INSTRUMENT

A survey instrument was developed based on the Program Choice Questionnaire developed by Poock (1997), and labeled the Sport Management Program Choice Survey. The items selected for the survey were drawn from previous studies on program choice at the doctoral level. The literature has established common factors in the choice process that have been applied to different academic disciplines. This study has taken these established line of questions and applied them to the field of sport management. The survey was pilot tested with a group of 50 students seeking a Master's degree in sport management in the fall of 2000. The survey used a 5 point Likert type scale to measure the importance of 62 items influencing a students' decision to attend their institution. Demographic data were also collected.

SAMPLE

The subjects for this study were 158 sport management doctoral students, representing 8 institutions in North America. Two institutions with programs declined to participate. Unfortunately, there is not a comprehensive listing of sport management doctoral programs. Therefore, it is possible some programs were omitted unintentionally. Institutions for this study were selected based on the NASSM website and personal correspondence with sport management faculty members that had recently served on faculty search committees. Because they were privy to the resumes of numerous applicants, these faculty members were able to identify institutions that were producing graduates that were stating they had a doctoral degree specifically in sport management. A total of 76 surveys were returned, producing an overall response rate of 48%.

DATA COLLECTION

A contact person at each institution was identified. This person distributed the instrument either during a class session or by mail to all registered doctoral students. The students were asked to take the survey home complete it and mail it back to the researcher. A two step variation of the Dillman (1978) method was used as a follow-up procedure.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

Mean and standard deviation scores were calculated for each of the items related to the choice process. Frequency counts, converted to percentages were utilized to report demographic information.

RESULTS

Poock (1997) used a mean score of 3.5 or higher to signify items that were "highly rated" in the choice process. Applying his criteria to this work, seven items were found to be highly rated. These include opportunity for assistantship, job placement, friendliness of faculty and staff, and the time required to complete the program. In addition, three items "reputation of the institution," "reputation of the program," and "positive interaction with the faculty" had a mean score above 4. Table 1 illustrates the mean score and standard deviation of all items on the instrument.

Table 3 illustrates the 10 lowest rated items on the survey such as the availability of child care, relatives living nearby, and parking on campus. Table 5 illustrates selected high rated variables from this study and confirmatory findings from program choice literature such as reputation, assistantships, time required to complete program and positive interaction with faculty. Table 6 illustrates findings of this study that contradict the program choice literature. These include factors such as location close to home and the role of brochures and catalogs in the choice process.

Table 4 illustrates the results of the principal demographic variables of the respondents. The data suggests that a sport management doctoral student will most likely be a white male age 33. Who is studying full-time, seeking a PhD, and has 1-3 years of work experience in sport. Further, they are most likely to be married and want to pursue a career in college teaching.

The final open-ended item in the demographic section asked the number of miles the respondent had to travel to relocate from their permanent address in order to attend their doctoral program. The range was from a low of 0 to a high of 10,000. The average distance a respondent had to travel to attend their doctoral program was 1405 miles. This number appears to be influenced by the relatively high percentage of Asian students in the sample that may have had a greater distance to travel to a North American institution.

Two items, reputation of the athletic department and NASPE/NASSM program approval were added to the instrument because of their relevance to the population. However, neither item was found to be among the highest rated items.

It is interesting to note that 4 of the institutions in the study had 8 or fewer students and the other 4 had twenty or more. Two institutions had forty or more students. Further, this study found that over 50% of doctoral students applied to only one school.

DISCUSSION

The ranking of individual items in this study were supported in the literature of college and program choice. The highest rated items in this work were very similar to the results of Poock's 1997 study that influenced the design of this project. This would suggest that in general, the choice process of doctoral students in higher education is similar to that of students in sport management. Reputation of the institution and of the program were the two top rated items in the study. A possible explanation for this can be found in the literature of human resource management. Chelladurai (1999) states that supervisors may judge employees based on perceptions of themselves. This is called similarity error. For instance, if a supervisor rated an employee higher than they deserved because they had similar interests or life experiences as the supervisor; similarity error has occurred. This bias may have had an effect on the rating of reputation. Students may have rated the reputation of their school high because it is "their" school. It is unlikely that a person would report that their school does not have a good reputation. It is probable that some degree of similarity error occurred when the respondents were rating the reputation of their own program and institution. To minimize the effect of similarity error, the concept of reputation should be investigated further. The importance of the role a programs faculty plays in the choice process was underscored by this study. Positive interaction with the faculty and the friendliness of the faculty and staff were the 3rd and 4th highest rated items in this project. This is a clear indication that the faculty needs to play a primary role in the recruiting process. Institutions should not defer all of the recruiting to the de-

partment head or the support staff. Faculty members need to make time to interact with prospective students and they need to do this in a friendly manner. This aspect of the choice process was deemed much more important than tangible items such as brochures and catalogs in the choice process.

Faculty-student ratio was rated in the top 20% of responses. This is interesting considering the variance in the size of the programs. The data suggests that prospective doctoral students appear to have the option of being part of a large or small community of doctoral students. The assumption could be made that smaller programs lead to a higher faculty-student ratio. However, the overall high rating for this item suggests that programs with larger enrollments are taking steps to maintain a manageable faculty-student ratio. These steps may include adding additional sections of courses and hiring additional faculty to meet the demands of a high enrollment.

It would be logical to assume that larger programs would have more faculty, thus more diversity in course offerings. However, smaller programs may incorporate more classes from other departments into their programs of study. This consideration may contribute to the overall high rating for diversity of courses offered. Size of the department was also rated fairly high, but that result is inconclusive. The question only asked the respondent to rate the importance of the size of the department. A distinction between large and small was not made. Therefore, it is impossible to determine if the respondents feel a small department is important or a large department is important. This needs to be corrected in further research as well as the addition of an item regarding class size.

It is also salient to note the high rating for opportunity for assistantship/fellowship. It may be surmised that programs with small enrollments have more of an opportunity to provide financial assistance to their students since there are fewer students to provide for. The overall high rating for this item suggests that this is not the case. The findings of this work suggest that programs with both large and small enrollments are able to provide the opportunity for assistantship/fellowship. This opportunity was rated higher than the nature or time commitment of the assistantship/fellowship. This is a positive finding for program administrators and students. In addition to research and teaching assistantships within a sport management program, there are often times funds available for assistantships in other areas. The athletic department, physical education activity courses, intramurals, and campus recreation are allied departments that may be willing to fund a doctoral student in sport management. The data suggests students are willing to work in a variety of different areas as long as there is the opportunity for compensation. This finding gives the program administrator more avenues to pursue to obtain assistantships/ fellowships.

Time required to complete the program was another high rated item that was well supported in the literature. The job market for faculty positions in sport management may have influenced the high rating for this item. The job market is currently very good for sport management academics. This study indicated that a large majority of sport management doctoral students are most likely to pursue a career in academia. It appears that students want to go to a program that they can complete in a timely fashion and be able to take advantage of the current favorable job market conditions.

Placement was found to be both important and unimportant in previous studies on program choice. Placement and job placement reputation were both among the top ten highest rated items in this study.

Since the majority of students in sport management doctoral programs aspire to a career in college or university teaching, it would be logical to assume that students are most interested in learning about recent program graduates that are teaching at the college level.

Several other variables were found to be important in the literature, but were not strongly supported by this study. Location close to home was an item rated highly in Poock's (1997) study but not rated highly in this work. This could be explained by the fact that there are so few doctoral programs in sport management. Students often do not have the option to stay close to home to pursue their degree.

Previous research has identified location and cost to be leading factors in the choice process. This study found them to be rated near the top, but they were not the primary factors in the choice process. Geographic location was an interesting item. It ranked just outside of the top ten highest items. The interesting aspect of this is that the eight programs in this study represented many different geographic regions. One is in the mid-west, one is in the mid-south, one is in the deep-south, three are in the west, and two are on the east coast.

The low rating for influence of spouse/partner is surprising considering over 40% of the respondents were married. The low rating for the influence of undergraduate faculty in the choice process is easier explained. Doctoral students' in sport management have an average age of 33. In general, this indicates that they have been away from their undergraduate institution for over ten years. It is likely that the passing of time has weakened the influence of undergraduate faculty on the choice process of doctoral students. In addition, sport management is a relatively new academic field of study. It is unlikely that a doctoral student in his/her 30's would have been a sport management undergraduate major. Therefore, students may have determined that their undergraduate professors did not have a frame of reference to offer advice about sport management doctoral programs.

In general, items that were rated low in this study were also rated low in other program choice studies. The lowest rated items in this study were also found to be rated in the bottom tier of responses in Poock's (1997) study. The reputation of the athletic department was one of the highest rated factors in the companion study for this project, drawn from a sample of master's degree seeking students. However, it was not highly rated by the doctoral students. The data concluded that the vast majority of doctoral students were interested in a career in academia as opposed to athletic administration. This likely explains the lower rating for the reputation of the athletic department by doctoral students. A possible explanation for the lower rating of NASPE/NASSM program approval could be that the process is still new. This is one reason that program approval at the doctoral level should not be the only criteria used to evaluate a program. As more schools go through this process, this item will most likely become more important in the choice process than it is today.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, reputation of the institution and the reputation of individual programs were the highest rated factors influencing the program choice of doctoral students in sport management at North American institutions. The importance of the faculty in the recruiting process also

stood out in the choice process. Positive interaction with faculty and the friendliness of faculty and staff were both highly rated items in this study.

The data also suggests that there is a general lack of gender and racial diversity among doctoral students in sport management. The ranks of doctoral students in sport are dominated by white males in their early thirties.

Further, a variance in the number of students attending individual programs was also found. Some programs have many doctoral students while others have only a few.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are for faculty and program administrators wanting to align their recruiting efforts with data collected from this study. The focus should be on the reputation of the institution and the program. Faculty should take an active role in the recruiting process. Further, they should provide information about the placement record of the program and place emphasis on graduates teaching at the college level. In addition, they should provide opportunities for assistantships/fellowships and simplify the admissions process and minimize the time required to notify students about their admission status into the program.

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TABLES AND CHARTS

TABLE 1

Mean and Standard Deviation for the Individual Items Regarding the Decision to Attend an Institution

Items	Mean	SD
Institutional Characteristics		
reputation of institution	4.18	1.02
job placement reputation	3.41	1.37
geographic region of institution	3.29	1.52
cost	3.17	1.50
access to current technology	3.08	1.26
library facilities and collections	2.98	1.34
reputation of athletic department	2.91	1.56
location close to home	2.60	1.67
university size	2.42	1.32

Institutional Characteristics Continued

Items	Mean	SD
Program Characteristics		
NASPE/NASSM program approval	2.40	1.43
attractiveness of campus	2.34	1.20
sensitivity to the needs/interests of minorities, women, disabled	2.30	1.35
social atmosphere of campus	1.94	1.13
location far from home	1.79	1.28
parking	1.56	.926
mean for the category	2.69	
reputation of program	4.12	.999
friendliness of department faculty and staff	3.93	1.14
opportunity for assistantship/fellowship	3.86	1.42
postgraduate job placement	3.74	1.20
time required to complete program	3.52	1.28
ease of admission process	3.37	1.22
diversity of courses	3.30	1.27
speed of acceptance into program	3.26	1.28
rigor of program	3.13	1.24
faculty student ratio	3.09	1.36
internship/practicum opportunities	3.01	1.39
size of department	2.93	1.32
opportunities to develop friendships	2.76	1.28
evening class availability	2.36	1.41
ability to be a part time student	2.29	1.54
day class availability	2.28	1.28
ease of program	2.05	1.11
mean for category	3.11	
Marketing/Recruitment Factors		
positive interaction with faculty	4.09	1.25
unsolicited contact from faculty	2.72	1.68
brochures	2.49	1.37
catalogs	2.45	1.35
department web site	2.44	1.47
campus visit	2.44	1.53
mean for category	2.77	

Institutional Characteristics Continued

Items	Mean	SD
Input from the Following People		
current professionals or colleagues	3.32	1.60
students currently in the program	2.85	1.52
master's faculty	2.82	1.61
spouse/partner	2.63	1.61
alumni	2.55	1.66
friends	2.46	1.35
parents/family	2.34	1.33
employer	2.06	1.49
undergraduate faculty	1.69	1.25
mean for category	2.52	
Financial Aid Factors		
amount of assistantship/fellowship	3.10	1.62
nature or responsibility of assistantship/fellowship	2.89	1.52
time commitment of assistantship/fellowship	2.56	1.47
only school offering aid	1.98	1.46
amount of loan	1.93	1.26
offer of non-assistantship/non loan aid	1.90	1.35
mean for category	2.39	
Personal Factors		
cost of living in the area	2.64	1.42
affordability of off-campus housing	2.49	1.45
ability to continue working in current job	2.28	1.72
job availability in area for spouse/partner	1.96	1.55
spouse/partner educational plans	1.70	1.31
availability of university housing	1.61	1.19
friends attend the institution	1.58	1.15
relatives live in the area	1.49	1.13
availability of child care	1.46	1.09
mean for category	1.91	

TABLE 2

The 10 Highest Rated Individual Items

Items	Mean	S.D.
Reputation of institution	4.18	1.02
Reputation of program	4.12	.999
Positive interaction with faculty	4.09	1.25
Friendliness of department staff and Faculty	3.93	1.14
Opportunity for assistantship/fellowship	3.86	1.42
Postgraduate job placement	3.74	1.20
Time required to complete program	3.52	1.28
Job placement reputation	3.41	1.37
Ease of admission process	3.37	1.22
Input from current professional or Colleagues	3.32	1.60

TABLE 3

The 10 Lowest Rated Individual Items

Items	Mean	S.D.
Availability of child care	1.46	1.09
Relative(s) living in the area	1.49	1.13
Parking	1.56	.962
Friends attend the institution	1.58	1.15
Availability of university housing	1.61	1.19
Input from undergraduate faculty	1.69	1.25
Spouse/partner educational plans	1.70	1.31
Location far from home	1.79	1.28
Offer of non assistantship/non loan aid	1.90	1.35
Amount of loan	1.93	1.26

TABLE 4

Response Rate by Selected Demographic Variables

Variable	%	(n)
Gender		
Male	68.4	52
Female	30.3	23

Response Rate by Selected Demographic Variables Continued

Variable	%	(n)
Household Status		
Single	39.5	30
Cohabitating	13.2	10
Married	42.1	32
Divorced	3.9	3
Race		
White	72.4	55
Hispanic	5.3	4
African American	5.3	4
Asian	15.8	12
Degree Type		
PhD	89.5	68
EdD	10.5	8
Field of Degree		
Sport Management	89.5	68
Related Field	10.5	8
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	77.6	59
Part-time	21.1	16
Number of Programs Applied to		
One	55.3	42
Two	19.7	15
Three	15.8	12
Four	5.3	4
Five	2.6	2
Academic Standing		
Taking Classes	67.1	51
Dissertation (ABD)	32.9	25

Response Rate by Selected Demographic Variables Continued

Variable	%	(n)
Attended Doctoral Institution as an Undergraduate		
Yes	11.8	9
No	86.8	66
Attended Doctoral Institution for Masters Degree		
Yes	27.6	21
No	69.7	53
Area Most Likely to Pursue Employment upon Graduation		
College/University Teaching	67.1	51
College/University Athletics Administration	19.7	15
Other	10.5	8

N = 76

TABLE 5

Selected Variables and Confirmatory Findings

Variable	Confirmatory Findings
Reputation	Kallio (1995), Talbot, Meier, & Rushlau, (1996), Webb (1996), White & Hernandez (1990), and Poock (1997)
Positive Interaction with Faculty	Olson & King (1985), Poock (1997)
Friendliness of Faculty	Poock (1997)
Opportunity for Assistantship/Fellowship	Talbot et al. (1996)
Time Required to Complete Program	Webb (1996), Poock (1997)
Diversity of Course Offerings	Kallio (1995)
Placement	Webb (1996)

TABLE 6

Selected Variables and Contradictory Findings

Variable	Contradictory Findings
Placement	Malaney (1987)
Input of Spouse/Partner	Kallio (1995)
Brochures and Catalogs	Malaney (1987)
Input from Undergraduate Faculty	Malaney (1987)
Location Close to Home	Poock (1997)