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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN ALTERNATIVE CAREERS/SPORTS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

There has been a tremendous proliferation of sports management programs. This article examines this growth and identifies some of the important elements in the development of viable preparation programs to respond to the growing demand for professionals in this field.

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INTRODUCTION

Educators have recognized the need for providing alternative career training for their students, and have instituted a variety of such programs. Most of these programs are at the baccalaureate level; a few are at the masters degree level and an even smaller number at the doctoral level.

The majority of the alternative career programs have been established within the last ten years. More are appearing as thoughtful educators realize the need for broadening their program offerings to respond to a growing demand for new programs. Others have been fully functioning for fifteen years or more.

There is considerable diversity among the existing programs, in content, title and emphasis. At least three attempts have been made in the 1980's to determine just how many programs exist, where they are located, and what titles they bear. The February, 1981 issue of Sport Studies Quarterly Report (1) listed ten undergraduate programs in the United States with some emphasis or specialization in Sports Management; ten masters programs with a concentration in some aspect of Sports, and two institutions offering doctoral programs with an emphasis in Sports Management. Fifteen other colleges/universities were known to be planning similar programs, or to have such programs functioning, but the stage of development of each were not fully known. In addition, ten Canadian colleges/universities supported courses of study in some aspect of Sports Management. At the same time, the editors indicated, the 1979 edition of the College Blue Book: Degrees Offered by College and Subject listed only two institutions with degrees in Sport Studies.

The 1983 Women's Sports Career Guide (2) listed 154 institutions with programs that also offered other specific sports-related programs. Dr. Larry Neal, Professor of Recreation at the University of Oregon, solicited responses from institutions across the nation in a survey during 1982-83 academic year. This study was completed in order that a definitive listing of program offerings might be compiled.

Even with the efforts of researchers at these foundations and institutions, it is quite probable that alternative career programs, which are outgrowths of Sport related programs, are much more widespread than any survey will indicate. There are a number of reasons for this difficulty in accounting, among them are: the diversity of titles given to programs, lack of time on the part of those solicited to respond properly to the survey, misdirected or misplaced mail, or lack of concern for the significance of such surveys. Perhaps the greatest problem is that programs, whatever the titles or program emphases, are developing so rapidly that it is impossible to keep records up-to-date. In each of the Foundation reports mentioned, the institution with which this author was associated already had a viable, functioning program, whereas it was listed in one report as being in the planning stage, and another was not listed in either report. Faculty mobility also could account for some of the difficulty in reporting.

IMPACTS

This mushrooming of programs has both positive and negative implications on the professions. Positively, it is indeed heartening to know that the faculty of so many of our institutions are alert to the need to provide opportunities for their students, that more nearly meet the realities of today's world. The traditional major programs of Sport and Recreation have not fully prepared students for many employment opportunities that are most prevalent today. The mushrooming of leisure-related careers--be they in sports, fitness, travel, communications, or other areas--has been phenomenal, and all too few persons have had adequate professional preparation to take full advantage of the opportunities, or to even realize that such opportunities would be appropriate for them. Those enterprising individuals who have taken the risk of leaving their traditional fields to seize the opportunities available have often had to learn on-the-job, frequently to their disadvantage.

Consideration of the possible negative aspects of such program proliferation centers around the possibility of a program being initiated without adequate planning. Just as in other fields, professionals in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance have been prone to "Jump on the latest band wagon," only to find in a relatively short period of time that the fads adopted by a fickle public seldom have a long life span. Among the examples of this tendency are: the fitness boom of the 50's (ended by the disastrous Sunday Fifty-Mile Run); the golf and tennis booms of the 60's, which left numerous communities or individuals with an excess of facilities and all too few patrons; and the racquetball craze of the 70's, which again has faded, leaving owners of racquetball complexes attempting to find other ways of utilizing their facilities. Those who have been taking advantage of the revival of fitness, both in the provision of health spas or fitness centers with varied equipment, and those devoted to manufacturing and selling the

accounterment for jogging , skiing or a variety of other activities are still flourishing. Yet, the likelihood that this trend will also change is quite strong. Institutions that have rushed into providing training for students in these careers may find the market overcrowded, just as that for teachers of Physical Education or leaders of city recreation programs have become. The state of the economy, as well as changing certification requirements, have had their impact.

PROGRAM PLANNING

There are a number of preliminary steps that any faculty and its administration should consider carefully, before undertaking new program emphases. Even after due consideration, of course, it is still possible that decisions may be made that will eventually be unsound. There just is no way in which anyone can be completely certain of long-range needs in a program area. However, if certain precautions are followed, the likelihood of real disasters in programming may be avoided.

Before a faculty initiates a program in one or more of the alternative fields, it is suggested that some or all of the following proposals be explored: a survey of the region, evaluation of faculty, coordination with other departments and/or programs with the institution, and financial resources.

The survey of the region and the nation should include the local community, to ascertain possibilities for field experiences by students in their specific areas of interest. Also included should be a survey of employment potential for program graduates. In addition, contacts should be made with managers/owners of various commercial enterprises, to obtain their support and cooperation to develop manpower. A supply of potential students for the program is also a necessity.

Faculty evaluations should consist of determining the availability and expertise of current faculty, willingness for further training of faculty in needed areas, and possibilities for employment of additional qualified personnel. An important issue, also, would be the availability of persons with the necessary qualifications that would be employable by the institution. If it will not be possible to employ additional faculty for the new programs, then it may be necessary to decide upon program cut-backs in other areas to support the new program. If such steps are not feasible, then the initiation of new programs should perhaps be postponed, or even eliminated from the plans.

Several viable program possibilities have never gone beyond the initial stages, because cooperation had not been sought from other departments on a campus. This is a very politically sensitive area on most campuses, and with budget cut-backs that most are experiencing, this becomes an even more critical move. Most alternative careers will require at least some support from the Business department/school/college. Business programs usually have all the students they need; in some instances (due in part to the prevalent thought by many that every student should have at least one or two business courses), there is a greater demand than the business faculty can handle. If Business limits the number of non-business majors permitted into courses, your students may be excluded, unless an understanding has been reached ahead of time.

Any new program must have a sound basis of financial support, or it will face possibly severe limitations or even failure. Financial planning is needed for most of the preliminary steps just discussed. Much travel and/or telephone communication on the part of one or more involved faculty will be necessary: to make the initial surveys; to establish contacts for later cooperation; to follow up on earlier contacts; to supervise students involved in fieldwork experiences; and finally to attend professional conferences which are held locally, regionally, nationally, and even internationally. The latter, of course, requires professional affiliations/memberships. Another serious consideration must be that of current and/or potential library holdings. Without sufficient financial support, the wisdom of attempting to initiate new programs would be questionable.

One final issue that should receive long and serious consideration is that of providing for a narrow specialization as opposed to a broad spectrum of program possibilities. Either decision has its strengths and weaknesses; either, carried to the extreme of the continuum, could present hazards to the success of the program.

CONCLUSION

Considering the current climate for employment of students in traditional programs, students with a genuine desire to be involved with sport, fitness or leisure-related programs need an option for other employment opportunities. With the growing trend toward four, five, or even more major career changes during one's lifespan in today's world, even persons currently employed may wish training in new fields. Not all institutions should immediately attempt to initiate programs in alternative career areas. However, those faculties that wish to seriously consider such measures, as indicated above, may make the decision to undertake such an endeavor. The need for subsequent coordination, evaluation and eventually even endorsement or certification of programs by some central organization will be an issue of the future.

REFERENCES

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