Introduction to the Special Issue on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport Management Education

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In her 1993 North American Society for Sport Management Earle F. Zeigler address, the late Dr. Joy DeSensi asserted that “the education of future sport management leaders regarding multiculturality is critical” (DeSensi, 1994, p. 69). She highlighted the need for future sport management professionals to have intercultural competence and sensitivity, to value diversity, and to gain an understanding of interpersonal relations. To have bold, inclusive conversations, we must first acknowledge that there are systemic inequalities that have a profound influence on people’s personal and professional experiences and outcomes. We cannot ignore the historical and current realities that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Nor can we ignore the unique talents, knowledge, voices, abilities, and experiences that people of diverse races, ethnicities, sex, gender, religions, sexual orientations, and disabilities bring to the table.

Recently, however, there has been an increase in the number of efforts seeking to limit and even eliminate classroom discussions about many inclusive or diversity issues in our history. Some efforts are taking the path of introducing and passing laws to prohibit educational presentations or discussions related to privileged, critical race theory (CRT), and concepts that are perceived to inflame divisions (e.g., Idaho House Bill 377, Mississippi SB2113, West Virginia House Bill 2595, South Dakota HB1012). There have also been laws that seek to ban institutions from requiring diversity training (e.g., Oklahoma House Bill 1775) and prevent them from awarding credit for student-service-learning opportunities with advocacy groups (e.g., Texas HB3979). If allowed to progress, these efforts by a few will have negative implications for all academic programs, including sport management. Therefore, it becomes even more imperative to work harder to protect diversity and inclusion.

The sport business industry is massive and is incredibly diverse. People of all characteristics are the primary reason the sport business industry exists; without people, there would be no sports or sport business industry. It is, therefore, our responsibility to appropriately prepare our students about diversity and inclusion because they are the future sport business professionals. Moreover, we must recognize that our students are, themselves, of incredibly diverse characteristics. They will be the ones who will make or break the industry.

Today is a highly vital time for a special-topic issue on diversity and inclusion in sport management education. This special issue encourages these discussions by showcasing 11 original research articles, case studies, and essays to help advance the body of knowledge related to multicultural education, inclusive pedagogical practices, and social justice education in sport management curricula and programs.

Diversity and Inclusion Experiences of Sport Management Faculty and Students

Grappendorf et al.’s (2022) article “What Female Sport Management Professors Think: Adherence to Gender Roles and the Impact on Salary Negotiation” starts this special issue by highlighting the influence that internalized and expressed gender expectations and stereotypes have in the salary-negotiation process of female sport management professors. Their research focuses on gender role expectations and the influence on confidence. Our educators are the critical backbone in sport management education. It is therefore imperative that their employment reflect principles of inclusion and diversity in every aspect, including employee benefits. This contribution to the special issue will help increase understanding of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural barriers that can result in inequitable faculty salary outcomes. Moreover, although this research is focused on sport management faculty, the article has valuable teaching implications for undergraduate and graduate students entering the sport management industry or academy.

In “Differences in Sport Management Doctoral Students’ Experiences With Gender Microaggressions and Stereotype Threat By Gender,” Williams et al. (2022) additionally highlight the importance of educating future sport management professors about factors that may affect their experiences in academia. The researchers contribute to this conversation with a focus on doctoral students’ experiences with gender microaggressions and stereotype threat. Their analysis highlights the differences in experiences of a national sample of male and female sport management doctoral students. These experiences during doctoral training have major implications for the recruitment, development, and retention of women in academia.

This discussion of the experiences of sport management students is continued in DeLuca et al.’s (2022) investigation of undergraduate students’ views of diversity and inclusion in higher education and sport management. In the article “Understanding Student Perceptions of Diversity and Inclusion,” the researchers highlight the important role that students’ demographic characteristics, internship location, and transfer status have in defining their openness to diversity, personal beliefs about diversity, and levels of social dominance orientation. The article provides readers with valuable curriculum implications to help students develop diversity and inclusion competencies.
Diversity and Inclusion Concepts in the Sport Management Curriculum

What we teach in the sport management classroom has important implications for how students will navigate and experience increasingly diverse organizations and society. Therefore, it is important to assess the body of knowledge that a student must learn to achieve the appropriate preparation and education for a job and the industry in which they will work. Textbooks are critical in education—they are the “primary source of information about a topic, thus greatly influencing how content is delivered” (Pitts & Danylichuk, 2007, p. 41). Thus, in a world in which people with disabilities are a growing segment of sports and sport business, as evidenced by such megaevents as the Paralympics, textbooks in sport management should include plenty of content about people with disabilities in sport. In “Examination of Disability-Related Content Across Sport Management Textbooks,” Pitts et al. (2022) explore how textbooks in sport management are inclusive of disability sport and/or people with disabilities in sport. The findings reveal an inadequately low amount of content about disability sport and/or people with disabilities in sport. Thus, the authors provide recommendations to improve the content in textbooks and examples of how textbook authors could do this.

To provide a more holistic education, we should provide students with learning opportunities that extend beyond knowledge acquired via textbooks and the classroom. Service learning is an experiential learning pedagogy that takes students beyond the classroom to become active participants working on a real, community-identified need. When coupled with social justice education, service learning provides a setting in which students may critique their previously held beliefs about communities and people toward gaining new and broader understanding of issues such as inequities, patriarchy, racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic oppression, to name a few. Arinze et al.’s (2022) article “Developing Social Justice Outcomes Through Service Learning Among Sport Management Students” provides sport management educators with a successful example of how to educate students about social justice through the use of service learning. In this article, the authors share students’ reflections of their experiences in a service-learning course specifically designed for social justice education and outreach. This article provides valuable insights on the differences between charity-oriented and social-justice-oriented service relationships and how educators can use service learning, combined with other pedagogical strategies, to foster social justice.

In the current political culture in the United States, there are efforts by politically motivated groups to limit discussions and outreach. This article “Developing Social Justice Outcomes Through Service Learning Among Sport Management Students” provides sport management educators with a successful example of how to educate students about social justice through the use of service learning. In this article, the authors share students’ reflections of their experiences in a service-learning course specifically designed for social justice education and outreach. This article provides valuable insights on the differences between charity-oriented and social-justice-oriented service relationships and how educators can use service learning, combined with other pedagogical strategies, to foster social justice.

The Pedagogical Innovations section closes out this special issue with a collection of case studies and a critical essay to assist educators and students in discussing a variety of diversity and inclusion topics. The case studies are instructional resources that challenge students to explore different forms of diversity and examine the role of sport management professionals in promoting an inclusive culture. Instructors are provided with teaching notes to facilitate each case. The critical essay provides a framework to aid students in conceptualizing many varied and interconnected aspects of diversity.

Beattie and Lower-Hoppe (2022) provide a case study examining diversity and inclusion efforts with the Dallas Mavericks organization. In particular, “The Marshall Plan: How Diversity and Inclusion Transformed the Dallas Mavericks’ Organizational Culture” focuses on the leadership of new CEO Cynthia Marshall, who sought to transform the organization’s culture in the wake of a sexual harassment scandal. This case helps students explore the importance of an organizational culture of diversity and the role of sport management professionals in creating inclusive workspaces.

The case study “Eliminating Barriers to Youth Sports in Greenville, North Carolina,” by O’Brien et al. (2022), is a resource for instructors who want to highlight the effect that socioeconomic status has on participating in recreational youth sports. The authors chronicle the experiences of a Greenville Recreation and Parks Department intern who is charged with creating guidelines to break down participation barriers. This case encourages students to consider management strategies for reducing barriers and increasing participation in youth sports. In particular, the authors outline ways sport management professionals unintentionally exclude participants through policy and management choices. The authors then encourage students and instructors to consider innovative solutions for creating a more inclusive sport experience.

Kluch and Rentner (2022) provide a case study discussing the We Are 1 Team (WAIT) initiative, a grassroots movement developed by college students and student-athletes designed to use sport as a tool for promoting a more inclusive culture. This case study “As Falcons, We Are One Team!” Launching a Grassroots Institutional Change Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion Through Sport at a NCAA Division I Institution” outlines the history and growth of the WAIT initiative on the campus of Bowling Green State University, tracing a five-step plan of action for developing a social justice campaign. The authors provide a theoretical foundation for educators to aid in facilitating discussions regarding the challenges and best practices for developing inclusion-focused programs on university campuses.

Finally, this special issue includes a case study by Stensland et al. (2022) focused on issues of race in intercollegiate athletics. “We Are Not Who We Thought We Were: A Case Study of Race in
Intercollegiate Athletics” combines multiple events from actual universities into a single hypothetical case to explore issues of race and power in the context of college sport. Drawing on Bell’s (1995) conceptualization of CRT, this case examines issues of both overt and covert racism, as well as the role of interest convergence in maintaining systems of oppression. The case provides a detailed teaching plan to aid instructors in discussing CRT with students.

We close out the special issue with a critical essay by Cox et al. (2022) that outlines the application of social work theory to the field of sport management. In “Applications of Social Work Theory to Sport Management Curriculum: Ecological Systems Theory,” the authors argue that the field of sport management would benefit from more robust articulation of standards related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Drawing comparisons to the field of social work, the authors suggest that current models of training for sport management faculty can leave them unprepared to meaningfully address DEI in their teaching. The authors suggest the increased use of social ecological theory in sport management classrooms as a tool for developing a more robust discussion of topics related to DEI.

Conclusion

As educators in sport management, we are tasked with training the next generation of professionals in the sport business industry. These future leaders will influence the industry’s growth and development. In today’s political culture in which politicians are boldly making attempts to prohibit selected diversity topics in public educational institutions, this special issue is all the more necessary. As educators of these future professionals, it is our responsibility to provide students with tools and understanding necessary to enhance inclusive and equitable opportunities for a diverse group of industry stakeholders. To provide students a more complete understanding of their importance, we argue that diversity and equity concepts should be present across the sport management curriculum, and not confined to a single social issues course. By consistently presenting a variety of contexts and viewpoints in courses, educators can equip the next generation of sport management professionals with a deeper understanding of the complex and varied nature of the industry. The articles and pedagogical innovations tools in this special issue provide insight into several issues related to diversity and inclusion in sport management education. We hope they are a useful resource for educators seeking to create a more equitable sport business industry.

References


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