

SUPERVISING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN SPORT MANAGEMENT: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

Karen Danylchuk, Western University, karendan@uwo.ca
Bob Baker, George Mason University
Brenda Pitts, Georgia State University
James Zhang, University of Georgia

Introduction

Internationalization is a very relevant topic at universities around the world and has become an organizational priority. It has even attracted the attention of national governments and international governing bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005). Over time, universities have grown increasingly aware of the benefits of diversifying their student body and providing students with an international perspective that will allow them to succeed in an increasingly globalized world (Tamburri, 2007)).

One way to achieve internationalization at universities is to increase the number of international students. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2012 annual review entitled "Education at a Glance", about four million students studied outside their home countries in 2010. This number has doubled since 2000 at an average annual rate of about seven percent. It has even been suggested that there will be seven million students studying abroad by 2025.

The education of international students is considered a major export industry and significant benefit to the economy. Alongside the benefits, however, are also ensuing challenges that are faced by both the students and their supervisors. This study examines the perspectives of sport management academicians regarding their experiences supervising international graduate students.

Method

A cross-section of sport management academicians who supervise or have supervised international graduate students at the masters and/or doctoral levels were invited to participate in a telephone/Skype interview. Fifteen individuals from five countries agreed to participate. Collectively, the participants represented 285 years of experience supervising international graduate students, with an average of 15 years of experience. Interview questions pertained to the practices utilized in international student identification, recruitment, acceptance, orientation, progress, and retention, and the inherent challenges and benefits. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Content analyses of the pre-determined themes were carried out.

Results

The initial involvement with international students varied amongst the sample, ranging from the participant's own initiative to a program/faculty initiative to a university

initiative. The countries from which the students originated were diverse, with the majority from Asia followed by Europe, the Middle East, South America, and Africa.

The level of university commitment towards international students appeared to increase over the years as universities have adapted a more global and international perspective. International student identification varied, with many participants reporting no proactive recruitment strategies. In many instances, international students approached the participants based on their reputations or were referred by colleagues at other universities.

Acceptance of international students was consistent with the grade point average standards expected by domestic students, with the exception of special language standardized test scores (e.g., TOEFL) being a requirement for international students. The majority of participants indicated that orientation for international students was efficiently carried out by the institution's international services office. At the program/faculty level, domestic and international students received the same orientation, with senior students often involved in assisting and mentoring incoming students. Orientation was more informal at the program level. Regular faculty-student meetings were carried out to assist students in their progress towards their degrees. Although these meetings were consistent with those for domestic students, other strategies specific to international students were incorporated, such as referring students to English-writing labs/centres. Nearly all participants indicated that retention of international students was no different than for domestic students. In some instances, it was even higher due to the level of commitment of the international students.

The primary challenge cited by the majority of participants was language, along with cultural differences in learning. Overall, all participants concurred that the benefits of supervising international students far outweighed the challenges. These benefits included bringing an international and global perspective into the learning environment that was positive for both students and professors.

Implications

This study provides a picture of the landscape surrounding involvement with international sport management students within our academy. In so doing, it provides suggestions for improving the overall international sport management student-supervisor interaction and experience. Universities and colleges prosper when there is a significant international student presence on campus. As well, society as a whole prospers in terms of economic impact and job creation. Furthermore, international cooperation and development stands to benefit. Strategies University Teaching in Sports Management

to improve the overall international experience may be beneficial for all stakeholders.

References

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