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Necessary Education for the Success of Athletics Directors: NCAA Presidents' Perceptions

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Given the many demands placed on the current day athletics director, the necessity of appropriate education has become paramount. Several years ago, Leith (1983) recognized the need for athletic administrators to be competent in a variety of skills. Today, the need for athletics directors to be well versed in multiple job-related skills has become even more apparent.

The current status of athletic administration among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) colleges and universities suggest that occupational demands are being placed on sport administrators at an increasing rate (Bradley, 1993; Lea & Loughman 1993; Neilsen, 1990). Copeland and Kirsch (1995) recognized the escalating responsibilities and the inherent demands of contemporary sport in order to maintain competitive programs. It was discovered in a study undertaken by Cleave (1993) that intercollegiate administrators generally perceived their jobs as becoming more complex.

Coursework and Standards Pertinent to the Athletics Director

Schneider and Stier (2001) stressed the importance of prospective athletics directors obtaining formal education through specific college/university courses in order to become knowledgeable as an athletics director. Courses deemed most pertinent for the position of athletics director were athletic administration, legal liability, facilities and equipment, and communications (Hall & Bradwin, 1989). Stier and Schneider (2000) stated that colleges and universities must recognize the need for potential athletics directors to be competent in the areas of fundraising and promotions, and offer courses accordingly. Hatfield, Wrenn, and Bretting (1987) found that NCAA athletics directors and professional sport managers deemed the following educational courses to be most important for career preparation: athletic administration, speech communication, public relations, marketing, and business management.

Research/literature should play a role in ensuring that coursework is effectively preparing athletics directors to succeed upon their employment as an athletics director. For example, when the results of research, such as that completed by Hums, Barr, and Gullion (1999), indicate that sport industry managers need to recognize and confront ethical issues, the area of ethics should be taken into consideration when developing and continually updating formal education courses and strategies.

The View of Intercollegiate Presidents

Hoch (1998) noted the importance of informing and educating presidents of universities to the challenges within an athletic department and the skills necessary to meet those challenges.

Presidents, according to Covell and Barr (2001), feel the need to address, in detail, the many problems associated with athletics. According to Seidler, Gerdy, and Cardinal (1998) as a result of problems in intercollegiate athletics, university presidents have taken an active role in the oversight of athletic departments.

To date, this present investigation is the only national study of all NCAA institutions, separated by division, asking presidents what type of formal and informal education they believed to be important for the success of the athletics director at the collegiate level. The purpose of this study was to find out how formal and informal education is related to the success of the athletics director at the collegiate/university level. More specifically, this study sought to determine - in the opinions of presidents of colleges and universities - the specific content areas and levels of education, essential to the success of the college/university athletics

director.

Methods

Subjects

The subjects were the presidents of NCAA affiliated colleges and universities throughout the United States. Current addresses of the subjects were obtained from the NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana. Surveys were coded by division (NCAA I, II, and III) enabling the researchers to differentiate between divisions and making it possible to make divisional comparisons.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 19 formal and informal areas of education in the form of Likert type scale statements. In selecting one of the five Likert type scale responses - essential, very important, important, not very important, irrelevant - the presidents selected the level of importance of specified formal and informal areas of education necessary for the successful completion of duties and responsibilities of an athletics director.

The respondents to the questionnaire included all of the presidents of the NCAA affiliated colleges and universities throughout the United States. Division I presidents returned 161 of 318 surveys for a return rate of 50.6%; Division II presidents returned 137 of 248 surveys for a 55.2% return rate; and Division III presidents returned 201 of 395 surveys for a 50.8% return rate.

Results

This investigation ascertained NCAA presidents' views related to the importance of formal and informal areas of education necessary for the successful completion of duties and responsibilities of athletics directors. The results that follow, along with discussion, provide insights that can be of value for prospective as well as current athletics directors.

Table 1 displays the rate at which the NCAA presidents at Divisions I, II, and III believed each of the 19 formal and informal areas of education were essential, very important, important, unimportant, or irrelevant to the success of athletics directors. There were results for 17 formal areas of education (5 degrees and 12 courses) and 2 informal areas of education (sport/administrative clinic attendance and professional reading).

When examining the results of the formal degrees, the baccalaureate degree was easily judged to be the most essential by the presidents of Division I (81.4%), Division II (82.0%), and Division III (89.2%) for the success of athletics directors. Judged as the second most essential area of education, by the presidents, was the master's degree. The master's degree was believed to be at least important (combining the essential, very important and important responses) by presidents of Division I (94.1%), Division II (93.9%), and Division III (93.9%). A certificate beyond the master's degree was thought to be not very important or irrelevant by the presidents of Division I (59.3%) and Division III (53.3%), yet was believed to be at least important by presidents of Division II at 56.0%. The Specialist (Ed.S.) Degree was also believed to be not very important or irrelevant by presidents of Division I (72.1%), Division II (67.3%), and Division III (66.2%). Finally, in terms of degrees, a doctoral degree was viewed to be not very important or irrelevant by the presidents of Division I (69.6%), Division II (63.8%), and Division III (63.5%).

The presidents provided their opinions regarding the importance of completing formal coursework in order to succeed as an athletics director. A total of 12 different college level courses were included. Taking a class in socio-cultural dimensions in sport was believed to be not very important or irrelevant by 54.2% of Division I presidents; however 31.4% of Division I presidents believed socio-cultural dimensions in sport to be important. Division II presidents, at a rate of 62.1%, believed that taking courses in socio-cultural dimensions in sport was at least important. And, Division III presidents at a rate of 64.9% believed taking

courses in socio-cultural dimensions in sport to be at least important.

Management and leadership in sport courses were believed to be at least important (combining the essential, very important and important responses) by Division I presidents (61.0%), Division II presidents (65.5%), and Division III presidents (70.2%). Completing sport management ethics courses was believed to be not very important or irrelevant by over one-third of the Division I presidents (37.3%), whereas Division II and III presidents believed taking sport management ethics courses to be at least important at a rate of 69.0% and 83.8% respectively. Marketing in sport courses were believed to be at least important by Division I presidents (61.9%), Division II presidents (65.5%), and Division III presidents (72.3%). And, communication in sport courses were believed to be at least important by Division I presidents (60.2%), Division II presidents (64.6%), and Division III presidents (70.9%).

Of all the formal coursework areas, across the three NCAA divisions, budget and finance courses were believed to be the most important by the presidents. The Division I presidents believed budget and finance to be essential at a rate of 10.2% and when combining the responses for essential, very important, and important the rate increased to 61.9%. Division II and III presidents thought budget and finance to be at least important, at rates of 65.5% and 74.3% respectively.

Legal aspects of sport courses were believed to be at least important by Division I presidents (61.0%), Division II presidents (65.3%), and Division III presidents (77.1%). Economics in sport courses were thought to be at least important by Division III presidents (61.6%), yet were thought to be not very important or irrelevant by Division I presidents (48.3%) and Division II presidents (51.7%). Venue and event management in sport courses were believed to be not very important or irrelevant by 55.1% of Division I presidents; yet were perceived to be at least important by Division II (53.5%) and Division III (58.1%) presidents.

The results showed Division I presidents to be somewhat indifferent to governance in sport courses, as 51.6% viewed governance in sport as at least important and 48.4% viewed it as not very important or irrelevant. Division II and III presidents had similar opinions, as they viewed governance in sport as at least important at 52.6% and 54.7% respectively, yet believed governance in sport to be not very important or irrelevant at rates of 47.4% and 45.3% respectively.

Field experiences in sport courses were believed to be not very important or irrelevant by 56.7% of the Division I presidents. Division II and III presidents, somewhat contrarily, believed field experiences in sport courses to be at least important at respective rates of (56.9%) and (51.4%).

Of all the formal coursework, research in sport courses were believed to be the least important by the presidents. Over one-fourth (27.2%) of the Division I presidents believed research in sport to be irrelevant and when combined with those that thought it to be not very important (35.6%), the rate of presidents believing research in sport to be not very important or irrelevant increased to 62.8%. Division II presidents also believed research in sport to be not very important or irrelevant at a rate of 62.8%. Division III presidents felt nearly the same, as 62.2% of them believed research in sport to be not very important or irrelevant.

When examining the two informal education areas of sport/administrative clinic attendance and professional reading it was learned that the presidents across the NCAA divisions found these two informal areas of education to be at least important at high rates. Sport/administrative clinic attendance was believed to be at least important by the presidents of Division I (80.5%), Division II (95.6%), and Division III (90.6%). Additionally, Division II presidents believed sport/administrative clinic attendance to be essential at a rate of 14.7%. Professional reading was believed to be at least important by presidents of Division I (92.4%), Division II (94.9%), and Division III (94.6%). When examining the rate at which presidents of all three NCAA divisions found professional reading to be essential for the success of an athletics director the results were noteworthy. Over one-third (35.8%) of Division III presidents believed professional reading to be essential as did 16.4% of Division II presidents and 17.8% of Division I presidents.

Discussion

Given the effect that intercollegiate presidents can have on the employment status of their athletics directors, it is necessary that athletics directors, at the very least, make themselves aware of the opinions that presidents hold concerning the importance of athletics directors possessing different types of formal and informal education. Certainly, the athletics director can perform more effectively if he/she is aware of the degrees of importance that presidents have placed on selected areas of formal and informal education in this national study of college and university presidents of all three divisions of the NCAA.

In terms of educational degrees, it is essential to the success of an athletics directors to attain a baccalaureate degree and it is very important that they earn a master's degree. Although a certificate beyond a master's degree, a specialist (Ed.S.) degree, and a doctoral degree would be helpful, these three degrees are not considered essential or very important to the success of the athletics director.

The two areas of informal education - sport/administrative clinic attendance, and professional reading - were the two areas in the study that were believed to be important to the success of athletics directors by the highest rate of presidents at each of the three NCAA divisions. Given this information, administrators would be wise to budget funds for professional development in the form of clinics and strongly encourage or require their athletics directors to attend. As for professional reading, athletics directors should identify, subscribe to, and read current professional literature related to their profession.

Not surprisingly, socio-cultural dimensions in sport courses, management and leadership courses in sport, and marketing in sport courses were all believed to be important by the presidents. These courses should not only be sought out and completed by athletics directors but should also be offered as part of professional preparation programs for the purpose of training prospective athletics directors.

In order to gain an understanding of the legal environment of athletic departments, legal aspects courses should be completed by athletics directors. In this litigious society, in order to protect the financial well being of the athletic department it makes sense that athletics directors - as was indicated by the presidents - understand legal aspects related to the athletic environment.

Somewhat surprising was the higher than expected rate at which Division I presidents believed field experiences to be not very important or irrelevant for the success of athletics directors. It might be that the Division I presidents simply do not believe a field experience can capture the realities of directing athletics at the Division I level. Division II and III presidents, overall, viewed field experience as important, which is more what the researchers expected.

Athletics directors at each of the three NCAA Divisions should make sure they understand the finances of athletic departments and are also competent in the area of athletic budgets. The ability to balance the athletic department budget, which includes financial decisions that directly affect men's and women's programs, must be an area in which athletics directors are competent. Without strong fiscal management skills, goals of the athletic department will become difficult to realize.

It seems that ethics in the area of athletics has been somewhat forgotten, given the relatively low rate of presidents who believed ethics to be important. This is quite disturbing since one might argue that ethics in athletic departments begins with the upper administration and trickles down to the players. If ethics is not believed to be important by presidents and athletics directors, the chances that players will behave ethically during sporting contests is unlikely.

As academia attempts to offer formal coursework that will prepare the potential athletics director for the rigors of the job, the importance of identifying the necessary elements required for the success of the athletics director, becomes imperative. Educators must possess an awareness of the essential, as well as the very important formal and informal educational components, necessary for the success of the athletics director. This identification process becomes even more challenging, given the increased depth and breadth of the tasks required of the current day athletics director. The findings of this study should also be used as part of the ongoing process of developing and refining curriculums intended to prepare the prospective athletics director.

Recommendations

It is recommended that various athletic department personnel be surveyed as a means of ascertaining their opinions concerning the degrees of importance of formal and informal education necessary for the success of the athletics director. Used in combination with the results of this study - that surveyed presidents - a more broad understanding of the overall degrees of importance associated with the success of the athletics director might be gained.

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