

Journal of Education and Recreation Patterns (JERP)

www.jerpatterns.com


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To cite this article:

Perry, J.L., Anderson, A.J., & Ohrberg, N. (2022). Digital Paradigm Shift: HBCU Sport Management Programs Transformational Challenges. *Journal of Education and Recreation Patterns (JERP)*, 3(1), 25-35

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Digital Paradigm Shift: HBCU Sport Management Programs Transformational Challenges

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Original Research Paper

Received: 15.06.2022

Revision: 22.06.2022

Accepted: 28.06.2022

<https://jerpatterns.com>

June, 2022

Volume: 3, No: 1

Pages: 25-35

Abstract

Sport Management as an academic field has experienced a significant expansion and transformation over the last four decades. With an increased influence of advancements such as new learning technologies and virtual learning, educators in the field have been forced to adapt instructional design, course delivery, and realign sport management curriculum with the demands of the present-day sport industry. This paradigm shift has fostered significant growth in sport management degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Leaders of these programs aim to meet the evolving needs of students in the areas of academic preparation and career readiness. However, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that serve marginalized populations have experienced challenges as they strive to maintain robust academic sport management programming that foster student engagement and prepare students for careers in the sports industry. These challenges are heightened in part due to various institutional disparities experienced by HBCUs. The purpose of this theoretical paper is to examine the impact that the paradigm shift has had on HBCU sport management programs and to discuss the outlook of these programs in lieu of advancements within sport management as both a profession and academic field.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Sport Management Degree Programs
Digital Paradigm Shift

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INTRODUCTION

The evolution of academic programs in the discipline of sport management has resulted in the need for leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the field. As the field of sport management continues to evolve, a digital paradigm shift has resulted in various technological advancements in the discipline. This includes the emerging of new learning technology, an increased use of virtual classroom spaces, and changes to the academic curriculum. The academic field of sport management continues to adapt to changes in both society and the professional realm to remain aligned with trends in the sports industry.

Although many institutions that offer sport management programs remain innovative and are equipped to sustain themselves into the future, some sport management programs find it difficult to obtain longevity. This can be contributed to disparities related to the digital divide among institutions, differences in the number of faculty, disparities in resources, and funding for sport management programs today. Many of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) face challenges in sustaining effective sport management programs and producing graduates that are prepared to enter jobs in the sport business industry due to factors that impact these institutions and their unique landscapes. Some of the challenges include the economic differences, social issues, and the learning environment that is present at many HBCUs today. Further, questions related to the ongoing emergence of virtual learning in HBCU sport management classrooms after the global pandemic remain a point of discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this theoretical paper is to examine the paradigm shift in HBCU sport management programs caused by the evolution of technology in both the profession and classroom settings. Further, this paper will discuss the outlook of such programs in light of the emergence of new sport management courses, a shift in academic curriculum, and the emphasis of developing students that are prepared for the everchanging sport industry.

The Evolution of Sport Management Programs

Sport Management is one of the fastest growing disciplines in colleges and universities in the United States. Institutions develop sport management curriculum aimed to prepare students for careers in sport. Such careers include the positions of athletic director, sport coach, facility manager, sports agent, broadcasters, and much more. The sport industry is a very competitive field and the objective of the sport management faculty is to provide students with the knowledge and skills which will enable them to successfully apply what they learned in the sport management program to their career. As the way that sport organizations operate changed over time, graduates of sport management degree programs must be equipped to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the sport industry.

Although the curriculum requirements of individual programs vary there are similar subject areas that commonly make up the courses offered within academic programs today. Some of the common courses offered include foundational courses in sport management, legal issues in sport, sociology, facility management, ethics, and marketing. According to Brown et al. (2018), eighty-six percent of sport management undergraduate programs in the United States require mandatory internship credit hours incorporated in their curriculum. Brown's et al. (2018) research revealed that the internship was the most valuable requirement in the sport management program. This notion supports the need for sport management educators to

regularly evaluate and modify the experiential learning component of their curriculum to match the changes in the industry.

Sport management programs in higher education have evolved greatly since Ohio University's Masters of Sports Administration program, which was the first specialized academic sports program in 1966. Since then, sport management academic programs have grown significantly as well as student interest level. According to Jones et al. (2008), sport management programs have moved from a physical education model to more of a business-oriented model. The physical education model was more of a teaching-based model and has shifted to an exercise science model, called Kinesiology. Most Sport Management programs are housed in the College of Business, Education, Health Sciences, or Kinesiology. There are over 400 colleges and universities that offer a Sport Management or similar undergraduate degree. Of those institutions, less than 20 are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Less than ten Historically Black Colleges and Universities offer a master's degree in Sport Management (Sports Management Programs, 2022).

The National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) is an organization which developed national standards for sport and physical education. In 1986, NASPE established a sport management task force to develop guidelines for sport management programs. The North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) was established to conduct annual conferences and to promote, stimulate, and encourage study, research, scholarly writing, and professional development in the area of sport management (NASSM, 2022).

Together NASPE and NASSM, in 1989 created a committee to oversee curricular guidelines for Sport Management. In 2005, NASPE and NASSM formed a task force for both accreditation and standards (Zeiff, 2009). In 2008, the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) was created. COSMA began accrediting college and university sport management programs. Currently, there is only one HBCU who has an accredited program. COSMA evaluates sport management programs on the assessment of educational outcomes (COSMA, 2022).

One component in which Sport Management has evolved is through technology. Sport management programs in recent years offer online degrees, although most of the online degrees are graduate programs. There are challenges to teaching online as many professors did not experience online learning in their undergraduate program. Willet's et al. (2019) study of sport management faculty perception of online undergraduate program revealed sport management faculty believed face-to-face option was more appropriate in the curriculum. This is beneficial to individuals who plan to continue their education while working in the sports field. Students who want to pursue a degree now have an opportunity to earn it through the online degree options. While Willet's et al. (2019) study showed online delivery in courses such as event operations and facility management were least appropriate. It revealed courses such as, introduction to sport management and sport media were best suited using online delivery. Through research, the Sport Management program can tweak curriculum using software applications in the classroom as well as during internships.

In the world of sports, the use of technology has allowed organizations to capture data and analyze athletes' performance, then make projections based on the data. Another area of technology is gaming. Both analyzing data and gaming have emerged in the last decade and created career opportunities.

Esports is a thriving billion-dollar industry which needs professionals to manage the business. Esports can be defined as competitive gaming, computer-mediated sport, or

interactive spectatorship (Freeman & Guo, 2017). Esports has tallied over 450 viewers worldwide while earning nearly \$1 Billion in revenue in 2019 (Pannekeet, 2019). As the Esports industry continues to grow, collegiate institutions have seen the values in Esports programs. Not only are colleges offering students an opportunity to compete for their Esports team, but academic courses and programs are now available to students who want to pursue a career in esports. In the Fall of 2019 Becker College in Worcester, Massachusetts was the first institution in the United States to offer an Esports Management Bachelor of Science degree. More colleges and universities have added Esports in their curriculum as major, minor, or certificate programs. In higher education, these courses are being included on both the undergraduate and graduate level. Institutions such as Ohio State University, George Mason University, and Saint Peter's University are a few institutions who have an undergraduate degree program in Esports. According to Jenny et al. (2021) the most popular Esport courses offered are Business of Esports/Managing Esports; Introduction/History of Esports; Esports Media Production/Communications; Esports Event Management; Introduction to Esport Coaching; and Introduction to Game Design. Jenny's et al. (2021) study found thirty-three institutions in the United States that offer an Esports academic program through undergraduate, graduate, certificate, or minor programs. A growing number of HBCU institutions host Esports teams, clubs, and academic programs.

Sport Analytics is another emerging topic in the sport management field. "Sport Analytics can be defined as the management of structured historical data, the application of predictive analytic models that utilize that data, and the use of information systems to inform decision makers and enable them to help their organizations in gaining a competitive advantage on the field of play" (Alamar, 2013, p.4). The evolution of the technology has provided benefits and has widened the scope of sport analytics to applications that allow organizations to player analysis, team analysis and many more. Analytics is also integrated in the business operations of sport organizations such as marketing, ticket sales, and fan engagement (Patel et al., 2020). Career opportunities in the sport analytics field include statisticians, player evaluation, computer programmer, and sport analyst. There are nearly twenty colleges and universities that offer either a sport analytics undergraduate degree, master's degree, or certificate. Currently, there are no HBCUs that offer any degree in Sport Analytics (Discover Data Science, 2022).

Historically Black College and University sport management programs must continue to adapt to changes in the sports industry. As this field remains competitive, HBCUs must have students prepared to work in the industry. As a result, a large portion of sport management programs include a component of experiential learning in academic programs. Sattler (2018), discussed how COSMA identified experiential learning as an integral component to be included in sport management curriculum. This is critical in the assessment of students as they apply or observe what is learned in the classroom. New courses have emerged as the evolution of the industry continues. These emerging courses include topics such as sport analytics, global sport management, Esports management, social justice in sport, and crypto in sports. Trends in the industry are commonly followed in academia to better prepare graduates for a competitive job market.

The Digital Paradigm Shift in Sport Management

Sport management as an academic field and the actual practice of sport management have experienced significant changes since Ziegler's review of the field's status at the time and the field's suggested future in 1987 (Ziegler, 1987). This includes an exponential growth of sport management degree programs from 40 undergraduate and 32 graduate programs in 1987 to over 180 undergraduate and 220 graduate programs in 2017 (Parkhouse, 1993; Willett et al.,

2017). The growth of sport management and changes that have occurred in the field over time were suggested several years ago. Scholars in sport management predicted that the future included adapting curriculum and pedagogical methodologies to meet students' learning needs, prepare students for careers in the field and the demands of the sport management industry, overall (Skinner & Gilbert, 2007).

Even though the sports industry and the study and practice of sport management have not experienced a Thomas Kuhnian "crisis" or "revolution," a significant paradigm shift has occurred over time in sport management. When we consider Kuhn's definition of the scientific community and received beliefs as the foundation of the scientific community, we need to evaluate sport management as a scientific community that includes an "educational initiation that prepares and licenses the student for professional practice" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 5). Furthermore, the scientific community's view of and assumptions about the world is defined as normal science, which is continuously sustained and perpetuated by the scientific community and received beliefs as part of a paradigm (Kuhn, 1962).

A paradigm is a basic framework of assumptions, principles, and methods from which the members of the community work. It is a set of norms which tell a scientist how to think and behave and although in science there are rival schools of thought there is still a single paradigm that all scientists accept uncritically (McLead, 2020, para. 4).

Sport management as a paradigm and specifically as the foundation to prepare and develop students for a career in the field has experienced a rudimentary realignment of assumptions, beliefs, and world view (Kuhn, 1962) Over time, the field has experienced and been exposed to several empirical anomalies, which do not align with the expected received beliefs, assumptions, and paradigm of the sport management academic and practitioner communities. The anomalies have not fostered a Kuhnian scientific revolution; however, sport management as an academic field has been forced to adapt and accept new assumptions from what was once considered normal science over thirty years ago.

Anomalies as defined by Kuhn do not necessarily represent an academic or practitioner disaster in each field but may be considered corrective actions to reinforce and clarify the field's *normal science* and paradigm. However, anomalies may cause a *crisis*, which may undermine the basic foundation of the paradigm, but the anomalies must represent a degree of severeness to subvert the validity of the paradigm. Paradigms are not discarded due to the existence of anomalies, nor do they cause a scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1962). The following are *anomalies* that have had a significant impact on the field's *normal science* and forced a paradigm shift to better prepare and develop students for a career in sport management (Kuhn, 1962)

Business Schools: Traditionally, sport management degree programs have been based in physical education departments; however, over time sport management undergraduate and graduate programs have increasingly been housed in the school of business. This departmental shift has influenced a foundational curricular approach to sport management subject matter and preparing students for a career in the field (Zaharia et al., 2016).

Virtual Program Offerings: Technology and the internet have had a significant impact on sport management as an academic field, careers and as an industry. Online or virtual degree programs and courses are regular practice at the present time but would have been a foreign concept 30 years ago. Virtual degree program offerings have increased the accessibility to undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Increased Demand for Career Alignment: Wohlfart et al. (2022) outline the struggles of sport management as an academic field to align competence-based curricula with the demands of occupations in the sports industry. Historically, there has been a distinct disconnect between sport management curricula and the occupational demands in the sport industry. The authors suggest, “The gap between SMHE [sport management higher education] and the sport industry may persist. Influenced by trends such as commercialization, internationalization, digitalization, and sustainability. SMHE needs to re-evaluate its curricula on a regular basis to remain relevant and legitimate” (Wohlfart et al., 2022, p. 173).

Esports Management: Esports Management is a relatively recent academic program offering as part of the traditional sport management curriculum. It is evident that there is a significant interest in eSports management as an academic field, credible career option for students in a thriving eSport management industry (Funk et al., 2018). Esports/gaming has become a recognized and accepted academic field of study, which includes opportunities for research and career preparation for practitioners in the industry (Funk et al., 2018).

It is evident that sport management has experienced a number of anomalies over the last 30 years that have had an impact on the sport management scientific community’s view of and assumptions about the world is defined as normal science. This includes a process to adapt to meet the learning needs of the students, preparing students for careers in the field and the sport management industry. Dane-Staples (2019) suggests that the landscape of higher education is evolving to closely align with what employers are seeking in new hires rather than value being placed in traditional learning objectives. As the new sport management paradigm has shifted to include a focus on assessment, content knowledge only comprises part of the required outcomes. Further, as the number of sport management programs grows globally, specific soft skills that are needed in the workforce are expected to be modeled in college classrooms. As a result, employers expect sport management program graduates to be able to successfully navigate complex working relationships, independently tackle complex tasks, and know how to self-pace in the professional setting.

The Impact of Technological Advancement on HBCU Sport Management Programs

The paradigm shift in the field of sport management is significant to educators because a major influence in these academic programs is placed on allowing students to apply theoretical content to realistic experiences in the professional realm (Sutton, 1989; Perry, 2017). This ideology can be challenging to maintain in a virtual learning environment. The shift in the method of course delivery, instruction, and curriculum have changed over time in the field of sport management. This can be attributed to the emphasis on career readiness in the sport management curriculum as well as the emergence of new learning technology in education. As a result, a growing number of educators have moved away from traditional lectures and seek to present course content in a manner that actively prepares students for jobs in the field. However, many HBCU sport management programs face challenges that hinder their ability to remain ahead of the technological curve. Some of the challenges that these institutions face include institutional, financial, and programmatic differences. According to Stowe and Crowley (2021), in 2020 54 sport management programs were accredited by the commission of sport management accreditation, (COSMA) none of which were from HBCUs.

How do educators best support learners that face student hardship issues within sport management courses and how do these institutions overcome financial disparities are critical questions that must be addressed as sport management programs evolve. Examples of some of the hardships experienced include access to devices and administering effective online

instruction despite the digital divide. The technological evolution in sport management has presented challenges in virtual learning to both instructors and students at HBCUs. Some of the major challenges associated with online learning include equal access to devices, stable Internet connection, and difficulties in maintaining student engagement in virtual classrooms. Equal access to devices can be described as all students not owning or having reliable access to computers, tablets, or other electronic devices that allow them to complete coursework in a virtual setting. This issue is essential as a number of students face financial challenges and other hardships that limit access to technology when compared to sport management programs at larger institutions.

Having a stable internet connection is regularly viewed as being a routine element at well-funded institutions. However, it is among the biggest challenges facing students that participate in virtual learning environments (Baker et al., 2020). Disruptions or interferences to the Internet connection for students both on and off campus is alarming. Further, an increase in the number of cyberattacks at institutions of higher education, especially HBCUs is concerning. Additional elements such as weather, location, and quality broadband access are addressed in the literature as factors that can impact the enrollment in distance learning courses (Grubestic, 2008; Prieger & Wei-Min, 2008; Skinner, 2019).

Additional common challenges considering the paradigm shift in sport management are maintaining student engagement and emphasizing career readiness in course curriculum. Strategies to improve in these areas include training faculty as trends emerge and providing incentives for students to take an active role in distance learning courses. Baker et al. (2020) suggest that developing an instructor's presence is essential in the virtual learning and has resulted in increased student affective learning, cognition, and motivation in learning. As sport management continues to focus on applied skills and incorporate various hands-on learning experiences, educators must be trained in how to include career readiness in the virtual realm.

The need for sport management programs to develop to best serve students is discussed in the literature. According to Ratten and Jones (2018), the sport industry is by nature entrepreneurial and has a tradition of introducing new innovations that transcend to other industries. The changing perception within educational settings regarding curriculum requirements reflect the need for increasing practical engagement by students. The belief that sport management programs should involve more business dimensions and entrepreneurship education is also trending in the field. It is recommended that HBCU sport management educators seek learning opportunities that support professional development through professional engagement. This approach helps to maintain the applied nature of the field as the sport management curriculum advances. The academic realm of sport management remaining aligned with the professional realm is essential in preparing students for careers in the industry. As more sport management courses include new technologies, employers are hosting virtual workshops, seminars, and virtual internship/learning experiences as a way of engaging with potential job candidates.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of sport management classrooms has created a unique circumstance for members of the HBCU learning environment. Many of these institutions that serve marginalized populations face difficulties while aiming to implement impactful instruction and teaching methods. The ongoing paradigm shift which includes advancements in technology in sport management curriculum, instructional method, and design has added to the disparities among institutions of higher education. Furthermore, sport management faculty members at many HBCUs experience limited resources when maintaining their various roles as educators. Hardships for both students related to economic, social, and institutional challenges remain prevalent in this environment. The recent global pandemic has impacted education and resulted in a shift from face-to-face instruction to a virtual format for many HBCUs. The recommendations of supporting HBCU sport management educators by providing training on new sport management learning resources and applications, aligning the academic curriculum with advancements in the profession, and emphasizing student engagement can be used to mitigate the problems experienced in sport management pedagogy today.

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