Purpose and Perceived Benefits for the Inclusion of Disability Sport Topics in the Introduction to Sport Management Course

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Abstract

Inclusion of disability sport content in the sport management curriculum ensures students are educated and adequately trained with the practical and theoretical knowledge and understanding in the complexity of sport and disability sport management to be successful in this multi-billion-dollar sport business industry. Inclusion of disability sport topics, however, are not universal across sport management programs owing in part to its lack of inclusion in textbooks and sport management research journals (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014; Pitts & Shapiro, in press). The moral or ethical decisions for its inclusion by faculty remain unknown. Such an understanding can assist in further developing sport for and including individuals with disabilities as an important professional knowledge base in sport management programs. The purpose of this study was to understand why faculty choose to introduce disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course and their perceptions of the benefits of doing so. A total of 59 faculty (n=31 males, n=28 females) from institutions of higher education across the United States

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completed an online survey. Using a general inductive approach, written comments were analyzed and eight central themes were identified (inclusion/diversity, challenge social norms, awareness, legal issues, breadth of the field, resources/textbook, career opportunities, and miscellaneous). Results are discussed in relation to the themes with referent comments attributed to its respective theme providing an understanding of the perceived role disability sport plays in the introductory sport management course. Future research directions also are addressed.

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities and individual nations around the world have enacted policies to protect people with a disability in sport and in other social policy domains (Misener & Darcy, 2014; Thomas & Guett, 2014). The complexity of the policy and legal issues surrounding such legislative actions have led to gains in sport governing bodies (a) understanding that “equality in the context of sport is a major life activity and therefore is a universal human right and not a privilege” (Fay 2011.p66), (b) integrating sport opportunities for athletes with disabilities into their program offerings, and (c) acknowledging that issues of inclusion, equality, respect and opportunity in sport, physical activity and leisure for and by individuals with disabilities should be important to them and addressed no differently than efforts to combat racism and sexism across these settings (Fay, 2011).

Disability sport as used in this paper [also referred to as adaptive sports or parasports (Disabled World, 2015)] describes the broadest entity and context of sport, physical activity, recreation, and leisure for and including individuals with disabilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). Disability sport has become increasingly integrated at the local, regional, national and international levels within development activities of national sport-governing bodies, the Parapan American Games, the Commonwealth Games, and the Paralympic Games (Misner & Darcy, 2014). The International Paralympic Committee’s annual report [International Paralympic Committee (IPC), 2013] noted a marked increase in disability sport participation at elite and developmental levels. These findings are consistent with organizations like the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF.com), the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF), International Wheelchair Tennis Federation (http://www.itftennis.com/wheelchair/home.aspx), and the International Powerchair Football Association (http://fipfa.org/) who have reported growth in member nations and total participation. This growth has sparked an industry not just for participation, but also for spectators and industry management professionals. This evolution is evident based on the positive economic impact on London during
the Paralympic Games (Hardy, & Perry, 2013), has been demonstrated through sophisticated marketing studies showing strong fan commitment (Cottingham et al., 2014; Cottingham, Carroll, Lee, Shapiro & Pit, 2016; Ekmekci , Berber, Zaharia, & Turco, 2013), and through respected scholars noting the importance of disability on the sport industry (Fay, 2011; Hums, 2002).

The increased awareness, global recognition of, and involvement of people with disabilities in sport is due in part to “champions” who help in gaining greater integration and inclusion (Fay, 2011). These leaders need to be educated and given experience to fully understand the capability and level of athletic ability of persons with a disability to support the change needed for equal access and opportunity for sport and physical activity, recreation, and leisure for persons with a disability (Fay, 2011). These strategic allies must come, in part, from academic programs in sport management where an understanding of what sport is and who it accommodates can be strategically and intentionally communicated, analyzed, and reasoned among future sport professionals to “advance access, inclusion, equality, respect, legitimacy and opportunity for people with disabilities in sport” (Fay, 2011, pp.29).

There is little information on the visibility of people with disabilities in the sport management literature (Fay, 2011). Shapiro & Pitts (2014) reported a lack of research published across 34 sport management journals with less than 1% of articles pertaining to persons with disabilities and/or disability sport. Research also is needed to examine what is being done and ways to facilitate and support the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport (Fay, 2011). In a succeeding study (Pitts & Shapiro, in press), the prominence of disability and disability sport in the introduction to sport management course, alignment of this content with the sport management and industry segments, and practical teaching methods to infuse disability sport into the introductory course that bring people with disabilities into the forefront of consciousness was explored. The inclusion of disability sport in the sport management classroom is not universal across sport management programs owing in part to the lack of resources available in the literature and textbooks (Pitts & Shapiro, in press; Shapiro & Pitts, 2014). Other possible considerations for the lack of inclusion of disability as a topic in the introduction to sport management class may reflect faculty member’s perceived importance and interest or lack thereof in disability, the social status afforded to people with a disability and disability sport more generally, its perceived lack of ability to influence or increase mass participation or appeal to a global market, and a lack of general direction and agreement among practitioners on how disability sport should be discussed and/or promoted (Cottingham, Garity & Byon, 2013; Cottingham, Garity, Goldsmith, Kim & Walker, 2015).

Diversity, inclusive of disability, within sport management curriculum in the United States was addressed in the Commission on Sport Management Accredi-
tation (COSMA, 2010 pp.62) manual, which outlined that academic sport management programs should identify, prepare, and provide students with opportunities to acquire an understanding and appreciation to both deal with diversity and function effectively in an increasingly diverse sport industry. Such a focus on diversity in sport management relates in part to the proliferation of several key trends: (a) increased heterogeneity of the workforce requiring the need for employees to work with those who are different from themselves, (b) pressure for social justice, a moral obligation of organizations to accept all employees, and a growing emphasis on social inclusion of participants regardless of individual differences, and (c) the belief that promoting diversity can make good business sense and enhance organizational success by providing an organization with alternative viewpoints and opening up new markets through increased membership and revenue generation (Cunningham & Fink, 2006; Spaaij et al., 2014; Thomas & Guett, 2014).

While diversity and social justice are worthy ideals and have led to positive contributions to sport opportunities for persons with a disability, they may not in and of itself be a sufficient motivator to include disability sport topics in an introduction to sport management class. Conversely, an introduction to sport management course, while not likely to affect significant change with regards to attitudes towards diversity (Li, Kanters & Ammon, 2002) and people with disabilities specifically, is a good starting point to increase the mindfulness and appreciation of disability and the uniqueness of individuals with disabilities in sport. By understanding why faculty choose to include disability sport content for their introductory class, the outcomes and implications for doing so may offer a deeper understanding of its inclusion to faculty who currently do not address this topic or who perceive the topic of disability sport to be better addressed in more discipline related courses later in the sport management curriculum. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to qualitatively gain insight into the inclusion of disability and disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What are the reasons instructors include disability sport topics in their introduction to sport management class and (2) What are the perceived benefits of including disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course.

Method
Participants

Participants were 59 faculty (n=31 males and n=28 females) from 26 universities across the United States. To ensure anonymity of respondents, the number of universities represented within or across each state was not ascertained. Of the
respondents, 6 held the rank of clinical instructor, 21 were Assistant Professors, 19 were Associate Professors, 9 were Full Professors, and 4 were part time instructors at the time of survey completion. Respondents had experience teaching the introductory course with 31 people indicating they taught the class 7 or more times and an additional 11 having taught the class 4-6 times. A total of 17 respondents reported teaching the introduction to sport management class 1-3 times.

**Survey Questionnaire**

The survey was divided into two parts, demographic information and disability sport related questions. Demographic information included participants age, gender, title/rank, years of teaching the introduction to sport management course, and whether or not they include disability sport content into their introductory class. The disability sport section included a list of 40 possible disability sport topics as examples of content that could be included in an introduction to sport management course (Pitts & Shapiro, in press). The disability sport questions ascertained (a) the purpose for including disability topics into the introductory course in sport management and (b) what benefits instructors perceived the inclusion of disability sport topics to have on their students. Participants were not asked what content they taught or how they taught this content.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the university’s institutional review board. Participants were recruited through email solicitations posted using the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) and the Women in NASSM (WIN) listservs stating the purpose of the study inclusive of a web-link to an online survey posted on the university’s Qualtrics survey research system. The email solicitation was posted three times within 8-weeks and reached roughly 920 sport management educators, practitioners, and other professionals in the sport management industry. Eligibility requirements to complete the survey were the individual had to (a) teach in a sport management program at the undergraduate or graduate level and (b) teach an introduction to sport management class. While there was no way to guarantee that everyone teaching an introduction to sport management class in universities across the United States were solicited through these listservs, the demographics of the respondents reported in this paper (e.g., rank and years of teaching the introduction to sport management course) suggests that those who responded self-selected consistent with the inclusion/eligibility criteria.
Coding Procedures

This study used a general inductive approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; Thomas, 2003), a type of descriptive qualitative analysis to search for and identify commonalities/patterns/themes that extend across responses to reasons for and benefits of including disability sport content into the introduction to sport management class. The primary purpose of the general inductive approach is to condense raw text data into a brief, summary format that can be used to establish clear links between participants’ comments based on their experiences and personal reality and summary findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive thematic analysis approach provided a flexible and useful research methodology to afford a rich and detailed account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and assumes the responses provided by participants are more or less truthful indexes of their behaviors, attitudes, and motives (Vaismoradi, 2013) in this case, of faculty who include disability sport content into their teaching of an introduction to sport management course to provide insights to an area in which there are no previous studies dealing with this topic. The following is a description of the analysis phases used in this study.

Data Summarization. Respondents comments were reviewed several times to become familiar with the data and numbered to ensure that each comment was identified and categorized. Comments with more than one idea were numbered separately. Two authors independently sorted and collated all responses placing comments similar to each other into categories. The original wording of all comments was retained.

Identification of initial themes. Themes were identified independently by the first two authors, then in collaboration to ensure themes worked in relation to the categorized comments and the entire data set. This process was not sequential as new theme titles and subthemes emerged with discussion. There was no limit to the size or number of comments to comprise a theme. Consensus was achieved in the specifics of each category, names for each theme, and the selection of extracts relating to the themes.

Trustworthiness of the findings. Inter-coder reliability was used to enhance trustworthiness and rigor in this process. A third author provided a peer check. This individual, not privy to the discussions, was provided the initial numbered list of all items, the proposed categories and themes, and asked if they agreed or disagreed with how items were grouped and themes titled. The triangulation of comments and themes across the three coders served to verify and validate the decisions of each coder individually and the group of three coders collectively (Vaismoradi, 2013).

Determination of final themes. A final group meeting was held to ensure the data were representative of the initial data analysis and confirm all decisions. The
themes in the present study reflect the integration of respondent’s individual com-
ments that captured something important and represents some level of meaning
or value to the reasons and benefits of including disability sport into the introdutc-
tory sport management course (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, 2013).

Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into instructors’ perspectives and
beliefs regarding their reasons for including the topic of disability sport in their in-
troduction to sport management course, and what benefits they felt this focus had
for their students. The findings are discussed below in three sections: (a) themes
related to reasons to include disability sport, (b) those pertaining to the perceived
benefits to including disability sport topics, and (c) the consolidation of common
themes and identification of unique themes between the reasons for and benefits
of including disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course.

Themes relating to reasons to include disability sport topics. Themes iden-
tified with the question pertaining to reasons faculty include disability sport top-
ics consist of: (1) legal issues, facility design and risk management (n=13 com-
ments), (2) awareness of people with disabilities (n=11 comments), (3) breadth of
knowledge and well-informed future managers (n=11 comments), (4) inclusion,
diversity, social responsibility & ethics (n=10 comments), (5) career and job op-
opportunities (n=4 comments), and (6) it’s in the book (n=3 comments).

Themes relating to benefits to including disability sport topics. Themes
associated with the question on faculty’s perceptions of the benefits of includ-
ing disability sport topics include: (1) breadth of industry (n=16 comments), (2)
challenge social norms (n=10 comments), (3) diversity of people with disabilities
(n=11 comments), (4) careers and job opportunities (n=9 comments), (5) legal
issues (n=8 comments) and (6) equal importance (n=1 comment).

Common and unique themes. A total of six common themes emerged from
the two research questions. We chose to combine the comments for the common
themes for a more comprehensive examination of the themes. Common to both
questions and listed in order of frequency of total responses were themes related
to (1) breadth of knowledge, the industry & well informed future managers (n=27
comments), (2) legal issues/facility design and risk management (n=21 com-
ments), (3) inclusion, diversity, social responsibility & ethics (n=20 comments)
and (4) careers and job opportunities (n=13 comments). Unique to the questions
examining reasons for including disability sport topics were themes of ‘awareness
of people with disabilities’ (n=11 comments), and ‘it’s in the book’ (n=3 comments). The theme unique to the question on benefits of including disability sport topics were ‘challenge social norms’ (n=10 comments).

Discussion

Themes common to both reasons and benefits to include disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course

**Breadth & Well-Informed Future Managers.** Overall, it appears that including disability sport topics provides a depth of understanding of knowledge of the industry and an awareness of the importance diversity of disability brings to the field of sport management. Inclusion of disability sport topics into the introduction to sport management course should not be considered an additional topic. Rather, inclusion of disability sport topics ensures that individuals pursuing a sport management career possess a depth of knowledge and a broad range of competencies. The inclusion of disability sport topics in the introduction to sport management course supports the recommendation that sport management programs need a knowledge base in diversity to provide leadership and advocacy within the sport marketplace (Cottingham, Garity & Byon, 2013; Cunningham & Fink, 2006). One respondent wrote “I try to include all types and levels of sport. Disability sport is one of those”. Other comments to this effect agreed that students benefit by the inclusion of this topic because it expands their knowledge and awareness of the breadth of the sport business industry. Some of these comments were “want to expose students to a variety of sport settings/functions”, “open student’s eyes to more than main stream production of sport”, “provide comprehensive look at components to consider within the breadth of the sport management field”, and “to broaden the student perspective and make them aware of options in various sport segments.” One respondent mentioned the growing number of veterans with disabilities reentering society and sport as a reason for inclusion of disability sport in the introduction to sport management course.

**Legal issues, Facility Design, and Risk Management.** Laws, specifically the ADA are addressed in the introductory class to provide insights into considerations for physical accessibility not just for the sport facilities themselves but for housing or hotel/motel accommodations for both athletes and spectators with disabilities. Respondents listed and the literature supports several legal focal points relevant to the ADA for individuals with disabilities including, but not limited to, accessible elevators, entrances to bathrooms, ramps, signs in braille, emergency systems, egress issues, access to bleachers, paved and clear paths that lead to an avenue,
accessible seating around gym courts and court fields, parking, and shuttle bus services (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). This is potentially valuable as there is evidence that even Division I sports facilities are not fully accessible (Mestayer, Black, Edwards, Behlmann, & Cottingham, 2013). At this level in the sport management curriculum, addressing disability sport through the inclusion of topics relating to laws, legal implications, and legal liability have the expressed purpose of creating awareness for the existence of legislation as reflected in the following participant statements “the primary purpose is to make students aware of what ADA is and to give an example that provides a basis of which to remember what ADA is”, “mainly for risk management purposes – for students to understand and comply with all applicable laws”, “resource planning as influenced by ADA (facilities, programming)”, and “we live in a litigious society...students have to know legal issues related to people with disabilities.”

The initial presentation of disability sport through the law in the introduction class also may reflect faculty’s desire to promote advocacy, equality of opportunity, and human rights in which students become acquainted with the laws and the connection of laws to governmental agencies, schools, business, and industry (Sherrill, 1998). The importance of the mention of laws in the introduction class helps create an impetus to care enough to learn about and take an active interest in legislation and litigation to improve quality of life for persons with a disability (Sherrill, 1998). This idea of knowing and acting is reflected in the following participant’s comment “students need to know and understand- liability”, and “students become aware of how to comply with laws related to those with disabilities”. It is fully recognized by both survey participants and the authors that a more detailed discussion of laws relating to people with disabilities in sport occurs elsewhere in the sport management curriculum, likely in a legal aspects of sport class, where the variety of legislation both within the U.S. and around the world, the lawsuits, and court actions are discussed in significantly more detail.

What was noticeably absent from any mention of laws was any acknowledgement of the recent documents from the Government Accountability Office [U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2010] and Dear Colleague Letter from the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education issued in 2013 regarding the inclusion of extracurricular sport and physical activity for individuals with disabilities in public schools across the United States. One participant commented the following “it is a very important topic for sport managers because there are several laws and statutes specific for this issue such as ADA, IDEA [individuals with disabilities education act], due process, etc to provide a brief overview”. It may be that a discussion of this topic takes place in greater length in other courses in the curriculum. However, it has had a significant legal and political impact on the state of Maryland, for example, the first state in the U.S. to pass the Fitness and Athletics Equity for All Act as a direct response to a law suit based in large part on the
Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and a student’s right to compete in a track wheelchair alongside her able-bodied peers. This landmark legislation prompted the National High School Athletic Association to publish a best practices in adapted team sports document (NFHS.org, 2015) and state athletic associations across the country to examine their individual policies and practices with regard to equal opportunities for extracurricular athletics to students with disabilities within each state.

**Inclusion, Diversity, Social Responsibility & Ethics.** Diversity is arguably one of the most important social and political issues facing sport organizations (Cunningham & Fink, 2006; Spaaij et al., 2014). Not only is managing diversity an important challenge for sport organizations but how diversity is dealt with both within and across sport organizations affects opportunities for persons with a disability in sport and their overall well-being (Spaaij et al., 2014). From a sociological perspective, the inclusion of topics of disability sport in the introduction class begins to relate disability diversity on par with any discussion of diversity of gender, race, or sexual orientation, with a potential goal aimed at fostering equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all. Participant’s comments that support disability as a topic within a larger discussion of diversity include: “awareness of multiple populations of which disabled participants are one.” “reinforce awareness and support of inclusion as an opportunity not a threat”, and “to give an inclusive and wide-ranging introduction to sport”. Topics related to disability sport can create an awareness of how diversity of ability can have a significant positive economic benefit to a sports organization (Spaaij et al., 2014; Pope, 2010). Comments that support the recognition of people with disabilities and their respective families and communities include: “we live in a diverse society...they have to understand every aspect of spectators and participants”,” to provide an awareness of inclusion of participants and patrons of disability in sport”. One participant included that “The Wounded warrior Project is headquartered in the city in which I work which helps increase general awareness of the issue. We also have quite a few veterans in our program that either have suffered disabling injuries in combat or have friends that did. This is another variable that helps increase the impact of the curriculum.” One participant, however, commented “I don’t believe it [disability] has any more of an impact than any topic we cover. We cover a great deal in the introduction class.” This comment could have two different interpretations. First, it could be explained that this individual treats the topic of disability sport equal in importance to other topics and populations discussed in the introductory course. Alternatively, it could reflect a barrier in that there is already so much to teach in the introduction to sport management course that there is not enough time to give the topic of disability sport and people with disabilities in general emphasis at this stage in the program.

**Career and Job Opportunities.** Disability sport has gone through extensive professionalization since this time leading to its institutionalization and establish-
ment in society and the sport world (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; von Sikorski, Schierl, Moller & Oberhauser, 2012). The number of people with disabilities involved in sport and physical activity and recreation is steadily increasing around the world (Disabled World, 2013). Athletes with disabilities are demonstrating their athletic abilities and gaining increased recognition in both the able-bodied and disability sport contexts (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). The following participant comments suggest that faculty may perceive sport for persons with disabilities, while unique in many aspects, to share more similarities than differences with regard to the skills needed in the sport management field, and it is these similarities that make it meaningful to introduce disability sport into the introductory course. Comments include: “to expose students to their [people with disabilities] existence and the potential career opportunities that exist”, “to generate awareness of professional opportunities and scope of the industry”, “to make them aware of disability sport as a possible career option.” “to broaden the student perspective and make them aware of options in various sport segments”, “opens mind to other parts of the industry, including potential internship and job sites”, and “I have seen student interest in working in disability sport increase as a result of initial discussions in the Introduction course.”

An internet search of career opportunities in disability sport brought up a list of disability sport organizations across the U.S. who are offering staff positions and internship opportunities in areas such as program services interns, advocacy specialists, program directors, program managers, director of special events, gift services specialist, and international organizational development. Furthermore, there are diverse career opportunities working in sport commissions, sport marketing and management agencies, corporate sport events and marketing and sport organizations, for example, who are all looking to capitalize on the growing number of people with disabilities in the world, the globalization of disability sport, and the buying power of people with disabilities in the world today (Heumann, 2015; Pitts & Stotlar, 2013).

Themes specifically relating to reasons to include disability sport in the introductory class

Awareness of People with Disabilities. Instructors perceived the purpose of including disability sport topics in the introduction class as “important for students to think about sport for people with disabilities” and “help student learn, not just assume, about athletes with disabilities and the ways they compete”. This particular respondent went on to comment about spectators with disabilities at sporting events and added “help students understand our role in providing spectator experiences for fans with disabilities.” Other comments focused on awareness, but this time the awareness is not on the laws and liability but rather on persons with disabilities as two respondents wrote “one of the largest populations in the sport industry with a
tremendous amount of buying power”, “the growing voice and power of the disability sport movement, the growing awareness and greater mainstream visibility of disability topics in the media” and to “broaden the experience of the student in the introductory course and make them aware of disability sport as an issue of concern”. These comments reflect greater attention paid to people with disabilities both in the U.S. and around the world. This increased awareness is likely a reflection of initiatives of the World Health Organization, the American, and governments around the world adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the U.S. Department of State’s promotion of disability rights in employment, education and equal opportunity for all people. People with disabilities comprise 15% of the world’s population with a disposable annual income of roughly one trillion dollars (Heumann, 2015). Instructors may have as a purpose in discussing sport for people with disabilities the understanding that sport management professions work with people of all abilities and personalities. The introduction of sport for persons with a disability to the introductory sport management course may be an opportunity for students to begin to examine their attitudes towards those with disabilities, pointing out the commonalities beyond the disability. By discussing disability openly, instructors promote and model attitudes reflecting the right for equal opportunity for people with disabilities in sport and physical activity.

It’s In The Book. Comments within this theme were simply statements that the purpose for including the topic of people with disabilities in sport was that it was in the book. Specifically, the comments were “it’s in the textbook,” “part of the chapter topics,” and “it’s mentioned in the text book and is an important part of the sporting industry.” In previous research, faculty indicated they used readings, articles, and the SportsBusiness Journal for disability sport content in their introduction to sport management course (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014). This same study, however, found that not only is there a lack of coverage of disability sport content in scholarly research journals across disciplines within sport management from which faculty can draw on for teaching about sport for people with disabilities, but people with disabilities are disproportionally studied across sport management industry segments (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014). There is a dearth of information on the introduction to sport management textbooks on the inclusion of sport for people with disabilities. An examination, currently underway, of the extent to which this topic is addressed not only in the introductory texts but in textbooks across multiple sport management fields should shed light on what, how much, and in what ways sport for people with a disability is addressed across the sport management curriculum.

Theme specifically related to the perceived benefits to students

To Challenge Social Norms. It is likely that this theme is a direct outcome of
including disability sport topics for purposes of creating awareness of people with disabilities. This theme emerged with comments about helping students see the challenges and rewards in providing sports for people with disabilities. Some of these statements were “challenging social norms, beliefs, and assumptions”, “realize that sport is for all and that those who are disabled want and can participate just like the non-disabled”, and “hopefully they will become more inclusive of people with disabilities in their experiences, currently and in the future...also I hope they change their perspectives on the abilities and possibilities for people with disabilities.” Once awareness is heightened, students may begin to challenge social norms and stereotypes they have of individuals with disabilities both in society and in sport (Larkin, Cottingham and Pate, 2014). According to the United Nations Sport for Development and Peace office, sport plays a powerful role in raising awareness about different groups of humans and toward appreciation of diversity (2016). Sport and play have always been recognized for its power to bring people together, to inspire, and stands for inclusion, fairness, and teamwork toward a common goal.

**Limitations and Future Research Considerations**

There are several considerations that limit the generalizability of the findings in this study. First, the data are generated from two open-ended survey questions. While the data do provide some insights into faculty member’s views on the purpose and perceived benefits of including disability topics as part of introductory sport management courses, these data do not answer follow-up questions of “how” and “why” as these were not part of the chosen research approach used in this study. Some of this information, however, is available elsewhere (Shapiro, Pitts, Hums, & Calloway, 2012; Pitts & Shapiro, in press). It may be perceived in part that some of the explanations may be speculative, a limitation of using email surveys rather than interviews. It was our goal to gain a broad understanding of why people include such topics rather than a more limited scope from a smaller selection of faculty with different degrees of inclusion within their courses. With the preliminary insights gleaned from this paper future research can examine faculty member’s perceived importance and interest in disability as a topic for introductory sport management courses as potential influencing factors on the inclusion of disability sport into the curriculum, and to what degree the reasons and perceived benefits to including disability sport in the introduction course influences attitudes and behaviors of sport management students towards working with people with disabilities in sport. Lastly, it would be helpful to understand how different approaches and topics may lend themselves more easily for inclusion by faculty with little interest or content knowledge but yet for whom its inclusion is perceived as important.
Conclusion

Faculty who include topics relating to disability sport into their introduction to sport management course appear to have a clear focus and alignment between their reasons and the intended benefits/outcomes for doing so. Sport management students gain an increased understanding of the breadth of the profession inclusive of legal considerations, awareness of diversity, and the value of inclusion and challenging social norms which could open student’s minds to careers and job opportunities in disability sport students may otherwise not have considered.

The results of this study are important to the sport management academic community in regard to curriculum standards and curriculum development. While the study participants spoke to the importance of including people with disabilities in sport as part of the course, it should be noted again that the current curriculum standards do not specifically mention people with disabilities and sport or disability sport (COSMA, 2010), that some of the current textbooks for the introductory course do not include the topic (Pitts & Shapiro, in press), and that it is almost nonexistent in the published journals (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014). There appears to be a prevailing approach to the study of diversity in sport that tends to be at a surface level where disability is viewed categorically or as fragmented populations (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation) identifying those who are perceived to be different from the majority or in-group in a way that tends to compare experiences of members, negatively impacting equality (Spaaij et al., 2014; Cunningham & Fink, 2006). Perhaps it is time for those in the field of sport management to give serious consideration to formulating a more delineated approach to promoting the addition of people with disabilities and sport into the curriculum, classroom, and research (Pitts & Shapiro, 2014). Perhaps an increase in inclusion into more sport management textbooks can be the starting point for the field toward promoting more disability inclusion in the classroom.

References


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