

# A Proposal for a Rating System for Sport Management/Sport Administration Programs

Susan Mullane, University of Miami  
Michael Fraina, Farmingdale State College

## **Abstract**

*Data for a proposed rating system were collected through focus groups and surveys to determine factors considered important for evaluating Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Respondents (n = 43) were asked to rank, in order, the ten most important variables toward Sport Management/Sport Administration program evaluation for undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. An open-ended question was included to account for any additional criteria that may have been neglected. A response rate of 35% was achieved. Results indicated that different variables ranked highest at the various levels (i.e., "Curriculum" for undergraduate and master's programs, "Faculty Scholarship and Reputation" for doctoral programs). Additional data should be gathered and input may be required from a broader audience to ensure that appropriate evaluation criteria are being addressed. The next step is to create and implement a comprehensive document to be completed by each institution's program director and dean/designee. Ultimately, this rating system would be beneficial for consumers to use in choosing the most appropriate Sport Management/Sport Administration program for them.*

## **Literature Review**

The importance of ranking systems has been studied throughout various sectors of business and education. Ranking systems have been utilized to evaluate universities, academic journals, and individual researchers (Demange, 2012). The most widely respected ranking systems were developed by the *US News and World Report* and the National Research Council (Rouse & Garcia, 2004). These systems were observed to influence prospective students' perceptions of the institution and program.

Despite the proliferation of ranking systems within academia, a dearth of research has been conducted in regard to measures of evaluation within Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Students and parents have increasingly demanded quantifiable data regarding academic programs, and some form of comparison and program evaluation may help to provide direction for these individuals (Meredith, 2004). Elements of a classification system vary across academic degree programs and must be considered when developing a ranking system. Bias by the students, faculty, and administrators who complete the evaluations (mostly surveys) is a major concern. Ranking systems tend to produce only one "best program," which is an issue, in and of itself. These deficiencies were reported by Stigler (1996), which urged that rating systems are more appropriate than ranking classifications. The author's main points were that a university's curriculum is not defined fully by their programs' reputations, and that rankings are inherently biased in favor of larger departments (Stigler, 1996). Previously, the authors of the current study had proposed a ranking system to assess Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. However, due to limitations including reliability, objectivity, and implementation issues, the approach has shifted toward a rating system.

Currently, the most widely utilized criteria for evaluating Sport Management/Sport Administration programs is a ranking system implemented by “Sports Management Degree Guide.” In this ranking system, programs are categorized based upon accreditation/reputation, location, local sports teams, internships/networking, level of degree offered, cost, and student/teacher ratio. Each program is ranked on a point scale between 1-20, in which lower scores reflect greater achievement (<https://www.sports-management-degrees.com/best-sports-management-degree-programs-2014/>).

Efforts have been undertaken to address the limitations of ranking systems. Hill (2007) encouraged a system that shifts away from reliance on the *US News & World Report* and toward construction by third-party non-profit companies. The author proposed that this approach would allow for students to weigh their own criteria. An alternative is a rating system, whereby respondents can view and evaluate programs on the existence of previously established and acknowledged important criteria. The chief benefits of a rating system are that the criteria are more thorough and easier to compare. Previous research included attempts to develop a uniform ranking system for Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Based on a prior survey that sought to determine important factors for ranking Sport Management/Sport Administration programs, it was determined that different factors were important for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. The need for separate rating systems for each program level was reported by Shilbury and Rentschler (2007) and Jisha and Pitts (2004). These studies similarly explained that due to their differences in student population and program goals, there must be demarcation among types of academic programs. The current study was designed to draw upon that previous research and utilized a revised survey that was sent to members of a national Sport Management/Sport Administration organization to determine important factors for evaluating the three levels of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to determine important factors for evaluating Sport Management/Sport Administration programs at three educational levels, and develop a proposal for a rating system to be utilized within the field of Sport Management/Sport Administration.

Program evaluation presents both an opportunity and challenge for many sectors of society. Various academic departments (e.g., arts management, entrepreneurship) have sought to standardize measurement of the quality of their academic journals. As recommended by Stigler (1996), utilization of rating systems are more appropriate than ranking procedures toward evaluation of academic programs. Rentschler and Shilbury (2008) adopted a rating system to assess the quality of arts management academic journals. This rating system included a weighted score based on prestige, contribution to theory, contribution to practice, and contribution to teaching (Rentschler & Shilbury, 2008). Meanwhile, Stewart and Cotton (2013) developed a rating system of entrepreneurship journals based on journal impact factor and citation measures.

In the field of Sport Management/Sport Administration, Shilbury and Rentschler (2007) espoused the merits of rating systems for academic journals. Their method of creating the rating system included a weighted score based on four factors: (1) prestige, (2) contribution to theory, (3) contribution to practice, and (4) contribution to teaching. This method of rating Sport Management/Sport Administration programs was based upon the approach of Polonsky and Whitelaw (2006). The process of their rating system began with the participants indicating their perceptions of the importance of each of these categories (Shilbury & Rentschler, 2007). Respondents were instructed to allocate a total of 100% among these four criteria. Upon creation of the criteria designation, participants rated each journal based on the four criteria

through a seven-point Likert response scale. The weighted responses were multiplied by ratings of each criterion to determine an overall composite score. Ultimately, a composite weighted score was tabulated by averaging each journal according to each category and summing the weighted scores.

The study conducted by Shilbury and Rentschler (2007) revealed that the composite weighted score of prestige earned the highest rating. Additionally, there existed a significant, positive correlation between prestige and contribution to theory. It appears worthwhile to employ rating systems based on these categories to calculate outcomes within academia.

Despite these observations, few attempts have been made to rate the quality of academic programs. Hu and Li (2012) noted the efforts of the Chinese Ministry of Education to employ a rating system in order to measure the quality of Chinese preschool education. The authors explained that rating systems must consist of four elements: (1) measures of program quality and associated performance indicators, (2) weighing system for each dimension, (3) levels and categories of the rating system, and (4) measurement criteria for each category. As an attempt to standardize program evaluation, Yan and Yuejuan (2008) developed the Kindergarten Environment Rating Scale. The four domains of the rating system included physical, interactions, routine care, and curriculum. The physical domain corresponded to the ability of the program to create an environment that facilitated student's development and learning. All relationships among students, teachers, and parents were covered within the interactions domain. The routine care domain referred to whether the students' basic psychological needs are met. Lastly, course content was measured within the curriculum domain. Ultimately, 25 items were created to evaluate these four categories. While the mission of college Sport Management/Sport Administration programs differs from preschool education, this rating system can provide a model for program evaluation.

The most closely related study to the current study was an assessment of Sport Management/Sport Administration doctoral programs by Jisha and Pitts (2004). In this study, the authors examined the prime factors influencing program choice among doctoral students in the United States. Their study involved a survey completed by 158 Sport Management/Sport Administration doctoral students. Of 62 investigated variables, the 5 highest rated factors were reputation of institution, reputation of program, positive interaction with faculty, friendliness of department staff and faculty, and opportunity for assistantships and fellowships. Based on these findings, Jisha and Pitts (2004) recommended that institutions and individual units focus upon enhancing their reputations. These findings also demonstrate the influence of establishing clear lines of communication between faculty and doctoral students toward recruitment and retention. Lastly, provision of funding through assistantships and fellowships was an important factor toward program choice.

In addition to academic programs, studies have been authored to measure effectiveness of manuscript reviewers. Smaby, Smith, and Maddux (2002) implemented the Reviewer Quality Index (RQI) to gauge quality of manuscript evaluation among reviewers for the *Counselor Education and Supervision Journal*. The three variables of interest were timeliness, thoroughness, and disposition deviation. To calculate the RQI, the authors began by standardizing each of the dependent variables through converting all raw scores to z scores. Timeliness and disposition deviation scores were reverse-scored in order to create the final RQI. Following this process, higher RQI scores were associated with increased reviewing performance. Collection of this data enabled editors to develop a database, in which they released reviewers that had failed to meet their standards of timeliness, thoroughness, or

agreeability. Additionally, the authors observed that gender, type of terminal degree, reviewer experience, and board experience were not significant indicators of reviewer performance (Smaby et al., 2002).

One other area in which rating systems have been adopted is for content application. Hancharonak and Novysh (2015) employed a rating system to measure competency acquisition among graduates from Information and Communication Technologies programs. This rating system included a ten-point scale to determine the significance of the subject, the graduate's grades, level of competency acquisition through summative assessment grades, and the normalized coefficient of the subject's significance. Determinations of employees' competency acquisition were provided by academic professionals and field practitioners. The compilation of these findings support the value of rating systems, as well as the benefits of rating systems as a measure of academic programs.

### **Methodology**

An initial survey developed in 2015 by these researchers was sent via email to a convenience sample of Sport Management/Sport Administration faculty members. In terms of generating the criteria, respondents at all institutions completed the same survey. However, during implementation of the rating system, programs will be classified in three ways: (a) Large vs. small colleges/universities, (b) Private vs. public colleges/universities, and (c) Teaching vs. research institutions. More recently, focus groups of undergraduate and master's students were conducted to solicit their input on factors considered when choosing a program. In addition, emails were sent to a convenience sample of Master's students soliciting input on reasons for choosing a particular program. The researchers also held informal discussions with interested faculty from a variety of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs to identify factors faculty deemed important for rating programs.

Based on the previous research, and responses obtained through these discussions, focus groups and emails, criteria were compiled to form a comprehensive list of the most common items/factors for each educational level. Using this data, the previously adopted survey was revised and sent to current Global Sport Business Association (GSBA) members and registered 2017 conference attendees whose email addresses were available ( $n = 43$ ). Respondents were asked to rank, in order, the ten most important variables toward Sport Management/Sport Administration program evaluation in all three levels of study: undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. Along with the available criteria, an open-ended question was included to account for any additional criteria that may have been neglected.

A response rate of 35% was achieved. Results indicated that different variables ranked highest at the various levels (e.g., "Curriculum" for undergraduate and master's programs, "Faculty Scholarship and Reputation" for doctoral programs).

In order to ascertain the most important factor for inclusion within Sport Management/Sport Administration programs, all factors were tabulated based on a weighted score of rated position and total response count. Weighted scores were calculated in reverse, assigning a weight of 10 to the #1 most selected factor through a weight of 1 for the #10 most selected factor. Therefore, a total score was created for each factor at each of the three academic levels.

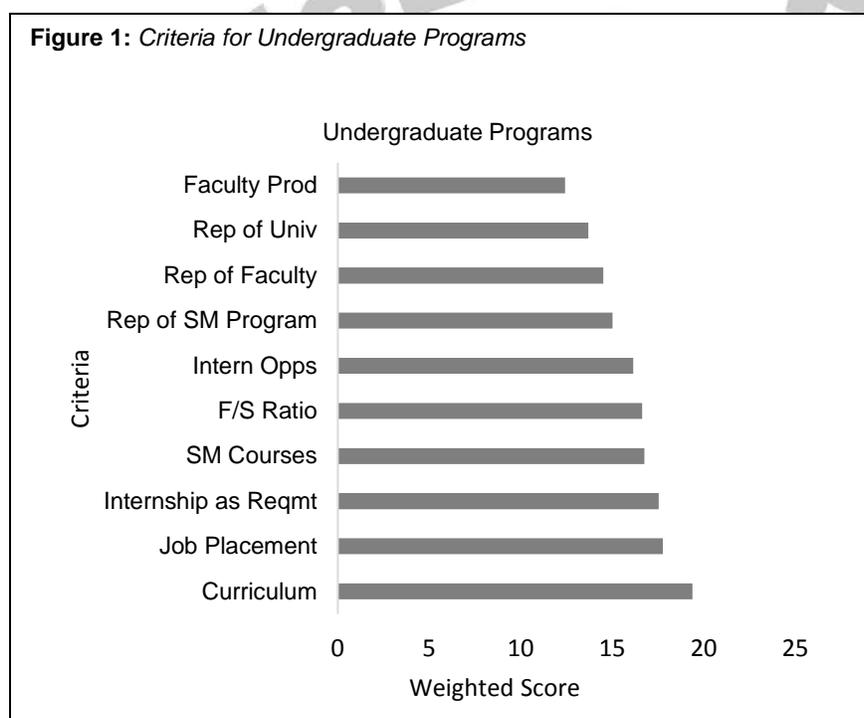
Additional data should be gathered and input may be required from a broader audience to ensure the appropriate evaluation criteria are being addressed. The next step is to create and

implement a comprehensive document for consumers to use in choosing the most appropriate Sport Management/Sport Administration program for them.

## Results

To determine potential differences among Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programs, respondents were asked to separately identify the most pertinent factors at each level. Weighted scores were calculated in reverse, assigning a weight of 10 to the #1 most selected factor through a weight of 1 for the #10 most selected factor. Therefore, a total score was created for each factor at each of the three academic levels.

Figure 1 indicates the factors selected in relation to Bachelor's programs. Noted criteria pertaining to Master's programs are presented in Figure 2. Lastly, Figure 3 offers the weighted scores selected toward Doctoral programs.

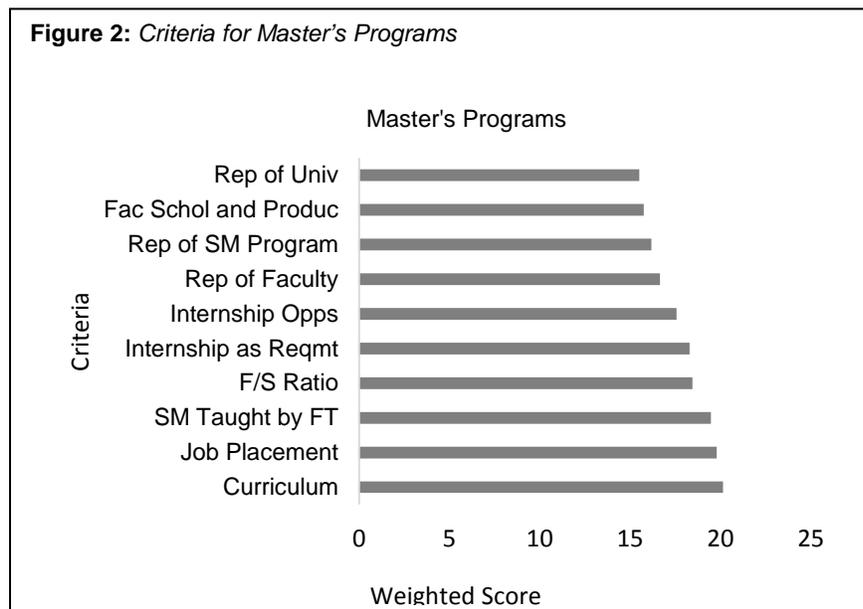


For Bachelor's programs, ten items were identified as program indicators. *Curriculum- inclusion of core Sport Management/Sport Administration content* was selected as the most important criteria. This item held a weighted score of 19.38. The variable of *Job placement* had a score of 17.75, and *Internship required for degree completion* followed with a weighted score of 17.53. The fourth most important factor was *Percentage of Sport Management/Sport Administration courses taught by Sport*

*Management/Sport Administration faculty*, with a weighted score of 16.75. Next was *Faculty/student ratio*, earning a weighted score of 16.62. *Internship opportunities within the sport industry* followed with a score of 16.13. Next was the *Reputation of the Sport Management/Sport Administration program*, scoring a 15.00. *Reputation of faculty* received a weighted score of 14.50. With a score of 13.69, *Reputation of the university* was the ninth most selected item. Lastly, *Faculty productivity* received a score of 12.42.

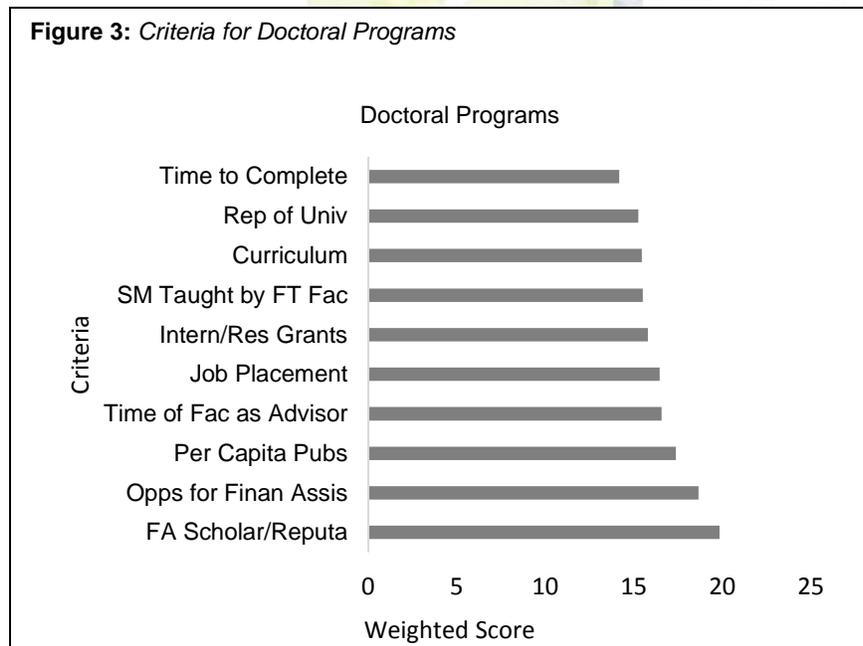
According to Torrillo (2014), a university's reputation is the most important factor in a prospective student's college choice. However, this critical variable may be the most difficult to quantify. Torrillo (2014) recommended that applicants review reputational rankings, compare results in the *U.S. News and World Report*, examine alumni and student evaluations, and solicit guidance from industry professionals. As noted in the limitations section, this may not completely eliminate bias within the variable of reputation.

**Figure 2: Criteria for Master's Programs**



Among Master's programs, respondents selected ten criteria. *Curriculum- inclusion of Sport Management/Sport Administration content-* was again selected as the most important criteria with a weighted score of 20.31. Similarly, *Job placement* was the second most popular choice, with a weighted score of 19.77. The third most identified factor, with a weighted score of 19.45, was *Percentage of Sport Management/Sport Administration courses taught by full-time Sport Management/Sport Administration faculty.* A weighted score of 18.44 was observed for *Faculty/student ratio.* This was followed by *Internship required for degree completion (18.27).* *Internships opportunities within the sport industry* held a weighted score of 17.55. The seventh most selected factor was *Reputation of faculty,* with a score of 16.64. *Reputation of Sport Management/Sport Administration program* scored 16.17. With a weighted score of 15.75, *Faculty Scholarship and Productivity* was noted as an important factor. The final identified variable was *Reputation of university,* earning a score of 15.50.

**Figure 3: Criteria for Doctoral Programs**



In the analysis of Doctoral programs, ten criteria were recommended for program rating. Achieving a weighted score of 19.83, *Faculty scholarship and reputation* was the most important consideration. *Opportunities for financial assistance* received the second most responses, with a weighted score of 18.64. The third highest

ranked response, with a weighted score of 17.36, was *Per capita student publications upon graduation.* Next was *Amount of full-time Sport Management/Sport Administration faculty serving as advisors (16.55).* A weighted score of 16.45 was determined for *Job placement.* *Internships/research grants* followed with a score of 15.78. The criteria of *Sport*

*Management/Sport Administration courses taught by full-time Sport Management/Sport Administration faculty had a weighted score of 15.50. The term Curriculum- inclusion of Sport Management/Sport Administration content was weighted at 15.45. Reputation of university garnered a rating of 15.25. The final identified variable was Time required to complete the program, with a weighted score of 14.17.*

## **Discussion**

Development of a rating system for Sport Management/Sport Administration programs would benefit administrators, faculty, and prospective students. Stakeholders would be able to identify pertinent program factors and determine whether the program in question holds appropriate standards. As an extension of Jisha and Pitts (2004) study, the current initiative proposes a standardized rating system of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs at the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels. Creation of a rating system of program factors would be beneficial in two respects. Sport Management/Sport Administration coordinators and prospective students could increase recognition of the most necessary program elements, thus improving course implementation, and, following construction of a standardized rating system, individual programs could be evaluated based on each category. The proposed rating system of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs would categorize programs according to size and mission of the institution. The initial step toward developing this rating system was the examination of the ten factors deemed most important for inclusion within Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Discussion of these factors is presented in the following section.

At the undergraduate level, the core curriculum of departmental courses was stated the most influential component. Based on this result, programs must emphasize curriculum development in order to most appropriately serve their students. Percentage of job placement upon graduation, although sometimes difficult to quantify, was another especially important factor. Programs would be advised to provide all available resources for their alumni to gain employment, and to advertise these successes. Perhaps, collaboration with career services departments would be beneficial. Mandated internships also received support among survey respondents. Institutions may consider offering expertise in securing and successfully completing internships.

Within Master's programs, the importance of curriculum development was again emphasized. It is apparent that utilization of proper course allotment and the applicability of "core courses" are most beneficial to applicants. Similarly, job placement was indicated as the second most important element of Sport Management graduate programs. In slight deviation, it was reported that the percentage of courses taught by full-time Sport Management/Sport Administration faculty was a meaningful contributor. Once the proposed ranking system is implemented, it will be notable to measure whether differences exist in this area based on type of institution. Seemingly, this would create the incentive for hiring qualified and experienced faculty who have specifically taught Sport Management/Sport Administration courses.

At the Doctoral level, faculty productivity through research and overall reputation was prioritized. Provision of grant money and other resources to produce publications could in turn benefit the faculty members' advisees. Interestingly, this may indicate the benefit of limiting the amount of advisees in order to remain productive. From the student's perspective, accessibility of assistantships and fellowships was of great importance. Furthermore, while not a direct benefit, assistantships could provide assistance to faculty members as a source of recruitment.

Possibly, this could lead to enhanced partnerships between the departments and funding institutions. Lastly, the number of student publications upon graduation was a noted factor. This would seem to promote the need for collaboration and support from the advisor as to best encourage student success.

Any effort to create a rating (or ranking) system contains inherent limitations based on evaluation quality and intangible elements such as a university's reputation or quality of its faculty. While bias and lack of objectivity often characterize ranking systems, it is hoped that a rating system will represent a more objective and fair approach, as the focus is to highlight the strengths of all programs as opposed to a designation of the "best" program. This approach will assist applicants in making choices based on their own priorities. An additional limitation will be the mechanics of implementation, including collecting, tabulating, and evaluating relevant information on Sport Management/Sport Administration programs.

The future goal of this project is to incorporate the gathered data to publish a standard rating system of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. The proposed rating system would be modeled on the U.S. News' ranking system of colleges and universities. The U.S. News ranking system provides data for 1,374 colleges and universities and consists of three stages: (1) The weighted sum of the standardized scores are calculated, (2) Scores are recalculated to assign the top-rated score in each category 100 points, and (3) Preceding schools are ranked as a proportion of the top score (usnews.com).

In terms of indicators, the U.S. News ranking system measures seven categories to determine each school's weighted score (usnews.com). These include graduation and retention rates (22.5%), undergraduate academic reputation (22.5%), faculty resources (20%), student selectivity (12.5%), financial resources (10%), graduation rate performance (7.5%), and alumni giving rate (5%) (usnews.com). Based on the collected data, the factors noted by the U.S. News would be replaced by those indicated for Sport Management/Sport Administration programs. Further, the U.S. News ranking system stratifies universities based on geographical location and size of the university (usnews.com). In slight variation, the proposed rating system of Sport Management/Sport Administration would be categorized into three classifications: (a) Large vs. small (b) Public vs. private, and (c) Teaching vs. research institutions. This would allow for potential applicants to compare peer institutions.

As the rating system remains in the proposal stage, the authors will continue to seek feedback regarding implementation. Depending on input, the authors will consider whether to employ a more sophisticated method, such as the Carnegie classification system (<http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu>). For baccalaureate colleges, institutions are categorized as either Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences focus or Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields. Master's programs range from M1: Master's Colleges and Universities- Larger programs, M2: Master's Colleges and Universities- Medium programs, or M3: Master's Colleges and Universities- Smaller programs. Doctoral programs are identified as R1: Doctoral Universities- Highest research activity, R2: Doctoral Universities- Higher research activity, or R3: Doctoral Universities- Moderate research activity.

Lastly, support from the Sport Management/Sport Administration community is crucial toward publication of this rating system. The authors of the rating system will seek the endorsement of the Global Sport Business Association (GSBA), one of the most prominent associations in the industry of Sport Management/Sport Administration. The implementation of the rating system would include re-evaluation and program analysis on an annual basis. The initial data collection

has included a sample of representatives from the GSBA, and corroboration from the association would substantiate the rating system. Garnering the endorsement of the GSBA would provide credibility to the rating system. Ultimately, completion of a rating system of Sport Management/Sport Administration programs would provide clarity to administrators, faculty, and applicants.

Despite the potential benefits of this Sport Management/Sport Administration rating system, the authors must acknowledge four critical limitations. First, as the rating system will be completed by faculty and administration from affiliated universities, there is an inherent bias within the process. While the endorsement of the GSBA will benefit the proposal, a fully independent and unbiased document cannot be guaranteed. While it was widely reported as an essential form of criteria, a university's reputation is notoriously difficult to quantifiably measure. Prior to implementation of the rating system, the authors will seek to hold focus groups to most appropriately and fairly measure program reputation. Also, the rating system will be distributed to programs of differing sizes and institutional missions. Therefore, both the criteria of evaluation and results may be influenced by demographic factors of the institution. In an attempt to mitigate this limitation, the authors have proposed that the rating system consist of four institutional classifications. Another potential limitation is the likelihood that perceptions toward essential criteria will contrast based on the reader's position. For example, a factor deemed critical by the program director and dean/designee may not be as impactful for the student. As the rating system progresses, it may be beneficial to retrieve feedback from all relevant stakeholders. Lastly, the effectiveness of the rating system may be limited by a sample bias. Participation in the first step, which included crafting the criteria for the rating system, only included members of the GSBA. Perhaps, future consideration and implementation could include members of additional Sport Management/Sport Administration associations.

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