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Blending Academics and Practitioners:
Utilizing a Business Advisory Council for Curriculum Review and Redesign

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Abstract

Neumann University's Division of Business and Information Management has had an active Business Advisory Council (BAC) for more than a decade. It consists of regional mid- to high-level executives and leaders across the spectrum of NU's majors in Accounting, Business Administration, Computer Information Systems, Marketing, and Sport Management. The first four programs listed are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and Sport Management is accredited by COSMA. When the new Dean arrived in Fall 2014, it was determined from meetings with multiple BAC members across all disciplines that most of the programs were in need of updates and modernization to reflect the careers and jobs desired by employers in the region and beyond. The Dean worked with faculty colleagues that Fall to nearly double the size of the BAC from about 20 to almost 40.

In Spring 2015, the BAC was divided into six small groups of 5-8 members each encompassing the five disciplines mentioned above, plus a sixth group for Entrepreneurship (a new minor under consideration). Meetings were held for each group to review the current curriculum, examine the regional employment market, and formulate suggested program revisions amenable to the BAC, the Dean and Program Directors, the faculty, and the VPAA and President. The goal was to revise majors so that students would have a high level of job placement upon graduation. Curriculum updates were proposed in Fall 2015, approved in Spring 2016, and implemented beginning in the Fall 2016. This presentation will focus on the activities of the Sport Management group, the program revisions employed, and subsequent activities undertaken as a result of this process.

Kane and Jisha (2004) found that advisory boards in Sport Management programs are beneficial for a variety of reasons, including networking. The value for NU applied directly to COSMA Principles 2, 3 and 7. Strategic planning, curriculum redesign and external relationships have all been direct positive benefits derived from the BAC relationship with NU's Sport Management program.

The BAC helped design a specific skill set, which was integrated through a revised undergraduate curriculum. The M.S. in Sport and Entertainment Management is now going through a similar exercise.

Networking was the primary benefit of sport management advisory boards, as determined by Kane and Jisha (2004). The NU Sport Management determined that the program needed an individual that could serve as both a faculty member and industry relations and media specialist. This individual would serve students, faculty and in turn, the sport management industry. The focus of sport management practices in the various fields within the industry translates to students learning how to prepare for their internship, gather experience and knowledge and secure employment upon graduation. While the sport industry is vast on a global scale, it's much smaller once you dive in, and networking is essential. The new position became a reality in June 2016, and this individual is focused on developing and maintaining external relationships, primarily with companies within business and sports industry, but also some nonprofit groups, furthering the University's research and outreach missions; promote the University's capabilities, coordinating faculty and student interactions with companies, increasing the number and/or value of industry contracts, promoting professional development, and identifying internship and job opportunities.

Since June 2016, the position has welcomed students to over 50 internship opportunities, 10 volunteer opportunities and several job opportunities. The introduction to the plentiful

opportunities was the beginning. Students have increased their industry portfolio by taking advantage of learning and connecting with professionals in their field. Events such as the Neumann University Young Sports Professionals Panel, Neumann University Collegiate Athletics Panel, Philadelphia Flyers' panel and networking, Philadelphia Phillies College Night, Philadelphia 76ers panel, industry pop-ups on Campus, mock interviews with industry professionals, and guest speakers in all sport management classes have promoted the University and opened lines of communications among professionals, students and faculty. In addition to the movement towards industry exposure, the Introduction to Sport Management course curriculum endured its own changes. Students are tasked with obtaining and conducting three informational interviews over the course of the semester. Each student is assigned a department and all interviews correspond with that department (i.e. Sales department, interview Manager of Inside Sales). This gives the students a glimpse of direct vs. indirect learning. Students learn from asking their interviewee questions and hearing their response. Students also absorb information from their peers when they present on the interviews they've conducted. Each department uses their interviews to develop a case study that becomes a tangible piece added to their growing portfolio. As their professional growth is established online (LinkedIn, Twitter) and offline (industry interviews, volunteer and internship opportunities), they are learning about the sport management industry, opening their minds to the business (beyond being a fan) and realizing the potential in securing a job.

This presentation explores how to build a Sport Management advisory board and create value for the members and most importantly, the students that the University serves.

References

- COSMA. (2016). *Accreditation Principles Manual & Guidelines for Self-Study Preparation*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from <http://www.cosmaweb.org/>.
- Kane, J. & Jisha, J. (2004). An Analysis of Sport Management Clubs and Advisory Boards in Sport Management Programs across North America. *International Sports Journal*, 8, 132-138.