

Comment on Dustin and Schwab Paper “Consider the Kirtland’s Warbler”

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Dan Dustin and Keri Schwab (this issue) raise serious concerns about the inclusion of sport management curriculum content into traditional park and recreation departments. They ask: “Is sport management the ‘brown-headed cowbird’ to park and recreation education’s ‘Kirtland warbler?’ By becoming ‘obliging hosts’ to sport management programs, will park and recreation programs, like the warbler, be overwhelmed by the presence of the larger, more aggressive ‘cowbird’ in the form of sport management?”

I do not believe efforts to accommodate sport management must result in dire consequences. Adverse impacts can be mitigated by careful planning. Fortunately, several excellent examples exist of park and recreation departments that have successfully integrated sport content into their curriculum portfolios without compromising the integrity of traditional programs.

Some perspective on the current state of sport management programs within traditional recreation and parks departments is helpful. First, let us examine the extent to which park and recreation departments have become “obliging hosts” to sport management. Actually, only a handful of traditional park and recreation departments have added sport management content of any kind. The North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) lists 233 sport management programs in the United States and 12 in Canada on its website. Significantly, only six of the sport management programs identified on the NASSM website were subsumed under the banner of a traditional parks, recreation and/or tourism department. For example, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at North Carolina State University offers a BS in Sport Management. An additional 11 programs were housed in Departments in which Sport was co-listed with Recreation or Leisure in the departmental designation, such as the University of Florida’s Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management. Though only a relatively few park and recreation curricula have embraced sport management to date, the concerns raised by Dustin and Schwab deserve serious consider-

ation. Given the demonstrated demand by students for sport management, many park and recreation departments will face the issue of adding sport management to their curricula. Dustin and Schwab raise the alarm well in advance of this being a widespread problem.

Also, it is important to recognize that since their inception as stand alone departments, recreation and park programs have been in an almost perpetual state of curriculum change and expansion. When I started my Master's degree program in the Department of Parks and Recreation at the University of Illinois in 1967, the field essentially offered two broad educational emphases: either community recreation or park management. Departments at that time were highly specialized and focused either on public recreation or natural resource management concerns. By the 1970s, therapeutic recreation matured into a widely adopted specialization, and commercial recreation emerged rapidly in the early 1980s as a prominent concentration in park and recreation curricula. In the 1990s, parks and recreation curricula across North America adopted the next "wave" of curriculum expansion by incorporating tourism as an area of specialization. Today, many of the most prestigious departments in our field have added tourism to their departmental designation. It would have been unimaginable 30 years ago to think that many of the oldest and most respected departments in our field would now be titled departments of recreation, sport and tourism management.

These broad changes were driven in large part by opportunistic behavior. Commercial Recreation emerged as an attractive extension of our traditional fare, largely after Proposition 13 and other similar property tax limitation measures of the late 1970s caused enrollment to drop as students realized that fewer opportunities awaited them in traditional public sector agencies. Promoting opportunities in alluring private sector recreation settings like health and fitness clubs, golf courses, ski resorts and the like proved to be a significant attraction to students and a way to counteract the waning demand for public recreation. Tourism's development inside park and recreation curricula during the mid 1990s was also driven by opportunity. Though scholars had been writing and teaching travel and tourism for years, given its interdisciplinary nature, no one discipline "owned" the subject area. In the mid 1990s, many recreation and park departments began to see tourism as a natural extension of the broader content theme of discretionary or leisure behavior, and as an appropriate fit for park and recreation curricula. For many programs, tourism was also a way to generate substantial student credit hours. The incorporation of these specializations had a profound impact on enrollment growth. Will sport management be the next big opportunity for parks and recreation programs? If recent history offers any insights, you would expect that sport, in fact, would be the next big "wave" of change, or the next "nesting" opportunity for parks and recreation. Importantly, and, surprisingly, there is little evidence to date that indicates that park and recreation curricula have viewed sport management as the next great opportunity for curriculum expansion and enrollment growth.

I am surprised because sport management is such an attractive area for park and recreation curricula. Sport is a massive industry, with estimates of its econom-

ic magnitude in U.S. alone ranging from \$200 to \$300 billion a year. It includes some of the most prominent companies/brands in the world, such as Nike and Adidas. It provides the promise of employment in very compelling settings—major league sports, intercollegiate athletics, golf venues, etc. In many ways, it seems a natural extension of current portfolio offerings in parks and recreation. Sport at its core is a discretionary activity that encompasses a number of mainstream leisure pursuits. Core sport products include boating, camping, hiking, and skiing, all of which park and recreation curricula have studied for years as part their “outdoor recreation” concentrations. The term “sports tourism” which has become commonplace, recognizes the interconnection between sport and leisure travel. The points of connection or overlap are numerous.

There is certainly justification for adding sport management content to existing park and recreation curricula. In my view, park and leisure programs contemplating this step should take one of two routes. The first approach would be to pursue the North Carolina State model. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism at North Carolina State offers an excellent example of how sport management can be successfully integrated into traditional curriculum offerings. It has created a viable sport management degree program within a larger park and recreation department without any of the resource displacement issues discussed in Dustin and Schwab’s article. The second approach may be to introduce sport content into the broader curriculum from a more tailored or “niched” approach. An excellent example is the inclusion of Professional Golf Management programs into traditional park and recreation curricula at places like North Carolina State and Penn State. This narrow, concentrated focus on one prominent dimension of sport makes a lot of sense to me. Though housed in the Department of Exercise and Sports Science at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, the Specialization in Sport Administration focuses entirely on preparing students for careers in collegiate athletic administration. UNC has done a great job exploiting this niche, establishing an outstanding reputation within the intercollegiate sport community. The Recreational Sport Management option at Indiana University does a wonderful job preparing students for careers in collegiate recreation and intramural sports. Certainly, this niche strategy could be adopted by park and recreation curricula to take advantage of available faculty expertise and to exploit the unique resources both on campus or within their local market. Unless you’re willing to commit substantial resources to developing sport management properly, then do not add sport management to your existing offerings. Many programs offering sport management concentrations or degrees inside both kinesiology and recreation and leisure curricula claim to provide students with a comprehensive sport management education, leading to career opportunities across the full spectrum from professional sports to intercollegiate athletics. Many of these programs are severely undernourished, with few relevant classes and, in some cases, only one full-time faculty member. The end result is that they are unable to deliver on the promise made to students.

With the appropriate commitment of resources and a sensible approach to

what can realistically be delivered, I believe that sport management can take its place in the broader curriculum offering of a traditional park and recreation department. There is evidence to suggest that sport can be the “Bluebird of Happiness” instead of the troubling brown-headed cowbird.