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Recommendations:

Gender Equity in Collegiate Sport Clubs

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After reviewing the literature and what universities are doing in contrast to others it is evident that club sports status and gender equity is expectedly low. Issues such as lack of recognition, financial inequality and lower levels of promotion still exist on many campuses throughout North America. Although most universities are consistent with the ratio of male and female varsity and intramural sports, club sport participation levels and financial support show vast inequality. New students who were actively involved in community sport systems at home find it difficult to discover what sports are available at a club level at their school. Potential student athletes must resort to reading the fine print in the school newspaper or randomly spotting an advertisement on a poster board. Student's opportunities in sports such as ringette, gymnastics, ultimate Frisbee, water polo, cricket, tennis, figure skating, fencing, and badminton are restricted since they do not receive adequate levels of interest, recognition and funding from many universities.

The first recommendation would be to increase club sport recognition. Universities such as Lakehead, and Simon Fraser offer informational websites of the affiliated club sports with information about the league and how you can register a club sport and when and if they have try outs for that particular sport. One such example of a University website which clearly highlights club sports in the University of Alberta. Their campus recreation page has direct links to all of their club sports that are offered. Teams can post information such as schedules, scores, photos and events for students and general public to access. (University of Alberta, 2010) Websites such as this are easily accessible and would increase enrolment and interest within these designated club sports from future and current students. After recognition has been received the potential to grow and become a varsity sport within the university level will increase.

Although most universities are increasing their gender equitable practices, most club sports are female or co-ed, whereas varsity and intramural sports are dominantly male oriented sports. Females may have a hard time finding sports to participate in because the information is not readily accessible; not having enough information available will in turn decrease female participation in sports and will detriment the universities that are trying to achieve athletic equitable practices. In an article by Henseler, Wilson, Gotz, and Hautcast (2007) marketing shortfalls were discovered in the following three main areas, strategic marketing seems to be neglected, the consistency of the marketing management, level of innovation and the willingness to change common habits and approaches to business. Women's club sports must focus their marketing on the afore mentioned headings and work to fill the gaps which exist in their current marketing mix. A recommendation that is based on the Canadian Interuniversity Sport gender equity policy would be to utilize this policy as a guideline within club sports, by following these twelve steps the sport can gain a more professional status (Beaubier, 2004). This in turn can increase the universities female sport participation among universities and in the future have gender equity practices established over club sports, intramurals and varsity sports.

Universities are becoming more knowledgeable about gender equitable practices, but these policies still leave many female club sports without much recognition or funding. Another recommendation would be to offer scholarships among club sports. Scholarships can be based around leadership, determination, or volunteer dedication within the sport, not necessarily based on the skill level of these athletes. These scholarships would raise awareness for the club sport and would show future and current

students that participating in club sports could foster more than athletic ability. Club sports can foster leadership skills, relationships with fellow classmates, and offer job opportunities within the club sport association. One such school who is currently offering scholarship opportunities to female club sport athletes is Brock University. A ringette scholarship is available to student athletes to apply for. Each year the ringette team, a club team, grants scholarship money to its players (Brock University, 2010).

Women's equity in University athletics, especially club sports, can be divided by the amount of financial support that a school provides to its female athletes. Following the Title IX amendment of the 1972 colleges and universities were legally obligated to comply with equity laws surrounding female athletics. Although the Title IX law had existed for nearly 30 years, in 2000 male athletes in the U.S. received one and a half times the amount of athletic scholarship dollars than their female counterparts (Beaubier, 2004). Universities such as Appalachian State in Michigan have built gender equity issues directly into their campus athletics department master plan. For example, the athletic department at Appalachian State has a goal to increase their student athlete participation ratio's to mirror their male/female ratio's on campus. Therefore, a school which has 55% female population should have 55% of their student athletes be female. Their goal however stretches further than just participation rates but also includes scholarship monies and opportunities (Appalachian State University, 2007). Stating goals such as this within their athletics department master plan makes Appalachian State a leader in the area of gender equity. A recommendation, based on scholarships and participation rates for female athletes, would be to follow the model listed above and

have the participation and scholarship ratios mirror the male/female ratios within the student body.

Many club sports are forced to affiliate themselves with community sport agency rather than the university. An example of such an affiliation is at Brock University students gather to play ringette through the Niagara Falls Ringette Association. Although the team is made up of Brock students their team must practice and compete under the umbrella of the local sports association. Team cannot use the Brock name or logo to compete however hosts a tournament each year in which club teams from other universities such University of Calgary, University of Alberta and Simon Fraser University attend. These schools have supported their ringette program with funding and given them the ability to travel to such competitions. Schools must move towards an equitable treatment of club sports, especially female club sports. Although each school may choose to value their sport programs differently, they should value them equally. At schools where multimedia forms of advertising exist (ie – televised games, post-game wrap ups, newspaper articles) club sports, should have equal opportunity to use these sources. A recommendation would be to offer an unpaid internship in communications for postproduction and media coverage of all women's sports, especially the lesser known club sports (Appalachian State, 2007).

Club sports have a lot of room to grow, especially in the area of gender equity. Female club sports have long been pushed to the back burner when it comes to funding, access for students, advertising across campus and the community as well as athletic scholarships. Although there is much more that can be done, as seen through examples at several universities throughout North America, many steps are being taken to alleviate

the inequality felt by many female club sport athletes. The enforcement of gender equity policies, such as Title IX and the Canadian Intercollegiate Sports twelve step process will push universities towards equity. The recommendations made in this paper will help universities and colleges move forward with their athletic programs. Moving to a more balanced approach when it comes to gender equity is important and schools must act on the shortcomings on their campus.

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