

If classrooms and industry can align, new lessons can propel the future of women's sports

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A content analysis of the Case Studies in Sport Management (CSSM) journal since its inception revealed that of 103 case studies published, just four cases were dedicated solely to women's sport contexts.

If our female students aren't represented in a learning tool like case studies, how can we expect them to be prepared to work in an industry where they don't see themselves?

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the passing of Title IX, we must continually explore ways to improve women's representation in the sport management classrooms, hirings and promotions. The TIDES Complete Sport Racial and Gender Report Card gave the NFL, MLB, and MLS a "C+" rating or lower on gender hiring practices. These statistics worsen regarding Division I Football Bowl Series Schools; here, the 2021 TIDES report awarded an "F" for gender hiring.

Poor representation numbers persist in sport management classrooms as well. Research states that even though women make up 56% of the student population on college campuses, on average only 31% of students in undergraduate sport management programs are women.

This means that both industry practitioners in the workforce and academic instructors in the classroom have a shared opportunity: to forge meaningful partnerships that make sport business a more inclusive space for women.

As we explore these partnerships, greater representation in coursework, classrooms, careers and industry perspective will fortify our solutions. Here are the voices to elevate in our collaborations, and how to include them.

The Industry Voice Will Provide Exposure to Women's Sport Contexts

Practitioners in women's sport contexts can provide faculty and students with access to data and insights from the field. Cases are invaluable resources for the classroom, putting students in real-life situations and allowing them to think critically and apply knowledge they'll one day use in the industry. To make our case studies engaging, informative and applicable, data from women's leagues and teams can not only expose students to the issues sport leaders face, but also provide them with the opportunity to challenge and innovate in this growing, vital space.

We've long known that women's sport receives less coverage from mainstream media. A 2019 study discovered that 95% of sport news coverage, including ESPN's "SportsCenter," was devoted to men's sports. But even within academia, the coverage of women's sport is lacking. That means students aren't exposed to women's sport as a viable career opportunity or point of discussion in their coursework. Unless a faculty member takes it upon themselves to use women's sport examples of their own creation in their lecture materials and assignments, students are left relatively unexposed during their programs.

To help add to faculty resources to infuse women's sport content in the classroom, the CSSM is calling for a special issue of cases devoted to the business of women's sport later this year. Beyond collaborating with data and publishing case studies, sport practitioners can get involved in sport management classrooms through speaking engagements, guest lectures, and partnership with sport management faculty to develop group projects and case studies around real world challenges the organization is facing.

The Voice of the Classroom Will Prompt Investment in the Future

Wasserman's Collective Think Tank established a model to initiate partnerships between faculty and clients (e.g. NWSL, LPGA) who are seeking input on real world problems from students in universities across the U.S. and Canada. While these collaborations have been a great start at exposing students to organizations outside the Big Four, we can do more to connect students, particularly women, to a more diverse range of contexts and opportunities across the sport industry.

Our future leaders, both women and men, are innovative, engaged, and not afraid to challenge the status quo of the sports industry. Their thoughts and perspectives

elevated through class collaborations allow seasoned sport industry leaders to hear new perspectives — from future sport fans and future colleagues. Their POV must guide how industry practitioners invest in tomorrow.

The Voice of the Faculty Will Deliberately Amplify Diverse Perspectives

Faculty must strive for intentionality regarding female representation in the classroom. Opportunities within women's sport are on the rise and it's imperative to ensure that ALL students are eager to learn about and prepared to work in the women's sport landscape.

Historically, women who enter sport management programs have become aware of the gendered obstacles they will face in a male-dominated industry; however, as strides are made at the industry level to break barriers and grow opportunities for women, sport management programs can do more to encourage women in the classroom. To better support our female students, mentorship and networking are crucial. This might be through inviting female leaders as guest speakers in the classroom, or more formally by connecting students to alums or other contacts across the sport industry. Further, campus clubs empower students to meet like-minded individuals and practice networking skills in a safe and inclusive space.

The spaces where our female sport management students truly feel they can become tomorrow's sport leaders, are not yet built — and we can only build them through new partnerships. With support and engagement from professional counterparts, and educational exposure to a wider range of career trajectories, tomorrow's female sports leaders will internalize that “If you can see her, you can be her.”

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