Climbing the career ladder

Degrees in sports administration, coaching becoming more popular

By Kevin Hoffman, Managing Editor

Obtaining a master’s degree can significantly jumpstart the career of any graduate assistant or aspiring coach, but finding the time can be difficult. That’s something more colleges and universities with sports administration programs are attempting to address.

Online programs and degrees that can be earned in a short period of time are becoming more popular, as those in the industry try to balance their coursework with the hectic schedules of their full-time jobs. Master’s degrees aren’t mandatory in the coaching industry, but they’re necessary for anyone hoping to move up the career ladder or join the athletic program at a Division I school.

That’s why institutions are trying to make them more attainable, whether you’re a student looking for a career change or a coach or athletic administrator trying to build your resume.

“I think a master’s is really important if you want to become a head coach or want to move up the ranks and become the head of a department,” said John Paradis, marketing development manager for the University of
Northern Colorado. “This gives you a step above the competition, because in this day and age having a master’s degree is the bachelor’s degree of the past. That’s what really starts to separate you.”

Paradis said the university’s sports administration program is ranked one of the top five in the nation. It also offers an online sport coaching program that was created within the last five years.

That’s becoming the norm these days, as campuses have learned to adapt to the needs of prospective students. The University of Northern Colorado’s coaching program allows for all of the courses necessary to earn the degree to be taken online, while the sports administration degree allows a portion of its classes to be taken remotely.

These types of programs are designed with busy coaches and administrators in mind. Paradis said those currently enrolled in the program are a mix of graduate assistants and those already employed in athletic departments, but the degree is becoming more popular across the industry.

The University of Northern Colorado continues to add courses, while Southern Nazarene University added an entire program.

Sylvia Goodman, director of SNU’s sport management and administration, said the university’s brand new program has its first cohort of 13 students. It includes those with traditional business backgrounds and others who have already worked in athletic programs.

Goodman agrees demand is increasing, especially in Oklahoma where she said SNU has become just the second institution in the state to offer the program. Students continue to seek out educational opportunities in the sports industry, and Goodman felt like there weren’t enough colleges and universities to accommodate them.

That meant offering a program that’s convenient for the students, and SNU is among many schools that do just that. Goodman said classes are held on Wednesdays, which is typically not a night used for athletic competition at schools.

“This is a program that’s really reaching out and meeting the needs of lots of folks, whether it’s collegiate, local or private,” she said.

Students also don’t need to worry about pursuing a degree that’s going to take two or three years to earn. SNU’s sports management and administration degree can be earned over 18 months, taking classes like sport marketing, ethics in sport management, sport law, facility planning and management, and organizational communication. The program consists of 12 courses in all.

That’s not to say participation in sports administration or coaching programs is a breeze. It’s still a considerable commitment that challenges students, but most institutions say their programs — especially those made available online — can be completed at the student’s convenience.

What coaches and athletic directors must determine is whether the investment is worth it in the long run. A master’s degree in sport coaching may not be beneficial...
to a part-time assistant helping out the local varsity soccer team, but industry leaders prefer to hire those with greater educational backgrounds. After all, coaching is teaching and athletic directors want someone qualified and passionate about their jobs.

A master’s degree can lead to an increased salary and greater job security, so for those who plan on building a career in sports, the decision is a simple one.

“Most head coaches in major programs already have a master’s degree in something,” Paradis said. “This is just a nice option so those who want to can get a degree in something they’re really passionate about.”

5 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ENROLLING

Making the decision to pursue a degree on athletic administration or coaching is an important one that requires a significant amount of thought and planning. As you consider the next steps, here are some questions to ask yourself.

1 What are my needs? Consider the endgame and what you hope to come away with. Perhaps you’re looking to move up the pay scale in your industry, or maybe you want to join a top Division I football program. Determine your goals and work backwards to identify what you’ll need to do in order to achieve them.

2 What’s my budget? Finances can be covered through student loans or other means, but you want to incur as little debt as possible. Budget what you can afford before you dive into specific programs that you’re interested in.

3 Are there grants or scholarships? It’s worth researching whether you qualify for any financial aid that will help lower your out-of-pocket cost of tuition. Some employers even offer assistance for anyone going back to school to earn a master’s degree.

4 What best accommodates my schedule? If you’re a student hoping to earn your master’s degree immediately after your bachelor’s degree, the transition is much smoother. If you’ve been out of school for a while, own a home and have a full-time job, attending on-campus classes on a regular basis could be difficult. Find what schools offer programs and courses online. Make sure you can balance your job with your coursework, and learn what’s required of you to earn the degree.

5 What program is best? This means looking beyond an institution’s name. Don’t hesitate to check out the professors and their backgrounds on the subject matter. Find out what courses are offered and ask some colleagues about the universities they attended. Don’t take a program at face value — do the research.

Learn How to Communicate in Practically Any Situation

This all-inclusive 20-page guide gives athletic administrators tips for all forms of communication from verbal and written communication to public addresses, media relations and social media. It’s a must-have guide for athletic administrators at all levels.


Only $9.95
Plus shipping and handling
The Master's Degree designed for Coaches or Athletic Administrators

18 Months I Accelerated Format

12 Courses I Highly Qualified Faculty

100% I Online Learning

For more information call or visit:
405.717.6263 | snu.edu/masma