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## Making (Applied) Sport Management Accessible

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## Making (Applied) Sport Management Accessible

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### **Abstract**

The Applied Sport Management Association's Distinguished Service and Mentorship Award was initiated in 2022 as a renaming and repurposing of the ASMA Scholar Lifetime Achievement Award presented from 2009 to 2020. This service and mentorship award recognizes an ASMA member who has exhibited continued, exemplary service to ASMA, who connects sport management research with practitioners in an applied manner, and who demonstrates dedication to students and mentorship within the ASMA. Recipients of this award provide a keynote address to the ASMA membership at the annual conference. The content of this address is published in the Journal of Applied Sport Management, the peer-reviewed journal and official publication of ASMA.

*Keywords:* Students, accessibility, inclusiveness

## **Making (Applied) Sport Management Accessible**

Before I begin, I want to offer a sincere thank you to everyone here, since this organization and conference wouldn't be possible without so much support from faculty and students in the sport management community. This is certainly a banner year for ASMA, as it's our largest conference ever with approximately 270 attendees, including 19 student case study teams. In my remarks here, I'm going to talk a little more about how important it is for us, as faculty, to foster student involvement in this type of event. But I want to begin by just expressing my gratitude to everyone here for making this event a success.

I'm very honored to receive the ASMA Distinguished Service and Mentorship Award because this is a conference and organization that I've been involved with for a long time, and it's played a significant role in my career. On that note, I want to offer a bit of background for those of you who are younger than me and/or more recent to become involved with the organization. The Applied Sport Management Association grew out of a student-focused conference initially organized by Dr. Fred Green and Dr. Jason Lee at Troy University in Alabama, which was originally known as the Southern Sport Management Conference. I first attended the conference in 2009, and by that point, Dr. Mike Martinez, who was the original winner of the Distinguished Service and Mentorship Award, was serving a major role in organizing and running the conference. Dr. Martinez was certainly a deserving recipient of that first award, as he ran the conference for several years at Troy, stewarded it in its first year rotating between different host sites, and remained in a leadership role for multiple years after he'd moved to LSU, including three years as conference host in Baton Rouge! After hosting the conference this year at Tennessee, I'm not sure how Mike was convinced to serve in this role for so many years in a row, but I'm certainly grateful that he did. The subsequent recipient of this award, Dr. Jeffrey Petersen, is a faculty member at Baylor University, where they have hosted the conference twice. So in that way, I've had it easy compared to our previous award recipients by only hosting once! Anyway, all kidding aside, I'm certainly thrilled to receive an honor previously bestowed upon people who have contributed so much to ASMA, such as Dr. Martinez and Dr. Petersen.

Now I also want to talk a bit about what makes ASMA a special and unique event, because while it's similar to other sport management conferences in many ways, I think it also serves a special and unique role. In my discussion here today, I plan to make four primary points. First, I will clarify that I conceptualize "applied" sport management as being done with a particular focus on how our work is contributing to and making a difference in the world of sport. Second, I will argue that one of the primary ways in which we "do" applied sport management is through work with our students. Third, I will emphasize the importance of making our sport management organizations and other spaces accessible to best serve our students. Finally, I will describe a vision for making sport management organizations financially accessible by partnering with and investing back in our own institutions of higher learning.

On my first point, I want to comment on the word "applied" in the name of the organization and our journal, the Journal of Applied Sport Management. I recognize that there is a long history of scholars discussing and debating issues related to the application and practical use of scholarly knowledge in sport management and related fields (e.g., Cuneen & Parks, 1997; Gammelsæter, 2021; Ingham & Donnelly, 1990; Newman, 2014). However, in the interests of simplicity for my talk today, I think the term "applied" can generally be thought of as entailing a particular focus on how our research can be relevant and our

knowledge transferred beyond the realm of academia to practitioners in the world of sport. As I just alluded to, the question of “how is our work contributing to and making an impact in sport” has long been a focus of scholars in the field. In 1995, for example, James Weese (1995), who was president of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) at the time, lamented that the academic field of sport management was having little impact on professional practice in sport with an article titled, “If we’re not serving practitioners, then we’re not serving sport management.” And this question of how we might go about better “serving” practitioners has been discussed by many scholars, as it’s complicated, particularly for those whose research might focus on inequitable or unethical practices in sport. For example, to “serve” practitioners, colleagues and I have called for two-way, critical engagement with a wide range of sport stakeholders (Love et al., 2021). In my particular area of this field, sociology of sport, sociologists have long debated and discussed the topic of “public sociology” (Cooky, 2017; Donnelly, 2015; Nixon, 1991), which addresses the question of how can we make a meaningful impact on the public through the research and other work that we do.

So, of course, this is a complicated and many faceted issue, but related to my second point, I want to focus my comments on our work with students as it pertains to making an impact in the field and “serving” practitioners. Obviously, our students are hopefully future practitioners in sport, but they’re also current practitioners, as many of them work in a variety of roles as student assistants and interns at our colleges and universities, with professional teams, and with community and recreational sport organizations. In thinking about how we can connect with practitioners and members of the public to have our work be impactful, sociologist Michael Burawoy calls students our “first public,” in that they are one of the groups we most directly have a duty to serve and that, in the case of sport management, they are often also practitioners working in sport. Clearly, the future of sport management, as a professional and academic field, depends on students, and if we are not making sport management welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to students, we’re doing ourselves a massive disservice.

So in that regard, related to my third point, I’m proud to say that ASMA has always tried to have a focus on being a welcoming and accessible space for students. On our website, we state that ASMA “seeks to foster a supportive environment in which emerging scholars and aspiring professionals [read: students] can exchange ideas and strengthen relationships.” Now, of course, the organization isn’t perfect and still has much to work on, but there is at least an effort to keep support for students in the forefront of our vision. While other sport management organizations also do excellent work and have important initiatives related to access, diversity, and inclusion, my fear is that this type of work may be seriously undermined if the financial cost of our events makes them inaccessible to many people. So I make these comments not so much as a criticism, but in a spirit of challenge—challenging all of us to do what we can in the organizations we’re a part of to make our events financially accessible. One of our most prominent organizations, NASSM, hosts an excellent conference, but the regular registration rate for students for the 2024 conference is \$400, plus there is an additional \$80 membership fee for students, potentially making the cost of just getting in the door close to \$500. Whereas in ASMA—and we do need to continue to be self-critical and think about ways we can do better—but a team of four case study students is able to sign up for \$300, which is \$75 a person, with no additional membership fee. And, overall, I think this really helps ASMA foster student involvement in the academic field of sport management, and I thank so many of you here

today for being supportive mentors and bringing students to this conference. So, again, I just intend these comments as a challenge for us to all think about how our organizations can be as accessible as possible, so as to not undermine other excellent work we're doing toward the end of being equitable and inclusive.

On that note, I want to make a final comment—my fourth overall point—about the model that ASMA uses with the conference, which involves partnering with a university host rather than a hotel conference space. So the conference you attended this week has taken place here on campus at the University of Tennessee, not, as has been the case with most academic conferences I've attended, in a hotel. In addition to helping make the conference financially accessible, as mentioned previously, there is one other huge benefit to this model—it allows us to invest our funds back into a university partner. In other words, rather than having our registration money go to a corporate host, such as Marriott or Hilton, our registration funds get to directly benefit an institution of higher learning. At a time where many universities and colleges face significant challenges and threats, it's even more important for us to think about how we can use events like this to invest back in our own institutions.

So, to summarize my remarks for today, I began by suggesting that “applied” sport management must involve thinking about how our work is contributing to and making a difference in the world of sport. I then argued that one of the primary ways in which we “do” this type of applied work is through our efforts with students. Third, I emphasized the importance of making our sport management organizations and events accessible in order to best serve our students. If financial costs prevent students from getting “in the door” to an event and organization like this, it will undermine many of our other efforts of inclusivity and support for students. Finally, I argued in favor of making sport management organizations financially accessible by partnering with and investing back in our own institutions of higher learning when hosting conferences. So in closing, I recognize that ASMA certainly has things to work on as the organization continues to grow and develop, but I think we have a lot of positive things going for us, and I owe a great amount of gratitude to everyone associated with this organization who helps make it possible. Thank you!