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A Multi Dimensional Examination of the Perceptions of Journal Quality by Sport Management Academics

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The exclusion of sport management journals from most rating systems compels auditing institutions to develop their own ratings. Exclusion from such lists is a factor of youth in terms of the recency of sport management as a field, and is also a question of fit. In other words, sport management does not fit neatly within management, marketing, sociology, economics or law but as a multidisciplinary field draws on these and other fields as its platform for scholarship. Ratings and ranking of journals has gained credence for institutions, individual academic performance and academic disciplines (Geary, Marriott, Rowlinson, 2004; Mort, McColl-Kennedy, Keil, Soutar, 2004; Polonsky & Whitelaw 2005). Although assessing quality is the underlying logic behind establishing a list of rated journals, it is not the only measure of quality. Citation and impact factors are also used as a surrogate for quality, but there are few sport management journals that are subject to rigorous citation and impact calculations. Notwithstanding the accepted wisdom of using citation and impact factors, there are limitations to its use such as the lag that often occurs between publication and citation, and impact. The field's youth obviously contributes to the lack of journals included in indices such as the Social Science Citation Index. Broad impact for the field is achieved when its journals are accepted for inclusion in relevant citation outlets. Rating journal quality is therefore an important action the field can undertake as it strives to have its scholarship recognised by auditing intuitions. Ironically, as McKercher (2005) noted in relation to tourism journals, the lack of a ranking system can accentuate the gap between the top few journals and the rest, hurting the next tier of journals more than the Big Three" (p. 651).

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of a study in which 13 sport management and related journals were rated by senior academics worldwide. The catalyst for this study was the impending implementation of the Research Quality Framework in the Australian University sector, the already established research quality exercise in New Zealand, and the implications of the United Kingdom Research Assessment Exercise. At present, sport management scholars cannot direct institutional auditors to a coherent, externally derived list which provides a rating for the relevant journals in the field. This limits the independent assessment by institutions of the quality of research publications in this field, and directly impacts on the capacity of individual sport management scholars to maximise their case in relation to promotion, grant applications and generally advancing the field.

Forty-five sport management scholars responded (70.3% response rate) to a survey which produced ratings for 13 journals in the field. This study was based on the four criteria and weighting system developed by Polonsky and Whitelaw (2005) and included: Prestige of Journal; Contribution to Theory; Contribution to Practice; and Contribution to Teaching. Based on a seven point Likert scale, which was represented by A+=1, A=2, B+=3, B=4, C+=5, C=6, D=7, respondents were asked to rate each of the four criterion for each journal. Prior to undertaking the ratings, respondents were asked to indicate their perceived importance of the four criteria as a percentage and these weightings were used to develop a composite weighted score for each journal. The weighted scores were used as the basis to allocate a rating for each journal after a K-means cluster analysis was used to support a four-cluster solution. Consequently, three journals were allocated an A rating with the Journal of Sport Management deemed to be the leading A rated journal in the field, four journals were rated as B+, five as B and one journal as C+. Results also show the discreet ratings in each of the four criteria highlighting diverse differences amongst journals. For example, the Journal of Sport Management ranked 1 for both Prestige and Contribution to Theory and Sport Management Review 3 and 4 on these two criteria, whereas Sport Marketing Quarterly ranked 1 for Contribution to Teaching and 2 for Contribution to Practice. The implications of the ratings and individual criteria differences are discussed and the impact of journal ratings for the field is also considered.