Dr. Brian Mills joined the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management in August as an assistant professor. His love of sports and his academic background in statistics and economics has provided Mills with a unique approach to sport management topics and research.


As a faculty member, Mills is currently teaching a sport finance course at the graduate level, and will also teach a statistics course in the spring. One of his current projects involves the evaluation of professional sport fandom across borders; specifically, examining Canadians’ propensity to root for or attend American-based National Hockey League (NHL) games. His research evaluates potential markets in Canada as the NHL considers possible team relocations from southern cities in the United States to areas such as Toronto.

Mills is also working with colleagues in Michigan and Illinois to present studies that refute findings which indicate that there is race discrimination in official ball strike calls in baseball. “A recent paper in the American Economic Review claims that umpires make biased calls in favor of their own race,” Mills said. “Our studies find something different; we actually don’t find this effect to be true.” Their findings are currently under review for publication by the Journal of Sports Economics.

Another line of research Mills is conducting examines fantasy football and marketing manipulations that influence peoples’ intention to participate in a league, and evaluating the mediating effect of the expected quality of their opponents, Mills said.

Fantasy sports typically involve a group of participants in a league where each individual participant builds a team of players based on statistics generated by the actual players or teams of professional sports. “We find that people like to win at fantasy sports, but that they also prefer more competition to less,” he said. “Once competition is not good enough – or if it’s too good – people are not as interested in participating. However, when they see the competitive environment as being close in skill level to their own, that’s when they have the highest intentions of joining the league.”

Mills recently presented his study, “Competitive Environments in Fantasy Football: League Advertisements as Competition Signaling” at the Sport Marketing Association Conference in October.