

The Sport Industry and Related University Degree Programs: a Study on Employability

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The economic growth of the sports sector over the past two decades (e.g., Li, Hofacre, & Mahony, 2001) has been accompanied by increasing job and career opportunities. These opportunities appear to be endless and are as varied as the segments and various businesses, including: sport tourism, sporting goods, sport apparel, amateur participant sport, professional sports, recreation, high school and college/university athletics, outdoor sports, and other related sport businesses such as marketing firms, sponsorship companies, and sport governing bodies (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). A study in Europe revealed that the sport sector had increased its overall employment between 1990 and 1998 by 57%, reflecting an increase of just under 1 million jobs (main occupation) in the former 15 European Union member states (Le Roux, Chantelat, Camy, 1999). The Conference Board of Canada (2005) estimated that sport accounted for 2% of the total jobs in Canada. Educational institutions, offering sport related programs, need to have a clear understanding of the various career opportunities in this growing sport industry. This study will provide insight into whether graduates from sport related programs are taking on key positions in today's sport industry.

Different approaches can be taken when analyzing the evolution and trends in sport employment. First, one can study the number of individuals employed in the sport sector, and identify: (a) their demographics; (b) the type of jobs they perform; (c) the type and size of businesses they work in; as well as, (d) the sector of employment (i.e. the public sector, the voluntary sector, and the commercial sector; Taks, 2000). Second, one can study trends in the number, size, and types of businesses in the sports industry (e.g., through the analyses of National Statistics; Sport et Emploi, 1999). Third, input-output analyses can be carried out to show the effects of sport related economic activity on total employment within a country (Kesenne et al., 1998). Fourth, the careers of graduates in human kinetics, kinesiology, sport and physical education programs can be analyzed under the assumption that these graduates would be the primary beneficiaries of the increased job opportunities in the sports sector, as described above (Taks, et. al 2003). The scope of this study is limited to the latter approach, i.e. tracking the careers of Bachelor and Master graduates in Human Kinetics (hereafter BHK's and MHK's) from a Canadian university.

The sample consisted of 154 alumni of the 560, who graduated between 1999 and 2004 (response rate 28%). This time frame is essential since a high employment turnover is generally noticed among Kinesiology students when they first enter the job market (Taks, 1997). It is assumed that the graduates reach a more stable employment situation two or three years after graduation. The five year time span also provides the opportunity to analyze early career routes (Taks et al., 2003). Of these 154 subjects, 31 (or 20%) had obtained a BHK in Leisure and Sport Management, 78 (or 51%) a BHK in Movement Sciences, 20 (or 13%) a MHK in Sport Management, and 24 (or 16%) a MHK in Applied Human Performance. A written questionnaire was developed based on a survey developed by a European study group which tracked careers of graduates in sport and sport related programs (Taks et. al., 2003). The questionnaire assesses sports graduates in terms of the jobs they perform, the organization they are employed by, the skills required, the reasons why graduates moved out of the sports sector (if applicable), and the reasons of their (dis)satisfaction. Personal data and education curriculum information is also collected in addition to the career path, specifications about the current job, and future employment aspirations. Data are analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The results indicate that 52% of the BHK's completed teachers college after they finished their BHK program, indicating a strong interest for a career in the educational sector. In addition, over 30% of both BHK's and MHK's had some form of additional professional education in the form of instructing, coaching and/or life guarding certification. Twenty nine percent of the BHK alumni started their 'first' job in the educational sector; this percentage increased to 42% when asked about their 'current' job. When BHK's first entered the job market, about 13% became therapists, 10% kinesiologists, 8% started in the fitness and health industry, 7% as coordinators in sport organizations, 6% as coach or instructor, 5% as managers, 4% as ergonomists. Nineteen percent ended up in a job outside the sport industry. When asked about their current job, the largest drop was seen in the health and fitness industry from 8% as entry job to 2% as current job. The two highest employment sectors for the current jobs of MHK's were in the educational sector (29%) and in ergonomics (24%). Fourteen percent of the MHK's were employed in sectors outside the sport related field. Both BHK's and MHK's were fairly satisfied with their annual gross income (64% and 77% respectively, indicated to be 'satisfied/very satisfied'). Both groups indicated that the most important reason for obtaining their current job was their degree (28%), followed by their skills and competencies (26%), and their professional experience (20%). The three most important skills needed in their current job were in order of importance: (a) communication skills (oral, 15%); (b) handling pupils/children (11%); and, (c) self-management (11%). Family, personal references and relations were the most important channels used for searching a job (27%). Thirty four percent mentioned that

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they had no obstacles to overcome when searching for a job, while 16% indicated a 'low demand' as problematic, as well as 'level of specialization not high enough' (16%). Students appeared to be satisfied with the curriculum offered, however there were some general remarks regarding a lack of professional preparation in the form of internship opportunities. Some of the respondents mentioned the difficulty of finding a job related to their degree. Furthermore, respondents would like to see the curriculum expanded with courses related to finance, web applications, ergonomics, fitness, non traditional sports, and hands on education.

The study provides useful insights regarding job market skills, and consequently initiate reflection on the actual curriculum provided to the students. The study supports the notion of professionalism in the sports industry, defined as 'specialized trained people taking on positions in the field'. However, the results confirm former research and stress the important role of the educational sector for graduates in HK (Banks & Wright, 2001; Taks et al., 2003). Educational institutions with sport related programs need to take a more proactive role in creating linkages with the different sectors in the growing sport industry, and consequently, expand career opportunities for graduates in a domain that is supposed to be their area of expertise. This study is only a first step in the analysis of the sport labor market in Canada. Further research should include analyzing the sport labor market from the employers' perspectives (Hanson et al., 1998), as well as national statistics, both from a 'people' and from a 'business' perspective. Eventually, input-output analysis can be performed in order to find out to what extent the sport industry affects the employment in other sectors of the economy.