

## Sources of information for selecting internship sites among students in sport management programs

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**Professional preparation  
Session 9**

**Thursday, May 29, 2008  
4:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

**Poster  
Abstract 171**

Due to the numerous benefits, internships, also called practicum or fieldwork, have become an essential part of sport management curricula (Cuneen, 2004; Stier, 2002). As previous research found that the internship programs are beneficial for all related constituencies: students, academic programs, universities, and employers. Although internships benefit in many ways, research also found that if internship programs are not carefully thought out, they may result in a disappointing experience for interns (Ross & Elechi, 2002; Cannon & Arnold, 1998; Garrett & Bauer 1995; Hite & Bellizzi, 1986). Such disappointments are associated with many different aspects of the working conditions and environments. Due to the fact that there is a lack of practical experience, it is often difficult for students to understand the work environments and conditions of the internship organizations. Therefore, it is imperative to communicate with references who have credibility in assisting students with internships which will allow the students to select the proper internship sites. Although several studies investigated internship-related issues in the field of sport management, no studies have investigated the major information sources which students seek for their internships. Moreover, studies on information sources have been one of the most fundamental issues in other academic fields such as marketing, consumer behavior, and communication. In consumer behavior and marketing, consumers will seek sources, types, and amount of information that seem most likely to satisfy their needs (Engle, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993). References with high credibility, such as those having expertise, will serve as primary sources of information (Childers & Rao, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to investigate primary information sources when sport management students search internship organizations. Specifically, this study focuses on the information sources that differ among students with different demographic backgrounds. Participants were two hundred ninety-four students who enrolled in sport management programs in the United States. Of the 294 participants, 52% (n=152) were males and 48% (n=142) were females. With regard to degree levels, 58.2% (n=171) of the participants were undergraduate students, 36.4% (n=107) were master's students, and 5.4% (n=16) were doctoral students. The instrument for the study was a survey to measure influence of information sources when searching internship organizations. The survey consisted of two parts. In the first part gender and degree level of the respondents were obtained. In the second part six sources of internship information that were identified by the pilot study and the literature review were listed. Students were asked to check the primary information source from which they learn about the internship organizations. The frequency of descriptive statistics found that 42.5% (n=125) students stated that the faculty members in the program are the primary information source, 37.4% (n=110) stated personal networking, 10% (n=29) stated the Internet sites, 4.8% (n=14) stated friends (other students) who did internship with the organization, 2% (n=6) stated school career centers, and 3.4% (n=10) stated other information sources. The chi-square test of independence was used to explore the differences between genders and among degree levels. It was found that the primary information sources differed between genders ( $\chi^2 = 16.260$ ,  $df=5$ ,  $p=0.006$ ). For female students, 49.3% stated that the faculty was the greatest information source, 31% stated personal networking, 7.7% stated the Internet sites, and 3.9% stated friends. However, for male students, the personal networking was the greatest information source (43.4%), followed by the faculty (36%), the Internet sites (11.8%), friends (5.6%), and other sources (3.6%). Chi-square analyses also found that the information sources differed among degree levels ( $\chi^2 = 22.545$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p=0.013$ ). For undergraduate students, the faculty members were the greatest information source (49.1%), followed by personal networking (32.1%), the Internet sites (9.9%), friends (2.9%), and school career center (2.9%). For master's students, the personal networking was the greatest information source (44.8%), followed by the faculty members (31.7%), the Internet sites (10.2%), and friends (7.7%). For doctoral students, the faculty members (43.7%) were the greatest information source, followed by personal networking (37.5%), the Internet sites (6.25%), friends (6.25%), and school career centers (6.25%). As stated earlier, although internships benefit students, programs, universities, and organizations, they often bring negative experiences. It is mostly due to a lack of understanding on the internship organizations. The faculty members and internship coordinators should recognize that overall, they are the greatest information source when students seek information on internships. Therefore, they should provide a sound guide, which will allow students to have positive internship experience. In addition, the information sources differed based on students' demographic backgrounds. The faculty members and internship coordinators should also provide instructions about the internship based on students' different demographic backgrounds.