

The expectations and concerns of students regarding successful sport management internships

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Abstract 25**

An important element of many sport management programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level is a quality field experience through a successful internship program (Stratta, 2004; Somerick, 2001; Janice, Bell & Joyce, 1993). Previous researchers have identified the following internship objectives: (1) personal objectives including developing students' self-confidence, communication skills, social interaction skills, and a sense of professionalism, (2) academic objectives including developing cognitive skills, problem solving, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and applying theory to practice, (3) career objectives including planning and testing career options, developing job acquisition skills, and understanding the real world of the sport industry (Stratta, 2004; Somerick, 2001; Janice, Bell & Joyce, 1993; Chouinard, 1993; Brassie, 1989; Sutton, 1989). Most previous studies outlined the components of a successful sport management internship from the authors' perspectives and experiences through theoretical and informative approaches rather than through empirical research based on the students' expectations and concerns when they prepare for an internship.

As an empirical study, Stratta (2004) identified the students' key concerns regarding sport management internship programs after interviewing 20 students who completed their internship. The results identified the following concerns: match with personal factors, match with personal goals, exposure to professional challenges, and the establishment of both a professional reputation and a professional network. Building on the results of Stratta's study, this study was designed and implemented in order to understand the students' internship expectations and concerns through quantitative research methods. Based on previous studies outlining the goals/objectives and assessment of successful sport management internships (Jowdy, McDonald, Spence, 2004; Stratta, 2004; Somerick, 2001; Janice, Bell & Joyce, 1993; Chouinard, 1993; Neapolitan, 1992; Brassie, 1989; Sutton, 1989), this study examined six aspects of their expectations and concerns which included: (1) students' personal perspectives in choosing the right internship agency, (2) concerns about developing various skills during the internship, (3) opportunities for career development, (4) expectations for the internship agency, (5) expectations for the internship supervisor, and (6) expectations for the faculty/internship coordinator in their schools. The questionnaire contained 21 items, each with a 5 point Likert scale to measure the students' degree of agreement on the importance of the various aspects of their internship expectations and concerns. Five faculty in sport management programs in the northeast region of the US verified the instrument's content validity.

During the fall semester of 2006, a total of 300 graduate and undergraduate students majoring in sport management from two universities in the northeast region of the US were surveyed. 256 usable surveys were analyzed using SPSS 14.0. Regarding personal considerations, adequate time and internship schedule ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.58$) showed the highest mean; however, compensation during internship ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.93$), and location of internship ($M=3.61$, $SD=1.19$) had lower means but higher standard deviations which could imply much variation regarding these two questions. Regarding skill development, the acquisition of skills and experience ($M=4.57$, $SD=0.62$), leadership skills ($M=4.46$, $SD=0.64$), social skills ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.71$), communication skills ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.84$), and application of theories to practical situations ($M=4.08$, $SD=0.79$) were found to be important factors. Regarding career development, internship as career development resource ($M=4.66$, $SD=0.52$), career network development ($M=4.53$, $SD=0.63$), and increase in knowledge of the industry they want to work in ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.71$) were also found to be important factors. Regarding the expectations for an internship agency, respondents strongly agreed on a qualified internship supervisor's support ($M=4.53$, $SD=0.61$), provision of essential resources during internship ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.66$), and valuable job appointment ($M=4.26$, $SD=0.68$). Regarding the expectations for an internship supervisor, quality of instruction ($M=4.37$, $SD=0.60$), regular feedback ($M=4.34$, $SD=0.68$), listening to students' suggestions and recommendations ($M=4.27$, $SD=0.62$), and willingness to discuss various issues ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.75$) were highly appreciated. Finally, concerning the expectations for a faculty/internship coordinator, the students highly regarded help finding an appropriate internship ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.68$), visiting the internship site during the internship ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.64$), and regular communication with the students during the internship ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.86$). Additionally, independent T-tests were conducted with SPSS 14.0.

The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the means for each question between male and female students, and between undergraduate and graduate students. The results of this empirical study provide both faculty, internship coordinators, and internship supervisors with information as to what the students expect as part of a successful internship experience. As Chouinard (1993) suggested, students' internships should be planned and implemented through cooperative education which essentially emphasizes a partnership between education and business to help sport management students develop their professional skills which will eventually lead to their successful career development in the sport industry.