

**The effects of internship satisfaction on affective commitment and behavioral intentions**

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Abstract 39**

The field of sport management and the number of universities that offer a sport management major has grown tremendously since the creation of the program at Ohio University in 1966. Recently, the Web site of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) revealed that 206 universities in the United States offer a sport management program on either the undergraduate level, graduate level, or both (NASSM, 2007). Along with this growth of the sport management field, the importance of the internship experience has increased significantly. The internship experience is of benefit to students in many ways. For instance, development of skills (Ross & Elechi, 2002; Verner, 1993), opportunities to build professional relationships (Bell & Countiss, 1993; Brassie, 1989; Stone & McLaren, 1999; Parks, 1991), and gaining a greater appreciation and understanding of the field (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1993; Neapolitan, 1992; Ross & Elechi, 2002) are among the advantages that can be gained through the first-hand exposure an internship provides. Although internships are regarded as a beneficial and necessary experience conducive for future employment within the sport management profession, relatively little is known about the specific characteristics of the internship that influence a student's satisfaction levels with the experience. Furthermore, the effect of their satisfaction with that specific experience has upon their perceptions of and intentions to establish a career in the sport management field needs further investigation. The purpose of this study, therefore, is two-fold: (1) to investigate how student-interns are satisfied with the characteristics of the internship experience and (2) to examine the effect of students' satisfaction level upon their affective occupational commitment and subsequent intentions to pursue employment in the sport management profession.

The participants for the study consisted of upper-level undergraduate sport management students who were currently participating in their internship at a major university in the Southeastern region of the United States. Data were collected during the 2005-2007 academic years. Each semester students were contacted via e-mail and were asked to complete an on-line survey three weeks before completing their internship. A total of 211 students consisting of 139 male (66%) and 72 female (34%) voluntarily participated the on-line survey. The mean age of participants was about 22 years old (SD=2.17).

The results revealed that student interns were overall satisfied with their internship experience in terms of development of skills (M=5.42, SD=1.27), opportunities to build professional relationships (M=5.68, SD=1.38), and opportunities to participate in significant tasks (M=5.44, SD=1.38). ANOVA with repeated measures further provided a significant difference in satisfaction on the three characteristics of internship experience,  $F [2, 420] = 6.65, p = .001$ . The findings indicated that student interns were most satisfied with their opportunities to build professional relationships. In addition, the two structural equation models (e.g., a partially mediated model and fully mediated model) were employed to examine the proposed causal relationships among the latent constructs based on the fit indices. The fully mediated model includes two causal relationships; a direct path between internship satisfaction and occupational commitment and a direct path between occupational commitment and behavioral intentions as the partially mediated model includes three causal relationships; a direct path between internship experience and occupational commitment, a direct path between internship experience and behavioral intentions, and a direct path between occupational commitment and behavioral intentions. The results indicated that the fully mediated model had a reasonable fit to the data:  $\chi^2(1, 1281) = 39.26, p < .001$ ; RESMES = .08; SRMSR = .43; CFI = .95; PNFI = .72, as well as the partially mediated model fit the data well:  $\chi^2(1, 1281) = 39.26, p < .001$ ; RESMES = .08; SRMSR = .43; CFI = .95; PNFI = .72. The RMSEA and PNFI values showed a discrepancy of .003 and .027 between the fully mediated and partially mediated models while the chi-Square difference test was not significant ( $\chi^2 = .07, p > .05$ ). Thus, the fully mediated model illustrating that occupational commitment mediates the relationship between internship experiences and intentions to enter the profession, is considered as the more parsimonious model for the data. Also, the fully mediated model summarized that the internship experiences were significantly associated with occupational commitment, explaining about 41% of the variance in occupational commitment ( $t = 8.53, p < .01$ ). The occupational commitment was also significantly associated with intentions to enter the sport management profession, explaining about 75% of the variance in sport management profession ( $t = 14.25, p < .01$ ).

This research could serve as a template that can be beneficial to personnel within the academic and internship setting. For instance, field-experience or internship coordinators could gain a greater understanding of the experiences their students are having at various sites. As a result, they could make recommendations to their students and increase the likelihood of helping them find an internship that would be perceived as satisfying as well as beneficial to the student. In addition, practitioners should critically analyze the internships they offer and alert them of elements within their internship program that causes dissatisfaction

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among their interns. This research could help in better determining areas that could hinder attracting future interns to their site. As a result, adjustments could be made in order to provide a satisfying internship program that will generate interest among potential interns to seek experience at a particular internship site. Finally, the commitment sport organizations hold regarding internships is evidenced by the fact that most collegiate and professional organizations offer this experience. Sport organizations want to cultivate people who are entering the sport industry. The internships thus provide students the opportunity to gain experience that will be advantageous in their search for employment in the profession.