

An analysis of career interest and academic preparation of graduating sport management students

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Since the first sport management program was established at Ohio University in 1966 (Crosset & Hums, 2005), the number of academic programs specializing in sport management has grown to over 200 (North American Society for Sport Management, 2008). To ensure academic quality of the rapidly expanding field, members of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) determined core curriculum guidelines necessary for success in the industry (Laird, 2005). Researchers have examined curriculum content in relation to the NASPE-NASSM guidelines (Fielding, Pitts, & Miller, 1998; Lissandra, 1993; Lyons, 1997; Steer & Schneider, 2000) and from the perception of sport managers in the field (Jamieson, 1987; Lissandra, 1993; Parks & Quain, 1986). Additionally, studies have addressed specific components of sport management curriculum from the student perspective (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Stratta, 2004), however no study examines the entire core curricular from the perception of students. Similarly, despite the increased number of programs and subsequent graduates, only a limited amount of literature addresses sport management careers (Hums & Goldsburly, 2005; Kjeldsen, 1990; Mathner, 2006; Loy & Sage, 1978) none of which directly examine the students' career interest. Therefore, this study may contribute to the body of literature in both curriculum and vocational disciplines. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between career interests and perceived importance of core courses.

Specific research questions included: (1) what career areas of the sport management industry are of greatest interest to graduating sport management students, (2) what core courses were perceived as most important to graduating sport management students, (3) is there a relationship between career interests and perceived importance of core courses, and (4) do career interests vary based on gender. Moreover, this study served as a pilot test to improve the instrument. Based on the results, the authors intend to survey graduating students from multiple NASPE-NASSM approved programs. Data were obtained at a liberal arts university over a four year period. Of the 143 students who graduated with a degree in sport management, 135 completed the survey resulting in a 94% return rate. The sample of graduating sport management students (60% male and 40% female) completed a brief questionnaire focused on career interests and importance of core curriculum. Respondents were asked to identify their first, second and third areas of career interest. Categories presented as career options included event planning, facility management, fitness management, high school and college athletics, professional sport, parks and recreation, and tourism. To assess perceived importance of core courses, responses were recorded on a five point scale such that 1=very important and 5=very unimportant. Core sport management courses included Introduction, Communications, Management, Facility Management, Event Management, Research, Legal Aspects, Finance, Marketing, Accounting, Governance, Senior Seminar, and Internship. Once the data were coded, entered and cleaned, they were analyzed using Statistical Analysis Software (SAS) to generate descriptive data and examine research questions.

Specific tests utilized included Chi-Square Test of Independence and ANOVA. Descriptive data was used to examine the first and second research questions. The first research question examined career areas of greatest interest to graduating sport management students. Forty-two percent of students indicated professional sport was their primary career interest area, followed by high school and college athletics (17%), event management (16%), and tourism (12%). Fewer than five percent of graduating students indicated facility management (2%), fitness management (2%), and parks and recreation (2%) as their primary career interest area. Seven percent of students indicated an area of the sport management field not listed. The second research question assessed what core courses were perceived as most important to graduating sport management students. Internship was rated the most important with a mean score of 1.10, followed by Communications (1.55) and Event Management (1.73).

Graduating sport management students indicated Research (3.08), Governance (2.77), and Accounting (2.70) as the least important core courses. ANOVA analyses were used to assess the third research question which examined if students with varying career interests differ on perceived importance of core courses. Means for importance of Program and Event Management differed across career interests and were statistically significant ($F=2.56, p=0.02$). Graduating students with a primary career interest in event management rated the importance of Event Management the highest ($M=1.16$) and students with a career interest in professional sports indicated a lower level of importance ($M=1.92$). Except for Event Management, means for importance of core courses differed little across career interests and were not statistically significant (Introduction, $F=1.81, p=0.09$; Sport Marketing, $F=1.49, p=0.17$; Senior Seminar, $F=1.98, p=0.06$).

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A Chi-Square Test of Independence was applied to examine if career interests varied based on gender. The obtained value of chi-square was 26.63 with seven degrees of freedom and the p-value was statistically significant at the .001 level. Fifty-four percent of men identified professional sport as their first career choice compared to 27% of females. Twenty-nine percent of women chose event planning as their primary career interest area compared to 6% of men. Tourism was the third most highly rated career for both men (10%) and women (18%).

The results of this study have pedagogical significance. First, professional sport was the primary career interest area of graduating sport management students, particularly of male students. In addition to professional sports, students indicated high school and college athletics, event management, and tourism as areas of special interest. This suggests that educators need to continue to expose students to a broad range of career options as it is the duty of faculty to inform students about a variety of careers (Kjeldsen, 1990). Secondly, Internship and Event Management were identified by graduating sport management students as the first and third most important courses. Both courses offer a highly applied, experiential learning component. This supports previous research that suggest today's learners tend to prefer experiential based activities as opposed to traditional methods of teaching (McNeely, 2005; Oblinger, 2003; Windham, 2005). Additionally, the recognition by graduating sport management students that Internship was the most important course supports the continued widespread use of it as a requirement (Parkhouse, 1987; Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, & Han, 2003). Future research for this study should include additional institutions which may provide better insight into the relationship between career interest and perceived importance of core course as well as gender comparisons.