Human resource management scholars and practitioners have both recognized the importance of understanding the processes, limitations and complexities of staffing personnel (Sark, 2005). While the literature in recruitment of personnel seems abundant across most disciplines (Ahadiat & Smith, 1994; Chew & Teo, 1993; Emenheiser, Clay, & Palakurthi, 1986; Flaherty & Pappas, 2004; Moy, 2006), less research has been conducted in relation to screening and hiring criteria within sport organizations and specifically within college athletic departments.

The literature suggests that a number of factors would influence the perception of the suitability of an applicant on the mind of the recruiter. Chew and Teo (1993) examined factors, such as integrity, future potential, intelligence, maturity, communications ability, personality, health, future ambitions, personal appearance, extra-curricular activities, preparation, work experience, recommendations, sense of humor, gender, ethnicity. Ahadiat and Smith’s (1994) considered factors such as professional conduct, reliability, ethical standards, communication skills, personal problems, maturity, appearance, personal disposition, congeniality, advancement potential, compatibility, overtime disposition, references, academic achievement, travel flexibility. More recently, Moy (2006) examined the most critical characteristic that influenced corporate employers and his results suggested five ideals attributes (e.g., academic performance) and four observable traits (e.g., open to experience) would be most likely to influence decision on hiring. DeCenzo and Robbins (2007) identified the initial screening of candidates, completion of job applicants, employment testing, comprehensive interviews, background examinations, medical examinations and, finally the job offer as important steps in selecting a job candidate.

As the job market becomes increasingly more competitive due to the increasing supply of sport management graduates around the country and the unknown growth of demand that match this supply (King, 2009). It is likely that in the near future sport industry employers will become increasingly selective as the supply of qualified candidates exceed the actual availability of job openings. As a result, the need to better understand factors that influence hiring selection deemed to be useful and timely for both prospective applicants and college athletic administrators. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to investigate (a) what are the most salient observable attributes considered during the screening process, (b) which non-readily observable skills and traits are considered to be more critical during the hiring process, (c) where there is the impact of raters’ positions and divisional affiliations on job candidates’ attributes, and (d) which job candidates’ qualifications are commonly lacking.

From a sample frame of 1,061 NCAA schools a total 427 NCAA athletic departments were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure. Athletic departments were stratified in three groups based on the NCAA divisional affiliations. From each of the 427 athletic departments a maximum of 13 athletic administrators were chosen representing three levels: Athletic Directors; Associate ADs, and other titles (e.g. Director of Ticketing). A total of 2,132 athletic administrators were selected and asked to respond to a synchronous web-based survey (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996). A total of 315 subjects responded to the survey for a response rate of 14.8%. This rate of return is within the 15% accepted rate for surveys submitted to organizations (Baldauf, Reisinger, & Moncrief, 1999) and within the expected rate of return for web surveys (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). Of the total responses, 167 were from D-I, 48 from D-II, and 85 from D-III institutions (15 responses). In terms of positions held, there were 48 ADs, 101 associate ADs, 67 assistant ADs, and 35 departmental directors while 50 respondents were classified “others” and 14 did not reveal their position. Average age of respondents was 42.1 years old (SD = 11.04) with an average industry tenure of 11.5 years (SD = 8.59). The majority respondents were male (n = 198; 65.3%) and Caucasian-Americans (n = 263; 87.7%).

The questionnaire was developed to measure the importance of: (a) 10 easily observable job candidates’ attributes during the screening process, and (b) 10 non-readily observable skills and traits during the hiring process. Based on the literature review, a pool of items was generated for both observables (12 items) and non-readily observables (15 items). A panel of experts examined the initial pools of items and came up with the 10 most important items for each
2010 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2010)

Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each attribute or skills on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 “not at all important” to 5 “very important”). In addition, the questionnaire included an open-end question to investigate the three most commonly lacking qualifications of job candidates.

Among the top 10 observable attributes in screening, career-related work experience was considered to be most important in the screening process (M = 4.68), followed by recommendation (4.07), leadership experience (4.03), reference person (4.03) and undergraduate education (3.75), to list the top five. Among the top 10 non-readily observable traits and skills, work ethics was considered to be the most important in the hiring process (M = 4.85), followed by communication skill (4.68), motivation (4.63), maturity (4.62), and conceptual skills (4.54). To investigate the influence of raters’ positions, gender, and divisional affiliations on the perceived importance of job candidates’ attributes and characteristics, the data was analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with independent variables of divisional affiliations (D-I = 167; D-II & III = 133), gender (male = 196; female = 104) and positions (higher = 164; lower = 136) and dependent variables of two sets of employee characteristics. Due to the missing values, the sample size included in MANOVA (n = 300) was smaller than the actual sample size (N = 315).

For the observable attributes in screening, the results showed that there was a main effect for positions, Wilk’s lambda = .93, F(10, 283) = 2.10, p = .025 and gender, Wilk’s lambda = .94, F(10, 283) = 1.94, p = .04, but not for divisions. Univariate analysis of variance indicated that the effect of participants’ positions was significant for career-related work experience, graduate studies, and sport participation while participants’ gender was significant for academic achievement. In regard to raters’ positions, higher-level administrators rated greater on graduate studies and sport participation while lower-level administrators reported greater importance on career-related work experience. In comparison to female administrators, male counterparts rated greater on academic achievement. For the non-readily observable traits and skills, the results also showed that there was a main effect for gender, Wilk’s lambda = .93, F(10, 283) = 2.08, p = .026, but not for divisions and positions. Specifically, the effect of participants’ gender was significant for maturity, conceptual skills, decision-making skills, and technical skills. In comparison to male administrators, female administrators reported greater importance on all four employee traits and skills. In addition, results from an additional open-answer question revealed that, of the 315 respondents, about 60% (n = 188) of the athletic administrators considered ‘communication skills’ as one of the three commonly lacking attributes of job candidates, followed by ‘related work experience’ (n = 129; 40.9%), work ethics (n = 69; 21.9%), and maturity (n = 45; 14.3%).

From a theoretical perspective, the study adds to the literature in human resource management and athletic administration. The study also has important practical implications. The findings from this study can help prospective employees in college sports including sport management students to better prepare during the job preparation and job seeking process. The study also provides athletic administrators when setting criteria for screening and hiring entry-level employees. In addition, the study provides valuable information to sport management faculty members in terms of which skills they need to emphasize in their curriculum.