Slack and Parent (2006) describe a “cash cow” as a product that makes a slow and steady growth. Since the establishment of the first sport administration program, the growth of sport management education programs has resembled this major with over 300 institutions offering the major according to the North America Society of Sport Management (NASSM) website. The growth of sport management as an academic study may be expected by the recent popularity of the sport industry as a whole. This growth has established an imperative that education satisfy the needs of the field, yielding students with the tools and knowledge necessary to enter careers in the field and to excel with minimal aid. Establishing realistic perceptions for sport management graduate and undergraduate students entering the U.S. job market can be a challenge for practitioners and educators alike.

Mathner and Martin (2012), sampling results from 81 different sport management programs examined career choice and the relationship this had on sport management graduate and undergraduate's perceptions. The measured perceptions of students were compared to the perceptions of practitioners in sport management. Statistically significant results were reported in salary perceptions, number of months necessary to reach upper-level management positions, time to find an entry-level job, and expected competencies in the field. This study also found that promotion opportunity and salary were influential in career choice. As institutions in higher-education embrace this field, it is important to analyze the job climate and its volatility. Students must be given realistic depictions of the job climate and establish perceptions that help them to enter the field successfully. Similarly, building on this knowledge will allow instructors to tailor the curriculum to enable the students to develop invaluable knowledge and skill.

A large piece of the gap between education and career is bridged when internships are instituted into the required curriculum. Internships help students to increase professional confidence, expand professional network, collect personal references, and improve communication skills, all of which lead to better work habits and allow students to demonstrate initiative in a “real-world” environment (Stratta, 2004). Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, and Turner (2005) examined how internships influence career satisfaction, occupational commitment, and intention to enter the field leading up to and following internships. This study shined a light on the idea that although internships provided a positive influence on intentions of sports management students entering the field, they also brought a negative perception to previously positive held beliefs about the field. Students who were surveyed pre and post-internship showed a decrease in mean scores on career-related intentions. Although various factors were discussed as to what produced this outcome, overall, “love of sport” kept interns interested in the field. The findings of this study will attempt to further explore how internships, specifically in sports management, influence students’ career perceptions.

This study will examine career placement, career advancement, salary perceptions, and the effect of internships on the perceptions of graduate and undergraduate sport management students at a medium-sized Midwestern university. Through the use of a survey questionnaire, information will be collected to better understand the role of internships on student perception of future career placement, career advancement, and salary perceptions. Information gained from the student's perceptions will be compared against current data found within the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the Collegiate Salary Report, and the Chronicle of Higher Education to determine the accuracy of student perceptions to the current job climate and establish a perception gap. This study will utilize similar survey instruments to Mathner and Martin and will adopt the job satisfaction surveying strategy of Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner in order to account for the affective expectations of the sample population.

The study will further explore the dimension of internship participation on the accuracy and intention to enter the field that previous studies may have overlooked. Upon finalizing the results in January of 2014, the researchers will analyze perception gaps and construct a regression model to predict student perception accuracy based on the...
measurable factors. By establishing the reasons for this gap, curricula will be evaluated at the graduate and undergraduate level in order to determine possible deficiencies within current sport management program planning. Recommendations will be made to assist in bridging the gap between education and career placement for sport management students.

References


