Students' Search Behaviors, Goals and Expectations for Their Senior Internship

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The senior, capstone internship is a major curricular component and career stepping stone for undergraduate students in many sport management programs. Studies in the broader literature point to positive outcomes for students who complete internships including better job marketability and networking (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010; Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000). Further work suggests that the internship can influence students’ commitment to their career path (Liu, Xu, & Weitz, 2011; Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, in press), thus showing the importance of the internship in a student’s career development. Despite some progress in studying the outcomes of internships, there remains a gap around how the students search for internships, and how well their chosen internship matches their career goals.

Although not universal, undergraduate students are usually responsible for securing their own internship site that is then approved by an internship supervisor at the university. If a student fails to find an internship that meets the university’s criteria and fits within a specific time frame they risk delaying graduation, thus opening the possibility that students may be ultimately favoring internships that fit their graduation requirements rather than their career or learning objectives.

In addition to university requirements, several other factors may influence how and why students search for and choose internships. Recent work (Walker & Agyemang, 2013) has highlighted that students with financial or personal constraints may not be able to afford pursuing some prestigious, unpaid internships away from their hometown. With these issues in mind, the purpose of this study is to investigate student search behaviors for their senior, capstone internship and identifying factors that influence these behaviors.

The procedure will include sampling undergraduate students preparing for their Spring 2015 senior internships from sport management programs at two universities. The interviews will take place in November and December 2014 after internship selection deadlines ensuring that students participating in the study have completed their search and will be able to give a full account of their internship selection process. The sample will include as many as 40 students depending on when a sufficient level of saturation is reached based on the research questions.

The participants will be asked about their internship search behaviors including the number of applications they submitted, when they began and finished searching, the number of interviews they had, the type of organizations and positions they applied for, and any relevant factors that influenced their search strategy including geography, finances, family or others. Furthermore, students will be asked about the resources they used to search for internships including university resources, online search sites, and personal or professional connections. Open coding of interview transcripts by two researchers will be used to identify patterns and themes in student responses.

Much of the extant literature on internships includes prescriptive articles from academicians (i.e., Stratta, 2004; Williams, 2004). While most of the peer reviewed articles and texts on the subject provide sound advice based on years of experience and trial and error, there are much fewer scientific investigations of the internship arrangement. This study will be a significant step forward in providing scientific evidence to inform the practices of supervisors in sport organizations that hire students as interns. The findings of this study will help provide a stronger foundation for future research in the area as well as inform internship supervisors who manage internship requirements and mentor students through their search process.

References
perspective. Education & Training, 52(1), 76-88.


