Ticket Sales Training: Student Perspectives on an Embedded Experiential Learning Project

Dale Sheptak, Lake Erie College
Brian Menaker, Lake Erie College
Charles Campisi, Baldwin Wallace University

Teaching Abstract 2015-073

Thursday, June 4, 2015
4:15 PM
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
(Seigniory)

Sport management as a professional practical educational program requires that students engage in work-related experience as an enhancement to the educational endeavor. A majority of sport management programs require a component of experiential learning (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2011) whether it includes internships, practica, and/or embedded experiential learning components into their curricula. In addition, sales training is considered an integral part of professional sport profession education, as well a key component of exposure to the sport industry (McKelvey & Southall, 2008). Industry has noted the lack of sales training and supporting curricular materials in sport management programs. This presentation examines student perspectives in a ticket sales training program as part of the experiential learning component of a sport management course. The study seeks to identify the components of the experiential learning process while providing a new conceptual framework for course-embedded experiential projects in the sport management course setting.

There has been much coverage of internships and practical education in sport management literature. As noted by many authors (e.g. Bennett, Henson, & Drane, 2003; Charlton, 2007; Dees & Hall, 2012; Hardin, Bemiller, & Pate, 2013; Weese, 1995) hands-on experience, specifically in the field of sport management, assists in augmenting the classroom experience and provides opportunities for students to experience professional life in a controlled setting while earning credits towards their degrees. Previous studies in this area focused on educational benefits, legal implications, and sport sales. Southall, LeGrande, Han, & Ammon (2002) discussed the implementation and learning benefits of out-of-the-classroom learning experiences and its educational merit have been discussed. Schoepfer & Dodds (2011) have analyzed the legal implications of the traditional sport management internship experience and whether it fits with the educational mission. Pierce, Petersen, & Meadow (2011) considered the way an integrated sport sales class provides or fails to provide sport sales skills, sport sales knowledge, and changes in perception of sport sales.

Foster's Five-Step Experiential Learning Model discusses five levels of experiential learning: volunteerism, practicum or apprenticeship, cooperative education, service learning, and graduate assistantship (internship) (Foster & Dollar, 2010). In this study students received on-site job training combined with classroom experience, which corresponds with the cooperative level of the model. Students worked with a faculty member from their institution and a member of a North American professional sport franchise to learn and implement industry standard sales techniques. This project sampled students from sport management classes at two colleges that participated in the ticket sales training program conducted by a Major League Baseball team from January through March of 2014. The program was structured by the team as follows. Each class had a commissioner who communicated directly with the sales representative in charge of the program. Classes were split up into groups of 3 or 4 and each group had their own leader. The team representative held an on-campus training session to teach and review the basics of sales and concepts specific to sport ticket sales. A second training session occurred in February at the stadium, which included tours, sales training sessions, and a session to introduce students to other facets of the sports industry. Classes were tasked with selling tickets to four games which had been targeted by the team.

The sample consisted of 13 students, six from one school and seven from the other. Interviews were conducted face-to-face on the campus of each school. Interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes on average and were audio-recorded. Each interview was transcribed. The analysis used grounded theory to identify emergent themes and were coded accordingly.

Three major themes about the ticket sales training experience emerged from the analysis: Value, performance, and
structure. Value refers to the value that the students felt the ticket sales training program had for them. Within this general category five subthemes emerged: experience, training, connections, professional focus, and hands-on exposure. Performance represents student views on personal performance (and associated factors) in the ticket sales program. Five subcategories of performance are results based, education based, motivation, frustration, and self-efficacy. Structure refers to the positive and negative issues associated with the organization itself and the structure of the program. Five subcategories of communication, timing, competition, organizational access, and roles emerged from the program structure.

The exploratory nature of this study provides valuable insights into student perspectives of experiential learning outcomes. Results showed that students engaged in this program placed importance on personal and professional outcomes along with the relationship they were able to build with the sponsoring sports organization. From a personal standpoint, students expected the organization to provide an environment where they felt confident and prepared to be successful. Professionally, students expected a supportive framework toward job cultivation and development from the organization. Students wanted to know that the organization was as invested in the developmental and educational process as they were. These findings can help inform sport management instructors on how to create optimal learning opportunities while creating partnerships with sport organizations. Instructors and professional sports organizations can learn from the positive and negative components of program structure in order to provide a student-centered, education based, performance-focused sales training program for future sport management students.