An area of great interest to many in higher education is determining which factors lead to student career success. Many have engaged in predictive research relating to success in college. Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, and Elliot (2002) investigated the roles of goals, ability, and high school performance in predicting college success. The authors found that various differing goals were linked to specific educational outcomes. In contrast, inconclusive findings were reported by Mouw and Khanna (1993) who did a review of studies and summarized that no one predictor has good success at pinpointing college achievement. In terms of career success, Waldman and Korbar (2004) found that college Grade Point Average (GPA) was not a good predictor of early career progress, but that it was a good predictor of salary. When it comes to career success, it is vital to understand that people in different settings use different criteria for evaluation (Heslin, 2005).

Colleges and universities have an array of reasons to desire success for students once they leave campus. From the very basic intrinsic desire to see students succeed to the knowledge that successful former students may give back to the school in forms of time, money, and positive word-of-mouth marketing, these reasons are critical. After all, the reason students decide to attend college is not merely to succeed in the classroom, but to develop skills and knowledge that will lead to a successful career. If students, parents, faculty, and essentially every stakeholder involved in the educational process examined career success of each school’s alumni, great strides could be made in school selection. In theory, schools that do not place the appropriate amount of attention on student career preparation would be viewed negatively while schools at the opposite end of the spectrum would receive proper accolades, as well as better incoming students.

One conclusion is clear - career success involves ambiguous criteria. Abele and Spurk (2009) analyzed the role job self-efficacy and career goals had on both subjective and objective career success. These authors emphasized the importance for both occupational self-efficacy as well as career goal-development, both of which are difficult to measure but are clearly paramount. Additionally, “knowing why, knowing whom, and knowing how” were determined to be predictors of career success (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). It is the current researchers’ stance that this is even more critical in sport-related fields, where the importance of networking is highlighted time and again. With this in mind, we believe that more research needs to be done in this area, so that more concrete assessments can be made regarding career success predictors.

The purpose of this study is to identify the specific factors that lead to early-career success in the sport industry.

RQ1: What pre-graduate school factors, if any, contribute to career success in the sport industry?
RQ2: What within-graduate school factors, if any, contribute to career success in the sport industry?

Methods
To address the research questions, a sample was chosen from a sport management graduate program at a mid-Atlantic university. Every student admitted to the program from the years 2009 through 2013 was included, resulting in a sample size of approximately 200. Data collected included pre-program factors (e.g., undergraduate GPA, graduate entrance exam scores [GRE, MAT, GMAT], previous work experience), within-program factors (e.g., program GPA, comprehensive exam results, graduate assistantships), and post-program factors (e.g., fully-employed in sport industry, starting salary, amount of time to first job, job changes/promotions). Data are being collected in two phases. Phase I includes collecting all existing data from student and alumni files, which are available through the graduate program directly. Phase II includes a short survey to all alumni in the sample asking them to confirm accuracy of data, as well as filling in any missing data on themselves. The program has current contact information.
for 80% of its entire alumni base, and close to 95% of its alumni who entered the program within the 2009-2013 time frame. Phase I of data collection will be completed by November 15, 2014, and surveys to alumni will be sent out immediately following. Data collection will be completed by January 2015. Data analysis will follow and will be completed no later than March 2015.

In order to accurately answer research questions one and two, a series of regression analyses will be run on the data. Regression analyses will allow the research team to determine whether any of the independent variables (both pre- and within-program) are significant predictors of the ‘success’ outcome variables. Other descriptive statistics and forms of statistical analyses will also be utilized to further dissect the trends revealed by the regression analyses.

Discussion
The results of the analyses will determine the direction the discussion will take. However, there are a few trends we are specifically looking for which may guide this study’s applicability. In looking at pre-program independent variables, it will be interesting to note whether academic factors or experiential factors have more bearing on success in the industry. For instance, do students entering the program with high GPA and test scores have more early-career success than those with lower? Or is it the students who come in with previous industry experience? These factors may not be mutually exclusive, but the results of these questions will be valuable to sport management graduate faculty in determining what criteria to put emphasis on when making admissions decisions. Similarly, we intend to dissect the same question using within-program criteria (GPA, comprehensive exam results, graduate assistants) to determine which factors most strongly predict early-career success.

The audience for this study is broad, in that we believe it includes academicians making admissions decisions as well as those in the industry looking to hire new employees. It can provide both practical and theoretical applicability, and is one of very few existing studies looking at this topic specific to the field of sport management.

References


