One of the most rapidly growing sub-disciplines within business school curricula is “sport(s) business,” or “sport management” (Li et al., 2013). This growth is tied to the increase in the size of the sport industry, which is estimated to be $485 billion in 2014 and one of the top 10 industries in the U.S. (Plunkett, 2014). In response to growing concerns by leading industry executives that more focus should be placed on business fundamentals rather than sports-themed courses, the University of Oregon established the first endowed sports management program in the Lundquist College of Business at the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center in 1993 (Warsaw & Swangard, 2004). Since then, the number of sport management programs (including majors, minors, and certificates) housed in a school of business or with formal curriculum-based ties to a school of business (hereinafter “sport business programs”) has grown to over 200 programs in the U.S. (Li et al., 2013). In light of this growth, sport management has the potential to shift to a more business-oriented discipline (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). However, there is a lack of empirical research on sport business programs, including research on interdisciplinary programs featuring faculty and resources shared among different units or even among (and within) business school departments. No benchmark data is available to institutions contemplating movement to or establishment of a sport management program in a school of business. Thus, the purpose of this study was to survey department chairs and program directors employed in U.S. business schools offering sport business programs in order to provide, for the first time, benchmarking information related to accreditation, faculty performance requirements, and faculty and alumni salaries in sport business programs.

Sport business programs need to consider broader business accreditation considerations and operate under the overarching institutional effort to maintain business accreditation, which is a key value-adding proposition for the future of business schools (Noorda, 2011). Three of the most successful professional organizations in the U.S. that have made the most of the growing market for business schools’ accreditation are the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) (Brink & Smith, 2012). Unlike programs in business schools, sport management programs appeared externally inefficient due to the lack of a formal accreditation process prior to the arrival of the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) in 2008 (Gladden & Williams, 2012). COSMA launched an outcome-based, mission-driven specialized accreditation model (Williams & Colles, 2009), but it has gained limited traction as only 15% of all sport management programs are institutional members of COSMA (COSMA, n.d.; Gladden & Williams, 2012).

Sport business programs also must grapple with faculty performance requirements. Deans and promotion and tenure committees at research-oriented business schools are not impressed by a publication record solely in a sport-related academic journal (Fink & Barr, 2012), and sport management and marketing research may conceivably be gaining traction in top business journals, particularly in the generic marketing journals (Shilbury, 2011). Additionally, faculty and alumni salaries can present challenges. One should note that the sport management academic field lacks sport management-specific and sport business-specific salary surveys. Those in the sport management professoriate, who are experts in a particular field related to a business root discipline, may choose to work only with programs that are housed within a school of business because a competitive salary in the sport management field is important to attract or retain a valuable faculty member (Mahony, Mondello, Hums, & Judd, 2006). In addition, business schools are sometimes reluctant to integrate or launch sport programs because business school rankings are based in part on their graduates’ starting salaries (Fink & Barr, 2012).

The study’s population consisted of 228 U.S. sport business programs and their department chairs/program
directors, identified by searching the website of each business school member of AACSB, ACBSP, and IACBE accrediting agencies in the U.S. The survey remained active for 16 weeks, and resulted in 74 usable surveys and a 32.46% response rate. The population data of U.S. sport business programs (N = 228) was compared against the sample of data collected (N = 74). No significant difference between the population and the sample was found in terms of type of degrees offered, business accreditation agencies, and institution type (i.e., public/private). The researchers examined the data for influences associated with U.S. business schools’ accreditation bodies: AACSB (n = 29), ACBSP (n = 21), and IACBE (n = 24) because previous research recognized that AACSB, ACBSP, and IACBE differ with respect to the rigidity and rigor of their accreditation guidelines and with respect to teaching, research, and allocation of resources in a business school (Brink & Smith, 2012; Li et al., 2013). Therefore, the researchers utilized descriptive statistics to analyze characteristics of chairs/program directors and their sport business programs, considering these three accreditation agencies, and also employed a multinomial logit regression analysis in order to assess which key characteristics would explain the business accreditation of U.S. sport business programs.

Regarding the sport business programs’ COSMA interest, this research empirically assessed for the first time what past sport research theorized (Gladden & Williams, 2012; Jones et al., 2008): The majority of department chairs and program directors of U.S. sport business programs view the COSMA accreditation as redundant. Because sport business programs are housed in academic units that are already accredited by more visible accrediting agencies such as AACSB, ACBSP, and IACBE, acceptance and recognition of COSMA accreditation is an issue. It would be non-sequitur to argue that the sport management academic area lacks quality outlets for scholars’ research based on our finding that only a little over 31% of surveyed institutions maintain a journals’ list (and indeed only about a quarter of those institutions, namely only five in our survey, maintain a sport-specific list). What is true, however, is that sport management journals undoubtedly have not yet risen to the level of broad acceptance by research and promotion/tenure committees, given the still fairly narrow confines of sport academe and the shortage of quantifiable impact metrics (e.g. low citations’ numbers, impact factors). Regarding salaries for new faculty hires, as anticipated, the majority of AACSB-sport business programs reported higher salaries compared to the ACBSP- and IACBE-sport business programs. Considering that a competitive salary in the sport management field is important to attract or retain a valuable faculty member (Mahony et al., 2006), AACSB-sport business programs can have a competitive advantage. Previous research pointed out the advantages of sport business programs recruiting students, who consider applying to (non-business school) sport management programs (Danylochuk & Boucher, 2003). Given our findings on sport business alumni salaries, sport business programs may be challenged to entice students, who would consider attending an otherwise established sport management program, albeit outside a business school. Indeed, it appears that entry-level salaries are low across the board, be it for sport business or sport management (non-business) alumni. Other implications of the results will be discussed.