Examining Undergraduate Sport Management Internship Requirements and Procedures in the United States

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A unique aspect of many sport management programs is exposing students to professional settings by requiring them to complete an internship. The internship is an integral part of sport management curricula at both the graduate and undergraduate level (Williams, 2003). The Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) recognizes the role of practical and experiential learning as a relevant component of sport management curricula (COSMA, 2010). Over the past 20 years, internships and other forms of proactive socialization have become increasingly popular as a way to bridge the transition from the classroom to the work world (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). Internships can provide potential employers with an opportunity to recruit and train students, as well as providing students a window of opportunity to prove themselves to an organization.

With the increase in sport management majors as well as an increase in university sponsored programs, this research is significant because there is currently a lack of research that is being conducted that is specifically related to programmatic internship requirements and best practices within sport management programs. The purpose of this research presentation is to highlight the internship requirements and processes undergraduate sport management programs are implementing for their internship programs.

Two hundred and nine institutions in the United States offering undergraduate programs in sport management/administration were identified using the NASSM website. A survey was constructed for the project and included four sections consisting of demographics, internship description, internship assessment and evaluation, and administration and workload. Fourteen emails were undeliverable, therefore, a total of 195 surveys were sent to potential participants. A total of 79 surveys were completed which accounted for a 39% return rate.

Based on the findings of this study, the majority of sport management internship programs look as follows: 11-12 credit hours which equates to 200-300 contact hours taken in the senior year (one semester) that requires a prior field experience. Students are responsible for locating their internship sites (the majority working with professional sport teams) and are assigned a letter grade at the completion. Written weekly reports, a special project, and two site supervisor evaluations are used to assess and evaluate student performance. In terms of administration, internship coordinators make one in person visit and have 1-3 personal contacts with students during the semester long experience. One internship coordinator is assigned to all student interns and is responsible for overseeing 11-30 students which equates to a workload of one academic course during each semester.

Based on the findings of this research, program requirements vary drastically from one institution to the next. In reality, it seems that schools take very different approaches to the requirements and administration of the internship program. This may be due to many different circumstances including the number of students in a program, the number of faculty, resources, faculty workload, and the magnitude of internship requirements.

Because of the growth in sport management programs inside and outside of the United States, and the increase in qualified sport management graduates filling valuable sport management positions, the importance and understanding of the current sport management internship model is important. Since the completion of the study, there are 84 new sport management programs listed on the NASSM website (NASSM, 2014). In order to effectively and efficiently coordinate sport management internship programs a basic comprehension of what current sport management programs are implementing is necessary to better educate current students within a comprehensive sport management curriculum.