Examining the Application of Experiential Learning Techniques across Sport Management Programs

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Teaching
Thursday, June 2, 2016
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
(Forum East 2)

Abstract 2016-028
11:15 AM

Experiential learning practices are increasingly encouraged across institutions of higher education as millennial students have come to expect an engaging and interactive learning environment (Mangold, 2007). Additionally, scholars have found that exposure to experiential education positively impacts student learning outcomes, as well as persistence and retention rates (Eyler, 2009; Pierson & Troppe, 2010; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008). The Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) has identified experiential learning projects as an integral element to be included in sport management curriculum (COSMA, 2015). However, often the experiential learning opportunities offered by sport management programs are limited to a required internship experience (Foster & Dollar, 2010). While internship programs have been widely accepted and implemented by sport management programs (Eagleman & McNary, 2010), there is little evidence of widespread implementation of other experiential learning practices within sport management programs. According to the Five-Step Experiential Learning Process Model (Foster & Dollar, 2010), sport management students should acquire experience beyond the culminating internship, through volunteer exploration, apprenticeship, classroom-based activities, and practicum experience. While a handful of sport management scholars have examined classroom-based experiential learning outcomes within individual classroom environments (Irwin, Sutton, & McCarty, 2007; Pauline, 2013; Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, and Han, 2003), an in-depth analysis of the widespread application of experiential learning practices across the field of sport management has yet to be conducted.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is three-fold. This study investigates the widespread application of experiential learning practices across sport management programs. Additionally, this study seeks to examine faculty attitudes as they relate to the application of experiential learning practices and their impact on student learning. Finally, this study seeks to determine the impact of academic and professional experiences on faculty attitudes towards the implementation of experiential learning techniques.

In order to address these research concerns, a quantitative survey methodology was used. A survey instrument was adapted from a previously tested questionnaire that was utilized to measure service learning across marketing departments in higher education (McIntyre, Webb, & Hite, 2005). In order to adapt the original survey to incorporate experiential learning constructs specific to sport management, Foster and Dollar’s (2010) five categories of experiential learning in sport management were utilized in place of the original service learning-related activities. The newly adapted survey has been titled the Experiential Learning in Sport Management Survey (ELSM). The first goal of the survey instrument was to determine basic demographic information related to faculty background, including gender, age, education, and other information specific to their prior work experience. This information will be gathered through a series of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. The second goal of the survey instrument was to determine faculty utilization of experiential learning techniques inside and outside of the classroom. This information will be gathered through a series of Likert-Scale questions regarding specific experiential learning techniques and the faculty member’s own application, using Andreasen’s (1995) stages of behavior change. A final goal of the instrument was to examine faculty attitudes as they relate to the application of experiential learning techniques and their perceived impact on student learning. This information will be gathered through a series of Likert-Scale questions regarding the faculty member’s own attitudes towards experiential learning. All sport management faculty currently subscribed to the NASSM listserv will be contacted via e-mail for participation in the study.

The study is currently in the data collection stage, however, full results and implications will be available at the conference. In order to respond to the research questions at hand, the quantitative data collected will first be analyzed using descriptive statistics. Using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, each section of this study will be analyzed to determine the following information. The extent to
which sport management faculty are applying experiential learning techniques will be identified by producing frequencies, or a list of pedagogical experiential learning techniques and how often they are utilized by faculty. Basic descriptive statistics will also be used to gather information regarding faculty demographic information. Descriptive statistics will also be utilized to express the attitudes of faculty as they relate to the application of experiential learning techniques. The survey data will be analyzed using more advanced statistical analysis. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) testing will be conducted in order to measure variability among the independent variables. This will allow the researcher to determine whether or not the lived experiences of faculty have an impact on their application of and attitudes toward experiential learning. Specifically, the three variables are prior teaching experience, prior industry experience, and terminal degree program of study. Prior teaching experience will be broken down into two categories: experienced and novice. Prior industry experience will also be broken down into two categories: experienced and limited experience. Finally, the terminal degree program of study variable will be broken down by program type (business, education, kinesiology, etc.) and the number of categories will vary depending on the survey responses. If group differences exist, Post Hoc testing (Bonferroni) will be conducted in order to determine which groups are different.

The information provided by this study could prove useful for both program directors and faculty. The results of this particular study may help sport management program directors to identify where their program fits within the current state of experiential learning implementation across sport management programs. Exploration into the results of this study could provide faculty the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices related to experiential learning. Finally, the results may also help to identify a need for increased training of sport management doctoral students in the area of pedagogy and curriculum design. The results of this study also have the potential to add to the greater, ongoing debate within the field of sport management regarding the purpose of a sport management education. Is that purpose to provide a theoretical or applied education? Is it a combination of both? A widespread analysis of experiential learning across sport management programs can help gauge how far faculty within sport management programs have moved towards an applied and experiential teaching framework.