Despite the sporting industry’s projected growth of approximately $150 billion between 2010-2015 and the increased opportunities to work in this field, obtaining employment in the sporting industry has become progressively more difficult (Belzer, 2014). As a result, developing a better understanding of the factors that impact hiring decisions within intercollegiate athletics and professional sports holds timely and useful implications for sport management researchers, practitioners, and students interested in pursuing a career within this industry. Previous research has explored many different factors (e.g., race, gender, previous work experience, etc.) impacting hiring decisions within the general labor market; however, efforts examining these issues within the sporting industry has been sparse (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2010; Howell et al., 2015; McEvoy et al., 2015).

Given this gap, the primary purpose of the present study aims to examine a specific set of factors (e.g., ethnicity and type of experience as an undergraduate student) that would potentially impact hiring decisions within intercollegiate athletics - specifically within student-athlete academic services. Second, using homologous reproduction theory as a framework (e.g., Kanter, 1977; McEvoy et al., 2015; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991), we also seek to explore the extent to which similarities (specifically with experience as a former student-athlete and gender) between the hirer and job candidate might influence a job candidate’s potential for being offered an interview.

Literature Review

Examining and understanding the factors that significantly impact hiring decisions within the labor market is a timely issue within the human resource management, sociology, and psychology literature. A number of previous research efforts have explored the extent to which various factors impact personnel decisions within a workplace setting. Factors such as gender (e.g., Darity Jr. & Mason, 1998; Lahey, 2008), race (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Park et al., 2009), and age (e.g., Lahey, 2008) have generally been the overarching foci of this area of research.

More specific to the present study, empirical research examining personnel and hiring decisions in sports has focused predominantly on the employment of coaches within intercollegiate (e.g., Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Sagas et al., 2006; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006) and interscholastic (e.g., Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991) athletics. Findings from these research efforts indicated that female and male administrators are more likely to “reproduce” their own gender when making hiring decisions - a phenomenon posited through Kanter’s theory of homologous reproduction (1977). More recently, however, research has also examined hiring decisions in intercollegiate athletics and Minor League Baseball (Howell et al., 2015; McEvoy et al., 2015). The overarching findings from these two studies indicated that the primary determinant of evaluating a job candidate was previous work experience, while other factors such as gender, undergraduate major and academic success were not considered significant. Contrary to the research on intercollegiate and interscholastic coaches, no similar bias (i.e., no homologous reproduction) existed within intercollegiate athletics or Minor League Baseball. In addition to the aforementioned findings suggesting that students should obtain professional work experience early and often in order to be better positioned for employment after graduation, issues surrounding a student-athlete’s (SA) ability (or lack thereof) to gain experience “off the field” (given current NCAA regulations) also remains a timely and important topic and thus a primary objective of the present study.

Method
The study participants, full-time Division I student-athlete academic services staff members, were recruited from a self-compiled email database obtained via publicly available directories (n = 1523). They received an email from the investigators with a link to an online survey requesting they evaluate one single résumé with each of the independent variables of interest being manipulated between participants. Additionally, all other resume-related items were held constant in order to isolate the effects of the variables of interest. Respondents were then asked to evaluate the candidate (on a 7-point Likert scale) based on two criteria: (1) the likelihood that they would offer the candidate an interview (1 = not at all likely; 7 = extremely likely); and (2) the quality of the candidate based on their professional experiences (both on the scale of 1 = not at all qualified; 7 = extremely qualified). Once the respondent completed the candidate evaluation, they were then asked specific demographic questions (e.g., gender, race, previous experience as a SA, etc.).

The design for the present study was a 3 (assumed ethnicity: Black/African American vs. Hispanic/Latino vs. White/Caucasian) x 3 (type of “experience” during their undergraduate studies: intercollegiate SA vs. internship experience in intercollegiate athletics vs. involvement in Greek life and university student government) factorial design. Utilizing the self-compiled database of individuals currently employed within a given student-athlete academic services department (n = 1523), a total of 310 usable survey were obtained, yielding a response rate of 20.4%.

Results

Results from the 3 x 3 ANOVA test yielded no significant differences for applicant’s ethnicity for both likelihood of being offered an interview and in the quality of their experiences. However, significant differences were seen in the type of experience of the job candidate in terms of likelihood of being offered an interview \( [F(2, 307) = 42.27, p < .001] \) and in evaluating the quality of their experiences \( [F(2, 307) = 85.77, p < .001] \). Tukey post-hoc analyses indicated significant differences in the likelihood of being offered an interview between the candidate who was involved in Greek life and university student government (M = 3.15, SD = 1.58), the SA candidate (M = 3.88, SD = 1.78), and the candidate with professional experience in intercollegiate athletics (M = 5.17, SD = 1.42). Additionally, significant post hoc differences were also seen in the quality of the candidate’s experiences relative to their involvement in Greek life and university student government (M = 2.94, SD = 1.58), as a SA (M = 3.96, SD = 1.77), and having professional experience in intercollegiate athletics (M = 5.70, SD = 1.21).

Discussion and Implications

To address the main objective of the present study, the study findings suggest the primary determinant of evaluating a job candidate in a student-athlete academic services department is previous work experience within intercollegiate athletics. However, being a college SA is of more value than participating in Greek life or college student government. Interestingly, a job candidate’s ethnicity did not significantly impact the likelihood of being offered an interview. Secondly, no similarity bias (i.e., homologous reproduction) existed between the applicant and participant based on gender or previous experience as a student-athlete. Complete descriptive statistics, results from statistical analyses conducted (i.e., ANOVA and post-hoc tests), and implications for sport management researchers, athletic administrators, and university stakeholders will be discussed.