An internship is often considered to be the culminating experience of a student's academic progress, and the link that connects them to their future career in the sport industry. Foster and Dollar (2010) classify a sport management internship as a full-time work experience to be completed after all other coursework has concluded. The vast majority of undergraduate sport management programs now include an internship component in their curriculum. Eaglaman & McNary (2010) found that 77.5% of undergraduate sport management programs require their students to obtain and complete an internship and the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) has identified the internship under the “Integrative Experiences and Career Planning” component for accreditation (COSMA, 2016). According to Cuneen and Sidwell (2003), there are three primary benefits that students obtain through the completion of an internship. Those benefits include the opportunity to practice professional skills and apply theoretical concepts to real-world issues, the opportunity to problem solve and think critically beyond classroom examples, and finally, internships often socialize students toward values and norms of a particular sport organization.

Despite the wide acceptance of the internship across sport management programs, there is evidence to suggest that sport management students may be lacking key competencies needed to excel at their internship sites. In their study of sport management student preparedness, DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove (2016), internship site supervisors noted that sport management students lacked skills in the areas of adaptability, communication, organization, and accountability. Other practitioners have contended that students in sport management programs don’t get enough real-world experience or practice prior to entering the field, resulting in a preference to hire someone with experience over a degree in sport management (Cuban, 2014; Dolich, 2004; King, 2009). In fact, a Turnkey Sports Poll of sport industry executives found that sport industry employers were more likely to hire a candidate with a business degree than a candidate with a sport management degree (King, 2009). Petersen and Pierce (2009) called on sport management faculty to incorporate more experiential learning techniques into curricula, noting that it provides students with an invaluable opportunity to link curriculum with sport industry practice. DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove (2016) recommended that sport management programs incorporate mandatory pre-internship experience coursework where students gain formal contact hours with on-campus groups like athletics, or volunteer hours with local organizations. It is evident through the literature that a call to action of sorts has been sounded to better prepare sport management students for internship experiences, and inevitably, sport-related careers.

In order to prepare students for internship experiences in sport, it is essential for academicians to understand the key competencies that are sought by industry practitioners making hiring decisions. Consequently, this study utilized a content analysis methodology to collect key data points from internship job announcements. Prior studies in the field have examined sport industry job descriptions using a content analysis approach. Pierce, Petersen, and Clavio (2011) conducted a content analysis of entry-level ticket sales job postings and Diamond, Pierce, Johnson, and Ridley (2014) examined sponsorship sales job postings. Both studies resulted in a comprehensive analysis of key skills and qualifications sought by practitioners, with recommendations for sport management faculty in the development of curricula within their programs.

For the current study, data was collected over a 6-month period. From May, 2016 to October, 2016, job postings including the word “internship” were collected from Teamwork Online, a widely used and highly regarded sport industry job posting site (Wong, 2012). A total of 215 unique internship announcements were collected over this period. The data collection stage is complete, with data analysis currently underway. Two coders possessing knowledge of the sport industry and sport-related internship experiences, are working to develop an online codebook that will be used in analyzing the job description information. Some of the questions addressed in the codebook relate to demographic information at the organizational level, such as job title, organization name, industry sector, and geographic location, while other questions relate to key skills and job requirements. Once the codebook...
is complete and both coders have assessed the data, quantitative statistical analysis will be conducted. Descriptive statistics will be used to determine which areas of the sport industry are most represented through internship postings, as well as which skills and responsibilities are most commonly outlined across the postings. Additionally, group differences will be examined using chi square analysis and t-tests. Full results and implications will be available at the conference.

The information provided by this study could prove useful for program directors, faculty, and students within sport management programs. Exploration into the results of this study could provide program directors and faculty the opportunity to reflect on department curricula and teaching methods, and determine whether or not current approaches are helping students develop the competencies needed for success in their internships and beyond. Students will also likely benefit from the knowledge attained through this study. In an increasingly competitive job market, sport management students must distinguish themselves from competitive intern and job seekers. Students that have an awareness of key competencies and the ability to develop those throughout an undergraduate program are likely to find more success in their internship experiences and beyond.