Experiential learning has been a core part of sport management education since the field’s inception (Parkhouse, 1987; Sutton, 1989) and continues to play an important role for most programs (Eagleman & McNary, 2010; Young & Baker, 2004). Scholarly work on internships has examined their effect on career decision-making (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Koo, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016; Odio & Kerwin, 2016), how students find internships (Odio, 2017; Stratta, 2004), legal issues (Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010), their general administration (Kelley, 2004), and student preparation (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2010). Despite the growing literature, the field is operating without a universal definition or practice for internships. This creates a challenge for sharing teaching practices and prevents research from effectively generalizing knowledge across the discipline. The purpose of this presentation is to explore how sport management programs teach and manage their internship courses and compare the various practices and philosophies across the discipline.

Internships across the field can vary in terms of duration, learning expectations, whether they offer compensation, and whether academic credit is required (Foster & Dollar, 2010; Odio, 2017). Unlike academic disciplines that follow standards from an accrediting body like psychology, engineering, and medicine, sport management internships are organically created by each program. While many follow a format of having a “full-time” internship for an entire semester as a capstone course, there is no evidence suggesting that this is the norm for most programs. The lack of a consistent definition for internships has been identified as likely culprit leading to a lack of understanding between students, teachers, and supervisors that then causes many of the legal and ethical issues plaguing internships in sport (Odio, 2017) and other industries (Perlin, 2011).

In a study of undergraduate sport management programs, Brown and Willett (2015) received surveys from 79 out of the 195 programs they solicited. Their data show a wide range of different characteristics for internships including whether internships were required or optional, when in the curriculum internships had to be completed, number of credit hours, and types of assessments (Brown & Willett, 2015). Although this analysis helps understand the variety of internships, more depth is needed to advance research on internships in sport management.

To address this issue, researchers will conduct semi-structured interviews with intern coordinators across the discipline. Stratified sampling will be used to select a diverse sample that includes research versus teaching-focused universities, large and small programs, and different internship arrangements. An interview guide has been created based on five themes that emerged during a pilot study panel discussion with five content area experts completed via e-mail. These pilot study panelists collectively have experience in educator and tenure-track positions, administrating at teaching and research-focused programs, and supervising and performing research on internships in sport.

The first theme that will be examined is the relationship with outside organizations in which intern coordinators will address issues such as the management of the relationship between the program and outside organizations, and the goals and definitions of an organization. Intern coordinators will also discuss the management of interns, answering questions such as “have you observed or do you know of different management practices for interns by the various sites” and “does your program encourage or discourage any practices within the management of interns”. Participants will also address the learning outcomes and experiences via the internship by discussing the practices and policies regarding internship learning outcomes. Additionally, participants will be asked to consider program and logistical issues, discussing expectations such as the length of the internship, the rules and recommendations, whether and how site visits are conducted, and how assessments of sites are completed. Lastly, participants will discuss the process for finding internships and placements.
Two researchers will code the data independently and meet to compare codes to assure analyst triangulation (Patton, 1999). Following the identification and agreement with the a priori themes and subthemes, the researchers will then independently code a second transcript. The researchers will again meet to determine if their themes are closely aligned. Disagreements will be discussed and a consensus met. The researchers will then independently code the remaining transcripts and merge the codes using NVIVO 11.

This study will qualitatively analyze differences in program and course-level educational philosophies. Such comparisons of educational practices and philosophies across sport management programs are rarely done. The findings of this study will make contributions towards research and practice of internships in sport management including a better understanding of how and why internship courses differ across sport management. This will help facilitate conversations and sharing of experiential learning practices across programs, and illuminate future paths for research on internship effectiveness.