Teaching for Internship Success: Instructional Methods and Curriculum Ideas for Preparing Students to Enter the Unpaid Workforce

Neal Ternes, Miami University
Sam Ehrlich, Florida State University
John Holden, Oklahoma State University
Matthew Hawthorn, Fairleigh Dickinson University

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Internships have been a vital aspect of the sport management curricula since at least the mid-1980’s, providing real-world learning experiences and industry connections for students (see, e.g., Brassie, 1989; Chouinard, 1993; Kjeldsen, 1990). The role of internships not only offer potential benefits for students seeking employment in an ever-more insular sport industry, they also connect universities to the practitioners who can be resources for experiential learning opportunities beyond internship relationships (see Frawley, Favaloro, & Schulenkorf, 2018; Sauder & Murdieck, 2018; Williams & Parker, 2016). However, student satisfaction with the sports industry after completing an internship often decreases, and there are numerous reports of inappropriate and possibly illegal behavior by employers towards student interns (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Wiest & King-White, 2013). This is likely due in no small part to a lack of explanation for employment law in textbooks, lectures, and classroom discussion. It is our view that employment law, particularly those statutes which apply to interns, ought to be a crucial discussion point within the sport management curriculum prior to student internship experiences. However, given the relative obscurity of employment law in preparatory materials for sport management instructors and potentially the lack of experience with this topic, it may be difficult for many sport management instructors to include this crucial topic into their normal curriculum without assistance.

Our presentation discusses the importance of discussing employment law and the different types of lessons and material we cover in different classes. Specifically, we discuss our methods of teaching employment law in both dedicated sport law courses versus more general sport management courses and the different types of material covered in each type of course. Furthermore, we discuss the different types of classroom activities we have created in order to engage students with these concepts and potential ways in which to relate these concepts back to broader discussions about the sport management industry. Finally, we touch on ways in which concepts from teaching employment law can be used by those in positions overseeing student internships and the tools available to those people in working with employers who may not be acting in good faith.