Preferential Learning in Sport Management Courses: An Assessment of Student Learning Styles, Instructional Methods, and Course Outcomes

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Engaging students in course content is instrumental to ensure effective classroom learning. Educators must understand that students have different learning styles and approaches to studying that impact how they engage with course content (Brown, White, Wakeling, & Naiker, 2015). Although research has been conducted in the field of sport management education, limited research exists on the preferred learning styles of students in sport-related programs. Peters, Jones, and Peters (2008) used the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) and found a majority of students in sports-related disciplines are multimodal and identify as auditory and kinesthetic, and prefer to learn in groups. Their study differs from the present study in that they used PLSPQ rather than the VARK (visual, aural, read-write, kinesthetic) questionnaire, and they did not examine the study skills of students.

Research suggests recognizing the preferred learning styles of students allows educators to overcome the predisposition to treat all students in a similar way (Fleming, 1995). Thus, using multiple modes of instruction can assist educators in reaching more students and positively affect the learning process (Wehrwein et al., 2006). In addition to the importance of understanding the learning styles of students, research has suggested it is imperative for educators to recognize and be knowledgeable about student approaches to studying (Brown et al., 2015). For these reasons, the purpose of this study is threefold. First, this research aims to examine the preferred learning styles and study skills of sport management students. Second, the study intends to seek whether or not relationships exist between preferred learning styles and course outcomes. Finally, the research aims to examine if there is a relationship between study skills and course outcomes.

A survey design was used for this study. The sample included 300 students in six Sport Administration courses. Participants completed a questionnaire that included demographic items, the VARK instrument to determine one’s preferred learning style, and the Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students (ASSIST) to measure study skills. In each of the six courses, students will complete a quiz following the delivery of content targeted to each of the four preferred learning styles. Both quiz scores and the final course grade of students will be used as outcome variables.

Although the study is ongoing as the outcome variables will not be available until the end of the current semester, preliminary data indicates over 60% of students identify as either kinesthetic or aural learners, supporting findings from Peters et al. (2008). Furthermore, almost two-thirds of participants revealed the utilization of strategic, rather than deep or surface, study skills.

If accepted to the conference, the presentation will discuss the relationships between the preferred learning styles of students and course outcomes. Furthermore, the methods of instruction used in each of the classes that emphasize each learning style will also be explained, as previous research has suggested exposure to multiple modes of learning that differ from one’s preferred learning style allow students to become more versatile learners (Zapalska & Brozik, 2006).