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From classroom to courtside: An examination of the experiential learning practices of sport management faculty



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ABSTRACT

The Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) has identified experiential learning as an integral element to be included in sport management curriculum. However, often the experiential learning opportunities offered by sport management programs have been limited to a required internship experience. The purpose of this study was to investigate the widespread application of experiential learning practices of sport management faculty. A survey instrument using Foster and Dollar's (2010) Five-Step Experiential Learning Process Model was sent to all subscribers to the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) List-serv. Results showed the majority of sport management faculty are utilizing some form of experiential learning technique. While usage rates were high for classroom-based experiential learning and internship, usage rates were considerably lower for volunteer exploration, practicum elective, and apprenticeship.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, student learning in undergraduate sport management courses has been centered on textbooks or academic readings and subject information was communicated through lectures and in-class discussions (Spence, Hess, McDonald, & Sheehan, 2009). Evidence of a recent shift can be seen by comparing a 1990 analysis (Desensi, Kelly, Blanton, & Beitel, 1990) of sport management programs that found 63% of programs required an internship experience to a more recent study (Eagleman & McNary, 2010) that found that nearly 80% of programs now require an internship experience. In addition, the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) has identified experiential learning projects as an integral element to be included in sport management curriculum (COSMA, 2016), and a number of sport management educators have embraced the concept, as evidenced through the publication of various experiential learning models (Sport Management Education Journal, 2017).

Although there is evidence that the majority of sport management programs require an internship experience of their students (Eagleman & McNary, 2010), there is little information regarding the implementation of other experiential learning practices within sport management programs. While some sport management educators have moved towards a more experiential, applied learning model within their classrooms, the extent to which academics across the field of sport management are applying these same techniques is unclear. And while a handful of sport management scholars have examined experiential learning outcomes within individual classroom environments (Bower, 2014; Irwin, Southall, & Sutton, 2007; Pauline, 2013; Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, & Han, 2003), a singular study has yet to provide an in-depth analysis of the widespread application of experiential learning practices across the field of sport management. In addition, no studies have examined sport management faculty attitudes towards the use of experiential learning practices and their impact on student learning.

Studying the experiential learning practices of faculty can provide insight into the current view of those in the field. In addition, a

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push for more experiential education in institutions of higher education is evident, as millennial students have come to expect an engaging and interactive learning environment (Mangold, 2007). Scholars have found that exposure to experiential education positively impacts student learning outcomes, as well as persistence and retention rates (Eylar, 2009; Pierson & Troppe, 2010). Thus, it is important to determine the extent to which faculty within sport management apply experiential learning practices both inside and outside of the classroom. The purpose of this study is three-fold: to investigate the experiential learning practices of sport management faculty, to examine faculty attitudes as they relate to the application of experiential learning practices and their impact on student learning, and, to determine the impact of academic and professional experiences on faculty attitudes towards the implementation of experiential learning techniques.

While internship programs have been widely accepted and implemented by sport management programs, scholars have noted that many students don't select an internship until their senior year, which may limit their opportunities for experiential learning. Foster, Schwarz, and Hatlem (2009), suggested that in order for students to benefit from experiential learning, they need to be exposed to multiple learning opportunities throughout their time as a student. Yang, Cheung, and Song (2016) found that recent graduates of a tourism and hospitality program positively associated experiential learning (EL) items they engaged in throughout the course of their undergraduate degree with employability skills in the workplace. Petersen and Pierce (2009) called on sport management faculty to incorporate experiential learning techniques into curriculum, noting that it provides students with an invaluable opportunity to link curriculum with sport industry practice. In their recent evaluation of sport management student preparedness, DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove (2016) suggest programs incorporate more experiential opportunities, specifically 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 in regards to providing sport management students with multiple experiential learning opportunities.

1.1. Foster and Dollar's five-step experiential learning process model

In the field of sport management, Parkhouse (2001) defined two categories of experiential learning activities: discrete and non-discrete. Discrete experiential learning activities are experiences that occur separate from the on-campus educational experience, and non-discrete experiential learning activities are experiences that occur as an extension of an on-campus learning activity. She suggests that examples of discrete experiential learning activities include cooperative education, field study, practica, internships, and service learning, while examples of non-discrete experiential learning activities include field trips, interviews, site visits, and role play activities (Parkhouse, 2001). Foster and Dollar (2010) are well known for their study of experiential learning. The Foster Five-Step Experiential Learning Process Model encourages faculty to expose undergraduate students to a variety of experiential learning practices prior to applying for their first full-time position in the sport industry, noting that students benefit from increased exposure throughout their undergraduate experience (Foster & Dollar, 2010). The five steps of the model include: volunteer exploration, apprenticeship, classroom, elective, and culminating internship. Each step within the model will be utilized as a variable within the current study, therefore a more in depth explanation of each is provided below.

1.1.1. Volunteer exploration

The concept of volunteer exploration can be summarized as a students' active involvement in which they provide hours of their time in order to assist a charitable or non-for-profit organization, as well as to gain experience in some area of the sport management field (Foster & Dollar, 2010). Volunteer exploration is similar to service learning, which has been an element of higher education learning since the late 1960s. Service learning occurs when civic responsibilities are used as a tool to connect classroom theories (You & Rud, 2010). A primary distinction between volunteer exploration and service learning is that service learning involves a classroom component, which isn't always true of volunteer exploration.

A number of studies have supported faculty use of volunteer exploration as a positive tool that contributes to student learning and growth. For example, Bennett, Henson, and Drane (2003) found that sport management students exposed to volunteer experiences had improved social interaction skills, resume building, awareness of social responsibility, development of practical skills, and interaction with others from diverse cultures.

1.1.2. Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship is defined as a formal entry level work experience that involves observation and instruction from masters, guided practice, and finally, progression into performance of tasks that ultimately leads to independent work by the learner (Ferris & Perrewe, 2014). According to Ferris and Perrewe (2014), an apprenticeship is inherently tied to the concept of mentoring, as the student relies heavily on the master or practitioner for both knowledge and guidance in a particular area.

In sport management, an apprenticeship is viewed as entry level work experience related the sport management field. While an internship is typically considered a full-time work experience completed independently by the student, an apprenticeship is just a part-time work or training experience, often with instructor supervision. And while an internship is typically completed towards the end of a student's academic career, according to Foster and Dollar (2010), an apprenticeship should be completed by the student in their freshman or sophomore year, after completing some sort of volunteer exploration. An apprenticeship is also viewed as an opportunity for students to learn about a particular segment of the sport industry, and thus, determine whether or not that is an area they want to pursue a career. An example of an apprenticeship in sport management is a student working with a minor league sports team's sales department. During the apprenticeship, the student observes a sales executive as they make cold calls, respond to customer service concerns, and fulfill sales orders. The student then has the opportunity to practice these skills, while still receiving

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