

Effectively Adapting the Sport Management Curricula

Harnessing Internal and External Resources to Address Industry-Specific Needs

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Abstract

Academic programs must constantly evolve in order to ensure that students are best prepared for success in internships and subsequent postcollegiate endeavors within the dynamic, rapidly changing sport industry. Based upon qualitative research, this work assesses and recommends areas of development in sport management curricula using internal and external resources so as to facilitate the best educational and preparatory experience for students seeking to enter this highly competitive field. This research provides a foundation from which faculty can benefit by further considering best practices in curriculum and course design as well as cross-campus and external resource collaboration to augment students' preparation in the areas of academic, experiential and professional development.

Keywords: *curriculum; experiential learning; professional development; sport management*

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In the United States, “[t]he landscape of higher education—the growing variety of higher education institutions, the cultural environment, the competitive ecosystem—is changing rapidly and disruptively ... and is as ‘seismic’ as it has been in decades” (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Institutions are experiencing financial issues, as institutional costs are rising at a time when government is providing a smaller subsidy to university budgets than in previous years, as well as technological changes, with online learning and technological mandates (“The future of universities,” 2014). This, coupled with President Obama’s goal for all citizens to obtain at least one additional year of education after high school (Wood, 2012), and the inference that universities “are now responsible for training and retraining workers throughout their careers” (“The future of universities,” 2014) to continue to learn new skills, earn more money, and be successful, has significantly changed the collective national ideology about the need for higher education. However these trends and imperatives lead to the very important question, *is college worth the cost?* Currently, student loan debt in the United States is over \$1.2 trillion and tuition has increased at almost three times the rate of inflation, yet statistics indicate that the value of a bachelor’s degree is one million additional dollars over one’s lifetime earnings (Rossi, 2014). Thus, “the choice to not go to college seems like financial suicide, even if the choice to take on debt may seem very risky as well” (Rossi, 2014). Accordingly, career preparation is of paramount importance to students (Staley & Trinkle, 2011), yet often appropriate guidance and career opportunities are not given to students and they end up with a large debt that “they won’t be able pay off in the unemployment line” (Selingo, 2015). Higher education is crucially intertwined with the economy as an important function of universities is to contribute to supplying various industries with an educated labor force (Yorke & Knight, 2004). Therefore universities and faculty face a heavy burden to find ways to make sure students are getting the most out of their degrees, and upon graduation, are not only prepared, but also armed with a skill set that augments their employability, setting them up for future success.

In academia, the foundation of our students’ preparation begins with curriculum development. Therefore, it is pivotal that we continue to challenge the norm and not become complacent with what becomes “easy” over time. As such, it is crucially important that faculty understand the complex nature of their particular field of study in order to develop comprehensive programmatic requirements to best prepare students for success in internships and subsequent postcollegiate endeavors. Therefore, when focusing on an industry with truly unique attributes such as the sport industry, it is the faculty’s responsibility to understand the complex (and changing) nature of the field in order to develop a comprehensive list of requirements and offerings. Within sport-related fields, in particular, this is vital to our students’ preparation and ultimate success and perhaps even more difficult as worker supply far outweighs the demand for new employees. Currently the number of sport management programs and graduates is much higher than the number of available positions (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008; Mathner & Martin, 2012). Therefore, what W. James Weese (1995, p. 238) articulated 20 years ago still remains true today: sport management, as a discipline, needs “to be concerned with translating theory into practice” because “if we’re not serving practitioners, then we’re not serving sport management.” Sport management faculty need to act as the critical conduit between students and the industry, providing preparatory opportunities both within and outside of the classroom with the goal of adding value to the student degrees as well as increasing their employability.

Literature Review

Rae (2007) asserts that students' employability should be considered a "core" goal of a university education, not less important or separate from academic programs. It is a concern for government entities, industry, universities, and students (Emery, Crabtree, & Kerr, 2012). Students are beginning to make the concept of finding a job and deciding on a career path an important consideration when choosing institutions and majors (Rae, 2007; Sibson, 2010). Interestingly, however, Rae (2007) reports that while employability might be an important factor, students' professional development and preparation for industry is not commensurate. Along these lines, Rae (2007) advocates personal development, applied learning, skill development, work-based learning, and career management skills be worked into curricula in order to ensure students are better prepared for their postgraduate careers. "Hiring rates and the extent of satisfaction with graduates' performance in industry are clear indicators of the quality of a university's academic program" (Tener, 1996, p. 156), and thus represent important goals for academic programs and point to the direction faculty need to move regarding overall career preparation.

As it relates to sport management, specifically, students appear to be more prepared in the career fields that most programs tend to cover through their curriculum (Yoh & Choi, 2011). Yet "little progress has been made in defining the employment standards in the sport industry and emerging discipline of sport management" (Emery et al., 2012, p. 340). Further, there is an important gap that exists between classroom-based courses and students' preparation for the "real world," career development skills, and experiential knowledge to support their future employability within the sport industry (Grasgreen, 2013; Yoh & Choi, 2011). Sport management professor Janet Fink argues that "professors must step outside their university confines more often if they hope to bridge the gap with the industry" (King, 2013, p. 16). In order to address this disconnect, better prepare our students for success beyond their undergraduate academic career, and augment employability, sport management programs should take on a comprehensive curriculum review that includes more emphasis on practical experience (Emery et al., 2012) and the incorporation of experiential and professional development opportunities (Yorke & Knight, 2004).

Little research has been conducted on why sport management students choose their major; however, it is often a "discovery major" as students learn about it once they are already enrolled at a University and decide it will be exciting due to their love of sports (Mathner & Martin, 2012; Schwab et al., 2013). Yet the majority of sport management students do not end up in a sport-related career (as cited in Schwab et al., 2013), likely because they are not equipped with the skill set nor receive the appropriate support to turn their enjoyment of sport into a viable career (Schwab et al., 2013). In fact, Chen and Shen (2012) found support was one of the biggest factors regarding whether or not students remained in a hospitality-related industry. Ultimately, this again speaks to addressing this important issue of adapting curricula to better suit both student and industry needs. Specifically, Grasgreen (2013) asserts:

Colleges need to make sure their curriculums align with the way companies work today, with fast-paced technology and social media changing data collection and communication. Employers should articulate to colleges what they're looking for in employees, and help make sure [that] what they're teaching is useful. (para. 19)

The practical application of this imperative is that institutions of higher learning need to partner and collaborate with industry-specific businesses in order to forge meaningful relationships which provide opportunities for students (“Bridge that gap,” 2013) and involve creative ways to stimulate student interest to promote their career development and future employability (Rae, 2007). There are gaps between what employers are expecting and the skill sets students are equipped with (Rae, 2007). Selingo (2015) reports that preparation for the current job market involves teaching students to apply classroom knowledge, and thus “a combination of academic experience and practical experience.” Thus the degree to which graduates are prepared to perform well within their careers “can be enhanced by effective industry-university cooperation” in the areas of “curriculum, course content, faculty qualifications and development, resources, co-ops and internships” (Tener, 1996, p.156). Not only will this type of collaboration contribute to a wider array of experiential learning opportunities, but it will also provide students with more real time exposure to organizational culture, infrastructure, and expectations (“Bridge that gap,” 2013).

As the collegiate experience has evolved, a drive toward increased experiential learning has become a major force in higher education (Cantor, 1995; Kuh, 2008; O’Neill, 2010; Rosenstein, Sweeney, & Gupta, 2012). “Experiential learning is ... a preeminent means to accomplish goals that are fundamental to the entire educational enterprise. It is a set of strategies that structure acquisition of information, analysis of ideas, and self-reflection in order to pull people into active engagement with their world” (Braid, 2008, p. 37). Twietmeyer (2013) argues that experiential learning is “absolutely vital to the field” (p. 237) as it is through these opportunities that industry “know-how” is gained in a way that “cannot be entirely encapsulated by textbooks or procedure manuals” (p. 236). In addition to gaining a network and the potential for direct employment, these experiences can also provide a student with a variety skills helpful in their future employment (Moore & Gomez, 2013). This is not a new focus for the sport management curriculum given the imperative for professional preparation in the field (e.g., Cuneen, 2004; Moorman, 2004; Stier, 2002). Previous research in the area of sport management experiential learning has focused primarily on program characteristics of and best practices relating to facilitating quality internships for students (e.g., Case, 2003, 2007; Chouinard, 1993; Cuneen, 2004; Jowdy, McDonald, & Spence, 2004; Kelley, 2004; Verner, 2004; Young & Baker, 2004), students perception of their internship (e.g., Ross & Beggs, 2007; Stratta, 2004), their ultimate career choice (e.g., Case, 2007), and the level of preparedness for this (e.g., Williams, 2004). Yet there is a dearth of literature which focuses on student preparedness for internships, field experiences, and career entry into the sport industry (Mathner & Martin, 2012).

In addition, there has been little academic exploration of sport management programs and curricula, with Eagleman and McNary (2010) and Authors (forthcoming) as notable exceptions. Curricular research is necessary to advance the sport management field, address program quality at the college and university levels, offer the best educational preparatory experience to students possible, and develop future industry leaders (Eagleman & McNary, 2010; Jones et al., 2008; Spence, Hess, McDonald, & Sheehan, 2009). It is paramount that institutions deliver “relevant programs that provide graduates with the professional competency-based sport management education required by the sport and fitness industry” (Sotiriadou, 2011, p. 542). Accordingly, following these imperatives, the purpose of this research is to articulate areas of development in sport management curricula using internal and external resources so as to facilitate the best educational and preparatory experience for students. Specifically, the following research questions guided this investigation:

RQ1: How well did the sport management curriculum prepare students for internships/pre-professional experience?

RQ2: How can the sport management curriculum be improved in relation to student preparation for endeavors in the sport industry?

RQ3: How prepared are students for their post-collegiate endeavors in the sport industry, based on their internship and academic coursework?

The following sections will cover the methods guiding this research, important findings, as well as a discussion of how best to structure sport management curricula and prepare students for career success.

Methods

Through the process of evaluating professional preparedness of sport management students, this research explores the factors deemed necessary for the development of successful future sport professionals. Specifically, the five factors assessed include: Preparation (four items—i.e., resume skills, interview skills, initiative and follow-up, ability to relate coursework to experience), Communication Skills (three items—i.e., accurate, complete, and persuasive written communication, both interpersonal and team communication, use appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues), Critical Thinking (eight items—i.e., use problem-solving techniques, adaptable/flexible thinking, critical thinking, express creative thinking methods to produce ideas, distinguish fact from opinion and critical from noncritical information, develop solutions to a problem, continuous learning, common sense), Technology (two items—i.e., effective use of software and various forms of new media), Leadership Development & Ethics (seven items—i.e., accept responsibility for your actions, resolve interpersonal and team conflicts, open-minded, team skills, appropriate business behavior and appearance, manage time and tasks, attend work regularly and on time).

The results and conclusions discussed in this article are based upon research conducted on one undergraduate sport management program at a large, mid-Atlantic University in the United States. Data collection focused on qualitative feedback from student interns and their site supervisors over four consecutive semesters, as well as qualitative data sought from an expert group of campus resource office directors.

Students

The total student sample ($n=136$) was comprised of 75% male and 25% female participants, all of whom were either juniors or seniors matriculating through the Sport Management major. All students who participated in this study did so following a program-required, for-credit internship. The majority held unpaid roles within the following types of organizations: major/minor league sport, collegiate athletics, community/private/campus recreation, health and fitness, youth sport, sport journalism/communications, sport marketing, and facility/event management. At the conclusion of each semester during the data collection period, an anonymous, confidential web-based survey was distributed to student interns requesting their voluntary participation. This data collection tool assessed measures related to their general preparedness for their internship. In total, 100 students responded to this survey (74% response rate). In addition, also at the conclusion of each semester during the data collection period, students were asked to volunteer to participate in confidential focus groups ($n=59$; 43% response rate), discussing additional concepts

related to their sport management academic and internship experiences. Trained staff from our University's career center conducted focus groups in order to minimize bias and threats to validity resulting from professors researching students. Sessions were recorded and transcribed by the researchers. Data from focus groups and the web survey was uploaded into Atlas.ti and analyzed by the researchers using qualitative coding procedures in order to identify and understand emerging themes.

The goal of the survey and the focus groups was to assess the sport management program generally, including student perceptions of the curriculum, university resources, and recommendations for change. Specific questions for students involved determining how classroom work impacted preparedness at internship sites; which courses, in particular, augmented preparation; what specific subject areas did students wish they had an opportunity to take courses in; and how did their internship impact their level of preparedness for a sport management career.

Site Supervisors

Site supervisors ($n=82$; 78% male, 22% female) were asked to respond to a qualitative assessment of their interns, via personal communications with the researchers ($n=49$, 60% response rate), which addressed various characteristics related to students' general preparedness, performance, and skill areas at their various internship sites. The information sought focused around site supervisors impressions of student preparedness for their internship experience in the areas of General Preparation, Communication, Critical Thinking, Technology, and Leadership and Ethics; how sport management curriculum meets current industry needs; recommended courses that they thought would benefit curriculum; and skills that they would like to see better developed in current/future interns. As with the students, qualitative data was loaded into Atlas.ti, coded, and analyzed.

Expert Panel

Directors of the following campus resource centers: Student Activities, Career Center, Study Abroad, Campus Recreation, and Academic Advising, comprised the experts ($n=5$; 60% male, 40% female) who participated in a professional panel discussion facilitated by the researchers/authors at a large university event. These directors play a role in on-campus student development and preparedness and accordingly, the questions they responded to centered on student professional development and experiential learning. In addition to the panel discussion, each of these five professionals, as well as a representative from University Athletics (total $n=6$; 50% male, 50% female), engaged in one-on-one meetings with the authors to further articulate their goals and ideas and to develop collaborations to augment the sport management curriculum. Within both the panel discussion and meetings, these experts discussed topics related to the way in which they currently work with students, faculty, and academic departments; how they see the various aspects of preprofessional development impacting their role/office going forward; current initiatives geared toward students' overall professional preparedness; and recommendations for ways in which faculty can work with these groups to build stronger collaborations across campus and in the community so as to facilitate student success in internship and postcollegiate endeavors. As with the other participant groups, data collected from the experts was loaded into Atlas.ti, coded, and analyzed.

Results

In general, results indicate the benefit of focusing on the three main areas: (1) curriculum redesign focusing on academic, experiential, and professional development competencies; (2) the need to use campus resources effectively; and (3) the importance of a continued understanding and connection with the industry through work and contact with industry professionals.

Curriculum Adaptations

Clear themes about how and why curriculum change should occur emerged in the data. First, students indicated that they found value in only three of their seven required sport management core academic courses: Introduction to the Sports Industry, Sport Management, and Sport Marketing (see Table 1). They also valued their Business Administration minor, finding it to be more rigorous and challenging than their other courses. Conversely, students found little value in the socioculturally focused courses that were required and offered as electives, thirsting for more business-focused, applied courses to be offered within the major.¹ Additionally, there was evidence for a more prescriptive curriculum so courses are taken at an “ideal” time during their four years, opening the door for other opportunities. This was echoed by a site supervisor, noting that

...interns that have come to me have been adequately prepared and are at the end of their college careers. As a result they have taken and/or completed the courses necessary to insure a successful experience. I guess my main recommendation would be that an internship at this site should be scheduled during the last 1-2 semesters of their college experience.

For example, many students expressed their dissatisfaction with waiting to take sport marketing until their senior year as it would have been helpful within the context of their internship and it was a course offering them good insight into this important segment of the sport industry. Site supervisors/industry professionals articulated a real lack of experiential learning competencies within interns, and thus advocated the development of new courses and assignments that included a practical, applied focus; communication skills; greater computer programs and design-applications knowledge; and sales experience.

Further, data demonstrated that the internship process/gaining practical experience is incredibly important for students' future careers as well as learning about the rigors of the industry. In particular, students indicated the need for and value in more than one internship and/or a longer, more substantial experience. One student, who noted that he had held many jobs and done an internship before, indicated that “120 hours is nothing” and suggested that other interns might not realize they need more experience to get jobs. He suggested more than one internship or longer internships. Another recognized that “the more things you're exposed to, the more likely you are to [obtain] a job.”

¹ Our research discovered that while students expressed their perceived lack of benefit from their socio-cultural courses, the professors teaching these courses get some of the highest praise from students and receive strong evaluations. Accordingly, we have strived to adapt our curriculum based on this feedback and offer it here in order to reflect on how we are preparing students for professional roles within the sport industry. We want to make it clear that this is not an indictment on faculty who teach socio-cultural courses or the place of these types of courses within sport management curricula.

Table 1*Former Sport Management Curriculum*

Major Requirements (3 ch each)	Business Minor Requirements (3 ch each)
Introduction to the Sport Industry	Accounting I
Sport: A Cross-Cultural Perspective	Accounting II
Sport Management	Microeconomics
Sport and Society	Macroeconomics
Internship	Finance
Sport Marketing	Marketing
Sport Governance, Policies, and Legal Issues	Management
Cultural Economy of Sport	Statistics

Regularly Offered Electives (15 ch required, 3 ch each)	
History of Sport in America	Leadership for Sport Professionals
Introduction to Rec. and Leisure	Sport Sales and Sponsorship
Principles of Coaching	Special Topics Courses, TBA by semester
Modern Olympic Games	Sociology of Sport
Psychology of Sport	Sport Facilities Management
Sport in Film	Sport and the Media
Second Internship	Intramurals Management

Industry professionals noted a desire for students to have completed a practical, applied project (e.g., formal, business document), as well as focusing upon skill development in areas of adaptability and “coachability,” leadership, assertiveness, communication, and organization. Additionally, findings demonstrated the importance of presenting students with various opportunities to improve their professional development skills and industry-related competencies. As one site supervisor stated, they “would recommend that before their internship they conduct some research so that they are knowledgeable about the department and programs offered.”

Of particular importance is the noted concerns/lack of expertise on behalf of the students, including their desire for increased help to find internship site placements; those who had already completed internships or were almost finished with the process being unable to communicate a focused career goal; and a lack in various professional development areas (i.e., professionalism, résumé and job searching skills/training, and communication). Specifically, public speaking was addressed, noting that “it would be beneficial to have more speaking based classes...[as] a lot of kids have a “deer in headlights” look [in this type of situation].”

Industry professionals pointed to industry and company-based research as lacking, along with the need to be more innovative, self-starters, pay more attention to detail, demonstrate better communication and follow-up, and have strong social media skills. Students also noted the need for industry-based skill development, with one noting that “it’s just important to be on top of the latest trends, whether it’s Twitter or Instagram, so if you can learn how to utilize those as a business tool...[putting] you ahead of the game in terms of the hiring process.”

Campus Resources²

Through a professional panel with campus resource directors it has been discovered that the majority of academic programs are underutilizing internal (and external) resources as faculty do not know how or who to contact to facilitate ideas. While this was noted as the case, these individuals were interested in overcoming the disconnect between the academic and support service sides of campus. One individual noted that faculty are the “critical conduit between our office and students that (faculty) see on a daily basis.” Therefore, they “provide opportunities for collaboration [with faculty]...strategizing with [the office] regarding integration into the curriculum.” Another professional encourages faculty to “actively engage in who [they] are and what they do, trying to establish practicum-based learning opportunities that partner with them, creating a win-win scenario.” A third campus resource professional noted that they are “willing to create” opportunities, and are open [to] thoughts/plans ideas...for a particular student and [they would] be willing to work with [faculty] on that.” In addition to working with faculty to achieve student-centric objectives, others also “encourage [faculty] to attend [events] to engage with the employers that the students will ultimately be interning or working with.”

While high turnover, busy schedules, alternate agendas, and stretched resources often prevent meaningful collaborations, it is crucially important to bridge this gap, as noted by each of these directors. However, while resources are limited, a common theme was the variety of options and the willingness that these individuals showed to develop opportunities to enhance the student’s ability to develop as future professionals.

Specifically, findings note that faculty should capitalize on resources to augment student learning; including, but not limited to Academic Advising, Student Activities, Study Abroad, Career Center, Campus Recreation, and University Athletics. These campus resources offer a variety of opportunities in regards to employment (i.e., learning from full-time employees in that discipline—many of which are industry related), leadership, links to additional internal and external resources, platforms for self-marketing, and insight/guidance regarding the development of discipline-specific and general (professionalism) skills. As one professional noted, in addition to the services that they provide, they are educators outside of the classroom, “instrumental in creating lifelong skill development related to teamwork, professionalism, personal responsibility, organizational responsibility, customer service, and relationship building.” Additionally, they “[like to] partner with... other offices throughout the University to achieve those things.”

Industry Resources

Findings note that this connection helps students determine their career direction, bridges the gap between academics and industry, and provides feedback on their progression and abilities. As one site supervisor stated, interactions with industry professionals is beneficial on many levels, as “[this will allow them to] learn from mistakes and advice from others. The quicker they adapt, the better they end up being.” Additionally, this assists in the development of appropriate communication styles for the workplace. According to one site supervisor:

²All stated goals and opportunities described within this section are based on the industry panel and data collected with pertinent resource office staff as discussed in the methods section.

Personally, I feel one of the most important skills for young men and women is communication. They should speak clearly and concisely, be able to exchange ideas with others, write reports, memos and letters using correct spelling and grammar. Complete work thoroughly, accurately, neatly, according to specifications and on time. And, understand that asking questions is a good thing!

The breadth of these potential opportunities is vast and can manifest in a variety of ways, many of which are possible regardless of the resources available to the academic unit. As noted by a site supervisor, one recommendation "...is to do some sort of practical project...[in my academic program] I was able to complete a document that the company was able to use for their future operations. It was great to put on my resume too."

Discussion

Overall, research with the aforementioned groups substantiates the need to continually evaluate and ensure that students are being educated in a way that is going to prepare them for entry into the sport-related career they are seeking to obtain. In general, both the students and the industry change, but what happens to programs? While faculty might have various constraints regarding this evolution, the work is vital to assist in the employability of our graduates. As noted in Selingo's work (2015), employers have stated that the most vital skill that students can learn in higher education is the "ability to learn," obtained through efforts both in and out of the classroom (i.e., major classes, outside activities, internships, leadership roles). Providing these opportunities, in conjunction with the development and dissemination of clearer objectives for internship programs, including guidelines, consultations, site visits, and support for students (Chen & Shen, 2012) have the potential to lay the foundation for student preparation and, therefore, success.

Curriculum Adaptations

Authors (forthcoming), suggest that our sport management students lacked preparedness for internships and postcollegiate endeavors, and discovered that their skills needed to be developed further in the areas of academic, experiential, and professional development. Accordingly, and in alignment with Yoh and Choi's (2011) findings that students are most prepared in career fields covered within courses, this work prompted our program to embark on a series of curriculum changes to better align with student and industry needs as they related to these three competencies. Therefore, it is important to continually evaluate and adapt curricula to maximize student benefits and keep pace with the demands of the dynamic sport industry in which students are seeking to gain employment. This will ensure that industry needs are addressed and students are prepared for new challenges that they might face as early as their fieldwork or internship experiences.

As previously indicated, students noted that they found value in only three of their seven required sport management core academic courses. Armed with this data, we sought to answer the question, how can a curriculum do a better job preparing students for the rigors of the sport industry, particularly in relation to academic, experiential, and professional development? This, aligned with the constant academic debate regarding the role of higher education as an institution of higher thinking/learning versus task-based skill acquisition leads to a delicate balance in evolution (e.g., Sutton, 2014a). Accordingly, the program of note has made significant updates and improvements to our core curriculum (see Table 2). As such, six credit hours have been added to our core requirements in the

form of experiential learning. Specifically a Field Experience course has been developed, sequenced to follow an Introduction to the Sport Industry course and precede the internship requirement, in which students will have an opportunity to improve upon their professional development skills through career-based assignments and exercises (i.e., resume review, cover letter writing, mock interviews, career panels with industry professionals, etc.) as well as the mandate to complete 50 hours of experiential learning volunteer work at a local sport-related site as part of their coursework and professional preparation for their internship experience. The internship component of the curriculum has been increased to allow for six to 12 credits (rather than three) and thus requires students participate in a more rigorous experience and allows them the option of completing a second substantial, preparatory internship for significant credit. Core course offerings have also been updated to include modifications to three existing courses. First, Sport and Cross-Cultural Perspectives has been changed to Sport and Globalization and will feature more business-related content, articulating important global relationships between sociocultural material and business/management application. Second, the Sport Governance course has been modified and condensed into a module within our Sport Management course. Finally, a Legal and Ethical Issues course has been added to keep pace with both our University's imperative to promote ethics within our curricula as well as the sport industry more generally. In addition to new course offerings and adaptations to current requirements, these recommendations led to adaptations in the sequencing of courses, with a greater level of prerequisite coursework put into place to try to enhance preparedness through various stages.

Table 2

Updated Sport Management Curriculum

Major Requirements	Business Minor Requirements (3 ch each)
Introduction to the Sport Industry (3)	Accounting I
Sport and Globalization (3)*	Accounting II
Sport Management and Governance (3)*	Microeconomics
Sport and Society (3)	Macroeconomics
Internship (6-12)*	Finance
Sport Marketing (3)	Marketing
Legal and Ethical Issues in Sport (3)*	Management
Cultural Economy of Sport (3)	Statistics
Field Experience (3)*	

Regularly Offered Electives (12 ch required)	
History of Sport in America	Leadership for Sport Professionals
Introduction to Rec. and Leisure	Sport Sales and Sponsorship
Principles of Coaching	Sport Facilities Management
Modern Olympic Games	Sport and the Media
Psychology of Sport	Intramurals Management
Sport in Film	Special Topics Courses, TBA by semester
Applied Sport Marketing*	Applied Sport Event Management*
Applied Sports Communication*	The Role of Sport Scandals*

* denotes a new or modified course offering

After considering our findings ranging across all three themes, additional elective offerings have been added, including more practical, applied experiences, competencies, and skills through projects resulting in tangible experience and students developing formal, practical documents useful in the hiring process (i.e., portfolios, business plans, etc.). Specifically, an emphasis has been placed on the inclusion of new, innovative elective courses that push boundaries and necessitate collaboration, new connections, and relationships. These courses are applied in nature, focusing on a practical experience, helping them to develop competencies in particular areas (e.g., Applied Sport Marketing and Applied Sport Event Management). These examples facilitate legitimate marketing and event management roles, responsibilities, and tasks in which students develop formal business documents and executable plans which they are tasked with putting into action. Students are responsible and accountable for the outcome of the implementation and fulfillment of their ideas, and subsequent evaluation and presentation, all within a course setting in which the professor functions as a supervisor as well as an instructor, assisting with/helping facilitate the key collaborations (i.e., University athletics department, marketing professionals, event facilities/sites, etc.) necessary for the successful implementation of student plans. Other applied, practical elective offerings for students to take advantage of have been incorporated (e.g.: Applied Sports Communications, Role of Sport Scandals), with the continued development of additional courses in the areas of Parks and Recreation and Collegiate Athletics, to name a few. Of particular note is that each of these offerings has been undertaken in collaboration with local professionals. Further, there is also the importance of working on written and oral communication skills through a course sponsored by the department or embedded within another department/college on campus. Ultimately, these additions will help to make students more marketable by improving their academic-related preparedness in the areas of experiential and professional development, particularly as the communication styles of professionals' often deviate from those of millennial students.

Campus Resources

While these curriculum modifications were both significant and necessary, it is important to note that there is no way to adequately address academic, experiential, and professional development competencies without collaborating with resources on campus to best accommodate students. For example, newly developed course offerings necessitate strong campus relationships and collaborations to facilitate not only the course but also student success and skill acquisition. Accordingly, an important step in considering modifications to a major and best practices within undergraduate sport management programs more generally led to the investigation of resources that are on many campuses in the U.S.

Thus it is asserted that one of the most important ways in which faculty can help prepare students is to help them take advantage of the services they pay for, including the areas discussed below.

Academic advising. The advising unit of the university promotes and coordinates all freshman and transfer advising, works with students experiencing academic trouble and offers counseling to undecided majors. Of particular note is advising for the major of sport management as Schwab et al. (2013) indicates that many students choose this major due to their passion for sports rather than their distinct interest in working in this industry. With appropriate direction from faculty, Advising could offer important screenings and

appropriate counseling regarding the selection of this major. Further, the type of contact that the advising office personnel have with university students affords them a platform with which to connect to students in meaningful ways, as well as the distinct opportunity to promote programs assisting students in gaining various experiential and professional development opportunities on and off campus. They also employ students as peer counselors and accept volunteers, thereby offering another way in which students can obtain valuable, transferable skills augmenting their employability.

Student activities. This office offers students opportunities in the areas of leadership development, community service, marketing/communication, event management, and the administration of student-run organizations. Additionally, they maintain a formal document on file with the university that catalogs student engagement in various activities over their time on campus and ultimately helps them articulate how their campus activities correlate to their academic competencies. This record is demonstrative of experiential development and is an example of the type of formal, professional development document employers may be looking for when hiring. Further, much like academic advising, student activities provides employment opportunities, thereby offering another way in which they can obtain valuable, transferable skills to augment their employability.

Study abroad. The staff works to incorporate the study abroad experience into students' education, ultimately working to better prepare them for future employment in the global workforce. Accordingly, they offer a professional development opportunity in the form of "re-entry training" designed to help students turn their study abroad experience into an effective marketing tool. This office strongly believes that faculty is the "critical conduit" between students and the study abroad experience. Not only can faculty communicate the message about experiential learning and internship opportunities during the study abroad experience, but also they can promote time abroad more generally. Study Abroad staff is looking to work more closely with faculty to develop study abroad opportunities benefitting students that will translate classroom competencies into life experiences, and furthermore, want to collaborate in order to better strategize on ways to internationalize curricula. Specifically, this can be accomplished through such actions as the incorporation of short-term study abroad programming through the academic program, development of internship abroad opportunities, or even the promotion of full-term opportunities that are applicable to the major via program outlets (e.g., listserv, bulletin boards, websites, classes—particularly those with a global focus, etc.).

Career center. This student resource center is best poised to help students incorporate experiential learning and professional development skills into their future employability, however many students do not take advantage of their services in meaningful ways. Specifically the career center helps students determine their career direction, offers them resources to improve their self-marketing (i.e.; resume writing, mock interviews, networking, etc.), and works to connect students with employers in various ways. Similarly to study abroad, they look to faculty to reach out to and refer students. They are looking to connect with more entities across campus to increase collaboration. The career center also strives to provide general professional preparedness training and their office mission includes a strong focus on professional development training so as to facilitate experiential learning through formal internships and job acquisition. However, again, they are relatively under-utilized, and as this research discovered, by the exact student population that claims to need more professional development assistance.

Campus recreation. This office is crucial for any sport management-oriented undergraduate program as it utilizes student employees and volunteers and tends to be one of the largest employers on campus. Through employment, students have the opportunity to liaise with many offices on campus (i.e., Risk Management, Marketing, Facility Management, etc.) and they are tasked with providing education through courses teaching health and fitness, recreation, and safety-related competencies. Ultimately Campus Recreation is instrumental in offering interested students experiential learning and professional development opportunities through employment and can assist them in building a network. Further, due to their needs, Campus Recreation has a strong desire to establish and augment practicum-based learning opportunities for students.

University athletics. Much like Campus Recreation, they are instrumental in offering students experiential learning and a professional development opportunity through employment. Through their involvement, students gain experience in a variety of college athletics-related roles and responsibilities (i.e.: operations, compliance, marketing, fan development, external relations, sales, fund development), can develop an important professional network, and build an understanding of collegiate athletics, a specialized sport industry segment. Athletics also has a strong aspirations focused around establishing and augmenting practicum-based learning opportunities for students, as well as a desire to engage with faculty to implement unique opportunities into coursework (i.e., Applied Sport Marketing and Event Management courses; “Pack the Arena” and fan development-oriented projects; fandom research and evaluation projects, etc.).

Ultimately these six areas on campus have the capacity to offer meaningful skill competencies, experiences, and developmental opportunities to students, however they are often under-utilized and therefore the authors argue that faculty should work to incorporate these (and/or other relevant) resources into their curricula in innovative and prominent ways. Of particular note are the employment and course collaboration opportunities that both campus recreation and university athletics can provide for sport management-related majors³ as a result of career interests within the major. Drawing on these resources is crucially important for students’ experiential competencies and professional development, as well as for academic curricula. All of the aforementioned campus resources offices can provide important forms of support for students as they matriculate through their academic program. However, to harness these resources, important steps need to be taken. First, faculty and resource office staff should be encouraged to form collaborative committees, promoting experiential learning and cross-campus collaboration. Second, it is important that formal methods and corresponding agreements are in place between faculty in their individual departments and each of these resources offices. Not only will this help to prevent initiatives from being dropped due to faculty/staff turnover, but it will also contribute to the official plans and procedures governing these various collaborations.

³“The umbrella term, ‘sport management,’ is broad-based enough to represent a variety of sport-related areas including, but not limited to, recreational and sport facilities; hotels and resorts; public and private aquatic, golf, and/or racquet clubs; health and fitness programming found in corporations, hospitals, private agencies and clubs, and public settings; merchandising; youth, interscholastic, intercollegiate, and professional sports; community recreation; collegiate recreational sports; armed services recreational sports; and nonprofit youth agency recreation and sport programs. Further, the sport management curriculums are flexible enough to meet the demands of student career considerations in such areas as sport leisure and recreation, sport and athletics, sporting goods industry, hostelry and travel, nonprofit agencies, and health and fitness management” (Sawyer, 1993, p. 4).

Industry Resources

The importance of internal resources can only be balanced by the incorporation of external, industry resources. While it is vital to uphold the academic rigor of a curriculum, it is a disservice to student development to not understand and progress with industry changes. Therefore, beyond the knowledge garnered by personal connections with industry professionals and the use of industry publications to link trends and current issues to theory for class discussion, it is the connection that is made between these various outlets and a program that ultimately impacts the professional development of the student (and tends to garner greater levels of consideration on the part of the student).

In an effort to bridge the gap between academics and external resources, opportunities could include courses with experiential components (e.g., field experience course with on-site hours requirements, semester-long assignments that align students with industry professionals/organizations, etc.); participation in informational interviews, student conferences, and networking events; and electives taught by industry professionals, just to name a few. In addition to the networking opportunities provided to students, various projects (particularly group-based) will also offer the opportunity to partake in an experience that mimics the environment that they will enter upon graduation. Specifically, Easter and Evans (2014) noted that

Class projects appear to be a valuable teaching methodology in sport management and recreation curriculum. Students tend to view class projects positively and recognize how working with other students on the projects parallels the work environment of professionals in their field. Students tend to report development of knowledge and skill at the conclusion of a class project. (p. 40)

Developing the relationships and/or knowledge to provide the connection to external and internal industry resources is ultimately the responsibility of the faculty member. While this practice might be limited based on a variety of factors (e.g., breadth of local industry, geographic location, etc.), it is vital to the advancement of a program to develop and strengthen these relationships in order to best prepare students for what lies ahead in the industry.

General Conclusions

This work discusses and answers a variety of questions that will assist in the progression of curricula and utilization of campus and industry resources to ensure a superior level of preparedness for and success in internships, field experiences, and subsequent post-collegiate endeavors. As previously noted, the empirical evaluation of pre-internship preparedness is an area that has received limited attention in sport. However, what has been addressed is the idea that the sports industry is changing at a rapid pace and students need to be prepared for this new market (e.g., Eagleman & McNary, 2010). This study provides a snapshot of one university's assessment of their current curriculum and, as a result of these findings, what changes could lead to a more prepared future sport professional. Theoretically, this work moves the literature beyond its initial investigation of the importance of preprofessional preparation and offers a framework for other programs to begin to analyze their curricula and relationships so as to best prepare their students for postgraduate academic and professional opportunities.

While it might result in a bit more time and effort on the part of the faculty member, it is important to always question the status quo and allow for program evolution. In addition, it is crucial that faculty are conducting research on programs via current students as well as alumni to facilitate appropriate and essential curriculum change. Moreover, faculty need to reach out to pertinent constituents, both on and off campus, that have the ability to connect with students in meaningful ways. Faculties need to work with various resource offices on campus to formally collaborate in order to support students through academic, experiential, and professional development opportunities. Further, faculty need to engage with external stakeholders in order to create opportunities for development in a way that often garners greater attention from students as well as a lasting impression for both individual growth and industry advancement (e.g., applied class projects, individual external opportunities, student/alumni/industry networking events, etc.). In general, all resources possible need to be harnessed to effectively improve all student-learning experiences (applied and classroom-based) and therefore their overall employability.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any exploratory work, there are both a number of limitations and areas of future research that must be addressed. Again, this was an assessment/snapshot of one university's program (i.e., students, site supervisors, industry contacts, university officials, etc.), which alone warrants further investigation to determine the impact that these findings could have on the curriculum. Investigating these factors at various universities (e.g., large versus small, graduate versus undergraduate, research versus teaching, etc.) would allow for a greater discussion regarding the continued evolution of student preparation, and what that means for today's professor in academe. Further, as much as this research has sought to answer important questions, many significant conundrums remain. In particular the balance between experiential learning opportunities and the assessment of these experiences from a University standpoint may be problematic. Additionally there needs to be more research and data collected on who the millennial sport management student is and how pedagogical practices can develop them into a future sport industry professional. In addition, while it is argued that engaging in the aforementioned collaborations is crucially important to move programs forward, this proposition may not be feasible for all faculty within sport management-related programs as it is time consuming and there are important considerations related to their respective value or weight in the promotion and tenure processes at many universities. However, ultimately sport management scholars must pursue answers to these important questions to move the pedagogical basis of this field forward.

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