Advancing Future Leaders of the Sport Industry: An Examination of Leadership Development, Barriers, and Opportunities to Careers in Sport

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Sport Management curriculums are offered by universities to help sport management students prepare for administrative/supervisory leadership roles within the sport and leisure industry (see Ohio State University, n.d.). However, it is to our understanding that the bridge students cross from curricula to industry contains differentiating perceived opportunities, barriers, and motivations which can impede upon a student’s transition into such leadership roles within the sport industry. Previous scholarship has identified students’ motivations for selecting sport management as a major, as well as identified what specific careers motivate students to enter the professional field of sport (Hancock & Grenwell, 2013; Kane, Johnson, & Lee, 2017; Schwab et. al., 2013). However, to our knowledge, the literature has only identified few opportunities for sport management majors (Danylchuck, 2011; DeSensi, Kelley, Blanton, & Beitel, 1990; Parkhouse, 1987), and very few barriers when transitioning from curricula to industry (Hancock, Darvin, & Walker, 2018; Sauder, Mudrick, & DeLuca, 2018; Stratta, 2004). In addition, it was also found that leadership was one of the top three criterion for hiring within various areas of sport (Desensi et. al., 1990), and that students expect access to development opportunities (Stratta, 2013) although not always offered.

We intend to address the gap in the literature by identifying additional motivations, identify existing opportunities and barriers, and pinpoint how leadership development can be used to address these variables and aid in a sport management student’s transition into the sport industry. Therefore, the purpose of this study is two-fold: first, to examine students’ motivations to pursue sport industry as a career and identify perceived barriers and opportunities; second, to understand how leadership development implementation can addresses such perceived motivations, opportunities, and barriers which in turn can ease the transition of sport management majors from curricula to future leaders within the sport industry.

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach. First, 210 undergraduate students who have selected their major as sport industry at a large Midwestern University will be surveyed to identify potential career motivations, opportunities, barriers, and needed leadership development to best support their integration into the sport industry field. To further the data collection, the researchers will conduct 4 focus groups to yield opportunities. Leadership development workshops conducted by leadership experts will be implemented to address the opportunities, barriers, and motivations of sport industry majors.

We anticipate finding that students are unprepared with leadership skills to address and conquer barriers and opportunities they may face when entering full time employment in the field of sport industry. Therefore, with the implementation of a leadership development program that addresses the identified motivation, opportunities, and barriers of sport management students, we intend to provide students with the leadership skills to address and conquer barriers and opportunities they may face when crossing the bridge from sport management curricula to sport industry. Implications will provide evidence to faculty as to how leadership can help progress future sport management students.