The Influence of Graduate Programs on Perceptions of Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Emotional Intelligence

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Graduate school provides students multiple opportunities to solidify their future plans and gain greater confidence and knowledge to be successful in their careers. For students and educators, it is important to determine if graduate school is increasing students’ ability to make career decisions and improving their skills to be successful in their fields. Although the research on teaching and learning related to graduate students is limited, these investigations should include thinking about graduate education in terms of student outcomes (Cassuto, 2015). In sport, satisfaction of sport management students at the graduate level has been measured, (Popp, Weight, Dwyer, Morse, & Baker, 2015), however, career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) and emotional intelligence have not been. The purpose of this study is to determine if CDSE and emotional intelligence change during graduate school and whether emotional intelligence impacts CDSE.

Career decision self-efficacy is the degree to which individuals believe they can complete the tasks necessary to make career decisions (Betz & Luzzo, 1981). In the context of education, previous research has examined the improvement of CDSE over time, because CDSE can be enhanced by interventions (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). For example, Komarraju, Swanson, & Nadler (2014) and Scott and Ciani (2008) found a course related to career exploration and experiences enhanced undergraduates’ CDSE and confidence in career planning. Additionally, emotional intelligence, one’s ability to recognize and manage their emotions and the emotions of those around them, can positively impact CDSE (Brown, George-Currain, & Smith, 2003; Jiang, 2014, 2016). Goleman (1998) postulated that emotional intelligence might be more important than general intelligence in predicting success in the workplace, which makes the improvement of emotional intelligence important. We hypothesize that CDSE and emotional intelligence will increase over the course of nine months in graduate school.

Participants were recruited via email from the kinesiology departments at three universities and asked to complete an anonymous survey through Qualtrics. A total of 507 students were invited with 121 starting the survey and 98 completing it. The second iteration of the survey will be sent to the same group of potential participants in April 2020. Career decision self-efficacy was measured using the CDSE-SF, a scale created by Betz, Klein, and Taylor (1996). Other researchers have examined the psychometric properties of this scale, finding it to be valid and reliable (Chung, 2002). Emotional intelligence was measured using Wong and Law’s (2002) Emotional Intelligence Scale. Differences in first- and second-year graduate students will also be explored. A comprehensive analysis of the data will be completed with results disseminated at the conference.

While undergraduate programs often go through rigorous program reviews for accreditation, graduate programs are assessed less often. It is important for graduate faculty to explore whether graduate school positively impacts students, so that we can effectively recruit students and adequately explain the benefits and outcomes of obtaining a graduate degree. Results will provide kinesiology graduate faculty with insight into changes in career choice confidence and emotional intelligence over the course of a year in graduate school.