Universal Design for Internships: Making Internships Inclusive and Accessible

Michael Odio, University of Cincinnati

Teaching/Learning - Teaching Pedagogy (Other)  
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop  
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Internships are an important educational component in sport management, but educators have limited influence in their design. Some design control is exerted through assessments for internships including journals, portfolios, and projects that are all mostly guided through Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, but other learning theories can provide additional utility. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014) provides a framework that can guide the design of internships for both educators and employers to account for student variability. This helps minimize barriers that may limit the success of otherwise qualified students and maximizing learning. The purpose of this workshop is to demonstrate and discuss how the three UDL principles can be integrated from the educator and employer perspective to make internships more accessible and pedagogically sound.

Principle 1: Provide for multiple means of engagement, including options for self-regulation, sustaining effort and persistence, and recruiting interest. Students vary in terms of career interest, and often take internships with little relevance to their career (Odio, 2017; Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014). Some may have clearly defined career paths and a job in place but still need to complete an internship requirement. Using UDL, educators and employer can design internships that account for this variability to provide students with experiences that allow for customized challenges and a focus on gaining skills relevant to them. This can include opportunities for students to have input on their goals and the type of feedback they wish to receive.

Principle 2: Provide for multiple means of representation, including options for comprehension, language and symbols, and perception. This principle acknowledges that students come from varied backgrounds with diversity in terms of disabilities (e.g., blindness, dyslexia), language and cultural backgrounds, and preferences in approaching content. Designing internships that keep these differences in mind allows for organizations to better integrate and train students into their organization, thus unlocking the benefits of diversity. Employers could create a handbook that outlines the basic terminology and tools that the student may encounter during the internship. Educator could take similar steps as they outline the requirements for their internship course.

Principle 3: Provide for multiple means of action and expression, including options for executive function, expression and communication, and physical action. Common assessments like journals, portfolios, and projects allow students to monitor and analyze their growth and progress towards goals (Williams & Colles, 2009). Still, educators can gain add more elements derived from this principle, including allowing students to express themselves using audio and visual means, and to update or adjust their goals during the internship in order to ensure these goals remain relevant and at an appropriate level of challenge. Employers can similarly review their practices to ensure that students can explore multiple methods of expression so that they can more effectively communicate and contribute to the organization.

The workshop will provide additional examples and resources for each principle, and participants will be invited to discuss challenges and opportunities for new related research and pedagogy.