

Analyzing sport management students and their internship behaviors and pathways



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Abstract

This study investigates the internship behaviours and pathways of postsecondary sport management students in Canada aiming to reveal potential patterns and factors that have influences the students' experience. The research employs an analysis from collected data of sport management students at a medium sized Canadian university who graduated from 2010-2020. The results provide valuable insights on sport management behaviours of internship completions. Nevertheless, these findings are particularly important for academic institutions to refine their curriculum and for sports organizations to revise their hiring processes and requirements.

Keywords: *sport management; internship behavior; curriculum*

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1. Introduction

The financial crisis of 2008 had a major impact on North America's professional sport leagues; National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball League (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Major League Soccer (MLS) (Humphreys, 2010). These North American professional sport leagues had a heavy reliance on consumer spending through single game and season ticket sales, concessions and other game day spending and licensed merchandise (Humphreys, 2010). Moreover, Humphreys (2010) emphasizes how sports organizations faced great difficulties due to their organizational structure, decreased consumer expenditure, diminishing corporate support, sponsorship cutbacks and an unpredictable economy. In response of these added challenges posed by the recession, sport managers needed to implement various strategies to survive including cost-cutting measures, diversification of revenue streams and profit maximization. Businesses cut costs by laying off employees and reducing expenses on other inputs to production (Humphreys, 2010). Sport organizations became accustomed to this efficient model where less staff could produce great results.

Since the recession, the sport industry has intensified as it has experienced one of the biggest growth periods seen thus far. According to Gough (2023) the global sports industry revenue amounted to nearly 487 billion U.S. dollars and was expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.2% between the years of 2022-20232. It is estimated that by 2027, the global sports market is expected to be worth over 623 bil-

lion U.S. dollars (Patel, 2023). This industry encompasses the people, activities and organizations that are involved with producing, managing, facilitating and organizing sports activities. As the sport industry has seen significant growth and change within the last twenty years, it is key for sport management graduates to remain current in their field of study. There are vast opportunities for graduating students as employment rates in the sport-related industry has increased by 12.6 percent between 2010-2014, and the national job market grew by 5.5 percent. (CareerBuilder, 2014). With great employment demands in this sector, universities began adopting sport management programs at their respective universities due to student interest (Jones et al., 2008).

The rapid growth in the sport industry and an equally aggressive rate of graduating sport management students has forced students to gain a competitive edge on their peers. Employers consider numerous factors when vetting new employees, but the resources associated with training is especially significant. Recent graduates are often disadvantaged due to of the high cost training them based on their perceived lack of experience or expertise in their field, especially when compared against more experienced applicants or internal hires. Furthermore, the projected costs of upskilling a recent graduate quickly balloon if they are seen as having gaps in their industry specific knowledge, business acumen, or the organization's specific mission, vision, and values (Zao-Sanders & Kelly, 2019). Internships, as a practice, appear to address these gaps and have become a fixture of North American capitalist economies, especially as labor trends in North America shift

away from traditional roles and towards more inconsistent, ad hoc positions. Scholars have conducted research on the laws surrounding unpaid internships in North America (e.g., Curiale, 2010) and the overall benefits of experiential work placements or further education for the students and academic institutes (e.g., Weible, 2010), but there is an absence of research on students' pathways.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the patterns and potential factors influencing internship behaviors and pathways among postsecondary sport management students. Accordingly, proposing the challenges that sport management students may face when seeking to obtain the competitive advantage needed over their peers. This study will provide valuable insights that academic institutions can leverage to potentially improve their curriculum, refine organizational hiring processes, and better prepare students for successful careers within the sports industry. As scholars continue to unveil and understand the challenges and barriers sport management students face when seeking to do the advised, completing a deep dive of sport management students' behaviors and paths within an academic institute is imperative. This study builds upon Silva's (2021) research examining the barriers un-paid internships impose towards certain groups in Switzerland by extending the analysis to the Canadian landscape of the sports industry. This study can also be used for employers in positions of legality and policies, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), operations and competitive strategy as well as the managers/ chief operating officers who are seeking to further grasp the student's perspective when seeking em-

ployment at their organization. Also, notably important for the academic institutes and prospective sport industry professionals.

Specifically, this paper will analyze students' academic experience in a medium-sized school majoring in sport management in Canada. Data were collected from one sport management institution and its graduates over a 10-year span of time (2010-2020), including various elements such as their grade point averages (GPA). Additionally, graduates were cross-referenced on LinkedIn for analysis of items such as; number of internships completed, first employment postgraduation, as well as any completion of a master's degree to explore for patterns and/ or trends regarding their career paths. In an industry that will continue to gain competitiveness, it is important to further consider the way(s) in which students prepare themselves as they seek to enter the sport industry.

2. Literature Review

Commercial/Professional Sector

A historical review demonstrates that the sport industry was much more simplistic in its infancy in comparison to the twenty-first century. The concept of making money from sports began when William H. Cammeyer charged an admission fee at baseball games in 1862 (Gregg et al., 2017). From there, the industry has continued to grow through actions such as the formation of intercollegiate sports, the development of the Major League Baseball Association and in 1983, the introduction of the NBA salary cap (Gregg et al., 2017). Sport management students' vocations within the sport industry have been found to be within the professional sport and/or collegiate

level (Kjeldsen, 1990). Students often pursue employment in the sport industry due to the promotion and celebratory attraction driven by television or social media; however, the image may not often be the reality of the actual occupation (Kjeldsen, 1990).

Working within the professional sector of the sport-related industry allows one to receive a great level of benefits and opportunities for individuals to learn and develop their skills. Brown et al., (1990) explored how individuals receive their training in larger businesses, including corporations, and it was found that new employees received an excessive number of hours for formal and informal training in organization with over 500 employees. Not only do individuals have the opportunity to receive more training directly impacting their ability to garner and sharpen their skills, but scholars have found that the productivity levels are increased due to competitiveness (Brown et al., 2018).

Corporations are also able to offer greater salary and benefit packages, attracting recent graduates as they seek to pay off potential student debt (Kjeldsen, 1990). The large corporation brands that are heavily involved and known within the sport industry can include but are not limited to Nike, ESPN, Adidas and Gatorade (Ozanian, 2021). As the sport industry continues to grow, it is not only attracting corporations to become involved through sponsorship but also as corporate owners. Several team owners within the North American professional leagues are encouraged to have corporate ownership, including the NBA and the NHL (Harvey, 2001). Several of the professional teams, which include the five major sports

leagues in North America; (NHL), (NFL), (NBA), (MLS) and the (MLB), are corporations. More recently, the emergence of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) is a prime example of the industry's growth, opportunity for industry experience and learning (ESPN, 2023).

Internships

Modern (North American) internships began in the late 19th century, and their focal point of these experiential learning opportunities was the transition of medical students to physicians. From its origins in hospitals apprenticeships, this experience of professionalization has followed in nearly all employable sectors (Wentz, 1984). As the sport industry grew and diversified after the 2008 financial crisis, internships have found their way into the sport industry culture as these experiences have been proven to be key for sport management students as they seek to enter the workforce (Walker et al., 2020).

Sport industry internships allow students to work with organizations where they seek to gain valuable tools and build their network (Elizabeth, 2008). The more students immerse themselves in their classrooms and apply that knowledge in practical experiences, the greater the probability employers will be attracted to them in the overly competitive field (Brown et al., 2018). For example, the Sports Business Journal (2015) surveyed over 2,000 senior-level sport industry executives spanning professional and college sport on the most important factors for the success of a sport management student. Results concluded that 51% of the senior-level executives considered internship experiences as the most important (Sport Business Journal, 2015). Research illustrates the importance

of internships, yet many students do not complete these professional development opportunities even though they will be gaining crucial knowledge that will allow them to gain that competitive edge on their peers. In contrast, some organizations are seeking for economical workforce (Walker et al., 2020) a trend that has changed the culture of the sport industry. Hence, are students not taking advantage of internships due to the newly embedded culture within the sport industry of these unpaid internships? Furthermore, Walker et al., (2020) explains how it is now the norm for students or recent graduates to work multiple unpaid internships to better their chance of getting a full-time position in the sport industry. Therefore, sport industry-related internships are only attractive and possible for individuals capable of working without pay for a full summer (approximately 18 weeks), creating inequality and an added barrier. The individuals that can do so will give these sport management students the needed access to differentiate themselves from their graduating class as they receive an opportunity to network, garner new skills and apply theory to practice. More importantly a report conducted by Galarneau & Gibson, 2020 and published by Statistics Canada provided valuable insights regarding students' financial situations after postsecondary graduation, potentially affecting student' completion of internships and ability to complete internships. Moreover, according to Statistics Canada "Between 2000 and 2015, one in two postsecondary graduates graduated with student debt" (Galarneau and Gibson, 2020). With COVID-19 hitting shortly after it can only be assumed that similar trends occur to this day. This is

important to consider as this study analyzed Canadian sport management students from a medium-sized school in Ontario between the years of 2010-2020. Relatedly, many students already face debt, and the sport industry places constraints for these individuals to earn sufficient funds during the crucial summer months when they seek to obtain money for the upcoming academic year. Overall, the students who are not able to adhere to the sport industry internship norms miss out on the ability to build their network and gain the experience needed to lead to full-time positions.

Despite the known benefits of internships, not all students complete these experiences and scholars have analyzed the key factors affecting the internship rates completed in North America. As professional sport leagues sought to minimize costs during and after the 2008 depression, unpaid internships continued to evolve and be imbedded in the industry's culture (Chancer et al., 2019). Furthermore, scholars have begun using the term intern economy to further understand the internships as a system and model (Hawzen & King-White, 2022).

One of the most pressing arguments against unpaid internships is that they impose a barrier to certain individuals within mid-low socio-economic status (Hora, 2022). Intern experience leads to better employment outcomes, yet only individuals from relatively advantaged backgrounds can afford an unpaid stint of 3 to 6 months, resulting in unequal access for individuals of more modest means (Silva, 2021). More importantly, the industry has such high value for these internships as they provide crucial experien-

tial learning, but studies have found that site supervisors and other employees in the workplace have little reservation offloading their low-level tasks to interns which they have described as ‘busy work’ (Corrigan 2015). As opposed to the expected high-quality learning, scholars have argued that sport management internships are commonly experienced and rationalized as a form of ‘hope labor’ (Hawzen & King-White, 2022). The logic behind this theory of hope labour further relies on the concept that internships often promises that “experience” and “exposure” needed to gain the competitive advantage but consequently do not (Hawzen & King-White, 2022).

The Canadian Landscape

As Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah (2020) argue “The emergence of internships as a form of educational training, paid and un-paid ... is occurring at a time marked by increasing joblessness and precarious employment”. Additionally, others have supported the conclusion that internships lead to improved success rates for recent graduates seeking employment (e.g., Cai et al., 2015; Öncel, 2014; Tolentino et al., 2014). Combining work experience through internships with a degree-level of study has been seen as a key differentiator for securing employment upon graduation in a competitive employment market (Brooks & Youngson, 2016). This not only applies to North American academic programs in general, but, as this study demonstrates, this correlation specifically relates to sport management and the subsequent career opportunities internships afford. A key consideration for students seeking future employment in the sport industry is the potential to attain these coveted roles, so applying for internships is the logical

and proven first step in that process. While the individual reasons for eschewing internships are many and varied, including personal circumstances, preferences, and interests, there are unique factors that distinguish sport management students in Canada, specifically, from other programs in North America.

As employment in the sport industry continues to evolve in Canada, it continues to perpetuate many barriers and structural issues that are directly associated with the internship system. There are many well-established criticisms of internships, with critics arguing that the process of selecting candidates for unpaid or underpaid internships actively recapitulate pre-existing power structures. We begin to see the internship system as a set of social mechanisms that differentially include and exclude populations along intersecting lines of age, class, gender and race (DePeuter et al., 2015: 331). Thus, the problem not only lies within the concept of unpaid internships, but its influence on the demographic composition who are able to apply for these positions (Levkoe, & Offeh-Gyimah, 2020).

This inconvenient truth around internships in the sport industry has gained such cultural currency that it is now the norm for students or recent graduates to work multiple unpaid internships to better their chance of getting a full-time position in the sport industry (Walker et al., 2020). In contrast, employers are heavily advantaged by unpaid internships as they gain access to significant help and quality work in an affordable manner (Walker et al., 2020). Unpaid internships exacerbate the problem of wealth inequality by inculcating in our youngest workers the expectation that a certain

amount of unpaid work is a necessity for success in the contemporary economy (Discenna, 2016).

Luxurious Jobs

Thousands of young professionals are drawn to the luxurious employment opportunities within the sport industry as an avenue to pursue a career aligning with their fan interests and within a field known through media portrayals of celebrity, action, and excitement. However, the media of today may not paint the real story of day-to-day experiences of those who work in sport (Weight et al., 2021). The inconvenient truth about working in the sport industry has attracted the attention of several scholars as employees face several challenges as they finally obtain and begin their careers with these luxurious jobs.

Working in the sports industry can come with several benefits, that sports fans crave. Having front-row seats at sporting events, meeting the sport professionals and working in a fast-paced environment with exciting day-to-day responsibilities seems ideal for several (Twaro, 2023). The harsh reality is these jobs can often require an extensive amount of dedication and hours with low pay (Twaro, 2023). Unfortunately, due to the number of people who wish to work in the sport industry being far greater than the available positions it creates an environment where sport organizations do not feel the pressure to provide competitive compensation packages.. According to the State of Sport Hiring Report within Twaro's (2023) research 64.6% of respondents were employed within the sport industry, but were seeking opportunities elsewhere and other firms/ organizations.

Even more notably 21.5% of sports employees looking for a new job are doing so because

they are unsatisfied with their pay" (Twaro, 2023). Pay is a significant stressor within the sport industry and is creating a large problem in staff turnover within the sport industry. According to Twaro (2023) the 2020-22 turnover rate for college athletics was 48%. As sport management students seek to better themselves and grasp every opportunity to obtain these jobs through un-paid internships, they also face financial crisis once they enter the workforce.

Financial instability is not the only issue when working in sport, burnout, high stress levels, family prioritization are also common problems seen with sport industry employees (Weight et al., 2021). Scholars have begun diving into the real lifestyle and the sport industry culture. Words like workaholism, difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities, discrimination and anxiety have been used to describe this industry (Weight et al., 2021). The inconvenient truths of the sport industry must be told and publicly known as sport management students seek to map out their careers.

3. Methodology

Data Collection

This research was initiated by reviewing records of sport management students from a medium-sized school in Ontario between the years of 2010-2020, which were contained in multiple .CSV files. This data was supplemented by cross-referencing students' LinkedIn profiles, a public social media platform that focuses on professionalization to further identify the students' post graduate route. Prior to collecting the additional data

on LinkedIn, it was important to clean and organize the .CSV documents as it was, a critical step in the process to ensure the foundational data was prepared for further analysis. Following the cleaning of the data, additional categories for data collection points were added to each graduation year. Those additional categories included convocation dates, first employer, still active in first job, length of service at first job, year of first job, number of internships completed, Master of Business Administration (MBA) completion, at same location or completion at a different university than undergraduate degree, and any researcher's comments. A total of 1,329 sport management graduates were collected over the 10-year span.

Data Analysis

After collecting data to address the research question (i.e., what are the discernible patterns and influential factors affecting internship behaviors and pathways among postsecondary sport management students in Canada?), a descriptive analysis was completed through the use of charts and tables. Specifically, correlation test and averages were calculated. Examples of such analysis include tables presenting the number of graduates per sector, the percentage of graduates who completed an MBA at their undergraduate academic institute or at another university/ college, and the total number of internships completed per year.

4. Results

The results in this research focus on the sport industry itself, its growth, and behavior of Canadian sport management undergrads through-

out their academic journey. Specifically, an analysis of internship completion rates and further professional academic development such as an MBA was considered and analyzed. Data analysis of these key points is presented in a progressive manner and can be reviewed in Tables 1-3.

Professional Development and the Student Experience

The following results seek to determine possible trends and reasons for the behaviors of sport management graduates at a medium-sized university in Canada. While the typical American and European route is rather known for sport management students, these results help one better understand the Canadian sport industry internship ecosystem for sport management undergrads. The development of several charts and tables allowed for an analysis regarding trends and/or correlations of sport management students' journeys. Looking at overall internship completion rates and further academic journeys such as MBA help encompass a student's experience as they seek to develop the necessary skills and gain a competitive advantage in the labor market.

Internship Completion Rate

Internship completion rates and GPAs also revealed key findings that are key to understanding any possible trend or reasoning for the behaviors or journeys of these sport management students. Analysis was completed on the number of students who completed zero, one, two, three or four internships throughout their academic journey. The results revealed that as the majority of students do not complete internships despite the well-known benefits. Table-1 reveals that 50% of the sport management students from a Canadian medium-

sized school between 2010-2020 did not complete an internship while, 41% of those who completed an internship only completed one. It is important to note that, Table-1 revealed the number of internships completed per student and its overall positive

increase over the last ten years. In 2015, the number of students with 1 internship completed decreased significantly and spiked the following year (2016).

Table 1

Total Number of Internships Per Number - Per Year

Year	0 Internships (#)	1 Internship (#)	2 Internships (#)	3 Internships (#)	4 Internships (#)
2010	38	10	1	0	0
2011	36	17	3	1	0
2012	46	19	1	0	0
2013	49	20	3	0	0
2014	59	29	8	0	0
2015	20	15	1	0	0
2016	60	46	9	0	0
2017	65	55	7	0	0
2018	51	63	9	0	0
2019	38	70	18	0	1
2020	29	63	23	5	1
TOTAL #	491	407	83	6	2
TOTAL%	50	41	8	1	0

Correspondingly, the number of students who did not complete any internships throughout their academic journeys drastically decreased in 2015 and then jumped back up till 2017, but but steadily decreased again from 2018-2020, potentially due to COVID-19. Notably this trend allows one to

assume that as the benefits of internships began to be known to students, the greater the interest leading to an increase in completion rate. While the overall number of internship completion rate had a steady growth from 2015-2019, it is important to highlight that nearly half of the students in a ten-year span

did not pursue this type of experiential learning.

Grade Point Average

In a student's career trajectory, the Grade Point Average (GPA) assumes a significant advancement. However, the current

study found no association between a student's GPA and the number of internships completed. According to the data in Table-2, the analysis revealed a weak or non-existent relationship between these two factors.

Table 2

Correlation Between GPA's and Internships Completed

Year	Correlation(#)
2010	-0.0386
2011	0.1973
2012	0.2320
2013	0.0230
2014	0.3522
2015	0.4033
2016	0.1600
2017	0.2493
2018	0.1120
2019	-0.0549
2020	0.1965

Despite the popular opinion that GPA can have an impact on a graduate's job advancement and placement, the research findings imply otherwise (see Table-2), calling into question the idea of a direct association between academic success and internship completion. This discovery may stimulate a re-evaluation of the elements that are genuinely perceived to control students future career success and the need for academic institutions to rather focus their curriculum on experiential learning rather than students overall GPAs. Emphasizing the need for broad experiential learning opportunities beyond academic excellence. This finding may otherwise demonstrate that students who may not perform at an academic excellency level can still pursue the opportunity to advance themselves through experiential learning such as internships. As a result, when seeking to understand sport management students, students must continue to explore and understand the positive impact that these internships may have when seeking to obtain employment.

Employment Job Sector

The Canadian landscape of the sport and entertainment industry is slightly different as there are only 7 NHL teams, 3 MLS teams, 1 NBA team and 1 MLB team comparatively to 32 NHL, 29 MLS, 30 NBA and 30 MLB teams. For Canadian sport management students whose vocation are often to be employed and obtain internships with a professional team it is extremely limited and se-

lective. Furthermore, with the use of the university's data and the cross-refencing with LinkedIn an analysis of where recent graduates gets employed was complete. The number of students and the percentage for recent graduates' first and second jobs can be seen in Table-3. The top four categories of recent Canadian sport management graduates first job can include (1) small business, (2) commercial, (3) non-profit sector, (4) semi-professional and professional. The findings are notable as Canadian students have the vision and goal to obtain employment in the professional sector but have an immediate barrier due to the sole number of teams. Consequently, Canadian sport management students obtain employment in non-traditional sectors within the sport industry.

It is not surprising to see these sectors within the top four due to the location of the study being in Canada. There are 58 National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in Canada which is more than three-times the professional sector (Heritage, 2022). Throughout a ten-year span of Canadian sport management graduates nearly 15% found home at a non-profit. The commercial sector continues to see an increase in businesses in Canada with registering over 450,000 active commercial businesses (Corporation Canada, 2020). Relatively, the commercial sector attracted 25% of the medium sized Canadian school sport management graduates' post-graduation. More notably 30% of sport management graduates from 2010-2020 ended up at a small business.

Table 3

Total Number and Percentage of Sport Management Graduates Per Sector Through Years 2010-2020

Sector	Total Count (#)	Percentage (%)	Job1 (#)	Job1 (%)	Job2 (#)	Job2 (%)
Academic	90	5	33	5	57	5
Agency	19	1	8	1	11	1
Analytics	15	1	7	1	8	1
City	24	1	8	1	16	1
Event Management	3	0	1	0	2	0
Financial	95	5	33	5	62	5
Government	32	2	9	1	23	2
Junior Hockey	86	5	34	5	52	4
Marketing	66	4	27	4	39	3
Corporation	246	14	77	12	169	14
Non-Profit	223	12	84	13	139	12
Professional	211	12	78	12	133	11
Recreational	75	4	27	4	48	4
Small Business	543	30	179	28	364	31
Transportation	93	5	41	6	52	4
Commercial	457	25	155	24	302	26
Grand Total	1175	100	646	100	1175	100

5. Discussion

The field of sport management has seen an increase in research that predominantly focuses on the industry's growth, or-

ganizational frameworks, models, and overall structure of the field within the US and the European countries. While these avenues of research are important, additional research must also be completed on the students' academic and professional journeys within the

Canadian ecosystem. This study aimed to identify sport management students' behaviors' focusing on experiential development such as internships opportunities and MBA completion as well as challenges Canadians face when entering the industry.

The study contributes to sport management literature as it analyzes the Canadian landscape within the sport industry and how it affects students when seeking experiential opportunities and future employment. This study can be used for employers in various positions and divisions within the sport industry. It is important to understand the ecosystem in Canada as employers begin to make job requirements and postings. It can also be important for the legal and DE&I team as they seek to better understand the frameworks and barriers that some may face when seeking to apply to their organization. Lastly, academic institutes can also gain knowledge from this study as they seek to implement or change the curriculum for their sport management undergraduates' program, adding, removing or mandating internships to graduate.

There are consistent findings with previous literature regarding the percentage of sport management students completing internships throughout their undergraduate journeys at this medium-sized Canadian University. While the completion rate of college interns in the USA is near 60% (Parker, 2023) this statistic can be compared to just over 50% of students completing internships throughout their journeys. So, what does this

mean to the sport management departments and faculty staff that only half of their students are engaging in experiential learning such as internships? There must be an added focus, attention and reward, by the institution for students to complete these vital learning and development experiences. A suggestion for the medium-sized sport management programs may be to build regional partnerships between the sports organizations and university. It would also be important for academic institutions to mandate an experiential learning component to their curricula in order to graduate. This could be completed through full term internship, in-house volunteering through the institutes athletic department, sports events hosted in the area as well as an internship course in order to prepare students for the experiences they will have in throughout their academic journey.

The Canadian sport industry reveals a distinctive trend when its various sectors are analysed, adding an intriguing dimension to the study. Several sport management graduates did not find employment at their vocations within the professional sector of the sport industry. This is important to highlight as the Canadian ecosystem is compared to other geographic locations who offer sport management programs. While the professional sports landscape is growing in Canada it is not nearly as developed as the USA, where most studies are conducted. Furthermore, obtaining employment in one of the twelve professional sports teams in Canada is increasingly difficult. Hence, being able to

analyse the pathways sport management students take in Canada has opened opportunities for new markets. The results suggest that recent graduates are making ways in small businesses or the commercial sector. The hockey landscape in Canada is comparable to the professional sport sector in the US or Europe. The Canadian Junior Hockey League encompasses 10 different junior hockey leagues (131 teams). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to highlight the junior hockey sector as it carried an abundance of internships completed and provides several opportunities for future employment. In Canada junior hockey is nearly categorized as a standardized sector due to the comprehensive number of teams reaching across the country, seeing this division shine within the Canadian landscape of the sport industry.

Overall, the results of this study present an opportunity for sport organizations to reconsider their hiring process and internship models. This study could also lead academic institutes to re-model their undergraduate curriculum in Canada. The biggest area of interest in this research is the internship completion rate among Canadian sport management graduates. While the number of internship completions increased throughout the ten-year span, it is important to consider the growth and interest of the industry itself. The results from the study are crucial to understand and cannot be overlooked. The workforce is increasingly misleading for students as there is a growing concern in the private

sector regarding employability of new graduates and the assumed readiness of recent program graduates (Gismond, 2022). Hence, students seek out internship opportunities, but are not accessible for all.

6. Conclusion

Results demonstrated that students had completed limited sport management internships, yet literature review suggests that experiential learning through internships can be a way to become a more knowledgeable and/or skilled professional. Specifically, these concerns regarding internship practices are exacerbated by the financial and geographical realities facing Canadian university graduates. This higher level of accumulated debt is due to many factors, one of which is rising tuition costs. On average, Canadian undergraduate tuition is 13 times higher than it was in 1972, and almost double if tuition matched inflation (Wong, 2023). Furthermore, the average number of undergraduate students in student debt upon graduation was 54% as of 2015, the average amount owed was \$28,000 with 45% of graduates owing over \$25,000 or more (Government of Canada, 2015). Given the levels of student debt burdening the average Canadian undergraduate, those encountering financial difficulties upon entering university are even further disadvantaged upon graduation. This means that those entering programs without socioeconomic support are likely to accrue even more debt throughout the program, making the prospect of working for little to no compensation

especially onerous. While sport management students are not necessarily unique in facing these financial challenges, when combined with the demand for extremely competitive internships, their situation becomes particularly precarious.

Another compounding factor specifically affecting sport management students is the relative scarcity of such programs offered by Canadian universities, often causing students interested in the field to re-locate large distances to attend universities with programs of choice. With only a few sport management programs, and eight being at the university level, Canadian students are forced to spread out across the country traveling thousands of kilometers. Canadian students that are forced to move away from home for university often take a significant financial burden, when accounting for relocation, travel home, and other personal costs associated with geographical dislocation. In choosing to study Sport Management, which is only offered at a small selection of Canadian universities, most students are forced to endure these additional costs and more likely to need outside financial aid, including through part-time work. Acknowledging these factors leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that Sport Management students are uniquely vulnerable to the recapitulation of unequal power dynamics present in the internship process.

Overall, this study allows sports organizations to critically analyze their internship structure and hiring processes in order to

reduce the socioeconomic gap between students seeking experiential learning through internships. It is also critical for academic institutions to acknowledge the low internship completion rate and to make crucial decisions moving forward with their curriculum. Changes could be made in order to prepare their students for the sport industry and provide all students with an opportunity to apply theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios. Considering the lack of internships by students an attention is needed in order to improve and bridge the gap between socioeconomic classes.

Although internships have been shown to increase future employment prospects for new graduates, skyrocketing student debts and the strains placed on Sport Management students in Canada must be accounted for as possible reasons for an apparent lack of interest. These persisting obstacles, alongside the evolving world of work and increasing precarity of roles within the sport industry, makes students less likely to complete internships, even when they are aware of the potential benefits these internships offer.

7. Limitations and Future Direction

Despite this study's broad applicability, there are still many opportunities for further research, especially given the dynamics of a changing sport management landscape that welcomes new pedagogical techniques with each passing year. While the present study does not adopt a global scope, broader,

more holistic studies are possible, and indeed necessary, beyond the geographic specificity of our present study. Limitations are noted within this study and can include the sample size and the utilization of a single data collection platform to cross-reference. Although the overall sample size had a large number of students analyzed, they were all from the same school. Specifically, the sample size for this research only included one medium-sized postsecondary institution. The amount of data collected only represents one Canadian school out of the few academic institutes that have a sport management undergraduate program. In addition to the sample, the graduate's information, which was collected from 2010 through 2020, could be argued as offering a snapshot, rather than providing an overall picture.

A second limitation to this research was the cross-referencing data collection platform used; LinkedIn. Only one social media platform was used to cross-reference the Excel files to provide further insight on sport management students' academic journey and employment sectors. Furthermore, the evaluation of students' academic journeys and further professional development was only evaluated through LinkedIn, which had an impact on the results if graduates did not have this platform. Other social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter were not used to cross-reference the student's journey in Canada. Lastly, the evaluation of students' journeys which could demonstrate profes-

sional development was not used in this research, thus a limitation of this study.

Given the results of the study, it would be valuable to conduct comparable analysis to other medium-sized universities and colleges. In addition, it could be valuable to compare the academic journey of sport management students at either a small, medium or large sized school and look for either correlations or differences in experience and exposure. Using several social media platforms for cross-referencing could also be beneficial to increase validity. Additional considerations for future research also include studying the level of networking a student does throughout their sport management undergraduate career and impact on their ability to complete internships and obtain future employment within their desired sector.

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