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*Experiential learning from an international perspective: An empirical study of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand*

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**Experiential Learning from an International Perspective:  
An Empirical Study of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**

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**Abstract**

Curricular and co-curricular experiential learning has become a vital component of higher education degree programs. This study examined the evolution of experiential learning in sport management from an international perspective. Self-administered surveys were completed by 98 sport industry organizations in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to analyze industry practitioners’ perceptions of the importance of various general education/liberal arts, business management, and sport management competencies gained through the sport management curriculum. Furthermore, it aimed to determine whether there was an optimal level of experiential learning from industry practitioners’ viewpoints. The results highlighted the continued and evolving importance of experiential learning within college/university degree programs, and that experiential learning builds beneficial partnerships that prepare students to become future sport management industry practitioners.

**Keywords:** experiential learning, sport management curriculum, practicum/internship, competencies

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## Introduction

The evolution of curricular and co-curricular experiential learning through outside of classroom learning experiences has progressed within higher education (Seidman & Brown, 2006), and become a vital component of sport management degrees (Bower, 2013; Brown et al., 2018; Pierce et al., 2011; Sattler, 2018; Sheptak & Menaker, 2016). Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as “The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combinations of grasping and transforming the experience” (p. 41). Higher-education institutions utilize practica/internships, apprenticeships, work-integrated learning, and placements to infuse experiential learning within the educational process for students at all levels of learning.

The experiential learning component within a higher education degree can range from approximately 30 hours to 750 hours, relative to course requirements and credits allocated to the placement (Ferkins & Fleming, 2004), and occurs within a wide range of government, commercial, and non-profit organizational settings. This allows students to apply classroom-learned theory while performing work-related tasks specific to the organization in a supervised practical working environment (Davie & Watson, 1988; Light & Dixon, 2007; Schaafsma, 1996). This has enabled students to learn through experience (Maye, 2013), or by doing (Dewey, 1986), with the community serving as the laboratory for applying knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom (Bower, 2013; Eames & Coll, 2010).

In 1993, the North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM), the pre-eminent sport management academic association in the United States and Canada, and the National Association

55 for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) included experiential learning as a required component  
56 of the Sport Management Program Standards and Review Protocol (Eagleman & McNary, 2010;  
57 Sport Management Program Review Council, 2000). In recent years, experiential learning has  
58 evolved through the creation of the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) as  
59 part of the integrated experience core professional competency standards, which were created in  
60 2008 (Commission on Sport Management Accreditation, 2016; Eagleman & McNary, 2010).

61  
62 In accordance with the maturation of experiential learning in sport management education, the  
63 purpose of this study was to investigate sport industry practitioners' perceptions of competencies  
64 gained by students through their course of study and, specifically, the integrated experiential  
65 learning activities as well as the requisite level of experiential learning considered appropriate to  
66 gain a career in the sport industry. The subsequent marketability of students who had undertaken  
67 experiential learning activities was also explored. The following review of literature illustrates the  
68 importance and benefits of experiential learning in a student program of study. However, there is  
69 limited information relating to optimal academic preparation in the literature; therefore, this  
70 research intends to fill this gap.

71

## 72 **Review of Literature**

### 73 **History of Experiential Learning**

74 In the 1930s, John Dewey was one of the first philosophers to emphasize practicality in  
75 education. Dewey viewed formal curricula as authoritarian, with input provided by a select few  
76 'all-knowing' academicians. He believed that practical and varied experiences better prepare  
77 students for life in the future as a whole; therefore, learning through varied activities was more

78 beneficial than traditional formal curricula (Dewey, 1986, 1997). The framework of this belief,  
79 combined with philosophical concepts related to William James' (1907) pragmatism, resulted in  
80 the birth of his philosophy of experimentalism. The purpose of experimentalism is the  
81 construction, through regular steps based on prepared plans, of a typical case formed with explicit  
82 reference to throwing light on the difficulty in question (Dewey, 1997). Dewey believed that  
83 experimentation was needed to enhance student learning and prepare them for post-academic life;  
84 thus, experimentation is an antecedent to today's educational use of experiential learning.

85  
86 Kurt Lewin's research on group dynamics in the mid-1940s, which involved a larger number of  
87 participants and a wider scope of influence, was a further precursor to traditional experiential  
88 learning (Marrow, 1977). Much of Lewin's work focused on leadership and management styles;  
89 however, his work on action research and organizational behavior within group settings focused on  
90 comparative research of the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research  
91 leading to social action. This was the foundation of traditional experiential learning, with the cycle  
92 comprising action, reflection, analysis, and testing (Jowdy et al., 2004; Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

93  
94 Much of Dewey's and Lewin's theoretical framework, relating to experiential learning, was  
95 drawn from the work of early 19<sup>th</sup> century developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget's  
96 theories relate to cognitive development and explain how experience shapes intelligence (Jowdy et  
97 al., 2004; Kolb, 1984). He believed intelligence was the product of interactions between  
98 individuals and the environment, and that intellectual development was a process involving  
99 assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium (Jowdy et al., 2004; Piaget, 1952). Piaget's theories

100 stressed that learning is individualized and self-directed (Jowdy et al., 2004) and, therefore,  
101 requires activity-based discovery learning, rather than teacher-centered instruction.

102  
103 During the mid-1950s, Kelly introduced Personal Construct Theory, which postulated that the  
104 world is perceived in terms of any meaning applied to it and that individuals have the autonomy to  
105 choose the meaning (Kelly, 1991). Specifically, individuals: (1) make a choice and anticipate what  
106 they would like to do; (2) invest in the chosen action; (3) encounter various situations during the  
107 action; (4) confirm or deny whether the action is personally appropriate; and (5) evaluate and make  
108 revisions as necessary. This process of developing a personal construct is a precursor to current  
109 experiential learning theory, as it aids in the creation of ‘professional employment templates’ for  
110 individuals in their chosen field of employment.

111  
112 Experiential Learning Theory has become an integral part of the educational process through  
113 Kolb’s (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning. Kolb developed the model from the underlying  
114 structures of the learning process, based on research in psychology, philosophy, and physiology.  
115 Specifically, the model focuses on concepts of adult development, and a typology of individual  
116 learning styles and corresponding structures of knowledge from various academic disciplines and  
117 professions. This developmental perspective was the basis for applications of Experiential  
118 Learning Theory to education, work, and life-long learning. According to Kolb, A. Y. and Kolb, D.  
119 A. (2009), it is a circular relationship comprising concrete experience, action, observation,  
120 reflection, analysis leading to the formation of abstract concepts, and testing new situations (Jowdy  
121 et al., 2004). This relationship demonstrates that the learning cycle begins at any one of the

122 circular points and should be approached as a continuous spiral (Hayes Sauder & Mudrick, 2018;  
123 Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Sattler, 2018)

124  
125 Joplin (1981) further defined experiential learning through the development of the five-stage  
126 experiential learning model. The five stages include: (1) the focus stage, which provides a general  
127 explanation of the educational objective; (2) the challenging action stage, where the learner is  
128 placed in a stressful situation to address the problem; (3) the support and (4) feedback stages,  
129 which provide security and information to the student regarding what they have done and will do  
130 for the duration of the process; and (5) the debriefing stage, which enables evaluation of  
131 information that may lead to an improvement in the repeating cycle. Facilitators, and the  
132 appropriate design of activities, are integral to this cycle to ensure optimal levels of learning and  
133 skill development (Joplin, 1981; Newman et al., 2017).

134

### 135 **Experiential Learning in Sport Management**

136 The experiential learning in sport management ‘story’ has been authored in numerous sport  
137 management publications for over 50 years. Walter O’Malley, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers,  
138 anticipated the professional sport industry’s growth and recognized the need for university-level  
139 curriculum to groom future sport administrators. In 1957, O’Malley corresponded with Dr.  
140 Clifford Brownell at Columbia University expressing the need for such a curriculum. This  
141 information was shared with Dr. James Mason at Ohio University, who sought to create the  
142 curriculum and bring O’Malley’s vision to life (Mason et al., 1981; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014).  
143 In 1966, Mason and his colleagues introduced a “Master’s Degree in Physical Education with a  
144 Major Emphasis in Sport Administration” (Ohio University, 1968, p. 96), widely recognized as the

145 first professional preparation curriculum in sport management/administration (Pedersen &  
146 Thibault, 2014). Part of that degree program required students to complete an “internship in  
147 competitive athletics” and “pass a written major examination based on the courses taken in his  
148 major field of study, including the internship experience” (Ohio University, 1968, pp. 96-97).

149  
150       Experiential learning provides many benefits for students, including knowledge development  
151 through experience transformation (Polito et al., 2004); acquiring transferable skills (Busby, 2003),  
152 such as teamwork, initiative, relationship building, and confidence (Rainsbury et al., 2002); and a  
153 platform to practice skills and knowledge learned in the classroom (Basow & Byrne, 1992; Sutton,  
154 1989). However, questions often arise as to whether experiences need to be meaningful to be  
155 effective learning tools. Experiences can be meaningful and effective learning tools when  
156 experiential learning opportunities encompass substantial tasks that provide learning opportunities  
157 acknowledged by sport organizations and supplemented with supervisor feedback and support  
158 (D'abate et al., 2009).

159  
160       As the benefits of experiential learning are important to sport management education,  
161 colleges/universities include experiential learning in their educational curriculum through both  
162 required and elective coursework that incorporates discrete (separate from the classroom)  
163 practica/internships (Southall et al., 2003). COSMA defines practica/internships as “an experience  
164 that enables students to work for a sports organization, or in a sports-related office to gain useful,  
165 relevant experience for a career in the sports field” (Commission on Sport Management  
166 Accreditation, 2016, p. 13). Practica/internships are integral to sport management curricula

167 because they enhance students' professional preparation and, subsequently, their prospects of  
168 gaining employment in the sport industry (Brady et al., 2018; Parkhouse, 1987; Stratta, 2004).

169  
170 Additionally, experiential education is supplemented with metadiscrete (outside the classroom,  
171 but under the supervision and guidance of a professor/mentor) practical experiences (Southall et  
172 al., 2003), such as field experiences, site visits, event assistance, and sport management clubs.  
173 Experiential learning settings are wide and varied, including "national, regional, and local sport  
174 organizations; private and public sector health and fitness clubs; local authorities; professional  
175 sports clubs; sports marketing and event management companies; sports media; education  
176 (including schools and tertiary institutions); and sport performance and sport science  
177 organizations" (Ferkins & Fleming, 2004, pp. 143-144).

178  
179 The present study focuses on experiences embedded within the sport management curriculum;  
180 therefore, it is important to acknowledge the role NASSM and NASPE had in recognizing the need  
181 for experiential learning through practica/internships internationally as a required component of  
182 standards and accreditations. In 1986, before the joint effort of these two organizations, a group of  
183 faculty and sport management practitioners developed a committee responsible for determining  
184 curriculum guidelines for sport management degrees (Eagleman & McNary, 2010). Shortly after,  
185 Parkhouse (1987) found that the curricula offered by colleges/universities were inconsistent and  
186 typically lacked the substance of a major within a degree (Eagleman & McNary, 2010).  
187 Consequently, NASSM and NASPE developed the Sport Management Program Review Council  
188 (SMPRC), which in turn developed the Sport Management Program Standards and Review  
189 Protocol (Eagleman & McNary, 2010; Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010; Sport Management Program

190 Review Council, 2000). Of the 12 standards, the final one, Field Experience in Sport  
191 Management, “discussed the benefits of students participating in an in-depth practical experience  
192 before graduation and entrance into the sport industry” through the completion of a “minimum of  
193 400 hours of hands-on experience after the junior year” (Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010, p. 188). The  
194 SMPRC felt that “the practical aspect of internships in the curricula of sport management is so  
195 important that [the] inclusion of field experiences at both the undergraduate and graduate levels of  
196 professional preparation programs [was required] in order to obtain approval as an approved  
197 program” (Schneider & Stier, 2006, p. 36).

198  
199 In 2007, NASSM and NASPE transformed the SMPRC standards into a full accreditation,  
200 resulting in the development of COSMA as "a specialized accrediting body whose purpose is to  
201 promote and recognize excellence in sport management education in colleges and universities at  
202 the baccalaureate and graduate levels" (Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010, pp. 188-189). As the sole  
203 accrediting body for sport management education, COSMA’s goal was “to legitimize programs  
204 and ensure that sport management programs are preparing graduates to be successful contributors  
205 to the field” (Eagleman & McNary, 2010, p. 3). According to COSMA’s (2016) accreditation  
206 principles of outcomes assessment, strategic planning, curriculum, faculty, scholarly and  
207 professional activities, resources, internal and external relationships, educational innovation  
208 (Eagleman & McNary, 2010), and experiential learning, such as practica/internships, all are part of  
209 the integrated experience core professional competency in the Common Professional Component  
210 (CPC) of curriculum (Commission on Sport Management Accreditation, 2016; Eagleman &  
211 McNary, 2010; Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010).

212

## 213 **Purpose of this Study**

214 It is clear from the literature that experiential learning through practica/internships is vital to the  
215 education and professional preparation of sport management students; however, there is a lack of  
216 data related to optimal academic preparation of sport management students. Previous research  
217 focusing on the history, theory, and practical application of experiential learning in sport  
218 management education recommended future research in several areas. The present study focused  
219 on three of these key areas, with a purpose of analyzing: (1) sport industry practitioners'  
220 perceptions of the importance of various general education/liberal arts, business management, and  
221 sport management competencies gained through the sport management curriculum; and (2) sport  
222 management industry practitioners' perceptions of the amount (i.e. number of hours and courses)  
223 of experiential learning required to prepare for a career in the sport industry.

224

## 225 **Methodology**

### 226 **Participants**

227 The subjects for this study were sport organizations that offer student placements in the United  
228 States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The target subjects for this study were those  
229 organizations that had previously offered a student-t placement to students supervised by the  
230 researchers. The use of convenience sampling for this study is valid and reliable based on the  
231 assumption that members of the target population are homogenous. Convenience sampling is a  
232 type of nonprobability sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) that enables researchers to gather information  
233 from participants who meet specific practical criteria, including geographical proximity, easy  
234 accessibility, and willingness and availability to participate.

235

236 In total, 177 self-administered surveys were emailed to sport organizations, known to the  
237 researchers through previous student placements, in the United States and Canada (87), and  
238 Australia and New Zealand (90). The sport organizations included major and minor sport leagues,  
239 for-profit professional sport organizations and support services, non-profit sport organizations,  
240 amateur sport governing bodies, parks and recreation programs, corporate sport organizations, and  
241 high school/college/university athletic programs. The overall response rate was 55.4% (98 of 177  
242 surveys); 63.2% (n=55) for the United States and Canada, and 47.8% (n=43) for Australia and  
243 New Zealand. Organizational type responses were leagues/governing bodies (n=11), professional  
244 sport (n=29), professional sport support services (n=11), non-profit sport (n=33), and amateur  
245 sport (n=14).

246

## 247 **Procedure**

248 Access to the sample was attained through the individual researchers' databases and a random  
249 sampling of colleges/universities affiliated with NASSM (mainly the United States and Canada)  
250 and the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ) (mainly  
251 Australia and New Zealand). The random sample was attained through a random selection of  
252 colleges/universities known to the researchers for having a required practicum and/or internship to  
253 obtain a list of sites they use for student placements. The sample was then divided into  
254 organization type (leagues/governing bodies, professional sport, professional sport support  
255 services, non-profit sport, and amateur sport) to ensure coverage across the sport industry. Once  
256 the organizations were selected and contact information attained and confirmed, the self-  
257 administered survey was delivered to each subject via email with a cover letter explaining the  
258 purpose of the study.

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**Instrument**

The survey consisted of a variety of questions, including demographic inquiries, five-point Likert scale questions, yes and no questions, and multiple response questions. Questions were developed by (1) examining experiential learning in sport management literature; (2) considering the standards set forth in the previous NASSM-NASPE Program Approval Process and current COSMA Principles and Standards; and (3) analyzing selected colleges/universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to understand their purpose and inclusions of their practica/internship program.

Demographic information included the sport organization’s name (optional), location (country), and type of sport organization they defined themselves as (from a list provided or by self-description). The five-point Likert scale (1 - Not Important; 2 - Less Important, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Important, 5 - Very Important) sought respondents’ perceptions on such factors as a range of required competencies (general, sport management, and business) important for potential employees to possess to be hired by their organization as this aspect was a key purpose of the study. The Likert scale questions investigated the extent the respondent felt that general competencies, sport management competencies, and business competencies were important for a potential employee to possess prior to be hired by their organization. Another question inquired about the level of importance placed on the college/university the student graduated from or their grade point average (GPA) in hiring a student for an entry-level position.

281 Sample yes and no questions included “Would you be more likely to hire a graduate for an  
282 entry-level position who has gained sport management experience in conjunction with their  
283 college/university program through experiential learning, such as a practica/internship?” and  
284 “Would you hire a recent graduate for a position above entry level due to their having experience  
285 in conjunction with their college/university program through experiential learning?”. Multiple  
286 response questions were designed to identify respondents’ views to questions like “What benefits  
287 do you feel practica/internships provide your organization?” and “What concerns, issues or  
288 limitations do you have with practica/internships?”. Respondents were asked to indicate all items  
289 that applied to them.

290

## 291 **Data Analysis**

292 For questions that required responses on a five-point Likert scale, an average score was  
293 calculated for each response with higher scores indicative of more agreement with each particular  
294 competency or credential. Binary variable responses were reported as percentages due to the  
295 ordinal nature of the data in which the respondents were asked to provide their opinion using a  
296 yes/no format. In terms of multiple response questions, respondents were asked to select from a  
297 range of options and select all responses that applied to them. The proportion of respondents  
298 selecting each option was then calculated and reported as a percentage for each option.

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## **Results**

301 The first analysis revealed that nearly two out of three sport management practitioners surveyed  
302 (64.3%) said it was important for potential employees to have a sport management (or related  
303 field) degree.

304

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**Table 1**

306 *Importance for a Potential Employee to have a Degree in Sport Management or a Related Field*

| Response | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|----------|------------|--------------|---------|
| YES      | 70.9%      | 55.8%        | 64.3%   |
| NO       | 20.1%      | 44.2%        | 30.8%   |

307

308 Next, ratings of the importance of general competencies sport organization managers expect  
309 potential employees to possess were ascertained. As Table 2 indicates, communication skills,  
310 people skills, and time management were the most desired competencies. Computer skills,  
311 particularly word processing, were considered more important than public speaking. Interestingly,  
312 there was a lack of agreement between professional writing and word processing.

313

314

315

**Table 2**

316

*Mean Scores of the Importance of General Competencies in Potential Employees*

| General Competencies                   | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|--|------------|--------------|---------|
| Public Speaking                        | 2.7        | 2.4          | 2.5     |
| Time Management                        | 3.7        | 3.4          | 3.6     |
| Stress Management                      | 3.3        | 1.7          | 2.6     |
| People Skills                          | 3.7        | 3.8          | 3.7     |
| Professional Writing Skills            | 2.8        | 2.7          | 2.7     |
| Problem Solving Skills                 | 3.6        | 3.0          | 3.3     |
| Computer Skills                        |            |              |         |
| Word Processing <sup>1</sup>           | 3.2        | 3.2          | 3.2     |
| Spreadsheets <sup>1</sup>              | 2.8        | 2.5          | 2.7     |
| Databases <sup>1</sup>                 | 2.6        | 2.3          | 2.4     |
| Project Planning Software <sup>2</sup> | 1.3        | 1.4          | 1.4     |
| Presentation Software <sup>1</sup>     | 2.2        | 2.6          | 2.4     |
| Web Development Software <sup>2</sup>  | 1.6        | 1.4          | 1.5     |

317

<sup>1</sup> = one ANZ did not respond

318

<sup>2</sup> = two ANZ did not respond

319

320

Table 3 presents ratings of the perceived level of importance of sport management

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competencies as expected by managers of sport organizations. The most important competency

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rated by respondents was “sport-related practical work experience” (mean score 3.2). Aside from

323 experiential coursework, marketing and event management were also rated as important  
324 competencies, which aligns with the focus of many practica/internships.

325 **Table 3**

326 *Mean Scores of the Importance of Sport Management Competencies in Potential Employees*

| Sport Management Competencies           | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|---|------------|--------------|---------|
| Facility Management <sup>1</sup>        | 2.5        | 1.6          | 2.1     |
| Sport Marketing                         | 3.2        | 2.3          | 2.9     |
| Understanding of Sociocultural Concepts | 2.6        | 2.1          | 2.4     |
| Sport-Related Practical Work Experience | 3.1        | 3.2          | 3.2     |
| Event Management                        | 3.1        | 2.4          | 2.8     |
| Sport Law <sup>1</sup>                  | 1.9        | 1.3          | 1.6     |
| Sport Finance <sup>1</sup>              | 2.0        | 2.0          | 2.0     |
| Sport Sponsorship                       | 2.9        | 2.4          | 2.7     |

327 <sup>1</sup> = one ANZ did not respond

328

329 The importance of business competencies for potential sport organization employees was clear.

330 As Table 4 illustrates, these include the business concepts of strategic management/planning,

331 managerial decision making, budgeting, and marketing.

332

333

334

**Table 4**

335

*Mean Scores of the Importance of Business Competencies in Potential Employees*

| Business Competencies                             | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|---|------------|--------------|---------|
| Budgeting <sup>2</sup>                            | 2.8        | 2.8          | 2.8     |
| Managerial Decision Making <sup>2</sup>           | 3.3        | 2.5          | 2.9     |
| Strategic Management/Planning                     | 2.9        | 2.9          | 2.9     |
| Organizational/Administrative Skills <sup>1</sup> | 3.3        | 2.7          | 3.1     |
| Accounting <sup>2</sup>                           | 1.8        | 1.9          | 1.8     |
| Marketing <sup>1</sup>                            | 2.8        | 2.4          | 2.6     |
| Corporate Finance <sup>2</sup>                    | 1.5        | 1.3          | 1.4     |
| Economics <sup>2</sup>                            | 1.7        | 1.3          | 1.5     |

336

<sup>1</sup> = one ANZ did not respond

337

<sup>2</sup> = two ANZ did not respond

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339

Results, as shown in Table 5, suggest that both the college/university a potential employee

340

attended, and their level of academic achievement, i.e. grade point average (GPA), was irrelevant

341

when determining their employability.

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343

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**Table 5**

345

*Mean Scores of the Importance of Academic Credentials in Potential Employees*

| Academic Credentials              | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------|---------|
| College/University Degree is from | 1.7        | 1.8          | 1.7     |
| Grade Point Average <sup>1</sup>  | 2.1        | 1.9          | 2.0     |

346

<sup>1</sup> = two ANZ did not respond

347

348

All respondents reported they were likely to hire graduates for entry-level positions who had

349

sport management experience gained through experiential learning as a part of their

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college/university degree through practica/internships. Respondents were also asked if they were

351

skeptical of hiring graduates with high volumes of experiential learning for entry-level positions

352

for fear of them not accepting the position or leaving after a short period. The results (Table 6)

353

showed that most practitioners (82.7%) were convinced it was an advantage to hire graduates with

354

as much experiential learning as possible and were not concerned that applicants might leave for

355

other positions after a short period.

356

357

**Table 6**

358

*Respondents Who Would Be Skeptical of Hiring a Graduate for an Entry-Level Position Who Has*

359

*Excessive Experiential Learning*

| Response | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|----------|------------|--------------|---------|
| YES      | 10.9%      | 25.3%        | 17.3%   |
| NO       | 89.1%      | 74.4%        | 82.7%   |

360

361 Respondents were also asked if they would hire recent graduates with sport management  
 362 experience, in addition to college/university education through experiential learning, for higher  
 363 than entry-level positions. Over 75% of respondents, as indicated in Table 7, felt it would be  
 364 advantageous for their organization to hire employees with substantial experiential education, and  
 365 would consider them for positions above entry-level if their experience met the criteria required for  
 366 upper-level positions.

367

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**Table 7**

369 *Respondents Who Would Hire a Recent Graduate for a Position Above Entry Level due to Having*

370

*Experience Acquired Through Experiential Learning*

| Response | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|----------|------------|--------------|---------|
| YES      | 76.4%      | 81.0%        | 76.5%   |
| NO       | 23.6%      | 19.0%        | 23.5%   |

371

372 Additionally, respondents were asked to identify the perceived benefits of ‘hiring’ students who  
 373 had participated in experiential learning programs included within sport management degrees.

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Results indicate (Table 8) that the benefits potential employees could bring was important to all respondents. They viewed students who undertook experiential learning via practica/internships through their college/university degree as having quality experience and being worthwhile to employ. The response to the benefit of practica/internships offering cost-effective assistance (76.5%) was unsurprising due to the typically limited availability of sport organizations’ financial resources for producing sport programs.

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**Table 8**

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*Respondents Reporting a Benefit Associated with Experiential Learning*

| Benefits                                   | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|--|------------|--------------|---------|
| New Ideas                                  | 70.9%      | 55.8%        | 64.3%   |
| Passion, Energy, Enthusiasm                | 70.9%      | 58.1%        | 65.3%   |
| Identification of Potential Employees      | 76.4%      | 76.7%        | 76.5%   |
| ‘Quality’ Volunteers                       | 81.8%      | 58.1%        | 71.4%   |
| Links to Colleges/Universities             | 63.6%      | 46.5%        | 56.1%   |
| Cost Effective Assistance                  | 76.4%      | 76.7%        | 76.5%   |
| Social Responsibility (‘Feel Good’ factor) | 23.6%      | 37.2%        | 29.6%   |
| Worthwhile Assistance                      | 76.4%      | 58.1%        | 68.4%   |
| Students Help Promote the Organization     | 34.6%      | 27.9%        | 31.6%   |

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Finally, respondents shared their perceived concerns, issues, and limitations regarding

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experiential learning programs associated with sport management (or related field) degrees. Major

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concerns were students’ suitability, reliability, and quality, and the timing of practica/internships

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(Table 9). Other concerns, issues, and limitations such as quality/quantity of work and mentors

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available were minor.

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**Table 9**

*Respondents Reporting Concerns, Issues or Limitations with Experiential Learning*

| Concerns, Issues, or Limitations                                     | Canada/USA | Australia/NZ | Overall |
|--|------------|--------------|---------|
| Students' Suitability, Reliability, Quality                          | 52.7%      | 67.4%        | 59.2%   |
| Timing of Practicum/Internship                                       | 63.6%      | 46.5%        | 56.1%   |
| Students' Lack of Hands-On Experience                                | 23.6%      | 37.2%        | 29.6%   |
| Student Unclear of Objectives  | 29.1%      | 23.3%        | 26.5%   |
| Organization Unclear of Expectations                                 | 5.5%       | 27.9%        | 15.3%   |
| Communication between the Organization and the<br>College/University | 23.6%      | 9.3%         | 17.4%   |
| Support and Guidance from the College/University                     | 29.1%      | 9.3%         | 20.4%   |

**Discussion**

Experiential learning in sport management has evolved over the past 20 years and is integral to sport management degree curricula. Sport management education continues to expand globally; therefore, it is important to gauge the value of experiential learning in different countries to ensure that what is offered meets sport organizations' expectations. The purpose of the present study was to analyze: (1) sport industry practitioners' perceptions of the importance of various general education/liberal arts, business management, and sport management competencies gained through the sport management curriculum; and (2) sport management industry practitioners' perceptions of the amount (i.e. number of hours and courses) of experiential learning required to prepare for a career in the sport industry.

405 The importance placed on having a degree in sport management (or related field) is in line with  
406 historical reasoning, such as grooming future sport administrators to work in the sport industry,  
407 creating sport administration as an academic discipline (Mason et al., 1981; Pedersen & Thibault,  
408 2014), and the ongoing evolution of curriculum through NASSM-NASPE approval (Eagleman &  
409 McNary, 2010; Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010; Sport Management Program Review Council, 2000)  
410 and COSMA accreditation (Commission on Sport Management Accreditation, 2016; Eagleman &  
411 McNary, 2010; Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010).

412

413 In terms of sport management competencies, the unanimously positive response to the ‘sport-  
414 related practical work experience’ competency highlights the importance of practica/internships  
415 from a global perspective. The results reveal that practitioners deemed the college/university a  
416 prospective sport management candidate attended was unimportant. Practitioners also did not  
417 believe that the candidate’s GPA was as valuable as the skills they possessed. This suggests that  
418 being able to apply concepts in real-world settings was a priority to employers, which further  
419 validates the value of experiential learning.

420

421 The positive response to hiring graduates with sport management experience through  
422 experiential learning such as practica/internships in conjunction with their college/university  
423 education for entry-level positions suggests experiential learning is favorable. This validates early  
424 research that experiential learning as part of the curriculum enhances students’ preparation and  
425 prospects of gaining employment in the sport industry (Brady et al., 2018; Parkhouse, 1987;  
426 Stratta, 2004).

427

428 Respondents reported that employees who had participated in experiential learning acquire  
429 transferable skills and knowledge from the experience. They also felt that practical experience is  
430 the most effective way to validate what was learned in the classroom as it considerably adds to  
431 their knowledge base. This confirms previous research on knowledge development through  
432 experience transformation (Polito et al., 2004), which indicates that experiential learning is a  
433 platform to practice skills and knowledge learned in the classroom (Basow & Byrne, 1992; Sutton,  
434 1989).

435  
436 Some survey questions sought to determine whether students' experiences need to be  
437 meaningful to be effective learning tools. Experiential learning provides settings that facilitate a  
438 variety of meaningful experiences, including increased self-confidence, opportunities for industry  
439 networking (Cook et al., 2004; Herrick, 1987), and development of interpersonal skills (Gryski et  
440 al., 1987). Andonian (2017) found a link between student self-efficacy and the meaningfulness of  
441 experiential learning, including opportunities for active decision making and personal growth.  
442 Kelly et al. (2014) suggested that social, professional, and personal contexts of experiential  
443 learning provide unique and meaningful personal learning experiences that enhance learners'  
444 personal and professional maturity. Overall, results indicate students with any level of experiential  
445 learning have greater prospects of entry-level employment within sport organizations than those  
446 with none.

447  
448 Additionally, there is a lack of clear evidence suggesting that sport industry practitioners are  
449 skeptical of hiring graduates for entry-level positions based on concern they might reject the job,  
450 or leave after a short period, due to possessing a large amount of experiential learning experience.

451 In fact, it is more likely for recent graduates to be hired in higher than entry-level positions, due to  
452 their experience in conjunction with their college/university education through experiential  
453 learning.

454

### 455 **Implications of the Study**

456 This research provides valuable information as to the benefits and shortfalls of experiential  
457 learning from the perspective of sport industry professionals. The identification of potential  
458 substantially skilled employees was a high priority for all sport organizations. Major concerns  
459 included ensuring students had quality theoretical backgrounds; were suitable, reliable, and  
460 possessed transferable knowledge and skills; and the inflexible timing of practica/internships.  
461 Timing is usually determined by an academic institution's school term; therefore, it is not always  
462 possible to make modifications that satisfy organizations' needs. Furthermore, professors and  
463 organizations share similar concerns regarding the suitability, reliability, and quality of student  
464 interns. Specifically, professors must determine whether students are suitable candidates for  
465 quality practica/internships as they do not want to compromise their relationships with sport  
466 organizations. In these situations, professors often must identify a practicum/internship location  
467 that can manage such a student, such as an on-campus placement.

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469 Although there are some positive implications, there are also some limitations. A possible  
470 limitation of the study was the overall survey response rate of 55.4% (63.2% for the United States  
471 and Canada, and 47.8% for Australia and New Zealand), which meant only respondents highly  
472 interested in the topic might have participated, suggesting data was potentially subject to non-  
473 response bias (Rogelberg & Luong, 1998). Further limitations are that the survey included five-

474 point Likert scale questions, which often leads respondents to select the most extreme options;  
475 therefore, extreme response bias potentially influenced the results (Paulhus, 1991). Studies that  
476 utilize qualitative data collection methods, such as semi-structured interviews, may be better suited  
477 to ensure higher response rates and obtain deeper, meaningful information during interviews, to  
478 enrich data collected (Crotty, 1998), as would have been beneficial to this study. Additionally,  
479 data was only obtained from respondents in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New  
480 Zealand, making it difficult to generalize results globally. Therefore, perspectives on sport  
481 management experiential learning in other regions is unclear and further research is recommended  
482 to ascertain this.

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484

### **Conclusion**

485 This study provided insight into the evolution of experiential learning in sport management  
486 from an international perspective utilizing sport organizations in the United States, Canada,  
487 Australia, and New Zealand. Specifically, the research involved surveying sport industry  
488 practitioners representing for-profit professional sport organizations, non-profit sport  
489 organizations, and corporations with a sport management focus. It aimed to analyze their  
490 perceptions of the importance of various general education/liberal arts, business management, and  
491 sport management competencies gained through the sport management curriculum to determine  
492 their viewpoint on whether there was an optimal level of experiential learning

493

494 The findings demonstrated the high value placed on “sport-related practical work experience”,  
495 which highlights the importance of practica/internships from a global perspective. Business  
496 competencies college/university attended, and GPA of prospective candidates for sport

497 management positions were viewed as having less relevance across organizations.. Conversely,  
498 greater value was placed on the skills they possessed. Employers were more likely to hire  
499 graduates with sport management experience through experiential learning, such as  
500 practica/internships, in conjunction with their college/university education for entry-level  
501 positions. Additionally, it was more appealing for employers to hire candidates with experience,  
502 as they are more likely to be productive at a faster rate, require less training, and possess  
503 transferable skills and knowledge. Overall, results indicated students with experiential learning  
504 have greater prospects of entry-level employment within sport organizations.

505  
506 This study highlights the continued and evolving importance and necessity of experiential  
507 learning within sport management degree programs. Academicians are advised to continue  
508 offering experiential learning opportunities to their students, and for students to engage in their  
509 education and these programs to enhance their employability. Experiential learning builds  
510 mutually beneficial partnerships that enable employers to trial and assess potential employees and  
511 for students to profit by preparing them to become future sport management industry practitioners.  
512

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