

ACTION RESEARCH AND INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Alumni Perception of Industry Engagement: An Action Research Study on Student Satisfaction
and Occupational Preparedness in Sport Management Experiential Learning Curriculum

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine sport management experiential learning curriculum and how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Qualitative data was collected to examine alumni's perceived occupational preparedness and satisfaction with the experiential learning curriculum in East Stroudsburg University's (ESU) sport management program. Alumni from the university were interviewed about their education and exposure to the sport industry while enrolled at the university. Using Daniel Funk's Sport Experience Design Model (2017) as a conceptual framework, the analysis uncovered five emergent themes: 1) *Combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, 2) *hands-on learning and networking*, 3) *real-world application and transferable skills*, 4) *alignment with industry expectation*, and 5) *extracurricular engagement*. These themes serve as a basis for understanding the influence of industry exposure on perceived student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Upon completing this action research study, the emergent themes collectively depict the landscape of experiential learning within the sport management program and guide future inquiry and development.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The rationale for this study stems from the need to enhance the sport management experiential learning curriculum at East Stroudsburg University (ESU) and improve the students' overall learning experience by increasing industry exposure. Development of sport management curriculum in post-secondary education stresses the significance of practical workplace knowledge through faculty-guided participation (COSMA, 2022; Odio, 2022). While project-based learning and experiential learning approaches have gained recognition as effective educational methodologies, there is a gap in understanding how these approaches contribute to student satisfaction with the educational experience and occupational preparedness upon graduation.

Background

To further explore this gap in research, this examination pursues the relationship between program requirements for industry exposure and the perception of alumni regarding satisfaction with the learning experience and occupational preparedness. Through qualitative data analysis, exposure to the sport industry is defined, identified, and subsequently examined in connection with the perception of alumni satisfaction in preparation for employment in the sport industry. Rationale for including student exposure to industry standards is supported through the literature review. However, it reveals a deficit of research focused on the number and variation of opportunities for industry exposure provided by the sport management program. Research has focused on graduate and undergraduate student perception, faculty pursuit of curriculum development and application, and sport industry expectation, but is limited in alumni perception of these topics. Existing literature, such as Stratta (2004), Kolb and Kolb (2005), Deluca and Braunstein-Minkove (2016), and Milstein, French, and Philips (2023), support the justification for including student exposure to industry standards, highlighting the need for a comprehensive review of those program-led opportunities by alumni. This leads to the focus on sport management alumni, their perception of industry exposure (i.e., applied coursework such as project-based learning, early internships, and practicums), and the relationship to a more satisfying educational experience. In addition, based on alumni perception, whether the applied coursework and industry exposure benefited the graduate upon entering the sport industry workforce. Advocated by the sport management accrediting body, Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA), research focused on student exposure to industry standards is essential, and this study is intended to build upon that body of knowledge.

The Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA), since its inception in 2008, has reinforced the necessity for using experiential learning practices. COSMA requires the use of curriculum-led tools, such as project-based teaching methods, internships, and practicums, to be recognized as an accredited sport management program (COSMA, 2022). COSMA (2022) identifies 474 sport management programs and has one of the most significant sport management academic conferences annually. Their strength within sport management academia has grown exponentially through rigorous accreditation processes and continuous support of academic development in the discipline. While COSMA accreditation is not required for a sport management program, their voice mirrors the industry's academic standards in emphasizing experiential learning techniques. Common core requirements for accreditation highlight the need for "interactive experiences...that enable a student to demonstrate the capacity to synthesize and

apply knowledge” (COSMA, 2022, p.19). COSMA’s continued support of sport management as an academic discipline brands the organization as a leader in curriculum standards.

With the abundant number of recognized sport programs in the United States, to conduct this research and identify an appropriate sample, it is essential to select an institution of higher education with a sport management program that adopts experiential learning practices and echoes the requirements set forth by COSMA. Currently, thirty-three universities or colleges offer a sport management degree in Pennsylvania, eighteen of which are in the eastern half of the state. In northeastern Pennsylvania, four universities offered undergraduate degrees in sport management, with two holding COSMA accreditation. For the purpose of this study and due to this researcher’s extensive knowledge of the program, a small northeastern Pennsylvania institution of higher learning was chosen as part of the purposive sampling method. The university is a part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and, when compared to the other PASSHE schools, has similar sport management curriculum requirements, including an experiential learning component (CalU, n.d.; ESU, n.d.; KU, n.d.; LHU, n.d.; SRU, n.d.). To complete the undergraduate program, students at this university are required to participate in a twelve-credit internship, of which 480 contact hours are mandatory throughout the practicum. In addition, the selected university’s sport management curriculum provides courses constructed around applied coursework and project-based learning – an active student-centered form of instruction, which is characterized by students’ autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication, and reflection within real-world practices (Kotowski, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). Through program development and COSMA accreditation, the program has also demonstrated the importance of the experiential learning process (see Appendix B). Curriculum designed on applied coursework embraces the concept of experiential learning and exemplifies the academic standards of COSMA-supported experiential learning (see Appendix C), making this institution of higher learning appropriate for the direction of the study.

Investigating sport management curriculum that aligns sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) to student satisfaction and occupational preparedness requires a reflective perspective and interpretation of the learning experience. With a foundation of John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984), literature reinforcing the impact on skill development through applied coursework, project-based learning, work studies, and internships endorse an experiential learning framework in higher education. The majority of sport management experiential learning research has focused on student perception (Koo, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016; DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Hawzen, McLeod, Holden, & Newman, 2018; Stratta, 2004), curriculum development and application (Brown, Willett, Goldfine, & Goldfine, 2018; Pangelinan, Norcross, MacDonald, Rudisill, Wadsworth, & McDonald, 2018; Kelly, 2004), and industry expectation (Brady, Mahoney, Lovich, & Scialabba, 2018; Brandon-Lai, Armstrong, & Bunds, 2016; Hurd & Schlatter, 2007), but is limited in alumni perception. Therefore, this study sought to explore alumni's perception of the opportunities provided by the sport management program, aiming to establish a connection among satisfaction, occupational preparedness, and sport industry exposure.

Purpose of the Study

A literature review also identified a consistent gap in academic research when discussing experiential learning as a uniform opportunity for all students. The exploration of this topic and exposure to multiple theoretical frameworks guided this researcher's interest in student opportunity, focusing on the influence of curriculum-led industry experiences, such as applied coursework and project-based learning. The problem of inadequate or inconsistent industry exposure is prevalent throughout higher education and academic research (Singer, 2005; Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; Rose & Paisley, 2012). The attention then shifts to actions implemented by the university, faculty, and program/curriculum to ensure students are provided adequate industry involvement to meet their needs. Creating this sport educational environment requires a collaborative effort by all stakeholders (Stratta, 2004; Brown et al., 2018). The recognized overlap created through the symbiotic relationship of the stakeholders is a focal point for this study. Aligning with this focus, the following questions are addressed:

RQ1: Does the sport management program provide substantial opportunities for industry exposure, and do those opportunities contribute to a more satisfying learning experience?

RQ2: What are the key skills and competencies fostered by sport industry exposure that contribute to a more satisfying learning experience?

RQ3: Does the applied coursework and industry exposure align student needs with industry expectation?

RQ4: How does the applied coursework and industry experiences shape occupational preparedness?

Each of these questions centers around the student's needs, program requirements, and the social context (sport environment) in which the opportunity is provided. Guided in design by Kolb and Kolb's (2005) continued development of the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), the research questions incorporate components of the concept of learning spaces - four regions in the ELT learning process that students navigate in pursuit of knowledge and skill development. The concept of learning spaces creates an individualized learning process acute to the student's experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005); this lends itself to the current study as each student engages in the experiential learning process uniquely. By exploring these questions, the study aims to shed light on the benefit of industry exposure in sport management programs and identify the common themes that contribute to a positive learning experience, better-preparing graduates for their careers in the sport industry.

Theoretical Framework

The use of experiential learning has long been a cornerstone of higher education with focused investigation by John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984) headlining the discussion of research in experiential education. Their work emphasizes the practical application of course materials to real-world, career-related experiences, highlighting its potential as a powerful developmental tool within any program's curriculum. While Dewey's social constructivism is a benchmark theoretical approach to education, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a comprehensive framework for designing curricula through the introduction of learning spaces that enhance the experiential learning process.

According to Kolb (1984), ELT defines learning as the process in which knowledge is generated through the transformation of experience. In this process, knowledge is formed by both comprehending and actively transforming the experiences encountered by an individual. With the continued development of his ELT, Kolb and Kolb (2005) introduced the concept of *learning spaces*, the balance between four regions in the ELT learning process that students navigate in pursuit of knowledge and skill development. The four regions – Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation – are cyclical in nature and create an individualized learning process acute to the student's experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb and Kolb (2005) explain the concept of ELT as dialectical thinking, where learning is a process of conflict resolution between opposing perspectives of the four regions (p. 194). In addition, through inclusion of learning spaces, education through experience can be molded around the needs of the individual (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb's ELT provides a foundation for this investigation as the current study explored curriculum-led industry exposure and the relationship to the perception of satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Based on this study's interpretive/subjective nature, ELT lends itself to this investigation as each student engages in the experiential learning process uniquely.

Experiential Learning Theory has gained widespread acceptance as a valuable framework for promoting educational innovation that prioritizes learner-centered approaches, such as instructional design and curriculum development (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The relevance of this theory for the current study is dissected in greater detail in the literature review. First, recognition of common vernacular must be outlined to provide context for research application and comprehension.

Operational definitions

To align theoretical concepts and their application, it is important to develop an understanding of common vernacular in the context of this research. The terminology outlined below lay the foundation for the direction of exploration and concepts coupled with curriculum development and program assessment. While not exclusive to this research, these terms are utilized in a manner associated with higher education and sport management as an academic discipline.

First, we must clearly distinguish what is considered the sport experience. To aid in this clarification, concepts from the academic discipline of sport management, specifically Daniel Funk, outline the basis for this study's definition. Funk's (2017) research is focused on consumer behavior and interactions with stimuli that solicit behavioral responses. His research describes the sport user experience as "...a process that generates emotional and physical responses that can influence satisfaction and future behavior" (Funk, 2017, p. 153). In Funk's context, the sport experience is not exclusive to physical activity but, the interaction of the user in the chosen sport environment. The sport experience does not mean physical participation and/or competition, but rather sport-associated interactions that induce behavioral responses. Aligning with the current study, these interactions can occur through the direction of the sport management program, and/or, through self-driven student ambitions/exploration. The sport experience can occur in any context, across multiple years, and is crucial in creating the learning environment. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the *sport experience* encompasses various interactions between the student and the immersive environment created in conjunction with the sport management curriculum.

In addition, another focus of this research is on the opportunities provided by a sport management program to introduce workforce expectations. This industry exposure describes the learning opportunities given to sport management students with the purpose of gaining experience and knowledge of the sport industry. For the purpose of this study, *industry exposure* is curriculum-led activities that allow students to engage with and learn from real-world sport organizations, events, and professionals. The educational initiative of this definition follows Kolb and Kolb's (2005) concept of creating learning spaces that are a combination of student individuality and elements of the learning environment. Therefore, industry exposure includes internships, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences that provide students with a deeper understanding of the sport industry's operations, practices, and challenges. This current research explores the extent and impact of industry exposure on student satisfaction, occupational preparedness, and curriculum implementation.

Continuing the research alignment of relevant terminology, *student satisfaction* will be characterized as the subjective evaluation and perception of the overall learning experience by sport management students. It encompasses recognizing opportunities to develop relevant skills, engage in substantial industry-related tasks, and build a networking base (Koo et al., 2016). Student satisfaction also incorporates the level of fulfillment, contentment, and positive feelings that students associate with their sport learning experiences, considering several factors such as industry exposure, the relevance of activities to career aspirations, and the alignment of student expectations with the sport experience. Satisfaction serves as an essential indicator of the sport management program's effectiveness in meeting students' educational and career-related goals, as well as their level of engagement and motivation within the sport industry. Identifying student need aligns with comprehension of student satisfaction. Supported by research (Stratta, 2004; Odio & Kerwin, 2016; Odio, 2016; Satter & Achen, 2021), *student need* incorporates components of academic and professional aspirations but are subjective to the student. For this study, student needs were captured during data collection and interview questions guided by the conceptual framework, the Sport Experience Design Model (Funk, 2017). To support the purpose of this study, this research investigated the factors that contribute to student satisfaction with the educational experience and explored the relationship between industry exposure, curriculum design, and occupational preparedness of the sport management student.

In a 2016 publication, Deluca and Braunstein-Minkove describe occupational preparedness as skills that best prepare students for sport-related professions. Additionally, the researchers identified three sites of student development and the extent to which sport management students feel equipped and ready to enter the workforce. *Occupational preparedness* involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for successful employment in their chosen career path. This concept encompasses various aspects, including the development of industry-specific knowledge, practical skills, professional networks, and the ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-world sport management scenarios. It also involves the cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the industry's dynamics and practices. On the basis of this description, the current research sought to explore the role of applied coursework, industry exposure, and the overall curriculum design in enhancing students' occupational preparedness, ultimately aiming to identify the common themes that contribute to their readiness for the sport industry workforce.

The purpose of this study was to examine sport management experiential learning curriculum and how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. As identified by Odio, Pate, and Aicher (2022), pedagogical implementation of that industry exposure lacks consistency, creating challenges in achieving program objectives, in the case of this study, student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. The problem of inadequate or inconsistent industry exposure was examined through the lens of Funk's (2017) Sport Experience Design model. Although primarily used to investigate how the sport experience can induce consumer feelings and behaviors, the adaptation of this framework is intended to highlight the significance of connecting student needs, curriculum-led experiences, and the social context in shaping the learning process. In addition, the application of Funk's model will emphasize the role of curriculum structure in enhancing student satisfaction with the educational experience and occupational preparedness. By investigating the extent to which sport management programs provide industry exposure, the study addresses the assessment of program requirements in meeting student satisfaction and occupational preparedness.

Conceptual Framework: Sport Experience Design (SX) (Funk, 2017)

Daniel Funk's Sport Experience Design model (2017) is the theoretical framework guiding this investigation. This model provides a valuable lens through which to examine the factors that influence an individual's sport experiences, particularly in the context of experiential learning and industry exposure in sport management programs. The identified gap in academic research regarding experiential learning and industry exposure aligns with the central tenets of Funk's model, which emphasizes the importance of the user needs, social context, and sport organizations in shaping an individual's sport experiences. In the context of this study, the focus shifts from Funk's original framework to align with the specific objectives of this investigation. This adaptation involves redefining the key components of Funk's model to match the focus and scope of this research. Specifically, redefining the *user* as the sport management *alumni*, the *social context* as the *sport educational environment*, and the *sport organization* as the *sport management program/curriculum*.

Funk's model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the elements that influence the satisfaction and occupational preparedness of sport management alumni, particularly in the context of sport experience and industry exposure. By incorporating Funk's Sport Experience Model into the research design, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to student satisfaction in the sport management educational experiences. Furthermore, the adaptation of Funk's model emphasized the role of curriculum structure in enhancing occupational preparedness through the identification of common themes that contribute to a more satisfying experience. The model serves as a theoretical foundation to explore the relationship between curriculum-led industry experiences, student needs, and curriculum structure, ultimately offering insights into improving sport management programs and assessing their effectiveness.

For this study, the chosen university, as a COSMA-accredited institution, has a sport management curriculum that exposes students to industry expectations and provides opportunities for skill development in a controlled, instructor-assisted environment. This curriculum-led experiential learning strategy enables students to explore their abilities with the

support of faculty, fostering important teacher-student relationships. These sites for student development are constructed to prepare undergraduates in transition to their chosen career path. An example of this curriculum strategy can be found in Appendix B. Adaptation of the Sport Experience Design framework will aid in the exploration of key interactions that shape students' perceptions, satisfaction levels, and occupational preparedness within the experiential learning curriculum.

Chapter 1: Summary

Integrating Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and the Sport Experience Design model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing the educational experiences of sport management students. Experiential Learning Theory, as outlined by Kolb (1984), forms the foundation by emphasizing the cyclical and individualized nature of the learning process, where each student engages uniquely in the experiential learning process. ELT's interpretive and subjective nature aligns well with the diverse experiences described by sport management alumni, acknowledging the responses to educational experiences. On the other hand, the Sport Experience Design model, developed by Daniel Funk, provides a structured framework that considers the interaction of human elements and environmental design, specifically in the context of sport experiences. By adapting Funk's model to focus on sport management education, its three domains (sport user, sport context, and sport organization) can be redefined to align with the specific objectives of the study. This integration allows for an exploration of how alumni navigated through the learning process, providing insights into satisfaction and occupational preparedness. By combining ELT and Sport Experience Design model, the united approach enables investigation of experiential learning experiences within the sport management curriculum, facilitates a comprehensive assessment of program effectiveness, and assists in understanding the factors influencing student satisfaction and occupational preparedness for the sports industry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To support the focus of this study, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to emphasize the significance of experiential learning curriculum and the implementation of industry exposure initiatives, such as project-based learning, applied coursework, and other immersive educational experiences. These active student-centered instructional approaches foster autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication, and reflection within real-world practices (Kotowski, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). Furthermore, the literature review acknowledges the crucial role of the *learning space* and its impact on shaping the application of an experiential learning curriculum that meets the needs and expectations of the students. In this literature review, a problem of practice – actionable issue that occurs within a specific educational setting (Mertler, 2021) – will be recognized, along with supportive literature outlining the current understanding and context of the problem.

In addition, the following examination of literature is presented to underscore the significance of experiential learning curriculum and the integration of program-led sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences). The use of experiential learning has long been a cornerstone of higher education, focused investigation by John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984) headline the discussion of research in experiential education. Their work emphasizes the practical application of course materials to real-world, career-related experiences, highlighting its potential as a powerful developmental tool within any program's curriculum.

The literature review also aims to highlight the social context, referred to in this study as the sport educational environment, which is modeled by the interactions among students, teachers, sport industry, and the structure of the sport curriculum. Understanding the dynamics of this social context is essential to comprehend the factors that influence student satisfaction, occupational preparedness, and overall success within the sport management program. By examining relevant literature, the intent is to establish a strong theoretical foundation and gain insights into the various aspects of the social context, including its impact on student experiences and the overall effectiveness of the experiential learning curriculum in preparing students for careers in sport management.

Problem of Practice

Action research is “a systematic inquiry conducted by educators with a vested interest in the teaching/learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their schools operate, teach, and students learn” (Mertler, 2020, p. 5). This type of research design is a cyclical process with the intention of generating practical knowledge and facilitating ongoing progression. Application of this approach facilitates future assessment and continual development in an ever-changing educational environment. When discussing experiential learning, a consistent gap in academic research has been the uniform opportunity for all students within that educational environment. The exploration of this topic and exposure to multiple theoretical frameworks guided this researcher’s interest in industry exposure, focusing on the influence of curriculum-led industry experiences, such as applied coursework and project-based learning. Specifically, the investigation into the experiential learning framework of sport management curriculum, the need to support integration of additional program-led interactive opportunities, and the disparities in student opportunity based on the university’s core

curriculum. Understanding the problem as inadequate opportunity provided to sport management students, the focus must then shift to actions implemented by the university, faculty, and program/curriculum. With this focus, this action research study's problem of practice should center around aligning students' needs, the program requirements, and social context (sport environment) in which the opportunity is being provided (Mertler, 2020; Mertler, 2021). By exploring these elements, the study intended to shed light on the benefit of industry exposure in sport management programs and identify the common themes that contribute to a positive learning experience, better preparing graduates for their careers in the sport industry.

Review of Previous Research

Support of the experiential learning process has a long history of development. Widely recognized research such as John Dewey in 1938, Kurt Lewin in 1951, and Jean Piaget in 1970, acknowledged the importance/impact of experience as part of the learning process and spawned additional exploration into the development of experiential learning (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988). The introduction of the Experiential Learning Theory by David Kolb in 1984 was a point of reference for research in discipline-specific curriculum, such as sport management. Kolb's theory provides a foundation for exploration in experiential learning curriculum development and is the theoretical framework for this investigation.

Theoretical Framework: Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

The use of experiential learning has long been a cornerstone of higher education with focused investigation by John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984) headlining the discussion of research in experiential education. Their work emphasizes the practical application of course materials to real-world, career-related experiences, highlighting its potential as a powerful developmental tool within any program's curriculum. While Dewey's social constructivism is a benchmark theoretical approach to education, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a comprehensive framework for designing curricula through the introduction of learning spaces that enhance the experiential learning process.

According to Kolb (1984), ELT defines learning as the process in which knowledge is generated through the transformation of experience. In this process, knowledge is formed by both comprehending and actively transforming the experiences encountered by an individual. With the continued development of his ELT, Kolb and Kolb (2005) introduced the concept of *learning spaces*, the balance between four regions in the ELT learning process that students navigate in pursuit of knowledge and skill development. The four regions – Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation – are cyclical in nature and create an individualized learning process acute to the student's experience (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Kolb and Kolb (2005) explain the concept of ELT as dialectical thinking, where learning is a process of conflict resolution between opposing perspectives of the four regions (p. 194). In addition, through inclusion of learning spaces, education through experience can be molded around the needs of the individual (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Kolb's ELT provides a foundation for this investigation as the current study explored curriculum-led industry exposure and the relationship to the perception of satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Based on the interpretive/subjective nature of this study, ELT lends itself to this investigation as each student engages in the experiential learning process uniquely.

Experiential Learning Theory has gained widespread acceptance as a valuable framework for promoting educational innovation that prioritizes learner-centered approaches, such as instructional design and curriculum development (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). It is around Kolb's concept of experiential learning, this research studied implementation of industry exposure within sport management curriculum design.

Building on Kolb's ELT, the current study was intended to explore multiple factors that influence satisfaction and occupational preparedness based on industry exposure. To fully grasp the value of these practical workplace experiences, an investigation into previous research identifies the importance of addressing students' needs and concerns in sport management internships, an example of industry exposure. Terese Stratta's early 2004 study revealed a recurring theme, indicating that students expect access to opportunities that enhance their prospects for future employment in the field of sport. In addition to identifying student needs and expectations, the study's findings propose a commonality in teaching strategies that can serve as a valuable resource for students, internship sites, and academic programs to improve the quality of sport management industry exposure, specifically in internships. Stratta (2004) found the emergent typology to be consistent student expectation of "...opportunities that facilitate future employment" (Stratta, 2004, p.27). By utilizing the proposed commonality in teaching strategies and promoting effective communication and collaboration among all stakeholders (e.g., students, internship sites, and academic advisors), the quality and desired outcomes of sport experiences can be significantly improved. Stratta's work was meant to provide a framework for developing a sport experience that aligns curriculum to student need. Stratta's early research also provides support for incorporating experiential learning practices and building upon the body of knowledge around sport management-specific curriculum development.

Research by Brown, Willett, Goldfine, & Goldfine (2018) support a similar perspective in the use of experiential learning within sport management curricula. Brown et al. (2018) applied Dewey's (1938) approach to education to develop a framework for sport management internship programs and advocate for learning experiences within the sport industry. Brown et al. (2018) writes:

Sport management is an applied field of study in which the knowledge and expertise needed to be successful is acquired both inside and outside of the classroom. The more opportunities students have to immerse themselves in practical and applied sport management experiences before graduation, the greater the likelihood they will be attractive to potential employers in the competitive field of sport management (Brown et al., 2018, p. 75).

Brown et al. (2018) also acknowledge faculty and student relationship is essential to the mission of higher education. The recognition of this relationship, with a foundation from Stratta (2004), suggests the fulfillment of academic responsibility must involve all stakeholders and link the objective of the educator to the needs of the student. This indicates the importance of aligning the function of experiential learning to student aspirations (needs), exposure to relevant industry proficiencies, and providing a site for application and practice. Student educational preferences in conjunction with elements of the environment create the most optimal learning atmosphere (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). The immersive educational environment created through the investment of all stakeholders aligns with the concept of learning spaces. It is within these learning spaces; student development is enhanced through industry exposure.

Additional research supports the influence on skill development and the significance placed on gaining experience through curriculum-led industry exposure, such as internships, work studies, and practica (Brandon-Lai, Armstrong, & Bunds, 2016). Brandon-Lai et al. (2016) identify a weakness in previous research on student skill development and occupational sustainability with regard to sport experiences, in this case internships. Brandon-Lai et al. (2016) suggest that due to the political environment of sport organizations, development of political skills is necessary to continue employment after the sport experience. For their study, the authors' evaluation of internship effectiveness is built upon the following political skills: perceived competence, identification of self within the sport industry, and pursuit of employment (Brandon-Lai et al., 2016). Their assertion of quality is based on assigned tasks by supervisors, level of responsibility, and interaction within the work environment. Brandon-Lai et al. (2016) also state that "...great importance is placed on these experiences, as they represent a viable pathway to employment within the sport industry." The importance of exposure to industry standards can also be recognized by the 77% of sport management programs that require a form of experiential learning (Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010).

While the accepted practice of gaining industry exposure through internships, work studies, and practica have become integrated into higher education curriculum, a glaring issue repeats itself throughout this research review. Pangelinan, Norcross, MacDonald, Rudisill, Wadsworth, & McDonald (2018) recognize the tendency of using experiential learning methods in sport management programs, they also identify a lack of continuity in their application. Pangelinan et al. (2018) apply the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) best practice principles in their examination of two undergraduate sport management programs that require a form of experiential learning. Upon conclusion, Pangelinan et al. (2018) provide recommendations for other sport management programs based on their critical observation and application of NSEE standards. This research is significant as it, not only supports the use of experiential learning, but recognizes the inconsistencies that exist from program to program, and student to student. Although Pangelinan et al. (2018) focus on the implementation of program curriculum, teacher-student relationship is mentioned as influential in the students' opportunity of attaining quality experience in sport management education. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship is a critical overlap in creating satisfying experiences and is the direct link between aligning that curriculum with student expectation/need.

To further explore student need, and ultimately satisfaction, Sauder and Mudrick (2018) conducted a study to assess the satisfaction of sport management interns by examining their work experiences and perceived level of learning. To establish the foundation for their research, the authors reference COSMA by identifying accreditation requirements that involve experiential learning. At the core of Sauder and Mudrick's research is the connection between sport management curriculum and the experiential learning process. Sauder & Mudrick (2018) use Kolb's (1984) ELT as a framework to explore perceived satisfaction in student sport experiences, student internship, and link student experience to perceived satisfaction. Additionally, Stratta's (2004) categorization of agents (students, faculty/college, and internship site) was utilized by Sauder and Mudrick to identify the roles and responsibilities that influence a satisfactory internship experience, including the significance of the teacher-student relationship. Sauder & Mudrick, while focused on student satisfaction, identify factors their study did not utilize. It is within this gap of research the authors recognize the need for future exploration into the impact of multiple experiential learning opportunities. Sauder & Mudrick (2018) found that students

who engaged in two or more semesters of early internship experience exhibited significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their internship duties compared to those with less early internship experience. One potential explanation for this finding is that students who took part in more early internship experiences had a better understanding of the duties they desired for a subsequent experience (Sauder & Mudrick, 2018). While Sauder and Mudrick's research centered around student internships, alignment to the current study remains constant: the relationship of industry exposure to a more satisfying educational experience.

Transitioning from the exploration of student satisfaction in internships, the study by Sauder and Mudrick (2018) sheds light on the connection between sport management curriculum and the experiential learning process. As we navigate into the conceptual framework of the Sport Experience Design model, Sauder and Mudrick's insights become pivotal, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of how industry exposure contributes to a more satisfying educational experience within the sport management program.

Conceptual Framework: Sport Experience Design (Funk, 2017)

Human Factors and Ergonomics explores the interaction of human elements and environmental design with the intention of optimizing well-being and optimal system performance (Bridger, 2018). Daniel Funk (2017) introduces the *sport experience design* framework centered around consumer behavior and is derived from research involving Human Factors and Ergonomics – an academic discipline focused on human behaviors/characteristics in a controlled, designed work environment. Funk (2017) identifies three domains – 1) sport user, 2) Sport Context, and 3) Sport Organization – and recognizes the overlapping components as critical areas of investigation. The intention of this model is to provide an outline of exploration into the structured system of a sport experience and how that experience can induce consumer feelings and behaviors (Funk, 2017, p. 151). To support the purpose of this study, Funk's framework was adapted and applied to sport management education, specifically, to identify the perception of student satisfaction with the educational experience and occupational preparedness within the experiential learning curriculum at East Stroudsburg University.

As stated, the theoretical framework guiding this investigation is Daniel Funk's Sport Experience Design model (2017). This model provides a valuable lens through which to examine the factors that influence an individual's sport experiences, particularly in the context of experiential learning and industry exposure in sport management programs. The identified gap in academic research regarding experiential learning and industry exposure aligns with the central tenets of Funk's model, which emphasizes the importance of the social context, user needs, and sport organizations in shaping an individual's sport experiences. In the context of this study, the focus shifts from Funk's original framework to align with the specific objectives of this investigation. This adaptation involves redefining the key components of Funk's model to match the focus and scope of this research. Specifically, redefining the *user* as the sport management *alumni*, the *social context* as the *sport educational environment*, and the *sport organization* as the *sport management program/curriculum*.

First, Funk's (2017) original concept of the *user* in his model is redefined as the sport management *alumni* in the context of this study. Instead of considering the user as a spectator or participant in a sporting event, we shift the perspective to view the sport management alumni as the primary recipient and participant in the sport experience. This adjustment allows us to explore how the alumni's needs, expectations, and perceptions of industry exposure influenced

their behavior. Second, the social context, as conceptualized in Funk's model, can be understood as the sport educational environment within the context of sport management education. This includes the academic setting, the interactions with peers, faculty, and industry, and the overall atmosphere and culture of the sport management program. By examining the social context of the sport management educational environment, we can gain insights into how it shaped the alumni's experiences, opportunities for industry exposure, and overall satisfaction with the sport management program. Finally, the sport organization, as originally defined by Funk, can be equated to the sport management program or curriculum in the context of this study. The sport management program acts as the organizing entity that provides the structure, resources, and educational experiences necessary for alumni to develop their skills and knowledge in preparation for careers in the sport industry. By examining the influence of the sport management program on sport experience and industry exposure, we can assess the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs and expectations of the alumni.

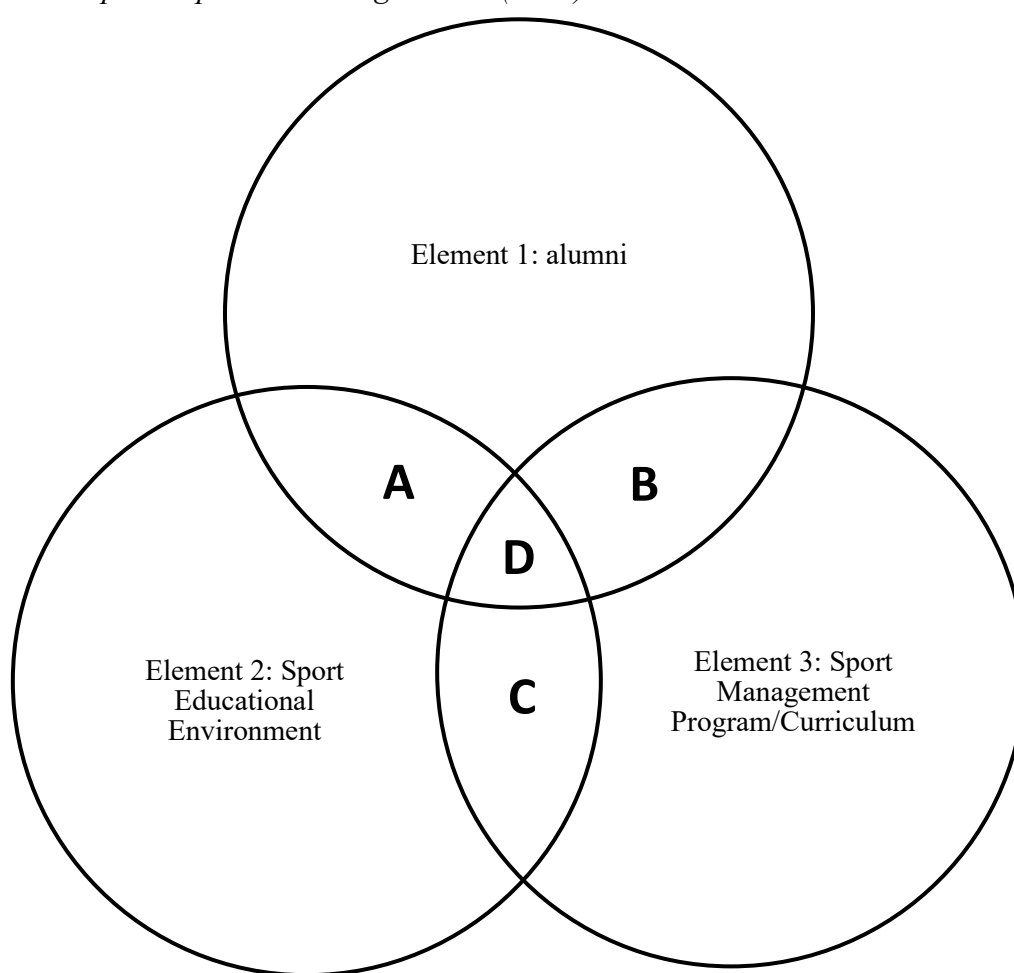
In alignment with our research focus, acknowledgment of the overlapping sections of the adapted model is critical. As depicted in Figure 1, each of the elements discussed earlier has intersecting components that establish a connection to the corresponding element. These overlaps highlight the dynamic relationships and interactions between the alumni, sport educational environment, and the sport program/curriculum. Overlap A represents the engagement of alumni in activities that contribute to the exploration and definition of their career interests, which may extend beyond the specific realm of the sport curriculum. This emphasizes the importance of considering diverse sport experiences and opportunities in shaping alumni's professional aspirations. Overlap B signifies the alignment between the alumni's needs and the organization's efforts to fulfill those needs, thereby achieving educational objectives. This mutual understanding and collaboration between the alumni and the sport management program are essential in creating meaningful and fulfilling experiences. Overlap C focuses on the role of the sport management program/curriculum in creating opportunities within the sport educational environment based on their understanding and perception of alumni needs. It highlights the program's responsibility to design and deliver experiences that cater to the educational and developmental requirements of the alumni. Finally, Overlap D encompasses the comprehensive integration of the sport management program within the sport educational environment, providing multiple opportunities for students to engage in activities that align with their educational and career objectives. This overarching overlap emphasizes the extensive scope and impact of the sport management program in facilitating alumni's growth, learning, and preparation for future careers.

Funk's model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the elements that influence the satisfaction and occupational preparedness of sport management alumni, particularly in the context of sport experience and industry exposure. By incorporating Funk's Sport Experience Model into the research design, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to student satisfaction in the sport management educational experiences. Furthermore, adaptation of Funk's model emphasized the role of curriculum structure in enhancing occupational preparedness through the identification of common themes that contribute to a more satisfying experience and occupational preparedness. The model serves as a theoretical foundation to explore the relationship between curriculum-led industry experiences, student needs, and curriculum structure, ultimately offering insights into improving sport management programs and assessing their effectiveness.

For this study, the chosen university, as a COSMA-accredited institution, has a sport management curriculum that exposes students to industry expectations and provides opportunities for skill development in a controlled, instructor-assisted environment. This curriculum-led experiential learning strategy enables students to explore their abilities with the support of faculty, fostering important teacher-student relationships. These sites for student development are constructed to prepare undergraduates in transition to their chosen career path. An example of this curriculum strategy can be found in Appendix B. Adaptation of the Sport Experience Design framework will aid in the exploration of key interactions that shape students' perceptions, satisfaction levels, and occupational preparedness within the experiential learning curriculum.

Figure 1:

Adapted Funk Sport Experience Design model (2017)



Note: This is the adapted Sport Experience Design; elements are redefined to apply to the research. The user as the sport management alumni, the social context as the sport educational environment, and the sport organization as the sport management program/curriculum.

Chapter 2 Summary

This literature review supports the focus and objectives of the current research, which is meant to explore the factors that influence student satisfaction and occupational preparedness in the sport management experiential learning process. Previous literature emphasizes the significance of experiential learning curriculum and the integration of applied coursework and project-based learning, which are essential components of this study. These active student-centered approaches, as highlighted in the literature, foster skill development essential for potential sport professionals. Moreover, the literature review acknowledges the crucial role of the teacher-student relationship, which aligns with the objective of understanding the significance of this relationship in the application of a curriculum that meets the needs and expectations of the students.

Furthermore, the literature review emphasizes the importance of considering the social context, referred to as the sport environment, which encompasses the interactions among students, teachers, and the structure of the sport curriculum. Understanding the dynamics of this social context is vital for exploring the factors that influence student satisfaction, occupational preparedness, and overall success within the sport management education program. This is in line with the study's objective to investigate how the social context influences student experiences and the effectiveness of the experiential learning curriculum in equipping students for sport management careers.

The reviewed research also supports the predominant perspective on the use of experiential learning in sport management curricula, providing further validation for our study's focus on experiential learning and its potential benefits. Additionally, the identified gaps in previous research, such as the need for consistency in the application of experiential learning methods and the exploration of multiple experiential learning opportunities, align with our study's goal of contributing to the understanding of these areas. Considering the findings by Sauder and Mudrick (2018), which suggest that students with multiple early internship experiences exhibit higher levels of satisfaction with their internship duties, our study seeks to investigate similar trends and potential explanations within the context of sport management curriculum. This supports the significance of early industry exposure and the understanding of desired tasks, as well as the need for further exploration of the impact of multiple experiential learning opportunities.

In addition, the literature review conducted in this study establishes a strong connection to Funk's Sport Experience Design model (2017). When applied, the Sport Experience Design model underscores the integration of theory and practice in sport management education, which aligns with the focus of the literature review. By exploring the significance of experiential learning curriculum, the literature review supports the practical application of knowledge within real-world sport contexts. With reference to Funk's model, this integration of theory and practice seeks to develop well-rounded sport management professionals who can effectively navigate the complexities of the sport environment through experiences manufactured by both the exploration of student needs and curriculum development. Furthermore, the literature review acknowledges the importance of student need within the sport environment, which is a key element of Funk's model. Understanding the dynamics and interactions among students, teachers, and the structure of the sport curriculum is essential for comprehending the factors that influence student satisfaction, occupational preparedness, and overall success within sport management education programs. The literature review examines these dimensions, emphasizing the importance of the

social context, student needs, and the influence of the sport management curriculum on student experiences.

In summary, the literature review supports the combination and application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Funk's Sport Experience Model by emphasizing the integration of the social context, individual student needs, and curriculum in shaping student experiences. By exploring these connections, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical implementation of both ELT and Funk's model in an educational setting and its relevance in preparing students for careers in sport management.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To support the purpose of this study, data collected has identified common themes tied to the transition from curriculum-led industry exposure to the perception of student satisfaction and occupational preparedness based on social context (sport environment), student need, and the sport management curriculum. This examination pursued the relationship between program requirements for industry exposure and alumni perception of student satisfaction with the educational experience and occupational preparedness. Through analysis of qualitative data, curriculum-led opportunities for industry exposure are defined, identified, and subsequently connected with the perception of alumni satisfaction in preparation for employment in the sport industry. Investigating sport management curriculum that aligns industry exposure, such as applied coursework, to student satisfaction in the experiential learning process requires a reflective perspective and interpretation of the learning experience.

Target Population and Sampling Method

Based on the interpretive/subjective nature of this study, qualitative data collection was deemed best to explore this topic. Using a department-generated list of sport management alumni and a call to participate through social media outlets (LinkedIn, Twitter), alumni were asked to contact the primary researcher. Interested alumni were asked to contribute to the study through a semi-structured interview. This type of purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting participants who possess specific characteristics or meet certain criteria that are relevant to the research objectives (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The current study employs this sampling method due to the researcher's knowledge and expertise of the sport management curriculum (see Appendix B), allowing rich and in-depth information related to the research topic. Criterion sampling, a method of purposive sampling, was used to select participants who meet specific criteria and reach the desired number of eight (8) to twelve (12) interviews. Specifically, sport management undergraduate alumni who have graduated within the past five (5) years. Due to the lengthy history of the program and the national academic accreditation, East Stroudsburg University provided generalizability to the larger population of sport management graduates and offers the advantage of focused data collection.

For this study and due to this researcher's extensive knowledge of the program, East Stroudsburg University (ESU) was chosen as part of the purposive sampling method. ESU is a part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and when compared to the other PASSHE schools, such as California University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown University, Lock Haven University, and Slippery Rock University, ESU sport management has similar program obligations including an experiential learning component (CalU, n.d.; ESU, n.d.; KU, n.d.; LHU, n.d.; SRU, n.d.). For example, ESU students, in order to complete the undergraduate program, are required to participate in a twelve-credit internship, of which, 480 contact hours are mandatory throughout the practicum. In addition, the ESU sport management curriculum provides courses constructed around applied coursework and project-based learning – an active student-centered form of instruction, which is characterized by students' autonomy, constructive

investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication, and reflection within real-world practices (Kotowski, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). ESU, through program development and COSMA accreditation, has also demonstrated the importance of the experiential learning process (see Appendix B). Through a curriculum designed on applied coursework, ESU embraces the concept of experiential learning and exemplifies the academic standards of COSMA-supported experiential learning (see Appendix C).

Instrumentation

In alignment with Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), constructivism is a research philosophy that emphasizes the active construction of knowledge and meaning by individuals through their experiences and interactions with the world (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This philosophy of research suggests knowledge is actively created by learners as they engage in experiences and integrate them with their personal surroundings. In constructivism, the environment is subjective and context-dependent, with individuals actively constructing their own interpretations and understanding of the world. This research philosophy acknowledges the role of social interaction and cultural influences in shaping knowledge and emphasizes the importance of individual context. Centered on this philosophy, this research explored the complex and dynamic nature of knowledge construction, seeking to understand how our students make sense of their experiences. Ultimately, this research sought to understand the concepts that influence how students perceive and interpret their evolving needs, the dynamics of the sport environment they construct, and their comprehension of the influence the curriculum has on meeting their needs. By embracing the principles of constructivism, this research can gain valuable insights into the diverse perspectives and interpretations that our students bring to the educational environment.

Based on the interpretive/subjective nature of this study, inductive qualitative research is deemed best to explore this topic. Inductive qualitative research is an approach that aims to develop conceptual frameworks based on the analysis of empirical data (Metler, 2020). The focus of this research approach is on exploring and understanding the patterns and themes that emerge from the data, allowing the research findings to guide the development of relevant concepts and constructs. Inductive qualitative research is often associated with exploratory methods of data analysis, such as thematic analysis, grounded theory, and thematic analysis. It offers the flexibility to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences, allowing for a deep exploration of individual perspectives and social experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 43). By allowing patterns to emerge organically, aligning this research approach to the current topic can uncover alumni insights that contribute to the development of knowledge in sport management experiential curriculum.

With this philosophical foundation in mind, nine (9) interview questions were constructed, each designed to extract themes associated with the Sport Experience Design model and subsequent overlaps (see Appendix E). Interview questions one, two, and three explore the motives, expectations, and decision-making process of the alumni. These questions address the *user* element of Funk's model, exploring how the student's needs, expectations, and perceptions of industry exposure influence their behavior. Questions four, five, and eight of the interviews

explore the program's contribution to students' comprehension of the sport industry and industry exposure in preparing them for careers. These questions address the *sport organization* that provides the structure, resources, and educational experiences necessary for students to develop their skills and knowledge in preparation for careers in the sport industry. Interview questions six and seven are intended to explore the alumni's perspective of the *social context*, or sport educational environment. By examining the social context of the sport management educational environment, we can gain insights into how it shapes the students' experiences, opportunities for industry exposure, and overall satisfaction with the sport management program. Finally, the ninth question overlaps all elements of the model by inquiring about challenges related to all three elements of the adapted Sport Experience Design: *alumni*, *sport management program*, and *sport educational environment*.

Research Strategy

Action research is “a systematic inquiry conducted by educators with a vested interest in the teaching/learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their schools operate, teach, and students learn” (Mertler, 2020, p. 5). This research design is meant to be a participatory approach that combines research and practical action to improve educational practices. Action research is a cyclical process with the intention of generating practical knowledge and facilitating ongoing progression. Application of this approach facilitates future assessment and continual development in an ever-changing environment. Collaboration of stakeholders (e.g., faculty and alumni) is an integral part of improving professional practices in this educational setting. The focus of this research was on improving practice, enhancing understanding, and promoting the development of an experiential curriculum that meets the needs of our students. Action research emphasizes the active involvement of participants; this collaborative approach fosters engagement in the learning process and the development of practical solutions that are context-specific. The evaluative nature of action research allows for continuous reflection and adaptation of instructional methodologies, ensuring that findings and recommendations are responsive to the evolving needs and challenges of the context. The current study, while cross-sectional, provided a base for ongoing assessment of the ESU sport management program.

With this research strategy, the researcher's association as an active faculty member, and due to the targeted populace, an application to conduct this study was submitted to the ESU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). On August 31st, 2023, the board approved the application (see Appendix D), and data collection procedures began. The first interview was conducted on September 14th, with the final interview on October 11th.

Data Collection Procedures

The use of semi-structured interviews is a common data collection method in qualitative research. These interviews offer a flexible and adaptive approach to gathering in-depth information from the targeted population. Unlike structured interviews that follow a strict format, semi-structured interviews provide a framework of research-specific topics to guide the conversation while allowing for the autonomy of the interviewer to explore possible themes relevant to the research that may arise (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The interviewer has the

freedom to probe for more details, ask follow-up questions, and allow the conversation to unfold naturally. This approach promotes responses that express experiences, perspectives, and emotions in the participants' own words. The data obtained from semi-structured interviews can be analyzed thematically, uncovering patterns that contribute to the research inquiry (Creswell, 2014). Following study-specific interview protocols ensure uniformity in the delivery of the questions, but semi-structured methodology allows for flexibility in the investigation and exploration of underlying themes (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviewing as a data-collecting method following the responsive interview model (Rubin and Rubin, 2012), the established protocol helps to create a bond between the researcher and participants. In continuity with action research methodology, the researcher's voice is an aspect of the investigation and an integral part of improving professional practices in education (Mertler, 2020).

Upon approval of the IRB and using a department-generated list of sport management alumni, a call to participate through social media outlets (LinkedIn, Twitter) was posted with interested alumni asked to contact the primary researcher. Email addresses of willing participants were collected, and a subsequent invitation to participate (see Appendix D) was sent. Accepting participants were provided with a synopsis of the study, identification of the interview process along with an explanation of potential follow-up questions that may arise based on their responses (See Appendix F). To facilitate the interview process, a scheduled Zoom meeting was arranged, enabling the conversation to be recorded for further analysis and transcription purposes. Transcripts of the interview were converted into Word documents and Excel spreadsheets, and only shared with an assisting data analyst after each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The recordings were kept on this researcher's password-protected computer until the completion of the data analysis process, after which the recordings were deleted. Transcripts of the interviews are kept throughout the completion of the study, with the only identifiable participant indicator being the pseudonym provided by this researcher.

Consisting of questions designed to solicit alumni perception of their experiential education and occupational preparedness, thirteen (13) interviews were conducted in alignment with the Sport Experience Design model. Participants consisted of alumni who graduated from the sport management program, ranging from the Spring semester of 2018 to the Spring semester of 2023. Each consented to participate in a video-recorded interview that was transcribed for analysis. Introductory questions provided insight into the participants' current employment status, educational level achieved, and possibility of continuing their education. Nine (9) of the alumni still work in the sport industry, eight (8) attained graduate degrees, and five (5) are considering continuing their education. This information provided a foundation for analysis of the research questions.

Data Analysis

For this research, it was determined that thematic analysis would be the best approach to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. This approach developed codes and themes inductively with direction from Funk's Sport Experience Design framework (2017). The intention of this model is to provide an outline of exploration into the structured system of a sport experience and how that experience can induce consumer feelings and behaviors. To

support the purpose of this study, Funk's framework was adapted and applied to sport management education, specifically, to identify the repetitive themes in the perception of student satisfaction with the educational experience and occupational preparedness within the experiential learning curriculum. Thematic analysis is a commonly used qualitative research method that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within textual data. It involves carefully examining and interpreting the content of the data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the process began with the conversion of transcripts into Word documents and Excel spreadsheets, followed by the development of coding categories that capture the key concepts present in the interview transcripts. Consistent with common practices of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Mertler, 2020), upon completion of each interview, the researcher reviewed the data collected and engaged in the initial coding process.

This research employed rigorous coding procedures to ensure consistency and accuracy in the coding process. The six-step procedure for inductive analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized and the analysis was guided organically by the data. First, each interview was transcribed verbatim and reviewed by the researcher to get a general sense of the data. This phase enables the researcher to establish a preliminary comprehension of how the three elements in the Sport Experience Design model are applied and identified. In the second step, data was reviewed line by line to generate preliminary codes. Based on the alignment of the interview questions to Sport Experience Design elements (see Figure 1), data coding was linked to the adapted elements (alumni, sport program/curriculum, and sport educational environment) of the theoretical framework. In the third step, initial codes were organized into themes representative of the sport management alumni-educational environment-program/curriculum interaction, Overlap D of the adapted model. In the fourth step, codes within each category were reviewed and assembled into subthemes based on repeated patterns of meaning. In the fifth and sixth steps, themes were refined to generate clear and accurate labels, and supporting text extracts were selected to substantiate each theme and produce the qualitative narrative.

Once the coding is complete, the data is summarized and analyzed to identify recurring patterns and interpretations. The use of investigator triangulation will be employed to assure the validity and reliability of the data analysis process. In this type of triangulation, a data analyst, a thematic investigator for this study, was involved in the data analysis process allowing different interpretations and ensuring that findings are not solely dependent on the perspective of a single researcher (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEnvoy, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2020). Triangulation strengthens the credibility of qualitative research by reducing the potential for bias, increasing the reliability of findings, and providing a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the research topic (Mertler, 2020). Furthermore, researchers can engage in data triangulation by incorporating various sources of data within the interview itself. This can include using prompts or probes to encourage participants to provide examples, narratives, or reflections on their experiences, which can be further validated or complemented by other data sources (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By employing these triangulation strategies, the researchers of this study enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of the findings obtained from semi-structured

interviews and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEnvoy, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2020).

Analysis of the transcripts followed a systematic process guided by the principles of qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed to grasp the alumni's perspectives on their sport management experiential education and occupational preparedness. This initial step allowed us to identify preliminary codes associated with the research questions and guided the subsequent analysis. The data was then systematically reviewed, line by line, to generate more specific codes. Codes were assigned to segments of text related to the primary research questions, enabling the identification of patterns and themes. Investigator triangulation was employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the data analysis process. In this type of triangulation, a thematic investigator was involved in the data analysis process, allowing different interpretations, and ensuring that findings are not solely dependent on the perspective of a single researcher (Andrew et al., 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2020). Member checking – the practice of validating raw data collected from an interview with the participant to ensure the accuracy of analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Metler, 2020) – was employed to establish the trustworthiness of data gathered.

Summary

In summary, the methodology supports the utilization of Funk's Sport Experience Model by exploring the integration of the social context, student needs, and curriculum in shaping student sport experiences. Aligning interpretative meanings of exploration with the subjective nature of the constructive philosophy, and through the use of triangulation, the collected data will support the ongoing development of sport management curricula. In addition, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical implementation of Funk's model in an educational setting and its relevance in preparing students for careers in sport management.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study is to examine sport management experiential learning curriculum and how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. To support this purpose, data collected has identified common themes tied to the transition from curriculum-led industry exposure to the perception of student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. These themes are based on alumni need, sport environment, and the sport management curriculum, the adapted elements of Daniel Funk's (2017) Sport Experience Design model. This examination pursued the relationship between program requirements for industry exposure and alumni perception of student satisfaction with their educational experience and occupational preparedness. Through thematic analysis of qualitative data, curriculum-led opportunities for industry exposure are connected with the perception of alumni satisfaction in preparation for employment in the sport industry.

Due to this researcher's extensive knowledge of the program, East Stroudsburg University (ESU) was chosen as part of the purposive sampling method. ESU is a part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and when compared to the other PASSHE schools, such as California University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown University, Lock Haven University, and Slippery Rock University, ESU sport management has similar program obligations including an experiential learning component (CalU, n.d.; ESU, n.d.; KU, n.d.; LHU, n.d.; SRU, n.d.). Due to the lengthy history of the program, and similarity to other universities with sport management programs, and the national academic accreditation (through COSMA), this populace provides generalizability to the larger population of sport management undergraduates and offers the advantage of focused data collection.

The use of semi-structured interviews offers a flexible and adaptive approach to gathering in-depth information from the targeted population. Consisting of questions designed to solicit alumni perception of their experiential education and occupational preparedness, thirteen (13) interviews were conducted in alignment with the Sport Experience Design model. Participants consisted of alumni that graduated from the sport management program, ranging from Spring semester of 2018 to Spring semester of 2023. Each consented to participate in a video recorded interview that was transcribed for analysis. Introductory questions provided insight into the participants' current employment status, educational level achieved, and possibility of continuing their education. Nine (9) of the alumni still work in the sport industry, eight (8) attained graduate degrees, and five (5) are considering continuing their education. This information provided a foundation for analysis of the research questions.

Analysis of the transcripts followed a systematic process guided by the principles of qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed to grasp the alumni's perspectives on their sport management experiential education and occupational preparedness. This initial step allowed the researcher to identify preliminary codes associated with the research questions and guided the subsequent analysis. The data was then systematically reviewed, line by line, to generate more specific codes. Codes were assigned to segments of text related to the primary research questions, enabling the identification of patterns and themes. Investigator triangulation was employed to ensure the

validity and reliability of the data analysis process. In this type of triangulation, a thematic investigator was involved in the data analysis process, allowing different interpretations, and ensuring that findings are not solely dependent on the perspective of a single researcher (Andrew et al., 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2020). Member checking – the practice of validating raw data collected from an interview with the participant to ensure the accuracy of analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Metler, 2020) – was employed to establish the trustworthiness of data gathered. The following is a breakdown of the information collected aligning the Sport Experience Design model with this study's research questions.

4.1 Emergent Themes

The analysis of the interviews revealed several key themes that provide insight into the perceptions of the sport management alumni regarding satisfaction in their experiential education and occupational preparedness. The five common themes derived from the data were: 1) *Combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, 2) *hands-on learning and networking*, 3) *real-world application and transferable skills*, 4) *alignment with industry expectation*, and 5) *extracurricular engagement*. These themes provide a context for exploring the influence industry exposure has on perceived student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. The emergent themes align with overlapping elements of the Sport Experience Design model and provide insight into improving the sport management program and assessing its effectiveness.

The first theme, *combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, aligns with the purpose of this study by emphasizing the motivation behind students pursuing a sport management program. The study sought to delve into how students, driven by their love for sports, integrate this fervor with the business aspects of the sports industry. Many alumni expressed a deep passion for sports and an interest in merging their love for sports with the business side of the industry. They emphasized how their personal enthusiasm for sport motivated their decision to pursue a sport management program. One participant explained,

“I knew I wanted to be within sports because it always had a team environment and I love the culture. It kind of amps you up, but [I] also knew I wanted to stay under a business side, because that stuff I feel like is always important to me, as far as marketing, sales, finances, anything under that branch. With sport management it has kind of best of both worlds, because it would allow me to still stick with business side, but it would be more directed toward sport.”

This theme aligns with Funk's model and the adapted alumni perspective (Element 1), emphasizing the importance of passion and personal interest in shaping the learning experience. By exploring this alignment, we gain insight into how the alumni's inherent motivations contribute to their satisfaction and readiness for careers in the sport industry.

The second emergent theme, *hands-on learning and networking*, indicates a focus on how the curriculum provides practical, hands-on experiences and facilitates networking opportunities for students. Several alumni highlighted the significance of practical experience, internships, and networking in their sport management education. They described the perceived value of hands-on learning opportunities, such as project-based learning and internships, which allowed them to gain industry exposure and build essential connections.

"Hands-on learning in my sport management program was the game-changer. It wasn't just about textbooks and lectures; it was about diving into real projects, facing challenges head-on, and learning the ropes of the sports industry through practical experience."

This theme emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, internships, and networking within the curriculum. The study sought to uncover how these components are structured within the sport management program, and how they enhance the students' understanding of the sport industry. Ultimately, these hands-on learning experiences and networking opportunities contribute to students' overall satisfaction and readiness for the sport industry.

The next theme derived from the data collected was *real-world application and transferable skills*. With this theme, the practical application of theory and development of competencies that are interchangeable across professional environments became paramount. A common thread among alumni was the emphasis on real-world application and the development of transferable skills during their education. Participants spoke of how their coursework and industry experiences prepared them for the challenges of the sports industry and provided them with skills applicable beyond the field.

"Like, I said. I think it touched on all aspects of the business world. Everything I learned in class, I definitely apply to my job now, whether it be in sports or not, it's just business related, and just getting that hands-on experience was super important."

This theme supports the development of skills students gain through the experiential learning curriculum, and the proficiencies integrated into the learning environment cultivates transferable skills applicable across industries. The real-world application and transferable skills are fostered by the curriculum in an attempt to create a sport industry immersive learning environment.

When discussing the curriculum many of the alumni recognized the *alignment of industry expectation* and the program's experiential learning practices. Alumni discussed the importance of their education structured around industry expectations and highlighted faculty guidance throughout industry exposure. One alumnus stating,

"The course work and the professors at ESU definitely take the time to make sure that what they're teaching in class is going to relate to you at some point in your work, and even now, like being two years in. I'm definitely still seeing that."

This example underscores how the program's structure and faculty efforts align with industry expectations. It indicates that the program is designed to ensure relevance to practical application, efforts that continue to be evident after the participant has worked in the industry.

The final theme extracted from the transcripts was *extracurricular engagement*. This concept is taken from alumni's perception of industry involvement and the importance of self-driven engagement. Participants described how these experiences enriched their education and helped them adapt to changing circumstances and challenges in the sport industry.

"I started taking part more in the [SMGT] club, taking part more in those field trips that we would take down to college nights at Scranton, Wilkes Barre, or with the Iron Pigs. Things like that. I think that definitely helps paint that picture for you outside the classroom."

In this quote the participant identifies the opportunities to engage in activities outside the program requirements. The alumni's description of self-driven industry exposure underlines the importance of extracurricular engagement in shaping one's career trajectory. Other responses included, "wish I started sooner", and "I wish I would have done it earlier in freshman-sophomore year", both examples of how motivation influence choices in educational practices and engagement.

The five themes align with the overlapping components of Funk's Sport Experience Design model, emphasizing the dynamic relationships and interactions between students (user), the sport management program (organization), and the sport environment (social context). The overlapping elements highlight how each theme contributes to the overall sport management education experience and influences the satisfaction and engagement of students. Funk's model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the elements that influence the satisfaction and occupational preparedness of sport management students(alumni), particularly in the context of sport experience and industry exposure. The next section will explore the identified themes in relation to the research questions posed in this investigation.

4.2 Research Questions and Themes

By analyzing the feedback regarding industry exposure among alumni, the identification of themes revealed insight into student satisfaction in their experiential learning education and readiness to enter the sport industry workforce. These themes capture facets of adapted Funk model, and provide alignment to alumni, the sport environment, and the sport management program/curriculum in shaping the learning process. Emergent themes revealed student need was driven by personal interest and passion for sport (overlap A of Funk's model), but recognized uncertainty in career direction upon entering the educational program. In addition, themes established the educational environment created was driven by the interaction between both the student need and the sport management experiential learning curriculum (overlap C of Funk's model). Thematic analysis also revealed industry exposure sought by the student, and provided by the program, assisted in outlining industry expectation and possible career direction. Linked to the broader context of the study's research questions, these themes offer insight into the motivation driving students to pursue a sport management education, their industry expectations, and the impact of the curriculum on professional development. As we delve into the alignment of these emergent themes with the Sport Experience Design model, an understanding of the concepts influencing student satisfaction and occupational preparedness begins to unfold.

Building upon the emergent themes, we now turn our attention to the first research question, aiming to dissect the opportunities for industry exposure provided by the sport management program and establish how these opportunities contribute to a more satisfying learning experience.

4.2.1 Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question 1 was intended to explore the motivations and decision-making processes that lead students to pursue sport management as an academic discipline. This research question is posed to examine the factors that attract individuals to sport management programs, with a specific focus on industry exposure. With this question as a driving factor, it was revealed that many students are drawn to these programs due to their genuine love for sports and a desire to combine this passion with business practices. The propensity to view a sport management

program as a tool/pathway to transform a passion for sports into a meaningful career aligns with the direction of this research question. Participants recognized a lack of knowledge about industry expectation and career opportunities but demonstrated a desire to explore avenues of professional development. Individual aspirations of the student, such as the love for sport, drove decisions to seek educational programs that supported their initial ambitions, outlining the student's need. Alignment of that student need, therefore, is realized through engagement in the sport environment with the assistance of the sport management program.

In the context of the Sport Experience Design model, the research question embraces respondents' *passion for sports and their interest in combining sports with business*. This aligns with the user's perspective and their needs, represented in Overlap A. This overlap signifies the engagement of students in activities that contribute to the exploration and definition of their career interests. In support of that career exploration, one of the participants explained:

"I knew going in, I wanted to be in sports. So I was, like okay, let's see what happens here. And I think when I had my voluntary internship with the Blue Rocks my sophomore year, it really hit me. I was like this is it! I knew I wanted this personally, and I knew I found my goal in life. This would be in facilities and events and see that side of things. So really, I feel like it's a throughout the years for me where I discovered where I wanted to be with sports."

This alumnus represents the sentiments of all the research participants. Each of the thirteen participating subjects commented on the variety of opportunities present in the educational environment. It was their search for personal passions that ignited the direction of career interests, and ultimately, choices to engage in industry exposure opportunities. Responsibility in providing those sites of self-exploration falls onto the sport management program. For the educational experience to support student aspirations, the sport management program must understand each of the goals and objectives of the student. This is identified in Overlap B of the Sport Experience Design Model.

Overlap B signifies the alignment between the student's needs and the organization's efforts to fulfill those needs, thus achieving educational objectives. This mutual understanding and collaboration between the student and the sport management program is essential in creating meaningful and fulfilling experiences. With relation to RQ1, respondents recognized the efforts of the sport management program through the varying opportunities provided by the curriculum and the educational environment created. One participant stated,

"I think when I went into sport management, it definitely exceeded my expectations of what it was going to be. I got a lot of experience, and I got to talk to a lot of professionals, which was something that I definitely needed. With my own career now... I think that's the beauty of sport for me because there's variety for everyone."

This respondent, like many others, entered the educational program with uncertainty, just an exuberance for sport and the need for career inquiry. Driven by that passion, this student relied on the sport management program to create a learning space for their exploration of career ambitions. Uncertainty in career direction is an underlying component of student needs, Overlap C provides the sport management program with direction in creating an educational environment that fulfills student need based on industry expectations.

Overlap C focuses on the role of the sport management program/curriculum in creating opportunities within the sport environment based on their understanding and perception of student needs. It highlights the program's responsibility to design and deliver experiences that cater to the educational and developmental requirements of the students. The *hands-on learning and networking* theme, as indicated by students actively seeking opportunities within the curriculum for practical application of theoretical knowledge, directly speaks to the investigation of RQ1. Molding varying curriculum-led experiences of industry exposure provides opportunity for student engagement within their chosen learning space. This variety influences students' perception of the curriculum as offering valuable, real-world experiences that contribute to the educational environment and individual learning space. Ultimately, the overlap of the sport management experiential curriculum within the sport environment that provides industry exposure fulfilling student need is outlined in Overlap D of the Sport Experience Design model.

This study defines student satisfaction as the subjective evaluation and perception of the overall learning experience by sport management students. It encompasses recognizing opportunities to develop relevant skills, engage in substantial industry-related tasks, and build a networking base (Koo et al., 2016). Overlap D of this study's conceptual framework incorporates elements of student need, the sport educational environment, and curriculum-led industry exposure to support defining of student satisfaction. Directly relating to RQ1, Overlap D suggests that student satisfaction align their broader career objectives and educational goals within the sport environment while providing industry exposure that allows for career exploration. Participants outlined their perception of student satisfaction through repeated reference to industry exposure within the program created educational environment. When asked about their sport management education all thirteen of the participants responded with an example of varying opportunities for industry exposure. This underscores the significance of creating a co-curricular environment with varying industry exposure opportunities to meet student satisfaction.

To summarize the findings for RQ1, Overlaps A, B, and C highlight the importance of diverse experiences and opportunities that can contribute to a more satisfying learning experience. They emphasize the engagement of students in activities that help define their career interests (Overlap A) and the role of the sport management program in providing opportunities based on student needs (Overlap B). It is also incumbent of the sport program to understand the chosen sport environment and create industry exposure opportunities within that context (Overlap C). These overlaps provide insights into how industry exposure opportunities offered by the program align with student needs and industry expectations. Therefore, the more opportunities for industry exposure provided by the educational program, the more satisfying the educational experience.

4.2.2 Research Question 2 (RQ2)

The identified *hands-on and networking* theme aligns with the second research question (RQ2), which seeks to pinpoint the key skills and competencies cultivated by sport industry exposure. Networking emerges as a critical skill in the sports industry, and when students emphasize its role in their education, it indicates a recognition of the importance of building professional connections. One participant acknowledged:

"I got my job off of LinkedIn. I saw the application on LinkedIn, and I would have never gotten LinkedIn if professors didn't pound on us to get linked. Same with

like alumni who went to [Sport Industry Networking Event], who also said, networking. LinkedIn, Get this, do this, so I wouldn't have done any of that if I wasn't suggested to, or kind of told, you won't really go anywhere if you don't do this in the sport world. I would say, LinkedIn, because that's how I'm here today."

This quote stresses the importance of networking, particularly with LinkedIn, in securing a job opportunity. It highlights the proactive approach of leveraging networking platforms based on the advice received from industry professionals, emphasizing the role of networking in career success. Again, all the participants referred to interaction with sport professionals (networking) as a critical skill to develop in attainment of career objectives. The alignment of this theme directly contributes to the overarching goal of this study, investigating how industry exposure contributes to student satisfaction and occupational preparedness.

In addition, the theme of *extracurricular engagement*, representing self-motivated sport experiences, is also directly pertinent to RQ2. Alignment of this research question and theme suggest these self-motivated sport experiences contribute to a more satisfying learning experience. Extracurricular engagement involving voluntary internships, volunteering, personal projects, and other self-initiated activities, embodies the proactive involvement of students in the sports industry. Understanding the nature and impact of these extracurricular activities provides valuable insights into how students actively shape their own learning experiences beyond the formal curriculum. All of the thirteen participants made reference to engaging in sport-related activities outside the formal curriculum. Although each participant recognized extracurricular involvement, each had different examples of those activities. This further supports the assumption of co-curricular involvement in creating the sport educational environment.

In the context of Funk's model, both of these themes provide examples of multiple overlaps. Overlap B, which signifies the alignment between the student's needs and the sport management program's efforts to fulfill those needs, is evident in the data collected through consistent reference to industry exposure. The emphasis on hands-on learning, internships, and networking aligns with Overlap A, emphasizing the engagement of students in activities that contribute to exploring their career interests and gaining practical experience. Overlap D considers the integration of the sport management program within the sport environment, providing multiple opportunities for students to engage in activities that align with their educational and career objectives. This alignment with key components of Funk's model further enriches the understanding of how industry exposure, networking, and self-motivated sport experiences contribute to students' satisfaction and fulfillment within the sport management program.

In summation, the findings of RQ2 emphasized the critical role of industry exposure, networking, and self-driven sport experiences in cultivating key skills and competencies that contribute to a more satisfying learning experience within the sport management program. The proactive approach to building professional connections, guided by advice from sport industry professionals and the sport management program, emphasized the importance of industry exposure in career development and occupational preparedness.

4.2.3 Research Question 3 (RQ3)

The third research question of this study is intended to explore whether the applied coursework and industry exposure align student needs with industry expectations. Students

expressed that their education fostered what the industry expected, indicating a positive connection between the curriculum and the broader expectations of the sports industry. This alignment is essential for ensuring that students are well-prepared and that their educational experiences meet both their individual needs and the industry's standards. In participant responses, numerous mentions of how the coursework, experiential learning, and real-world examples provided by the sport management program connected with industry expectations. One graduate explained:

"I think, practically in every course there were guest speakers. or like real-life examples of what was being taught. So, I think it made it really easy to apply what you're learning... bringing in the guest speakers a lot, helps [recognize] 'this is a real person that did all this stuff'. So, it definitely works as long as you can apply it. You know, combining it with examples of sport experiences and then bringing it to your internship or things like that."

In this quote, the participant highlights the insertion of guest speakers and real-life examples in nearly every course, emphasizing practical application. This suggests that this type of industry exposure contributes to aligning student needs with industry expectations by providing tangible connections between theoretical knowledge and real-world scenarios.

In addition, the extracurricular engagement theme offers insights into the broader experiences that contribute to students' overall satisfaction and engagement, addressing aspects of the RQ3. By exploring students' involvement in activities outside the formal coursework, the study intended to uncover factors that enhance satisfaction and the sport educational experience, shedding light on the nature of the sport management education experience. Participants responses demonstrate that activities beyond the standard curriculum play a significant role in preparing students for the expectations of the sport industry. These activities provide practical experiences, networking opportunities, and exposure to the sport world contributing to the alignment of student needs with industry expectations. This experiential learning aspect is crucial for aligning educational experiences with the practical demands of the industry.

"The [Sport Industry Networking Event] definitely teaches you the way to act in a professional setting, how to dress, how to conduct yourself, how to be at meetings and take notes, and all of those little details and attention to those details. I think, sets me up for the most success. I didn't come in unprepared. I wasn't late. I do my job. I focus on those little things."

This quote highlights how extracurricular engagements, specifically a sport industry networking event, goes beyond traditional coursework to teach practical aspects of professionalism. It emphasizes the importance of details and how such engagements contribute to setting up students for success in a professional setting, aligning their skills and behaviors with industry expectations.

Looking through the lens of the Sport Experience Design model, Overlap C echoes the initiatives of this research question. The role of the sport management program in providing opportunities based on student need suggests an adaptable curriculum connected to the sport industry. Program design should cater to the educational and developmental requirements of the students, ensuring that what is offered aligns with their expectations. Alumni interviewed commented,

"Guest speakers coming in and explaining their workday helps me narrow down what I wanted to actually do. Having ticket sales reps, come in and talk, I knew that's not what I wanted to do. And then [Sport Industry Networking Event], how some years we bring in a bunch of different people; college athletic employees, Minor League, all that kind of stuff also helped."

This quote demonstrates how these experiences played a role in helping the individual identify their interests through program-led industry exposure. In addition, the comment establishes the sport management program's attempt to inject variety of that industry exposure to align with the needs of the student. This encapsulates the initiative of overlap C.

The investigation into RQ3 reveals a strong alignment between the applied coursework, industry exposure, and the fulfillment of student needs in meeting industry expectations within the sport management program. Participants consistently emphasized the practical relevance of their education, citing examples of guest speakers and real-world applications integrated into coursework (project-based learning). This connection between theoretical knowledge and industry expectations was considered essential by the participants in forming a link to the industry after graduation. In addition, the recurring extracurricular engagement theme highlights activities beyond formal coursework and establishes a significant contribution in preparing students for the demands of the sports industry. Through initiatives like networking events, the program not only encourages sites for practical skill development, but also aligns students' behaviors with industry expectations. The Sport Experience Design model, particularly Overlap C, appropriately captures these efforts, showcasing a curriculum that is flexible to the various needs of the sports industry, ensuring that students' educational experiences are coordinated with industry standards.

4.2.4 Research Question 4 (RQ4)

The last research question (RQ4) directly corresponds to the study's purpose of how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with occupational preparedness. As described, occupational preparedness involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for successful employment in their chosen career path. In alignment with the direction of this research, multiple themes emerged and are applicable in the investigation of RQ4. Alumni interviewed recognized the ability to use their developing skills and competencies across a spectrum of segments of the business industry, beyond that of sport management. These transferable skills were highlighted multiple times through comments such as this:

"...because what was taught in business transfers over to sport management. You just changed the product. Vice versa, everything we learned in sport management, whether it's sport marketing or management concepts, I can take the same process to business marketing. But now we're not talking about stadiums and teams, we're talking about other types of products. The principles there are still the same."

The mention of transferable skills within this theme is crucial. It indicates that students recognize the broader application of the skills acquired in the learning process, suggesting that they believe these skills are not only relevant to the sports industry but also transferable to other contexts.

This aligns with the idea of occupational preparedness, as individuals who perceive their skills as transferable may feel more confident and prepared for career challenges.

In the context of the fourth research question (RQ4), alignment with industry expectation theme provides insights into how the applied coursework and industry experiences shape students' perceptions of their preparedness for real-world challenges. This theme suggests that students value aspects of their education that go beyond theoretical knowledge. Program-led industry exposure guided the alumni in comprehension of workforce expectation. One participant commented:

"The [Sport Industry Networking Event] definitely teaches you the way to act in a professional setting, how to dress, how to conduct yourself, how to be at meetings and take notes, and all of those little details and attention to those details. I think, set me up for the most success. I didn't come in unprepared. I wasn't late. I do my job. I focus on those little things."

This quote reflects on a program-led networking event that served as a platform for learning how to act professionally, which is indicative of understanding the expectations within the sports industry. The emphasis on alignment with industry expectations suggests that students perceive the educational experiences as directly relevant to the realities of the sports industry. This is crucial for understanding how industry exposure prepares them for real-world challenges. If students believe that what they are learning aligns with what they will encounter in their future careers, it implies practical and effective preparation for the challenges they may face.

With relation to RQ4 to the Sport Experience Design model, Overlap D plays a significant role in providing insight into this research question. Overlap D encompasses the comprehensive integration of the sport management program within the sport environment, providing multiple opportunities for students to engage in activities that align with *their* educational and career objectives. It emphasizes the extensive scope and impact of the program in facilitating students' growth, learning, and preparation for future careers. According to participants, the sport management program is proactive in creating opportunities that mirror the real-world challenges in an attempt to create an immersive learning environment.

"I think all of the classes that I took in my four years really touched on all aspects of the industry. We went from sports law to coaching... And then, like I said, the Special Olympics was also super hands-on and really put what we were learning in the classroom to an applied test and applied learning."

The industry exposure generated intersects the three elements of the Sport Experience Design model and provides sites for professional development. The emphasis on real-world application and transferable skills, as well as alignment with industry expectation, outlines how applied coursework and varying industry experiences contribute to occupational preparedness.

The identified themes and relation to adapted Sport Experience Design model provides insight into how sport management alumni perceive their education and its impact on their satisfaction and occupational preparedness. The analysis of the interviews revealed several key themes that provide insight into the perceptions of the sport management alumni. The five common themes derived from the data were: 1) *Combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, 2) *hands-on learning and networking*, 3) *real-world application and transferable*

skills, 4) alignment with industry expectation, and 5) extracurricular engagement. These themes provide a context for exploring the influence industry exposure has on perceived student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Further conversation addressing the application of these findings will be discussed in the next chapter. Specifically, in addition, providing varying opportunities for industry exposure and its contribution to occupational preparedness will be highlighted.

Chapter 4 Summary

The exploration of themes through the lens of Funk's Sport Experience Design model offers insight into how sport management alumni conceptualize their education and its impact on their satisfaction and occupational preparedness. The analysis uncovered five emergent themes: 1) *Combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, 2) *hands-on learning and networking*, 3) *real-world application and transferable skills*, 4) *alignment with industry expectation*, and 5) *extracurricular engagement*. These themes serve as a context basis for understanding the influence of industry exposure on perceived student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. The subsequent chapter will delve into a discussion, focusing on data that suggests the more opportunities for industry exposure provided by the educational program, the more satisfying the educational experience. In addition, data revealed the impact of providing varying opportunities for industry exposure on occupational preparedness.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to examine sport management experiential learning curriculum and how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. In the previous chapter, findings of qualitative data collected from sport management alumni align with perceived occupational preparedness and satisfaction with the experiential learning curriculum in East Stroudsburg University's (ESU) sport management program. This chapter engages in a comprehensive discussion of qualitative data through an in-depth exploration of sport management alumni. The analysis, anchored in Kolb and Kolb's (2005) Experiential Learning Theory and Daniel Funk's (2017) Sport Experience Design model, has revealed common themes that stress the relationship between industry exposure and the perception of student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Based on social context (sport environment), student need, and the sport management experiential learning curriculum, we delve into the implications of these themes and how they can impact the delivery of sport management curricula.

The common themes identified align directly with the research questions posed in this investigation. For this study, the following research questions were designed to derive perception of student satisfaction with their educational experience and occupational preparedness:

RQ1: Does the sport management program provide substantial opportunities for industry exposure, and do those opportunities contribute to a more satisfying learning experience?

RQ2: What are the key skills and competencies fostered by sport industry exposure that contribute to a more satisfying learning experience?

RQ3: Does the applied coursework and industry exposure align student needs with industry expectation?

RQ4: How does the applied coursework and industry experiences shape occupational preparedness?

Each of these questions centers around the student's needs, program requirements, and the social context (sport environment) in which the opportunity is being provided. Guided in design by Kolb and Kolb's (2005) continued development of the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), the research questions incorporate components of the concept of learning spaces - four regions in the ELT learning process that students navigate in pursuit of knowledge and skill development. The concept of learning spaces creates an individualized learning process acute to the student's experience (Kolb and Kolb, 2005), this lends itself to the current study as each student engages in the experiential learning process uniquely.

Grounded in the exploration of these questions lies the root of how students navigate their individual learning experience within a sport management program. The theoretical foundation of Kolb and Kolb's (2005) ELT, particularly the concept of learning spaces, provides the basis through which we explore the intersections of student needs, program requirements, and the social context (sport environment). As we delve into the identified themes shaping the discussion, we look to bridge the theoretical and practical, shedding light not only on the findings themselves but also on their implications for educational strategies and the ongoing enhancement of sport management programs.

The identified themes, such as 1) *Combining a passion for sport with business concepts*, 2) *hands-on learning and networking*, 3) *real-world application and transferable skills*, 4) *alignment with industry expectation*, and 5) *extracurricular engagement*, form the foundation of our discussion. This chapter not only dissects the key findings but also critically examines their implications for educational practices and implementation. Additionally, it offers a platform to discuss the necessity for diverse industry exposure opportunities and their impact on graduates' readiness for the challenges of the sport industry. The conversation extends beyond the mere presentation of results, delving into the practical significance of these findings and their potential to guide future educational strategies, ultimately contributing to the ongoing evolution of sport management programs.

Interpretations of the Findings

In the context of this investigation, which explores the impact of curriculum-led industry exposure, ELT's adaptability to the subjective nature of the study is particularly relevant. Each student engages in the experiential learning process uniquely, aligning with the cyclical nature of ELT. As a widely accepted academic framework for promoting student-centered approaches, ELT provides a solid theoretical foundation for understanding and enhancing educational experiences. Additionally, using Funk's Sport Experience Design model (2017) as a conceptual framework for the development of interview questions and to view emergent themes, provides for an examination of how students navigate through the learning process. Linking these two concepts provides a structure for investigation and an avenue for analysis of data collected regarding student satisfaction and occupational preparedness of sport management students.

The integration of ELT and the Sport Experience Design model effectively aligns with key emergent themes in the responses from sport management alumni. First, the combination of a passion for sport with business concepts resonates with ELT's emphasis on learning through balance conflict within the learning space of experiences. Creating and linking industry experiences to the student's interests stimulates motivation and enhances learning efficacy (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Shen et al., 2009; Bardorfer & Dolenc, 2022; Okada, 2023). By incorporating real-world applications within the curriculum, students can actively engage in the sports industry, merging their passion for sports with a deeper understanding of business principles. This aligns with the Sport Experience Design model's focus on the sport user actively participating in crafting their educational experiences (Overlap A). This type of active engagement by the student in developing industry exposure is supported by the concept of curricular freedom. Deluca and Fornatora in a 2020 study introduce the idea of curricular freedom and found that students who felt they had an active role in the direction of their learning, a guided autonomy, were more engaged due to the alignment of their interests (Deluca and Fornatora, 2020). In addition, Milstein, French, and Phelps (2023) suggests early involvement in industry exposure promotes engagement "...in academic activities which pertain to their chosen career paths" (p. 16). These studies emphasize the importance of personal interest in shaping the learning experience, and, in turn, gain insight into how the students' inherent motivations contribute to their satisfaction and readiness for careers in the sport industry.

The next themes of hands-on learning and networking are well-supported by both ELT and the Sport Experience Design model. ELT's emphasis on active experimentation and

reflective observation corresponds to the hands-on learning experiences highlighted by respondents. These hands-on experiences, as facilitated by the sport management program's curriculum, align with Funk's model's recognition of the sport management efforts to fulfill the needs of the alumni (Overlap B). This theme also emphasizes the relationships and interactions between students, the sport organization, and the sport environment (Overlap D). Such interactions become opportunities for networking within the sports industry, contributing to the development of meaningful connections. Brown et al. cite the importance of creating that connection within the experiential learning process.

Furthermore, the concept of real-world application and transferable skills is intrinsic to both ELT and the Sport Experience Design model. ELT's emphasis on applying knowledge in real-world settings corresponds to the Sport Experience Design model's focus on creating opportunities within the sport environment based on an understanding of student needs (Overlap C). This integration ensures that students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also acquire practical skills that are transferable to various contexts within the sports industry.

Alignment with industry expectations, the fourth theme, is a key outcome of combining ELT and the Sport Experience Design model. ELT's cyclical learning process, involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, ensures that students are well-prepared to meet industry expectations by constantly adapting and applying their knowledge (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). This aligns with Funk's model, which recognizes the role of the sport organization in shaping students' experiences and aligning them with industry needs (Overlap D).

Finally, the theme of extracurricular engagement is supported by the integrated framework. ELT's recognition of diverse learning styles and experiences, coupled with Funk's emphasis on the sport environment and user needs, provides a lens through which to view and encourage extracurricular activities. Overlapping sections in the adapted Sport Experience Design model, such as engaging students in activities that contribute to the exploration of career interests (Overlap A), underscore the importance of considering diverse sport experiences and opportunities in shaping alumni's professional aspirations outside the formal curriculum.

The emergent themes, supported by the combination of ELT and the Sport Experience Design model, demonstrate key factors involved with student satisfaction and places emphasis on providing variety with industry exposure to ensure occupational preparedness. The study revealed that sport management alumni regard industry exposure experiences provided by the curriculum as a critical component in their educational process, but also recognize the importance of variation in those experiences. Exposure to real-world scenarios and opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in different capacities within the sport environment were found to significantly contribute to their satisfaction with their education. These experiences aligned with the alumni's needs and expectations, creating a fulfilling learning experience. In addition, alumni perceived the development of essential skills and competencies during their education, often referring to critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability. These competencies were regarded as transferable, extending beyond the sports industry, and preparing alumni for diverse career challenges.

The analysis revealed that applied coursework and industry experiences were instrumental in shaping occupational preparedness. The alumni described how these experiences equipped them with practical knowledge and confidence, enhancing their readiness for the sport

industry workforce. The study found that sport management programs, like the one at ESU, successfully aligned with both student needs and industry expectations. The curriculum was tailored to provide opportunities that met the demands of the sports industry while addressing the academic and career objectives of the students.

Recommendations

Considering the findings from this investigation, and in line with the transformative nature of action research, it is recommended that the sport management program at ESU consider structuring industry exposure in collaboration with the learner's ambitions. This coordination in curriculum design between the student and sport management program will align with the needs and expectations of students and the sports industry. The research revealed that industry exposure is a key factor contributing to student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Therefore, integrating more diverse and hands-on experiences within the curriculum could be beneficial. This enhancement should focus on creating a variety of industry exposure opportunities with guidance from student aspiration, ensuring that students encounter real-world scenarios and can apply theoretical knowledge in different capacities within the sport environment. This concept also requires a strong connection/relationship to be fostered between the sport management program and the sport industry.

In addition, flexibility and adaptation of the curriculum should be considered. The research emphasized the unique and subjective nature of each student's experiential learning process. To cater to the students' educational need, the program should explore ways to provide more flexibility in the curriculum, allowing students to customize their industry exposure experiences based on their individual interests and career goals. This tailored approach could contribute to a more personalized and fulfilling learning experience. The recommendation suggests offering a variety of industry exposure opportunities within the curriculum. This aligns with the Sport Experience Design model, emphasizing the importance of creating an educational environment that caters to the diverse needs and interests of students. By expanding the range of industry exposure options, the program can better serve the aspirations of its students, providing them with a comprehensive and satisfying learning experience.

These recommendations center around collaborative curriculum development and flexibility in program design. Additionally, the establishment of variety in industry exposure opportunities will aid in the development and guidance of transferable skills. These adjustments aim to optimize the alignment between the sport management program, student needs, and sport industry, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience for sport management students at ESU.

Limitations

This study is subject to several methodological considerations that could impact the interpretation and generalizability of its findings. The use of purposive sampling, while advantageous for capturing rich and in-depth information from participants, introduces potential sampling bias. The selection of participants based on their status as East Stroudsburg University (ESU) sport management alumni may limit the broader applicability of the study's findings to other populations. The decision to focus exclusively on a single institution, although beneficial for leveraging the researcher's extensive knowledge of the program and in line with action research, may restrict the generalizability of the findings to sport management programs at

different institutions with distinct structures or demographics. Additionally, the deliberate exclusion of a detailed exploration of the traditional classroom setting limits the comprehensive understanding of how these contribute to the overall educational experience.

The research design, characterized by an interpretive/subjective qualitative approach, allows for a deep exploration of individual perspectives but raises concerns about the generalizability of findings to wider contexts. In terms of data collection and analysis, the semi-structured interview format may introduce social desirability bias (Fisher & Katz, 2000), as participants might shape their responses to align with perceived study goals. Although member checking was employed to mitigate this bias, some degree of it may persist. Additionally, the thematic analysis focused on identifying common themes, potentially limiting the exploration of divergent perspectives among participants.

The findings of this study are context-specific to the sport management program at East Stroudsburg University. Caution is warranted when applying these findings to programs with different structures, industry demands, or demographic contexts. The exclusion of student characteristics such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status from the study design limits the understanding of how these factors may influence the learning process and perceptions of industry exposure. Future research endeavors should consider incorporating these elements for a more comprehensive analysis. Comparative studies that explore differences in perceptions and experiences among sport management programs with varying structures and curriculum designs, as well as longitudinal studies tracking alumni career trajectories over time, could provide valuable insights into the enduring impact of experiential education on professional lives.

Conclusion

In concluding this investigation into the impact of curriculum-led industry exposure on sport management alumni satisfaction and occupational preparedness, the alignment of educational theory and practical experience emerges as a cornerstone for the effectiveness of experiential learning. Rooted in Kolb and Kolb's (2005) extension the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) that included the concepts of learning spaces, and through the lens of Daniel Funk's Sport Experience Design model, this study delved into the dynamic interplay between students, the sport management curriculum, and the broader sport environment. The emergent themes — the fusion of passion with business concepts, hands-on learning and networking, real-world application of transferable skills, alignment with industry expectations, and extracurricular engagement — collectively depict the landscape of experiential learning within the sport management program at East Stroudsburg University.

The findings illuminate the reciprocal relationship between students' intrinsic motivations, program structures, and industry demands. The significance of integrating personal passion with academic pursuits not only validates the user perspective of Funk's model but also highlights the importance of tailoring educational experiences to individual interests. The emphasis on hands-on learning and networking experiences echoes the Sport Experience Design model's recognition of the overlapping elements within the learning environment. In addition, the recurrent theme of real-world application and transferable skills signifies the program's effort in preparing students for diverse challenges beyond the sports industry.

Alignment with industry expectations emerges as a key outcome, validating the cyclical nature of experiential learning as proposed by Kolb and emphasizing the adaptability of students

to the demands of the sport industry. The exploration of extracurricular engagement sheds light on the self-driven efforts of students to expand their industry exposure, showcasing a proactive approach to career preparation. It is within this experiential learning environment we see the influences of Kolb's ELT.

Embedded within this exploration is the theoretical framework of ELT and the development of learning spaces. Originating from the works of John Dewey (1938) and further refined by David Kolb (1984), ELT offers a comprehensive lens through which the elements of experiential education can be understood. Kolb's model, with its four learning spaces — Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation — provides an understanding of the cyclical and dialectical nature of the learning process. ELT's adaptability to individual experiences aligns with the interpretive and subjective nature of this study, providing a theoretical support that echoes the uniqueness of each student's engagement in the experiential learning process.

It is, however, important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the study design. The exclusive focus on one institution, ESU, and the specific demographics of its sport management program may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The deliberate exclusion of certain student characteristics and a comprehensive exploration of traditional classroom settings adds a layer of complexity to the broader understanding of the learning process.

In summation, this study provides valuable insights into the relationships between experiential learning, student satisfaction, and occupational preparedness within a sport management program. The findings contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the effectiveness of curriculum-led industry exposure and provide a foundation for future research endeavors. By grounding the investigation in Funk's Sport Experience Design model and leveraging the unique context of ESU, this study not only enriches the academic dialogue but also offers actionable recommendations for enhancing sport management education. As Dewey said, "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are educative..." (Dewey, 1938, p. 25).

Appendix A:

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Appendix B:

East Stroudsburg Sport Management Program of Study	
Required:	
SMGT 201	Foundations of Sport Management
SMGT 302	Psychosocial Aspects of Activity
SMGT 304	Historical Concepts of Movement and Sport
SMGT 346	Computer Applications in Sport Management
SMGT 347	Introduction to Sport Law
SMGT 405	Comparative and International Issue in Sport and Physical Activity
SMGT 408	Financing Sport Operations
SMGT 409	Concepts of Sport Marketing
SMGT 440	Contemporary Sport
SMGT 445	Organization and Administration of Sport Operations
SMGT 447	Sport Facilities
SMGT 486	Field Experience & Internships
Select 6 credits from:	
SMGT 209	Principles of Coaching
SMGT 286	Early Internship
SMGT 327	Stress Management in Exercise and Sport
SMGT 402/EXSC 402	Psychology of Sport and Exercise
SMGT 403	Women, Sports and the Body
SMGT 404	Philosophical Concepts of Movement and Sport
SMGT 406	Theory and Techniques of Coaching
Denotes Industry Exposure embedded in course	

Appendix C:

3.2 Common Professional Component (undergraduate only)

Excellence in sport management education at the undergraduate level requires coverage of the key content areas of sport management – the Common Professional Component (CPC). The CPC topic areas, as outlined below, should be adequately covered within the content of undergraduate sport management programs (associate's and bachelor's degrees). Evaluation of the “balance” within the sub-areas is based on the sport management academic unit's mission to allow maximum flexibility. For clarification of each content area, see “Definitions” in this section.

A. Foundations of Sport and Sport Management

1. Definition of sport and sport management
2. Historical roots, social issues, psychology, evolution of sport management
3. Management Concepts
4. Governance, Policy
5. International Sport

B. Functions of Sport Management

1. Sport Operations, Event and Facilities Management
2. Sport Marketing, Sales and Public Relations
3. Sport Media and Communications
4. Sport Finance, Budgeting, Accounting and Economics

C. Sport Management Environment

1. Legal and Risk Management aspects of sport management
2. Ethical aspects of sport management
3. Diversity and sociological issues in sport management
4. Technological advances in sport management

D. Integrative Experiences

1. Internship/Practical/Experiential Learning/Capstone Experience

E. Innovations (optional)

This CPC category allows your program to capture innovations in content, experiences and skills that might not otherwise be included. Consider including the following: Community/Team/Player Relations, Sport Entrepreneurship, Sport Analytics, eSports, Research, Contemporary Issues in Amateur and Professional Sport, Job Search Strategies, Professional Development, Undergraduate research, Human Resources, etc.

Appendix D:



East Stroudsburg University Institutional Review Board

Human Research Review

Protocol # **ESU-IRB-002-2324**

Date: **August 31, 2023**

To: **Edward Arner and Gene White**

From: **Shala E. Davis, Ph.D., IRB Chair**

Proposal Title: **“Alumni Perception of Industry Engagement: An Action Research Study on Student Satisfaction and Occupational Preparedness in Sport Management Experiential Learning Curriculum”**

Review Requested: Exempted Expedited **X** Full Review

Review Approved: Exempted Expedited **X** Full Review

FULL RESEARCH

- _____ Your full review research proposal has been approved by the University IRB (12 months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research.
- _____ Your full review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**
- _____ Your full review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit.

EXEMPTED RESEARCH

- _____ Your exempted review research proposal has been approved by the University IRB (12 months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research.
- _____ Your exempted review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**
- _____ Your exempted review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit, if appropriate.

EXPEDITED RESEARCH

- ☒ Your expedited review research proposal has been approved by the University IRB (12months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research.
- ☐ Your expedited review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**
- ☐ Your expedited review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit, if appropriate.

Please revise or submit the following:

NOTE: Include IRB contact on Appendix

Appendix E:

Invitation to Participate

Good afternoon,

As part of my ongoing development in the area of research and analysis of instruction, I would like to ask for your participation in an interview. I am completing an action research project that assists in the development of our curriculum. My intention is to explore student needs, our curriculum requirements, and the learning environment with internship satisfaction.

The semi-structured interview should take about 25 to 30 minutes and will be done via Zoom. As we are all extremely busy, my goal is to complete the data collection segment within the next month. Please keep in mind, anonymity will be maintained throughout the entire process. If you are willing to participate, please let me know your availability by responding to this email or texting/calling me at 570.460.0137.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edward J. Arner

Appendix F:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Synopsis

The purpose of this study is to examine sport management experiential learning curriculum and how sport industry exposure (such as applied coursework, practicums, field trips, guest lectures, industry networking events, and other immersive/educational experiences) aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Your participation will help our department understand the changing needs of our students while supporting the evolving learning environment. The research is focused on exposure to the sport industry during your undergraduate study at ESU. The goal is to provide insight into improving ESU's sport management program and, through a conceptual behavioral model, a template for assessing the experiential learning curriculum.

Interview Structure

To collect data for this research, the outline for the semi-structured interview is intended to solicit responses about your exposure to the sport industry. The semi-structured interviews provide flexibility by asking open-ended questions that allow for follow-up inquiry. I have prepared a list of questions related to your time as an undergraduate at ESU. However, during the interview, you may be asked to elaborate and provide a more in-depth response. This method encourages participants to share their feelings, thoughts, and opinions while still maintaining a certain level of consistency across interviews. The semi-structured nature of our interview will also allow further exploration into unexpected themes that may arise, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of your experience.

Opening Statement of the Interview

I have begun recording this interview, do you give me permission to do so? (Wait for consent)

Thank you for participating in this action research study. The intention of this investigation is to explore sport management experiential learning curriculum that aligns with student satisfaction and occupational preparedness. Your feelings, thoughts, and opinions are important to the ongoing development of curriculum at ESU. With that being said, measures to protect your anonymity will be taken and the only identifiable marker will be that you graduated within the past five (5) years. All information collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. You will be given a pseudonym and transcripts of our conversation will be the only thing shared with colleagues, but not before reviewed for any identifiable data. The transcripts of our discussion will be coded and analyzed, but at no time will your identity be revealed or disclosed to other researchers. Please understand this is a voluntary study, you may end the interview at any time with no penalties.

Do you understand and agree to these terms? (Wait for consent)

Do you have any questions about the research?

Appendix G

Interview Questions and Rationale of Structure

Applying Funk's (2017) Sport Experience Model as the framework for this study, the following questions are intended to establish the elements of the model. Responses may apply to multiple overlapping components.

Order of Questions:

Rationale for Choosing/Entering a Sport Management Program:

1. What motivated you to pursue a sport management program (as an academic discipline)?
Can you elaborate on your decision-making process?
2. Were there specific aspects of sport management programs that attracted you? If so, what were they?
3. How did your expectations align with the reality of your sport management education and subsequent career experiences?

Perception of Curriculum-Led Opportunities:

4. Can you describe the applied coursework or project-based learning experiences you had during your sport management program here at ESU? How did they contribute to your understanding of the sport industry?
5. How did the curriculum prepare you for real-world challenges and professional opportunities in the sport management industry?

Self-Motivated Sport Experiences:

6. Beyond the formal curriculum, did you engage in any additional sport-related experiences (e.g., internships, volunteering, personal projects)? If yes, could you share some examples?
7. What role did networking, mentorship, or involvement in professional associations play in shaping your career trajectory within the sport industry?

Exploration of the Educational Experience and Recommendations for Improvement:

8. Reflecting on your sport management education, what aspects do you believe were most beneficial to your professional development? Can you provide examples?
9. Were there any challenges or limitations within the educational experience that you encountered? If so, how do you think they could be addressed or improved?