

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE SPORT INDUSTRY: MOVING STUDENTS TO THE NEXT PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

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## Abstract

This presentation will focus on discussing the innovative use of experiential learning within the various sports industries to not only enhance student learning, but also to supply a much needed benefit to industry stakeholders in the form of applied research. The authors have termed this innovative experiential learning approach as the Industry Engagement Model (IEM) of internship provision within sport management curricula.

It is critical that students in sport management programs have the opportunities to gain hands-on experiences while still learning within the academic environment. These experiences usually come in the form of internships or practica courses that are required aspects of the curriculum. In most instances these experiential learning courses are offered near the end of a student's degree program.

Faculty within the Motorsport Management (MSM) program at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina (United States) have developed a more wholistic approach to involving students within the sport industry that has positive benefits not only for the students, but also for the betterment of the industry. This experiential learning approach, termed the Industry Engagement Model has five (5) components.

The components are:

1. Incorporating hands-on experiential learning throughout the curriculum versus only near the end of the course of study
2. Developing a systematic plan of indentifying critical industry issues and a strategy for engaging program faculty and students to study those issues
3. Leveraging key industry personnel in several fields such as marketing, facility operations, sponsorship, new business development, ticketing, etc. to permit your

program faculty and students to study a particular issue

4. Involving students in all phases of the project from inception to reporting study results to the industry
5. Insuring student reflection at all phases

Every student within the MSM program is required to participate in a minimum of four (4) experiential learning events each semester for a total of 32 experiential learning events within the industry during his/her college career. As a component of the four experiential learning events, each student is required to complete a written reflective piece that ties the experience back to the Motorsport Management curriculum content and program objectives. These 32 experiential learning events and subsequent reflective assignments are in addition to the more traditional internship and practica courses that are also required.

Faculty have leveraged industry contacts to develop innovative techniques to further engage the industry in the practical hands-on experiences. This presentation will focus on describing how the program faculty at Winston-Salem State University and Western Kentucky University have engaged the industry with the practical experiences of their respective management programs. This engagement has come through the designing of very specific research and applied projects that students and faculty conduct on-site at the various sporting venues. For example, at several venues, the faculty and students have worked directly with industry personnel to design a variety of survey instruments that have addressed the specific topics that a particular sport venue was interested in studying. For example, topics such as customer satisfaction, sponsorship recognition, fan base ethnicity, and fan avidity have all been the focus of research projects with different venues. Interestingly, as industry facility managers and marketing directors have heard of the quality of the product the academic programs have produced, many more experiential learning opportunities have evolved, many of which have included the industry organization paying for the student and faculty travel expenses to come on-site to conduct the specific research topic of interest.

The focus areas of this presentation will be:

1. A description of the innovative Industry Engagement experiential learning model
2. A discussion of how the authors have leveraged industry contacts to produce research projects
3. A discussion of the importance of the reflection within the experiential learning process
4. How the Industry Engagement Model approach to experiential learning has enhanced the industry and increased opportunities for students, including enhanced career placement
5. How the development of industry research projects for experiential learning has yielded industry financed experiential learning for students and faculty

References:

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