

# Exceeding Expectations: Internship Legacy In Sport Management

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## **Aim**

This New Zealand case study reports on a document analysis of student reflections, post internship (N = 272) over the period 2007–2016 from Massey University's sport management program. The lead researcher's prolonged engagement in the program (over 20 years) also provides a unique insight into the facilitation and enhancement of reflective practices, student expectations, personal and professional development.

## **Theoretical background/literature review**

The All Blacks have created a legacy of winning over the past century (Johnson, Martin & Watson, 2014). Outward Bound is another Kiwi organisation, with a motto 'to strive, and not to yield', that values 'greatness' and has been running programs with the belief that 'there's more to you than you think' (Martin, Dench & Paku, 2016). Both organisations are about 'developing people, developing teams'. In the context of internship programs, academic supervisors are a catalyst for creating personal change and professional development. Linking to McGregors' (1960) Theory Y of how human behaviour and motivation in the workplace assists in maximizing output, they aim to facilitate symbiotic relationships between the supervisors and student, which initiates aspects of self-actualization and self-esteem (Maslow, 1962). The importance of setting 'great expectations' for both students and supervisors should be emphasized in the induction process (Martin & Leberman, 2005). Throughout their internship students must be encouraged to be increasingly proactive, demonstrate initiative and add value to the organization. This transition involves them moving away from the student persona and towards producing an outstanding professional performance — grade 'A' (Martin, 2013).

## **Method/research design**

In this case study, Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) of the students' open ended question responses involved searching (using Nvivo11) for common themes based on the model of analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The lead researcher's prolonged engagement (over 20 years) and reflexivity also provides a unique perspective and insights "in a deeper and more sustained manner" (Anderson & Austin, 2012, p. 140). Narratives of self are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000). Whilst self-studies have been scarcely used when examining experiences associated with the management of sport, more recently Kerwin and Hoerber (2015) have encouraged personal reflection as a tool to strengthen methodological approaches in qualitative research.

## **Results/discussion**

From 2002–2016, 42% of Massey University sport management internship students (500+) achieved A grades (the University guide for A grades is between 5–30%). In 2015–2016, 58% (29/50) of students achieved an 'A' grade with 18 of these achieving an 'A+' grade. The findings consistently pointed out the added value of the internship experience for the students in terms of achievement, enjoyment, reinforcing employment decisions, and developing positive industry/supervisor relationships. Some evidence, however, has shown inconsistencies in students' ability to critically reflect on their experiences despite the broad range of activities undertaken. This finding has resulted in a more in depth and proactive approach to facilitating student reflective activity prior to the commencement of the placement.

## **Conclusions/implications**

By setting great expectations students have continued to add value to their internship organizations and many have exceeded expectations. Top students are commonly employed in their internship organization or by previous graduates of the same program in other sport organizations. However, whilst the focus of government and University strategy have increasingly been focused on developing work ready graduates, internship programs should be seen as more than just increasing graduates employability and as a catalyst for creating significant personal change and self-development. Leaders of internship programs are 'coaches' with the opportunity to set far greater aspirational goals and create alumni with a legacy of 'greatness'. However, they also need to help facilitate student leadership and critical reflection skills. Such activities have now been embedded into the program.

## References

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