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Sports Marketing Field Trips: Student Expectations, Perceived Benefits, and Proactivity

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ABSTRACT

A sample of 191 sports marketing students responded to a survey that focused on issues germane to attending sports marketing field trips. The results indicate that there is an understanding that these types of events are important to those seeking a career in the sports marketing industry. This study examines expectations on the part of two segments: students who attended at least one event and students who attended none of the five field trips scheduled for the 2016-17 academic year. The results indicate that the primary reason students did not attend is a scheduling conflict. It also delineates the benefits that the attendees feel they received while also identifying the singular most important benefit (gaining new insight). Students who attended also indicated in which of several proactive behaviors they engaged during and after the event. It concludes with an assessment of their own decision to either attend or to not take advantage of the field trip opportunities presented by their sports marketing professors.

INTRODUCTION

Students across all disciplines are often presented with opportunities to attend field trips where they visit the facilities of a host organization and hear from practitioners in their chosen field. One study characterized field trips as a learning experience whereby we can achieve a “coalescence of industry and academics” (Chambers, Holm, and Worzala, 2006). As such, they represent one way by which professors can operationalize the concept of experiential learning (Elam and Spotts, 2004; Gremler, Hoffman, Keavency, and Wright, 2000). These opportunities are positioned by their professors as a chance to learn and, perhaps more importantly, a chance to network. Professors tend to stress the networking opportunities, especially for those students who are seeking careers in industries where entry-level positions can be characterized as being in high demand yet in low supply, not a great set of circumstances for job seekers. Perhaps nowhere is this condition more apparent, thereby making networking opportunities even more important, than it is in the sports marketing industry – especially for those students seeking employment in the spectator sports side of the industry. Let’s face it, jobs with the San Francisco Warriors, the Chicago Cubs, the Pittsburgh Penguins, and the New England Patriots are hard to come by.

Sports marketing field trips are often done in conjunction with a game for the host organization's team. They typically consist of two key components: an informational session with speakers from the host organization and a game that follows the informational session. Thus, they are often done at night. Most students choose to not take advantage of these field trips. Perhaps there are extenuating circumstances such as their work or class schedule, maybe the cost is viewed as prohibitive, transportation to the venue might be problematic, or maybe they do not really want to work in the field specific to the field trip opportunity. Perhaps they don't expect the benefit to be substantial enough to offset the time and cost commitment being asked of them. That raises the question of what do they expect. And we know how word-of-mouth spreads information like a virus among members of this population using interpersonal communication, social media, and Internet resources such as ratemyprofessor.com. So, it raises the question of what have they heard from their peers regarding the outcomes associated with these opportunities. More importantly, do we professors know what these field trip veterans think and say?

This project takes a look at this aspect of student engagement. What are their expectations prior to attending? If they chose not to attend, what was their reasoning? What benefits did they gain by virtue of their attendance? What did they do to engage the presenting practitioners during and after the event? Answers to questions like these provide some insight into the students' mindset, insight which might help professors in their efforts to market these field trips to their future students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will focus on three key issues germane to the current study. The initial focus will be a historical perspective with a look at articles from 1937 through 1999. Next, it will address field trips in general; that is to say irrespective of any specific discipline. Finally, it will look at the literature that specifically addresses the leisure industry with an eye towards the sports marketing discipline. The sources included in this literature review include reports in the popular press as well as peer reviewed academic publications.

What better way to start a literature review about field trips than with a quote from an article from some 81 years ago? It was stated that a field trip "is of material aid in giving authority to class-room statements and in offering first-hand information as to current methods" (Faville, 1937, p. 278). Dewey (1938) characterized these field trips as part of an experiential learning framework. Several other articles reach back in the archives, but not so deep as the previous publications. One author referred to field trips as "short term experiential education" (Scarce 1997, 219). The incorporation of field trips within the realm of "experiential learning" was taken a step further when students in a marketing class at an Australian university participated in a form of case study based on insight gained at the visits to the host organizations. That study documented the benefits derived from the link between industry and academia (Alam, 1998). At a more fundamental level, a Canadian program known as *Project Business*, delineated the primary benefits of on-site field trips as those of using practitioners as teaching resources as well as having students gain insight about potential career paths (McQuade, 1984). In this regard, it was stated that "a gap exists between what marketing professors teach in the classroom and what marketing managers actually practice in the real world" (Lantos and Butaney, 1985, p. 3). Thus,

field trips were viewed as a way of closing that gap. This apparent gap, and the opportunity to close it, was similarly articulated by Scott and Frontczak (1996). Accordingly, *Training Magazine* delineated 19 “Tips for Teaching.” The organization, planning, and scheduling of frequent field trips was number 11 on that list (Anonymous, 1978). Similarly, they were ninth on a list of 13 ways that marketing educators can help their students (Berdine, 1988). And these opportunities should not be limited to university students; it was reported that a number of programs were available for high school students, and that they were often used to provide new opportunities to minority students (Overman, 1993). As we closed out the 20th century, we welcomed in the Internet. Technology can assume a role in today’s field trips that most of the aforementioned authors never imagined. With the streaming capabilities offered by the World Wide Web, virtual field trips have emerged as a viable option (Watkins-Miller, 1996; Holtzblatt and Tschakert, 2011). As bandwidth, speed, and streaming capabilities at host organizations have increased, the virtual field trip is a more practical option today than it was just a few years ago. This statement provides the perfect segue into the second component of the literature review.

While the look from the 20th century was intriguing, the focus will now shift to more recent times. For this second component of the literature review, the emphasis is on field trips, irrespective of any particular discipline. But we start with a perspective regarding marketing students. It has been indicated that in comparison to students in other disciplines, those in marketing “prefer concrete experience and active experimentation in their learning” (Jaju and Kwak, 2000, 243). This, of course, is where field trips can be incorporated as part of the learning environment.

Professors often seek ways to engage their students, to get them more involved in the learning process. Such opportunities should not be limited to undergraduate students; Dubas and Hershey (2009) advocated the incorporation of “add-ons” such as field trips into graduate courses that address marketing planning and marketing strategy. Validating this suggestion is verification that extracurricular activities in general, field trips in particular, do tend to increase the level of student engagement (OECD, 2012), and these add-ons enhance learning (Dubas and Hershey, 2009). An empirical study that used multi-dimensional scaling to plot 21 learning activities as viewed by marketing students found field trips to be characterized as: preferred modes of learning, less challenging, more enjoyable, and a cross between the real world and their academic education. Field trips, as were guest speakers and the viewing of videos, were placed into a dimension that the author simply referred to as *enjoyable* (Karns, 2005). The University of Wisconsin pushed this concept even further by identifying potential young entrepreneurs and creating a *residential learning community* where these business students resided on the same dormitory floor, took classes together, had dinners with successful entrepreneurs, and went on related field trips (Anonymous, 2008). In England, an article in the popular press noted how universities went beyond their presumed roles of informing and facilitating learning on the part of aspiring entrepreneurs by using field trips to rapidly growing small business organizations (Gregson, 2000). ESSEC, outside of Paris, uses field trips for its older student base in its MBA program where students are often seeking to transition from one career into a new career that focuses on business skills (Alsop, 2006), so as noted earlier, field trips are not limited to undergraduate students. Falling within the realm of experiential learning, field trips have even been viewed a valuable pedagogical teaching tool in the law discipline (Higgins, Dewhurst, and

Watkins, 2012). In real estate, it was viewed as a way to bring the outside in (Chambers, Lisa, Jennifer Holm, and Elaine Worzala, 2006). The idea of bridging the gap seems to be the dominant rationale supporting the use of field trips to facilitate learning by today's business students irrespective of their chosen field of study.

The literature review concludes with an overview of the information germane to the leisure industry, a primary component of which is sports marketing. Field trips were earlier characterized as a form of experiential learning, a concept that has most assuredly come into vogue in recent years in higher education. One study of this ilk that examined attitudes about field trips on the part of tourism students who had participated in such an event reported that the students were generally satisfied. More importantly, they viewed them to be an effective learning tool. Of particular note from the students' perspective were the group dynamics (Xie, 2004). A recent article that likewise examined the impact of field trips on tourism students concluded that they have a positive impact on the three intellectual competencies as articulated by Aristotle: practical knowledge, skills, and attitude/experience (Cardenas, Hudson, Meng and Zhang, 2016). If that is true for tourism students, then it may be safe to presume that this form of experiential learning would be true for students in a myriad of disciplines, perhaps none more so than sports marketing. Though not addressing field trips, a recent article on event marketing highlighted the positive outcomes associated with this form of teaching and learning. This publication was one of the few that directly addressed sports. (Lamb, 2015). As can be seen in this literature review, there is a paucity of research and understanding of field trips as pedagogical tools for sports marketing students. This deficiency needs to be addressed. As such, it provides the impetus for engaging in the current study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are basically related to the task of determining expectations and outcomes germane to participation in a sports marketing field trip. Specifically, there are nine objectives. First is that of determining student perceptions of the potential value of attending a field trip when one's goal is to establish a career in sports marketing. Related to that objective, the second objective is the identification of differences of opinion regarding the importance of these field trips between the students who attended one or more of the events in comparison to those students who did not. Third is the delineation of student expectations regarding the likelihood that those attending would receive important benefits. A set of 12 potential benefits was addressed. Next is the determination of the primary reasons as to why some students decided not to participate in these field trips. Fifth is the objective of identifying which of the aforementioned 12 benefits that the students who attended one or more of the events felt they actually received. Along this same line, the sixth objective is the identification of the single most important benefit that they received by virtue of their attendance. Seventh is the determination of their proactive behavior – both during and after the event – that would serve to enhance their knowledge about sports marketing as well as exploit the networking opportunities that these field trips create. The eighth objective is that of examining the relationship between whether or not they attended at least one of the events and their expectations regarding the potential benefits resulting from attendance at one of these sports marketing field trips. The ninth, and final, research objective is predicated upon a single question seeking the students' feedback on their decision. In retrospect, how do they feel about their decision to attend or to not attend one or

more of the sports marketing field trips made available to them over the course of the academic year?

METHODOLOGY

A survey was designed to gather information from students regarding the key issues as delineated in the research objectives. Specifically, it included questions such as: how important are these opportunities? What are your expectations regarding the benefits presented by a sports marketing field trip? If you chose to not attend one of the five field trips offered across the academic year, what were your reasons for that decision? For those who did attend, what benefits did you actually gain by virtue of your attendance? Which of those benefits was the most important? For those who did attend at least one of the field trips, what did you do to increase the potential benefit emanating from this opportunity; did you speak one-on-one to a presenter; did you bring your resume; did you get a speaker's business card; have you had follow-up communication with any of the presenters? It also determined pertinent student demographics. These demographics included their sex, age, major, and work status. It concluded with a question regarding their assessment of their decision to attend or to not attend any of the opportunities. The survey was primarily a multiple choice format with opportunities to write in "Other" responses to some questions. The survey was designed by the three coauthors, all of whom teach sports marketing classes. It was distributed in sports marketing classes as an extra credit opportunity – one of those classroom exercises for which few students are absent. So the response rate was quite high, albeit not 100 percent. Regarding the sample, it is important to note that the sports marketing class is a restricted elective in the marketing curriculum, but it is also part of the sport management and recreation curricula. The course is also open as a free elective for anyone who has completed the prerequisite (Principles of Marketing, Introduction to Sport Management, or Introduction to Parks and Recreation). So the population, thus the sample, is diverse in regard to the students' majors.

The survey had an internal check in an effort to insure the voracity of the students' responses. It essentially asked the same question twice – once at the beginning and once towards the end of the survey. Student responses to the two questions were compared. If there was an illogical set of answers – for example agreeing with a statement early in the survey while disagreeing with a comparable question later in the survey – then that student's responses were not included in the analysis process. And those students did not receive the extra credit associated with the survey.

Data analysis relied on descriptive statistics to take a cross-sectional look at this segment of the student population. Simple means and/or percentage distributions met the needs related to this project. Since the data were mostly nominal in nature, the frequency distributions were deemed appropriate for most of the variables under scrutiny. However, there were several questions that utilized a balanced, forced, six-point, itemized rating scale to determine student expectations. As such, these scales are (arguably) interval in nature, so simple means were deemed appropriate metrics for the task of assessing central tendency. Simple t-tests were used to determine whether significant differences in the means existed when any two groups were under scrutiny. A probability of .05 was used as the benchmark for rejecting the null hypothesis of equal group means.

RESULTS

The net usable sample, after deleting five surveys that failed to pass the validation test, was 186. The demographic breakdown documented a diverse sample that is a good representation of the undergraduate sports marketing student population. Specifically, it was 48.4 percent female, with 83.3 percent of the aggregate sample falling below the age of 25. As one would expect, given that the sample was drawn from a senior level elective course, 76.9 percent of the students fell between the ages of 21 and 24. Fully 16.7 percent of the students were 25 or older. Regarding work status, 24.2 percent were employed in a full time position; 59.7 percent were working part-time; only 7.5 percent were participating in an internship (not necessarily in sports marketing) at the time the survey was taken. Based on this confirmation of having drawn a sufficiently representative sample, the focus can now shift to the series of research objectives.

The initial question simply asked students how important they thought these opportunities to participate in a sports marketing field trip were for students seeking a career in sports marketing. The six-point scale ranged from very important (1) to very unimportant (6). The mean of 1.5215 falls almost squarely between very important and important on the scale. This finding supports the premise that students do see positive benefits accruing from their attendance. Perhaps more compelling is that none of the 186 respondents answered 4 or higher, thus indicating that 100 percent of the respondents – whether they attended any of the field trips or not – saw them as beneficial. But how beneficial is this opportunity? The answer to this question is forthcoming.

Table 1
Summary of the Likelihood Students Will Receive Each of the 12 Potential Benefits

| <u>Potential Benefit</u> | <u>Item Mean*</u> |
|---|-------------------|
| Gain insight into sports marketing | 1.3226 |
| Opportunity to ask questions to sports marketing pros | 1.3925 |
| Network with classmates and professor | 1.4624 |
| Get new ideas regarding future career in sports marketing | 1.6398 |
| Be entertained | 1.6828 |
| Network with sports marketing professionals | 1.7527 |
| Impress the professor | 1.8387 |
| Opportunity to purchase discounted tickets to event | 2.1290 |
| Chance to give resume to some important person | 2.0860 |
| Chance to entertain one's friends and family | 2.2043 |
| Increase internship chances with host organization | 2.4516 |
| Increase likelihood of getting job with host organization | 2.5323 |

* Scale from 1 to 6 with lower values representing greater likelihood

Before proceeding, it should be noted that 49.5 percent of the students who submitted valid surveys indicated that they had attended at least one of the five sports marketing field trips offered by their professors. So the participation rate fell just below the 50 percent threshold. A simple t-test was used to compare the two groups of students, and the null hypothesis of equal means was rejected. Students who opted to attend one or more of the field trips exhibited a mean

of 1.3696. This compares favorably to the mean of 1.6702 for the group that had not taken advantage of any of the opportunities. The level of significance associated with this difference was .002. Thus, there is ample evidence to conclude that those students who did attend one or more event felt that the opportunity presented by field trips was more important than did the non-attendees. Yet despite this conclusion, it is evident that both groups saw the importance of these events. Of note is the fact that the attendees' mean of 1.3696 fell very close to the most important designation on the scale – that being 1.00.

The next look will be at student perceptions of the level of expectations regarding the benefits potentially associated with attending a sports marketing field trip. All students, regardless of whether or not they had attended any of the field trips, rated the perceived likelihood of attaining a specific benefit by attending an event on a balanced, six-point itemized rating scale with lower values representing a greater likelihood. The scale ranged from very likely (1) to very unlikely (6). The set of benefits comprised 12 specific outcomes. Noteworthy is the fact that all 12 of the items exhibited mean scores below the scale's midpoint of 3.5, thus they were all viewed as likely to be received by students in attendance. Of the 12, the highest levels of likelihood were in evidence for the benefit of gaining insight regarding sports marketing and that of being able to directly ask questions to sports marketing practitioners. Conversely, though still deemed likely to occur, the two items at the bottom of the scale were those of increasing the likelihood of getting a job with the host organization and increasing their opportunity to secure a sports marketing internship. Table 1 summarizes the results for all 12 of the potential benefits.

Table 2
Overview of Non-Attendees' Reasons for not Attending

| Reason for not Attending Event(s) | % |
|---|----------|
| Schedule Conflict (work, classes, other) | 73.4 |
| Transportation Problem | 18.1 |
| Costs were Prohibitive | 18.1 |
| Lack of Awareness and Poor Planning (event sold out) | 17.0 |
| Not Interested in Career in Sports Marketing Industry | 10.6 |
| No Interest in Attending | 5.3 |
| Saw No Benefit Gained by Attending | 4.3 |

Earlier, objective three addressed benefits that students would expect to gain by virtue of attending a sports marketing field trip. Those results included all students, even those who had not taken advantage of the opportunities they had. Objective five focuses solely on the students who did attend one or more of the field trips. Specifically, it seeks an understanding of which of the 12 aforementioned benefits they actually felt like they received by virtue of their attendance. The most commonly cited benefit was that they were entertained. Most field trips include a game afterwards, and 89.5 percent said that they were entertained. This would have been anticipated since most of the students have an obvious interest in sports. Close behind on the students' list of benefits attained was that they did, in fact, gain insight into the sports marketing industry. Fully 87.4 percent of the students indicated this belief. Third was the benefit of gaining new career ideas. At the other end of the list, few students (10.5%) felt like the benefit of having an opportunity to give their resume to someone important in the organization did

present itself during the event. Furthermore, less than half of the students who attended one or more of these field trips indicated that they felt their attendance had increased their likelihood of securing either an internship or a regular position with the host organization. Complete results related to the benefits that students actually received are presented in Table 3.

The focus now shifts to the fourth research objective, that of determining why the students who did not take advantage of any of the field trip opportunities made that decision. As noted earlier, just over half of the students chose not to attend any of the events. (It should be noted that the additional five students who did not meet the validation standard all reported that they had not attended any of the field trips.) There were seven primary reasons that were noted. Students could designate more than one reason, so the percentages will not sum to 100. Far and away, the most common deterrent was a schedule conflict. Fully 73.4 percent of the non-attendees indicated that they had a conflict – most commonly with work or other classes. Tied for second were issues related to transportation and costs with each reason being noted by 18.1 percent of the non-attendees. Fourth on the list at 17.0 percent was “other.” In this regard, the lack of knowledge about the event or poor planning were the most commonly articulated reasons. This reason was most common among students who were enrolled in a sports marketing class during the summer semester who were unaware of events that took place during the fall or winter semester or students who made the decision to attend after all available tickets had been sold. Other reasons documented by students were a lack of interest in sports marketing as a career, simply not interested in the event, or they saw no personal benefit for attending. An overview of the results regarding non-attendees’ reasons for making that decision are summarized in Table 2.

Table 3
Which of the 12 Benefits Students Reported Receiving

| Benefits Received | % |
|--|----------|
| Was entertained | 89.5 |
| Gained insight into sports marketing | 87.4 |
| Got new ideas regarding future career in sports marketing | 85.3 |
| Networked with classmates and professor | 74.2 |
| Impressed my professor | 67.4 |
| Asked questions to sports marketing professionals | 66.3 |
| Entertained my friends and family | 60.0 |
| Networked with sports marketing professionals | 58.9 |
| Purchased discounted tickets to event | 54.7 |
| Increased internship chances with host organization | 35.8 |
| Increased likelihood of getting job with host organization | 31.6 |
| Gave my resume to some important person | 10.5 |

So while it is apparent that students do perceive the benefits associated with their decision to attend one of these event, it begs the question of which is most important. The answer to that question is the basis for the sixth research objective. To do so, students were presented with a list of the same 12 benefits that were used earlier in the survey and asked to check the one single

benefit that was the most important to them. Three benefits topped the list. Most important were the benefits of getting new ideas about their career (30.4%), networking with sports marketing professionals (23.9%), and gaining new insight into the sports marketing industry (also 23.9%). No other benefit was selected as most important by more than 6.5 percent of the attendees. The three least important potential benefits were those of: increasing the likelihood of securing an internship with the host organization, increasing the likelihood of securing a full-time position with the host organization, and entertaining friends and family. Table 5 summarizes these results. In reviewing the results, it is apparent that the sum is not 100 percent. Even though students were asked to indicate the single most important benefit derived from attending, some checked more than one answer. For those who had attended multiple events, it is conceivable that different benefits accrued. So for those students, multiple responses were allowed.

Table 4
Most Important Benefit Reportedly Received by Students

| Most Important Benefit Received | % |
|--|----------|
| Got new ideas regarding future career in sports marketing | 30.4 |
| Networked with sports marketing professionals | 23.9 |
| Gained insight into sports marketing | 23.9 |
| Impressed my professor | 6.5 |
| Was entertained | 6.5 |
| Networked with classmates and professor | 4.3 |
| Asked questions to sports marketing professionals | 4.3 |
| Purchased discounted tickets to event | 4.3 |
| Gave my resume to some important person | 4.3 |
| Increased internship chances with host organization | 2.2 |
| Increased likelihood of getting job with host organization | 2.2 |
| Entertained my friends and/or family | 2.2 |

The list of benefits for those students who took advantage of the opportunity includes a set of actions which required proactive behavior on the part of the student. For example, there might be an opportunity to pass along one's resume to someone of importance, someone within the organization who impacts hiring decisions. But did the student actually give that resume to that decision maker? Objective six looks at student engagement of these decision makers. What did they do to specifically exploit the opportunity presented both during and after the event? The first action concerned the students' decision to take copies of their resume with them to the event. Despite being informed of the potential opportunity to pass their resume along to a marketing decision-maker, only 33.7 percent opted to take their resume to the event. More disconcerting is the reality that of the subset of students who did take their resume, only 32.3 percent, that is to say 10.9 percent of the attendees, did actually give out one or more copies of their resume to these important presenters. They did, however, take advantage of the opportunity to speak one-to-one with one or more of the host organization's presenters; 65.2 percent indicated that they had done so. Another opportunity that students did exploit was the opportunity to acquire the business card from one or more of the speakers; the success rate in this regard was 54.3 percent. The final issue concerned follow-up communication. Students had

names, some contact information, even some business cards. Did they use that information to subsequently reach out to these marketing practitioners? Only 21.7 percent of the attendees indicated that they had any follow-up communication with these individuals who make hiring decisions in the industry in which many of these attendees purportedly aspire to enter. These results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Attendees' Proactive Behavior

| <u>Proactive Action</u> | <u>% Engaging in that Action</u> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Spoke one-on-one with speaker(s) | 65.2 |
| Got business card from speaker(s) | 54.3 |
| Took resume but did not give it a speaker(s) | 22.8 |
| Had follow-up contact/communication with speaker(s) | 21.7 |
| Took resume and gave to speaker(s) | 10.9 |

Having answered the question regarding proactive behavior on the part of the attendees, the focus now shifts to objective eight – the task of determining differences regarding the level of expectation for securing each of the 12 potential benefits when comparing attendees to non-attendees. The same 12 benefits as used earlier provide the basis for making this determination. Of the 12 potential benefits, statistically significant differences were documented for only three. In each case, the attendees had higher expectations of the benefit actually accruing. The three for which attendees exhibited higher expectations were the opportunity to give their resume to someone important within the host organization, the opportunity to purchase tickets to the game associated with the field trip at discount prices, and the opportunity to garner new ideas about a career in sports marketing. The results for all 12 potential benefits are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Comparison of Attendees to Non-Attendees Regarding Importance of Benefits

| <u>Potential Benefit</u> | <u>Means</u> | | <u>sig.</u> |
|--|------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| | <u>Attendees</u> | <u>Non-Attendees</u> | |
| <i>New career ideas</i> | 1.4130 | 1.8617 | .000 |
| <i>Purchase discounted tickets</i> | 1.8587 | 2.3936 | .002 |
| <i>Give resume to important person</i> | 1.8587 | 2.3085 | .003 |
| Ask questions to Sports Marketing pros | 1.2935 | 1.4894 | .052 |
| Entertain friends and family | 2.0543 | 2.3511 | .062 |
| Gain insight into Sports Marketing | 1.2609 | 1.3830 | .118 |
| Be entertained | 1.6196 | 1.7447 | .217 |
| Network w/ Sports Marketing pros | 1.6957 | 1.8085 | .321 |
| Impress my professor | 1.7826 | 1.8936 | .354 |
| Increase likelihood of getting job | 2.4783 | 2.5851 | .441 |
| Network w/ classmates and professor | 1.4783 | 1.4468 | .733 |
| Increase internship chances | 2.4565 | 2.4468 | .943 |

Objective nine is predicated upon a single question asking students to evaluate their decision, in retrospect, to attend or to not attend any of the sports marketing field trips that were made available to them. To achieve this objective, it was essential to have all students respond. Fully 40.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they wished that they had taken advantage of more of these opportunities. This group includes students who regretted not attending any of the events (30.1 percent) as well as those who attended one or more events and wished that they had attended others as well (10.8 percent). Fully 36.6 percent of the total sample indicated that they had attended one or more events and were happy with what they received. That figure represents 73.9 percent of the attendees. Only four students (2.2%) indicated that they had attended and were disappointed with the event(s). The remaining attendees were among those who reported that they wished they had attended even more of the field trips available over the course of the academic year. A total of 12.9 percent did not attend any of the events and believed that their peers who did attend have an advantage over them in the job market. Finally, 7.5 percent did not attend and did not believe that they had missed anything important. The students' evaluations of their own decision are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7
Students' Evaluation of Their Decision in Retrospect

| Conclusion | % Indicating this Conclusion |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| I Wish I had Taken Advantage of More Opportunities | 40.9 |
| I Attended & I Am Happy with What I Got | 36.6 |
| I Didn't Attend; My Peers have Advantage in Job Market | 12.9 |
| I Didn't Attend & I Didn't Miss Anything Important | 7.5 |
| I Attended but I am Disappointed with What I Got | 2.2 |

DISCUSSION

Foremost is the recognition that students, based on the low mean score, clearly understand the potential benefit associated with field trips of the type offered here. Yet the fact that there is a statistically significant difference of opinion regarding that importance between the attendees and the non-attendees reflects a need for professors to clearly articulate the value of attending. It is evident that some students who are enrolled in a sports marketing class are not seeking that discipline as a career path. Perhaps they just like the instructor, or it best fits their schedule, or it is perceived as a better option than other courses. Maybe they think it's about sports, how difficult can it be? (Yes, we sometimes hear that, and we try to let them know on day one that that reasoning is flawed.) The point is that some might not view a sports marketing field trip as exceedingly important, but might see a field trip to an advertising agency in a different light. Still, it is important to understand that the wording of this question addressed the value of this type of endeavor for students seeking a career in sports marketing. In light of this disconnect, the onus is on us as sports marketing professors to instill within the students' mindset that attending one of these field trips will be beneficial. We also need to stress that sports organizations need people with an array of skill sets, not just marketing.

When it comes to benefits, clearly the ability to add to one's knowledge base regarding sports marketing as well as the networking opportunities associated with these events were viewed as the most likely to present themselves at a sports marketing field trip. This insight is not limited to the students either; we professor can gain insight which will help us close the aforementioned gap between the classroom and the so-called real world of which Lantos and Butaney (1985) earlier spoke. Of interest is the finding that networking with peers and professors was rated as almost as likely to occur as was networking with sports marketing professions. But remember, this is not predicated upon importance. While still viewed as likely benefits, students indicated a lower likelihood when it came to passing out their resumes, securing an internship, or even getting a job with the host organization. In this regard, professors should do two things – if possible. We need to stress the opportunity to pass along their resume as one way to establish a foothold in a highly competitive industry. Second, if possible, is the scheduling of one or more of our former students who work for the host organization to speak to the students at the event. And if that student got their job by virtue of attending a similar event or via networking based on another job they attained by attending a similar event, that is all the better. Furthermore, we need to do this as part of our own marketing effort that is designed to convince students to attend. Doing this is a simple way of convincing students that these opportunities can produce life-changing outcomes.

Students give a number of reasons for not attending. Some of the barriers represent issues which neither the student nor the professor can overcome. Work schedules are often difficult to manipulate, and time off may mean a smaller paycheck. Class schedules, especially night classes, may represent barriers as exams may be scheduled, attendance may factor into their grade, and some professors are reluctant, some to the point of refusal, to grant students with an excused absence. Transportation is a common issue. In some cases, car pools can be established. In a limited number of cases, bus transportation can be provided by the university as part of the cost. Students with no real interest will likely be holdouts; the only real option from the professors' perspective is to sell the entertainment benefit for the students themselves as well as for their friends and family if the field trip is open to their attending. Cost is also difficult to overcome, so get tickets in the cheap seats as part of the inventory; stress the discount that they are getting. If possible, give students the opportunity to attend the informational aspects of the field trip without forcing them to purchase a ticket to the game. This does not overcome the transportation barrier, but it reduces cost as a significant deterrent. Students still need to get to the venue; that takes gas; and they may need to pay for parking. But the reduced expenditure may be the incentive needed to attract some of the reluctant students. Another possible option is to have one or more of the speakers come to school and make a presentation during class or at a related club meeting. While this option eliminates many of the barriers, the downside is that it may be difficult to schedule a cadre of speakers to leave their sports marketing jobs and come to your location. It is virtually impossible if there are multiple sections for which you would like to present with the same opportunity. As a consequence, club meetings may be the preferred option, particularly if they take place towards the end of the day. And of course there is no game associated with the event, so the entertainment value is essentially a non-factor in the students' decision to attend. An emerging option is the virtual field trip. Much like many office meetings have moved to a virtual space using software such as gotomeeting.com, field trips can be arranged where the students and the speakers never occupy the same physical space. Several components can be incorporated into this type of opportunity. Proprietary content such as a

virtual tour of the facilities, live presentations, interactive question and answer sessions, and even the associated game can be streamed to the students. It overcomes many of the barriers, but it does not produce revenue for the host organization. Timing may also be difficult to coordinate. Despite these potential problems, watch for the popularity of these virtual field trips to substantially increase over the coming years.

Marketing today is predicated upon benefits. Does what the customers receive in the exchange process make the price being asked reasonable in their eyes? The list of benefits reportedly received by attendees is substantial. So we can stress benefits just the way that marketers of toothpaste stress the benefits associated with their products. While the entertainment aspect tops the list, it is far from being among the most important of the benefits gained. Students gain insight and they have networking opportunities. Both of these are instrumental when the student is confronted with the job-search process in what we often hear referred to as the real world. Students do not see field trips as having greatly increased the likelihood of securing an internship or a job with the host organization. This is one shortcoming that having a former student or two as speakers can overcome. Of particular note at this point in the discussion is a comparison of the results that are summarized in Tables 1 and 3. Table 1 looks at student expectations regarding the likelihood that they will receive each of the 12 benefits addressed in the survey whereas Table 3 looks at what they actually received. A visual comparison documents the fact that they are highly correlated, so what the students expect corresponds to what they self-reportedly received. While this is encouraging, it should be considered that students' responses as to what they expected to receive may have been influenced by their actual experience, thus producing convergence of the two sets of responses. But one should recall that more than half of the students whose responses were part of the calculation of the means exhibited in Table 1 never attended any of these events, so the comparison of the two tables is still quite meaningful.

While there are benefits that accrue from simply attending an event of this ilk, there are most assuredly things that students can do to enhance those benefits. Students need to proactively engage in beneficial behavior. While they earlier reported the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers, the reality is that such questions are often slow to surface. Encourage them to have at least one planned question prior to the session. While it is conceivable that someone else will ask that same question, they still feel that they received an answer. At the event, tell an individual or two a question to ask. Much like a carnival skill, this action sometimes builds a wave of participation. Professors can ask questions to the speakers as well. Of particular interest on the professors' part is the ability to have the speakers confirm principles that they have articulated in the classroom. But beyond asking questions, students should be encouraged to bring their resume, to give it to a speaker during a one-to-one dialogue, to ask for a business card, and to follow-up their meeting with further communication that highlights their conversation. Sometimes the business card allows one to skip the gatekeeper and reach out to the speaker directly. Students should be made aware of these opportunities and encouraged to exploit them in a tactful, objective-based manner.

In regard to potential benefits, there is little difference regarding the expectations of students who attended one or more field trip and those who did not take advantage of any of the opportunities. This can be viewed as a positive finding. In general, expectations are not appreciably different. Yet there were differences of opinion regarding three of the potential

benefits. This can be viewed as a marketing opportunity. Non-attendees had lower expectations for benefitting by virtue of getting new career ideas, giving their resume to someone within the host organization, and the opportunity of attending a sporting event at a discounted price. Professors need to make certain that students are aware of the fact that speakers will convey important information about the sports marketing industry and that their opportunity to ask questions adds more to that opportunity. Let them know that while it is not necessarily a good idea to pass along their resume to every single speaker, they should target the distribution based on one-to-one conversations and the rapport established with a particular speaker. Make certain their resume has a career objective specific to the industry. If tickets are being purchased at a discounted price, let them know that. They might be surprised by how much of a discount they are actually receiving, especially in this age of dynamic pricing. This information could induce greater participation, even on the part of individual students who have decided that sports marketing is not their bailiwick. This increased participation might result in a greater price break, but will most assuredly result in a stronger relationship with the host organization.

The final point of discussion addressed the students' own assessment of their decisions regarding attendance at one or more of these events. In general, the students who attended were satisfied with what they receive albeit that feeling is not without its detractors. Some students who chose not to attend believed that they had not missed anything important. Professors need to stress why that is not the case. However, students not interested in a career in sports marketing will be hard to influence unless the benefit of being entertained at a discount price resonates with members of this segment. Many non-attendees indicated that those who did attend have an advantage over them in the job market. Again, professors need to elaborate on how the insight gained and the networking open doors. If students do not want to be left on the outside looking in, then they should consider taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them. The most compelling finding associated with this objective is that almost 41 percent of the respondents wished that they had taken advantage of more of these opportunities. This segment includes students who had not attended any event wishing that they had (30.1 percent) as well as students who had attended one or more event who wished they had taken advantage of even more of these opportunities (10.8 percent). As professors market these opportunities, we need to convey the reality that there is little postpurchase cognitive dissonance associated with decisions to attend and that the real disappointment lies in the students' decision to not attend.

There are benefits to be had. We, as professors, need to market field trips as we would any other product. Benefits sell. So let us convey that information to the students who represent our target market. It is mutually beneficial in that the students, the class in general, the university, and the host organization all benefit from student participation in sports marketing field trips.

CONCLUSIONS

This project had nine specific research objectives, each of which was achieved. By surveying sports marketing students, several meaningful questions were answered. By separating the students who had attended one or more field trips from those who had not, some meaningful differences were documented. The results provide insight to professors regarding our sports marketing students, but they also provide us with direction regarding the scheduling of these events and promoting their value to the students. Sports marketing is an industry where students

seeking jobs greatly outnumber the number of entry-level positions available. Students should be encouraged to participate in as many of these events as possible as the upside greatly outweighs the downside. It is our task as their professors to convince them to do so based on our belief, and the students' beliefs, that attending sports marketing field trips gives attendees an advantage in the job market. And do not discount the importance of being entertained, something indigenous to most sports marketing students' psyche.

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