So Where Do You Work Now?: Examining the Factors that Influence Career Choices of Sport Management Graduates

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Abstract

Students seeking to leverage their sport management degree into full-time employment in the sport business industry (SBI) face a variety of challenges from low pay and personal finances to personal relationships and work-life balance. This study uses a mixed methods approach to examine how the constraints impacted the career trajectory of 124 recent graduates from a private and religiously affiliated liberal arts college in the Midwest between 2007 and 2014. The study examines the perceived capacity of individuals to make occupational choices despite external constraints. Swanson, Daniels, and Tokar's (1996) Career Barriers Inventory is used to frame the discussion of these challenges. Of the 13 barriers, five were found to be relevant to the results of this study: multiple role conflict, conflict between children and career demands, lack of spousal support, dissatisfaction with career, and job market constraints.

Introduction

The sport business industry (SBI) is broad and diverse, making it one of the largest in the United States with an estimated economic value of $498 billion (Plunkett, 2014). In response to its growing size, college and universities have created course and degree program offerings for students seeking to pursue a career in the SBI. Sport management and similarly titled academic programs have burgeoned over the past 30 years from 100 programs in 1990 to 613 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in the United States alone (Kjeldsen, 1990; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). The SBI offers many opportunities for young professionals, but remains a competitive field to enter and to advance. Graduates of sport management academic programs enter a competitive job market where the supply of graduates outnumber the available positions (Mahoney, Moorman, DeSchriver, & Hambrick, 2012; Mathner & Martin, 2012). Teamwork Online, the leading job hiring site in the industry, reported an average of 51 applicants for each job on the site (Teamwork Online, 2014), but it is common for entry-level SBI positions to attract hundreds of applicants. As a result, graduates often have to complete one or more internships after earning their undergraduate degree (Nagel & Southall, 2011), or work in a part-time or term contract position. Due to its stature as a glamour industry, employers can keep wages lower than comparable positions outside the sport industry (Kjeldsen, 1990; Mathner & Martin, 2012).

Students seeking to leverage their sport management degree into full-time employment in the SBI face a variety of challenges, from low pay and personal finances to personal relationships and work-life balance. As the federal government and state legislatures push institutions to tie career placement to state funding (Dougherty, Natow, Bork, Joes, & Vega, 2013), it is important for academic programs to understand the constraints that face students wishing to pursue a career in the SBI. Beyond this initial period of job searching, it is also important to understand

what impacts the decision making of SBI employees after graduation and matriculation into the workforce so that curricular decisions can be made to address key trends. This paper uses a mixed methods approach to examine the constraints facing recent graduates of one sport management program and how these constraints impact their career trajectory and graduate school matriculation.

Literature Review

Vocational psychology scholars have studied the ways in which people make career decisions during the past 50 years. Several key theories have been developed to explain how people make career decisions. Person-environment fit theory emphasizes the compatibility between an individual and work environment that develops when congruence exists between one's individual characteristics and the environment in which he or she works or wishes to work (Kristof, 1996). For example, according to Holland's (1997) theory of vocational choice, "people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitude and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles" (p. 4). Social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz, 1996) attributes career decision making to the learning that people do while interacting with their work environments. The learning experiences and their consequences interact to produce a specific career path. Finally, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) posits that individuals are likely to become interested in, pursue, and perform better at activities at which they have high self-efficacy (Sheu et al., 2010). People develop their interests in a certain behavioral activity when they believe they will perform well in that activity and experience positive outcomes (Sheu et al., 1990).

SCCT suggests that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting interact to help people demonstrate self-direction in career decision-making (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). However, the interaction between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting are impacted by the way people respond to perceived barriers (Albert & Luzzo, 1999). Brown and Lent (1996) noted that even if individuals possess high levels of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, perceived barriers may prevent an individual from pursuing career entry or goal attainment. "Even persons with well-developed and differentiated interests in a particular career path will be unlikely to pursue that path if they perceive (accurately or inaccurately) substantial barriers to entering or advancing in that career" (Brown & Lent, 1996, p. 355).

Nearly all people have at least some constraints to their desired career choice. The perceived capacity of individuals to make occupational choices despite constraints is called work volition (Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012). Work volition is a subjective belief in one's capacity to make job choices. Career barriers, which are external to the individual, play an important role in career management. Swanson, Daniels, and Tokar (1996) identified 13 barriers in the Career Barriers Inventory: (1) Sex Discrimination, (2) Lack of Confidence, (3) Multiple Role Conflict, (4) Conflict Between Children and Career Demands, (5) Racial Discrimination, (6) Inadequate Preparation, (7) Disapproval by Significant Others, (8) Decision-Making Difficulties, (9) Dissatisfaction With Career, (10) Discouraged From Choosing Nontraditional Careers, (11) Disability/Health Concerns, (12) Job Market Constraints, and (13) Difficulties With Networking/ Socialization. These barriers have the potential to impact the ability of graduates to enter into and stay in the SBI.

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges that face recent graduates pursuing a career in the SBI and how these barriers impact career trajectory. Specifically, the researchers explored participants' perspectives on factors that influenced their efforts to pursue their

preferred career options. This study investigated the career trajectories of young professionals who graduated from a sport management program at a Midwestern, private and religiously affiliated, liberal arts institution from 2007-2014.

Methodology

Data was collected at a private and religiously affiliated, liberal arts college in the Midwest. Tuition costs rose from $22,140 in 2007, the first graduation class interviewed for this study, to $27,524 in 2014, the last graduation class studied. In 2009, the students began entering national academic case study competitions. Now the program's trademark, teams won seven national competitions and earned 14 consecutive top three finishes from 2010-2014, defeating several of the more nationally recognized programs at larger, research institutions in the process. Approximately 124 students graduated from the institution with a sport management degree from 2007 through 2014.

Procedure

One-hundred and six sport management graduates from 2007 to 2014 were contacted during the fall 2014 semester to schedule an in-person or telephone conversation. The author used a semi-structured interview where participants received similar questions, but allowed for flexibility in the direction of the conversation (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, the phrasing of questions was dependent on the researcher's previous knowledge of the subject's career path. Examples of questions asked of most participants included the following:

- Has a romantic relationship ever impacted a career decision?
- Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?
- What is the status of your student loans?
- Has your student loan debt ever factored into a career decision?
- How important has it been for you to have a job proximal to your hometown or family?
- What is next for you in your career path?

Semi-structured interviews allowed for standardization and to leverage the relationship between author and subjects. This relationship allowed for an easy and flowing conversation, and for productive and honest dialogue. Each subject was asked to discuss the factors that impacted their career choices since graduating from college. Subjects were told they did not have to answer if questions were too personal, though respondents answered every question. Subjects' responses were recorded through hand-written notes that were later typed at the first opportunity (Merriam, 2009). Conversations were not recorded to protect the informality the interviews required. Some respondents initiated career updates with the investigator after the interview, usually through electronic mail or social media. Data stemming from these updates was considered through Nov. 19, 2014.

Participants

A total of 106 interviews were completed for an 80 % response rate. Males comprised 73.6 % of the sample. The number of responses for each graduation year is presented in Table 1. Finalists for the program's annual top award accounted for 22.6 %, while case study team participants accounted for 28.3 % of responses. Former student-athletes comprised 46.2 % of respondents. One-fourth of the participants attended graduate school. In terms of employment

after graduation, 81.1 % started their professional career in the SBI, 80.2 % were currently employed full-time at the time of the interview, and 17.4 % had made a career change out of the sport industry. The SBI was broadly defined as any job in the sport industry.

Table 1: *Participants by Graduation Year*		
Graduation Year	N	Pct
2007	8	7.5
2008	12	11.3
2009	11	10.4
2010	18	17.0
2011	10	9.4
2012	16	15.1
2013	11	10.4
2014	20	18.9

Data Analysis

Participant responses to semi-structured interview questions were typed into a word processing document at the first opportunity. Preliminary analysis of responses yielded identification of key words and phrases used in the data. These responses were subsequently reviewed by the authors and relevant categories were inductively established through initial coding, "an open-ended approach to coding in which the researcher codes for their first hit or impression words or phrases in responses to engaging the datum" (Hedlund-deWitt, 2013, p.5). The following categories were initially identified through the initial interview coding and other demographic information available to the researchers: graduation year, gender, miles current job is from the college, miles current job is from their hometown, the farthest (in miles) the respondent has been from their hometown through a job or internship, whether a respondent was a finalist for the program's award for top undergraduate major, whether a respondent competed on one of the institution's academic case study teams, the location of their required internship in geographic relation to the college, whether student debt has been a factor in a career decision, whether a romantic relationship has been a factor in a career decision, whether their first job was in the SBI, whether they are currently employed in the SBI, whether they attended graduate school, whether they were a student-athlete, their current romantic relationship status, the impact their family has on career decisions, and their willingness to travel anywhere for a job. Finally, the Career Barriers Inventory was also used as a framework to categorize answers.

After the key themes were identified in the initial coding, chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relationship between the constraints and the following variables: gender, graduation year, whether or not the respondent started their career in the SBI, and whether or not the respondent changed careers from the sport industry to employment outside of sport. T-tests were utilized to compare differences between groups on distance from current employment to hometown.

Results

Gender

The relationship between gender and the three outcome variables was examined. No significant relationship was found between gender and starting a career in the SBI, but a significant relationship was found between gender and leaving the SBI (χ^2 (1, $N = 86$) = 6.56, $p < .05$) and currently being employed in the SBI (χ^2 (1, $N = 106$) = 9.08, $p < .01$). In both cases females were more likely than males to leave and not currently be employed in the SBI.

Student Loan Debt

The most prevalent comment amongst respondents was the impact of student loan debt. Approximately one-third (36 out of 106) of the respondents believed student loan debt has impacted a career choice. Debt includes student loans incurred while attending a graduate program, if applicable. Some respondents included their romantic partner's debt in their responses. At the time of the interviews, the 2014 graduates had not been required to make their first payment, but many were planning accordingly. Respondents were not asked to identify the total amount of their loans, but only 14% of the sample self-identified graduating without any student loan debt. There was not a significant relationship between student loan debt and gender, graduation year, or starting or changing employment in the SBI. However, a t-test revealed that graduates facing loan debt as a constraint lived significantly closer to their hometown, $t(104) = 2.13$, $p < .05$.

While there was not a statistically significant relationship between student loan debt and starting a career in the SBI, student loan debt still played an important role in the career decision making and lifestyle of one-third of program graduates. Some respondents explicitly indicated the relationship between loan debt and their compensation package was a predominant reason they left the SBI, despite their desire not to leave, for careers offering an increased salary. The following were comments from students whose student loan debt affected their ability to start or remain in the SBI. (See Table 2)

For those who have persisted in the SBI, student loans still impact lifestyle choices. These respondents maintain a willingness to live their dream, despite the difficulty managing loan debt. Many of the respondents who stated debt had not impacted a career decision described how it significantly impacts their budget and lifestyle.

Table 3: *Impact of Student Loan Debt on Budget and Lifestyle*

Comment	Graduation Year	SBI Sector
My wife and I lived paycheck to paycheck for a while due to our loans and had to make sacrifices on the extras. You have to be willing to bide your time for the first few years. The payoff is there.	2007	Intercollegiate Athletics
Student loan debt and bills in general kept me at my job early in my career when I was getting the two-year itch. My friends would just up and leave their job and I was not in a position to do that.	2007	Sport Governing Body
I would have been forced to leave the industry or only work in it part-time if I did not receive my current position. I would not have been able to pay student loans and for a wedding, even with living at home.	2012	Intercollegiate Athletics
I am part of a federal loan program that allows me to pay based off my salary while working in a non-for-profit and if I stay with it for ten years the balance will be forgiven. I am just now at a point where I can make payments without my parents help and I am five years out.	2009	Sport Governing Body
It is tough to know a lot of my paycheck is going for a loan, but it has never deterred me from giving up my dreams.	2012	Professional Sports
I still pay the minimum on my loans six years out, but am happy to make the sacrifice for my career.	2008	Intercollegiate Athletics

Paying their student loan debt is part of the financial reality of most alums. The strategy to make payments can include the decision to live with their parents to defray expenses. One-sixth of the subjects self-identified still living with their parents. Some were 2014 graduates still searching for that first full-time position, but most were others purposefully saving money.

Table 4: *Student Loan Debt and Staying at Home*

Comment	Graduation Year	SBI Sector
With my student loan debt, I could not have afforded to live in a new city completely by myself on the salary I would be making. My parents and I really crunched the numbers.	2013	Professional Sports
Half of my pay check goes to student loans, so loans are prevalent. This is why I currently have to live at home.	2010	Sports Retail

Romantic Relationships

Slightly more than half of the subjects were either married or involved in a relationship at the time of the interview; and 25.7 % of all respondents, including those who self-identified not being involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the interview, indicated they have altered a career decision for such a relationship. Gender was significantly associated with having a romantic relationship impact a career decision, χ^2 (1, N = 106) = 4.30, p < .05. Women were 2.6 times more likely to state a relationship had impacted a career decision. Graduation year was also significantly related to romantic relationships, χ^2 (1, N = 106) = 14.5, p < .01. Subjects who graduated from 2007-2010 were five times more likely to indicate a romance has impacted a career decision than alums from 2011-2014. There was not a statistical relationship between SBI employment and distance from current residence to hometown.

Romantic relationships affected graduates in four primary ways. First, some graduates prioritized their romantic partner's career aspirations by leaving a full-time position in the SBI to follow them.

Table 5: *Romantic Relations Lead to Leaving SBI*

Comment	Gender	Sport Industry
My boyfriend pressured me to leave a good job in the golf industry, saying it was time to follow him or break up. I relented and wound up with an insurance job I hated. And then ultimately we broke up.	Female	No
My fiancée is finishing her doctorate and looking for faculty positions, so I know the day is coming that I will follow her. It will impact my career but that doesn't bother me.	Male	No
I am getting married next year, so I will be relocating to the city where she will have her dream job. It makes me a bit nervous but I am excited.	Male	No
I left a good job somewhat in sports for my boyfriend who is now my husband. I left my entire life for him, but all is going great.	Female	No

Second, other graduates prioritized their romantic partner by eschewing potential job opportunities and remaining in their current position.

Table 6: *Staying in Current Position Despite Romantic Relationship*

Comment	Gender	Sport Industry
I would have liked to get a job back home in an area park district, but I was serious with the man who is now my husband. And with my current job I have the ability to relocate should he need to.	Female	Indirectly
Early in my dating relationship with my girlfriend I had an opportunity at a sports job in another state. But after we talked I decided it wasn't worth the risk to join a fledgling company after my previous sports employer had paychecks bounce.	Male	No
I am open to relocating to a different city to help my career, but I am saving for a house with my girlfriend. Discussions on the subject of future relocation have not gone well, and I feel somewhat stuck in the radius where we will live. But I do think I would take something out of state for a year or two if it could help my career upon my return.	Male	Yes

In contrast, other graduates chose their current position or career over their romantic partner.

Table 7: *Choosing Career over Romance*

Comment	Gender	Sport Industry
I was in a long distance relationship a few years ago and he wanted me to move toward him. There were no real sport jobs in his area so I expected him to move closer to me. Ultimately it just didn't work out.	Female	Yes
I have friends that ask me why I didn't follow my boyfriend to his new job and new city, and question why aren't we engaged yet. I have always put my sport and school first, and now it is time to put my career first. If it is meant to be, it will be meant to be.	Female	No
I was dating a woman while at a sales training center but I didn't travel there to find a girlfriend but instead a career. We ultimately took jobs at different locations and the relationship ended.	Male	Yes
Romance has played different roles during my career, but ultimately I will be selfish and will not deny a career move for a romance. I will always decide to take an opportunity before seeing how a relationship progresses.	Female	Yes
I broke up with a boyfriend of three years and he may have been a factor in some early career decisions. I now realize I have to focus on myself and will put my career first.	Female	Yes

Finally, graduates recognized the importance of flexibility in upward mobility in dual-career families.

Table 8: *Growth and Upward Mobility*

Comment	Gender	Sport Industry
I started outside the industry while my wife finished her MBA. We then moved for me and the recession hurt her ability to get a job in her field. This industry requires mobility, and having a partner in crime makes it stressful and both have to be flexible.	Male	Yes
My husband and I were on the same page from the beginning, knowing what each person's career meant to the other and being supportive of the moves and the hours.	Female	Yes
I have always put my career ahead of my relationships when dating. I always expect a guy to move for me, and that is how my marriage is. My husband's profession is flexible so my career path will dictate moves.	Female	Yes
Both my girlfriend and I are completing graduate school and are looking for jobs. We are on the same page. If one gets their dream job first, the other will somehow make it work.	Male	Yes
My girlfriend got her dream job in a different city. We are both putting our career first and doing the long distance thing as neither wanted to hold the other back. Eventually a choice will have to be made, career or love.	Male	Yes

Geographic Considerations

Geographic considerations played a role in career decision making. The primary drivers for geographic restrictions were proximity to family and a general desire to be near one's hometown. Subjects attended a college an average of 184 miles away from their respective hometowns, suggesting most of them originated from the Midwest. A large number of graduates either lived within a 40-mile radius of campus or lived in the Chicago metropolitan area at the time of the interviews. Only 21.7% of graduates were willing to look anywhere to find employment. In contrast, 35.8% of graduates were unwilling to seek employment opportunities away from family or hometown. The remaining 42.5% of graduates had a preferred geographic radius, but would ultimately be willing to relocate for the right opportunity.

These choices affected whether or not graduates were employed in the SBI. Graduates committed to a specific geographic location and unwilling to move were significantly less likely to be employed full-time in the SBI, while those willing to go anywhere were significantly more likely to start their career in the SBI, χ^2 (1, N = 106) = 4.27, p < .05, and be employed full-time in the SBI, χ^2 (2, N = 106) = 5.5, p < .05. In fact, only one of the 23 graduates willing to locate anywhere was not employed full-time in the SBI.

Family considerations played an important role in determining where to locate. Returning home to take care of family was a theme for those who limited their job search to a specific area.

Table 9: *The Role of Family in Deciding Where to Locate*

Comment	Sport Industry	Graduation
After finishing graduate school and serving a stint as a college baseball coach, I knew it was time to return home. My focus was to find a job in my home area, regardless of whether or not it was in sports. My parents are in their 60s and I am an only child, so I needed to be back there to get ready to take care of them.	No	2010
My parents left so I will probably stay at my current job in my hometown until my grandmother passes away as I am the only family left for her.	Indirectly	2009
I wanted to have my first job in my hometown area since my mom is dealing with empty nest syndrome with my siblings in college and my dad on the road a lot. After a year I will be better prepared to leave for a good opportunity.	Yes	2014
Originally after graduate school I was willing to go wherever life took me. But now that I am an uncle and my parents are getting older I really want to stay in my home area, barring a great job or a girlfriend.	No	2007

Other graduates started their careers away from family, but with the goal of returning at some point.

Table 10: *The Goal to Return Home*

Comment	Sport Industry	Graduation
I was sad to leave my current job and area, but had always been honest that I wanted to move back home upon having children.	Yes	2010
After being all over the world my first years after graduating, I am happy to be back home now. I want to settle in by my family and make their metropolitan area my home base.	No	2010
Once I lost my job in sports, I went back home, which I always wanted anyway. I can't ever see myself leaving.	No	2010

Table 11: *Sacrifices Made to Move Away from Home*

Comment	Sport Industry	Graduation
My opportunity in the Southeast was a great one for me to move to a new place where I knew no one. It was tough since my brother is in the Marines and my mom is twice widowed. And it is tough not seeing familiar faces at gas stations and around town – an adjustment after being at a small school.	Yes	2013
I was the first grandchild on either side of the family to leave the county, so it was hard to attend graduate school on the east coast. But I knew I needed the advanced degree if I wanted to coach someday.	Yes	2008
I wasn't ready to leave home originally, and that undoubtedly hurt me in my job search. I am more prepared to do so now.	Indirectly	2011
It is tough on my family that both my sister and I are so far away. It makes getting home for the holidays a priority.	Yes	2009
My family has always been supportive of my sacrifices to be far from home. The day may come when I have to return to help them when they age, but not at this time.	Yes	2010

Graduates discussed the sacrifices and challenges that they had to make or anticipated encountering in order to move away from home to pursue a career in the SBI.

Work-Life Balance

The work-family balance, which Mazerolle, Casa, and Casa (2008) defined as "when individuals are unable to meet the demands of their personal lives due to the demands of their professional lives" (p. 5), also was frequently identified in the interviews. In fact, the time demands required to work in the SBI was the top reason that graduates left the SBI. Graduates noted the extensive time demands that impacted their ability to have the desired work-life balance, which in some cases led to them leaving the SBI.

Table 12: *Work-Life Balance*

Comment	Graduation	SBI
My first job in sports was for a minor league baseball team with brutal hours. Two-week home stands where you left at two in the morning and were expected to be back by 7:00. That forced me to look long and hard about working in sports and I decided I no longer wanted to.	2008	No
I left the college athletics world because I was working 70 hours a week with no weekends off for little pay. The last straw is when they didn't get me a graduate assistant to help me out.	2009	No
I enjoyed coaching college athletes and helping young men develop, but the grind with all the travel, long hours, long weeks, left me exhausted. It was time for a career switch.	2009	No
I enjoyed working in college football, but at age 28 I wanted some different things in my life except the huge time commitment of work.	2008	No
I had a lot of responsibility with my job at a sports facility, as there were only three employees. It was a lot of stress for not much pay. I had a short-term opportunity to come back home and make some money and I was willing to cash in all my vacation time and go unpaid for a week to capitalize on it. My boss wouldn't work with me, so I gave my two-week notice.	2010	No
I want to have a life outside of work. What you want at age 18 is not always what you will want. There is value to having a life as opposed to having a boss who will blow up your phone all day every day.	2010	Yes
It was a tough adjustment from college to the work force in terms of lack of personal time, even though as a student-athlete with a part-time job I was busy. I now realize that weekends are not for down time.	2011	Yes
I sacrificed a bank account to take the path I am on. I am happy but haven't reached my goals yet. Undergraduate students have no idea how hard they have to work to climb the ladder.	2009	Yes

Growth and Upward Mobility

Growth and upward mobility were also important considerations. Graduates found the inability to grow in a position or perceive upward mobility impacted their decision making.

Table 13: *Growth and Upward Mobility*

Comment	Graduation	SBI
There was no upward mobility at the sport governing body I worked. I was no longer challenged. You do the same events every year so it becomes the same job. After almost four years I was ready for a change.	2010	Yes
There are only seven employees at my sports company so upward mobility is limited. I want to go a new place where I can work hard and move up.	2012	Yes
I was working at a baseball complex in Arizona for four years. I liked my job, but ultimately the heat of the Arizona summer sun and the lack of upward mobility got me looking for other jobs.	2008	Yes
I was at my sports job for three years. I took advantage of different training opportunities with the hope of eventually getting promoted. After three denials I had a bad taste in my mouth, so it was time to start looking for something different.	2009	No
I declined a sports job because I didn't see any growth past my entry-level position. It wasn't worth traveling across the country for.	2009	No
I remember a prominent speaker who spoke to our sport management graduation class. He said the sports industry is a bunch of silos and that if you leave one silo you have to start at the bottom all over again. I have found that to be true.	2012	No
It is tough to break out of the temporary and part-time jobs. It took me four jobs before I could do so. And it is difficult working at your part-time roles while looking for the next job.	2010	Yes

Table 14: *Management and Hiring Decisions*

Comment	Graduation	SBI
My boss at my post-graduate internship left for another job and the ultimate restructuring cost me the full-time job opportunity likely coming my way.	2014	Yes
At my first job new ownership came in and cleaned house, and at my second job the company got bought out and restructuring also left me the odd man out. I then called the company who bought us out and was lucky to land there.	2012	Indirectly
I had quit my job as a para-professional for a sports job I accepted. I was told the contract was forthcoming. I showed up the first day and was told the position had to be downgraded to a part-time position, which was not what was advertised or what I had interviewed for. I quit right then and felt screwed over. I really thought this was my break, so I was extremely disappointed.	2013	No
I put too may eggs in one basket the second semester of my senior year, assuming I was going to get rehired where I interned the previous summer. It never panned out. The team's owner asked me what happened, and I am still not sure.	2014	No
I thought I was going to get offered a job for the team I interned with as a senior, so I was not aggressively looking for other jobs until it was too late and I found out I was not going to be added to the payroll.	2013	Yes
I had a post-graduate internship with a baseball team and I was hoping to stay on after the season in a full-time role. I saw the eventual layoff coming, but thought it wouldn't be so soon after the season. I thought I would stay on the payroll for 2-3 weeks after the last game, but instead it was 2-3 days.	2014	Yes

Management and Hiring Decisions

While hard work and sacrifices are important to career advancement, graduates also found that decisions by management created obstacles in pursuing a career in the SBI.

Discussion

This study examined the challenges faced by recent graduates pursuing a career in the SBI and how these barriers impact career trajectory using a sample of young professionals who graduated from a sport management program at a Midwestern, private and religiously affiliated, liberal arts institution from 2007-2014. Three items from the Career Barriers Inventory were relevant to the results of this study: job market constraints, conflict between children and career demands, and multiple role conflict (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996). One key theme not found in the Career Barriers Inventory was the role of social and emotional anchors of family, friends, and romantic partners.

Job Market Constraints

Job market constraints played a significant role for graduates pursuing a career in the SBI. Job market constraints were tied to low salaries, which makes it difficult to pay student loan debt, and limited job opportunities in certain geographic areas. Job market constraints are important to examine because Schwab et al. (2015) found that low salaries and limited job opportunities were the most common reason for sport management graduates to become dissatisfied with, and ultimately leave the SBI. In this study, one-third of graduates believed student loan debt impacted a career choice by either leaving a job or passing on an opportunity, and those graduates perceiving loan debt as a barrier resided significantly closer to their hometown than graduates without loan debt. This decision to stay close to home introduces the potential for limited viable job opportunities within the radius of one's hometown. Flexibility in moving to a new geographic area to find employment in the SBI was significantly related to being employed in the SBI. Students committed to a specific geographic location and unwilling to move were significantly less likely to be employed full-time in the SBI, while those willing to go anywhere were significantly more likely to be employed full-time in the SBI. This supports Gillentine and Crow's (2015) claim that the success of those attempting to work in the SBI is related to their willingness to relocate to where the jobs are. In fact, only one of the 23 graduates willing to locate anywhere was not employed full-time in the SBI. This means those who have stipulated debt has impacted a choice perceive they are unable to move as far from home due to their reliance on their family for continued financial support, which is common trend amongst young professionals who are increasingly living with their parents into their mid-20's to help defray expenses in an attempt to pay student loans (D'Arch, 2012). This trend is projected to continue, as the national student loan debt incurred for 2013 graduates was nearly $30,000 and growing at 6% annually (Kurtzleben, 2013).

While salary and the ability to pay off student loan debt were important themes in the study, it is important to recognize that student loan debt was not statistically related to starting or persisting in the SBI. In addition, nearly two-thirds of the respondents did not identify loan debt as having an impact on career choice, which supports Zhang's (2010) research suggesting debt does not impact one's career trajectory during the first two years after graduation. Zhang (2010) found that students who attend private colleges have already made a conscious decision to accept a higher price of education for future results. However, the type of university and nature of the student body is likely important, because Rothstein and Rouse (2011) found that college debt

affects post-graduation employment decisions, and students with more debt are less likely to accept jobs in low-paying industries. They concluded there is a relationship between debt and the employment a graduate accepts. Their study on graduates at a prestigious university indicated that each $10,000 of debt reduces the likelihood one will accept a position in a non-for-profit, government, or educational entity, and leads graduates to accept jobs that earned $2,000 more in pay.

While it can be concluded through this study that student loan debt was not statistically related to entering or persisting in the SBI, it still played an important role in the career decision making and lifestyle of one-third of program graduates. There was evidence of graduates dropping out of the SBI due to financial constraints stemming from student loan debt. Though no statistically significant relationship exists between graduation date and impact loan debt had on career choice, several respondents elected to leave the SBI after a few years for a higher compensation, which supports research that indicates economic needs can inhibit career goals (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield, & Koert, 2010; Schwab et al., 2015). This departure from the SBI can be attributed to two key factors. First, salary increases are not common in the first years of student loan payments coming due. As graduates become older and more likely to "settle down," their financial outlook is often impacted by student loan debt that may require a career change. In this case, financial and structural constraints (Duffy et al., 2012) decrease their perceived capacity to make occupational choices. Second, lack of upward mobility played a role beyond mere economic constraints. Some graduates were unable to break out of the part-time or seasonal positions in the industry, or move beyond their entry-level employment status.

Role Conflict

Role conflict embodies the idea that stress at work can affect one's life at home (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996). Graduates reported experiencing role conflict predominantly rooted in work-life balance, which occurs when "individuals are unable to meet the demands of their personal lives due to the demands of their professional lives" (Mazerolle et al., 2008, p. 5). One source of role conflict is the conflict between children and career demands (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996). Women still perceive more pressure to marry from family and friends, and often prepare for this path with their occupational decisions. Ganginis, O'Brien, Mereish, and Miller (2013) studied college age women and asked them to select their ideal careers. The results indicated many women prepared for careers enabling them to be home when their future children return from school. In this study, two women had children and have at least temporarily left the SBI and the workforce to raise their child. Research by Raiff (2004) suggested women choose occupations that do not fully utilize their abilities, or fail to follow their projected and aspired career path early during employment due to gender discrimination, children, or overall work-life balance. She added that women who planned on leaving the workplace upon having children perceived even more barriers. Three of the women in this study had children at the time of the interviews, and two had left the SBI.

While relationships with significant others and work-life balance create the potential for role conflict, young professionals also must navigate other factors during emerging adulthood like moving to a new city, finding new friends and fitting into a social group, managing expenses against income, and finding a religious place of worship (Murphy et al., 2010). Emerging adults are seeking their identity well into their 20s, a longer time period than what has been previously defined as adolescence (Arnett, 2004). These first years after graduation when emerging adults are exploring life options are a challenge for young professionals and their employers (Murphy,

Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). The time frame may include a mix of adolescent and adult commitment and responsibilities infused with experimentation, shifts in occupational interests, longer dating relationships, and decreased time spent with friends.

The results from Table 12 illustrate the challenges in balancing work with other important elements of life. Graduates discussed the significant impact that working long hours and weekends had on their personal life. The lack of personal time was a shock to the system after the relative ease of college life, and some graduates indicated they were not prepared for this fundamental shift. Coupled with other challenges like being short staffed, stress, and exhaustion, the long hours and lack of personal time took a toll on some graduates leading to a departure from the SBI.

Emotional and Social Anchors

Parents, family, and romantic partners served as social and emotional anchors that connected graduates to a particular geographic area. A desire to be proximal to family and loved ones played a significant role in the career decision making of graduates. Several of the respondents who either had moved away from their hometown for a job, or indicated a willingness to do so, articulated a willingness to return home when their career status affords them more flexibility. Some graduates prioritized finding employment proximal to their hometown as opposed to the SBI. This needs to be addressed more formally in future research to assist sport management faculty and other college personnel identify and appropriately advise this population, particularly in light of the decreased probability of securing employment in the SBI when the job search is limited to a specific geographic location. Amundson et al. (2010) found that family relationships became a priority consideration in career choices of approximately one-half of respondents who were shifting toward marriage or parenthood. However, the literature does not offer many specifics on how this factor influences the career trajectory of young professionals in the SBI. Graduates in this study pointed to the need to remain near family to help other family members like aging and empty nest parents, elderly grandparents, and helping siblings raise children. Graduates also pointed to always having the goal of returning home, even after starting a career in a different location. For some who have made the hard decision to leave home, they recognize the significant sacrifices it takes to do so.

In addition to the role of the immediate family, romantic relationships were identified by graduates as a significant consideration in career decision making. In fact, a quarter of the respondents revealed that romantic relationships altered career plans and trajectory at some point since graduating from college. This impact was disproportionately experienced by females, who were nearly three times more likely than males to state a relationship had impacted a career decision. This result is supported by Ganginis, O'Brien, Mereish, and Miller (2013) who found that professional women are more likely to sacrifice career goals for their relationships and that women do not plan their careers in isolation of other life choices such as marriage. The impact on career decision making ranged from leaving the SBI altogether to taking a different position than initially desired. Some females, however, decided to prioritize their career over romance, as illustrated in Table 7. Coping skills may predict the extent to which females can cope with perceptions of career barriers (Johnson, 2010).

A dating partner's interactions and influence increase during the transition into adulthood (Manning et al., 2009). The majority of emerging adults Manning et al. studied cited a desire for their partner to support them in their career endeavors, but only 18% indicated they would alter their career plans for a partner. This lack of congruence poses challenges, and many opt out of

the dating scene for a time period to focus on their career goals. The results of this study indicated one out of four respondents had altered a career choice for a romantic relationship, and in almost every case that alteration of a career choice took them out of the SBI. This is proximal to the percentage of individuals Manning et al. (2009) stated would alter a career decision for a partner, but is lower than the percentage of respondents who indicated they altered a career decision to remain proximal to family.

Implications

The findings in this study are important to sport management educators attempting to offer students a realistic picture of what a career in the SBI might entail. First, the results of this study indicate special attention should be paid to challenges females will encounter related to role conflict and persisting in the SBI because females recognize more career barriers than men (Johnson, 2010; Raqu-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2013). Second, students facing student loan debt should be prepared to make personal sacrifices in lifestyle, live on a budget, and be shrewd with finances early in their career as part of a long-term strategy. Student loan debt was shown to impact lifestyle choices and the ability of graduates to persist in the SBI. Third, it can be difficult to fully prepare someone for the impact a romance may have on their career trajectory. However, those preparing to enter the industry, regardless of relationship status, should develop a philosophy on how career moves may both impact romantic relationships and the distance they are willing to travel from home. Students should have conversations with the appropriate persons in their life concerning this philosophy.

Personas could be developed from the clear trends in this research to help demonstrate to students the factors that promote or detract from starting and persisting in the SBI. For example, storytelling through personas could highlight the fact that restricting the job search to a specific geographic region decreases the chance for finding employment in the SBI. A summary of these findings would be a perfect fit in an institution's introductory course, so that students have some semblance of the barriers before electing to continue to pursue the sport management degree. Similar information should also be shared at each internship or practicum experience the student undertakes. Students should be encouraged to discuss these points with their on-site mentors and supervisors to gain a first-hand perspective and then author reflections accordingly. A capstone experience would be a final place for students to reflect on the barriers. Finally, goal setting activities can consider how goals might be impacted by student loan debt, romantic relationships, role conflict, geographic preferences, and family considerations. Sport management faculty are encouraged to find opportunities both within and outside of their institution's curriculum to ensure students receive appropriate career-related information multiple times during the student's development.

Limitations

There were limitations with the study. First, the results of this study lack generalizability to other sport management programs at large. Second, the author[GR1] could not replicate this process at other institutions where previously established relationships would not exist. As a result, the author's previous relationship with the respondents and employment at the institution constitute a bias. Third, the interviews were completed in different settings, including in-person one-on-one, over the phone, and in small group settings. The potential interaction with a third party may have impacted the willingness of participants to answer certain questions and the researcher's interpretation of the answers given. Fourth, the curriculum underwent significant changes during the timeframe under examination in this study. The program added new courses, an application

for admission to the major, and the focus on case study teams during this time, making the program much different in 2014 than 2007. Finally, there was not 100% participation in the study. The author would perceive a majority of the alums who did not participate as less engaged students during their undergraduate studies and, to the best of the author's knowledge, less likely to have made advancements in the SBI. Their participation may have altered the results.

Conclusion

This study used a mixed method approach to study alumni who graduated from a sport management program at a private and religiously affiliated, liberal arts college in the Midwest from 2007-2014. The study's purpose was to examine their career trajectory and the factors impacting employment decisions. Program alumni were interviewed in person or via the telephone and the interviews were coded for common themes. Student loan debt, romantic relationships, and proximity to home emerged as factors warranting further study. There were significant differences between women and men concerning the impact of romantic relationships on career trajectory. Significance did not apply to factors involving student loan debt and persistence in the industry, but the research indicated student loan debt often was a consideration in career trajectory decisions. Sport management educators should consider this study's results and how to best apply it within the curriculum. This should be done at multiple levels within a student's program of study to prepare students for the demands of being employed in the SBI.

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Table 2: *Impact of Student Loan Debt in Starting SBI Career*

Comment	Graduation Year	Industry
I had a job I enjoyed in the recreation field. But I had no benefits and low pay with student loans coming due, and so had to make a change.	2010	Health Insurance
Loans have been my biggest burden in the last six years. I have been on forbearance due to unemployment or low wages. It is very frustrating but my loan debt is still more than the equivalent of a down payment for a house. If I had to do it all over again I may have made different decisions concerning my undergraduate education.	2007	Non-sport Sales
I loved my college experience but it put me in a tough place financially. I was in a bad place until I got a job in the insurance industry. There I was able to pay loans and put money away, but it just wasn't for me. Now that I am back in college coaching I can pay my loans but can no longer do any saving.	2009	Intercollegiate Athletics
Loan debt was a factor in my original decision to decline a job offer in the tourism and recreation industry immediately upon graduation. I could make more money staying in a part-time role at Menards and just couldn't accept a job where paying loans and rent couldn't work.	2009	Non-sport Sales
I believe my loans are double the national average since I stayed a fifth year and also as a result of my mother's second marriage. The money at my sports-related job just wasn't there to make payments.	2009	Non-sport sales
My first job was for a marketing company that had contracts with the Milwaukee Bucks and Brewers. The pay scale was such that I could barely pay my rent. I was treading water. With my move to the insurance industry, my loans have been paid off for three years and I have bought a house.	2008	Insurance
Loan debt has been brutal as both my boyfriend and I had undergraduate and graduate debt. It absolutely impacts your ability to live like you want and forces you to always be conscious of having and maintaining a job.	2007	Health Industry
Earlier in my career I was a finalist for a full-time position outside my home area but the money just would not add up. I could not have moved to St. Louis with my loan debt.	2010	Professional Sport
The sports industry is a vicious circle. You think you deserve the job because you have the education, but you don't have the experience. So you take an entry-level job where the pay is so low you can't pay off the loans necessary to get your education. Just having a degree is not enough to get noticed.	2007	Multi-media