The internship experience has long been a staple of sport management curricula around the world. Likewise, the benefits derived from internships in the sport industry have been widely documented in the literature. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly every aspect of the global sport industry has been impacted in one way or another. Continued health and safety precautions dictating work in the sport industry, among other things, have also affected the sport management internship experience.

This particular study examines the expansion of virtual internships or “e-internship” programs in the sport industry. Furthermore, the focus of this particular study does not solely lie within the confines of academia and potential issues of declining job placement rates, but also within the sport industry and how fast change occurs relative to this new means of professional development. As health conditions, governmental and educational regulations have forced many sport organizations to create virtual experiential opportunities, the inherent concern from academia is the influence this modality will have on student learning outcomes. Bisland et al. (2020) found that while these types of experiences may in fact enhance professional development areas such as communication, networking and relationship building, there are also considerable challenges such as program design, access to technology and availability of reliable internet service.

Literature related to virtual internships is sparse, however, it is important to revisit the growing trend of online sport management education. Shreffler et al. (2019) found that instructional delivery method (i.e., face-to-face and online) did not affect course outcomes. It should be noted that while there is much more to an internship beyond mere course content and subsequent outcomes, but these findings are promising given the potential for increased use of virtual internships beyond 2020. Therefore, as the virtual mode of internship delivery becomes more common, program structure also will become more streamlined and tailored to student professional development goals. Student, site supervisor and academic advisor feedback was solicited as it relates to this modality.

As the online student learner has somewhat developed in recent decades, there are still reservations from faculty within sport management academia. Willett et al. (2019) found that most faculty have negative views of online learning and feel face-to-face options are more appropriate in the sport management curriculum. With that in mind, it is also important to solicit faculty input and extend this assessment to the increasing move to virtual internships. The intent is to uncover best practices, assess potential barriers and evaluate potential differences in the deliverables of face-to-face and virtual internships. Additionally, future directions of this study include the potential to advise sport organizations on the development of virtual internship programs to maximize student learning outcomes through technological advancements. Educational institutions and sport organizations must still commit to investing in future leaders while possibly facing declining revenues.