

Influence of Volunteer Motivations on Satisfaction for Undergraduate Sport Management Students

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Abstract

Attracting, satisfying, and retaining volunteers can be a challenge for undergraduate sport management programs responsible for staffing athletic events. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of student (volunteer) motivations on their satisfaction volunteering at sporting events. For this study, 103 undergraduate sport management students at a Midwestern University who volunteered with the co-curricular sport management club completed a 51-item survey. The volunteer satisfaction and motivation questions used in this study were adapted from Clary et al. (1998) and Bang and Ross (2009). Multiple regression was used to predict the satisfaction level of volunteer experience based on volunteer motivations. The regression indicated that increases in Career, Social, and Love of Sport resulted in increases in satisfaction ($F(9, 93) = 24.5, p < .001$), accounting for 65.3% of the unique variance. Implications for sport management faculty and student organization leaders are explored.

Introduction

Sport management programs often partner with their institutional athletic departments, or community sport organizations, to provide volunteer experiences for their students. This arrangement is often a positive reciprocal relationship whereby the students gain practical experiences while the athletic department or community organization gain motivated volunteers. Oftentimes these volunteer opportunities are coordinated by co-curricular clubs. These clubs, also called professional student organizations, are university sponsored groups that are a part of the educational process within an academic major that exist outside the realm of credit-driven courses, internships, or other field experiences (Judge et al., 2011). Within the field of sport management, co-curricular clubs can provide students an opportunity to acquire field experiences that allow exploration of interests in their chosen major (Bodey & Schaumleffel, 2008; Foster & Dollar, 2010). However, undergraduate students have a variety of other interests and requirements that place demands on their time, which makes attracting and retaining volunteers to work sporting events a challenge. Despite the professional development and social benefits that can be derived from volunteering, students and faculty responsible for staffing events can find it difficult to secure a reliable, motivated group of students (Bodey & Schaumleffel, 2008). The stakes can be high for sport management programs that seek to create a mutually beneficial relationship with the university's athletic department or other sports organizations. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the influence of student (volunteer) motivations on their satisfaction volunteering at sporting events organized through an undergraduate sport management club.

Literature Review

Astin's theory of student involvement posits that students learn by being involved. Student involvement refers to the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). According to Astin's theory, students will achieve greater amounts of learning and personal development as they increase their involvement in college (Astin, 1984). Specifically, Astin found a positive correlation between students' co-curricular involvement and their success in college. Moreover, Astin's theory is valuable to frame the concept of volunteerism because it allows one to understand the individual psychological components necessary to promote a positive working relationship between volunteer and organization (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). The psychological contract then is the set of expectations from both the volunteer and the organization that serves to determine if an experience was meaningful. If students are involved physically and psychologically in their chosen volunteer activities, the psychological contract will likely be fulfilled and the quality of learning will be improved. Furthermore, most psychological contracts are considered relational. Relational psychological contracts are open-ended socio-emotional exchanges where a volunteer and organization are interested in mutual satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment (Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007). Therefore, if student volunteers engage in volunteerism through a program or co-curricular club, they are likely to be engaging in a relational psychological contract where they are aware their role is to support the organization's goals while simultaneously meeting goals of their own.

With an understanding that volunteers generally engage in a relational form of psychological contract, it is important to note the uniqueness of volunteerism in sport. In addition to traditional events, sporting events include a level of competition and on-field spectacle that can attract volunteers with varying motives (Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998). It is possible that volunteers want to be involved with sport because of the nature of the event or the athletes themselves. This could be problematic considering sport volunteerism, more so than many other field, relies on large numbers of volunteers to overcome the operational costs and lack of skilled employees (Strigas & Jackson, 2003). This could be especially problematic with student workers who may find the volunteer requirements less enticing than being in a sporting environment due to their love of sports (Todd & Andrew, 2008). In essence, sporting events, especially large scale events (Strigas & Jackson, 2003), have the advantage of drawing volunteers due to its unique and entertaining nature, but volunteers may be more interested in being entertained rather than engaging in some of the more mundane volunteer activities. This notion is particularly important for faculty or leaders of co-curricular clubs as they assess the best ways to market and staff events with student volunteers.

Regarding co-curricular clubs and their impact on volunteerism, Bodey (2008b) found that academic departments utilize co-curricular clubs to "promote professional development, increase networking opportunities, provide opportunities for application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, and integrate students into the institution" (p. 34). In a study conducted at one Midwestern institution, Bodey (2008a) found that building relationships with classmates and colleagues, meeting new people with similar interests, networking with professionals in the field, learning about career options, and developing professional skills were the top benefits of participating in the club. The primary barriers to participation centered on time conflicts with academics, work, and other commitments (Bodey, 2008b). While co-curricular clubs are organized differently at each institution, they can fulfill a variety of purposes within a sports management program. Bodey and Schaumleffel (2008) found that students most valued networking with professionals, attending a sporting event, obtaining experience through volunteering, and hosting a special event around a major sporting event.

As it relates to this study, it is important to note that co-curricular clubs can be one mechanism by which students acquire volunteer field experiences that allow exploration of interests in their chosen major (Bodey, 2008a; Foster & Dollar, 2010). According to Bodey and Schaumleffel (2008), “events should complement the curriculum and include opportunities for hands on experiences to further develop professional competencies and increase students’ ability to achieve higher levels of learning” (p. 5). This is an important concept that supports the relational form of psychological contract (Farmer & Fedor, 1999) whereby students understand their participation in volunteer activities is a meaningful activity that enhances their professional competencies.

For sport management programs and their co-curricular clubs charged with placing volunteers at athletic events, an understanding of volunteer frequency is required. Approximately 30% of college students volunteer, double the percentage of individuals the same age who do not attend college (Corporation for National Community Service, 2006). Of those college students who volunteer, 44% volunteer at least 12 weeks per year with their primary organization (Corporation for National Community Service). These statistics highlight the difficulty that can be faced in finding volunteers when 70% of college students do not volunteer, and nearly half of those who do volunteer spend a significant amount of energy with one organization. Although sporting contexts can seemingly improve these numbers (Strigas & Jackson, 2003), challenges are ever-present.

Clary et al.’s (1998) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) sheds light into the motives behind volunteering and how those motives predict volunteer satisfaction. Clary et al. (1998) utilized a functionalist theory approach toward understanding the motivations of volunteers by developing the VFI. Functionalist theory posits that “people perform the same actions in the service of different psychological functions” (Clary & Snyder, 1999, p. 156). In other words the same volunteer activity may be staffed by many people with many different motives. Other tenants of functionalist theory are that people are goal-directed, can be motivated by more than one goal, and are satisfied if their experience fulfills their motives (Clary & Snyder, 1999).

The VFI assesses six motivations for volunteering. First, *values* are understood as opportunities provided for individuals to express ideals related to a concern for others. This relates to concept of altruism in that a motivation for people to volunteer is to benefit others. Second, the *understanding* function of motivation involves the opportunity for volunteers to gain learning experiences and utilize their own knowledge, skills, and abilities. The third function, *social*, states that volunteers may be motivated to strengthen their social relationships. Fourth, the *career* function stems from career-related experience where people who volunteer can prepare for a new career or maintain career-relevant skills. The fifth function, *protective*, focuses on the protecting the ego from negative thoughts of the self. This type of volunteer motivations is about reducing guilt about being more fortunate than others, and it is about addressing personal issues. Finally, the *enhancement* function centers around personal development and obtaining satisfaction related to personal growth and self-esteem. The psychometric properties of the scale have proven to be reliable and valid in a variety of studies related to volunteer motivation (Clary et al., 1998).

In order to account for the fact that the volunteers in this study were volunteering within the context of sport, Bang and Ross’ (2009) *love of sport* motivational factor was also included. Bang and Ross found love of sport, as well as the VFI motives of expression of values and career orientation, were significant predictors of volunteer satisfaction for volunteers at a marathon event. In sum, the six factors from the VFI and one factor from Bang and Ross formed

the seven motivational factors chosen for examination in this study. The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of student (volunteer) motivations on their satisfaction volunteering at sporting events organized through an undergraduate sport management club.

The following research questions guided this paper:

RQ1: What factors motivate sport management students to pursue volunteer opportunities?

RQ2: Do different motivation factors predict satisfaction with their volunteer experience?

Methodology

Sport Administration Association (Co-curricular Club)

The Sport Administration Association (SAA) at the institution from which data was collected for this study was responsible for securing volunteers for the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics in the sports of football, basketball, soccer, field hockey, gymnastics, track and field, and volleyball. Tasks performed by student volunteers included basic event management functions such as securing loose balls, crowd management, distributing programs, and on-field promotions. During the course of one academic year, the SAA on average would staff 70 athletic events with 300 volunteer positions for a total of 700 hours volunteered. In addition to events worked for the athletic department, the SAA was also an important contributor of volunteers for a local event management company that organized a wide variety of road race events in the region. Students were not compensated financially for their work. Volunteer satisfaction was an important issue for the club because it experiences high turnover and no-show rates.

Measures

All participants completed a questionnaire that asked them to provide their year in school, gender, how many events they had volunteered for during the most recent academic year and during their time in college, motivations for volunteering, and satisfaction with volunteering. All motivation questions were measured using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*extremely important*), while satisfaction was measured using 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Values

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure values. Items included "I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself," "I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving," "I feel compassion toward people in need," "I feel it is important to help others," and "I can do something for a cause that is important to me." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .856$).

Understanding

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure understanding. Items included "I can learn more about the cause for which I am working," "Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things," "Volunteering lets me learn through direct hands on experience," "I can learn how to deal with a variety of people," and "I can explore my own strengths." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .885$).

Social

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure social. Items included "My friends volunteer," "People I'm close to want me to volunteer," "People I know share an interest in community service," "Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service," "Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .883$).

Career

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure career. Items included "Volunteering can help me get my foot in the door at a place where I'd like to work," "I can make new contacts that might help my business career," "Volunteering allows me to explore different career options," "Volunteering will help me succeed in my chosen profession," and "Volunteering experience will look good on my resume." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .882$).

Protective

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure protective. Items included "No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it," "By volunteering, I feel less lonely," "Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others," "Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems," and "Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .883$).

Enhancement

The wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adopted to measure enhancement. Items included "Volunteering makes me feel important," "Volunteering increases my self-esteem," "Volunteering makes me feel needed," "Volunteering makes me feel better about myself," and "Volunteering is a way to make new friends". The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .885$).

Love of Sport

The wording on three items from Bang and Ross (2009) were adopted to measure love of sport. Items included "I like any event related to sport," "Sport is something I love," and "I enjoy being involved in sport activities." The reliability estimate was acceptable ($\alpha = .747$).

Satisfaction

the wording on five items from Clary et al. (1998) were adapted to measure satisfaction. Items included "I am enjoying or have enjoyed my volunteer experience with SAA," "My volunteer experience has been personally fulfilling," "This experience of volunteering with the SAA has been a worthwhile one," "I have been able to make an important contribution by volunteering with SAA," and "I have accomplished a great deal of good through my volunteer work with SAA." The reliability estimate was high ($\alpha = .943$).

Procedures

After receiving permission from the university's Institutional Review Board, the surveys were distributed in eight different sport management courses during the final week of the spring semester. Professors allocated the first ten minutes of class for students to complete the surveys. Students who were not enrolled in a sport management class during the spring semester were given the opportunity to complete the survey online using Qualtrics survey software. The answers from the paper-based and online surveys were merged to form one data set.

Participants

Participants for this study were 103 undergraduate students who had volunteered for at least one event through the SAA. In sum, 42.9% of the students in the major responded to the survey. The sample was comprised of 4.9% freshmen, 27.2% sophomores, 36.9% juniors, and 31.1% seniors. Males comprised 73.8% of respondents, which is representative of the overall gender breakdown in the major whereby approximately 75% of the students in any given semester are male. On average, students responding to the survey had volunteered for 14.5 events during their time in college and 5.4 events during the past academic year.

Data analysis

Using SPSS version 20.0 software, a score for each of the five factors was determined by calculating the mean score of the questions within that particular factor. Multiple regression was used to predict the satisfaction level of volunteer experience based on volunteer motivations. Gender, class standing, and the seven motivation factors were entered using backward elimination in order to identify the best subset of volunteer motivation variables.

Results

The means and standard deviations on each of the seven motivation factors are listed in Table 1. Students were mostly satisfied with their experience as a volunteer ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.40$).

Factor	Mean	SD
Love of sport	6.36	.84
Career	5.79	.98
Understanding	5.34	1.08
Values	4.97	1.19
Enhancement	4.52	1.35
Social	3.97	1.42
Protective	3.28	1.37

The bivariate correlations between the factors are presented in Table 2. Discriminate validity between factors was established as a result of no correlation greater than .85 (Kline, 2005). Multiple regression analysis was utilized to predict the satisfaction level of volunteer experience based on volunteer motivations. Following the recommendation of Bang and Ross (2009), backward multiple regression was employed to identify the best set of motivation predictors. The final regression model indicated that three volunteer motivation predictors accounted for 65.3% of the unique variance in volunteer satisfaction ($R^2 = .41$, $F(9, 93) = 24.5$, $p < .001$). It was found that *Career* ($\beta = .36$, $p < .05$), *Social* ($\beta = .37$, $p < .01$), and *Love of Sport* ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$)

predicted volunteer satisfaction. The model indicates that increases in any of the three factors are likely to result in increased satisfaction.

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Satisfaction	A							
Career	B	.519**						
Social	C	.544**	.401**					
Values	D	.519**	.602**	.729**				
Understand	E	.546**	.747**	.611**	.700**			
Enhance	F	.584**	.635**	.714**	.728**	.776**		
Protect	F	.432**	.404**	.733**	.651**	.585**	.724**	
Sport	G	.470**	.605**	.338**	.523**	.534**	.453**	.233*

** Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

The results of the backwards multiple regression are presented in Table 3.

	B	SE B	t	P
Career	.361	.142	2.543	.013
Social	.372	.082	4.524	.001
Love of Sport	.317	.161	1.969	.050

Discussion

The results of this study have implications for sport management faculty and co-curricular club student leaders who need to find involved students seeking a relational psychological contract with the organization. However, because a student's time is perhaps his or her most precious asset, time is finite and volunteer opportunities often compete with family, friends, job, and other activities for a share of students' attention (Astin, 1984). In a study on barriers to participation in a co-curricular club, Bodey (2008b) found that time conflicts related to academics, work, and other commitments were the top three reasons why students chose to not participate in clubs. Finite time, coupled with the transient nature of students, lack of urgency to engage in volunteer activities, and their miscomprehension regarding the importance of field experiences can create problems for sport management programs and their partnered organizations. Sport management faculty and student leaders tasked with attracting, satisfying, and retaining a reliable volunteer work force within their undergraduate programs or co-curricular clubs often find that securing and motivating student volunteers is a difficult challenge. The results of this study indicate that sport management programs in need of satisfied volunteers working events in a co-curricular club setting should focus on creating an environment that caters to the student's career aspirations, social needs, and love of sport in order to increase their level of satisfaction.

Love of sport was the top-rated motivation for volunteering and a significant predictor of satisfaction. While the students' love of sport would seem to be inherent to their interest in majoring in sports management, sport management faculty and student leaders should not assume love of certain sports will inherently motivate the student to volunteer, let alone volunteer at the types of events for which the program or club is seeking volunteers. For example, students may have a love for football and basketball, but lack any interest in field hockey and track, which may require a constant flow of volunteers throughout the competitive seasons. One solution to this dilemma is to identify a core group of students who are passionate

about specific sports (e.g. Olympic, non-revenue) for which volunteers are needed. Another solution may be to emphasize the ways in which volunteers are part of the action when distributing marketing materials during the volunteer recruitment phase. For example, volunteers at a road race event are typically on the race course doing things like timing and scoring, distributing water, calling out split times, and positioning equipment on the course. At a volleyball game, volunteers are near the court tracking down loose balls and keeping the flow of balls in play for the next serve. In other words, sport management students enjoy being part of sport activities, and recruiting them to volunteer with sports for which they have a specific passion, or in ways that makes them part of or close to the action can increase their satisfaction with volunteering.

Next, the ability to advance one's career was a predictor of satisfaction. Despite the fact that sport management faculty preach the importance of acquiring field experiences in sport management, some students may not recognize the relevance of volunteering at sporting events. Those responsible for securing volunteers can engage in several strategies to help students recognize how these field experiences can advance their careers. First, volunteer managers should work with sport organization officials (i.e. athletic department, event management company, professional team) to identify positions that are relevant and important to the operation of the event to ensure that students feel they contribute to the outcome of the event. On a related note, upper-level students can be assigned to more challenging tasks than lower-level students who have just entered the co-curricular club or major. For example, standing at an intersection and directing runners through a race route might be an appropriate task for a freshman working his or her first event, but a senior student volunteering for the event would be better placed at the finish line assisting with the scoring and timing system. Sport organization personnel and sport management faculty should also work to help students understand the broader context in which their volunteer position takes place. Students will connect with their seemingly menial volunteer position better if they understand the specific sport management need that they are able to fill.

The second career advancement strategy that could be employed by club leaders and faculty is to provide a mechanism by which students learn how to describe their volunteer experiences on a resume, or during an interview. This can be done in the classroom, club meetings, advising meetings, or through a variety of online delivery systems that can be accessed by students at their convenience. Without the ability to effectively communicate the work performed or what they learned from the experience, the experience may as well not have occurred. Finally, students should be prepared to leverage the networking opportunities available while volunteering for an event. Students motivated by career outcomes should network with sport industry personnel who may be supervising their performance or organizing the event. If ability to advance one's career is truly a motivator, it is imperative that faculty or club supervisors emphasize these important concepts to their student volunteers. In sum, the more students feel like their volunteer experience enhances their career outcomes, the more satisfied they will be with the volunteer experience.

Finally, the ability to strengthen one's social relationships predicted satisfaction. This result is reinforced by Bodey (2008a), who found that the most important reasons why students participate in a club are social reasons. Social motivations included building relationships with classmates, meeting new people with similar interests, and networking. Those responsible for retaining volunteers should identify ways to strengthen the relationship between volunteers. Signing up individually to volunteer at an event, then being assigned a volunteer position without social interaction, can be an isolating experience that could result in future volunteer attrition. Instead of the *one-off* volunteer approach, a better strategy would be to create a team structure

where volunteers work with the same group of people throughout the semester. This structure would create an environment where students are accountable to the other members of their team. While this structure requires a higher level of organization and management within the co-curricular club or by a faculty advisor, it may be worth the long-term investment if volunteers are satisfied and retained. Lastly, Bodey and Sschaumleffel (2008) recommended a mentoring system where senior students are mentoring and training freshman and sophomore students. Such a mentoring system would allow upper level students to convey the importance of volunteer positions, while also achieving the social component desired by student volunteers. Authors (in press) described how the mentoring structure can take place within the context of upper-level students serving as mentors for students completing a field experience assignment in an introductory sport management course.

Limitations and future research

This study was primarily limited because data was collected from one institution. Generalizing the results beyond the institution from which data were collected may be inappropriate. Additionally, this study did not distinguish between types of volunteer experiences. Experiences with different types of sports or with different types of time commitments were treated similarly. Future research should examine the volunteer motives of student's at a variety of institutions where the sport management program or co-curricular club secures volunteers for events. This would lead to a larger sample size and increased generalizability of the findings. Finally, making the distinction between self-directed volunteer experiences and those required by the sports management program could add context to the existing literature.

Conclusion

Attracting, satisfying, and retaining volunteers can be a challenge for undergraduate sport management programs or co-curricular clubs responsible for staffing sporting events. The results of this study indicated that sport management students' love of sports, career benefits, and social needs predicted satisfaction with volunteering. Faculty and student leaders should focus their efforts towards helping sport management student volunteers' leverage their experiences in ways that can improve satisfaction. Specifically, sport management programs and co-curricular clubs should target their recruitment efforts on students' love of sports and the development of social relationships, while creating post-volunteering programming that emphasizes how to turn the volunteer experience into a career benefit. Implementing these strategies is a pragmatic approach to improving partnerships between sport management programs and sport organizations who rely on each other for satisfied volunteers.

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