



SELECTED SCHOLARSHIP ON TEACHING AND LEARNING at ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Volume 5 • April 2017

## Improving the Graduate Student Experience through Out-of-Class Experiences

**Rebecca M. Achen, Ph.D.**

**School of Kinesiology and Recreation • Illinois State University**



**Rebecca M. Achen, Ph.D.** is an assistant professor of sport management in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation at Illinois State University. She graduated with her Ph.D. in sport management from the University of Kansas, where she also taught as a graduate teaching assistant. Prior to going back to school for her Ph.D., she worked in the education department at the National Center for Drug Free Sport. She has many years of work experience in higher education administration and sport marketing and sales. Her research focuses on the effectiveness of social media as relationship marketing tools in professional sport. She also conducts research on participant sport, sport sponsorship, and effective teaching.



**Clint Warren, Ph.D.**

**School of Kinesiology and Recreation • Illinois State University**

**Clint Warren, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor and the Coordinator of graduate study in Sport Management in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation. He earned his PhD at the University of Minnesota, and he studies the structure and strategy of soccer in the United States. His past work has included papers examining topics such as supporter connection to clubs, match attendance, season ticket holder preferences, and other topics related to sport management strategy. His current work studies soccer governance and policy related to the United States Soccer Federation and Major League Soccer.

**Amanda Fazzari**

**School of Kinesiology and Recreation • Illinois State University**

Amanda Fazzari, Graduate Student, School of Kinesiology and Recreation  
Sport Management Graduate Sequence

**Hannah Jorich**

**School of Kinesiology and Recreation • Illinois State University**

Hannah Jorich, Graduate Student, School of Biological Sciences  
Sport Management Graduate Sequence

**Ken Thorne**

**School of Kinesiology and Recreation • Illinois State University**

Ken Thorne, Graduate Student, School of Biological Sciences  
Sport Management Graduate Sequence

*This study evaluated student experiences and learning outcomes related to the professional field trip, which is designed to encourage connection between students and improve professional skills. Twenty-two graduate students attended the trip to Milwaukee, WI, where they participated in a networking event with industry professionals, toured an arena and Marquette athletics, and attended a baseball game. The trip was evaluated using pre- and post-trip surveys, a focus group, and interviews with professionals that the students interacted with. Results suggested the trip met students' expectations, improved their connection to their cohort, clarified their professional goals, and improved their networking skills.*

---

**Grant funding:** *This research was funded by the 2016-2017 SoTL University Research Grant.*

---

# Improving the Graduate Student Experience through Out-of-Class Experiences

Dr. Rebecca Achen, Dr. Clint Warren, Hannah Jorich, Amanda Fazarri, Ken Thorne  
School of Kinesiology and Recreation

## BACKGROUND

- Student experiences out-of-class can be vital parts of the learning experience (Kuh, 1995).
- The theory of student involvement “emphasizes active participation of the student in the learning process” (Astin, 1984, p. 522).
- Cognitive and affective learning can occur as a result of field trips (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008).
- Kuh (1993) found out-of-class experiences have a positive impact on college students’ personal competence and skills such as confidence; students did not report experiences impacted their academic skills or knowledge application.
- Gosen & Washbush (2004) called for research on the learning outcomes of experiential learning.
- Pontius & Harper (2006) called for research into student engagement for graduate students.
- Berte & Jones (2014) advocated for detailing the connection between the trip and learning outcomes prior to planning the trip.

**GOAL:** To evaluate the annual professional field trip to determine if it is meeting students’ expectations and providing them with value that supports class content and enhances their experiences as graduate students.

## METHOD

### Measures:

Pre-trip expectations survey  
Post-trip perceptions survey  
Post-trip focus group

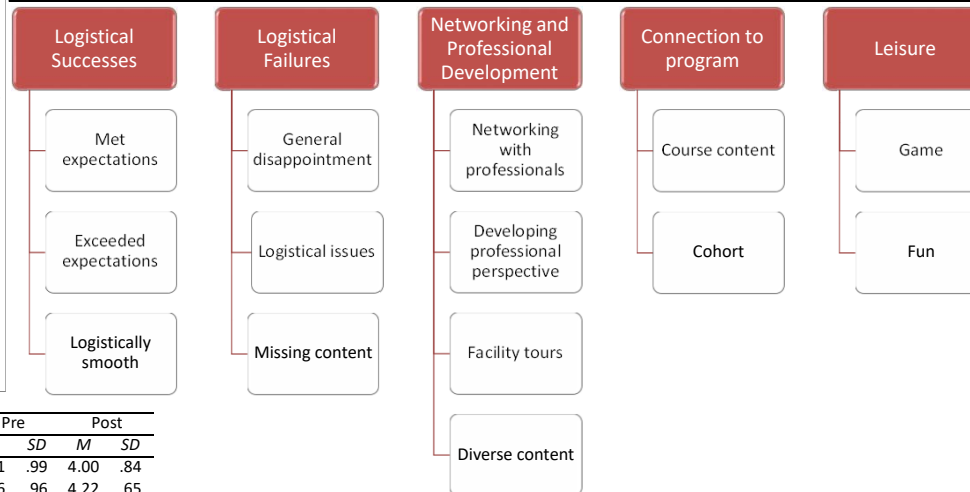
### Sample:

22 students attended the trip  
19 pre-trip respondents  
18 post-trip respondents  
6 focus group participants

### Analysis:

Descriptive statistics  
T-tests of differences  
Thematic analysis of qualitative data

## RESULTS



After participating in the field trip, I will

Statements (changed to past tense for post-trip survey)	Pre		Post	
	M	SD	M	SD
Have more professional contacts.	4.11	.99	4.00	.84
Have improved my networking skills.	4.16	.96	4.22	.65
Have a deeper knowledge of what it is like to work in the sport industry.	4.26	.93	4.28	.58
Be more excited about my future in sport management.	4.37	.96	4.22	.73
Feel more connected to my cohort.	4.53	.96	4.67	.59
Know more about what to expect in my future career.	3.89	.99	4.11	1.02
Have a better understanding of the job search process.	3.68	1.11	3.61	.98
Be able to see connections between course content and real-world application.	4.21	.92	4.39	.50
Be glad I participated in the trip.	4.63	.96	4.89	.32
Feel the trip was a valuable experience.	4.63	.96	4.83	.38
Know more about my potential career path.	4.00	1.05	3.94	.87
Have built at least one solid connection with an industry professional.	4.05	1.03	3.56	1.10
Be more knowledgeable about the next step in my career.	3.89	.94	3.56	1.04
Feel that I had fun while on the trip.	4.53	.96	4.89	.32
Be more comfortable completing class projects with other students in my cohort.	4.05	1.03	4.56	.51
Have a better understanding of sport facilities and how they are operated.	4.32	1.00	4.39	.61
Have expanded my knowledge of potential career options in professional sport.	4.16	.96	4.17	.51
Have expanded my knowledge of potential career options in college sport.	4.05	.91	4.06	.73

I feel that participating in the field trip will

Statements (changed to past tense for post-trip survey)	Pre		Post	
	M	SD	M	SD
Help me to cement difficult information	3.74	.81	3.72	.90
Encourage me to interact in a more relaxed environment	4.26	.93	4.39	.50
Allow me to escape the routine of the classroom	4.58	1.02	4.89	.32
Increase my motivation for learning	4.26	1.10	4.39	.70
Provide me with firsthand experience related to the topics discussed in the program	4.53	.96	4.50	.62

## SO WHAT?

- Student expectations were met/exceeded.
- Students recognized and appreciated the multitude of benefits related to getting to know their classmates.
- Trip led to more realistic job expectations.
- Professional networking could be improved by providing training prior to the trip.
- The learning objectives for the trip were met, and students found professional, personal, and social value in the trip.
- Students learned more about the field and their career, and connected trip experiences to course content.
- Continual assessment of the trip will help to provide support for continued funding and departmental support.

## MOVING FORWARD

“ Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers.”

- Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 4

---

***About GAUISUS***

*Gausius* is the internal, peer-reviewed scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) publication at Illinois State University (ISU). Its purpose is to provide instructors writing about their teaching and learning a local but peer reviewed publication outlet and to offer other instructors and students an accessible publication to read to obtain a sense of, and learn from, some of the scholarly teaching and SoTL projects conducted by their colleagues on our campus. The name, *Gausius* means glad, gladly, or joyful in Latin, as in the Illinois State motto/logo, "Gladly we learn and teach."

Find the latest edition online at [gauisus.weebly.com](http://gauisus.weebly.com)

The Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning can be found at [SoTL.IllinoisState.edu](http://SoTL.IllinoisState.edu)