

Hospitality Education: Potential Path Forward

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Abstract

Hospitality education is under increased scrutiny as to its value for students and relevance in research driven higher education universities. Concurrently, academic institutions are examining whether hospitality is worthy of its own department or if it should be consolidated into a broader school.

The hospitality four-year education degree program has been available since the mid-1920's in the United States; nevertheless, many non-hospitality scholars have suggested the field is nothing more than a vocational exercise. While academia has argued as to its relevance, hospitality industry participants have advocated for even more resources devoted to this area as they see the need for more rigorous academic research as well as the education of next generation industry leaders.

This paper will examine these arguments as well as potential resolutions. Key focus will be on building out hospitality studied academic relevance as well as the adjustment of mission and curriculum of hospitality programs in a post-pandemic environment. Rather than resisting collaboration outside hospitality academic studies leaders should embrace work with social science and business scholars. A revised curriculum justifying the value of a hospitality education both to increase employment opportunities as well as to build scholarly acceptance.

Many of the findings of this paper were preliminary presented at a previous North East Business Educators conference but never published in an academic journal. More detail, history and resources have been added to augment and justify the findings.

Keywords: hospitality, tourism, academic relevance

1. Introduction

“We are Not Alone” (Sullivan, 1966) was the title of a book published in the mid 1960's that described the search for intelligent life on other worlds. United States hospitality educators are not alone in justifying the existence of their field of education, as other countries (e.g., United Kingdom and Indonesia) face a similar challenge. Other majors have also had to validate their field.

In the past few years, articles have been written about the hospitality debate in the United States, United Kingdom and Indonesia. Hospitality is not just some vocational program but a true way to educate leaders in one of largest global industries. However, there are challenges hospitality

education faces, such as the value or its place in higher education institutions. Concurrently there is increased expectations for the major from practitioner/industry leaders as well as opportunities to enhance its positioning over the next decade.

1.1 Need for Change in Hospitality Education.

The major themes that percolate out of studies that examine the future and needs of hospitality education programs include the following:

- 1) Is the role of a hospitality and tourism program to simply teach the skills to create the next generation of hoteliers, restaurateurs, convention and tourism planners and other specific career titles, or is it to get students to learn how to “think”?
- 2) Is it so that they can be successful in other non-hospitality careers or that they have the leadership, management, and cognitive skills to be able to move up in hospitality organizations where technical skills may be less valued but cognitive skills will be paramount?
- 3) What do industry leaders want from the graduates of hospitality programs, and how can this be incorporated into the debate and trajectory of hospitality education?

1.2 Broader College and Professional Study Challenges

While hospitality education does have idiosyncratic challenges, it seems that over the past thirty years there has also been a discussion more broadly about the role of higher education in society. A movement seems to have occurred, possibly driven by economics and the expense of education—that there should be more of a focus towards the need to give students the skill to achieve gainful employment. More specifically, there is a need for job ready graduates to find work and pay off their student loans.

This view seems to arise especially when it comes to public funding for universities and colleges where politicians have suggested if higher education cannot get people ready for jobs why should we fund it (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017)? The idea of a liberal arts education just to build knowledge is viewed as an unaffordable luxury and learning must be applicable to potential businesses and organizations (p. 164). The other side of the argument is even though employment is a notable goal for higher education, especially for a hospitality program, there is also a need to “develop well rounded thoughtful individuals who can contribute to society, other vocations and industries “(p. 164).

Another issue that universities face is the prestige factor of a hospitality major versus others. At the risk of stating the obvious, a quick review of Noble Prize history does not show any winners who explored the area of hospitality. Greater focus of awards are in broader liberal arts and sciences subject such as physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and economics (“Nobel Prize”, n.d.). Even if one examines schools of higher education for Fulbright scholars, there seems to be a preponderance of undergraduate institutions with more of a liberal arts focus (“Fulbright Online, n.d.). Lugosi and Jameson (2017) noted, “It could also be argued that the vocational focus of hospitality education has caused further frictions as universities seek to concentrate on

higher-prestige, mainstream academic fields in positioning themselves in the global higher education market” (p. 164).

The challenges that hospitality schools face creating an educational process that justifies the need for theory versus the applicability for real life and job readiness, is also part of the debate in other academia. For example, in an article on teaching techniques in the nursing profession (Crookes, Crookes and Walsh, 2013), the authors noted that nursing professors are often pushed into constantly contextualizing theoretical material/other sciences/liberal arts so students can connect the courses’ content with the need for practical application. This example provides an illustration that “we are not alone” in trying to balance the relevance of vocational training with the value of learning and theory.

Finally, it is important to note that the question or debate relevancy of a hospitality program may, in fact, be based in its origins. The first hotel school was established in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1893 to meet the needs of this very high-end tourist destination (Oktadiana& Choi, 2017). From the onset, emphasis was on a vocational focus with a target of creating entry level employees (Oktadiana et al., p. 15). The advent of tourism programs seems to be less clear and initially part of business school programs (p. 15). While research in hospitality and tourism started in 1940’s, it became more prevalent in 1970’s as more academic journals began to arise (p. 15). The history seems to point out that hospitality education is still early in its development relative to other majors at universities and, in fact, did have its basis in vocation rather than science and theory.

Hospitality education seems to contrast with a business education, which appears to have had more of a start in economics and statistics rather than job creation. In fact, in 1881 Wharton was the first college level business school established in the world (“About Wharton,” n.d.), even before Lausanne as well as other major university hotel schools started to be established. The relevance of a business degree seems to be less debated than a hospitality degree but, in fact, may simply be a function of its lineage and age rather than relevance.

1.3Needs of Industry, Students and Hiring managers

The other part of the debate of relevance, vocational or academic focus for the future of hospitality, is what industry leaders and students want. The reality is that there seems to be no consensus on this front from CEOs, CFOs and human resource professionals at publicly traded or real estate investment trust companies. For example, I interviewed with the head of human resources at a major hotel company who did not want to recruit at Cornell, NYU or Boston University for operational positions because he felt these students did not want to devote themselves to an operating environment that is highly demanding and requires overnight and weekend work.

Another human resource person noted they were concerned about state university hotel schools because these students did not seem to have a willingness to move around the globe to advance their careers. Finally, when I have spoken to the senior management of REITS and large hotel owner groups, they wanted graduates who have a thorough understanding of finance and real estate. Thus, while hospitality educators are trying shift their programs to more relevance, it may

be hard to reach an understanding of direction from industry executives since there seems to be no accord.

2. Findings

Given the history of the start of programs, the existing debate of vocation vs. more academically driven rigor and the lack of agreement, it is likely that this deliberation will continue.

2.1 Considerations as Curriculum is Developed.

There are at least two considerations that might be helpful for leaders of the academic institutions to embrace. First, there needs to be more interdisciplinary interactions between departments within a university, especially when it comes to academic research. For example, if a hospitality professor is doing work on a marketing subject, why not reach across campus to the business school to co-author the report? Maybe it is naivety of the politics of interdisciplinary work, but the impact of co-authoring could be powerful. For example, three business school professors at Boston University wrote a report on the rise of Airbnb (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2013). If this were published in a hospitality driven journal, the impact may have been earlier and much wider.

Second, there needs to be more cross pollination of the students in hospitality programs and other departments. It is troubling that students attending a hospitality school can take courses at the business school for credit but students at the business school are discouraged from taking courses at the hotel school. In addition, sometimes the business school does not invite hotel students to their speaker and extracurricular programs. Similar complaints have been expressed when I interview students from nearly every hospitality program. Leadership at the upper levels of the university level need to mandate a more equal playing field among the majors/disciplines/schools with mutual benefits for academic research, education and reputation.

2.2 Framework

The design of an undergraduate curriculum the strategy would be very similar to the start of any new business: (1) target emerging needs; (2) assess the competition; (3) evaluate existing assets; and (4) create a curriculum prototype/business plan. There does not appear to be any templates for finding for a project like this. In a competitive world, university leaders are unlikely to share the strategy; nevertheless, there is public information from existing programs as well as some studies of educational impact.

Targeted emerging needs is varied and seems to be an increasingly important part of appealing to the next generation of hospitality leaders. One common theme was expressed by the following, "There is a need for hospitality and tourism higher education to develop courses and curriculum that emphasize the internationalization that encourages students to become responsible global citizen" (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017, p. 16.) There is also a burgeoning interest in event planning and management (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017, p. 169). Finally, there is increasing interest in the area from international students (Lugosi et al., 2017. p. 166).

The location of a higher education in a large urban area may make the program especially attractive in that the city, itself. It would also be a natural attraction for international students and

should have a global feel given the high visitation of tourists. In addition, given the heavy calendar of events in any major city, there should be plenty of opportunity for adjunct faculty to be recruited to teach event planning and for students to intern/participate.

The next step in the program development is to assess the competition. There are more than 200 hospitality programs across the United States (“Hospitality School Rankings”, n.d.) so there is no shortage of competitors to be evaluated. The focus of this competitive curriculum analysis city-centered schools apart from Cornell which is based in a secondary city. Some of these schools offer a range of electives that is wide and includes real estate, gaming, destination management along with the usual food and beverage, operations, and event management. They may also offer 5-year co-op programs, 5-year BA/MBA programs, a “4+1” MLA in Gastronomy along with a variety of certificates.

2.3 Evaluation and Comparison of Hospitality Programs

Given these parameters, the focus of the analysis will be on Cornell, Boston University, Drexel and UNLV. The following are the salient advantages or disadvantages for each school:

Cornell: Cornell is widely recognized as the best hotel school in the country, it is Ivy League and many of their graduates have moved on to leadership positions within the industry. However, the hotel program was absorbed by the business school. Cornell has 21 core courses with most completed in first two years which makes it unique as creates a cohort of students who bond together as freshman and sophomores as they are studying a similar program and are in classes together. The hotel school currently offers a minor in real estate and three concentrations: (a) finance, accounting, and real estate; (b) hospitality leadership; and (c) services marketing and operations management (“Cornell Core Curriculum”, n.d.).

Boston University: The School of Hospitality Administration requires 60 credits in the hotel school with concentrations in: (a) hospitality marketing (b) event Management and (real estate development). One of BU’s advantages is its location within in a “college city” with many other higher education institutions. The concentrations in event management and real estate are also extremely popular (“Undergraduate Curriculum”, n.d.).

Drexel University: One of Drexel advantages is that the university itself has a wide appeal to students with a wide range of academic skills. This is in contrast, to more competitive schools for admission like Boston University and Cornell. Drexel University’s Center for Hospitality and Sport Management has Sports Management, Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts & Food Science all under one department. The hospitality program offers specialization in: (a) food and beverage management; (b) gaming and resort management; (c) travel and tourism; (d) hotel administration; and (e) meeting and event planning. One of its unique attributes is on campus it has 6,500 sq. ft. space with a commercial kitchen, bakery, and laboratory.

University of Nevada Las Vegas: The hospitality program is clearly targeted towards the local cottage industry, gaming. The four specializations are: (a) gaming management; (b) meeting and events; (c) PGA golf management; and (d) restaurant management. UNLV is well regarded and has some assets that other programs do not. For example, it has a very active professional

development program that target practitioners with courses, diplomas, and degrees, has research centers and institutes that produces information that is read by many practitioners and seems to be able to get donations from local wealthy casino leaders and companies. The school itself is named after William Harrah, and its new hospitality hall received significant contributions from nearly every major casino company/leader (“U-N-L-V”, n.d.).

3. Recommendations

After evaluating these four programs it appears that a new hospitality program should have: (1) multiple currently relevant concentrations (hotel, event planning, real estate and food and beverage); (2) make sure to engage local wealthy benefactors; and (3) have a research center to produce research targeted to the industry practitioners rather than academic journals; Students have also expressed an interest having laboratory for food and beverage classes and the creation of cohort of students so that incoming classes feel a connection to each other right away.

The next step in designing the program is to assess existing assets and utilize them. One of the biggest advantages of being in large city with an active hospitality community is that one can tap into the network of executives. With an outreach program the new institution should be able to attract these executives as adjuncts, be willing to present at fireside chats with students, and be a target for internships and employment. Another existing asset is the local tourism infrastructure which should allow the school to target tours of existing hotel and restaurants to bring the book learning into a realistic setting.

If the university has a business school or economics department, these divisions should be involved early in the planning of the program, so they share ownership. These other areas of study should be used by the hospitality school. It would be best if the introduction to economics, marketing or accounting courses could be specifically designed for the hotel students so that it balances relevance with scope.

3.1 Sample Curriculum

The following core courses will be taken by all undergraduates during their freshman year (Table 1). Assuming the average course load for freshmen at the university is 10 courses or 30 credits these courses will utilize 25 of the 30 leaving one to two courses outside the major class to be completed in the first year. The goal is to get students fully engaged in the sector/major right away and as mentioned previously, create bonding of a cohort of students.

Table 1. Core Curriculum

Core Courses	Credits	Rational
Tourism Impacts and Issues	3	Introduction to the basis of this global tourism
Lodging Industry	3	Introduction to mechanics and terms for hotels
Financial Management for Hospitality and Tourism	3	Introduction to earnings, valuation, cash flow, interest rates and basic finance
Hotel and Tourism Accounting	3	Introductory accounting class with a focus on the specific issues faced by sector
Hospitality Sales and Marketing	3	Introductory marketing class with a focus on the specific issues faced by sector
Leadership	3	Leadership with guest speakers from the industry along with target case studies
Hospitality and Travel Law	3	Introductory legal class with a focus on the specific issues faced by sector
Communication	3	Focus on writing in a business and academic setting and public speaking-all with a focus on hospitality
Introduction to Excel	1	Learning the basics of Excel

Regarding electives, the proposed curriculum will include concentrations in event management (Table 2), hotel development/real estate (Table 3), marketing and food/beverage (Table 4), (“SCPS”, n.d.). One other area, which may not be worthy of a concentration but should include one or two courses, is entrepreneurship as there is increased interest from undergraduates in this area.

Table 2. Event Management Elective (“SCPS”, n.d.)

Event Management	
Food, Beverage and Catering	3
Event Design	3
Sports Tourism	3
Conferences and special events	3
Marketing of conferences and special events	3

Table 3. Hotel Development and Real Estate (“SCPS”, n.d.)

Hotel Development and Real Estate	
Room revenue management	3
Advanced room management and on-line travel agents	3
Real estate development	3
Planning and design	3
Investment analysis public and private	3

Table 4 Marketing (“SCPS”, n.d.)

Marketing	
Customer relationship management	3
Brand management	3
Revenue management	3
Advanced revenue management and on line travel agents	3
Marketing of conferences and events	3

Table 5. Food and Beverage

Food and Beverage	
Food, beverage and catering operations	3
Food production	3
Beverage management	3
Safety and sanitation	3
Restaurant management	3
Culture and cuisines	3

With an expectation that the university will require 120 credits, this proposal suggests 25 core credits with the majority taken in the first year, 12 credits in the concentration and another 9 credits taken as electives in the hospitality program. A total of 46 credits will be taken in the major with the remaining 74 credits taken in liberal arts or other areas.

The proposed content curriculum will allow undergraduates to pursue concentrations; however, because it is only 48 credits, it will also allow them to explore other areas of knowledge, study abroad without missing out on required courses, and be active in internships without the overhang of too many required courses. Given the outstanding location of the hotel school, access to hospitality leaders and operations and a flexible current curriculum, this program has the potential to rival some of the best hotel schools within a short period of time.

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