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# Hospitality Doctoral Students' Job Selection Criteria for Choosing a Career in Academia

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**HOSPITALITY DOCTORAL STUDENTS' JOB SELECTION CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A JOB IN  
ACADEMIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

When graduation approaches for doctoral students, they must begin the tedious process of searching for their first faculty position. It becomes important for the student to have a good understanding of what factors are most important when he or she is looking for that position. Very limited hospitality research addresses this viewpoint. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors of importance for hospitality management doctoral students when they select an academic position to apply for or accept. An online survey of students found that likelihood of obtaining tenure, criteria used for obtaining tenure, base salary, and teaching load were the four most important factors. Differences were found in gender, and nationality. Implications and future research are discussed.

**Key words: Job selection, hospitality, faculty, academia, doctoral students**

**INTRODUCTION**

This experience can be quite overwhelming and daunting, especially in light of everything else the student must accomplish during that same time period (i.e. finish his/her dissertation). Job selection criteria may play different roles for different students. For example, one student may seek an institution that is located within a certain part of the country, while another may seek an institution based on the research standing of that school, or the salary paid. Knowing the most important factors should provide practical help to both the doctoral students seeking new positions, as well as the departmental search committees that are recruiting them. This type of research is prominent in the finance, accounting, and management literature, but it is relatively untouched in the hospitality literature. As Hunt (2004) suggests, "research should be performed in other individual academic areas because of a) differences in job markets for those in different academic areas of business and b) individual differences that may cause people to choose one major over another" (p. 53). The purpose of this study, therefore, is If students identify their most important factors, they can better identify the appropriate faculty position that offers those factors, and find the best job that will offer them the overall experience that they are seeking.

These results will help universities with hospitality and tourism programs identify the most important factors that students may emphasize when seeking employment in the higher education field. With this information, universities can create an attractive package for recruiting candidates. For example, if teaching load is of more importance than research requirements, then research universities may need to adjust their promotional recruitment materials to reflect this fact. If geographic location is of importance, then universities located in typically undesirable locations may need to emphasize other factors that will attract candidates to

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those universities. Doctoral students can also utilize this information to help them make informed decisions about their future in hospitality education.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Expectancy theory has been heavily used to explain behavior in the workforce and may play a role in explaining job selection for PhD graduates searching for faculty employment (Wanous, Keon & Latack, 1983). In particular, it has been used to explain the decision making process for individuals when they decide to take (or leave) a job, move to a different organization, and how much effort they put forth in their jobs (Wanous, Keon, Latack, 1983). Expectancy theory attempts to explain why individuals make the choices they do for, or within, an organization (Vroom, 1964). In the present study, expectancy theory “indicates that applicants will be attracted to jobs that they believe will lead to positive outcomes” (Hunt, 2004, p. 57). In other words, individuals will put more motivation into obtaining a job if they believe that job is their most attractive option (Klein, 1991). The motivation or action for obtaining the job is a function of expectancy (likelihood that a particular outcome will result from that action) and attractiveness (the affective orientation towards that outcome) (Klein, 1991, p. 230). The criteria that are most attractive to the students will be their motivators for choosing a particular job over another.

Job selection research, in particular the criteria that are most attractive to applicants, across the business world in general is extensive (Lim & Soon, 2006). The primary focus of such research has been on graduates entering the business administration job sector. Overall, the opportunity for advancement, followed by wage or salary were typically the most important job selection criteria for college graduates (Lim & Soon, 2006). Other important factors included job location, job security, and the applicability of the obtained degree to the job (Lim & Soon, 2006).

The importance of certain job selection criteria differs, however, for graduates entering the education sector (Lim & Soon, 2006). Some differences are to be expected when taking into account different job requirements for educators, i.e. number of required publications or teaching load. In fact, Hunt (2004) found teaching load to be the most important selection factor for graduates of management PhD programs, if the PhD candidate was interviewing or entering a doctoral degree-granting university. Likelihood of obtaining tenure was the second most important factor. While graduates interviewing with, or entering, non-doctoral institutions also ranked teaching load number one, compatibility with other faculty was ranked number two. The likelihood of obtaining tenure was ranked third. Base salary was of minimal importance to both groups (Hunt, 2004). Kida and Mannino (1980) also found differences between graduating management PhD's that were going to doctoral institutions vs. non-doctoral institutions. Bertin's (1983) study of finance faculty who had accepted new finance faculty positions indicated that, in order of importance, base salary, research emphasis, friendliness of faculty as well as teaching load affected their job selection. A later study conducted by Bertin and Zivney (1991) produced different results primarily because the supply of new finance faculty exceeded the demand for new finance faculty. New PhD's ranked friendliness of existing faculty, research support, and salary as the three most important factors, respectively.

Holland and Arrington (1987) took a different approach and surveyed accounting faculty that were already employed with one university but had decided to relocate to a different university. Personal issues such as spouse or family happiness and quality of life were deemed more important than financial matters. Their results also revealed differences between faculty relocating to universities granting doctoral degrees and those that do not. In a similar study, Eaton and Hunt (2002) looked at both new faculty, as well as relocating faculty, in the accounting field and determined that the importance placed on specific job factors differed between the two groups. As earlier studies had found, there were also differences between those study participants accepting positions at doctoral degree granting universities vs. non-doctoral degree universities. Finally, Eaton and Nofsinger (2000) surveyed relocating finance faculty, as opposed to accounting faculty. Their results differed from those produced by Holland and Arrington (1987) in that teaching load, followed by compatibility with other faculty, were the top two selection factors. Results were similar for finance PhD graduates that were just entering a university.

The aforementioned research has shown that the importance placed on specific job factors may vary between faculty entering non-doctoral degree granting universities and faculty entering doctoral degree-granting universities, as well as new faculty versus relocating faculty. The importance placed on job factors may also differ by gender. The effect of gender on job acceptance is well documented, albeit it with inconsistent results (Huffman & Torres, 2001; Steffy, Shaw & Noe, 1989; Rynes & Rosen, 1983). Although Thomas & Wise

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(1999) found that job factors, versus recruiter or organizational factors, were the most important factors affecting attractiveness of an organization, the strength of importance varied when both race and gender were taken into account.

Searching for and hiring the ideal candidate for a hospitality education faculty position is not a new research topic. In fact, much research has been conducted in that field; however, the focus of such research has primarily been conducted from the university's perspective. Downey and DeVeau (1992) surveyed hospitality administrators for their views about the search committee process and its effectiveness. Schmidgall and Woods (1993) asked faculty members what they perceived to be the most desirable or required attributes of a candidate. Collison and Sheldon (1991) surveyed deans, department heads, and program directors to determine what they believed to be the most important employment standards, as well as the most important standards required for advancement. Lefever & Whitman (1995) surveyed hospitality administrators in order to determine what credentials were most important for the selection of newly hired faculty.

Studies focusing on the hospitality students' perspective of job selection have been limited to those students entering the non-educational job sector, i.e. working at a hotel or restaurant. Sciarini and Woods (1997), and Cho, Woods & Sciarini (2006), determined that students develop perceptions of potential employers. These perceptions in turn influence the student's decision to work for, or not work for, a particular organization. Wildes and Tepici (2003) found similar results in their study about student perceptions of recruiter behavior and its influence on the student's decision to accept employment. Very limited research addresses the viewpoint of soon-to-graduate, or newly graduated, doctoral students and what job selection criteria are most important to them when entering the education sector.

### METHODS

A survey was created and administered via an online company called Qualtrics. An invitation to complete the survey, along with a link to the survey, was sent to 188 attendees of a hospitality conference specifically for hospitality graduate students. Because the target sample was doctoral or masters students that are interested in working in academia, a screening question was used to filter out those not interested in academia. At the beginning of the survey, the respondents that indicated that they were not interested in academia were subsequently terminated from the survey.

The survey itself incorporated both demographic questions and questions about the features that are important to students when seeking a job in higher education. Questions in the demographic section of the survey included those related to gender, age, marital status, industry work experience, number of years the participants have been in their program, and their area of preference for teaching. The participants then rated the level of importance, from 1 = not at all important to 7 = extremely important, for 32 features they might consider when thinking about a job at an institution of higher learning. The features were obtained from previous studies addressing the same issues for graduates of management doctoral programs (Eaton & Hunt, 2002; Hunt, 2004; Kida & Mannino, 1980).

Given the small sample size and non-normal distribution of the data, non-parametric analyses were used. The independent samples tests were conducted by the non-parametric alternative, the Mann-Whitney U test. A disadvantage of the non-parametric tests is that they are not powerful and may not detect small differences (Norusis, 2005.). In this study, the results were reported at both 0.05 and 0.10 significance level to identify both small and large differences.

### RESULTS

A total of 46 responses have been received thus far. Approximately 74% of the respondents were PhD students, almost 60% were female, and most were between the ages of 20 and 39. Forty seven percent of the students were single and half of the have had 5 or more years of work experience in the hospitality and tourism industry. The majority of the respondents were international students (46%). Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the students.

Of the 32 job selection factors that respondents rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, the likelihood of obtaining tenure was rated the highest with a mean score of 6.35, followed by criteria used for promotion and

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tenure decisions ( $M = 6.15$ ). The least significant factor was family ties to the region with a mean score of 3.54. All of the mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

*Table 1*  
*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Demographic Category	Number	%
Age		
20-29 years old	13	28.3
30-39 years old	22	47.8
40-49 years old	8	17.4
50 or older	3	6.5
Total	46	100.0
Gender		
Male	19	41.3
Female	27	48.7
Total	46	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	20	43.5
Single	22	47.8
Other	4	8.7
Total	46	100.0
Student Standing		
Master's	12	26.1
PhD	34	73.9
Total	46	100.0
Years of Industry Work Experience		
1 year or less	5	10.9
2 years	7	15.2
3 years	7	15.2
4 years	3	6.5
5 years or more	23	50.0
Total	45	100.0

*Table 2*  
*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Job Selection Factors*

Job Selection Factor	M (N = 46)	SD
Likelihood of obtaining tenure	6.35	0.92
Criteria used for promotion and tenure decisions (e.g., relative emphasis on teaching, research, service)	6.15	0.94
Base salary	5.93	1.02
Teaching load	5.87	1.00
Compatibility with department head	5.76	1.14
Availability of funds for travel to meetings	5.76	1.04
Compatibility with other faculty	5.72	1.00
Opportunity to teach desired courses	5.72	1.05
Support available for research (funding)	5.72	1.28
Fringe benefits package	5.57	1.09
Geographic location of school (e.g., particular part of country)	5.52	1.36
Quality and motivation of students	5.33	1.28
Library and computer facilities	5.30	1.13

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Spouse's/Partner's evaluation of area	5.20	1.73
Prestige of school or department	5.17	1.18
Job opportunities for spouse/partner	5.17	1.82
Availability of supplementary research grants	5.17	1.34
Cost of living in area	5.13	1.46
Availability of research assistant support	5.09	1.36
Compatibility with dean	5.04	1.33
Existence of Master's program	4.98	1.20
Physical facilities (e.g., condition of faculty offices, classrooms, etc.)	4.89	1.22
Location of school (i.e., urban vs. rural)	4.87	1.24
Consulting opportunities	4.80	1.56
Available recreational and cultural activities	4.76	1.45
Amount of committee work	4.70	1.28
Existence of PhD program	4.70	1.75
Background, interests, and research orientation of other faculty	4.67	1.45
Class size	4.54	1.31
Climate	4.50	1.55
Availability of summer teaching	4.24	1.58
Family ties to region	3.54	2.00

Results of the non-parametric t-tests did identify some significant differences within the nationality group, gender, and student standing, and the ranks for each job selection factor. Specifically, students from countries outside the United States ranked teaching load; support for research (funding); base salary; existence of a PhD program; support for research grants; existence of a Master's program; and, availability of research assistant support higher than did the students from the U.S. Females ranked several attribute significantly higher than did the men: availability of travel funds; compatibility with the department head; fringe benefits package; availability of supplementary research grants; cost of living in the area; physical facilities; compatibility with the dean; and, job opportunities for spouse/partner. Finally, the Master's students ranked base salary; quality and motivation of students; available recreational and cultural activities; and, availability of research assistant support. For a summary of rankings for each group, see Tables 3, 4, and 5, respectively.

*Table 3*  
*Mann-Whitney U Nonparametric T-test results by Nationality*

Job Selection Factor	U. S.	International	Sig. (2-tailed)
	(N=18)	(N=21)	
	Mean Rank		
Teaching load	16.31	23.17	.049*
Likelihood of obtaining tenure	21.17	19.00	.502
Compatibility with other faculty	21.22	18.95	.510
Spouse's/Partner's evaluation of area	21.69	18.55	.381
Support available for research (funding)	12.67	26.29	.000*
Availability of funds for travel to meetings	18.11	21.62	.313
Criteria used for promotion and tenure decisions (e.g., relative emphasis on teaching, research, service)	20.03	19.98	.988
Prestige of school or department	16.81	22.74	.087**
Background, interests, and research orientation of other faculty	18.58	21.21	.460
Library and computer facilities	17.94	21.76	.282
Opportunity to teach desired courses	22.25	18.07	.223
Base salary	15.83	23.57	.027*
Compatibility with department head	22.17	18.14	.251
Existence of PhD program	14.22	24.95	.003*
Fringe benefits package	17.86	21.83	.255
Geographic location of school (e.g., particular part of country)	22.50	17.86	.182
Availability of supplementary research grants	13.42	25.64	.000*

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Quality and motivation of students	20.94	19.19	.612
Cost of living in area	19.83	20.14	.931
Physical facilities (e.g., condition of faculty offices, classrooms, etc.)	21.83	18.43	.337
Climate	18.00	21.71	.300
Available recreational and cultural activities	18.19	21.55	.344
Existence of Master's program	14.19	24.98	.002*
Location of school (i.e., urban vs. rural)	19.53	20.40	.804
Amount of committee work	17.06	22.52	.120
Class size	21.42	18.79	.460
Compatibility with dean	22.72	17.67	.157
Job opportunities for spouse/partner	18.64	21.17	.479
Availability of summer teaching	20.72	19.38	.709
Consulting opportunities	17.28	22.33	.157
Family ties to region	16.89	22.67	.108
Availability of research assistant support	13.06	25.95	.000*

Note. \* Indicates significance at the 0.05 level

\*\* Indicates significance at the 0.10 level

Table 4  
Mann-Whitney U Nonparametric T-test results by Gender

Job Selection Factor	Males	Females	Sig. (2-tailed)
	(N=19)	(N=27)	
	Mean Rank		
Teaching load	21.89	24.63	.475
Likelihood of obtaining tenure	24.32	22.93	.696
Compatibility with other faculty	20.24	25.02	.202
Spouse's/Partner's evaluation of area	20.63	25.52	.213
Support available for research (funding)	20.16	25.85	.141
Availability of funds for travel to meetings	18.74	26.85	.034*
Criteria used for promotion and tenure decisions (e.g., relative emphasis on teaching, research, service)	22.39	24.29	.616
Prestige of school or department	24.05	23.11	.805
Background, interests, and research orientation of other faculty	23.68	23.37	.936
Library and computer facilities	20.26	25.78	.156
Opportunity to teach desired courses	19.97	26.02	.112
Base salary	19.92	26.02	.110
Compatibility with department head	17.97	27.39	.015*
Existence of PhD program	20.89	25.33	.257
Fringe benefits package	19.21	26.52	.055**
Geographic location of school (e.g., particular part of country)	21.53	24.89	.381
Availability of supplementary research grants	18.84	26.78	.039*
Quality and motivation of students	22.55	24.17	.674
Cost of living in area	19.42	26.37	.076**
Physical facilities (e.g., condition of faculty offices, classrooms, etc.)	19.39	26.39	.072*
Climate	21.13	25.17	.306
Available recreational and cultural activities	23.58	23.44	.972
Existence of Master's program	23.53	23.48	.991
Location of school (i.e., urban vs. rural)	19.82	26.09	.103
Amount of committee work	19.97	25.02	.190
Class size	20.21	25.81	.153
Compatibility with dean	18.18	27.24	.021*
Job opportunities for spouse/partner	17.74	26.85	.018*
Availability of summer teaching	22.13	24.46	.555

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Consulting opportunities	21.42	24.96	.365
Family ties to region	21.71	24.76	.439
Availability of research assistant support	20.76	25.43	.234

*Note.* \* Indicates significance at the 0.05 level

\*\* Indicates significance at the 0.10 level

### DISCUSSION

Likelihood of obtaining tenure, criteria used for promotion and tenure, base salary, teaching load, and compatibility with department head were the five top criteria that might affect a student's decision to accept a faculty position at an institution of higher learning. As a result, these five factors represent opportunities that

*Table 5*  
*Mann-Whitney U Nonparametric T-test results by Student Standing*

Job Selection Factor	Masters	PhD	Sig. (2-tailed)
	(N=12)	(N=34)	
	Mean Rank		
Teaching load	28.13	21.87	.145
Likelihood of obtaining tenure	20.25	24.65	.270
Compatibility with other faculty	18.08	24.79	.109
Spouse's/Partner's evaluation of area	23.50	23.50	1.00
Support available for research (funding)	28.63	21.69	.110
Availability of funds for travel to meetings	26.29	22.51	.380
Criteria used for promotion and tenure decisions (e.g., relative emphasis on teaching, research, service)	22.13	23.99	.658
Prestige of school or department	27.00	22.26	.267
Background, interests, and research orientation of other faculty	23.58	23.47	.980
Library and computer facilities	21.08	24.35	.453
Opportunity to teach desired courses	21.00	24.38	.425
Base salary	30.08	21.18	.307*
Compatibility with department head	20.46	24.57	.342
Existence of PhD program	23.83	23.38	.918
Fringe benefits package	27.54	22.07	.201
Geographic location of school (e.g., particular part of country)	22.29	23.93	.704
Availability of supplementary research grants	27.38	22.13	.225
Quality and motivation of students	28.75	21.65	.098**
Cost of living in area	23.25	23.59	.939
Physical facilities (e.g., condition of faculty offices, classrooms, etc.)	23.38	23.54	.969
Climate	23.63	23.46	.969
Available recreational and cultural activities	29.58	21.35	.059**
Existence of Master's program	28.17	21.85	.145
Location of school (i.e., urban vs. rural)	23.50	23.50	1.00
Amount of committee work	26.77	21.78	.255
Class size	27.04	22.25	.276
Compatibility with dean	21.54	24.19	.546
Job opportunities for spouse/partner	22.83	23.06	.958
Availability of summer teaching	20.92	24.41	.430
Consulting opportunities	26.42	22.47	.368
Family ties to region	28.42	21.76	.132
Availability of research assistant support	30.00	21.21	.045*

*Note.* \* Indicates significance at the 0.05 level

\*\* Indicates significance at the 0.10 level



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should be stressed by hiring universities when they are trying to attract, interview, or hire potential new faculty members.

Although base salary was 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the mean rankings, PhD students did not put as much emphasis on salary as did the Master's students. Since PhD students are most likely entering the academic job force before Master's students, the fact that salary is not as high a priority for those students is good news for universities. Universities not able to pay high salaries will still have the ability to attract desirable PhD students by focusing on some of the other important aforementioned job selection factors. The lack of emphasis upon compensation may also be the result of pressures felt by graduating PhD students to obtain a position first and then worry about compensation later.

Master's students were also more interested in recreational and cultural activities, perhaps recognizing that quality of life is an important part of working in academia. The same may be said of the importance they placed on availability of research assistance. It is often difficult for students, in particular after they become new faculty, for them to avoid taking on too much responsibility, becoming too involved in committee work, or trying to produce publications. Master's students may recognize this by realizing that assistance, and quality time away from work, may help them to succeed. It may also be said, however, that Master's students do not recognize the overwhelming amount of work that comes with new faculty positions. A form of naivety may play a role in the importance they placed on certain factors and it would be interesting to see if their viewpoints changed as they moved through a doctoral program.

There were also some interesting differences between those students from the United States and those from other countries. International students placed more emphasis on teaching load than did U.S. students. It is not clear however if the emphasis is there because they want to teach more or less. Most of the other factors that international students deemed more important are all related to research – existence of Master's and PhD programs, support available for research, availability of supplementary research grants, and availability of research assistant support. Schools wishing to attract researchers, or international students in particular should focus on these factors. Based on the fact that most of the important factors for international students are research oriented, it would seem that they placed a lot of importance on teaching load because they would rather NOT teach. If a university places a lot of emphasis on teaching, then an international student may look at this closely and use it as a reason not to apply to that university. The question that arises from this is why U.S. and international students are so different in this respect.

Some interesting differences were also detected between male and female respondents. Females ranked most all of the factors higher than did the males. The most significant differences were with those factors having to do with people relations, i.e. job opportunities for spouse's/partners. Universities may take note of this and make it a policy to invite spouses or partners to come to the university as part of the interview process. Females were also more interested in compatibility with the department head or dean. Again, universities may take note of this by ensuring that women spend quality time getting to know those in charge of the department, or the Dean. Women also tended to be more concerned with the less "technical" side of a job, such as the fringe benefits package or physical facilities of the campus, thus recognizing, perhaps, that a university may have more to offer than just a good tenure policy or nice salary.

### **LIMITATIONS/FUTURE RESEARCH**

The primary limitation to this study is the sample itself, as well as the size of the sample. The sample used was a convenience one in that all participants were attendees of a hospitality graduate conference. There are other hospitality PhD and Master's students that did not attend the conference who may have similar or different viewpoints than those expressed in this study. There are psychological factors, which were not explored in this study, that may also affect a student's job search; nor did the study assess why certain factors were more important than others.

All of these limitations lead to future research possibilities. A larger sample may provide a greater insight to students' preferences. A student's personal values or attitudes may explain why one student would place more importance on base salary than another. Open-ended questions incorporated into a survey would also help to validate and explain the results further. A longitudinal study that followed Master's students through graduate and PhD school, assessing their opinions along the way, would provide a picture of how students viewpoints may or may not change, and why. Finally, a follow-up study with the respondents in this

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survey, after they have accepted a faculty position, would highlight if or how their expectations were met, what compromises, if any, they made, and what other factors might be important when searching for another faculty position.

### CONCLUSION

The results of the study highlight differences between the type of student looking for a faculty position and the most important factors for them when selecting a position for which to apply. Men and women place emphases on different factors as do Master's versus PhD students, and international versus U.S. students. Universities may use this information to develop their hiring packages to attract a certain, targeted type of student; to better package those factors that are most important to them; and, to create a better overall recruitment package for students.

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