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HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS VS. THE INDUSTRY: A COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

An often-asked question in the hospitality industry is whether graduates of hospitality education programs possess the competencies that the hospitality industry believes students should possess. The purpose of this study is to determine the discrepancies, if any, in the competencies being taught in the classroom for hospitality tourism students versus what lodging and food and beverage professionals believe are the most important competencies to be taught. Semi-structured, personal in-depth interviews were conducted with

both educators of, and industry professionals working in, lodging management, and the food and beverage industry. The results of this study, incorporated into a competency domain model, indicate that there are small gaps between professionals and educators in both industries, as well as differences between the two industries. This discovery suggests that lines of communication are not open between educators and professionals. Faculty internships, industry forums, and interaction with graduating students are suggested means to opening communication.

Key Words: Hospitality, Education, Competency, Lodging, Food & Beverage

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2007), the United States' travel and tourism industry is expected to generate $524.5 billion dollars of economic activity with 15 million jobs in 2007, and $851.0 billion revenue with 16.1 million jobs by 2017. At the same time, there are just fewer than 1000 post secondary hospitality and tourism educational (HTE) programs located throughout the United States today (Riegel & Dallas, 2006). As a result of the growth in HTE programs, the growing tourism industry, in theory, should have a plethora of qualified applicants from which to choose when students graduate. The often-asked question, however, is whether graduates of HTE programs do in fact possess the necessary skills and abilities, or competencies that the industry is looking for.

Industry professionals often claim that what educators teach in the classroom is outdated (Goodman & Sprague, 1991; Kang, Wu, & Gould, 2005). Technology, the workforce, hospitality and tourism products, and customers are constantly changing. As a result, relevant competencies will also evolve. Therefore, university faculty and industry professionals must work together to ensure that graduating students can possess the necessary skills to enter the workforce successfully.

Hospitality and tourism education itself is derived from a need to supply the industry with competent professionals (Nelson & Dopson, 2001). Competency-based education (CBE) – teaching specific skills in pursuit of a specific outcome – is incorporated into many HTE programs, whether intentional or not. There have been a number of studies that assess what the important competencies are for the hospitality and tourism industry (Mayo & Thomas-Haysbert, 2005). However, most of the previous studies took a quantitative approach by using the survey method to determine only if gaps existed. In addition, the scope of the extant literature either focused only on one particular discipline (i.e. hotel) or on hospitality and tourism in general, leaving the comparison of the relevant competencies between the core industries of hospitality and tourism, lodging management and food and beverage management, and the universities, untouched.

To address the aforementioned issues, this study will, under the framework of competency-based education, take a qualitative approach. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine the discrepancies, if any, in the competencies being taught in the classroom for HTE students enrolled in four-year university programs versus what lodging and food and beverage professionals believe are the most important competencies to be taught. The findings can shed light on whether discrepancies exist and why certain competencies are deemed important. The results can also help enhance hospitality education for college students by equipping them with adequate competencies that meet the industry's needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature will begin with a description of what hospitality and tourism education encompasses. Then it will explore the definitions of competencies and competency-based education, and how they are incorporated into, and used with, competency models. Finally, the literature relating to competencies and competency assessment in the hospitality and tourism industry will be presented.

Hospitality and Tourism Education (HTE)

The first four-year hospitality and tourism education program in the United States started at Cornell University in the 1920's. Hospitality and tourism education programs have been growing steadily since then. In fact, in the past 30 years, the number of post-secondary institutions has quadrupled (Riegel & Dallas, 2006). Community colleges and vocational schools focus on teaching the hands on skills necessary to work in the hospitality industry and thus generate a good amount of students that begin working at the line-level (Goodman & Sprague, 1991). Four-year programs, on the other hand, focus on preparing students for management positions in the hospitality industry (Barrows, 1999). Hospitality and tourism education is traditionally divided into five sectors: food service, lodging management, recreation, travel related management, and convention and meetings management (Riegel & Dallas, 2006). While each segment has its own characteristics, each serves the same purpose, or has the same mission – serving the guest (Riegel, 1991). This study will focus on food service and lodging management, the two largest sectors of the hospitality and tourism industry.

Competencies and Competency-Based Education

Competencies, as identified by a specific profession and its educators, are all connected to what the workforce needs (Council on Education for Public Health, 2006). The activities and skills deemed necessary to perform specific duties at a given job are what Tas (1988) believes are competencies. Brophy and Kiely (2002) expand on this by also including attitude as a competency. The Department of Education (2002) defines competencies as a "bundle" of skills, abilities, and knowledge that can be used as currency out in the workforce. The foundation of acquiring any competency is also related to the traits and characteristics of each individual (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). Although each individual may learn differently, they all learn skills, abilities and knowledge that they take with them (demonstration) into the workforce. It is the point at which individuals acquire their competencies, in the classroom, that is the focus of this paper.

Competencies are the foundation of competency-based education (CBE). CBE began in the early 1960's as a base for adult education, or competency-based adult education (Hauf, 1980). Adult education arose out of a need to educate individuals over age 18 that had limited skills in reading or writing English. These individuals also had difficulty obtaining employment. It was believed that pursuing classes in adult education would eliminate that difficulty. CBE focuses on specific skills and abilities that employers might be looking for and emphasizes the specification of the behaviors or competencies that can be promoted, altered, or acquired by the learner (Burns, 1972). While there are variations on the specific definition of CBE, they all relate to skills or knowledge taught in the classroom that students can apply in the workplace (Brownell & Chung, 2001; Burns, 1972; Everwign, Bomers, & Knubben, 1993; Galambos & Greence, 2006; Klingstedt, 1972). This study adopts the definition of CBE by the Council on Education for Public Health (2006):

> CBE is an institutional process that moves education from focusing on what academics believe graduates need to know (teacher-focused) to what students need to know and be able to do in varying and complex situations (student and/or workplace focused). (p. 1)

The "need to know" is the competency, or the skills, abilities, and knowledge needed in the workforce, as defined by both educators and the industry professionals.

In the lodging and food and beverage industries, specific skills (e.g., housekeeping, cooking) are required to do specific jobs, while more general management skills, such as leadership or communication skills, are required to perform others. In hospitality and tourism academia today, developing these specific skills or competencies for the students are often an integral part of the curriculum – all as a result of competency-based education.

Competency Models

Competency models have been developed as a descriptive tool to identify, categorize and summarize competencies that might be relevant to perform a specific job effectively in an organization (Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003). The most influential and reliable competency model was notably the Competency Domain Model developed by Sandwith (1993). The Competency Domain Model divides competencies into: (1) Conceptual/creative domain, (2) Leadership domain, (3) Interpersonal domain, (4) Administrative domain, and (5) Technical domain. The purpose of the five domains is to help managers identify pertinent competencies and categorize them for specific jobs. It should be mentioned that some knowledge and skills will oftentimes fall into more than one category, for rarely does a manager's job rely solely on one specific task.

The conceptual domain "refers to cognitive skills associated with comprehending important elements of the job" (Sandwith, 1993, p. 46). Cognitive skills require being aware of one's role in an organization, others role in the organization, company mission, and vision of the future of the organization. While the conceptual/creative domain relates to the organization, its current ideas, and new ideas, the leadership domain encompasses the skills to communicate and execute those ideas. Leadership is an important aspect to any industry. The leader of an organization must have the support of all employees if the company is to succeed. If the leader does not have the skills to "get everyone on board," he/she will have a difficult time moving the organization forward. The interpersonal domain relates to how well an individual interacts with other employees in the organization, as well as with customers. This domain includes oral, written, and telephone communication skills, as well as conflict management and negotiation skills (Sandwith, 1993). The administrative domain encompasses the rules and regulations that an organization must follow. It also involves knowing about them, educating others about them, and enforcing them. The requirements for the administrative domain are typically the same across all departments of an organization. The last domain, the technical one, involves those skills necessary to perform a specific job. Unlike the administrative domain, this domain will incorporate skills that do vary across job types.

While Sandwith's Competency Domain Model is used often in the hospitality and tourism field (Chung-Herrera, et al., 2003; Kay & Russette, 2000; Tsai, Goh, Huffman, & Wu, 2006; Tas, LaBrecque & Clayton 1996), other researchers have developed their own competency models using excerpts from Sandwith's model. For example, Brownell and Chung (2001) developed a model for the Master of Management in Hospitality Program at Cornell University. Their "domains" were communication, presentation, and leadership/group processes. Horng and Lu (2006) categorized competencies into a cognitive domain, skill domain, and affective domain. The cognitive domain includes knowledge about management, sales and marketing, and market analysis, for example, as they pertain to the food and beverage industry. This domain also includes knowledge of food and beverage culture and the pairing of food and wine. The skills domain includes such skills as self management, leading a staff, and judging the quality of food and drinks. Work commitment, work effectiveness, and respect for others were identified as necessary competencies in the affective domain.

Competency models have been proven useful tools. Once industry professionals and educators determine the actual skills and abilities required to perform a specific job, they can categorize them into different groups, thus enabling employers to quickly assess where an individual excels or lags in a particular domain. As educators and professionals communicate with each other, it will become easier to identify the skills that can be incorporated into the domains and then into classroom curriculum.

Hospitality and Tourism Competencies

Since the 1980s, hospitality educators, researchers, and practitioners have begun to look for the competencies that are necessary for college students to possess once they graduate from HTE programs. As a result, a significant body of knowledge on this topic has been generated over the past 20 years. The majority of the studies focused on either the hotel industry by itself, or the overall hospitality industry,

with a few exceptions focusing solely on the food service industry (Horng & Lu, 2006; Okeiyi, Finley & Postel, 1994).

Enz, Renaghan, and Geller (1993) surveyed graduate students, faculty and industry representatives in order to determine the necessary skills for successful hospitality careers. This was the only study assessing hospitality competencies over-all that surveyed three stakeholders. All of the other studies surveyed either industry practitioners or educators. For example, Ashley. (1995) conducted brainstorming sessions with 25 industry executives to determine the characteristics, skills, and knowledge areas that hospitality graduates should possess upon graduation. In their study, Breiter and Clements (1996) surveyed 301 industry experts about important skills for future hospitality professionals. Agut, Grau, and Peiro (2003) assessed competency needs among Spanish hospitality managers and Tesone and Ricci (2006) reported the findings of a study about hospitality managers' perceptions of entry-level hospitality worker competencies. Kriegl (2000) studied the important skills required for international hospitality managers in general, and finally, in 1997, Su, Miller, and Shanklin asked both industry professionals and program administrators to rank the most important general management knowledge/skills for hospitality graduates.

The studies focusing solely on lodging management competencies include Tas' (1988) study which proposed and developed 36 competencies as the fundamentals for management trainees. Tas surveyed hotel managers in seventy-five top US hotels to obtain their views. In later years, Tas et al. (1996), examined job competencies of hotel-manager trainees using Sandwith's (1993) competency domain model. Using a design similar to Tas et al., (1996) and Sandwith's (1993) domain model, Kay and Russette (2000) interviewed 52 hotel industry managers. Further, Tsai et al. (2006) examined and compared the differences between perceptions of hotel professionals and hospitality educators in Taiwan regarding hotel managerial competencies, also using Sandwith's model.

While there are many studies that identify the competencies necessary for hotel or lodging management, relatively fewer have been done that relate specifically to the food and beverage industry. One of the most notable is Okeiyi, et al.'s (1994) study of the important skills for food and beverage management, as perceived by three stakeholders in food and beverage management education, namely, students, educators, and industry practitioners. In 2006, Horng and Lu conducted a study with food and beverage/hospitality management senior students at higher learning institutions in Taiwan regarding their views on pertinent professional competencies.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory qualitative research technique was employed to identify competencies that students should possess upon graduation and understand why, as seen through the eyes of educators and industry professionals, those competencies are so important. Understanding competencies in this study will provide a view into how the world of hospitality and tourism education operates, or perhaps, should operate, and how it works in conjunction with the hospitality and tourism industry. The advantage of this qualitative research, in this case, is three-fold. First, it enables the researchers to compare the results to previous, quantitative studies (surveys); second, it provides data that may be used for further analysis in future studies – whether quantitative or qualitative; and finally, it is hoped that, if differences are identified and understood, educators will incorporate what industry wants into the classroom curriculum.

Data Collection Techniques

Semi-structured, personal in-depth interviews were conducted with both educators of, and industry professionals working in, lodging management, and the food and beverage industry. This approach enabled the interviewers to ask both very specific questions about, for example, age or years working in the industry, to very general open-ended questions that pertained to important competencies. The respondents were encouraged to elaborate on any points that were not clear to the interviewer and to explain why they felt certain competencies to be important. The interviewers used guiding questions, but

the tone of the interview was more like that of a conversation. The questions were posed very generally so as not to influence the participant to answer a certain way. Instead of asking, for example, "do you believe leadership is an important competency", participants were asked "what knowledge, skills and abilities (or competencies) do you believe hospitality students should possess upon graduation"? All interviews, with the consent of the participants, were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

In addition to the personal interviews, the researchers also attended a panel discussion incorporating two food & beverage industry professionals, and two lodging management professionals.
The panel discussion, titled "Employment Trends in the Hospitality Industry", focused on what employers are looking for (skills) in HTE graduates.

Sample and Data Analysis

Participants were both professors working at 4-year universities that teach HTE, as well as professionals that work in the lodging, and food and beverage industries. This sample was a convenience sample in that the researchers interviewed people that they had personal contact with in both academia and the industry. The industry professional participants all held positions within the industry that gave them the opportunity to hire employees. By holding such a position, they will have had the experience of working with, and hiring, a variety of individuals. The educational participants were chosen from two major west coast universities. Both schools provide HTE programs at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Once the interviews were complete, they were transcribed for content analysis. Content analysis processes data that are in the form of communication such as television, magazines, newspapers, or in other written forms such as advertisements, letters, or contracts. The primary purpose of content analysis is to obtain a quantitative description of the data such as the frequency for which a particular word appears in the communication (Zikmund, 2003). Each interview transcription was thoroughly examined

for competencies, phrases and themes. Competencies were determined by noting the direct response to the question "what specific skills, knowledge or abilities do you believe our HTE students should possess upon graduation"? A list of noted competencies for each participant was created. The next step involved compiling one large list for each group. The final groups were food and beverage industry professionals, food and beverage educators, lodging management industry professionals, and lodging management educators. All groups were then compared with each other to determine the similarities or differences among them. The collected competencies, phrases, and themes were also compared with responses obtained using the survey method in previous competency studies. Finally, the competencies discovered in this analysis were incorporated into the Competency Domain Model (Sandwith, 1993) to create a tool that may be used by university educators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total, five food and beverage faculty, four food and beverage industry professionals, six lodging management educators, and five lodging management industry practitioners were interviewed. Sixty percent of the participants were male. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 40 – 60. The interviews, which were conducted in the offices of the participants, averaged 25 minutes. The panel discussion incorporating two food and beverage professionals and two lodging professionals lasted one hour. A comparison of identified competencies for food and beverage management is in Table 1, with similar comparisons for the lodging industry in Table 2.

When comparing the Competency Domain Model for educators and industry professionals (see Table 1) solely within food and beverage, the participants appeared to be in agreement on the administrative, conceptual, technical, and leadership domains. The cohesiveness in the administrative domain may be due to the strict standards to which the food service industry must abide. If those laws or policies are not adhered to, a food service operation may be shut down. In addition, ethics are undoubtedly important to all businesses, so it is no surprise that both groups believe that leadership should incorporate them.

Although some of the specific skills cited in the technical and conceptual domains differed, in general the two groups were in agreement. Reasons for this cohesiveness might be that food and beverage faculty may have worked in the industry for long periods of time therefore they bring that knowledge to the classroom. Furthermore, food and beverage faculty oftentimes are still heavily involved with the industry by running foodservice operations on campus. Campus food service operations give food and beverage faculty the opportunity to stay current with industry trends, needs, and wants.

The interpersonal domain is the one domain that seemed to separate the two food and beverage groups. With the exception of communication and leadership skills, each group focused on different skill sets. The professionals seem more concerned with skills that would improve an individual whereas educators seem to focus on skills that would help individuals work with others. This is interesting because teamwork is an important aspect of the food and beverage industry so one would think that it would be important to the professionals as well. Perhaps because they are so directly involved in the industry on a day to day basis, this is a skill that is simply taken for granted.

Table 1

Food & Beverage Competencies Incorporated into the Sandwith Competency Domain Model

Domain	Food & Beverage	
	Industry Professionals	Educators
Administrative	Food Laws	Sanitation Laws

		Food Safety
Conceptual	Understanding general food service operations Problem solving skills	Critical thinking skills Analytical skills Decision making Understanding general food service operations
Interpersonal	Labor management Time management Communication (written & verbal) Motivation Leadership Abilities	Customer service skills Communication (written, verbal, presentation) Cultural awareness Multiple language skills Working in groups Leadership skills
Technical	Product knowledge Purchasing Human Resources Marketing Finance Technological skills	Technology Finance Food & Beverage Costs Menu planning Product knowledge Recipe writing Human Resources
Leadership	Ethics	Ethics

There are also apparent differences between educators and professionals in the lodging management group (see Table 2). Educators for lodging management believed that HTE students should be very familiar with technical skills involved in a job. Some of those skills are very specific to lodging (i.e. front

desk operations), whereas others are much more general (marketing skills). For example, on marketing skills, one educator noted:

> I think the most important thing is you better be a good marketer, innately, inherently, and know something about it, because, again, think about it. If you look at the income statement, what's easier to do, cut expenses or increase revenues? Cut expenses!

One faculty member believed there should be even more emphasis on technical skills:

> I think one of the problems with the knowledge, skills, and abilities, is that we're becoming so academic that we're losing focus on what's actually used in the industry. We're studying the past, educating students in the present, but we're not looking as much to the future.

This particular faculty member is suggesting that lodging management educators are placing too much emphasis on the conceptual skills and not enough emphasis on actual "hands on" technical skills required by the industry. The lodging industry professionals, however, believe otherwise. They believe conceptual skills are important facets of hospitality education. As one industry professional noted, "When you're bringing someone in, they're going to learn most of the technical things at the property level." Industry professionals would like students to be able to think for themselves, and understand, analyze, and suggest corrective action for problems. Another industry participant commented that "there is little focus for hospitality students on strategic thinking and they are not taught to think like business owners." Teaching basic technical skills such as marketing, in other words, does not necessarily teach students how to think like managers.

Lodging management professionals do agree with educators that financial skills are an important tool for students. As one respondent said: "…if you don't understand simple economics, just the supply and

demand, it's going to be very difficult for you to properly price your hotel." Other than technology, however, finance skills, along with revenue management, are the only other technical skills cited by the industry. Industry professionals and educators both suggested using project management tools that enable students to apply their financial skills and analyze the financial side of the industry, as a method for teaching students these skills. Overall, lodging management professionals place very little emphasis on technical skills and place almost all of their emphasis on conceptual and interpersonal skills.

Table 2

Lodging Competencies Incorporated into the Sandwith Competency Domain Model

Domain	Lodging Management	
	Industry Professionals	Educators
Administrative		HR Policies Hotel laws
Conceptual	Analytical skills Understanding trends Decision making Understanding general hotel operations Critical thinking Problem Solving	Decision making Critical thinking Analytical
Interpersonal	Working in groups Building relationships Multiple language Communication (verbal & written) Motivation	Customer service skills Communication (written, verbal, presentation) Leadership skills Service quality

	Customer service	Time management
	Accountability	Networking
	Emotions	
	Personal development	
	Leadership	
Technical	Finance	Technology
	Technology	Finance
	Revenue management	Human Resources
		Marketing
		Real Estate
		Franchising
		Cost control
		Revenue management
		Preventative maintenance
Leadership	Ethics	Ethics

The discrepancy between educators and professionals in the administrative domain is a little more difficult to explain. The industry professionals did not mention any skill that would fall into the administrative domain, whereas the educators did (hotel law and policies). If industry professionals were asked in hindsight if laws were an important skill for students to obtain, they would most likely say yes.

Previous studies provided few comparisons between those competencies deemed important by the food and beverage industry, and those deemed important by the lodging industry. In the present study when comparing cited skills between professionals and educators across industries, there is some overlap, but not everyone was necessarily on board with all competencies. For example, interpersonal skills are important to educators and professionals in both industries, but where they differ is in which specific

interpersonal skills are important. This is highlighted once the skills are incorporated into the Competency Domain Model (see Tables 1 and 2). The nature of the hospitality industry is people oriented and people intensive so interpersonal skills are vital for success. As industry professionals working in the field every day, perhaps they see and understand the importance of interpersonal skills in a different way than educators, hence a reason for the differences. The make-up of industry employees changes constantly due to typically high turnover rates. There are also many different generations working in the industry. Each person brings a different set of skills and beliefs to a job. Working with these individuals every day gives industry professionals a perspective that may be difficult to capture in a classroom setting, which may be another reason for the discrepancies.

In the conceptual domain, the educators and professionals in both industries appear to be in agreement. Critical thinking, analytical and decision making skills, all coincide with problem solving skills.

> …our students need to be able to (1) look at that problem and come up with some viable solutions and the skills it needs…what are needed in order to be successful at changing that situation, and to analyze it.

Teaching these types of skills may vary by instructor but, as agreed upon by both faculty and industry professionals in the present study, the most effective means of teaching seems to be using a hands on approach for the students, project management, or specific case studies.

The greatest difference between the two industries occurs in the technical domain. While there is agreement on some general technical skills in this domain, the food and beverage educators mentioned restaurant operations, recipe writing, menu planning food & beverage costs, while lodging educators highlighted preventative maintenance, franchising, revenue management, and hotel operations. This

difference is expected since each industry requires skills specific to that industry. The food and beverage professionals also believed certain competencies related specifically to the food and beverage industry were important (purchasing and product knowledge), whereas lodging professionals cited more general skills such as finance and technology. The difference here may be due to the fact that the food and beverage industry, as well as food and beverage educators, have very specific skills that are required before working in foodservice operations. Most culinary foodservice programs adhere to the American Culinary Federation's (ACF) standards, which have very specific requirements. The lodging industry does not have such a program. In addition, the food and beverage industry, especially in comparison to lodging, is relatively homogenous. The lodging industry, on the other hand, is very heterogeneous and diversified, thus making it difficult to provide specific standards for all to adhere to. After analyzing the results of this study, it is understandable that the two industries, food and beverage versus lodging, would differ on their opinions of necessary technical skills for students to possess upon graduation.

The leadership domain, according to Sandwith (1993), encompasses those aspects of management that incorporate "doing the right thing", or getting employees to trust management by leading by example, trusting the employees, or giving them the necessary tools to do their jobs. Since trust, or doing the right thing can be incorporated into ethics, and based on Tas et al.'s (1996) study, ethics for this study was incorporated into the leadership domain. Both educators and professionals mentioned ethics as an important skill. This skill was the only one mentioned that falls into the leadership domain. This result is not surprising since ethics are an important aspect of any industry and any educational institute.

One purpose of this study was to compare the present results to those of previous competency studies, the majority of which used a quantitative method for collecting data (i.e. mail surveys). A quick comparison incorporating the three most recent surveys and the present study show very different results. Studies, conducted by Tesone & Ricci (2006), Horng & Lu (2006), and Tsai, et al. (2006) used a personal intercept survey, mail survey, and web survey, respectively. With the exception of communication skills,

customer relations, and diverse cultures, the results of those studies share nothing with the results of the present study. The skills identified in the present study do not necessarily coincide with skills identified in previous competency studies. This may be due to a couple of factors. One is that respondents in quantitative methods are given a pre-determined set of competencies to rate, therefore not receiving the opportunity to clarify and form their own answers to the questions. Another reason for the difference may be timing. As the industry changes, so too do the skills required in the industry. Data gathered in this study reflect the viewpoints of educators and professionals that have based their viewpoints on today's industry needs. Today's needs may differ from the needs of industry in the previous studies.

When comparing the results of the present study to those studies that previously used qualitative methods (e.g. Agut, et al., 2003; Ashley, et al., 1995; and Kay & Russette, 2000), on the other hand, the results are similar. Qualitative methods such as the personal interviews conducted in this study and previous studies provided further clarification into important competencies. Participants were able, in their own words, to provide and elaborate on the competencies they believe students should possess when graduating from HTE programs without receiving any leading questions from surveys.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify any discrepancies in the competencies being taught in the classroom and those required in the industry. The food and beverage industry and the corresponding faculty, appear to be in sync with each other. There are some gaps, however, between lodging educators and professionals. One educator points the finger at the industry by stating: "… at a lot of companies the job description doesn't even say that you need to have a hospitality degree. That, to me, from an operations standpoint, says something that we are missing. If we're not careful, it separates us more and more from the industry". To avoid this situation in the future, and if educators are to educate students by providing them with the up-to-date skills needed for their careers in the hospitality industry, the lines of communication should be open between those educators and the industry professionals that are hiring the

students. By the same token, industry professionals should be willing to contact and provide information to educators about what is needed out in the industry. A solution to closing that gap would be faculty internships during the summer months. Faculty and industry professionals may work together to create programs for faculty members to spend time within the industry to update their skill sets. To provide incentive for faculty to spend time in industry, administrators of hospitality programs could let faculty internships count towards tenure and promotion.

Another solution is to provide opportunities for faculty to attend industry seminars, and vice versa. This type of forum enables educators and professionals to communicate openly about new research projects, problem solving, and, in general, networking. With such an open dialogue, industry professionals, working along side the educators, can incorporate required competencies into job descriptions. Likewise, educators can incorporate some of those same competencies into course curricula. In addition, industry exposure (field trips, guest lectures, etc.) should be featured in every HTE course.

The primary limitation of this study is related to sample size. Because this is an exploratory, qualitative study, the sample size is small. As a result, generalization to the rest of the HTE population is difficult. Future research may benefit by adding the perspectives of students graduating from HTE programs. This could prove to be of value as they may have actually experienced a gap between what was taught in class and what was useful in the workplace. In addition, the present study can be replicated in other hospitality and travel sectors such as the meeting and events industry, and recreation and leisure.

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