

Importance of Industry Experience Among Hospitality Faculty in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The demand for qualified instructors in hospitality management higher education has increased significantly with the growth of hospitality programs in the U.S. Increasingly, these vacancies are required to be filled by Ph.D. candidates. Within recent years, the majority of these candidates have had little or no industry experience. This research seeks to understand how both hospitality faculty and undergraduates value industry experience among their peers and faculty.

Keywords: *Hospitality industry experience, hospitality faculty, higher education*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been significant growth in the number of higher education tourism and hospitality programs in the United States. As a result, the demand for qualified instructors to fill academic vacancies at the university level has increased proportionately (Ladkin & Weber, 2008). Due to the pressures on universities to gain funding and research recognition, the majority of these vacancies must be filled with Ph.D. candidates.

Current studies indicate that new hospitality faculty who have entered academia within the last five to ten years have very limited industry experience, often equating to only one or two years, and are frequently as a result of internship programs (Ladkin & Weber, 2008). As the trend continues, hospitality students typically graduate with an undergraduate degree, and subsequently complete their Masters and doctoral degrees without obtaining substantial industry experience (Malley, 1997).

One of the main purposes of higher education for hospitality students is to serve the hospitality industry by graduating a capable and competitive workforce (Johanson, Ghiselli, Shea & Roberts, 2010). The long-term viability of the hospitality industry is dependent on the ability of its management to provide a significant return on investment within a multitude of parameters. While this goal is often associated with years of experience, new graduates of hospitality programs must have, at the very least, a basic understanding of how to produce results within a high-pressure environment (Johanson et al., 2010).

While the hospitality industry reaps tremendous benefits from both the improved education of hospitality graduates and the body of research produced, there are still industry leaders who criticize the readiness of hospitality graduates who will work in the field (Dopson & Nelson, 2003; Harper, Brown & Irvine, 2005; Williams, 2005). Malley (1997) infers that it is this lack of industry experience among hospitality faculty that causes the deficiency in student readiness (Malley, 1997).

PILOT STUDY OF HOSPITALITY FACULTY AND STUDENTS

A recent pilot study by Chandler and Faiola (2009) found that a sample of higher education hospitality faculty felt it was important for hospitality educators to have industry work experience because it enhanced their ability to develop and deliver instruction to their students. In addition, the faculty also believed it was important for the undergraduate hospitality management students to have industry experience prior to graduation. In the same study, however, student respondents voiced contradictory sentiments. These hospitality students saw no benefit to their faculty having industry experience.

The purpose in identifying students' perceptions of hospitality faculty industry experience is critical, particularly for those students who will eventually go on to earn doctoral degrees and seek careers in academia. If these very students see no benefit in learning from a faculty with hospitality experience, nor gaining the experience themselves, then when they arrive at academic positions, they may not understand the benefits of that experience in their teaching and research (Chandler & Faiola, 2009).

An argument could be made for hospitality faculty whose primary academic responsibilities lay within hospitality research. These faculty could argue that no hospitality experience is necessary to produce useful research. However, this line of reasoning serves as a disconnect and could potentially polarize hospitality programs even further from the industry's criticisms and expectations. Therefore, this study seeks to determine if there is any difference in the attitudes of the usefulness of industry experience between teaching-centered or research-centered hospitality faculty.

METHODOLOGY

Using the Chandler and Faiola (2009) pilot study as a template, the research questions will be targeted at a population of hospitality faculty and students. The format for the attitudinal questions will be a five-point Likert scale (1=not important to 5= very important). The questions for the hospitality faculty will be Internet based, using survey software. The hospitality student survey will be administered in person. Questions for the faculty include:

1. If research is your primary area of expertise, how important do you think hospitality industry experience is among faculty in higher education?
2. If teaching is your primary area of expertise, how important do you think hospitality industry experience is among faculty in higher education?

Questions for hospitality students include:

1. How important is it for your faculty to have industry experience?
2. How important is it for students to have industry experience prior to graduating?

SUMMARY

While there is no argument that hospitality faculty must have exemplary academic qualifications, the current trend in hiring new faculty with limited, or no industry experience, poses a significant shift in the way that future hospitality programs will be taught (Chandler & Faiola, 2009), along with a potential shift in its relevance to the industry. To examine these beliefs during this shift will provide greater insight into the future of how these programs are being taught and whether or not it is necessary to require a certain amount of industry experience among new hospitality faculty.

The findings of this research will serve as an indicator for the criteria in hiring hospitality management faculty from a consumer's (student's) perspective. Due to the accelerated growth in hospitality and tourism programs, along with the increased competition between schools vying for students, the quality of faculty members remains an indicator for success in a hospitality education program (Hu, Bai, & Jang, 2003).

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