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Tourism Professional Competencies and their Relationship
to United States Higher Education Curricula

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ABSTRACT

Forecasts from the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (2002) indicate "travel and tourism is the world's largest industry and rivals any other in terms of size and impact" (p. 6). However, the United States has yet to establish universal tourism curricula and to identify requisite tourism competencies. Moreover, research suggests the tourism industry operates without concern for planning for long-term sustainability. Potential students may be confused as to which curriculum to choose for their future.

This study identified competencies needed by tourism professionals, analyzes the methods by which professional competencies are learned and third, compared higher education tourism programs offered in the United States with the competencies considered important by responding tourism professionals.

Descriptive statistics including Analysis of Frequencies, Analysis of Variance, Quantitative Analysis of respondent backgrounds and Post hoc Fisher's LSD tests were applied to 70 tourism industry competencies. National tourism industry professionals (N=368) were drawn from a sampling frame of over (N=750). Responses totaled (N=104).

Research showed the top 5 competencies considered important are: Economic Impact of Tourism, Leadership, Public Relations, Product Knowledge and Basic Computer Skills. Almost 98% of today's tourism professionals learned their competencies on-the-job. With regard to their education levels, 47.6% hold Bachelor's degrees and 18.4% hold Master's degrees.

United States higher education tourism programs (N=321) were analyzed. Course descriptions were examined for Bachelor's and Master's degree granting

institutions. A total of (N=160) programs were eventually compared to responses from the tourism professionals. Fifty percent of the institutions offered at least one course in tourism planning and development. Advertising/sales and marketing courses ranked highest in frequency, with 94 courses available to higher education tourism students.

The study identified significant incongruity among course offerings at institutions of higher education across the United States and competencies identified as important to industry professionals. This research makes clear, obligations and opportunities regarding tourism curricula revision in higher education. Great collaboration among industry professionals, private membership organizations, and tourism educators will be necessary if tourism in the United States is to grow in a sensitive, sustainable manner.