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

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments iii
Table of Contents iv
Abstract xiv

Chapter I

Introduction 1
Origins of Tourism Curriculum in Higher Education 3
Study Background 4
Problem Statement 5
Visitor Industry Demands 7
Status of Tourism in Higher Education 9
Tourism’s Impact 12
Tourism Industry Responsibilities 13
Tourism Planning and Development 14
Approaches to Tourism Curricula 21
Definition of Terms 23
Significance of the Study 26
Availability of Higher Education Programs 27
Competency Development 31
Summary 33
Dissertation Outline 34

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature 35
Introduction 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differing Perspectives</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competency Based Education and Industry Input</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Tourism Industry and Marketing</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding Future Needs</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differing Views on Competencies and Higher Education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism as an Emerging Profession</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring Practices in the Tourism Industry</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher Education and Employment</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands-on Training in Tourism Education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multidisciplinary Tourism Curricula</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recommended Tourism Courses</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Perspective of Tourism Planning</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Professional Credentialing</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher Education Accreditation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Case for Standardized Tourism Curriculum</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emerging Questions</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Research Design</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Validation</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Selection</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Administration</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Processing and Analysis</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter IV</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings, Results and Analysis</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Findings</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Findings per Research Questions</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad-Spectrum Comments from the Respondents</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter V</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendices

A. Competencies Questionnaire 143
B. Tourism Industry Segments 149
C. Positions Available in the Field of Travel and Tourism 150
D. Higher Education Institutions Offering Tourism Curricula 153
E. WTO Recommendations to Governments for Supporting and/or Establishing National Certification Systems for Sustainable Tourism National Certification 155
F. Permission to Quote World Tourism Organization 165
G. Higher Education Institutions Offering Tourism Curricula 166
H. Introductory Letter 198
I. Informed Consent Form 199
J. Anonymity Post Card 200
K. Request to Content Validity Experts 201
L. Reminder Post Card 202
M. Competency Rankings 203
N. Tourism Professional Comparisons 214
O. Additional Suggested Competencies by Respondents 236
P. Universities Attended by the Respondents 237
Q. Available Tourism Programs and Certifications Held 239
R. Competency Summaries 240
Table of Tables

1. Competency Rankings 203
2. College/University Competency Rankings Compared to Professionals' Competency Rankings 205
3. Competencies with Nearest Ranking of Significant Difference 208
4. Graduate Degrees Analyzed 210
5. Undergraduate Degrees Analyzed 212

Table of Figures

1. Highest Level of Education Achieved 215
2. Learned Tourism Competencies on the Job 216
3. Higher Education did/did not Prepare 217
4. Responses from all Regions of the Country 218
5. Media Database 219
6. Estimation and Forecasting 220
7. Ecological Principles 221
8. Media Database Bachelor vs. Graduate Degree 222
9. Development Policies 223
10. Sustainable tourism 224
11. Visitor Safety 225
12. Ecotourism 226
13. Architectural Design 227
14. Number of Years in the Industry 228
15. Number of Years in the Workforce 229
16. Continuing Tourism Planning and Development Programs 230
17. Approximate Population Per Area 231
18. Urban, Sub Urban, or Rural Area Classification 232
19. Tourism Planning Division 233
20. Tourism Planning & Development Responsibilities 234
21. Degree or Certification Requirement 235
22. Social Responsibilities 241
23. Leadership 242
24. Philosophy and Ethics 243
25. Research Skills 244
26. International Relations 245
27. Grant Writing 246
28. Community Outreach 247
29. Tourism Law 248
30. Decision-making 249
31. Foreign Languages 250
32. Indigenous Languages 251
33. Basic Computer Skills 252
34. Computer Mapping 253
35. Web Research Skills 254
36. Media Database 255
37. Community Database 256
38. General Business Knowledge 257
39. Business Management 258
40. Estimation and Forecasting
41. Inter-governmental Relations
42. Financial Management
43. Entrepreneurship
44. Strategic Management
45. Non-profit Management
46. Economics
47. Risk Management
48. Public Relations
49. Advertising
50. Labor Relations
51. Tourism Development
52. Structure of the Industry
53. Environmental Impacts
54. Product Knowledge
55. Development Policies
56. Sustainable Tourism
57. Principles of Planning and Design
58. Tourism Facility Planning
59. Tourism Economics
60. Visitor Safety Issues
61. Cultural & Heritage Tourism
62. Transportation Planning
63. Community Involvement
64. Eco-tourism 283
65. River/Coastal Management 284
66. Economic Impact of Tourism 285
67. Property Development 286
68. Resource Management 287
69. General Tourism Operations 288
70. Crisis Management 289
71. Tourism Education 290
72. Landscape Design 291
73. Engineering 292
74. Community Planning 293
75. Interpretive Skills 294
76. Historic Preservation 295
77. Architectural Design 296
78. Fund Development 297
79. Understanding Design Plans 298
80. Building Design Principles 299
81. Recreation Area Management 300
82. Attraction Management 301
83. Interpretation of Resources 302
84. Cultural Resource Protection 303
85. Land Use Regulations 304
86. Ecological Principles 305
87. Community Engagement 306
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Countryside Management</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Environmental Integration</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Inter-agency Regulations</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Understanding Community Needs and Wants</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>All Questioned Competencies Combined</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.