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**Hospitality Management Undergraduate Internships: Comparing Internship Requirements
to Industry Employer Expectations**

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Table Of Contents

Introduction.....4

Review of Literature5

Defining the Term Internship5

Role of Internships in Hospitality Management Curriculum6

Internship Structure7

Methodology8

Research Design8

Findings8

Limitations11

Implications11

Conclusion.....13

References.....15

Abstract

This article examines internship courses in undergraduate hospitality management programs in the Southern Association of Colleges and School Commissions on Colleges (SACSCOC) region. The purpose of this article is to examine how internship course curriculum compares to the industry employers' internship expectations. The results show the disconnect between curriculum for internship courses and what industry employers desire for internships. The findings show that undergraduate hospitality management programs in the same region vary in requirements, and these requirements do not meet industry employers' internship expectations.

Keywords: internships, undergraduate, hospitality management, hospitality industry, curriculum, industry employers

Introduction

According to a study, 89% of hospitality management degree programs across the nation involve some form of internship as part of the curriculum (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997). An internship is a form of experiential learning which “is a broad term referring to multiple programs and systems for providing students in educational institutions with work-based applied learning opportunities (Lee, 2007, p. 38). These courses are part of the overall total credits required to achieve the degree and allow students to gain a certain number of relevant industry experience to help build a resume and attract future employers. However, the literature suggests that future employers have a different expectation of what an internship entails, such as the number of internship hours or certain essential skills acquired through internships (Jack, Stansbie & Michael, 2017).

There is a perceived disconnect between hospitality management programs and industry employers in regards to the structure of internships and which skills should be developed through them such as communication or technical. Hospitality management programs need to take into consideration the expectations industry employers have in regards to internships and students’ skills. Institutions should see this as an importance because it is “in the best interest of all stakeholders - students, educators and industry - that these constituencies continue and enhance their cooperation in education and training of the next hospitality graduates” (Jiang & Alexakis, 2017, p. 33). Yiu and Law (2012) stated that students, employers, and educators need to have a better understanding of each others’ expectations of internships to “meet objectives and balance expectations” (p. 392).

The literature supports the importance of internships in the curriculum and that these internships allow students to gain real industry perspective. If internships are used by educators as a course to have students apply knowledge and gain industry experience, the internship structure should be reflective of expectations set by industry employers. This study therefore examines one region of higher education institutions and comparing it to the expectations of internships for all stakeholders involved, key factors can be highlighted to assist all stakeholders in having one common understanding of what to expect from an internship curriculum in that region. This research can then be used to assist the other accreditation regions and institutions examine their internship curriculum compared to the expectations of the stakeholders.

Review of Literature

There have been many studies to highlight the importance of internships in a hospitality management program. Much of the research has focused the fact that educators, students, and industry employers have different viewpoints of what skills and competencies should be focused on for an internship. There is very little research that has compared internship curriculum of various hospitality management programs, and if it reflects the industry employers' expectations. The literature reviewed is an analysis of internships based on accreditation standards and journals presenting viewpoints of educators, students, and industry employers.

Defining the term *Internship*

For the purpose of this article, internships will refer to any form of industry based

experiential learning. This includes the terms such as work experience, practicum, externships, practicums, experience-based learning, and co-op. Yiu and Law (2012) defined internships as “work-based educational experiences and require the cooperation of students, employers, and educators to be successful” (p. 378). This definition supports the literature and encompasses the terminology used by the universities in the SACSCOC Region. SACSCOC categorizes internship as a form of a direct assessment competency program, also known as a direct assessment program, which is “an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, uses direct assessment of student learning relying solely on the attainment of defined competencies, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others,” (2018, p. 1).

Role of Internships in Hospitality Management Curriculum

The hospitality management industry is built on services that are tangible and intangible. The tangible services of the hospitality industry are transactional moments such as reserving a hotel room, placing a catering order, creating a banquet event order, purchasing a show ticket or requesting rental equipment. The intangible services of the hospitality industry are the interactions that create the guest’s experience. These interactions require employees to have strong professional *soft skills* which are communication skills and employers prefer students and graduates to have these skills as well as technical skills (Yiu & Law, 2012, p. 392-393). Educators and hospitality curriculum mainly focus on teaching technical skills (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019, p. 216). An internship allows students to apply the theory courses into actual work

experience and build on the technical and communication skills to develop management skills (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997).

Internship Structure

Industry employers and educators have drastically different views on the structure of internships. SACSCOC Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation does not provide specific requirements for internships. Petrillose & Montgomery (1997) found that educators usually create a three month internship experience while industry employers believe internships experiences should be six months. Additionally, they found more than fifty percent of educators require internship hours be 600 or less, but more than seventy percent of industry employers recommended 1200 internship hours (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997). This industry employer belief of needing more internship hours is also supported by another study that found on average industry employers suggest on average 991 internship hours compared to the average 750 hours suggested by educators (Jack, Stansbie & Michael, 2017). Educators and industry employers agree that a written component should be part of the internship experience (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997).

Based on the literature, institutions have the information to restructure their internship curriculum based on the industry employers' expectations. Therefore, the stakeholders (industry employers and students) should be receiving a mutually beneficial internship experience. This study will examine the internship structure of various undergraduate hospitality management programs.

Methodology

This research examined various institutions and their curriculum regarding internship courses for the hospitality management program. The information collected allowed for comparison of the various curriculums in regards to the same key factors.

Research Design

A qualitative analysis based on secondary research is used for this study. The institutions are all part of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which include the following states: Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. The institutions selected met the following requirements - public, 4 year institutions, with a hospitality management undergraduate program. The type of bachelor degree, college or required total number of credit hours to earn the degree were not considered. The four key factors that were analyzed for each institution are as follows: number of internship courses, number of hours for the course(s), total number of credits, completed before/during/after senior year, and additional work experience needed. The information was found on the respective institution's major curriculum website.

Findings

Table 1 demonstrates the comparison of all 23 institutions. The number of internship courses offered ranged from 1 to 3 courses with the average being 1.3 courses. The number of

hours required for the internship course ranged from 300 to 1000 hours, but only 16 institutions provided specific hours required for the internship. The average number of hours required for the internship course was 493 hours. The total number of credits for the internship course(s) ranged from 0 to 6 credits with the average being 3.9 credit hours. Institutions varied the most in when the internship course needed to be completed relative to senior year. Out of 23 institutions, only two did not require an internship course.

While collecting data, a common factor occurred through 11 out of the 23 institutions. The curriculum required an additional hours of work experience needed that was either required prior to the internship course or as a total number of hours to be able to graduate. The definition of additional work varied for each institution or was not present on the website, which did not allow for further examination. 12 institutions did not require additional work experience.

Table 1

Comparison of Internship Requirements of Institutions in the SACSCOC Region

	# of Internship Courses	# of Hours for course work	Total # Credits	Completed before, during, or after senior year	Additional # of hospitality work experience hours needed
James Madison University	1	400	3	Before	600^
Virginia Tech	2	700	6	Before	

Virginia State University	3	1000	6	Before	
University of Kentucky	1	320	6	Before	100^
Westen Kentucky University	1	-	6	Before or during	
Appalachian State University	1	400	6	Before	
Western Carolina University	1	N/A	3	During	
University of North Carolina - Greensboro	1	480	3	During	600*
Eastern Carolina University	2	600	6	-	
University of Tennessee - Knoxville	1	600	6	-	300^
University of Memphis	1	-	3	During	
University of South Carolina - Columbia	1	400	6	Before	
Georgia State University	1	400	0	During	

Georgia Southern University	1	-	3	Junior Standing Needed	
Florida State University	1	varies	3	Varies	1000*
Florida International University	2	300 or 500	1	Varies	500*
University of Central Florida	3	-	3	Before and During	
Auburn University	1	400	5	During	600^
University of Mississippi	1	400	3	During	200^
University of Southern Mississippi	1	400	3	Elective course, not required	
University of New Orleans	1	-	3	Elective course, not required	600*
University of North Texas	1	500	3	During	500^
Texas Tech University	1	400	3	During	800*

* Total hours, including internship course(s) hours, to be completed prior to graduation

^ Total hours to be completed prior to internship course

- Information could not be found through online sources

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The findings are only reflective of one out of seven regional accrediting organizations in the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The institutions do not encompass all of the hospitality management programs in the SACSCOC region. Additionally, the information used for the research was the latest information found on the each institution's website but may not be the most current curriculum if the institutions have failed to update the website. Lastly, this research was performed in a limited amount of time which did not allow for primary research to be executed.

Implications

Based on the data from the 23 institutions and the literature review, the institutions in the SACSCOC region are not allied with each other or industry employers. All of the institutions offered some form of internship course, either required or elective format. The average internship hours were below the industry employers in the two studies mentioned (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997; Jack, Stansbie & Michael, 2017). The institutions varied between the number of internship hours and the other factor of additional work experience needed. The additional work experience was a required zero credit course for some institutions like James Madison University, a prerequisite to be able to complete the internship course like University of Kentucky, or an internship course was not required but additional work experience was like University of New Orleans. Furthermore, each institution varied on how these additional courses

were displayed on sample curriculum information. This inconsistency adds to the overall view that an industry employer will not be able to clearly understand the knowledge or skill level of a student or recent graduate with a hospitality management degree (Jack, Stansbie & Michael, 2017).

The research confirms the perceived disconnect between hospitality management programs and industry employers. Programs in the SASCOC region can review this information to assess where their internship curriculum stands with other institutions and the expectations of industry employers. Even though the institutions are within the same SACSCOC region, there is no standard internship structure. Future studies could compare the internship competencies and assessment methods within the region to find commonalities and which are most successful. This could assist in creating an internship structure that is accepted and standardized for the SASCOC region, which would benefit educators, students and industry employers.

Conclusion

This study aimed to compare hospitality management internship curriculum to industry employer expectations. With a focus on institutions in the SASCOC region, internship curriculum does not meet the expectations of the industry employers, which corresponds with past studies (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997; Jack, Stansbie & Michael, 2017). There are four key factors in internship curriculum from the SACSCOC region that can be used by industry employers to understand what to expect from students or recent graduates with internship experience. Additionally, these key factors can be used to define internship experience within the

SACSCOC region which would benefit educators, students and industry employers. This could encourage further research into hospitality management program internship standardization within the SACSCOC region and all regions under the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

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