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## Alternative Degree Program for Hospitality Educators

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# Alternative Degree Program for Hospitality Educators

## **Abstract**

Hospitality and tourism education programs are becoming increasingly popular, as is an increased demand for qualified faculty. Trends suggest that an insufficient number of qualified candidates exist relative to the demand for new faculty appointments. The authors present a proposed model for newly developed doctoral programs in hospitality education and suggestions for administrators considering the development of terminal degree programs for hospitality educators.

## **Keywords**

Dana Tesone, Education

# Alternative degree programs for hospitality educators

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*Hospitality and tourism education programs are becoming increasingly popular, as is an increased demand for qualified faculty. Trends suggest that an insufficient number of qualified candidates exist relative to the demand for new faculty appointments. The authors present a proposed model for newly developed doctoral programs in hospitality education and suggestions for administrators considering the development of terminal degree programs for hospitality educators.*

A number of higher education institutions across the country are developing and expanding programs in hospitality management. Several such projects have been established through education and industry collaboration. Recently, a number of substantial educational grants have been awarded to institutions such as San Diego State, California Polytechnic, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and the University of Central Florida by various industry constituents for the purpose of hospitality program development and expansion.<sup>1</sup>

One reason for this collaborative effort may be the continued growth of hospitality and tourism enterprises and the continuing demand for human capital on a global level. As the industry continues toward a maturity curve, industry executives recognize the need to invest in human resource development as a means to maintain strategic competitive advantages. It is estimated that employment scales will exceed 120 million positions worldwide. Hence, there is a challenge for hospitality and tourism education institutions to provide quality training for a growing number of executive and management practitioners in these sectors. These factors seem to influence the expansion of educational programs to deliver sector-specific training, which is enhanced through industry involvement in financing and curriculum design.<sup>2</sup>

While programs are expanding and new programs are being developed, it would seem to be a logical

flow that two factors are creating challenges for current hospitality program administrators. First, there should be an increased number of newly-created faculty positions to satisfy enrollment levels. Second, position vacancies are created through attrition with existing faculty seeking career development opportunities at other institutions. At the same time, the number of doctoral programs and the number of newly-minted Ph.D.s appear to be flat. This situation is not exclusive to hospitality education, as business schools are reporting the same scenario. According to the most recent survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, the number of business and related Ph.D.s has grown by only 3.5 percent over the past decade, while programs in these areas are dramatically expanding.<sup>3</sup>

#### **New degrees created**

Many studies focus on the number of Ph.D.s as a metric of faculty availability. However, it should be noted that a number of specialty degrees have been created to satisfy the demand for those with terminal degrees in various fields. These "specialty" degrees, which include but are not limited to Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.), Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and Doctor of Engineering (Eng.D.), seem to be held by a growing number of faculty members in semi-related disciplines. At issue is the value of these degrees as compared to the tradi-

tional training provided in traditional Ph.D. programs.

The key aspect of debate appears to be the level of preparation to conduct scholarly research possessed by specialty degree graduates. For instance, the doctor of arts (D.A.) degree is considered to be an applied degree designed to prepare graduates in advanced knowledge and instructional methodologies relative to specific professional disciplines. Some educators argue that, while the advanced knowledge provided by these programs is commendable, graduates may not possess the training to pursue scholarly inquiry leading to research publications.<sup>4</sup>

Specialties and disciplines in American higher education have expanded to create more academic degree programs at the terminal level. Unprecedented advances in a variety of fields such as computer science, hospitality management, and communications are greatly limiting the pools of qualified applicants for faculty positions at a time when university deans are compelling existing faculty members to acquire terminal degrees in their areas of specialization. Additionally, this issue is reinforced by the requisite for terminal degrees set forth by the six regional college accreditation associations in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Certain specialty degrees are considered to be terminal at the master's level; these include the master's in social work (M.S.W.) and master's in fine arts (M.F.A.). This is not the case for hospitality

master's degrees. However, most hospitality faculty members held the master's as their most advanced degree up until the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Current qualifications require the terminal degree as a minimum requirement for most hospitality educators, with approximately 10 institutions offering in-field, research-oriented doctoral programs. For this reason, hospitality educators may be encouraged to seek alternative related specialty degrees, as opposed to the traditional in-field Ph.D. program.<sup>7</sup> While these degrees are terminal, the issue for consideration becomes the qualifications of the degree holders as hospitality educators.

#### **Qualification issues visited**

It is commonly held that the role of hospitality educator lies in both research and instruction. While Ph.D. programs are research-oriented, alternate doctoral programs are known to be applications-oriented, with the focus more toward action research methodologies. A further topic of debate among educators and administrators is the role of industry practitioner versus that of industry researcher in hospitality education.

One view holds that industry practitioners favor the professionally focused instruction found in alternatives to the traditional Ph.D. programs because of their availability and applications orientation. However, administrators sometimes question the level of preparation for the potential to pursue

scholarly research when reviewing the credentials of these graduates. A number of hospitality programs are housed in Research I and II institutions where publication requirements are ranked as a top priority across university disciplines and curricula.<sup>8</sup>

While the merits of application-based knowledge in instructional delivery are self-evident, it may be argued that sound research skills may be currently more important than ever before in these times of industry/education collaboration. A natural outgrowth of program expansion support is the generation of funding for research and development activities to create breakthroughs applicable to the strategic direction of corporations.

One study notes that Proctor & Gamble Company is directly funding specific researchers on an individual basis to pursue R&D projects relevant to the firm's strategic interests. This trend will create scenarios in which individual researchers will be directly funded independently from the institution, similar to those in the physical sciences. Thus, value creation for a specific faculty member may exceed current measurements of publications and institutional grants to include levels of private individual funding. In the near future, hospitality educators will take private sector research funding with them to competitive institutions.<sup>9</sup>

Future opportunities for private sector funding may cause institutions to seek faculty

members who demonstrate the ability to conduct scholarly research that is both rigorous and relevant to the needs of the industry. One report articulates this mission for research as presented in a popular traditional industry journal and adds the dimensions of industry relations and global reach within its criteria for worthwhile studies.<sup>10</sup>

### **Blend is practical**

On the other hand, there are those who contend that holistic faculties include non-doctoral, instructional faculty along with those trained in research methodology. The counterpoint here is that pressures are exerted from institutions and accrediting commissions to limit non-tenured personnel and deprive them of rank and status in the institution.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that the inclusion of non-doctoral practitioners provides balance, although it is admitted in one report that the fight by administrators for their inclusion may become a losing battle. This trend could adversely impact the distribution of experienced faculty in a given hospitality school. As non-terminal instructors are displaced, the school could end up with a mix of senior tenured faculty and newly-minted Ph.D.s with a limited number of instructors in the range between the two polarities, thus limiting departmental productivity.

It is clear that the ideal faculty candidate is one who is in possession of the Ph.D., as well as substantial industry experience.

This provides a blend of research training with a practical background to enhance the classroom experience through the application of concepts in the "real world." The practitioner possesses the ability to provide instruction from an experiential learning base for hospitality students, who in traditional age cohorts are often absent these experiences. At the same time the practitioner who is a productive researcher will possess the ability to articulate current discoveries to students from an applied perspective based on how the research concepts come to life in actual practice.

Traditional Ph.D. programs in hospitality management require time commitments that preclude industry practice; thus, graduates from these programs tend to be individuals with limited industry and teaching experience. On the other hand, practitioners with a proclivity for education often begin teaching at the adjunct level while continuing their corporate careers; they are thus experienced instructors when the time comes for a career change. However, these individuals are mostly not positioned to spend time in traditional Ph.D. programs.<sup>12</sup>

Those practitioners who are able to earn the Ph.D. enter the institution as full-time faculty with substantial teaching experience, industry experience, and the training to pursue scholarly research activity. This is in contrast to the non-practitioner Ph.D. who begins a career by learning instruc-

tional techniques in addition to commencing research pursuits and engaging in internships to gain practical experience.

It would seem plausible that hospitality administrators would want the "best of both worlds," both in context of the Ph.D./practitioner and the newly-minted Ph.D. who is commencing an academic career. This makes sense in terms of the faculty distribution curve for any given institution, one in which the practitioner veteran begins a career in research while immediately contributing in the classroom, and the traditional new Ph.D. learning the ropes of instruction and research. This scenario fills the gap between the polarities. Consensus must be reached among administrators as to the balance of substantial practitioner experience and academic training.<sup>13</sup> There is at least one alternative solution that would preclude the need for such consensus.

### **Model may be solution**

One model may be used to overcome the practitioner versus researcher dichotomy by providing Ph.D.-level education to those who possess practical components of industry knowledge. For some time practical internships have been provided for hospitality educators in applied settings to instill "hands-on" work experience. Conversely, it seems sensible to provide Ph.D. training to individuals who already possess practitioner backgrounds.

Since it is established that faculty must possess the ability to

provide effective instruction and conduct scholarly research, it would appear that programs of study offering both aspects would not differ dramatically from those currently offered to students in traditional Ph.D. programs, with one exception; innovative delivery methods would accommodate the needs of non-traditional learners in terms of time and logistical constraints. Institutions considering the training of this niche of educators would want to re-think instructional pedagogy and delivery alternatives to suit the needs and learning styles of this non-traditional market. Various delivery methods may include weekend and evening class sessions, intermittent residency requirements, and distance learning.

One non-hospitality program offered by Walden University in applied management and decisions sciences may serve as an example for hospitality institutions considering this model.<sup>14</sup> It is clear from the literature that hospitality administrators deserve Ph.D.-qualified educators who possess practical industry experience.<sup>15</sup>

So, the question is posed as to who should provide this form of education for the niche of practitioner hospitality educators seeking the Ph.D. degree. The answer would be any institution with the resources and the desire to work with this audience of prospective doctoral students. For administrators considering such a venture, some suggestions follow:

- Consider whether the implementation of such a program is consistent with the mission for the school and the institution.
- Develop advisory committees comprised of industry representatives and experienced faculty and administrators to help conceptualize, develop, and evaluate program components.
- Conduct a thorough needs analysis of potential students representing the targeted cohort to determine program feasibility, pedagogy, and delivery methods using surveys, focus groups, and other instruments to gather relevant data.
- Consider beginning the program with a small cohort group of students to identify and overcome unforeseen complications prior to full program implementation.
- Track statistics such as job placement and career progression of graduates on a longitudinal basis.
- Continuously revise the program based on feedback from constituency groups.

#### **Issues are complementary**

There is a compelling need for additional Ph.D. educators in programs for hospitality management due to program expansion and development. The current state of the industry continues to create demand for graduates to fill a

growing number of hospitality and tourism professional positions. Industry collaboration projects are enhancing education program development at a growing number of institutions across the country. At the same time, the number of newly-minted Ph.D.s has remained somewhat flat over recent years.

The qualifications for hospitality educators include sound training in both advanced research skills and instructional methodology. It is possible that the research component may grow in importance due to the potential for individual funding for faculty research from private sector sources. Thus, the Ph.D. credential remains the terminal degree of choice for educators and institutions.

#### **Both provide advantages**

As for the long held debate of substantial practitioner experience versus Ph.D. training, the point could become moot given the pursuit of alternative forms of Ph.D. training for career change practitioners. Both traditional and non-traditional Ph.D.s provide advantages to hospitality schools, thus acting in complementary synergy within any given institution.

On one hand, the newly-minted, traditional Ph.D. is an individual who is originally engaged in a double loop trial-and-error learning sequence of instructional methodology and research direction (two separate and distinct functions). The advantage to the institution is that these individuals tend to be chronologically young, offering

a long term of service to the institution. The disadvantage is limited productivity during the first few years of service due to the double learning sequence. This is one reason newly-hired faculty are granted course reductions and other concessions during their initial years of appointment.

Conversely, the non-traditional career change Ph.D. would come to the institution with both practitioner and teaching experience. This affords the new appointee the opportunity to pursue a single loop learning curve of research development, suggesting higher levels of initial productivity relative to the traditional counterpart. However, the career change faculty member would be likely to provide fewer years of service to the institution due to chronological age.

The complementary synergy exists in the productivity life cycle for a given hospitality school. The non-traditional Ph.D. would immediately produce in the mid-to-high range of productivity levels with an exclusive focus on research activities. This would close the research productivity gap between first appointment junior and tenured senior faculty. As the non-traditional Ph.D. nears senior faculty status, a traditional Ph.D. hired at the same time is in the mode of full research productivity.

Both the practitioner and the traditional Ph.D. provide value for programs of instruction and research in hospitality and tourism management. In times of program expansion it would seem logical to

recruit both types of educators. However, institutions of higher learning must develop non-traditional Ph.D. programs to provide preparation for the non-terminal practitioner and educator. Future studies may further address this alternative form of higher education.

Development researchers may consider process model plans for curriculum, pedagogy, and alternative delivery methods. Others may choose to research productivity life cycles in academic institutions, while still others may choose to evaluate the performance of non-traditional Ph.D. graduates through longitudinal studies. The results of this article suggest increasing the number of trained Ph.D.s in answer to faculty openings in expanding and developing hospitality education programs.

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