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Accreditation: Implications For Hospitality Management Education

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Abstract

Accreditation was previously defined as a voluntary process in which recognition is granted to educational programs which meet or exceed established standards of educational quality. One of the inherent problems in the application of the accreditation process lies in the identification of educational quality, an elusive and subjective concept which creates the fear of the accreditation process becoming equally subjective. The author discusses this fear, along with other misconceptions regarding the implementation of accreditation in hospitality management programs at the baccalaureate level, concluding a two-part series begun in the Spring 1985 issue.

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The accreditation of hospitality management programs is not a new, but a recurring topic of discussion. A perusal of the literature and minutes of recognized industry organizations such as the National Restaurant Association (NRA) provide an historical perspective of the interest in accreditation by hospitality-related programs.

As recently as 1982 the NRA's Education and Research Committee proposed an Accreditation Council "devoted to the promotion and improvement of higher education for Hospitality Management."[1] Guyette reports from the 1978 NRA Educational Conference that not only was accreditation an item on the agenda, but the majority of the participants were in favor of some type of accreditation.[2]

The NRA has not been alone in its discussions concerning accreditation. Guyette conducted a study examining the perceptions of hospitality education program administrators toward specialized accreditation.[3] At that time (1978) both two and four-year programs favored the implementation of such a process. The increased interest in accreditation so influenced the Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (CHRIE) that in 1982 it charged a Committee on Accreditation to investigate the development and implementation of such a process.

The CHRIE study, published in 1984, surveyed all four-year hospitality programs and representative groups in industry. Numerous findings were identical to those reported by Guyette, including the majority of respondents favoring the accreditation of baccalaureate degree programs in hospitality management.[4]

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Accreditation Evolves From Professional Concerns

Why the renewed concern with accreditation in the 1980s? An interesting comparison can be drawn between the present status of hospitality management education and the state of affairs in other professional fields which eventually led to the accreditation of the educational programs supporting those disciplines.

One of the fundamental areas of similitude is the concern with educational quality. In 1916, 21 business educators from 17 business schools met to consider forming an American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Section II of the association's constitution adopted at that same meeting reads that "the objective of the Association is the promotion and improvement of higher business education in North America." That objective has not changed in the 70 years which have followed. Six months later, in December, the first standards for membership were introduced, representing "the first attempt to introduce a standard quality measure into the process of education for business."[5] While AACSB did not recognize the fact, the introductory standards (only three in number) paved the way for what is today their greatest role — accreditation.

The medical field is considered by some to be the first profession to perform the act of voluntary self-regulation.[6] The Flexner Report identified methods used in the granting of degrees to practice medicine which were found to be chaotic and primeval. The American Medical Association, feeling that it was the most appropriate resource to strengthen it's own profession, met the challenge and initiated accrediting activities.[7]

Shortly thereafter the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) was created in 1900. Formed by educators from 27 law schools, "Their purpose was to improve the legal profession by raising the quality of legal education in the United States."[8] Numerous other professional fields followed precedent in the 1920s and 1930s (nursing, optometry, engineering, and theology).

The history of these professional education groups demonstrates that standards for program/institution membership were frequently ensconced long before these organizations considered themselves to be in the business of accreditation. The initial standards were originated to deal specifically with the quality of education for that particular professional field. Unknowingly, the founders were establishing what would evolve into the accreditation criteria upon which their respective schools would be evaluated.

A study of the historical accounts of these professional education organizations shows a marked concern with the quality and improvement of the educational programs supporting the professions. Concern for educational quality was frequently stimulated by a rapid expansion of program offerings. Numerous "diploma mills" were found to be in existence in the early 1900s.[9] These education factories caused educators to recognize the need to protect both the public as well as the interests of the profession.

Hospitality Management Is A Growing Profession

Hospitality management, while not always respected, is an ancient

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occupation. While advanced study in the field does not date back as far as the profession does, institutions such as Cornell University have been granting degrees in hotel management for over 60 years. It has been just recently that these programs have begun to be recognized as credible, and, perhaps more importantly, pragmatic disciplines.

Hospitality management education has been made plausible by the growth of the industry that these programs support, growth that has been, and continues to be, unprecedented when compared to other service industries. McDonald's opened its 8,000th unit in 1984, just 29 years after Ray Kroc opened the first of his hamburger empire. 1971 saw Holiday Inns operating in each of the 50 states, less than 20 years from the time that Kemmons Wilson started the well-known lodging chain. And few people will remember a time when Orlando was not analogous with Disney World, even though the entertainment park will only be celebrating its 15th anniversary in 1986.

Not only has the growth of the hospitality industry been novel, but the size of the industry is equally prodigious. The NRA reported over 500,000 food service related business units in its *1982 Fact Book*, with over $136 billion in sales and services. The lodging segment figures as reported by Laventhol & Horwath list over 53,000 establishments with annual sales over $33 million. Lodging reports a 5.9 percent average annual increase over the past 56 years and food service an amazing $120 billion increase in the 23-year period between 1959-1982.[10]

Similarly, the growth of hospitality management programs has been equally unchecked in response to industry's need for capable graduates. Due in part to the large availability of job and career opportunities, students are entering these programs in increasing numbers. The results of a periodic survey of hospitality management programs conducted by NRA/NIFI is shown in Table 1. In a nine-year period, there has been a 70.5 percent increase in programs, with a 134 percent increase in the number of graduating students. Currently, the CHRIE office is aware of several other institutions investigating the feasibility of initiating hospitality programs.

Table 1
Growth of Hospitality Programs Granting Baccalaureate Degrees

Year	Number of Programs*	Number of Graduates
1977	73	2,289
1980	84	3,674
1983	114	4,098
1984	114	5,182
1985	114	5,361
1986	128	NA

Source: NIFI Headquarters.
(*Senior-level universities granting baccalaureate degrees as identified by NRA/NIFI survey).

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A plethora of different programs exist today, each granting similar degrees. Providing graduates for a diversified industry means that the need for a singular perfect curriculum for hospitality management does not exist — nor should it. However, the rapid unchecked growth does indicate the need for criteria for the maintenance of quality hospitality management educational programs.

Specialized Accreditation Benefits Professions

The history of other professional fields shows that the need for educational standards was acknowledged long before the recognition of the accrediting bodies. Additionally, that history corroborates the concern felt by educators over the quality of the education in their respective professions and their belief that they, in cooperation with practitioners, were the most appropriate group of individuals to monitor their programs.

Based upon the results of the CHRIE study, hospitality program administrators, along with the practitioners, harbor a similar concern over the quality of hospitality education. While an ideal curriculum does not exist, respondents overwhelmingly reached a consensus on the components for a quality program at the baccalaureate level. These components additionally provide the framework for standards which could appropriately be used for the purpose of specialized accreditation.

The potential benefits for hospitality management can be gleaned by acknowledging the benefits specialized accreditation has reaped for other professional fields. The accreditation process conducted by industry and academic peers provides a professional judgment of program quality, one intended to encourage continual improvement of hospitality education. M. Cardozo, executive director of the Association of American Law Schools (1963-1973), states that "achievement of excellence is one of the primary aims of the accrediting agencies."[11] More important than a mere watchdog seeing that programs adhere to minimum standards, accreditation serves as a process which encourages qualitative programmatic improvement, encouragement which is provided through the open dialogue, self-study, and peer review evaluation process.

The implementation of accreditation standards additionally serves as an information base for institutions contemplating the introduction of a hospitality curriculum. Standards may be considered the essence of the accreditation process, as they provide direction, insight, and a tangible base from which institutions can make astute decisions. Similarly, standards can provide assistance for internal curriculum review studies such as those recently undertaken by Penn State and Cornell University.

Historically, professional organizations have viewed accreditation as a tool which assists in the improvement of the profession through the improvement of the education programs. Professions such as engineering, medicine, and law see accreditation as "...protecting and improving the status of the profession and its practitioners."[12] An argument can then be made that a higher degree of professionalism is achieved by those professional fields affiliated with an accrediting body.

The accreditation body is accountable to the profession and its members with the assessment, enhancement, and recognition of program quality as worthy goals. But, most importantly, all involved in both the

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educational and industry sectors are responsible for the students seeking a career in the hospitality profession. Professional responsibilities require that a quality educational base is provided for the preparation of professional hospitality managers. Without requiring adherence to minimal standards, the hospitality field has no assurance that quality education and preparation is occurring.

Ultimately one can argue that the quality of educational programs will be evaluated by the quality of graduates and their performance records in the industry. Until that occurs, the possibility exists that well-intentioned students, enthusiastic about selecting a hospitality career, could select the "wrong" school, one whose program does not provide adequate preparation, thereby reducing their chances for succeeding in their chosen field, and quite possibly never having an opportunity to be hired. Specialized accreditation is seeking professional protection of students, the consumers, and the industry, each of which relies on the integrity and quality of the hospitality management program.

Misconceptions Evolve From Misunderstandings

The evaluation of program quality is not analogous to an idealistic approach for the perfect curriculum, the perfect faculty, or the perfect student. Accreditation in the qualitative sense does not emphasize the standardization of educational objectives, curricula, policies, and/or procedures. Curricula are to be based on the pre-determined need of the type of graduate the hospitality industry needs, coupled with what the educational program is capable of producing. Accreditation seeks to emphasize quality within each educational program regardless of the diversities in a specialized field of study.

Anatomy of individual programmatic offerings is not eliminated by accreditation. Uniformity and inflexibility do not become a by-product of the process. Programmatic variations among hospitality departments and schools are to be expected and desired. The great diversity of the hospitality industry translates to equally diverse personnel requirements. Uniformity, therefore, serves neither the industry nor the educational programs.

Guidelines to what should be included in a program's curriculum do not determine specific course context. To do so would infringe upon academic freedom. However, components of a quality curriculum should have stated objectives and should be taught in a sequential order. If programs exist that permit students to take an intermediate foods course before the introductory course, can educators and industry acknowledge that quality learning has occurred? If programs exist which grant hospitality management degrees, yet in reality have neither a curriculum in or faculty with a hospitality background, then are not the students, the industry, and the profession being victimized?

The implementation of accreditation standards in the face of increasing enrollments can serve the hospitality industry by preventing programmatic mediocrity. As institutions seek to slow or reverse their declining enrollments by offering degrees stamped "Restaurant/Hotel Management," the administration may lose sight of educational quality. The hospitality profession cannot afford to allow that to occur.

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Accreditation does not remove program control and decision-making and place it in the hands of the accrediting body. Neither CHRIE nor AACSB controls policy-making or the actions of its member programs. Accreditation simply requires adherence to minimum standards. Administration of the standards for membership falls into the hands of the accrediting body, whereas the criteria for membership constitute the standards for program accreditation. The development and implementation of standards does not change program responsibility nor stifle program innovation. Experimentation in hospitality education, as in business education, can be provided for within the objectives of the accrediting body.

Implementation Serves Hospitality

Accreditation of hospitality management programs would assure the existence of five basic norms:

- Financial resources have been committed by the institution for program development.

- Emphasis of the program has been determined.

- The curriculum matches program emphasis.

- Abilities of the educators allow for the achievement of program goals and objectives.

- Physical properties meet the needs of the curriculum.

Educators have a responsibility to insure that the emphasis on quantity is not at the expense of quality. The value of the educational process is too precious to allow that to occur. Just as poor quality in the hospitality industry should not be tolerated, educational malpractice must be guarded against. The accreditation of such a diverse body is indeed a difficult charge. The intricacy of the task, however, should not be allowed to stand in the way of qualitative standards which could make a positive contribution to the academic integrity of hospitality management education.

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