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## Industry Education: The Merger Continues

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# Industry Education: The Merger Continues

## **Abstract**

In the discussion - Industry Education: The Merger Continues - by Rob Heiman Assistant Professor Hospitality Food Service Management at Kent State University, the author originally declares, "Integrating the process of an on-going catering and banquet function with that of selected behavioral academic objectives leads to an effective, practical course of instruction in catering and banquet management. Through an illustrated model, this article highlights such a merger while addressing a variety of related problems and concerns to the discipline of hospitality food service management education."

The article stresses the importance of blending the theoretical; curriculum based learning process with that of a hands-on approach, in essence combining an in-reality working program, with academics, to develop a well rounded hospitality student.

"How many programs are enjoying the luxury of excessive demand for students from industry [?]," the author asks in proxy for, and to highlight the immense need for qualified personnel in the hospitality industry.

As the author describes it, "An ideal education program concerns itself with the integration of theory and simulation with hands-on experience to teach the cognitive as well as the technical skills required to achieve the pre-determined hospitality education objectives."

In food service one way to achieve this integrated learning curve is to have the students prepare foods and then consume them. Heiman suggests this will quickly illustrate to students the rights and wrongs of food preparation. Another way is to have students integrating the academic program with feeding the university population. Your author offers more illustrations on similar principles.

Heiman takes special care in characterizing the banquet and catering portions of the food service industry, and he offers empirical data to support the descriptions. It is in these areas, banquet and catering, that Heiman says special attention is needed to produce qualified students to those fields. This is the real focus of the discussion, and it is in this venue that the remainder of the article is devoted.

"Based on the perception that quality education is aided by implementing project assignments through the course of study in food service education, a model description can be implemented for a course in Catering and Banquet Management and Operations. This project model first considers the prioritized objectives of education and industry and then illustrates the successful merging of resources for mutual benefits," Heiman sketches.

The model referred to above is also the one aforementioned in the thesis statement at the beginning of the article. This model is divided into six major components; Heiman lists and details them. "The model has been tested through two semesters involving 29 students," says Heiman. "Reaction by all participants has been extremely positive. Recent graduates of this type of program have received a sound theoretical framework and demonstrated their creative interpretation of this theory in practical application," Heiman says in summation.

## **Keywords**

Rob Heiman, Industry Education: The Merger Continues, Education, Integration, Catering, Banquet, Model

# Industry Education: The Merger Continues

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*Integrating the process of an on-going catering and banquet function with that of selected behavioral academic objectives leads to an effective, practical course of instruction in catering and banquet management. Through an illustrated model, this article highlights such a merger while addressing a variety of related problems and concerns to the discipline of hospitality food service management education.*

As the number of colleges and universities offering programs of hospitality management continues to increase dramatically, it is almost without question that universal problems and concerns with the lack of or excess of resources exist. These include physical facility requirements, assigned faculty load hours, required student lab hours, and the premier concern, maintaining quality education for the increasing number of hospitality students. As a program leaves its embryonic stage, one of the main challenges and decisions to be made is how to create and manage the practical aspect of food service management education.

An ideal education program concerns itself with the integration of theory and simulation with hands-on experience to teach the cognitive as well as the technical skills required to achieve the pre-determined hospitality education objectives. Few of these programs, however, have balanced these roles effectively because of the numerous economical, legal, ethical, moral, and scholarly issues that have evolved from such attempts.

Food service education works with an expensive, dynamic, perishable product (food) that cannot and should not be disregarded after the lesson of experience is complete. One commonly used solution for this problem is to have the students of a practical food study or preparation class consume their experiment, often a prime motivator to excel in the class.

Methods to dispose of the experiment range from having the class operate its own departmental public food service operation to integrating the academic program with feeding the university population to supplying local operators and food distributors with processed food products. These strategies are met with varying degrees of success in terms of student productivity, maintenance of financial stability for the academic unit, legal ramifications, and academic excellence.

The food service industry is begging for the very resource in which food service education presently abounds. How many hospitality faculty, deans, or directors have been approached by industry concerns seeking qualified and/or interested personnel to staff the operation with a variety of full or part-time positions? How many programs are enjoying the luxury of excessive demand for students from industry? This demand covers the spectrum of personnel ranging from the entry level employee to the temporary or part-time student manager able to assist in operations management while in school, as well as the graduates of these programs.

The area of catering and banquets is one such example which, due to its irregular hours and nature of the discipline, is constantly in search of energetic, enthusiastic, and innovative personnel. "Do you know of any students who would want to work next Saturday? We just booked a party for 2000 and are frantically searching the area to staff it?" This cry is one which is heard throughout the land, primarily where the function of catering large banquets is located in close proximity to a hospitality school.

The two disciplines of industry and education need to capitalize on the resources of each other to benefit the food service industry, the business of serving catered banquets, and the business of educating students for a rewarding professional career in the management of food service operations.

The food service industry has been segmented into a variety of specific areas. For example, the National Restaurant Association categorizes the industry as having 13 different classifications such as eating places, food contractors, employee feeding, and transportation.<sup>1</sup>

The Market Data Committee of the International Food Manufacturers Association (IFMA) in 1985 segmented the food service industry into 17 diverse areas ranging from associations to vending. The purpose was to "develop uniform definitions for the Food Service Industry, providing manufacturers, distributors and operators accurate measure for their business and planning purposes."<sup>2</sup>

### **Catering, Banquets Are Big Business**

The functions of catering and banquets are integrated within virtually all of the different areas in one form or another and not segmented as its own discipline. Mike Roman, president and founder of the National Institute of Off-Premise Catering, has coined the description of the catering segment as the "stealth segment," in reference to the modern defense weapon systems and bombers.

Although studies vary and cannot realistically be defined due to an estimated "36,000 to 40,000 unlicensed caterers in the U.S.,"<sup>3</sup> this segment is most certainly one of the billion dollar status, and is growing. Crest studies have reported the following: 5.5 percent growth in 1984-1985; 7.5 percent in 1985-1986 and a projected 10.7 percent growth in 1986-1987.

A recent Restaurant Guide Index cited that the area of social catering would experience an 8.1 percent nominal growth between 1985-1990 in terms of total sales. This translates into over \$1 billion in sales.<sup>4</sup> The

reasons for this growth can be identified as follows:

- Restaurants, as well as all food service operations, seek to capitalize on their off-peak potential hours.
- Food service is in demand, regardless of the time, place, occasion, or function.
- Food service operations seek to expand their market and literally take their food to the customer.
- There is an overall increase in the demand for business-related and social group functions.<sup>5</sup>

A short micro-examination of catering and banquet operations helps to substantiate these macro-economic figures:

- Funtime Inc., operator of several multi-million dollar amusement parks, implemented a catering menu within the park itself in 1983. Results were 1983, \$40,000 in sales; 1984, \$100,000 in sales; 1985, \$250,000 in sales; 1986, \$500,000 in sales<sup>6</sup> (projected).
- Tangier Restaurant, Akron, Ohio, had \$6 million in total sales per year, with banquets and catering responsible for \$3 million a year.<sup>7</sup>
- University food service directors claim banquets for universities not only produce additional revenue, but are important for boosting community relations and keeping administrators happy.<sup>8</sup>

Industry leaders in catering and banquets indicate two broad yet distinctive different segments of catering and banquets: on premise and off-premise. Both on and off-premise catering and banquets are well integrated into the other 13-17 segments of the food service industry, not yet being identified as their own. For purposes of study, research, or accountability, this lack of identification can be a major problem.

Although these two segments are unique, the guiding objectives and operational goals can be universally stated and applied to both:<sup>9</sup>

- offer fun, informal elegance, and value in food, beverages, and service in a clean, safe environment<sup>10</sup>
- conduct perpetual marketing and merchandising strategies based on consumer needs and wants
- procure, prepare, and serve food designed to satisfy, please, and entertain new and repeat customers
- maintain a positive community image in order to generate new and repeat patronage

The trends of the last decade indicate a phenomenal growth in the number of educational programs dealing with food service management, as well as the total number of students enrolled in these courses of study.

The overall mission of an academic program in food service manage-

ment is to educate and/or train the student for a successful, rewarding, and self-fulfilling career in the dynamic food service industry or its related fields. Regardless of the level of education being offered, the student seeks direct or indirect involvement with the industry.

Based on a 1983-1984 study, ranking subject areas likely to be emphasized in four-year hospitality management/administration programs, hotel sales (banquets, conventions, etc.) ranked in the second quartile, finishing 14th out of 21 subject areas. This ranking was the result of an average of perceptions by hospitality educators, industry practitioners, and recent graduates.<sup>11</sup> On and off-premise catering and banquet operations and/or management were not specifically cited.

The principles, theories, and practical application of catering and banquets are integrated into numerous food production, operations, quantity foods, and management application classes. This correlates closely to the previously discussed industry segmentation and categorization of catering and banquets. It is often preferred not to offer a specific course in catering and banquet management.<sup>12</sup>

Objectives and goals for a senior college level course of study entitled "Catering and Banquets Operations and Management" would include the following skills for students:

- demonstrate proficient technical skills in the areas of banquet food preparation
- demonstrate proficiency in a variety of banquet service styles
- describe the organizational structure and mechanics of an operation for on-premise and off-premise catering and banquet facilities
- develop menus designed for actual implementation based upon specific theme concepts and cuisines with other realistic constraints considered
- establish and demonstrate procedures for successful sales strategies, contract negotiations, production, planning, and product procurement for a catered food service banquet
- demonstrate effective supervisory skills required for the management of food service employees
- develop an understanding of the unique social environment within the food service industry through experiencing the cliché of "working when other people play," with class being scheduled on Saturday night, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, etc.

These objectives are not intended to be an exhaustive or complete listing; however, they do serve as a basis for the integration of industry and education needs, resources, and opportunities.

### **Catering, Banquet Course Model Offered**

Based on the perception that "quality education is aided by implementing project assignments through the course of study in food service education,"<sup>13</sup> a model description can be implemented for a course

in "Catering and Banquet Management and Operations." This project model first considers the prioritized objectives of education and industry and then illustrates the successful merging of resources for mutual benefits.

The environment for this model is that of an actual catering and banquet operation whether on or off-campus. Cooperation and communication between the academic program and industry concerns are of the highest priority. This project is designed to allow the student to participate in and assume the major responsibility for the entire management process of a catered food service event.

Aside from learning the technical and managerial aspects of such a process, the student acquires human relations skill development. Required to interact with a variety of personnel within a catering/banquet operation, the student will observe, communicate with, and serve the client/customer who will most certainly undergo a degree of physical, physiological, and emotional changes from the time of the initial planning to the actual service of the meal. This form of education simply cannot be taught in the formal classroom or controlled lab.

This project can be subdivided into six major components designed to fulfill course objectives:

- **Sales negotiation, catering contract, banquet arrangement sheet creation:** As the business schedules an initial client meeting to begin the planning of the catered event, the student will role play as an administrative assistant and help create the arrangement sheet. The extent of the interaction with the customer is dependent upon a number of flexible factors ranging from student aptitude and knowledge to company policies.
- **Product procurement:** Based on classroom principles of purchasing, the student will aid in the mechanics of purchasing products for this function, while performing additional production and purveyor research for the pre-determined menu.
- **Production planning:** Based on function date, the student must first orient himself to the actual operation and then assist in scheduling equipment and personnel required to produce the function. Specific design for production and service is a requirement within this component.
- **Client communication:** Integrated throughout the project and subject to extremely close scrutiny by the operation personnel, the student can perform as the third part of communication within the client/operation relationship. The student is to confirm counts, educate the client as the various processes of the planning unfold, and develop a hospitable relationship with the customer. This will also include a final check-back of satisfaction after the event, as well as a follow-up note of appreciation to the client.
- **Production service:** Planned well in advance, the student will participate and assist in the actual production, pre-preparation, and

service of event. The specific tasks are varied according to operational and menu constraints. This component should serve as a strong asset to both the operations and the student.

- **Evaluation:** A complete recapitulation of the event is performed by the student to include evaluation of financial objectives, customer satisfaction, employee/employer satisfaction, production and service systems, self.

The class size will dictate the depth of integration into an on-going operation. With very few students, the management of this course is simplified. On the other hand, a larger number of students participating in such a merger will certainly benefit the operation, as its systems and personnel should continually receive new and innovative suggestions and recommendations to enhance their already successful business.

The student of such a project would be in a variety of physical locations at different times. On-going communication and a system of student monitoring and evaluation by the instructor is critical.

To the cooperating catering and banquet firm, the following short and long-term benefits will accrue:

- influx of new ideas
- examination of production and service systems
- positive image projection to customers by working with students of food service
- some additional staff to assist in operations
- formal, on-going, positive relationship with an institution which is a source of qualified short and long-term personnel for the operation

The following are activities resulting in strong educational benefits to the students:

- menu development procedures based on cuisines and system constraints
- indirect fiscal management and responsibility
- technical skill development through food production and service
- complete development of the catered food function concept from point of sale through the final analysis of the event
- self-time management
- supervisory skill development
- customer relations development
- self-confidence

Although other benefits to both industry and education can be discussed, self-confidence is perhaps the most important and beneficial factor to the student of hospitality management. Having completed this



project, the student is often surprised to find that he/she is quite capable of performing a task within the management of food service operations that perhaps he/she did not display the utmost confidence in doing prior to the assignment.

Student evaluation through this project becomes a challenge. The student is interacting with a variety of personnel of different hierarchical status. The instructor often assumes the role of coordinator and monitoring supervisor. However, effective student evaluation can be accomplished objectively through creative steps. Continual critiques of systems by the student are mandatory. Student creativity is challenged, required, and assessed. Attitude is subject to evaluation as it is critical to success in the hospitality industry. Meeting goals, deadlines, and projections can be assessed after completion of the project. Personal time management is tested due to the nature of the course and project itself. Students are required to efficiently plan and prioritize their activities.

On and off-premise catering is indeed a large segment of the food service industry, and the responsibility to upgrade and maintain its excellence lies with both the education and industry sectors.

The model has been tested through two semesters involving 29 students. Reaction by all participants has been extremely positive. Recent graduates of this type of program have received a sound theoretical framework and demonstrated their creative interpretation of this theory in practical application. It should be noted that this course of instruction is a combination of several lab projects, such as the model described, and specific lectures, for the purpose of model developing and organizational planning needed for this unique approach to education within the food service industry.

Food service education and industry can capitalize on the abundant resources of each. Other professional industries employ similar programs. Internships and cooperative working relationships in the health care industries have been in existence for years and have certainly proven effective. Education programs place student teachers in the schools even before the formal "student teaching" call begins. Many other such relationships exist throughout various professions. The food service industry and education must first look internally for ways in which to create innovative, cost-effective programs.

## References

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- <sup>3</sup>National Institute for Off-Premise Catering, descriptive publication, (Chicago, IL: June 1986), p. 46
- <sup>4</sup>*Restaurant Business*, (September 1985), p. 140.
- <sup>5</sup>Joy Treadwell, President, Ridgewell Caterers, Bethesda, MD., (May 1986).
- <sup>6</sup>Don Climes, Director of Food Service, Funtime Inc., (July 1986).
- <sup>7</sup>"Leading Independent Restaurants," *Restaurant and Institutions*, (January 1986), p. 146.
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- <sup>10</sup>Arno B. Schmidt, *The Banquet Business*, (Boston, MA: CBI Publishing, 1981), p. IX.
- <sup>11</sup>David V. Pavesic, "Educator Industry Perceptions of Subject-area Importance in Hospitality Programs." *Hospitality Education/Research Journal*, (Spring, 1984), p. 13-30.
- <sup>12</sup>Based on examination of 45 four-year degree programs of hospitality management; seven had a positive, identifiable course.
- <sup>13</sup>*Proceedings*, NRA Industry/Education Seminar, Chicago, IL., (December 1985).