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Abstract

The future of hospitality management education and research lies with its graduate programs, especially those offering research-based M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. In response to a need for additional hospitality faculty because of a growing number of programs, the number of graduate programs in the United States has increased substantially in recent years as well. This article presents an overview of graduate hospitality programs in the United States based on the following aspects: (1) program enrollments, admissions and graduation rates, (2) student profiles, (3) program duration and residency requirements, (4) financial support to graduate students, and (5) students' career opportunities after graduation. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords

graduate hospitality program characteristics, US graduate hospitality education

Characteristics of US Graduate Hospitality Programs

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Abstract

Despite the rapid growth in the quality and volume of hospitality graduate research and education in recent years, little information is available in the extant body of literature about the program choices of hospitality management graduate students, information that is crucial for program administrators and faculty in their attempts to attract the most promising students to their programs. This paper reports on a study among graduate students in US hospitality management programs designed to understand why they chose to pursue their degrees at their programs of choice. Given the large numbers of international students presently enrolled, the study additionally looked into why international hospitality management students chose to leave their home countries and why they decided to pursue a graduate degree in the US. Based on the findings, implications for hospitality administrators and faculty in the US and abroad are discussed and directions for future research are presented.

Keywords: hospitality management, graduate education, graduate hospitality student, international hospitality graduate student; graduate program choice

Introduction

The future of hospitality management education and research lies with its graduate programs, primarily those offering research-based M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. Students enrolled in these programs are the future professors and researchers of the field and will carry on the legacy of today's generation of academics who moved hospitality management education from its infancy in the fifties and sixties to its present-day stature of prominence.

In recent years, the field of hospitality management education has changed dramatically: there has been an increase in the number of hospitality programs in the U.S. and

abroad and a dramatic growth in the level and volume of hospitality research (Ottenbacher, Harrington & Parsa, 2009; Tsang & Hsu, 2011). The latter is exhibited by the increased number of hospitality management publications and the fact that several prominent hospitality researchers have moved beyond the field and made considerable inroads into the main stream literature such as business, psychology and marketing. An interesting example of how hospitality graduate education has grown in recent years is the Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism. The event grew from an informal get-together that was hosted by one university and attended by a handful of graduate students to a major conference attracting hundreds of graduate students and faculty and that is hosted and supported by all the major hospitality management programs (Van Hoof & Mattila, 2010). Besides its role as one of the two major venues for graduate hospitality students to present their research (the other being the I-CHRIE Annual Conference), the conference has gained prominence as the place where programs present job opportunities and where students market their personal and professional qualifications.

In contrast to information that is available on the status and growth of hospitality research, information on hospitality graduate programs, the suppliers of future research talent, is relatively scarce (Connolly & McGing, 2006; Enz, Renaghan, & Geller, 1993; Evans, 1990; Huang & Brown, 1996; Khwaja & Bosselman, 1990; Partlow, 1990) and this article attempts to address this by presenting an overview of US-based graduate hospitality programs. Of particular interest to the study were issues related to program composition (student gender and nationality), admission and graduation rates, graduate students' careers after graduation, financial support provided to students and the sources of those funds, program residency requirements, program length, program delivery methods and the specific features and qualities that distinguished one program from the next in the eyes of their administrators.

Research Objective

As stated the study was interested in generating an overview of research-based hospitality graduate programs in the U.S, those programs offering M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. Specifically, the study was interested in answering the following five questions:

1. What is the enrollment profile of a typical U.S. hospitality graduate program?
2. What are the admission requirements of U.S. hospitality graduate programs?
3. What kind of financial support is provided to hospitality graduate students?
4. What are the job opportunities for graduate students after graduation?
5. What do program directors consider to be the unique and distinguishing features of their programs?

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed for administrators of U.S.-based graduate programs offering M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. The programs were selected based on the most recent *Guide to College Programs in Hospitality, Tourism, & Culinary Arts* as published by International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (I-CHRIE). A review of this guide yielded a total of 31 U.S. based graduate programs which granted the M.S. (Master of Science) and/or Ph.D.

(Doctor of Philosophy) degrees. The study excluded programs granting professional master degrees.

An initial draft of the survey was reviewed by experts and subjected to a pilot-test. After a review of the comments and some minor adjustments, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part one of the survey inquired about student enrollments in the M.S. and Ph.D. hospitality management programs. Part two looked into admission requirements. Part three contained several questions related to the graduate students' futures beyond graduation. The final part of the survey investigated the financial support that programs provided to their graduate students. A final, open-ended, question asked the respondents to identify what they perceived to be the unique identifying features of their programs. The questionnaire was then input into Qualtrics survey software for data collection.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval for the study, the administrators of the graduate hospitality programs were invited to participate in the study by personal e-mail. After the initial e-mail, a second, personalized reminder was sent out ten days after the initial invitation and a third reminder was sent out a week after that. To increase the final response rate, two of the researchers then called non-respondents to encourage them to participate. At the end of 2011, a total of twenty-seven program directors had completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 87.1%.

Findings

Program enrollments, admissions and graduation rates

Among the 27 programs that were part of the study, there were eight that only offered the M.S. degree, three that only offered the Ph.D. degree, with the remaining sixteen programs offering both degrees. Descriptive analysis showed that, among the programs granting M.S. degrees, there was a large variation in student enrollments. On average, there were about 60 M.S. students (Mean=60.2, Std. = 82.27) enrolled in U.S. based M.S. programs at the time of study. Those programs admitted 31 M.S. students (Mean=31.3, Std. =51.15) and graduated 20 M.S. students (Mean=20.3, Std. =26.88) annually. A closer look at the data found that the main reason for the unusually high variation in size among programs was the fact that the six largest M.S. programs had student bodies ranging from 100 to 346, whereas the five smallest M.S. programs enrolled only 2 to 10 students.

Among programs granting Ph.D. degrees, on average there were 14 students (Mean=13.9, Std. =11.90) enrolled at the time of study. Annually, programs admitted four Ph.D. students (Mean=3.9, Std. =3.10) and graduated 3 Ph.D. students (Mean=2.5, Std. =2.17) annually. There were five programs in the U.S. that enrolled more than 20 students, with sizes ranging from 22 to 42 students. The five smallest Ph.D. programs enrolled between 1 and 5 students (See Table 1).

Student Profiles: Origin and Gender

M.S. Programs

Of great interest to administrators is information on student demographics, specifically student origin (domestic vs. international) and gender (male vs. female). Across the M.S. programs domestic students made up 57% of the student body and there were considerably more female students (61%) than male students (39%) enrolled (See Table 2).

Because of the dominant position of the six largest M.S. programs their statistics were analyzed separately. It was found that within those six large programs domestic students made up 59% of the total student body and 41% of the students came from overseas. With regard to gender, the enrollments were 56% female and 44% male.

The study then re-examined M.S. program enrollments without the six large M.S. programs. Among the remaining smaller programs, 51% of the total student body was domestic and 49% was international. As far as gender was concerned, these programs reported that 70% of the total M.S. student body was female and 30% was male.

Table 1 Program enrollments, admissions and graduation rates

		N	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Min.	Max.
MS Program	Total Enrollment	24	60.2 (82.27)	2	346
	Annual Admission	24	31.3 (51.15)	1	250
	Annual Graduation	24	20.3 (26.88)	0	100
Ph.D. Program	Ph.D. enrollments	19	13.9 (11.90)	1	42
	Annual Admission	19	3.9 (3.10)	0	13
	Annual Graduation	19	2.5 (2.17)	0	7

Ph.D. Programs

The directors of the Ph.D. programs reported that 56% of their students was international and 44% of them was domestic. They also enrolled more females than males: 55% of the students were females and 45% were males (See Table 2).

Table 2 Student Profiles - Origin and Gender

MS Students in M.S. Programs	Domestic	57.3
	International	42.7
	Female	60.6
	Male	39.4
Ph.D. Students in Ph.D. Programs	Domestic	44.1
	International	55.9
	Female	55.0

Program duration and residency requirements

M.S. Programs

It took the average M.S. hospitality management student less than two years (Mean=1.7) to finish his/her course work. Three-quarters (75%) of the M.S. programs allowed students to pursue their M.S. degrees on a part-time basis and 54% of the programs had some form of residency requirement, with 21% of all programs requiring full-time residency. Slightly more than half (54%) of the M.S. programs did not allow their students to take course work on-line.

Ph.D. Programs

Ph.D. program directors reported that it typically took their students close to 3 years (Mean=2.7) to finish their programs of study, with answers ranging from 2 to 4 years. Almost half (47%) of the Ph.D. programs allowed students to pursue their degrees on a part-time basis. A large majority of the Ph.D. programs (68%) had residency requirements for their students and 47% of the Ph.D. programs required full-time residency. A majority (68%) of the programs did not allow their students to take course work on-line.

Financial support to graduate students

MS Programs

A large majority of the M.S. programs offered partial (58%) to full (16%) financial support to their students. When asked specifically about the kind of financial support their students were provided, 70% of the programs responded that they provided some form of tuition waiver, 50% supported their students with cost of living stipends and 60% supported students with some travel support.

The study also asked M.S. programs to identify the sources of the financial support they provided to their students. Ninety percent (90%) of the programs reported using university funds as one of the sources, 85% of the programs identified research grants of faculty members as funding sources, 50% of the programs reported that their funds for student support partially came from endowments and 20% responded that the financial support came from industry support.

Ph.D. Programs

All of the respondents reported that they offered some kind of financial support to their Ph.D. students: 84% of the Ph.D. programs offered full financial support and 16% of the programs partially funded their students. When asked about the kind of financial support they provided their students, all of the respondents stated that they provided tuition waivers, 84% supported students with cost of living stipends, 84% offered some travel support and 42% of the programs offered other kinds of financial support.

When asked about the sources of the financial support they provided to their students, 89% of the respondents reported using university funds, 84% of the programs identified using research grants of faculty members, 42% of the programs reported that their funds came partially from endowments and 16% responded that financial support came from industry support.

After Graduation

MS Students

This study was particularly interested in determining student placements after graduation and asked the respondents to focus on their recent graduates in particular. The study found that 89% of domestic M.S. students had found jobs in the US, 4% had found jobs abroad, and 4% of domestic M.S. graduates had not found positions upon graduation. It was reported that 3% of the domestic M.S. graduates had decided to continue on to a Ph.D. program, either at their current university (2%) or at another university (1%) (See Table 3)

Among international M.S. hospitality management graduates, 65% had found positions in their home countries, 20% had found jobs in US and 1% had found jobs in other countries. Slightly more than 3% of the international M.S. graduates had decided to continue on in the Ph.D. program at their current university, while 7% had moved on to a Ph.D. program at other universities, with about 5% of the international M.S. graduates not finding positions at all (See Table 3).

When asked why the international M.S. graduates had returned home, the respondents suggested that they had returned because there were better opportunities in their home countries (33%), their visas had expired (22%), they could not find jobs in the US (17%) or for family reasons (11%).

Table 3: Career Directions of M.S. Students after Graduation

<u>Domestic</u>	
	%
Found jobs in the US	89.1
Found jobs abroad	3.8
Did not find a position	4.7
Continued on your Ph.D. program	1.8
Continue on Ph.D. program at another university	0.9
Total:	100

International

	%
Found jobs in the U.S.	20.1
Found jobs in the home country	65.1
Found jobs abroad, not home country	0.5
Continued on in a Ph.D. program at another University	6.9
Continued on your Ph.D. program	3.2
Did not find a position	4.2
Total:	100

Ph.D. Students

As for Ph.D. graduates, almost all (95%) of the domestic students had found jobs in the US and 5% had found jobs abroad. This meant that there were no domestic Ph.D. graduates who had not found positions upon graduation (See Table 4), an important potential marketing tool for hospitality graduate programs.

Among international Ph.D. graduates, 48% had found jobs in their home countries, 35% had found jobs in the US and 10% had found jobs in other countries. Only 7% of the international Ph.D. graduates had not found positions (See Table 6). The international Ph.D. graduates who had gone home upon graduation had done so mainly because they preferred returning home (36%) or they had not been able to find jobs in the US (27%). Some had returned due to government contracts (18%) or because they had already secured jobs in their home countries (18%) prior to graduation.

Table 4: Career Directions of Ph.D. Students beyond Graduation

Domestic

	%
Found jobs in the US	95.2
Found jobs abroad	4.8
Did not find a position	0
Total:	100

International

	%
Found jobs in the US	34.5
Found jobs in the home country	48.3
Found jobs abroad, not home country	10.3
Did not find a position	6.9
Total:	100

Unique Program Features

Finally, when asked what they considered to be the most unique feature about their graduate programs, only 5 out of the 27 program directors responded that it was faculty expertise. Seven respondents mentioned a strong industry connection as a distinguishing feature and six directors suggested it was a particular concentration that they offered. Other features that were mentioned more than once included location (3 programs), a strong Ph.D. cohort (3 programs) and the availability of an on-line program (2 programs).

Discussion

In looking at the results in greater detail, some interesting details came to light. The study found considerable discrepancies between the number of students admitted and the number of students graduating. At the M.S. level, the study found that U.S. hospitality programs admitted about 31 students a year and graduated an average of 20 students. Similarly, the respondents shared that they admitted 4 Ph.D. students every year on average, yet graduated only 3. The obvious question that arises here is: do 35% of the M.S. students and 25% of the Ph.D. students admitted not complete their degree requirements? Although these numbers compare favorably to national attrition rates for Ph.D. students in general of 50% or more (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007), losing about one-third of the graduate students to attrition still represents a tremendous waste of financial resources, human energy and intellectual effort.

In the M.S. programs, female students made up a majority of the student bodies (61% vs. 39%) and M.S. programs enrolled more domestic (57%) than international (43%) students. This enrollment picture was reversed in the Ph.D. programs with regard to student origins: the study saw more international (56%) than domestic (44%) enrollments. Yet, here too, there was a dominance of female students (55% female vs. 45% male).

It was important to see that almost all the Ph.D. graduates had found research/teaching positions, either in the U.S. or abroad, at a time when many universities were still trying to cope with the economic downturn and the ensuing budget cuts. All domestic Ph. D. graduates and almost all (93%) international Ph.D. graduates had found jobs. It was found that only 7% of international Ph.D. graduates had not found positions. Similarly, a large majority of M.S. graduates had found employment upon graduation. Of concern was the fact that very few M.S. students continued their studies at the Ph.D. level. Less than 3%

of domestic M.S. students and only around 10% of international M.S. students had continued their studies in their own or another Ph.D. program. Whereas many faculty members see the M.S. degree as a stepping stone to the Ph.D., most M.S. students apparently do not share that opinion and do not continue their graduate studies.

Limitations & Future Research

The study reported here had some limitations. First, the sample used in the study was derived from a subset of all hospitality graduate programs in the US: only those granting the research-based M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in hospitality management were included. The results cannot be generalized to the entire field of hospitality graduate education as many graduate programs have a professional rather than a research focus. Future research efforts can be focused on a comparison between professional and graduate hospitality programs.

The study only looked into programs that were U.S. based. Yet, as Formica (1996) suggested, the practices of hospitality education are very different across cultures. According to recent ranking research of hospitality and tourism programs (Severt, Tesone, Bottorff & Carpenter, 2009), many high-quality hospitality programs are now located outside of U.S. and future research efforts can be focused on an analysis of those programs and on a comparison of graduate hospitality education across cultures.

Moreover, it would be of great benefit to the field and to program administrators to determine how and why students choose one program and one university over others. More than a decade ago, Huang & Brown (1996) provided early insights into this topic when they looked into school choice, career expectations, and academic adjustment of first-year international graduate students in U.S. hospitality graduate programs; a continuation of that effort would be highly beneficial to the field. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, an investigation into graduate student attrition would be worthwhile.

Attrition rates in hospitality were lower than for graduate studies in the US overall, which was good news on the one hand, yet it also begs several other questions as to why that might be the case. Is hospitality graduation easier or less demanding? Are faculty members more engaged and more committed to making sure students complete their studies? Are hospitality programs perhaps attracting better or more dedicated students? Are the lower attrition rates perhaps related to the gender and nationality compositions on the program? All of these are interesting questions for future research as well.

Conclusion

Hospitality graduate education has grown dramatically in recent years and despite the recent cuts in university and program funding, new programs are still being developed. This study found that US-based hospitality graduate programs vary greatly with regard to duration, size, funding, education format, residency requirements.

In true hospitality fashion, program administrators around the country were very forthcoming in providing information about their programs and the researchers greatly appreciate their collaboration. Even though programs compete for the same highly-talented students, they are ultimately jointly responsible for the future of hospitality management education and research. It is a relatively small community and students educated at one

institution will become faculty members at another. The better these students are prepared, the better off all programs are.

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