

# Campus Recruitment: A Four-year Program Profile

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*A hospitality recruiter profile survey is replicated nine years after the initial study to ascertain if any meaningful changes have occurred among recruiters that might have an effect upon college students and the interviewing process today.*

Nine years ago a study was conducted that profiled campus recruiters at a four-year hospitality program.<sup>1</sup> The observations gained from that study identified traits of recruiters/respondents and provided a view of the interviewee and the interviewer from the perspective of the recruiter. The result was a composite of the interview dynamic which, it was hoped, would assist hospitality faculty and students in bettering their understanding of recruiters and their motives.

The 1983 study was replicated in 1991-92 to determine if either the profile or perceptions of hospitality recruiters has changed significantly over the past nine years. In these uncertain economic times it is imperative that all concerned with the interview dynamic (i.e., faculty, students, and recruiters) understand the motives, perspectives, and strategies employed by hospitality recruiters.

The survey instrument used in the current study was similar, but not identical to that used in the 1983 study. A number of new questions were added to examine the impact of the recession on the hiring practices of the surveyed corporations. Those surveyed do not represent an unbiased sampling of recruiters; thus no inference from this study should be made to the population of all hospitality recruiters.

Questionnaires were included in the packet of materials given out by the placement office at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas to each hospitality firm recruiting on campus. Potential respondents were instructed to return the survey prior to their departure from campus. A total of 44 companies recruited on the campus from the

fall of 1991 through the spring of 1992; 43 firms returned the questionnaire for a response rate of 97.7 percent.

The number of companies involved in the survey and the response rate significantly differ from the 1983 survey. The initial survey spanned a single semester (spring 1983) and the current study was conducted over the span of two semesters (fall 1991 and spring 1992). In 1983, there were 62 companies on the campus during the time of the survey; 39 of those firms (65 percent) responded to the survey.<sup>2</sup>

The higher response rate of the 1991-92 study is, no doubt, attributable to the diligence shown by the placement office and the college's external affairs director in their efforts to encourage all firms to answer the questionnaire prior to their departure from the campus.

The 29 percent downturn in the number of firms visiting the campus, particularly in light of the fact that the initial study was conducted over one semester while the follow-up study was over two semesters, was one of the most significant indicators of the effect of the current recession.

### **Recruiter Profile Has Changed in a Decade**

In 1983, the typical recruiter was male (87 percent), under 40 (77 percent), a staff person (86 percent), and college educated (94 percent).<sup>3</sup> The majority of recruiters in the '90s continue to fit that profile.

A few numbers have shifted significantly. Today, 67 percent are male; 95 percent are under age 40; 60 percent occupy a staff position, and 88 percent have a college degree. The typical recruiter of today may still be a male, but women have made considerable inroads into the profession during this past decade. Second, the typical recruiter of today is considerably younger than his counterpart of a decade ago. Third, the typical recruiter of today, is still likely to be a member of the staff, but there are more operations managers participating in the recruitment process.

Finally, the typical recruiter continues to be college educated, but the degree background has shifted somewhat over the decade.

Table 1 illustrates that business administration has outstripped both hotel administration graduates and graduates of the "other" category (psychology, sociology, economics, other liberal arts, etc.).

During the decade, the recruiter's authority to hire a candidate has been slightly restricted. In 1983, almost 80 percent indicated that they had the authority to hire a management trainee.<sup>4</sup> Today that number has slipped to 69.8 percent. Regardless, the typical recruiter continues to wield considerable (and final) authority in the selection of candidates.

Recruiting experience ranged from one individual who had no prior experience to an established "pro" with a 13-year track record in campus recruiting. The mean for the study was 4.36 years. The average length of tenure with the current employer was six and one-half years. Clearly, there are very few neophytes within the recruiter ranks.

**Table 1**  
**Backgrounds of Recruiters**

1983 College Major		
Degree	# Reporting	Percentage
Hospitality Administration	12	28.6%
Business Administration	10	23.8%
Other	20	<u>47.6%</u>
<b>Total</b>		100.0% <sup>5</sup>
1991-92 College Major		
Degree	# Reporting	Percentage
Hospitality Administration	09	23.8%
Business Administration	14	36.8%
Other	10	26.3%
No Response	05	<u>13.1%</u>
<b>Total</b>		100.0%

At UNLV, lodging corporations represent the majority (53.5 percent) of all hospitality recruiters, with commercial food service firms in second place (30 percent). Nearly 5 percent of the respondents represented institutional food service organizations, while over 9 percent were representatives of organizations that had both food service and lodging components. One respondent (2.3 percent) was a hospitality accounting firm.

#### **Recruiters Rank Student Attributes**

In 1983 respondents rank-ordered student qualifications in descending order as follows: verbal communication, work experience, personal experience, and grade point average.<sup>6</sup>

The original qualifications were maintained in the 1992 study, and two other options were added, extracurricular involvement and prepared and enthusiastic about the firm. A ranking of "1" constituted the most important qualification and the category of "other" was offered as optional, but was not included in the ranking (See Table 2).

Seven respondents chose to add responses under "other" in the 1991-92 survey. Responses in the category included three respondents who added "maturity," two who added "interpersonal relationship skills," and one each for "energy" and "commitment to a specific career path."

The categories of "work experience" and "verbal communication" reversed position in the rank order in 1992, but the two scores were only separated by .19 of a point, a insignificant amount given the

**Table 2**  
**Interview Qualifications**

	1993 Attribute Rank/Mean	1992 Rank/Mean
Personal appearance	3 (2.36)	3 (3.49)
Work experience	2 (2.30)	1 (1.98)
Grade point average	4 (3.65)	4 (4.70)
Verbal communication	1 (1.70)	2 (2.17)
Prepared and enthusiastic about the company		3 (3.49)
Extracurricular involvement		5 (4.95)

sample size. These findings continue to reinforce the findings of the 1983 study by showing that recruiters continue to believe that two of the most important qualities for a candidate to possess are relevant work experience and the ability to communicate.

Recruiters were also asked in an open-ended question what one thing they most remembered about a candidate; 35 percent responded with comments pertaining to the candidate's communicative ability, while 9 percent mentioned work experience.

The candidate's personal appearance and enthusiasm/preparedness for the interview were evenly tied for fourth place. In the open-ended response as to what recruiters remembered most about a client, 35 percent mentioned some aspect of a candidate's enthusiasm or preparedness, and 19 percent listed the candidate's appearance or personality.

#### **GPA Ranks at Bottom**

Nearly at the bottom of the ranking with a score of 4.70 was the candidate's GPA. Only one recruiter mentioned the candidate's knowledge as the most remembered feature.

Pollio and Humphreys listed five common facts shared by students, faculty, and administrators about grading that point to the frailty of the process:

- Different instructors produce grades in different ways.
- The quality, nature, and number of classroom tests vary.
- Cheating goes on in classrooms.
- Some students are interested in making grades but not in learning.
- College professors got better grades than anyone else.<sup>7</sup>

To support their contention that college professors give greater importance to GPA scores than other segments of our society, they

describe a national survey where 61 percent of 854 faculty members indicated that they received "mostly A's" in school, but only 25 percent of 362 business recruiters interviewed indicated that they received "mostly A's."<sup>8</sup>

Chandler postulated that this patent disregard for student GPA may be the result of not communicating the program's mission statement and/or the rationale behind the program's curriculum to third parties (i.e., recruiters) who have a vested interest in student learning: "Department major programs characteristically emphasize the number of courses required for a major but usually provide little or no rationale for the major and no compelling statement of the goals of the major."<sup>9</sup>

In any event, students should be cautioned not to rest upon their academic laurels during the interview process. The students' ability to communicate an image of the well-dressed, enthusiastic, energetic conversationalist during that initial interview is more important than prior academic accomplishments, but those very same academic accomplishments may be an asset as they practice their profession in the years to come.

However, educators should also make a greater attempt to explain to recruiters the mission of the program and the strategy behind the curriculum.

The last place in the rankings occupied by the category of extracurricular student involvement was particularly unexpected since one would assume that involvement in social groups and student associations would provide for leadership opportunities and the development of interpersonal skills.

Another aspect of student preparation which would appear to be helpful is the ability to communicate in a foreign language, particularly Spanish. More than 81 percent of the recruiters indicated that fluency in a foreign language would be helpful to the candidate, and more than 93 percent of those who indicated that a foreign language would be helpful chose Spanish as the most beneficial language to learn; Japanese was a distant second, with 6 percent. The overwhelming choice of Spanish is reflective of the need to work with Spanish-speaking employees. The need to communicate with guests in a language other than English was not an apparent concern.

Recruiters were also asked if preference would be given to an applicant holding a master's degree, assuming all other qualifications were equal. At this level of employment, a master's degree does not appear to be an advantage, since only 23 percent indicated that they would give preference to such a candidate.

This lack of interest in a candidate with an advanced degree is in keeping with the findings of Lukowski, Budde, and Cournoyer who postulated that recruiters are most concerned with a candidate's immediate contribution to the company.<sup>10</sup> The education that a student receives at the master's level will be of greater benefit to the company when the candidate is at a mid or senior level in the company, rather than entry level.

### **Corporate Package Has Changed Very Little**

A majority of companies are willing to give students a preview through internship programs; 52 percent of all recruiters indicated that their firms sponsor an internship program.

What can students expect once they join a company? Most of the graduates who are hired will find themselves in a management training program (79 percent), while the remaining (21 percent) will be directly placed into the corporation. Those who are placed into a management training program can expect to remain there for an average of 22 weeks. The length of management training programs varied enormously. Some programs lasted as long as an entire year, while other "suitcase" programs were as short as one month.

Those hired can expect an average starting salary of \$21,988; that falls within a fairly narrow range from a low of \$19,500 to a high of \$25,500. On the surface, this average is in marked contrast to 1983 when 69 percent of the recruiters reported beginning salaries of less than \$16,000, and not one company was offering more than \$18,000.

However, when inflation is factored into the salary equation, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index for June 1992, the average starting salary in 1991-92 is roughly equivalent to \$15,684 in 1982-84 dollars.<sup>11</sup>

### **Recession Takes Its Toll**

The current recession and the effects of overbuilding in the 1980s has had an obvious effect on recruiting; the number has declined since 1983 by 29 percent.

Respondents were also asked if the recession has had an effect on the number of management trainee hires; fewer than 36 percent indicated that they were hiring fewer college students than they had in past years.

Representatives of those firms who were cutting back on hiring indicated that, on average, they were hiring 48 percent fewer college students than in the past years. The estimated average number of fewer hires per company was 17. However, there was a wide fluctuation in the range from a minimum of 10 percent to a maximum of 100 percent. More than one firm indicated it was just recruiting for internship or hourly wage positions.

Thirty-eight percent of the recruiters indicated that their firms were visiting fewer college campuses than in the past, with an average campus reduction of nine (43 percent).

However, the prevailing mood was optimistic. Seventy-six percent of those recruiters whose firms were experiencing reduced hiring levels indicated they believed that their firm would return to the pre-recession hiring levels when the economy recovered. Only 18 percent (three firms) indicated that demand for management trainees at their firm was unlikely to return to its pre-recession level; 6 percent either did not know or had no opinion.

If recruiters are right, the long-term demand for graduates will continue to remain positive.

### **Much Remains the Same**

Although the results of the 1991-92 survey were not a replication of the results of the 1983 survey, there were numerous similarities, and one significant difference.

The profile of the recruiter has not changed significantly. The only notable exception was gender. Women have made inroads, but they have not yet achieved equity. Little difference was noted when the authors compared hotel company recruiters with food service representatives.

Student preparation needs for the interview were also remarkably similar to 1983. The need for students to have demonstrable interpersonal skills was readily apparent. The ability to communicate, show enthusiasm and energy, know something about the company, and look good is as important today as it was in 1983. A demonstrable record of academic achievement may not hurt the candidate, but it will have less of an effect on the recruiter than a well pressed suit, a winning smile, and a gift for gab.

Educators have not yet convinced recruiters that the student's GPA is a predictor of success. Perhaps it is because there is no demonstrated correlation between GPA and student learning. Perhaps other measures of student learning and predictors of student achievement should be implemented.

The recession has had a disastrous impact on recruitment. Fewer companies were visiting the campus in 1991-92 and over a third of those who were continuing to visit downsized recruitment efforts. The net effect has been a reduction of demand throughout the country.

Some might argue that the recession has given the hospitality industry, like many other industries, an excuse to downsize, to cut corporate personnel. However, unlike past recessions, staff reductions have been primarily from the ranks of management, not the hourly wage. Certainly, many of these laid off personnel are now competing for many of the same entry-level positions that have been traditionally reserved for the recent hospitality graduate.

However, many recruiters believe that this condition is temporary and demand for graduates will return to former levels after the current recession.

### **References**

<sup>1</sup>Alfred Izzolo, "Profiling Recruiting at a Four-Year Hospitality Program," *FIU Hospitality Review*, (Fall 1985), pp. 71-74.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup>H.R. Pollio and W.L. Humphreys, "Grading Students," in *Assessing Students' Learning*, ed. J.H. McMillan, (Summer 1988), pp. 86-89.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup>Bobby Fong, "Assessing the Departmental Major," in *Assessing Students' Learning*, ed. J.H. McMillan, (Summer 1988), p. 71.

<sup>10</sup>R.F. Lukowski, R. Budde, and N.B. Cournoyer, "Higher Education for the Hospitality Industry," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, (May 1974), pp. 14-21.

<sup>11</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *CPI Detailed Report*, (June 1992), pp. 5-7.

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