

# Profiling the Campus Recruiter At a Four-Year Hospitality Program

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*Each year major chain corporations as well as single unit companies interview hospitality students throughout the country. A study conducted at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, was designed to profile the hospitality industry campus recruiter and to provide meaningful data to college students who would be interviewing with these recruiters.*

Recruiting at the four-year hospitality program, by its nature, is not a science, nor is it highly quantifiable. The interviewing and selection processes are highly subjective and vary from company to company. Some traits and commonalities can be observed; however, any inference to a larger population is not possible.

The present study attempted to profile the hospitality industry recruiter. Data collected also depicted a view of the interviewee and the interviewer from the perspective of the recruiter. Together these observations present a composite of the interview dynamic which should assist educators and students.

Data were collected via a questionnaire specifically designed to answer questions about the recruiters and/or the companies that sent interviewers to the placement office of the university's hospitality program.

The questionnaire was included in the packet of materials received by each recruiter from the placement office. Of those responding, the majority filled out the survey after completing their interviews; several were returned by mail at a later date. Respondents were asked to identify which area of the hospitality industry they represented and then either check an appropriate box or answer questions about their company or themselves.

A total of 62 companies recruited on the campus during the time of the survey. Thirty-nine returned the questionnaire for a 65 percent response. The sample base totaled 49 since two recruiters responded from several companies.

## The Typical Recruiter Is Male

The "typical" recruiter representing hospitality firms at the university could be described as male (87 percent), under 40 (77 percent), a staff person (86 percent), and college educated (94 percent). Although

94 percent have college degrees, it is of interest to note that almost one-half the recruiters responding did not have a business or hotel administration degree.

**Table 1**  
College Major

Hotel Administration	12	28.6%
Business Administration	10	23.8%
Other	20	47.6%
Total	42	100.0%

Although it was not in the scope of this study, it would be of interest to determine if the educational background of a recruiter would bias that person regarding various courses of study. Obviously the companies represented in this survey did not feel that a degree in hotel administration was necessary for the recruiter who was selecting graduates of a hotel/food service program. One could also speculate concerning the knowledge a recruiter would have of a hospitality curriculum.

When asked if the recruiter had hiring or referral authority, almost 80 percent responded that they had the authority to hire management trainees (see Table 2). In either case, the recruiter is in a position to determine for the company who will be working for that company. With this in mind, the recruiter's perception of the interviewing dynamic becomes more important.

**Table 2**  
Recruiter's Hiring Authority

Actual	23	50.0%
Refer On	10	21.7%
Both	13	28.3%
Total	46	100.0%

**Few Campuses Are Visited**

The purpose of this portion of the study was to determine when the best interviewing time occurred and where. Recruiters indicated they recruited at fewer than 11 campuses (86 percent) with over half (56 percent) recruiting at fewer than six. Of the campuses visited, over 92 percent had hotel, restaurant, and institutional programs. This data would indicate that recruiting is occurring at a relatively few campuses with hotel/food service programs despite the proliferation in the number of programs throughout the country. Graduates from many programs therefore do not have the advantage of the campus interview. Recruiters preferred to interview in the morning (56 percent); the majority (71 percent) also felt the morning was the most productive period for selection. This would seem to have a direct impact on the student who may not get a morning time for the interview. At the university in question, students are selected for interviews via a lottery system and are assigned interview times. Respondents were asked to rank order (1-4) by importance various

qualifications that a student should possess. These included personal appearance, work experience, grade point average, and verbal communication. (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Interview Qualifications				
Rank	Personal Appearance	Work Experience	Grade Point Average	Verbal Communications
1	18.6%	30.2%	0.0%	51.2%
2	34.9%	27.9%	9.3%	27.9%
3	39.5%	23.3%	16.3%	20.9%
4	7.0%	18.6%	74.4%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The relative strength of both verbal communication and personal appearance is understandable since hospitality management is a "people" business. The role of verbal communication is especially impressive since over 50 percent of the respondents indicated it was the most important qualification an applicant should have.

The work experience qualification, although important, was not as significant as one might have predicted. Students are often led to believe that experience will be the most important consideration of employers. This conclusion is certainly not corroborated by this study, but it remains an important criterion in the view of the industry.

### GPA is Disregarded

The most striking result depicted in Table 3 is the virtual consensus by recruiters concerning grade point average (GPA). The GPA has been viewed by educators in most disciplines as a prediction of success and an indicator of knowledge. The total disregard for GPA as a qualification is, therefore, somewhat puzzling. It is difficult to convince students that they should achieve academically if the industry is not inclined to support the conviction that academic excellence is important. Obviously this study was not an attempt to definitively investigate campus recruiting for the hospitality industry. It was an attempt to answer some basic questions which would serve as guides to students and educators in preparation for campus recruitment. It has also served to generate questions which should be investigated if hospitality programs are going to meet the needs of the industry.

Recruiting for the hospitality industry appears to be very subjective. Recruiters are basing decisions to hire not on knowledge levels as determined by an academic grade point average but rather on criteria much less definitive, such as verbal skills and personal appearance. One might make the assumption that since all interviewees are graduates, all have an academic foundation which is sufficient for the industry. Unfortunately, this foundation is marginal for many students, and though they may be productive at lower management levels, it is unlikely that they will become executives.

The study also developed a portrait of the recruiter which would be

helpful to students preparing for interviews. This profile, along with the recruiter's perceptions of the interview and the interviewee, should help educators and students in professional preparation.

Many recommendations for future study, educational direction, and student involvement can be made based upon these preliminary findings. A thorough study into industry expectations needs to be conducted. Although many programs maintain industry education advisory boards, the question of industry need is still present. Such a study would involve corporate personnel officers as well as recruiters. The results would not only give direction to educational programs, but would also indicate areas where the industry may need "educating."

Students should make every effort to develop communication skills and to meet that elusive "corporate image" in personal appearance. Interviews should be scheduled during morning hours and verbal skills should be showcased. When one considers the recruiter profile mentioned above, it becomes obvious that students should practice relating to such individuals long before the interviewing process begins. Educators involved in a professional preparation program should make every effort to prepare future professionals for this entry level interview. If the industry is stressing appearance and verbal skills, both of these areas should be treated in the classroom and in seminars specifically designed for recruiting and the job search. Educators may also need to take the initiative and educate the industry concerning academic achievement. Hopefully the perception of recruiters concerning grade point averages is not indicative of the industry's attitude toward academic excellence.