



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

# Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste)



## Academic Papers

# Are university tourism programmes preparing the professionals the tourist industry needs? A longitudinal study



José Miguel Rodríguez-Antón<sup>a,\*</sup>, María del Mar Alonso-Almeida<sup>b</sup>,  
Luis Rubio Andrada<sup>c</sup>, Marisol Celemín Pedroche<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Facultad de Económicas y Administración de Empresas, Módulo E-VIII: Departamento de Organización de Empresas, Madrid 28049, Spain

<sup>b</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Facultad de Económicas y Administración de Empresas, Módulo E-VIII: Departamento de Organización de Empresas, Madrid 28049, Spain

<sup>c</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Facultad de Económicas y Administración de Empresas, Módulo E-XII: Departamento de Economía Aplicada, Madrid 28049, Spain

<sup>d</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Facultad de Económicas y Administración de Empresas, Módulo E-VIII: Departamento de Organización de Empresas, Madrid 28049, Spain

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Learning  
Cross-curricular skills  
Gender  
Tourism  
Higher education

## ABSTRACT

The present four-year study analysed university students' acquisition of the cross-curricular skills needed in the tourist industry. The aims were to determine whether tourism students at a Spanish university feel that their university experience enhances cross-curricular skills, which the tourism industry values as important, and whether there are differences in this respect between men and women.

The findings showed that the acquisition by the students of the cross-curricular skills that the industry values as important is uneven, and that most of them are not adequately acquired; and that there are no significant differences in this respect between men and woman.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

As an industry of growing importance and subject to increasingly stiffer world-wide competition, tourism needs professionals adequately trained to rise to the present and future challenges facing the sector (UNWTO, 2009).

Tourist company managers have been confronted with a number of these challenges over the last 20 years. Among the most significant are the changes in tourist tastes and needs (Briggs, Sutherland & Drummond, 2007; Kim, Lehtob & Morrison, 2007; O'Connor & Frew, 2002); the impact of ICTs (Garau & Orfila-Sintes, 2008; Martin, 2004); concerns over quality and the environment (Álvarez, Burgos & Céspedes, 2001; Alonso-Almeida, Rodríguez-Antón & Rubio-Andrada, 2012; Alonso-Almeida & Rodríguez-Antón, 2011; Harrington & Akehurst, 2000); new tourist typologies (Kim et al., 2007); the severance of the traditional distribution chain (Buhalis & Law, 2008); and the internationalisation of tourist companies (Gray, Matear, & Matheson, 2000).

In such a situation, tourist companies' human resources hold the key to this entire process. Incomprehensibly, however, the industry has been wanting in human resource development strategies geared to meeting its specific needs (Dale &

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [josem.rodriguez@uam.es](mailto:josem.rodriguez@uam.es) (J.M. Rodríguez-Antón), [mar.alonso@uam.es](mailto:mar.alonso@uam.es) (M.d.M. Alonso-Almeida), [luis.rubio@uam.es](mailto:luis.rubio@uam.es) (Luis Rubio Andrada), [marisol.celemin@uam.es](mailto:marisol.celemin@uam.es) (M. Celemín Pedroche).

McCarthy, 2006; Riley, Ladkin & Szivas, 2002; Szivas, Riley & Airey, 2003;). More than that, tourism schools have traditionally focused on helping students acquire the necessary technical expertise, while neglecting other aptitudes needed to rise to today's challenges (Baum & Odgers, 2001; Christou, 1999; Sigala & Baum, 2003).

Since the under- or post-graduate tourism schools created by most of the world's universities in recent years are designed to deliver a holistic industry-oriented education, both the employability of future professionals and the training intended for them to acquire the necessary skills have become key elements in higher education institutions (Gilhespy, 2005; Kinman & Kinman, 2001).

Prior studies conducted primarily in Anglo-Saxon contexts and only rarely in other geographic realms (Christou, 1999, in Greece) have analysed students' perception of the skills training acquired at university (in the United Kingdom, for instance, ;Brookes, 2003; Downie & Möller, 2002). Moreover, these studies were mostly snapshots of students' perception based on cross-sectorial data, with virtually no longitudinal coverage (except Brookes, 2003). No study has been found, however, that assesses university training for the cross-curricular skills required in the industry today in detail.

Against that backdrop, the present study targeted three main objectives, focusing on a Spanish university that has offered an undergraduate tourism programme for 15 years. The first objective was to analyse students' perception of the cross-curricular skills acquired during a school year. The second was to compare the skills acquired by student gender, identifying any similarities or differences. Lastly, it aimed to help determine whether university tourism students are acquiring the skills defined by the industry to be essential for future tourist company managers.

This study enlarges on prior research (e.g., Baum & Odgers, 2001; Brookes, 2003; Christou, 1999; Downie & Möller, 2002; Sigala & Baum, 2003) in a number of ways. First, it furnishes information on Spanish undergraduate tourism students' perception of the skills acquired in a detailed way. To date, studies of this nature have been confined to Anglo-Saxon countries. Second, it analyses skills acquisition longitudinally over time, for it covers four academic years, from 2007 to 2011. Third, prior studies on skills learning adopted a general approach, i.e., assessing skills acquisition overall, whereas the present study specifically explored the acquisition of cross-curricular skills. Lastly, it determines whether the skills identified by the tourism industry as relevant are acquired by students because this acquisition could improve their employability, leading to recommendations for the tourism training delivered by universities.

The article begins by identifying, through a review of the most relevant literature, the acquisition of cross-curricular skills in a university environment and the specific cross-curricular skills that the tourism industry identifies as important, followed by a detailed description of the methodology used, along with the findings and their academic implications. The article ends with the conclusions to the study, remarks on its limitations and proposals for possible future lines of research.

## 2. The acquisition of cross-curricular skills in the university educational context

The acquisition of cross-curricular skills in higher education has become a growing concern since the 1990s, in a worldwide context of the need to enhance students' employability. Great efforts are being made to close the gap between industry expectations and what academic studies offer (David et al., 2011; Trauth et al., 1993).

Thus, the term "skill" is defined here as "know-how about something, with certain attitudes" (Le Boterf, 2002), i.e., as a measure of something that people do well by integrating their knowledge, abilities, attitudes and personal traits. In the meantime, "cross-curricular skills" are defined as "general skills which can be taught and practiced in curricula for different disciplines" (Meijer, Elshout & Van Hout-Wolters, 2001).

Increased competition and the complexity of the environmental, instrumental, personal and systemic skills required have emphasized the critical nature of the problem in numerous professional contexts, such as technology and information systems (Lee et al., 1995); general business activities (David et al., 2011); public relations (Barry, 2005; Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Gower & Reber, 2006); and marketing (Rodríguez, 2007). Thus, Lee et al. (1995) concluded that personal skills were becoming as relevant as technical knowledge itself for the information services industry.

Nevertheless, previous research has shown mixed findings with regard to the acquisition of cross-curricular skills in universities. On the one hand, the study of eleven Malaysian universities conducted by Falahati et al. (2011) found high levels of some cross-curricular skills such as social interaction, decision making and problem solving, but a lack of so-called systemic skills such as creativity.

On the other hand, other studies have reported a low level of perceived cross-curricular skills. Thus, David et al. (2011) concluded that a significant gap remains between the development of students' skills and companies' requirements in relation to business school training in the United States. They proposed a review of business school curricula so as to focus on market requirements. A possible way to achieve this would be to develop a strategic plan for the future and to include business practitioners as teachers on courses. The same situation was reported by Trung and Swierczek (2009) in relation to interpersonal skills. To close this gap, they proposed the introduction of group assignments and of learning approaches based on case studies and group discussions.

In this line, Gower and Reber (2006) found significant differences between the perceived importance of managerial skills (such as acquiring an understanding of social responsibility, delegating, supervising, negotiating, team-building, interpersonal, leadership and group process skills) and the perceived extent to which students felt they had acquired such skills. Students felt that the level that they had achieved in these skills was lower than their actual importance for their future employability.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1011310>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1011310>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)