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What do hospitality undergraduates learn in different countries? An international comparison of curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality curriculum plays an important role in hospitality education and impacts the quality of the workforce entering the growing hospitality industry. From the top hospitality undergraduate programs worldwide, this study selected 36 programs from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia as the study sample. Curriculum related information was collected from the institutions' websites, including 620 undergraduate hospitality core courses. Content analysis generated a new 2-dimension course typology consisting of six categories of industry foci and 11 categories of topical areas. Chi-square and correspondence analysis were employed to compare the hospitality curricula across the three countries. The results indicated that hospitality curricula in the three countries had both different industry foci and topical areas. The study then provided practical suggestions on how to develop an international hospitality curriculum standard to prepare hospitality graduates for the globalized hospitality industry.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is huge, with the hotel sector alone generating over half a trillion dollars a year. The global hotel industry revenue reached 550 billion U.S. dollars in 2016, a 22% increase in revenue over 2011 (Mangan, 2016), including 199.3 billion dollars in the U.S., and over 73 billion pounds and 11.1 billion dollars in the UK and Australia, respectively (Statista, 2017). However, the hospitality industry is much broader still, providing an array of appealing management positions in food & beverage, destination management organizations, events, clubs, theme parks, cruise, gaming, and so on (TBS, 2017). In terms of hospitality employment, there are about 16 million employees in the U.S. in 2017 (U.S. BLS, 2017) and 3.2 million direct employment and a further 2.8 million indirectly employment in the UK in 2016 (BHA, 2017). In Australia, the hospitality industry provides employment opportunities for more than 270,000 people across the country (AHA, 2017). With such a huge demand for qualified workers within the hospitality industry, enrollment in hospitality management programs has also increased (Jiang & Alexkis, 2017).

Hospitality education dates back to the opening of the Lausanne Hotel School in Switzerland, the first hotel school in the world. Undergraduate hospitality education in the UK began with the establishment of Westminster Technical College in 1910 or overseas at the Lausanne Hotel School (Matthew, 2007). The U.S. offered its first undergraduate hospitality management program in 1922 at Cornell University, School of Hotel Administration (Scott, Puleo, & Crotts, 2008). Australian universities also began offering hospitality programs in the mid-1970s (King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003). Due to the needs from hospitality industry, there are now thousands of institutions around the world offering hospitality programs. With so many hospitality institutions around the world, it is essential for educators to understand the nature of hospitality curriculum and its design. Many researchers have realized the

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importance of curriculum in hospitality education as it allows students to acquire a set of competencies and skills in preparation of entering the workforce (Min, Swanger, & Gursoy, 2016; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005).

This emphasis on hospitality programs has resulted in different hospitality program standards in different countries. For example, in the U.S., hospitality programs are following the national standards provided by Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA). ACPHA identifies 17 required content areas in hospitality curriculum design and connected these areas to learning outcomes (ACPHA, 2017). In the UK, hospitality programs use Quality Code developed for the higher education sector and maintained by Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The Subject Benchmark Statement provides a general guide of learning outcomes and generic skills for hospitality programs (QAA, 2016). However, it doesn't represent a national curriculum standard. Similarly, the Australia Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) also develop a set of Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) for hospitality programs (Gross, Benckendorff, Mair, & Whitelaw, 2017). This standard defines five learning domains for hospitality graduates without discussing specific curriculum design (Whitelaw, Benckendorff, Gross, Mair, & Jose, 2015).

In many countries, hospitality programs are required to meet certain standards for accreditation purpose, thus hospitality programs in the same country usually show certain similarity in curriculum design. However, it is hard to ignore the differences among curricula across countries. As aforementioned, the hospitality program standards are different in different countries and some standards don't provide curriculum design benchmark. Therefore, a lack of consistency among hospitality curricula offered at different schools and in different countries has been widely reported (Ayoun, Johnson, Vanhyfte, & O'Neill, 2010; Formica, 1996; Knowles, Teixeira, & Egan, 2003). For example, Formica (1996) mentioned that U.S. hospitality programs focused on developing students' professional management skills and knowledge, while European hospitality programs concentrated on delivering knowledge related to the economic and social aspects of the industry. Knowles et al. (2003) revealed that most hospitality courses in the UK had a general management focus while those in Brazil were more tourism/hospitality industry focused. Ayoun et al. (2010) compared hospitality programs in the U.S. with those outside the U.S. and pointed out that U.S. programs should include international business subjects into current curriculum in order to better prepare students for the competitive markets. Since there is no established international standard for curriculum design of hospitality programs, divergences in hospitality education across countries has drawn attentions from both academia and the industry (Dale & Robinson, 2001; Lee, 2013; Lewis, 2005).

Globalization has had a major impact on the hospitality industry, bringing up the concerns on international labor utilizations (Munoz, 2005) and the design of international standardized hospitality curriculum (Smith & Cooper, 2000). A standardized and universal curriculum would provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to cope with the ever-changing hospitality industry and the challenges created by globalization (Lee, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study is to compare and explore the differences of undergraduate hospitality curricula across the three different countries, namely, U.S., UK, and Australia. Specifically, the following questions were considered in this study: what core courses are offered by undergraduate hospitality programs in each country? Are the curriculum foci different across the three countries? If so, how are they different? The answers to these questions will provide valuable information for hospitality educators not only to improve curriculum design in the three countries, but also to develop an international hospitality curriculum standard in order to prepare hospitality graduates for the ever-changing globalized hospitality industry.

2. Literature review

2.1. Development of hospitality curricula in different countries

Hospitality curriculum in the U.S. has experienced tremendous changes in terms both of structure and content due to the transitions of hospitality programs and the changing industry needs (Chathoth & Sharma, 2007). Since the 1980s, hospitality programs in the U.S. have gradually moved from home economics programs to business related programs (Rappole, 2000), making them different from vocational based programs (Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003). In general, four different types of curriculum foci, including business, combined, food home economics, and tourism, were used in the U.S. hospitality and tourism programs (Williams, 2005). With the increasing number of hospitality programs housed in business schools, special attention was paid to curriculum design of these programs, which usually offers courses in the three areas: business core, hospitality core, and hospitality electives (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004, 2005; Swanger & Gursoy, 2007, 2010).

Hospitality programs in the UK initially adopted a vocational approach, later challenged by researchers on the grounds that it may not be able to equip students with the abilities to perform managerial duties (Alexander, Lynch, & Murray, 2009; Lashley, 2004; Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003). Therefore, researchers have suggested that hospitality curriculum should shift from the traditional focus on practical skills to a comprehensive approach that balances practical skills with leadership skills, commercial skills, and transferable skills (Alexander et al., 2009; Farbrother & Dutton, 2005). Actually, in the UK subject benchmark statement, hospitality program is defined as not a merely vocational focus program, but an integrated technical, management and scientific discipline with strong connections to the industry (QAA, 2016).

First established in the 1970s and strongly influenced by European hospitality programs, hospitality programs in Australia experienced a gradual expansion in the 1980s with degrees offered mostly with a tourism focus (Breakey & Craig-Smith, 2007; King et al., 2003). In the 1990s, hospitality degrees in Australia could be categorized into four different types: hospitality management, business management, business degrees offering a major in hospitality, and those with only a few courses in hospitality (Breakey & Craig-Smith, 2007). Many hospitality programs were business oriented and hospitality curriculum was combined with business disciplines such as marketing, human resources, or accounting (King et al., 2003). Dredge et al. (2012) indicated that there's no

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