



## Research on hospitality and tourism education: Now and future

Hyun Jeong Kim<sup>a,\*</sup>, Miyoung Jeong<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Hospitality Business Management, Washington State University, Todd Hall, Room 331C, Pullman, Washington 99164, USA

<sup>b</sup> School of Hotel, Restaurant, & Tourism Management, University of South Carolina, 701 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29208, USA



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### ABSTRACT

The education-related topics that have been favored by hospitality and tourism scholars in recent years are presented in this opinion paper. We categorized them into six groups: leadership and human capital development, teaching methods with the emphasis on active and experiential learning, online education, diversity education, internationalization, and industry experience. In addition, we shared our thoughts on additional research topics, reflecting the emerging trends in the hospitality and tourism industry as well as hospitality and tourism academia. Specifically, those thoughts include the development of undergraduate students' cultural competency, issues on hospitality and tourism PhD programs, full-fledged online curricula, and relationships with alumni and advisory board. It is our hope that this article provides some insights regarding the current status of hospitality and tourism education, and stirs up interest in education-related research within hospitality and tourism.

### 1. Introduction

Traditionally, much research on hospitality and tourism education has focused on enhancing students' learning capabilities and developing instructors' teaching effectiveness. For example, hospitality and tourism scholars have frequently examined students' learning styles, students' competency in the subject areas, and teaching methods and delivery. In more recent years, however, the research paradigm has shifted to meet the needs of all key stakeholders - students, instructors, and industry employers (Barber, Deale, & Goodman, 2011). This shift has prompted a close examination of the practicality of hospitality and tourism education. Hospitality and tourism programs have undertaken curricular revisions and development to produce employees who are suitable for the ever-changing hospitality and tourism industry in the global society. We summarize the most salient, recent research topics into the following six facets: leadership and human capital development, teaching methods with the emphasis on active and experiential learning, online education, diversity education, internationalization, and industry experience.

### 2. Leadership and human capital development

One of the critical goals for the hospitality and tourism program is to cultivate students to be future leaders in the various segments of the hospitality and tourism industry rather than merely a workforce for the industry. As Vince Lombardi (2002) states in his book, *leaders are made,*

*not born*'. The current research on hospitality and tourism curricula highlights this element, identifying the characteristics and skill sets that a student should develop as well as the knowledge that a student should attain to be an effective leader in the hospitality and tourism industry. For example, soft skills such as interpersonal, communication, and team work skills are essential for hospitality leaders. This notion is natural because all hospitality and tourism services are based on a great deal of collaborative work and on-going communications. Although leaders do need knowledge in their functional area, literature shows that it is not hard skills but soft skills that ensure graduates secure positions and climb up the corporate ladder (Sisson & Adams, 2013). Students are encouraged to expose themselves to student clubs or organizations and take part in a leadership role. Through these activities, students gain opportunities to enhance leadership skills along with many other soft skills. Hospitality and tourism educators should take full responsibility to prepare students for success in their career paths after graduation.

### 3. Teaching methods with the emphasis on active and experiential learning

Prior studies show that students' engagement in class activities and academic performance have been improved by 'learning by doing', so called active learning (Green & Sammons, 2014). Active learning happens when students are engaged with the class materials and can understand what is being presented in a way that adds to their existing knowledge (Bojinova & Oigara, 2011). The active learning techniques

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [jennykim@wsu.edu](mailto:jennykim@wsu.edu) (H.J. Kim), [jeongm@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:jeongm@mailbox.sc.edu) (M. Jeong).

have been frequently adopted into the current educational environment with the help of advanced information technologies. For example, students are asked to work in a group to identify problems and generate solutions to the given cases in the form of simulation software (e.g., HOTs). Another technology commonly used in the current classroom is a classroom or personal response system (e.g., clickers); hospitality and tourism educators believe that this system improves student engagement and allows students to share their ideas comfortably with peers in class discussions.

Besides the active learning techniques, experiential learning has been a core research topic in many studies on hospitality and tourism education. The experiential learning is designed for students to grasp a greater level of real-life business contexts, compared to the traditional, lecture-based learning. Experiential learning is believed to bridge the gap between classrooms and real world situations. Its effectiveness can be measured by students' acquisition of practical knowledge and skills that can be easily transferred to their final career in the hospitality and tourism industry. Both hospitality and tourism scholars and practitioners strongly recognize the value of experiential learning in the current educational environment. Thus, hospitality and tourism educators strive their courses to mirror the way hospitality and tourism companies operate by more vigorously incorporating experiential learning techniques. The favorite experiential learning methods include case studies, service and community learning projects, field trips, job shadowing, industry internships, and so forth.

#### 4. Online education

Face-to-face (f2f) learning has evolved and expanded to distance learning. Distance learning occurs when students and teachers are located in a different geographical region. With the rapid spread of Internet technologies, the initial communication methods of distance learning, such as telephone, television, and audio/video recordings, have become obsolete. Internet technologies worldwide have led to the unprecedented growth of online learning in the past couple of decades. As technology continues to mitigate barriers of online learning and advances online features and functions, it is of paramount importance to assess perceptions of online learning from both students and instructors and their sense of community in the virtual classroom environment. Hospitality and tourism researchers have shown benefits and issues of online learning, compared to those of f2f learning (e.g., Annaraud & Singh, 2017).

Dependent upon students' acceptance of and adaptability to online learning, they can be thrilled by the different mode of learning or discouraged through their technological anxiety or other psychological apprehensions towards the technology. Research findings indicate a high possibility that students' psychological apprehensions may impede the development of strategic initiatives regarding online learning (Mejia & Phelan, 2013). Although there are controversial debates about online education, online learning has been recognized as the future of hospitality and tourism education.

#### 5. Diversity education

Diversity has been an emerging issue in the hospitality and tourism industry. According to Diversity Initiatives of University of Oregon (2017), diversity refers to understanding that each individual is unique, acknowledging our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and other ideologies. Because of the emphasis given to the subject by industry practitioners, partly originating from increasingly diverse workforce and customer base, research on diversity education has been on the rise. A common theme is the examination of students' attitudes towards and perceptions of diversity and the development of effective class materials for diversity education (e.g., Rivera, 2016). The mixture

of students also has been diversified in hospitality programs as the number of minorities enrolled has increased. Issues on recruitment and retention of minority students, who will play a critical role as hospitality leaders and employees in the future, have been addressed by some scholars (e.g., Hornsby & Scott-Halsell, 2015).

#### 6. Internationalization

Hospitality and tourism programs have started to share their academic offerings with other overseas programs in the pursuit of internationalization under international articulation agreements (e.g., 2 + 2/3 + 1 programs). Through these international articulation programs, both institutions assume they will achieve their goals. However, because two or multiple international institutions, with cultural differences in learning and teaching strategies, are involved in an international articulation program, various potential problems may rise. Hospitality and tourism researchers have made a significant effort to identify mutual benefits and barriers for the involved institutions (Lai & Wang, 2013).

From students' point of view, these programs offer opportunities to study abroad. A short-term study abroad also has been popular, such as a summer study abroad, organized by students' own institution through arrangements with international partner schools. In some cases, students make their own study-abroad plan through a third party provider. The most notable benefit of studying abroad is to broaden students' perspectives and possibly place them in a more competitive position in the job market.

#### 7. Industry experience

Industry experience such as internships are integral part of hospitality and tourism programs worldwide. Hospitality and tourism programs typically demand their students to complete industry experience prior to graduation. It is believed that internships are one of the most effective models of experiential learning in hospitality education (Yiu & Law, 2012). Through industry internships, students can explore their career options, enhance the knowledge previously gained at the traditional classroom setting, identify signs of links to prior learning, and seek connections between academic theories and the practical application of the theories in the workplace. However, for internships to be successful, it requires the cooperation of three stakeholders i.e., students, industry employers, and educators, and should discuss benefits and drawbacks of industry internships from the perspectives of all three stakeholders. In recent papers, how to design internships has been one of the focal research questions in order to increase students' motivation and satisfaction of the internship experience (e.g., Stansbie & Nash, 2016).

#### 8. Future research topics on hospitality and tourism education

The six facets shown in the previous section will remain prominent and continue to be researched in the foreseeable future. In this section, we present a few more ideas as an additional source of future research. First, as hospitality companies such as hotels are aggressively seeking business opportunities abroad because of market saturation and fierce competition in the domestic market, hospitality students are likely to receive opportunities to work overseas as leaders or managers. Although expatriate assignments are not new in the hospitality and tourism sector, it is unclear if we as educators are preparing students for such positions that may be prevalent in the future. Despite the growing trend in internationalization of higher education, including hospitality and tourism, it is rare to find studies concretely assessing students' cultural intelligence resulting from international articulation programs (e.g. 2 + 2), study abroad, or other similar programs; for example, pre- and post- studies comparing before and after joining aforesaid programs would be one promising research topic. It is also feasible to develop a

course to heighten the level of cultural competency for those who may not be able to participate in studying abroad. We foresee that cultural intelligence or competency will become one of the crucial soft skills leading to hospitality career success in the future.

Second, almost all forms of teaching methods, including active learning and experiential learning, are likely to be enhanced or recreated through the highly interactive, engaging information and communication technology. One recent article demonstrates the use of virtual field trips (Patiar, Ma, Kensbock, & Cox, 2017). Some may even consider developing virtual industry internships in the future. As many hospitality and tourism subjects are being delivered in the virtual learning environment, full-fledged online curricula are being established. This opens an enormous opportunity for hospitality and tourism programs to expand their audience and reach with sizable financial gains. The rigor of each online class with well-defined learning outcomes must be carefully thought out in advance and the developed online classes must be assessed on a regular basis. This is another, promising future research area that hospitality and tourism scholars should pay attention to.

Third, we would like to draw attention to hospitality graduate studies in particular, PhD programs. Most research on hospitality and tourism education centers on undergraduate curricular issues or learning. As the number of hospitality PhD programs is increasing, it is the time to take a serious look at our discipline's PhD programs. It is well known that a large percentage of hospitality faculty will retire within the next decade. There is a direct association between the entering hospitality PhD students and the body of future hospitality educators. A lack of or insufficient industry experience of hospitality PhD applicants has been a grave concern. We recommend collective thoughts with best practices to resolve or better the situation. We hope to see more research pertaining to hospitality PhD students' recruitment, selection, and retention in the future.

Last but not least, the relationship with alumni and advisory board members requires further attention. They are fairly overlooked stakeholder groups. A recent study identifies determinants to be active alumni after graduation (Cha, Kim, & Cichy, 2013). However, we often ignore international alumni. In the global society, keeping track of international alumni and finding the way to turn them into active alumni will be equally beneficial. Studies on domestic versus international alumni are an interesting topical area to explore in the future. Advisory board members are a critical resource as well. However, their roles are often vague. In the future, it may be beneficial to revisit their responsibilities for the program. This leads to a possible research topic; data could be collected from those who serve on the hospitality or tourism advisory board, and we find out their perceptions regarding their roles. These data are likely to help reshape the function of the extant advisory board, which in turn leads to more constructive relationships between the program and advisory board members.

## 9. Concluding remarks

The landscape of hospitality and tourism higher education is altering dramatically. Internationalization and advanced technology are the main forces behind most changes occurring, along with demographic shifts such as aging population and growing minorities. The hospitality and tourism industry is also experiencing all these changes, thereby looking for the competent employees who are agile to these changes and lead others. Thus, hospitality and tourism programs have no choice but to restructure their curricula to creatively meet and serve industry demands on HR. Despite chaotic changes, it is an exciting era for higher education. Thanks to highly advanced technologies, it is possible to imagine that hospitality and tourism higher education will be disseminated into every corner of the globe. In this paper, we tried to show vital research areas for hospitality and tourism programs to thrive in the future. It is our hope that this article provides some insights regarding the current status of hospitality and tourism education, and stirs up interest in education-related research.

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**Hyun Jeong Kim (Jenny)** is a professor in the School of Hospitality Business Management, Carson College of Business, Washington State University, Pullman, WA, USA. Her research interest includes tourism impact on national economy, service quality, hospitality workers' service orientation, employee burnout and emotional labor. She is currently the co-editor of *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*.



**Miyoung Jeong** is an associate professor in the School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management (HRTM), College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management, University of South Carolina. Her research area includes customer reviews, mobile technology, revenue management, self-service technology, hospitality operation, and consumer online behavior. She is currently the co-editor of *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*.