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**TOURISM EDUCATION: VIEWS  
FROM EDUCATOR AND THE  
TOURISM INDUSTRY**

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# **TOURISM EDUCATION: VIEWS FROM EDUCATOR AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In many fields of university education, there is general agreement among academics and professional bodies on the knowledge, skills and competencies required by graduating students (e.g., medicine, law, psychology, engineering, accounting). Further, in many cases professional bodies will not admit graduates from non-recognized degrees or institutions. This can severely limit or restrict non-accredited graduates' pursuance of careers in these fields. Although professional bodies are commonly accused of using this accreditation to limit the supply of professional (thus driving up the price of their services), this process works to ensure common standards of expertise and competence among those professions.

In Australia, an accreditation process has not been implemented for university-based tourism education (although many tertiary level training courses offer hospitality-based accreditation). Indeed, many would argue that such a system is not needed. Nonetheless, Shepherd highlights the inherent problems of current education provision;

The tourism and education and training sector has underperformed in the past and the confusing array of qualifications offered across divergent pedagogical systems continues to result in an absence of consistency in the curricula, a lack of mutual recognition of qualifications and competence, and variable standards of delivery (1997:70).

Developing an accreditation system for university-based tourism training, agreed to by both educators and industry professional, would go some way to addressing these concerns. However, the adoption of such a system and determining the form it would take has generated many debates among education stakeholders. Central to these debates are issues surrounding the adoption of a core curriculum and determining appropriate content for tourism studies.

Following a brief discussion of these issues, this research note presents an empirical pilot study assessing educators and industry professional's views on the keys themes of accreditation, core curriculum and tourism content.

### **National Accreditation of Tourism Education at University**

Accreditation can be defined as "...the recognition of the educational and training activities of an institution or organisation" (Pearce, Morrison, and Rutledge 1998:362). Logically, this recognition should be provided through national training bodies, and in the context of accreditation processes at the international level (see, for example, World Tourism Organization 2000).

Fayos-Solá (1997) identifies two advantages of accreditation. Firstly, tourism employers can be clear as to the competencies and skills acquired by tourism students. Secondly, accreditation facilitates students' professional mobility. Despite these benefits, the combination of political complexities, institutional resistance, and costly implementation creates barriers to the accreditation process (Hall 1992; Pearce, Morrison and Rutledge 1998).

### **Core Curriculum Debate**

An accreditation system should be based on an institution's ability to deliver quality learning opportunities. Bowden and Martin (1998:219) content that quality learning "should develop the capability [in students] to engage in effective action in novel situations within their field of expertise". To be of practical benefit, accreditation systems should then specify what student are required to learn (content-based learning outcomes) and, in addition, opportunities to apply that learning in novel situations (e.g., through practical experience or cooperative education). An appropriate accreditation system should then be contextualized through the adoption of a mandatory core curriculum.

A number of benefits derive from the adoption of a core curriculum. For example, it provides tourism education with a credible and identifiable focus (Cooper, Shepherd and Westlake 1996). This acts to minimize confusion among students as to what a tourism qualification actually entails and gives the tourism industry a clear understanding of what constitutes tourism studies. Some authors, however, contend that this uniformity acts to stifle creativity within tourism education (e.g., Amoah and Baum 1997). Gunn (1984) has argued further that educators should encourage the development of even more courses to fill gaps created through the tourism industry's rapid growth.

### **Tourism Content**

In Australia, the demand for tourism graduates by the tourism industry appears to be weak (Ashenden and Milligan 1998). This pattern raises concerns as to the relevance of tourism course content for the tourism industry. Cooper, Shepherd and Westlake (1996:151) supported this view by affirming that "... the needs of industry have been ineffectively communicated to educators, and consequently, the curricula developed are sometimes failing to equip students adequately". Addressing this concern, Koh (1995) investigated through mail-out survey tourism educators and tourism professionals (in the United States) ratings of perceived importance on 26 subjects deemed appropriate to a four-year tourism management degree. Interestingly, Koh (1995:70) found that only three of six tourism specific subjects (i.e., 'hotel-restaurant operations', 'the travel/tourism industry', and 'principles of tourism development') "were endorsed by the tourism executives as necessary".

### **EDUCATOR AND INDUSTRY VIEWS ON TOURISM EDUCATION**

The basis of any move towards tourism course accreditation in an Australian context should begin with an assessment of key stakeholder opinions. To achieve this, three research questions were used to guide this empirical study;

Research question 1: How do tourism educators and industry professionals compare in their support for the adoption of national accreditation of tourism curricula at Australian universities?

Research question 2: How do tourism educators and industry professionals compare in their support for the adoption of core tourism curriculum at Australian universities?

Research question 3: How do tourism educators and industry professionals compare in their importance-ratings of a selected list of tourism related subjects undertaken by students at Australian universities?

### **Study Method**

#### ***Research Design and Sampling Procedure***

The research design comprised mailed-out questionnaires using a stratified sampling technique. The aim was to achieve a representative sample of both tourism professionals (from a cross-section of the tourism industry) and tourism educators working in Australian universities. The list of Australian tourism educators, names and contact details were compiled from three sources. These were the annual Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) conference proceedings, university web-sites, and by telephone calls to several universities. The industry sample was obtained through a random selection of organisations from lists compiled across seven tourism industry sectors. Table 1 summarizes the sources for each list and provides information regarding mail-out samples' geographic distribution and size. In some cases, the sample's geographic distribution was limited to the state of Victoria due to the convenience and low cost of checking information (as this research was undertaken within a Victorian-based university). Budget constraints restricted the total mail-out number to a sample of five hundred addresses.

### ***Survey Instrument***

As the research reported here was part of a larger study, only those questionnaire sections relevant to the research questions are detailed below. To investigate the first and second research question, both tourism educators and industry professionals were presented with the questions, 'National accreditation of tourism curricula at Australian universities should be adopted' and 'Core curriculum at Australian universities should be adopted'. Responses were solicited on two separate five-point interval scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To investigate the third research question, respondents were asked to rate the importance of 14 tourism-related subjects commonly taught in Australian universities. The first 13 subjects were compiled from Wells' (1996) study of tourism programs at Australian universities. The researcher also included the subject 'hospitality management'. Although this subject list is not exhaustive, it does provide a comprehensive representation of tourism-related subjects commonly offered within Australian universities.

### ***Data Collection***

Within one month of the questionnaire dispatch, a total of 156 surveys were returned. All the surveys received were useable (56 were received from tourism educators and 100 from industry professionals). Both samples provided an acceptable response rate (43.8% for tourism educators and 26.9% for industry professionals).

### ***Data Analysis***

Results were analyzed using the SPSS version 9.0.1 software package with an alpha level of  $p < .05$ . The procedures used provided descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations), tests for statistically significant differences between groups (independent t-tests), and effect sizes (see Cohen 1988).

### **Results**

The results reported in Table 2 indicate that tourism educators disagree (on average) with the adoption of both national accreditation and a core curriculum of tourism studies. In contrast, the tourism professionals agreed (on average) with both these adoptions. Differences between the two groups were statistically significant on both questions (refer to Table 2).

Table 3 depicts educators and professionals' ranking on the importance of tourism-related subjects. A number of statistically significant differences are evident in this table, with four of these being of medium effect size (Cohen 1992). Of these four, educators rated 'introduction/ nature of tourism', 'significance of tourism and its impacts', and 'statistical measurement and dimensions' as relatively more important and 'hospitality management' as relatively less important, compared to the industry professionals.

### **CONCLUSION**

The results from this pilot study revealed polarized opinions among educators and professions towards the adoption of accreditation and core curriculum. Yet this division is not reflected to the same degree when comparing the views of both groups towards the importance of tourism subjects (i.e., qualification content). Referring back to Table 3, the six subjects ranked as most important by tourism educators fall within the top eight ranked subjects by professionals. Not surprisingly, the major differences can be explained where educators place more emphasis on subjects ground in conceptual knowledge (e.g., introduction/nature of tourism and significance of tourism and its impacts), whereas professionals place more emphasis on subjects offering practical based skills and knowledge (e.g., hospitality management and finance).

The adoption of accreditation and core curriculum does not necessarily lock educators into inflexible, externally determined courses or reduce their individual autonomy. Accreditation through a core curriculum merely determines the learning outcomes appropriate for university tourism studies through negotiation between the tourism industry and university educators. Conceivably, the results of this study suggest that an

accredited course would require as few as six specific tourism subjects (i.e., introduction to tourism, tourism marketing, tourism management, tourism behaviour, tourism planning, and tourism information technology). Quality education opportunities would be pursued through including a practical component (real or simulated) to apply this learning to real world problems and contexts.

Through this process, tourism courses would continue to encompass a high degree of flexibility; specialisation, for example, is still possible in other areas (e.g., foreign languages, hospitality management, business studies, or environmental studies) and courses can continue to be tailored to either the local industry and community or specific tourism sectors. The upshot of this accreditation process is university graduates that are better suited to workplace requirements and recognised by the tourism industry as such. Subsequently, this will increase tourism students' competitive advantage in the tourism job market.

This study suggests that further research is required to explain why educators appear resistant to adopting accredited core curriculums. This is very important as the benefits through accreditation brought to both the tourism industry and tourism students will improve the provision of university-based tourism education. This will simultaneously act to increase student demand for this opportunity.

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**Table 1. Sampling Frame for Industry Professionals and Tourism Educators**

Sample population	Sources of information	Geographic location	Sample size
<b>Industry professionals</b>			
Accommodation	Tourism Victoria web-site	Victoria	68
Food and beverages	Tourism Victoria web-site	Victoria	68
Attractions	Telstra yellow pages web-site	Victoria	47
Transportation	Telstra yellow pages web-site	Victoria	40
Travel intermediaries	Telstra yellow pages web-site	Victoria	38
Tourism media	The tourism and hospitality business handbook	Australia	31
Tourism organisations	The tourism and hospitality business handbook, Directory of Australian associations, Office of National Tourism web-site	Australia	80
Industry total:			372
<b>Tourism educators</b>			
Australian universities with tourism and / or related programs	Annual CAUTHE <sup>a</sup> conference proceedings, University web-sites, Telephone to universities.	Australia	128
Grand total:			500

<sup>a</sup>Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education

**Table 2. Ratings for national accreditation and core curriculum**

	Tourism educators		Industry professionals		<i>t</i> -value	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Adopt national accreditation	2.52	1.48	3.74	1.05	-5.44 <sup>***</sup>	0.95
Adopt core curriculum	2.45	1.32	3.80	0.96	-6.57 <sup>***</sup>	1.17

Note: Measurement scale: 1 = (strongly disagree) to 5 = (strongly agree).

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>*p*<.001.

**Table 3. Rankings for the importance of tourism-related subjects**

TOURISM CONTENT	Tourism educators			Industry professionals			<i>t-value</i>	<i>d</i>
	R <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	R <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
	Marketing	1	4.35	0.80	1	4.40		
Introduction/nature of tourism	1	4.35	0.89	7	3.83	1.13	3.143**	0.51
Tourism Management	3	4.31	0.79	4	3.93	0.99	2.440*	0.42
Determinants and motivations in tourism	4	4.28	0.81	5	3.92	0.92	2.403*	0.42
Significance of tourism and its impacts	5	4.16	0.88	8	3.61	0.99	3.611***	0.59
Computer applications	6	3.95	1.01	2	4.21	0.84	-1.760	0.28
Statistical measurement and dimensions	7	3.85	0.92	13	3.35	1.05	2.957**	0.51
Component sectors	8	3.83	1.03	11	3.40	0.99	2.493*	0.43
Finance	9	3.82	1.00	6	3.86	1.02	-0.237	0.04
Physical planning and development organ.	10	3.75	1.02	14	3.33	1.00	2.431*	0.42
Tourism project	11	3.73	1.05	12	3.36	1.00	2.093*	0.36
Tourism law	12	3.47	0.96	9	3.51	1.05	-0.188	0.04
Tourism transportation	14	3.06	0.98	10	3.41	0.97	-2.146*	0.36
Hospitality management	13	3.04	1.32	3	3.96	1.09	-4.673***	0.76

Note: Measurement scale: 1 = (not important at all) to 5 = (very important)

<sup>a</sup> Rank in order of importance.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

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