

A Review of Hospitality and Tourism Management Graduates' Post Education Employment

by

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Introduction

The travel and tourism industry accounted for 2.8 percent of the United States' gross domestic product in 2014. While this seems like a low percentage, it is important to note this created \$2.1 trillion in economic output. Travel and tourism support fifteen million jobs in the United States, eight million of which are direct tourism jobs. One in every nine American jobs depends on hospitality and tourism management.

Upon learning how extensive the hospitality and tourism industry is, I became interested in determining what career opportunities are available within the industry. As a Hospitality and Tourism major, I was unsure of all of the different career options available with this degree. Hospitality is such a wide field, ranging from country clubs to restaurants to event planning to hotel management, it can often be overwhelming to students to determine what can be accomplished with this degree. I was also interested in analyzing how beneficial Appalachian State hospitality and tourism management graduates found the program to be in preparing for careers in the field. I wanted to analyze how beneficial graduates thought the coursework as well as the internship were in pursuing a career in hospitality.

After some discussion with classmates and the head of the department, I decided to look at the academic and employment information of Hospitality and Tourism Management graduates since 2010. In order to do this, I created a survey that would allow me to analyze what career options graduates pursued, and how that correlated with the strength of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program at Appalachian State. The survey allowed me to statistically analyze the results to gather suggestions to improve the program. The purpose of this survey was to gather information such as classroom knowledge that carried over to job satisfaction, promotions earned, names of titles, beginning salaries, satisfaction

with curriculum of hospitality program, and satisfaction with the internship program. The department had information regarding the internships and many positions received by graduates; however, the goal of my data collection was to determine the quality of education Appalachian State provides as well as more extensive information regarding starting job positions.

I hoped that my results would reveal the extensive opportunities graduates of Appalachian State's program specifically have. Overall, I hoped to use the results to sell potential students on the program. I believed that information regarding all exciting job opportunities, promotion rates, starting salaries, placement rates upon graduation, and more would make potential students feel confident in the department. The results of this study will also benefit universities that offer a program in hospitality and tourism management, Appalachian State's program in particular, as it analyzed what is necessary of a curriculum today. My thesis answers the research questions: "What career paths can be pursued with a Hospitality and Tourism Management degree and how beneficial is having this degree in finding a job within this industry?"

In this thesis, I will begin by discussing results of the literature review I completed regarding potential careers in the Hospitality and Tourism Management field. Then, I will explain and define the curriculum at Appalachian State University. I will then move into discussing the set-up of the survey I created, as well as the distribution of the respondents. Finally, I analyze the results of the survey and recommend changes to the program based on these results. The thesis is concluded with suggestions for future research on this topic.

Literature Review Results

I began the process this thesis by examining what research has been done on this

subject previously. The most relevant piece I found was a survey completed by Scott Richardson of Griffith University in 2009. He surveyed three hundred and seventy nine hospitality and tourism management undergraduate students from eight different institutions to analyze what career paths they hoped to pursue. Most of the students responded with Hotel Management (forty-four percent). The remaining responses (in descending order of popularity) were tourism management, event management, hospitality management, travel, and club management. While these results were beneficial in determining what fields hospitality and tourism management students hope to work in, I hoped my thesis would be able to give more specific information about position titles and the types of organizations the graduates of Appalachian State's program went on to work for.

Another interesting piece of literature I discovered is titled Introduction to the Hospitality Industry. Within this text, the authors define hospitality to include, "not only hotels and restaurants, but also other kinds of institutions that offer shelter, food, or both, to people away from their homes." This definition shows the broad range of products and services offered within this field, and the extensive amount of jobs needed to provide those products and services. Within this text are results to another survey that analyzes what hospitality graduates hope to pursue as a career; the survey analyzed what type of hospitality institutions graduates hoped to work for. The results showed luxury hotels are preferred most, followed by clubs, fine dining, midmarket hotels, contract food service, midscale restaurants, economy hotels, and quick-service restaurants (in order of preference). This text shows what type of institutions graduates hoped to work for; however, it did not include all of the institutions the program at Appalachian State includes in its curriculum.

The Hospitality Industry: A Dynamic Experience was another text that gave relevant

information to this thesis. The author determined that there are four major career fields within hospitality: food, lodging, tourism, and recreation. I found this to be interesting as the program at Appalachian State determined there to be six major career fields based on the curriculum offered. The text also listed twenty nine potential career titles in the hospitality management industry such as general manager, casino manager, theme park manager, banquet manager, marina manager, country club manager, catering manager, food service director, etc. This list shows the wide array of positions available within the industry.

The literature review was completed with Job Descriptions for the Private Club Industry. This case study analyzed eighty-six private clubs throughout America to determine the most popular career positions. Over one hundred job descriptions of the most common positions were then discussed. These positions ranged from departments such as general management, food and beverage, clubhouse, accounting, membership, human resources, purchasing, recreation, rooms, and more. This text shows how extensive the career options are just within the club field of hospitality, which tends to be the least common field to pursue for graduates.

Appalachian State Hospitality and Tourism Management Curriculum

The Hospitality and Tourism Management major was developed in 1989. The major is still considered to be in the department of management; however, the degree allows for students to become more educated in managing hospitality specific companies. The degree aims to balance education in the hospitality field as well as a general business background. It is a requirement of all business majors to complete the College of Business core. These core classes consist of microeconomics, macroeconomics, introduction to finance, two courses in accounting, business law, two business statistics courses, organizational behavior,

introduction to marketing, strategic management, and a business writing course. This “core” allows students to have a general understanding of all business practices.

The curriculum of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program, specifically, consists of seven required courses. The first course to be taken is Survey of Hospitality and Tourism Industry; this course aims to give a brief introduction of the industry as well as trends, organizational structure, and economic impact within the fields. Another required course is human resource management. The next hospitality course is simply name Hospitality Management Operations I. This course is focused around food and beverage operations. Students learn about menu development, beverage management, catering, food service design, cost controls, and management approaches within this field. Hospitality Management Operations II analyzes lodging operations; this course focuses on not only hotel operations, but also resorts and cruise ships. Daily operations and functional areas of properties such as marketing, rooms division, engineering, accounting, computer applications, and security are taught in this course. The Meeting and Convention Planning course addresses management of convention, expositions, and other meetings. Program planning, budgeting, housing, food and beverage, transportation, convention centers, resources available through convention visitor bureaus, and set-up of an event are discussed. The final course in the Hospitality and Tourism Management curriculum is Destination Management. This class examines the operations of convention and visitor bureaus as well as destination management organizations. The final required coursework in the program is a six credit hour internship. The internship is generally completed the summer before a student’s senior year, and consists of four hundred hours at a hospitality firm of the student’s choosing.

Research Method

The best way to learn about today's hospitality and tourism management jobs was to reach out to recent graduates. An average of twenty-five students graduate with a Hospitality and Tourism Management degree each year from Appalachian State University. The department chair was an excellent resource for this study as he remains in contact with many of the graduates from the past five years. Each year, Dr. Clark asks students to list a non-school email to receive updates about the program and open jobs. I was able to obtain ninety-nine graduates' contact information through this email list. Dr. Clark, who also administers the Appalachian State Hospitality and Tourism Management Facebook pages, gave me permission to send a message out on the Facebook page. This page can be viewed by 737 people; however, they are not all alumni. The final way I contacted recent graduates was through the Appalachian State Hospitality and Tourism Management Internship Facebook page. This page posts pictures of every student that completed an internship through the program, which also lists the student's name and the location of the internship. I used these pictures to contact as many recent graduates as possible that were still active on that Facebook page; I was able to contact another 32 graduates through this page.

After acquiring contact information for the graduates of the program within the past five years, I developed a survey to gather the necessary information. The survey first focused on background information of the respondent such as gender, year of graduation, and grade point average upon graduation. I then developed questions to determine which field within the industry the student pursued for their first position as well as their internship. An important step in creating this question was to determine what the possible responses should be. Together with the department chair, we developed seven different fields to list as

possible responses. The next questions aimed to analyze how helpful the internship and coursework were in preparing the graduate for their first position. Following these questions, the survey moves to determine how helpful the program was in finding a job upon graduating. These questions aimed to analyze if a connection from Appalachian State or the internship helped the graduate in finding a job. The survey also asked the graduates to name the first company they worked for upon graduating, starting salary, and starting job title. Following questions concerning beginning positions, respondents would be asked if they had received a promotion since that first position. The remaining portion of the survey aimed to analyze the curriculum of the program. These questions consisted of determining the most beneficial course completed, satisfaction with the program, and to list additional courses that should be added to the program.

51 graduates responded to the survey. Dr. Clark estimates there to be 115 graduates in the last five years, meaning I received 45.2% of the target audience. I feel that this percentage is strong enough to complete a conclusive survey.

Table 1: Number of Respondents by Graduation Year

Graduation Year	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
# of Respondents	10	9	14	7	10

The number of respondents is relatively consistent throughout the various years.

Out of the 51 participants, 40 were female. This means that 82% of respondents were female. After discussing this with the department chair, he felt this percentage was representative of the graduates and the program.

Table 2: Number of Respondents by GPA

GPA	>3.75	3.5-3.74	3.25-3.49	3.0-3.24	2.75-2.99	2.50-2.74	2.23-2.49
Respondents	4	7	20	11	4	2	1

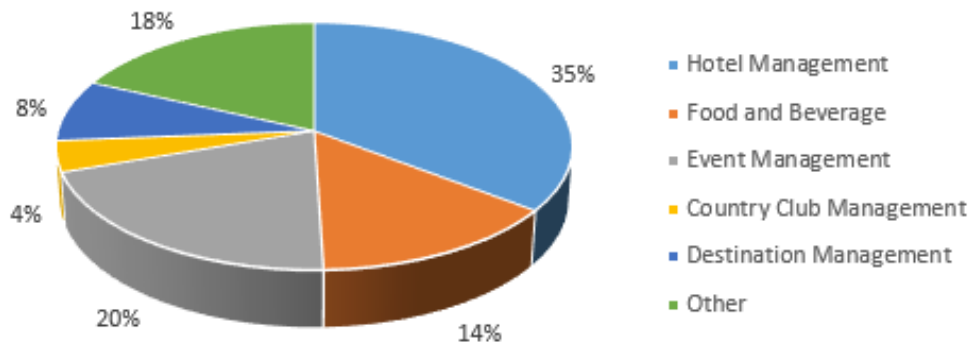
The greatest number of respondents fell into the range of 3.25-3.49 for cumulative GPA upon graduating. These results will be further discussed in the findings and discussion section of this thesis.

Findings and Discussion

Field Entered Upon Graduating

These result answer the research question of this thesis: what careers are pursued by graduates of the Appalachian State Hospitality and Tourism Management program.

Graph 1: Fields Entered by Graduates



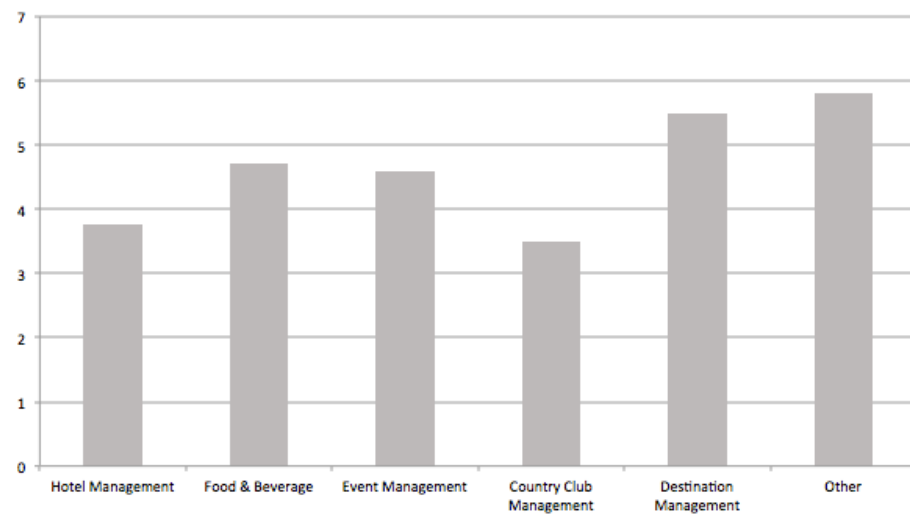
As shown in the graph above, the greatest amount of graduates go into hotel management upon graduating from Appalachian State. Event management follows hotel management

with 20% of respondents. 14% entered food and beverage management positions. 8 percent received a position in destination management, and 4% in country club management.

18% of respondents classified their first position as not fitting into any of the available categories. As discussed earlier, Dr. Clark and I determined seven possible fields as options for responses to this question: hotel management, event management, food and beverage management, destination management, country club management, travel management, and facility/venue management. As 18% is a rather large percent of the respondents, I analyzed what careers these respondents pursued. Two went into accounting in hospitality firms, three became marketers or salespeople, two went into convention sales, and two completely left the hospitality industry.

It is not surprising that the greatest amount of graduates of this program pursue jobs in hotel management; this is consistent with the results of the surveys analyzed during the literature review. It was surprising, however, that more graduates went into event management than food and beverage management due to the food and beverage field being larger than the event management field.

Graph 2: Starting Salaries by Field

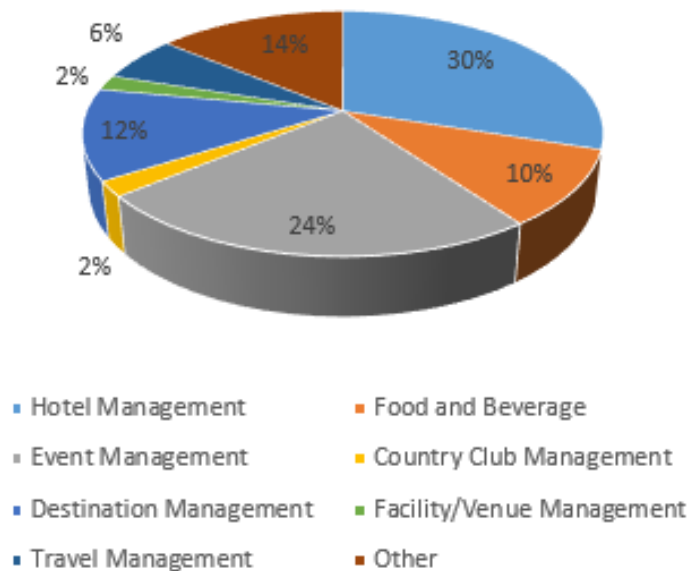


As depicted in the graph, the “other” category had the highest starting salary. The salary survey question allowed respondents to answer based on a scale, beginning at less than \$25,000 and increasing by increments of \$5,000 up to \$50,000. The “other” category was followed by destination management, food and beverage management, event management, hotel management, and country club management in order of highest starting salary to lowest.

Field Internships Were Completed In

Following analyzing fields entered upon graduating, I analyzed which fields students completed internships in.

Graph 3 Fields Internships Were Completed In



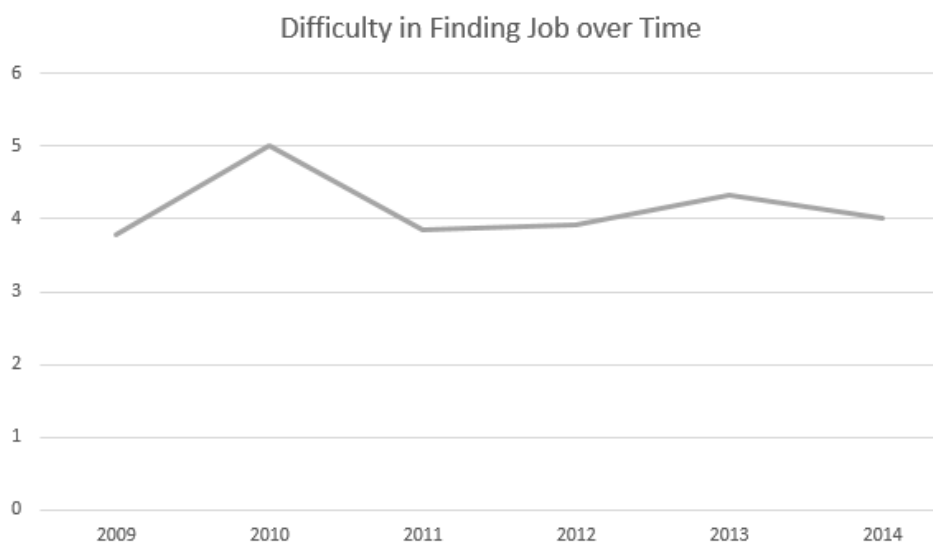
As depicted in the graph above, hotel management was again the most popular field entered at 30% of graduates. Event management followed hotel management again at 24% of graduates. The “other” category received 14% of responses, destination management received 6%, and country club management received 2%. Even though no graduates entered

the fields of travel management or facility/ venue management upon graduating, some did complete internships in these fields. 6% completed an internship in travel management, while 2% completed an internship in facility/ venue management.

Upon realizing that 8% of respondents completed internships in fields that jobs were not pursued in, I decided to analyze correlations between fields internships were completed in and fields entered upon graduation. 44% of respondents switched the field entered from their internship. Meanwhile, 8% of graduates went to work for the company they completed an internship. It was surprising that such a strong number switched fields between the internship and first position; however, this is often the purpose of the internship, to determine if it is really what the student hopes to do upon graduating.

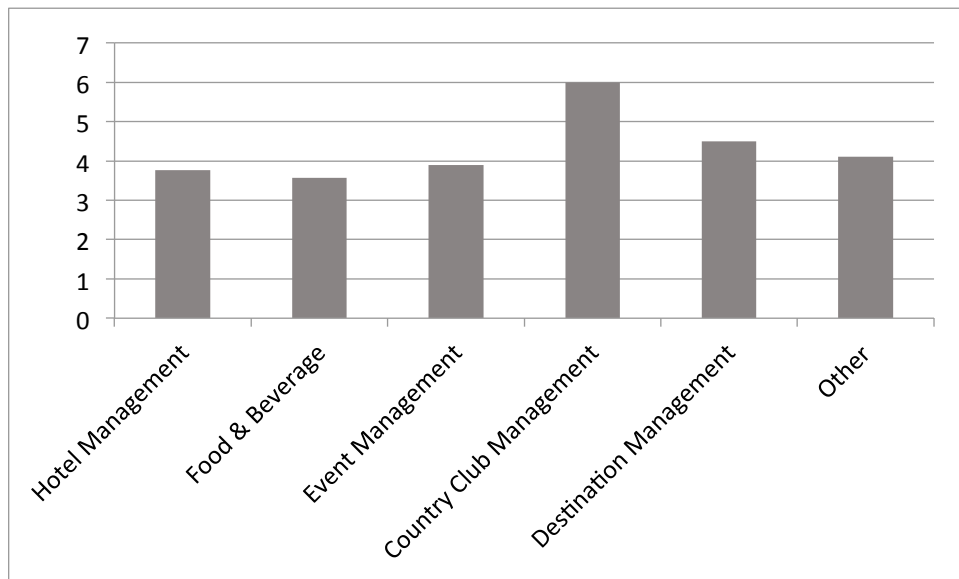
Difficulty in Finding a Job

After analyzing which fields graduates received positions and internships in, the survey went on to analyze how difficult the respondents felt it was to find these positions. The graduates answered this question on a scale of one to seven; one being extremely difficult and seven being very easy.



I first wanted to analyze the difficulty in finding a position over time. As depicted in the graph above, the class of 2010 found it to be the easiest to find a position (the average was a 4.98, which a 5 represented somewhat easy). The remaining classes remained relatively constant around the “neutral” level.

Graph 5 Difficulty in Finding Job by Field



The graph above depicts how difficult respondents felt it was to find their first position broken down into the fields they pursued. As shown in the graph, country club management positions were the easiest to find for the graduates. Destination management was the second easiest, followed by other. The hotel management, food and beverage management, and event management fields showed very similar results, almost at the “neutral” rating. These results are important for the Hospitality and Tourism Management department to note as the majority of graduates did not find it easy to find a position upon graduating.

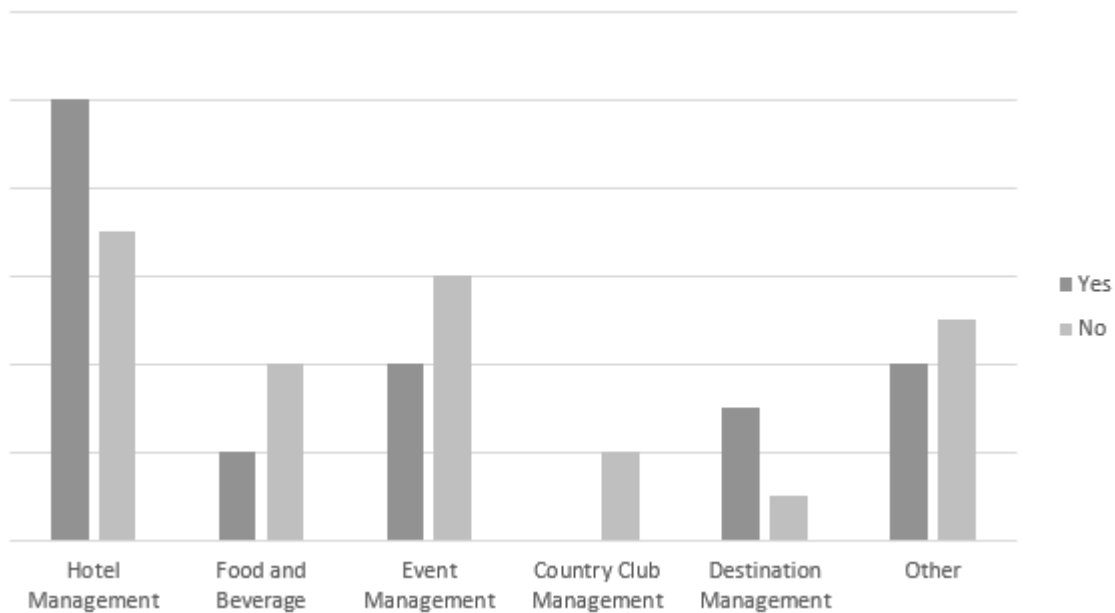
Along with difficulty in finding a position, the survey analyzed if a connection from Appalachian State assisted the graduates in finding their first positions. 38% of respondents

found their first position due to a connection. Upon explaining further, the majority that answered yes to this question, received this connection through Dr. Clark or a friend in the program.

Promotions

After analyzing difficulty in finding a position, the survey went on to ask if graduates had received a promotion since that first position. 49% of respondents have received a promotion since their first position. This is an impressive number as it means nearly half of the graduates of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program receive a promotion within five years of graduating, or less.

Graph 6: Promotions by Field

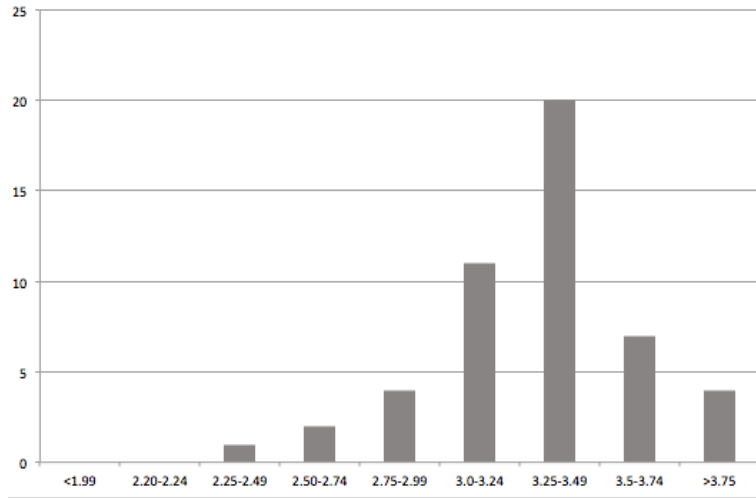


The graph above depicts the number of promotions received broken down into the different fields. As shown in the graph, only hotel management and destination management had more graduates receive a promotion than not receive one. Country club management was the only field to have no respondents receive a promotion. Event management, food and

beverage management, and the “other” categories all had at least half as many people receive a promotion as those who did not. These are impressive numbers for being within five years of graduating.

GPA of Graduates

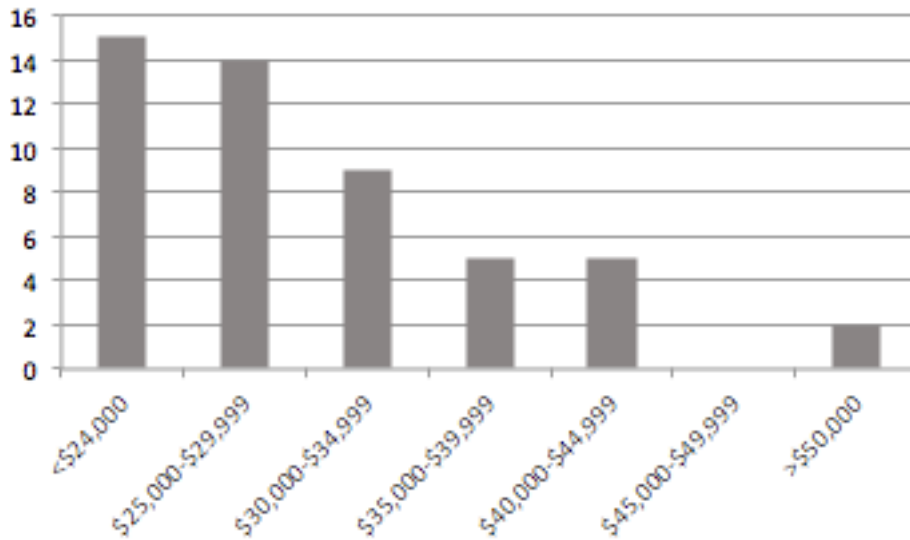
Graph 7: GPA of Graduates



As shown in the graph above as well as table 2, the majority of graduates of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program graduate with a cumulative GPA between 3.25 and 3.49. It is easy to see in the histogram that the GPAs are skewed to the left, this means that GPAs are higher in the program than a normal distribution.

Starting Salaries

Graph 8: Starting Salaries in First Position



As depicted in the graph above, the greatest number of graduates started with a salary less than \$24,000. Unfortunately, this graph is skewed to the right, meaning the higher the starting salary, the less respondents that received that salary. The average response was a 5.42. This means the respondents, on average, fell between the \$25,000-\$29,999 and the \$30,000-\$34,999 ranges. However, it is important to again note that 49% of graduates have received promotions within the past five years. This means that nearly half of the respondents received salary increases within five years. Even though the starting salaries in the hospitality and tourism management industry are relatively low, it is possible to quickly move up within the organizations.

GPA and Starting Salary Correlation

My advisor and I determined that it is important to analyze if GPA was significantly correlated with starting salary. GPA and starting salary were found to be statistically correlated. Using the Pearson's r as the correlation coefficient, it was found to be .283. This

shows that the correlation is positive: as GPA increases, starting salary also increases. The p-value for the two-tail test is .048, causing a statistically significant correlation at the alpha level of .05. It is extremely important to inform freshman students that GPA and starting salary are correlated, so they can strive to earn the highest GPA possible while at Appalachian State University.

Satisfaction with Job and Curriculum

Next, I analyzed results to determine if there is a correlation between current satisfaction with the graduate's job and satisfaction with how well the curriculum of Appalachian State prepared the graduate for the position.

The job satisfaction and satisfaction with curriculum are positively correlated. This means that as satisfaction with curriculum increases, satisfaction with the job also increases. Using Pearson's r as the correlation coefficient, $r=.554$. The p-value was less than .001, causing the correlation to be statistically significant at an alpha level of .05. This result is important to emphasize for the professors in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program. Based on these results, it is essential that students are satisfied with the curriculum they are learning as it relates to the work force. If more graduates are satisfied with their jobs, the more they are going to promote Appalachian State.

Helpfulness of Curriculum vs. Internship

I thought it would be interesting to analyze how helpful the students thought the internship was in preparing them for their first position versus how helpful they found the curriculum. 34% of respondents found the internship to be equally as helpful as the curriculum. However, overall graduates found the curriculum to be slightly more helpful than the internship. The average response for curriculum was 4.02, while the internship was

3.98, on a scale of one to five (one being not helpful whatsoever, 5 being extremely helpful). It is important to note that 94% of graduates found the curriculum to be neutral or greater. This means that only 6% of graduates found the curriculum to not be helpful in preparing for their first position. Meanwhile, 88% of graduates found the internship to be neutral or greater in helpfulness. This shows the strength of the curriculum and internship program as very small percentages found them to not be helpful.

Similar to helpfulness of curriculum in preparing for first position, the survey also asked graduates how satisfied they are with how well Appalachian State prepared them for their first position, on a scale of one to seven (one being very dissatisfied and seven being very satisfied). The average was found to be 6.78, meaning that on average students were satisfied with how well Appalachian State prepared them for their first position. No graduates responded lower than neutral, meaning that no graduates are dissatisfied with how well Appalachian State prepared them. 84% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. This, again, shows strength in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program at ASU as such a high percentage of graduates are satisfied with how well the education prepared them for their first position.

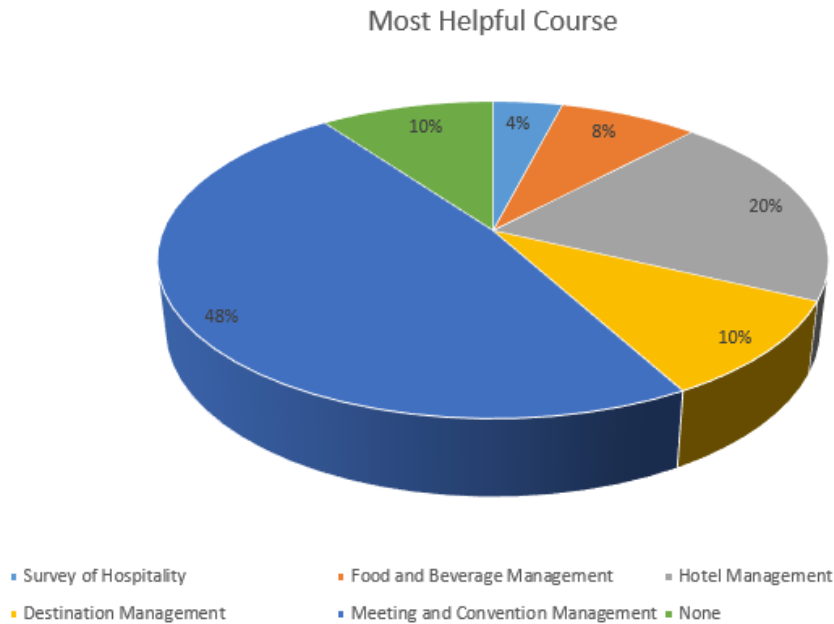
Gender and Helpfulness of Curriculum

Upon analyzing how helpful the curriculum of the program was in preparing the graduates for their first position, I analyzed if this was affected by gender. I found that the helpfulness of the curriculum differed by gender. Males found the curriculum, on average, to be 4.5, while females averages 3.93. Upon analyzing these results with the department chair, he hypothesized that these results could be due to having strictly male professors in the program until fall 2014. He believes that the male students may have benefited more from

male professors than female students did.

Most Helpful Course in Curriculum

I thought it would be beneficial for the program directors to know which of the five required hospitality and tourism management courses were most helpful in preparing the graduates for their first positions.



Nearly half of the respondents found the Meeting and Convention planning course to be the most helpful. This result was surprising, as event management did not have the greatest number of respondents enter this field upon graduation. 20% of graduates found the hotel management course to be most helpful. 10% found the destination management course to be most helpful. Another 10% found all courses to be equally helpful in preparing for the first position. Finally, 8% found the food and beverage management course to be most helpful. These results are important to note upon creating the curriculum for these courses. If the majority of the graduates are going into hotel management, then the majority of students should find the hotel management course to be most helpful. However, this is not currently

the case. This shows that this course should be evaluated further. It is also important to note that with nearly 50% of respondents choosing Meeting and Convention Planning as the most helpful course, this curriculum is obviously very strong.

Additional Courses to be Added to Curriculum

The final questions of the survey asked graduates to list additional courses to be added if they felt they were necessary. Only 40% of respondents felt an additional course was necessary to fully prepare students for the hospitality industry. The greatest number of recommended courses, 30%, was for a corporate event-planning course. Respondents expanded by saying a course that allows students to see every aspect of event planning is needed. An accounting course specific to the different hospitality institutions was suggested by 15% of respondents that answered this question. They went on to specifically suggest budgeting, technology related to accounting, and accounting principles specifically related to hotel and event management. 10% of respondents suggested a sales class pertaining specifically to hospitality fields. 10% also recommended a sustainable tourism course. A course in sustainable tourism was just added to the curriculum of Hospitality and Tourism Management program as an elective in Spring 2015. Another 15% suggested an extensive course in hotel and resort property management. These suggested courses are important for the program to take under consideration as they could lead to more satisfied graduates. Having completed the program and recently entered the work force, these respondents know best what needs to be added to the curriculum. However, only 40% of respondents felt that additional courses were necessary, so the program does not seem to be in dire need to add courses immediately.

Conclusion

This study looked at data from graduates of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program at Appalachian State University since 2010. Using a survey to research what fields graduates pursued careers in, job satisfaction, satisfaction with curriculum, and suggested curriculum improvements provided important results for potential students of the program as well as professors of the program. It is important to tell potential students the most popular fields Appalachian State graduates enter, starting salaries, the positive correlation between GPA and starting salary, and difficulty in finding jobs. Professors should note which courses were most helpful in preparing graduates for their first job, how satisfied graduates are with the curriculum, and suggested courses. I, personally, suggest that an event-planning course be added to the elective coursework of the program. Referring back to the most helpful courses, it is important to note that the greatest number of respondents found the meeting and convention planning course to be most helpful, but also stated that the curriculum needs an event planning course. This shows that the material may need to be expanded into two courses to allow it to continue to be most beneficial to students.

Based on the results of this survey, I developed several future studies that should be conducted that would be beneficial to the program. First, would be to research what can be done to improve satisfaction with the curriculum. Even though 94% of graduates answered neutral or greater, it was evident through these results that satisfaction with the curriculum is correlated to satisfaction with jobs. The more graduates that are satisfied with both the curriculum and their jobs, the greater promotion the program will receive.

Another study could be conducted to determine other ways that the program could assist graduates in finding jobs upon graduating. The average graduate answered the

difficulty level as being neutral. Research could be done to suggest methods to improve this rating to easy. Improving graduates' perceptions on ease of finding a job will again allow the program to receive better promotion.

It would also be beneficial for the program to conduct another survey in a few years to analyze if the helpfulness of the curriculum will still differ by gender. Now that a female professor has been added to the Hospitality and Tourism Management program, it would be interesting to see if the perception of helpfulness of the curriculum will increase for females and decrease for males.

In conclusion, this thesis revealed important information for the potential students of hospitality and tourism management programs. It also revealed improvements that could be made to program at Appalachian State University; however, the results showed that overwhelmingly graduates are satisfied with how well the Hospitality and Tourism Management program prepared them for their first position.

Survey

1) What year did you graduate from Appalachian State's Hospitality and Tourism

Management program?

- a. 2014
- b. 2013
- c. 2012
- d. 2011
- e. 2010

2) What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

3) What was your cumulative GPA upon graduation?

- a. >3.75
- b. 3.50-3.74
- c. 3.25-3.49
- d. 3.00-3.24
- e. 2.75-2.99
- f. 2.50-2.74
- g. 2.25- 2.49
- h. 2.00-2.24
- i. <1.99

4) What portion of the Hospitality and Tourism field was your internship?

- a. Hotel Management

- b. Food and Beverage
- c. Event Management
- d. Country Club Management
- e. Destination Management
- f. Facility/ Venue Management
- g. Travel Management
- h. Other

5) How helpful was your internship in finding a job upon graduation?

- a. Not Helpful Whatsoever
- b. Not Helpful
- c. Neutral
- d. Helpful
- e. Extremely Helpful

6) What portion of the Hospitality field was your first position in?

- a. Hotel Management
- b. Food and Beverage
- c. Event Management
- d. Country Club Management
- e. Destination Management
- f. Facility/ Venue Management
- g. Travel Management
- h. Other

7) Please name the first company you worked for after graduation.

8) Please name the official job title of your first position

9) How helpful was the curriculum of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program in preparing you for your first job?

- a. Not Helpful Whatsoever
- b. Not Helpful
- c. Neutral
- d. Helpful
- e. Extremely Helpful

10) How difficult did you feel it was to find your first position upon graduation?

- a. Extremely Difficult
- b. Difficult
- c. Somewhat Difficult
- d. Neutral
- e. Somewhat Easy
- f. Easy
- g. Very Easy

11) Did a connection from Appalachian State or the Hospitality program lead you to your first position?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12) If yes, please explain further.

13) Did you find the curriculum of one specific class to be more helpful in preparing you for your first position than the rest?

- a. Survey of Hospitality and Tourism Management
- b. Food and Beverage Management
- c. Hotel Management
- d. Destination Management
- e. Meeting and Convention Management
- f. None

14) What was your starting salary?

- a. > \$50,000
- b. \$45,000- \$49,999
- c. \$40,000- \$44,999
- d. \$35,000- \$39,999
- e. \$30,000- \$34,999
- f. \$25,000- \$29,999
- g. < \$24,999

15) Have you received a promotion?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16) If yes, please list current job title.

17) Overall, how satisfied are you with your current position?

- a. Very Dissatisfied
- b. Dissatisfied
- c. Somewhat Dissatisfied
- d. Neutral

e. Somewhat Satisfied

f. Satisfied

g. Very Satisfied

18) Overall, how satisfied are you with how well Appalachian State prepared you for your first position?

a. Very Dissatisfied

b. Dissatisfied

c. Somewhat Dissatisfied

d. Neutral

e. Somewhat Satisfied

f. Satisfied

g. Very Satisfied

19) Are there any courses and/or curriculum that you would like to see added to the program?

a. Yes

b. No

20) If yes, please explain further.

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