TOURISM AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY--
Relations with Industry

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Dean Ford, as leader of this session, has charged us with reporting on our experience in relating to industry as we teach tourism and develop further programs. Because our program at Texas A&M University is a bit unusual because it relates to resources development, our response to the several issues may vary from the experience of others. In our program we cover both the public and the private sectors and include parks, conservation, recreation and tourism within our scope. We usually have about 150 undergraduates and 100 graduate students (about half each, masters and Ph Ds) enrolled in our program each year.

Input from Industry

Industry, in our case, includes elements of commercial recreation, tourism and the many park and recreation agencies of the public sector. Although we have no formal structure for regular input from these sources, we believe we have reasonably good rapport. Many organizations, both within the state and the nation, have from time to time, made input in the form of comments at conferences, correspondence, and at forums such as this. But, generally, industry does not think curriculum. It thinks in terms of the person it will hire and the duties he is to perform. Detailed discussions about curricula and course content generally are not productive beyond very general policies.
How Program and Course Content are Derived

Generally our program and the courses are created through three steps: observation of the needs of the field; individual faculty initiative; and departmental faculty consensus. For example, contact with the field indicated a growing concern over liability. We therefore hired a competent attorney with experience in resources development law and litigation. He has initiated course proposals and the faculty have reviewed and ratified these approaches.

Our programs are limited to our own faculty capability. For example, we do not attempt to duplicate education that is the perogative of others, such as landscape architecture or physical education.

Internship

We tried student internship at the undergraduate level and it failed because of poor performance of students. Now, even though it is not required, many elect to obtain experience with agencies and firms, which is monitored by the faculty.

One track of the masters program includes a mandatory 6 months internship that is monitored by a faculty member and a supervisor within the agency or firm. This has proven to be extremely successful, with several students becoming full staff members upon graduation.

In a sense, our Ph D students do intern work as part-time teachers. We feel that they should have this experience before graduating with this terminal degree.

How Do We Meet Career Needs

Because our program is offered at three levels (baccalaureate, masters, Ph D) we have three different directions.
At the baccalaureate level, we have had some confusion over the years. These students are obtaining a four-year university education and are also interested in entrance jobs. In the past most have entered public park and recreation departments. However, because we do offer courses in commercial recreation and tourism and because we have several qualified faculty interested in these areas, we have experienced an increasing demand for this specialty. Recognizing that we were unable to provide a "hands-on" training for the many different channels of tourism and commercial recreation and tourism, we have used our electives to provide foundations in marketing, accounting, and business management. This is proving to be very successful and we have an increasing number of students going into work with attractions, chambers of commerce, travel agencies, and resort management.

At the masters level, the program is tailor-made to each individual, allowing those interested in tourism to select an appropriate set of courses. Students have the option of a thesis or non-thesis direction, again adapting to their individual backgrounds and career goals. Many of the past masters students have entered public agency work but an increasing number are entering the tourism field. For example, a recent masters student (non-thesis) prepared one professional paper on the structure of governmental and private management of tourism in Puerto Rico and is now interning at a hotel in Washington, D.C. She will be capable of obtaining a position with Puerto Rico's tourism agency in the future.

Our Ph D level is very flexible but stays within the tourism and recreation resource development area.

Our best barometer for meeting career needs is the continued employment of our students and feedback from them afterwards.
New Career Areas

We do not anticipate major changes in direction for our graduates but do see some adjustments. We anticipate greater emphasis on litigation, marine recreation, tourism, historic restoration, interpretation, and broad-scale tourism policy making at national and state levels.

Does Industry Redecognize the Value of Education?

My personal observation is that industry does recognize increasingly the value of educational programs. But, again, we must as educators recognize that industry's perspective is different from ours.

Personally, I have two goals for education, only one of which is of prime concern to industry:

a. to become better educated. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that there is merit in education for no other reason than to understand the world and how it functions, involving courses such as humanities, history, chemistry, political science, natural science. This goes beyond skill development. It is a personal goal for the student—to be stimulated into greater curiosity and greater search for knowledge.

b. to gain insight into a profession or a field. Certainly, we are obligated to consider this aspect of educational programs. It is of considerable interest to both student and future employer, but it isn't the only thing.

How can Greater Visibility and Marketing be Achieved?

There is little question that we must increase our rapport with industry. Certainly, we can make more frequent contact, exchange ideas, give them more information on our objectives and especially our problems.
Also, we need to get our administrations to recognize the need for faculty to get out of the classroom to attend and participate in national and international meetings. Because of the nature of our activity, we need to utilize field trips more frequently and more effectively. Too often faculty are penalized for these seemingly unorthodox methods.

As educators, we should do a better job of followup of our students after they are on the job. We need to develop case histories and conscientiously seek out past student recommendations for improvement. We could do a better job of tapping past graduates to make some field contacts for us.

Concluding comments

Being one of the few senior citizens in tourism-recreation education, I believe I can exercise my right of seniority in some closing comments, hopefully of wisdom. I would like to make just three points.

1. Because tourism is of such great complexity, there is no need for all of us to do the same things. Let Cornell be different from Las Vegas; let the New School be different from Michigan State; let Niagara be different from us at Texas A&M. If any thing, in today's world, we need even more diversity than uniformity. Therefore, I tend to resist moves toward curriculum standardization.

2. Because tourism education must grow, who is training the educators? We can no longer rely on retreats, such as myself. We need new and imaginative programs directed not only to the details of tourism management but also to tourism education, itself. Much more study must be given to the proper subject-matter areas and special emphasis placed on training future teachers.
3. Because tourism includes international travel, it can be the greatest instrument of peace and world understanding. This may surprise you. But, I do not believe that in our educational programs we are exposing our students to the richness and complication of international situations. Few students learn about any area other than their own. In today's world, this lack of cultural understanding is fostering divisiveness and conflict. Tourism, because it is international in scope, has a vital role to play. But, are we including this dimension in our educational programs? If travel is truly to become as broadening as we brag about, we'd better start teaching it so that the industry can do a better job of practicing it.