

ABSTRACT

Professional - Designed Academic Curriculum: Key Strategy for Empowerment of Graduate Employment in Hospitality and Tourism Industry:

จินดา เตชะวณิช

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As Thailand becomes one of the major tourist destinations of the world, demands for Human Resources to serve the Hospitality and Tourism Industry have increased substantially. Higher Education Institutions in Thailand both public and private Universities which offer academic programs in Hospitality and Tourism Education have expanded significantly during the past decade.

To empower graduate employment in Hospitality and Tourism Industry, prime importance must be emphasized on the curriculum structure and study programs specially developed and co-designed by Higher Education Institutions and Professional Associations in Hospitality and Tourism Industry such as Thai Hotel Association (THA), Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Thailand International Convention Association (TICA) the selection of the major courses, major electives and free electives; adjustment of criteria and qualification of lecturers and faculty members, professional skills and experience of instructors; new teaching methodologies especially learning by doing or student-center; faculty- student mobility; credit-transfer scheme; and the enforcement of Co-operative Education through university- industry partnership.

The ultimate goal is to create the ideal graduates of international standard qualifications instilled with a touch of Thai hospitality, fully equipped with core competencies, professional skills, multi-lingual talent, ICT literate, great personality, service-mind and most significant professional ethics – to serve both the local and global market in Hospitality and Tourism Industry in the globalization era under the FTA context.

Key Words: curriculum structure, graduate employment, faculty criteria and qualification, co-operative education, university-industry partnership.

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As Thailand becomes one of the major tourist destinations of the world, demands for Human Resources to serve the Hospitality and Tourism Industry have increased substantially. Higher Education Institutions in Thailand both public and private Universities which offer academic programs in Hospitality and Tourism Education have expanded significantly during the past decade.

To empower graduate employment in Hospitality and Tourism Industry, prime importance must be emphasized on the curriculum structure and study programs specially developed and co-designed by Higher Education Institutions and Professional Associations in Hospitality and Tourism Industry such as Thai Hotel Association (THA), Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Thailand International Convention Association (TICA); the selection of the major courses, major electives and free electives; adjustment of criteria and qualification of lecturers and faculty members, professional skills and experience of instructors; new teaching methodologies especially learning by doing or student-center; faculty- student mobility; credit-transfer scheme; and the enforcement of Co-operative Education through university- industry partnership.

Thailand Hospitality and Tourism Industry: An Overview

Following a troubled year for Thailand's tourism industry in 2005 in the aftermath of the tsunami, analysts have predicted positive growth for the remainder of the 2006, despite current negative factors. Although tourism business operators have reported a slowdown due to on going domestic political conflicts and rising fuel prices and interest rates, there are positive factors that are expected to spur the industry forward.

Moreover, the recent celebrations of the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty the King's accession to the throne would attract attention from the world's media, while the opening of Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi international airport in the second half of the year should all boost local tourism.

The growing middle class in the Asia Pacific region, with higher incomes and more leisure time, and the rapid growth of low-cost airlines to make air travel more affordable, would also have a positive impact on Thailand hospitality and tourism industry.

In addition, Thailand has led the Asia-Pacific region in signing open-skies agreements between Asian nations, and in reducing visa restrictions – these initiatives along with

the opening up of new direct routes to the region, from the United States, Russia and South Africa, for example, are also attracting increasing amounts of foreign tourists.

According to the Beau Thai report, the World Tourism Organization forecasts that by 2020 the number of international arrivals will more than double to 1.6 billion people per year from 700 million currently, and 400 million are estimated to be seen in East Asia and the Pacific. And in this region, Thailand will be the third largest recipient of international tourist arrivals.

Moreover, the recent Asia Travel Intentions Survey 2006 confirmed the bright prospects predicted by Beau Thai and revealed that the respondents from 10 markets which included the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, Japan, China, Korea and Australia have indicated Thailand as their most likely destination they considered for a holiday.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand also reported the growth of international tourist arrivals to Thailand during the first quarter of this year at 29.4%.

The growth of the Tourism industry around the world and particularly in Thailand has resulted in the increasing demand for trained professionals and skilled staff.

According to the Thai Hotel Association (THA) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), more than 8,000 newly graduates are required to serve the market.

Hospitality and Tourism Industry:

The hospitality and Tourism Industry is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. An exciting aspect is that the industry comprises so many different aspects and professions. Common dynamics in this diverse industry include the delivery of services and products and the customer-guest impressions of them.

Hospitality Industry: A People Industry – the service provider

Before we go into further details, it might be a good idea for us to understand the terminology of “Hospitality”.

What is Hospitality?

Providing hospitality means offering a welcoming environment to visitors. The hospitality industry is without doubt *a people industry*. The product of Hospitality industry is “*Service*”.

Services offered by the hospitality industry include the following:

- Accommodation
- Food Service
- Beverage Service
- Entertainment
- Theme Parties & Festivals
- Recreation
- Relaxation

- Spas and Health Clubs
- Functions and banquets
- Meetings
- Commercial catering
- Security
- Gaming

Moreover the hospitality industry is also closely related to other sectors of the tourism industry such as:

- Travel Agents
- Tourist Information Centers
- Airlines
- Transport Operators
- Tourist Attractions (Theme Parks)
- Retail Outlets
- Gift Shop

Role of Higher Education Institutions: The Human Resource Provider for Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

As Thailand becomes one of the major tourist destinations of the world, demands for human resources at entry-management level from the Hotel and Tourism Industries to serve the market have increased substantially. Higher Education Institutions both State and Private universities offering Programs in Hospitality and Tourism both have expanded significantly during the past decade to produce graduates to serve the industry.

The state universities include Kasetsart University, Ramkhamhaeng University Mahidol University International College ,Chiangmai University, Prince of Songkla University, Khon Kaen University,Silapakorn University,Sukhothai Thammathiraj Radjapat Institutions, Srinakarinviroj University

According to the survey, private universities offering undergraduate program in Hospitality and Tourism include Rangsit University, Stanford International College, Dusit Thani College, Siam University, ABAC, Kasem Bundit University, Bangkok University, St.John University, Durakitbandit University, Thai Chamber of Commerce University and Sripatum University.

These universities delivered their program both in Thai or International programs. According to the study, most lecturers of Higher Education Institutions, the providers of the undergraduates to serve the job market in Hospitality and Tourism Industries – despite holding the Master Degree in Hospitality and Tourism as required by Commissions on Higher Education (CHE) seem to lack professional skills and hands-on experience in this field. Very few have had actually working in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

Consequently, the study shows most curriculums for Hospitality & Tourism Studies in Higher Education Institutions seem to be following out-dated pattern without serving neither the practical purpose of the industries nor creating the competencies and skills for the graduate required by the hospitality and tourism industry.

The curriculum structure seems to lack concentration on either field as reflected by the availability of the major courses, the major electives and the free electives. Students are not properly provided the opportunity to truly concentrate their studies in either of the field but forced to take a combination of three subjects here and there i.e. three subjects of Hotel, three subjects of Tourism and/or two subject of Airline.

This is reflected by the name of the degree, which indicates as Hospitality and Tourism, as a result it requires students to have knowledge of both area..As mentioned earlier, hospitality industry covers a variety of industry and Tourism is actually part of Hospitality industry as tourism is all related to service and people.

Consequently, students who enrolled in the Hospitality & Tourism would have very wide-spread general information on Hotel Management, Tourism or Airline business, but no actual in-depth knowledge on any particular field to empower them for their employment or enhance them to be successful in their career path.

Professional - Designed Academic Curriculum: Key Strategy for Empowerment of Graduate Employment in Hospitality & Tourism Industry

In order to develop the academic curriculum for Hospitality and Tourism suitable for both local and international markets, Higher Education Institutions should join hands and work closely with business sectors especially professionals in hospitalities and tourism industries in designing the tailor-made or made-to-order curriculum structure, and study program. Concentration should be made on the availability and the selection of the major courses, the major electives and the free electives.

Meanwhile, joint-efforts should be made in recruiting more experts and professionals with practical experiences in each particular field – hotel, tourism or airlines – to serve as full-time lecturers not just occasionally guest-speakers. Such effort might be limited by the rigid and bureaucratic view of the CHE which indicated the criteria of academic qualification for university lecturers to have at least the Master degree in that particular field without considering the professional skills and experience needed to be a qualified lecturer.

Most of the hoteliers or professionals in Hotel or Tourism Industry have made their way to the top through their professional experiences and accumulating their competencies and skills through their various positions in the field as they climbed up their corporate ladder to be top executives of the organization they belong.

Moreover, new approaches on instruction such as site visit, role-play, web-based, e-learning utilizing audio-visual aids should be implemented. Credit-transfer between institutions both local and overseas should be allowed in this competitive edge. Co-operative education should definitely be emphasized to provide students with hands-on experience in the service industry.

Professional - Designed Academic Curriculum for Hospitality & Tourism Industry

In designing the curriculum for Hospitality & Tourism Industry to create the ideal graduates and professionals to serve the industry and business sector, following components should be taken into consideration:

- I. Name of the degree
- II. Curriculum Structure and Content of the curriculum
- III. Teaching Methodology
- IV. Profile of faculty members
- V. Co-operative Education Program

I. Name of the degree: B.A. or B.B.A.

As most hospitality and tourism industry especially Hotel in particular require management skill and business knowledge to be able to run a successful operation, it is recommended that the BBA or Bachelor of Business Administration should be the ideal degree for Hotel Management and Tourism Management rather than B.A. or Bachelor of Arts.

Moreover, in order to create graduates and professionals in particular field, the degree should not be BBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management, but either BBA in Hotel Management, or BBA in Tourism Management.

This is due to the fact that Hotel and Tourism may belong to the same Hospitality Industry but yet totally different in terms of nature of business, operation management as well as competencies and skills needed to operate a successful operation.

II. Curriculum of Structure and Content

Study shows most curriculum structures of Hospitality and Tourism offered by Higher Education Institutions both state and private consist of the following:

Curriculum Structure for Four-year Program

No. of Credit:	125 – 145 credits
General Education:	Humanities/Social Science/Math & Science/Language
Core Courses:	Depends on whether the degree offered is Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Business Administration
Major Courses:	Most courses are theoretical without lab

Electives:	Language courses: French, Japanese, German, Chinese, Spanish
Free Electives:	List of courses to be selected or any courses offered in the Undergraduate program approved by the advisor.
Internship:	Credit or Non-credit divided into two periods of 200 hours and 400 hours.

Suggestions for the Professional - Designed Curriculum Structure & Content

In order to provide students with required knowledge, competencies and skills and prepared them to be successful in their career path, adjustments should be made in the following area:

Selection of the major courses:

The complete line of courses should be made available for students to provide overall picture of the hotel or tourism structure, management and operation. The organization and operation of the various divisions of the hotel or tourism operation, the functions and responsibilities of each department, the human resource developments and training programs, the in-depth knowledge of the operation department or revenue-generating department as well as the supporting departments including marketing and sales, accounting and purchasing.

Adjustment of course structure:

Adjustment of course structure from **3 (3- 0)** which is 3 credit hours with only theory to **3 (2-2)** which means 3 credit hours with 2 hours theory and 2 hour lab/ practical experience in the following courses: Introduction to Hotel Management, Hotel Front Office Operation, Housekeeping, Food & Beverage Service, Food & Beverage Cost Control, Restaurant Management, Marketing and Senior Project.

Elective Courses:

Elective courses should be offered in various categories for students to select according to their interest as follows: Rooms Division, Food & Beverage Marketing & Sales, Administrative (Accounting, Purchasing, Cost Control, Receiving, Stores) Human Resource (Personnel & Training)

Internship:

Internship should be adjusted to co-operative education for students to gain on-the-job training and hands-on experience as well as the opportunity to be recruited as employee right after graduation.

Co-operative education must be assigned in the last semester of the fourth year of studies for mutual benefit of the company/ organization who contribute to the program by providing job training opportunity to students and the students on the other hand gain the chance to make good impression on their potential employers and get job offer right after finishing the co-operative education program..

Language Courses:

All language courses should be integrated as Professional Languages Courses to reduce repetition and time consuming.

Moreover, the study shows that most students who took 4-6 English Language Courses plus another 4-6 Elective Foreign Language Courses such as French, Japanese, Chinese for the four-year program face the same problem still can understand or speak these language only at the minimum or average level.

The study shows that following obstacles have affected the efficiency of Language teaching and learning and consequently the unsatisfactory outcome of students Language proficiency.

- Over –emphasize on grammar/structure
- Insufficient practical / professional terminologies or language
- Imported Text Books – unfamiliar names/ places for Thai Students
- Instructors for Lab/ are foreigners who do not have sufficient knowledge on Thai/Culture tourist destinations/names
Instructors do not have practical experience in hotels/travel agents/ airlines.
- Over-crowded class size

Suggestions for the Professional - Designed Language Courses:

Integrate Fundamental Language Courses to Languages for Professionals – English for Hotel, English for Tourism and English for Airline.

Moreover, following **ingredients** should be added:

- Local Flavor – Thai Context to preserve Thai Cultural heritages
- Local Wisdom
- Thai Arts & Crafts
- Local Tourist attractions / destinations
- Do's and Don'ts in Thailand

III. Teaching Methodology

Besides the frequently-used teaching methods based on text books, transparent sheets, whiteboard and lecture, new teaching methodology should be developed and implemented such as:

- Web-based learning
- Site Visit/Field Trip
- Learning by Doing
- Role Play
- Co-operative Education
- Hotel Operation Training Center

Web-based Learning:

Following web-sites should be logged-in and searched for information, data to use as knowledge-base.

<http://www.ehotelthailand.com/>

<http://www.tat.or.th/>

<http://www.thailand.com/>

<http://www.thaiairways.com/>

<http://www.amadeus.com/>

<http://www.newsasia.travel.com/>

<http://www.expedia.com/>

Hotel Site Visit/ Field Trip to Tourist Attractions:

- To create the first impression of Hotel Atmosphere and Working Life Style.
- To get the overall aspects of Hotel Operations
- To inspire students to achieve their goal in career development in Hotel Industry.
- To familiarize students with major tourist attractions required by TAT to qualify for Official Tour Guide License.

Learning by doing or Learner-centered Teaching Method:

Senior Project for Seminar Courses to encourage student's responsibility, creativity, teambuilding spirit, organizing skill, problem-solving, communication skill, marketing, administration and financial skills.

Food Festivals, Theme Parties organized by students such as A Touch of Thailand, Asian Food Festival, In Celebration of the 220th Anniversary of Bangkok, Discovery Thailand, A student-run Travel Agent organizing a package tour or one-day trip and conduct a real-tour operation e.g. Package Tour to Historical Sites in Sukhotai/Buriram/ Chiangmai or one-day trip to Koh Kred.

Role Play:

Students should be provided hands-on experience as well as practice their Language Skill through **role play** as staff of the Hotel's Operation both in Rooms Division and Food & Beverage Division

Rooms Division:

- Hotel Operator
- Receptionist
- Reservation Officer
- Front Office/ Cashier
- Bell Boy/ Concierge/ Doorman

Food & Beverage Division:

- Hostess/Waitress
- Room Service Order Taker
- Restaurant Manager
- Cocktail Waitress
- Bartender

IV. Profiles of Faculty members:

The current situation shows most lecturers of Higher Education Institutions – the providers of the undergraduates to serve the job markets in Hospitality and Tourism – seem to lack professional skills and real-life working experience in this field.

Consequently, the study shows most curriculums for Hotel & Tourism Studies in Higher Education Institutions seem to be following out-dated pattern without serving the practical purposes of the industries.

The current situation shows the following :

- most lecturers are either newly graduates in Hotel & Tourism with no practical experience
- old-timers graduating with Master's Degree from other fields without practical experience.
- A very few ex-hoteliars/faculty members with Master's degrees or Ph.D with practical experience.

In order to develop the human resource in hospitality & tourism industry, following measurements must be implemented:

- Train the trainers,
- Recruitment of professionals
- Adjustment of qualifications of lecturers
- Networking of both local and international

Train the trainers:

Human Resource Development for faculty members/ lecturers to acquire necessary practical experiences in Hospitality & Tourism Industry by taking on-job training with hotels or travel agents.

Recruitment of ex-hotel executives and hotel veterans:

Invite ex-hoteliars with years of experiences to be full-time lecturer/ part-time lecturer/ Lab Instructor/ and guest speakers.

Adjustment of Qualification for lecturers in Professional Field:

Following adjustments of qualification to attract more Professionals to join the Academic world and become lecturers in Higher-Education Institutions should be implemented:

- Master’s Degree in Hospitality & Tourism Management plus minimum one to two year experience in the field.
- Master’s Degree in other fields plus minimum two-year experience in the field,
- Bachelor’s Degree plus minimum three-year experiences in the field. Higher Vocational Diploma plus minimum three-year experiences in the field for lab instructor.

Networking:

Local networking among universities for expertise exchange International networking with leading universities for faculty exchange and professional development programme.

V. Co-operative Education:

Co-operative Education for on-job training to gain practical experiences for students should be provided and incorporated to the curriculum as credit-earned course to replace the non-credit internship.

The cooperative education will be successful only through personal connection and business networking.

Following Co-operation between Higher Education Institutions and other partners should be established:

- Professional Associations – Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA)
- Governmental Organizations – Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)
- Public Enterprise – Thai Airways International, Airport Authority of Thailand
- Private Sectors – International and Local Chain Hotels, TraveAgents, Tour Operators.

CONCLUSION:

Higher Education Institutions are the leading forces in training the new generations to serve the Hospitality and Tourism Industry. The professional designed academic curriculum for hospitality and tourism management must have a profound impact on academic perspectives and hospitality business practices to serve the market need.

The ultimate goal is to compete for Top Ranking in Thailand or even better in Asia to produce the ideal graduates with international standard qualifications with a touch of Thai hospitality fully equipped with professional skill, multi-lingual talent, computer literate, good personality and service-mind with and most importantly, professional ethics – to serve the Hospitality and Tourism Industry in the globalization and free-trade era.

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