

Body of Knowledge for a Tourism Curriculum: Revisited

William L. Obenour
Bowling Green State University

Julie Lengfelder
Bowling Green State University

Jackie Cuneen
Bowling Green State University

Abstract

The purpose of this article was to compare the tourism course titles offered at National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) accredited universities and colleges with the course offerings selected by tourism professionals. This study has implications for the formation of tourism accreditation standards through the analysis of the standardized core of courses titles in a tourism and recreation curricula. United States higher education institutions (N=85) were identified by using the NRPA accreditation listing of institutions and their institutions' websites. The course title, introduction to travel and tourism, was the most common baccalaureate course available and 8 additional courses appeared in 25% or more of the baccalaureate programs. Course titles for masters programs indicated 5 of the top 7 course titles were business orientated. This study contributed to the literature on tourism education by: (a) supporting the popularity of the business orientation of tourism education, (b) identifying a broader social science base in tourism curricula, (c) recognizing the lack of course titles involving tourism impacts, and (d) supporting further investigation of standards by accrediting organizations due to the popularity of tourism courses.

Keywords: curriculum, tourism, education, recreation, content analysis, accreditation

Introduction

The purpose of this article was to compare the tourism course titles offered at National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) accredited universities and colleges with the offerings selected by tourism professionals. Tourism, as a recognizable force in society for employment in professional positions, continues to increase in importance in higher education (Goeldner, 2001). Tourism curricula has often been integrated into recreation and leisure programs (Cohen, 1979), although these configurations have traditionally been based on the application of theoretical and conceptual constructs between leisure, recreation and tourism (e.g., Hamilton-Smith, 1987;

Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Moore, Cushman, & Simmons, 1995; Ryan, 1996). The similarities between tourism, recreation and leisure have not always been embraced in the design of academic curriculums as the three areas continue to strive for academic prominence (Smith & Godbey, 1991). Influential recreation and leisure associations such as the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and American Association of Leisure and Recreation (AALR) do not accredit tourism curricula.

The issue of accreditation, tourism core courses and level of standardization of the core across universities is an ongoing debate among academics and tourism leaders. Diverse tourism models comprising the frameworks for a core body of knowledge have been proposed, although none of the following have become the basis for accreditation standards in North America: (a) Goeldner's (2001) extension of Jafari's and Ritchie's model, (b) Jafari's model (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981); (c) Hawkins & Hunt (1988); (d) Leiper 1990; and (e) the national leisure group (Airey & Johnson, 1999). In the United States, the issue of core courses for accreditation is especially relevant as tourism spending continues to expand in the United States (TIA, 2005) with corresponding opportunities for professional careers growing.

This paper continues to focus on core courses for a tourism curriculum with implications for accreditation standards that would further enhance tourism as educational foundation in colleges and universities in North America. This paper updates a previous analysis of the tourism core courses by revisiting a set of tourism core courses used to survey tourism professionals concerning a tourism curriculum (Lengfelder, Obenour, & Cuneen, 1994). The importance of this article is to contribute research to develop a tourism curriculum as it exists within an accredited recreation and leisure academic unit. The results of this research have implications for the continued professionalization of tourism and the establishment of a tourism core of courses for the accreditation standards of tourism curricula. The results of this research will be compared to the professionals' perceptions of the tourism core as seen in the original Lengfelder, et al. (1994) article.

Literature Review

A body of knowledge consisting of core courses for tourism curricula has been debated in the literature concerning tourism in higher education. The literature review comprises topics that impact on the development of core courses for a tourism curricula and accreditation standards. The literature review includes the following areas: (a) arguments on whether tourism is a discipline or a field, (b) the influence of scholarship versus practitioner foci on the type of core courses, and (c) advantages and disadvantages of a standardized core of courses.

Discipline or Field

The structure of the core of tourism courses is impacted by the academic institutionalization of the study of tourism. Some tourism educators have argued that

tourism is a field with an interdisciplinary focus with courses integrated from non-tourism disciplines (Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Gunn 1987; Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Tribe, 1997). This educational model of a field melds several disciplines' courses into a focus on tourism with the integration of the concepts part of the teaching approach (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981). According to Tribe (1997), this is the essence to a field with the study of tourism similar to other educational fields such as engineering and not a discipline. Tribe (1997) advocated two subfields of tourism which were designated tourism business and tourism studies. Tourism studies subfield includes non-business topics and courses such as environmental impacts, carrying capacity, and social impacts.

Leiper (1981, 2000) argued for the disciplinary approach or tourology based on a general theory of tourism with a distinct tourism faculty and content. Leiper (1981) reasoned an interdisciplinary approach caused a fragmented curriculum with the result of students not understanding the interrelatedness of the tourism phenomena. The disciplinary approach develops courses that are distinct to the theory and study of tourism. Even with the advantage of distinct tourism faculty and course content, the tourism field and especially the subfield of tourism business has been increasing in popularity (Airey & Johnson, 1999).

Scholarly or Practitioner Emphasis

The body of knowledge contained within the core courses of a tourism curriculum can be derived from a scholarly approach, practitioner approach or a combination of the two approaches (Ritchie, 1988). Kaplan (1982) defined one group of tourism educational institutions as entities who were proactive and *determined* the industry needs. This proactive group was characterized by pursuing tourism curriculum that was based on a business approach concentrated on analysis, management, and work experience (Kaplan, 1982). The second group of institutions was reactive and asked what industry wants. This approach was characterized by a training approach used by faculty that covered industry skills and functions for a career in operations (Kaplan, 1982).

The practitioner approach through the perceptions of tourism professionals has been advocated in tourism curriculum design (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Churchward & Riley, 2002; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Koh, 1995; Lengfelder, et al., 1994; Weenen & Shafer, 1983). The potential disadvantage with solely depending on tourism professionals in curriculum design is an overbalance of course subjects that are vocational, career and industry focused (Airey & Johnson, 1999).

This tension between tourism professionals and tourism faculty in curriculum design is often resolved through the integration of the scholarly and practitioner philosophies. One form of integration is a curriculum based on the scholarly philosophies of understanding tourism as a social science, plus the industry philosophy of a foundation of industry competencies (Hill, 1992). Jafari and Ritchie (1981) labeled

this integration as a mix of conceptual learning and skill development. The input of tourism professionals is important in the establishment of a tourism curriculum, although there should be an integration of scholarly concepts and industry competencies for the education of tourism students.

Standardized Tourism Core Curriculum

A standardized core constitutes a set of tourism cores or content areas that forms a tourism curriculum and is consistent across universities and colleges. For example, the tourism educators in the United Kingdom has discussed and evaluated a standard core of knowledge for the study of tourism (Dale & Robinson, 2001). Educators (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Buergermeister, D'Amore, Jafari, & Pearce, 1992; Richards, 1998) identified the benefits for a standard core of tourism courses as the following: (a) facilitate definition of course and teaching objectives, (b) assist in communicating the tourism offerings to the public and industry, (c) facilitate course validation and quality assurance, (d) facilitate the development of conceptual understanding and progression, and (e) facilitate the transferability of credits. The major disadvantages of standardization of the core curriculum are the stifling of innovation and creativity and reduced flexibility in meeting the needs of the industry (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Dale, & Robinson, 2001). Hawkins and Hunt (1988) posit the standardization argument by stating that one curriculum model neither could nor should be designed to meet all of the various elements of the tourism system.

Four perspectives of a tourism core body of knowledge are reviewed and include the following: (a) National Leisure Group in the United Kingdom, (Airey & Johnson, 1999); (b) Jafari (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981); (c) Weenen and Shafer (1983); and (d) Koh (1995). Three of the four perspectives comprise specific course titles or subjects for a tourism curriculum and are compared in Table 1. Airey and Johnson described the seven core areas as defined by the National Leisure Group as the following: (a) meaning and nature of tourism, (b) structure of the industry, (c) dimension of tourism and issues of measurement, (d) significance and impact of tourism, (e) marketing of tourism, (f) tourism planning and management, and (e) policy and management in tourism were endorsed by academic institutions. In their study they found that 94% of the courses in colleges and universities in the United Kingdom covered 5 out of 7 core areas formulated by the National Leisure Group.

In addition to the core content developed by the National Leisure Group, Jafari and Ritchie (1981) described a tourism framework based on the interrelationship of tourism with multiple disciplines (see Table 1). This framework specifies subject areas for tourism which is useful in formulating course titles and content. Churchward and Riley (2002) utilized a modified version of Jafari's framework to analyze job knowledge of professionals in the United Kingdom. They found marketing, recreation/leisure, business/finance and economics to be the most common knowledge areas across respondents from diverse industry sectors.

The third perspective of a tourism core body of knowledge was researched by Weenen and Shafer (1983). The courses used by Weenen and Shafer (see Table 1) were further expanded by Lengfelder, et al. (1994) through the addition of three course topics (historical anthropology of tourism, political geography of tourism, and popular culture/leisure lifestyles). Lengfelder, et al. then used the 24 course topics in a survey of international tourism professionals to compare graduate/postgraduate course topics with undergraduate course topics. Of the 24 courses, 4 courses had significantly higher importance as graduate/postgraduate course topics compared to baccalaureate course topics. These courses were business lobbying, international marketing, programming in adult education, and systems analysis of services. Three courses, which were the administration of tourism, communication, and introduction to travel and tourism, were significantly lower as graduate courses and more appropriate for a baccalaureate program.

The fourth perspective advocated by Koh (1995) developed a list of course elements involving 3 different tourism sectors. The course elements were then used to survey tourism professionals with Koh finding 15 course elements listed, in Table 1, to be very important. In addition to tourism professionals, educators were surveyed and 12 of 26 course elements were significantly different between educators and professionals. Educators rated significantly higher compared to professionals on courses such as natural resources, societies and cultures, government/citizenship, marketing, marketing research, and laws. Professionals rated significantly higher compared to educators on courses such as managerial accounting, hotel/restaurant operations, and practicum after year three.

The courses in Table 1 are an inventory of course titles/subjects that are common across the three models. All three of the course/subject models have overlapping course subjects, especially for marketing and planning/development. The first half of Table 1 lists the topics that have similar titles between all three or at least two of the models with the topics on the same line. Each model had distinctive course subjects as seen in the later half of Table 1. Identifying the common courses is a curriculum inventory of courses for a tourism curriculum. In addition, the distinct courses may be appropriate for determining course specialization areas.

TABLE 1
Curriculum Models with Course Titles or Subject Areas

Jafari (Jafari and Ritchie, 1981)	Weenen & Shafer, (1983)	Koh, 1995
Marketing of tourism	Marketing in tourism	Theories of marketing
Tourism planning and development	Planning management in tourism	Principles of tourism development
Management of tourism organizations	Administration of tourism	
Economic impacts	Economics	
Geography of tourism	Political geography	
Sociology of tourism	Socio-psychological impacts	
Fundamentals of transportation	Transportation	
Tourism education	Analysis of teaching	
	Personnel management	Human resource management
	Communication skills	Written communication - Interpersonal relation skills
	Introduction to information	Microcomputer literacy processing
Role of hospitality and tourism		Hotel/restaurant operations
Unique course/subjects for each author		
Design with nature	Advertising	Ethics/social responsibility
Host -guest relationships	Business lobbying	Entrepreneurship innovation
Recreation management	Tourism policies	Managing service quality
Rural tourism	Human Behavior in Organizations	Managerial accounting
Tourism laws	International marketing	Travel/tourism industry
Tourism motivation	Introduction to Travel/Tourism	Practicum after year 1
World without borders	Marketing research	Practicum after year 2
	Social/physical impacts	Practicum after yr. 3
	Principles of public relations	
	Programming in adult education	
	Systems analysis of services	

Method

This study was a follow-up to an investigation conducted in 1993 - 94 that ascertained tourism professionals' perceptions of courses in a higher education tourism curriculum. The original Lengfelder et al. (1994) study analyzed U.S. and international tourism professionals' ideas regarding appropriate coursework and assessed content differences between baccalaureate and graduate courses. The current inquiry was conducted to determine if, after 10 years of development, tourism curricula reflect the coursework suggested by the tourism professionals who participated in the 1994 study.

Data Collection

All NRPA accredited four-year institutions' websites were evaluated, even though, some did not have a tourism major or contained tourism in the unit's title. The website for each program as accessed on the accreditation page of NRPA (2003) for four-year universities in Canada and the United States. Ninety-eight accredited four-year institutions' websites were listed and 85 institutions were analyzed. Thirteen institutions' websites, listed on the NRPA website, were not active or did not contain a listing of course titles. Unit names (i.e., department or major) were coded as nominal data with either a 1 representing that the unit name had the word, tourism, or a 2, representing that the unit name did not contain the word tourism.

Data were collected by a trained coder who examined institutions' official on-line curricula assessed through each institution's website. Because institutions' course titles may not have matched the verbatim titles as listed in the original Lengfelder et al. (1994) study, any combination of matching words in the titles were considered a match. Frequencies and percentage of curricula using the course titles were calculated in order to describe the types of courses that tourism major programs offer to undergraduate and graduate students. Simple frequencies were determined to be the best measure since there was a small sample of programs.

The original study by Lengfelder et al. (1994) yielded 24 courses that practicing professionals evaluated on a scale ranging from 5 = *Extremely High Importance* to 1 = *Extremely Low Importance*. The 24 courses are listed on Tables 2 and 3 with each course means and standard deviations.

The limitations of this study were the Lengfelder et al. (1994) use of the Weenen and Shafer (1983) course titles that were originally developed for graduate tourism program. In addition, this study addressed course titles as a one component of course content. Course titles are one indication of course content and any combination of words in the course titles was considered a match. Based on the content analysis, some titles could be outdated or not applicable from the 1994 article such as analysis of teaching, business lobbying and systems analysis of services that were all more highly noted as graduate courses by the tourism professionals who were surveyed.

Results

Of the 85 United States and Canadian higher education institutions surveyed for the content analysis of recreation and leisure programs, there were 84 undergraduate programs, 43 master's programs, and 9 doctoral programs. Note that the original study (Lengfelder, Obenour, & Cuneen, 1994) identified only undergraduate and graduate levels of curricula. The current study categorized the graduate level into master's and doctoral curricula, although the doctoral level will not be reported since there were so few results. Institutions were located in the Central ($n=10$), Eastern ($n=12$), Midwest ($n=17$), Northwest ($n=3$), Southern ($n=29$), and Southwest ($n=13$)

United States and Eastern Canada ($N=1$). There were 69 public and 16 private institutions. Tourism actually appeared in the name of 24 program units while 61 programs' names did not contain the word tourism.

Courses Available in Tourism Major Programs

At the baccalaureate and master's levels, at least one of the programs offered at least one of the 24 courses (see Tables 2 and 3). Introduction to travel and tourism was the most common baccalaureate course available. Planning management in tourism, economics, administration of tourism, tourism policies, personnel management, marketing in tourism, marketing research, and principles of public relations appeared in 25% or more of the baccalaureate programs. Business oriented courses are common although economics as a subject can be found in business departments or in social science departments. The popularity of planning management as a course title may be due to the coding of both management and tourism and planning and tourism as the course title of *planning management in tourism*.

All of the courses appeared in master's curricula in low frequencies. The economics, marketing research, administration of tourism, and systems analysis were all greater than 25 percent of the programs. These results appear in Table 3 and indicated a business orientation as more than five of the top seven courses are considered business oriented course titles.

There were 8 doctoral programs with only 15 courses used by the programs and the most common frequency of a course title appearing was 2 times. In addition, 9 courses had 0 frequencies and the remaining 15 courses were available in only 1 or 2 doctoral programs. Since the doctorate programs and masters programs appeared in low frequencies, further discussion will concentrate on the implications of the undergraduate course titles.

TABLE 2

Summary of Frequencies for Available Tourism Undergraduate Courses with Lengfelder et al. (1994) Mean Importance Rating

Course	f	Percentage of Curricula	Original Mean Rating for Undergraduate Curricula
Introduction to T & T	51	60.7	4.07
Planning Mgmt. in Tourism	48	57.1	3.52
Economics	42	50	3.82
Administration of Tourism	40	47.6	3.88
Tourism Policies	35	41.7	3.49
Personnel Management	32	38	3.60
Marketing in Tourism	26	31	4.27
Marketing Research	23	27.4	3.95
Principles/Public Relations	21	25	3.67
Programming in Adult Educ.	19	22.6	3.06
Communication Skills	18	21.4	4.28
Human Behavior in Organization	14	16.7	3.74
Socio-psychological Impacts	14	16.7	3.25
Systems Analysis of Services	21	11.9	3.31
Business Lobbying	10	11.9	3.57
Introduction to Info. Processing	09	10.7	3.88
Social/Physical Impacts	09	10.7	3.45
Transportation	09	10.7	3.72
Advertising	08	9.5	4.13
Analysis of Teaching	07	8.3	3.57
Popular Culture/Leisure	05	6	3.33
Historical Anthropology	05	6	3.21
International Marketing	03	3.6	3.81
Political Geography	01	1.2	3.37

Original Scale: 5 = *Extremely High Importance*; 4 = *High Importance*; 3 = *Medium Importance*; 2 = *Low Importance*; 1 = *Extremely Low Importance*

TABLE 3

Summary of Frequencies for Available Tourism Master's Courses with Lengfelder et al. (1994) Mean Importance Rating for Graduate Courses

Course	f	Percentage of Curricula	Original Mean Rating for Graduate Curricula
Economics	15	34.9	3.98
Marketing Research	14	32.6	4.15
Administration of Tourism	13	30.2	3.66
Systems Analysis of Services	11	25.6	3.51
Marketing in Tourism	09	20.9	4.29
Planning Mgmt. in Tourism	09	20.9	3.68
Tourism Policies	09	20.9	3.73
Human Behavior in Organization	07	16.3	3.71
Personnel Management	06	14	3.76
Principles/Public Relations	05	11.6	3.64
Socio-psychological Impacts	05	11.6	3.26
Introduction to T & T	04	9.3	3.53
Social/Physical Impacts	04	9.3	3.63
Advertising	03	7	4.09
Analysis of Teaching	03	7	3.38
Business Lobbying	03	7	4.02
Programming in Adult Educ.	03	7	3.28
Transportation	03	7	3.77
Communication Skills	02	4.7	4.09
Historical Anthropology	02	4.7	3.26
International Marketing	02	4.7	4.23
Introduction to Info. Processing	02	4.7	3.78
Popular Culture/Leisure	02	4.7	3.23
Political Geography	01	2.3	3.48

Original Scale: 5 = *Extremely High Importance*; 4 = *High Importance*; 3 = *Medium Importance*; 2 = *Low Importance*; 1 = *Extremely Low Importance*

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to compare the tourism course titles offered at National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) accredited universities and colleges with the course offerings selected by tourism professionals. This expanded on the original Lengfelder et al. (1994) study which surveyed tourism professionals. This study contributed to the literature on tourism education by: (a) supporting the popularity of the business orientation of tourism education, (b) identifying a broader

social science base in tourism curricula compared to input from tourism professionals, (c) recognizing the lack of course titles involving tourism impacts, and (d) supporting further investigation of standards by accrediting organizations due to popularity of tourism courses.

The business orientation of academic programs, indicated by the high frequency of tourism course titles such as administration courses, marketing, personnel management and marketing research, reinforces the recent drift towards the business focus of tourism (Tribe, 1997; Airey & Johnson, 1999). The business focus of the courses was surprising, especially since the analysis reviewed recreation accredited programs and not business programs.

The original study by Lengfelder et al. (1994) relied solely on the input of tourism professionals. This would result in course content that is more practitioner and industry-oriented and drift toward a vocational perspective that may neglect the scholarly basis of undergraduate education consisting focusing on theories and concepts (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981) or a social science foundation (Hill, 1992). As seen in the content analysis, a non-business orientation was advanced by the popularity of courses such as tourism policies, principles of public relations and, to a lesser extent, the tourism focused courses of introduction to travel and tourism and planning management in tourism. These courses differed from the tourism professionals' perceptions of the top courses (see highest means in Table 2) that were heavily weighted toward marketing and business. Airey and Johnson (1999) noted that a business/practitioner orientation would more easily lend itself to the establishment of a common core of business courses. A standardized core of tourism business is a deterrent, however, to the development of tourism curriculum since it would lack a social science perspective as described by other tourism researchers (cf. Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Weenen & Shafer, 1983) and the core areas of the National Leisure Group (Airey & Johnson, 1999).

Apparent in the content analysis was the lack of popularity of course titles associated with the social science topics centered on tourism impact courses such as social/physical impacts and socio-psychological impacts. As seen in many of the course titles/subject in Table 1 and the support provided by the content analysis, tourism curriculum designers should strive to differentiate its course offerings instead of just attaching tourism to the end of generic content such as tourism marketing (Koh, 1995). This approach neglects the unique attributes of tourism embodied in the tourism models of Leiper (1981) and creates the perception that a business degree provides a body of knowledge that is easily transferable to a tourism career. Including course titles involving tourism impacts would expand the social science perspective and differentiate tourism from a business perspective.

The popularity of tourism specific courses at the NRPA accredited institutions provides a continuation of the debate concerning the establishment of accreditation standards for tourism. Five courses with tourism in the course title (as noted in Table

2) were included as a topic 30% to 60% of the time. In addition, 28% (24 out of 85) of the academic programs had the word tourism as a component of the academic unit's title. This is an appreciable percentage of recreation curricula not currently being addressed through NRPA accreditation standards. Accreditation of the tourism curriculum would continue the expansion of the professionalism of tourism in academy (Airey & Johnson, 1999). Developing accreditation standards to include the heterogeneous nature of the tourism profession, industry, and phenomena would require some level of flexibility in the standards. The benefits of accreditation would be a systematic body of knowledge to differentiate tourism from the business major, distinctively identifying tourism as an academic and career path for students and professionals, and expand the presence of recreation and leisure in academic institutions through the integration of accredited tourism programs.

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