

Do Event Management Program Learning Objectives Resonate with Employers?

Cynthia Vannucci, Ph.D., Madeline Wiebeck, & Shinyong (Shawn) Jung, Ph.D.

School of Hospitality, Events, and Tourism (HEaT), Metropolitan State University of Denver

Introduction

The Bureau of Labor Statistics data confirmed in 2012 that there was 94,299 meeting, convention and event planners employed across the United States and this number was forecasted to grow 33 percent by 2022, resulting in 31,300 new positions. Demand by the meeting and event industry and those college students wishing to study the business of event management (EM) has fostered a proliferation of events courses to be added to hospitality programs within U.S. universities (Cecil, Reed, & Reed, 2011). For example, Metropolitan State University of Denver developed its Bachelor of Science in Event and Meeting Management in 2016. Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida, Iowa State University, and New York University offer EM as a stand-alone degree program.

Literature Review

As the industry grows and continually recognized, EM programs need to prepare their graduating students for an entry level position to the demands of the event (Cecil et al., 2011). Studies suggest that determining clear objectives for the curriculum is needed to keep up with a changing hospitality industry (Gursoy & Swanger, 2005). A number of hospitality curriculum study examined the operational and managerial skills for career success in the hospitality industry (Burgidge, 1994; Chi & Gursoy, 2008; Christou, 2002; Dopson & Nelson, 2003; and Knutson & Patton, 1992). Contributing factors to career placement beyond the classroom include quality internships, work hours in the industry and faculty industry experience.

While previous literature emphasize various skillsets and industry experience to be successful in the hospitality industry, little research has closely looked at the learning objectives of EM curriculum. Therefore, it is essential to take into consideration the perspectives of industry professionals toward EM course learning objectives to provide right tools for students to be competitive in the current job market

Table 1. Level of Agreement on Event Courses Learning Objectives from Professionals' Perspective

Course	Summary of Learning Objectives	Mean	SD
Conventions and Tradeshows	Compare and contrast the core logistical planning components of convention and exhibitions (N=34)	6.32	1.51
	Understand economic, social, and environmental impact of conventions (N=34)	5.21	1.37
Corporate Meetings	Analyze a meeting contract (N=31)	6.06	1.52
	Use industry standard forms and event management software (N=31)	5.35	1.52
Global Meetings	Evaluate specific challenges that may occur during the planning process and on site (N=30)	6.45	0.83
	Compare and contrast components of the meeting planning process overseas that are different from those in the U.S. (N=30)	4.32	1.62
Event Catering Strategies	Evaluate various types of catering contracts and effective negotiation strategies (N=30)	6.03	1.38
	Compare and contrast varying services, styles, and meal functions (N=30)	5.50	1.36
Event Support System	Apply online registration and reporting system to a specific event (N=29)	5.93	1.31
	Classify potential meeting sponsors (N=30)	5.13	1.11
Event and Meeting Contracting	Explain the required components of a valid, legally binding contract in the United States (N=28)	6.36	1.06
	Illustrate remedies and consequences of breaching enforceable contacts (N=28)	6.00	1.05
Advanced Planning & Risk Management	Conduct a post-meeting or event evaluation (N=26)	6.19	1.36
	Establish project teams and work breakdown structures (N=28)	5.57	1.57
Special Event & Wedding Production	Identify the equipment and professional personnel required to produce a special event (N=26)	6.00	1.13
	Discuss how effectively work with wedding clients, families, and vendors (N=25)	4.44	1.66

Pearson chi-square test sample results

1. Plan nutritionally sound, culturally correct group menus for a variety of meeting and event functions:
($\chi^2 (10, N=30) = 23.333, p < .05, \text{Phi-Cramer's } V = 0.10$). CMP (50%) vs. non-CMP (30%)

2. Understand the structure of conventions and trade show industries and the relevant buyers and seller:
($\chi^2 (8, N=31) = 16.543, p < .05, \text{Phi-Cramer's } V = 0.35$). CMP (48.4%) vs. non-CMP (29%)

3. Utilize current industry software to manage attendee registration, volunteer staffing, and audio visual requirement of the event?
($\chi^2 (8, N=30) = 16.501, p < .05, \text{Phi-Cramer's } V = 0.36$). CMP (50%) vs. non-CMP (30%)

Methods

After collecting names and emails of 247 event professionals within the Rocky Mountain MPI and Colorado Society of Association Executives Directories, an online survey using Qualtrics was developed based on the learning objectives from eight upper-level event courses that are currently taught in the EM program at MSU Denver. A total of 45 course learning objectives were framed as questions. A total of 34 samples were considered valid after collecting 45 responses. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data and Pearson chi-square tests were performed to discover a relationship between CMP versus non-CMP, using SPSS Statistics 24.

Conclusion

Industry professionals generally agree with importance of EM course learning objectives in that graduates are prepared to start their career in the event industry. However, the data suggest that **some learning objectives are less important than others. Some learning objectives should be revised to better aid the development of student skill sets to procure employment in the industry.** Practical implications include reviewing assessment tools, employing innovative teaching materials based on employers' feedback.

Chi-square tests suggest that four learning objectives are viewed differently by CMP versus non-CMP. This finding should be taken seriously and be further studied for college EM curriculum to reflect the best practices in the event management field. **A follow-up study that assesses a larger group of current CMP, and comparison with other EM programs is necessary for future study.**

Selected References

Cecil, A. K., Reed, B. J., & Reed, L. R. (2011). US higher education institutions offering meeting and event courses. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 12 (3), 179-205.
Gursoy, D., & Swanger, N. (2005). An industry-driven model of hospitality curriculum for programs housed in accredited colleges of business: Part II. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 17(2), 46-56.