





BACK TO SCHOOL

Partnerships with colleges and universities help the travel and tourism industry grow stronger

BY JENNIFER ROLAND CADIENTE

Like most industries, the hospitality and tourism industry changes at lightning speed. How can academia keep up? What is the best way for schools to prepare students for work in the “real” world? And how can the hospitality and tourism industry make sure it has plenty of new graduates to recruit and hire?

One answer to those questions is partnerships. Colleges and universities can help their hospitality and tourism students succeed by hiring industry professionals and building strong ties with local partners. Schools benefit because hiring industry experts helps them give students a world-class educational experience and maintain a positive reputation, even helping recruit more great students in the future.

Likewise, partnering with colleges and universities helps motorcoach and tour operators, convention and visitor bureaus, destination management companies, and

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other businesses streamline the process of finding future employees—and helps ensure that those employees are ready to start working on Day One.

Types of Partnerships

Hospitality and tourism companies can work with colleges and universities in a variety of ways to ensure that graduates are work-ready when they start their first jobs after college through the following:

- Guest lecturing and teaching
- Networking events
- Internships
- Mentoring

Guest lecturing and teaching

One of the best ways for the industry to partner with hospitality education programs is to share expertise directly with students. Dana Clark, director of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., invites guest speakers on a regular basis. “Forty percent of my classes are [led by] guest speakers working in travel and tourism today,” he says. Clark

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focuses on people who are on the cutting edge and can help students see not only where the industry is today, but where it’s headed and how it adapts to change.

The University of Hawaii at Manoa’s School of Travel Industry Management also invites guest speakers; in fact, according to Interim Dean Thomas Bingham, it has so many that they’ve been allocated extra parking passes. Bingham also hires industry professionals as part-time faculty to teach courses. “Our facilities class is taught by an architect, our restaurant entrepreneurship class is taught by a restaurateur, our ethics class is taught by a lawyer, and our advanced IT classes are taught by an IT professional,” he says.

Networking

Networking events can provide important face-to-face connections between working industry professionals and students. This is critical when students are looking for a job. “People do business with people,” says Mike Butts, vice president of sales and executive director of ABA member Visit Charlotte. Events include everything from career fairs to networking lunches and formal fundraising dinners, he says, but the personal connections will endure.

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Internships

Many hospitality programs require internships and real-world experience for graduation. For example, the University of Hawaii's program requires two 400-hour internships for graduation, and Appalachian State requires

students to do an internship between their junior and senior years. These internships offer industry partners the opportunity to get fresh insights from future professionals. And students benefit because they "get out there and give something a trial run in the real world,"

Clark says, helping them figure out what they would like to do after graduation.

Mentoring

Some students will benefit from a longer-term program than an internship, however, and that's why the University of Hawaii's program partners with the Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association on a six-month mentoring program that matches top students with top hotel and resort general managers. Industry partners volunteer their time to help students explore their chosen field.

Brian Antolin, CEO of ABA member CoTo Travel, sees value in mentoring programs, too. His company organizes tours that take college students to



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MIKE BUTTS, VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF VISIT CHARLOTTE, SENDS HIS STAFF TO SPEAK TO STUDENTS AT APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY.

potential job sites and connect them with industry professionals, and in his experience, the mentors gain as much as the students. “They love being able to tell their story and to give back,” he says.

Turning Partnerships Into Jobs

Although internships are a great way for companies to find entry-level employees (both Bingham and Clark report that internships frequently lead to job offers after graduation), college and universities can also be ongoing resources for mid-career employees.

Through his connections to industry partners, says Clark, he gets contacted when someone is looking to hire. He also asks students if they would like to be included on an alumni email job list, maintaining contact with current and former students who might be interested in new job opportunities as they come up.

When positions open, companies can contact connections at local colleges and universities and their career and job placement centers to help ensure that people trained in the industry find out about new opportunities.

Career fairs can also be a great resource for meeting students and graduates looking for work. Danielle Johnson, director of the North American Center of Excellence for Transportation Equipment (NAmTrans), says it’s particularly important to attend such events to show the opportunities available for graduates who choose to stay in the same area where they attend college.

As a division of the North Country Chamber of Commerce in Plattsburgh, N.Y., NAmTrans can speak to the overall industry in the area at its career fairs, and individual employers can attend to show how vibrant the local employment opportunities are. When working industry partners attend local events, they get the chance to develop one-on-one connections with prospective employees. This avoids a potential drawback with these events, Clark points out—when students meet only with recruiters instead of people actually working in the field.

Adapting to Industry Changes

The No. 1 job of an industry-focused program at a college or university is to ensure that students are employable after they graduate. For Steve Webb, instructor in Lane Community College’s Diesel Technology program, that starts

with the fundamentals: “a solid foundation built on the diesel engine—and specifically, the diesel fuel system. On top of that, we include diesel electrical systems, heavy-duty brake systems, heavy equipment hydraulics, powertrains, and air conditioning systems.”

Fundamentals shift with technology, Webb adds; as the diesel industry has worked to comply with regulations designed to reduce exhaust emissions, for example, more electronic and computerized components have been introduced in diesel systems. One of the trucks students train on has 16 computers that work to ensure that emissions fall within the guidelines, so the Eugene, Ore.-based school has worked with an industry advisory council to ensure that it keeps up with what graduates will see when they join a shop.

Programs that require students to work hands-on with machinery and vehicles need to have access to expensive equipment to keep up with changes, though. This is a great opportunity for industries to partner; companies can donate older equipment to provide students with different types of machinery to work with, and schools can swap items of equipment they’ve doubled up on so that every program has the biggest variety of machinery to learn on.

Webb says most of Lane’s vehicles and lab trainers have been donated by its advisory council, and although

Ongoing Education and Development Opportunities

Learning doesn’t have to stop when students graduate. Targeted training programs in your local area can keep your employees at the top of their game, too.

Alyssa Senecal, assistant director of tourism and marketing at ABA member Adirondack Coast Visitors Bureau (ACVB), coordinates ongoing training for front-line and management staff on hospitality and marketing specific to the area. Additionally, it offers occasional introductory trainings in French, as many operators in the Lake Placid area often see French-speaking guests from Québec.

ACVB also hosts fairs for local attractions and venues to show off what they offer, so front-line staffers can offer recommendations to tour operators looking for new locations to feature.



the technology is changing rapidly, the committee is very successful when it comes to updating their training iron. “This leads to well-prepared, successful graduates,” he says.

Ongoing personal contacts are also key to keeping up. Bingham says he listens to what industry contacts are saying about what they need from graduates. “When I first joined the program, I was hearing a lot of need for students who could help with social media,” he says. “Now that’s shifted, and more recently I’m hearing the need for students skilled in revenue management and finance.”

Keeping the Lines of Communication Open

Clearly, industry and college and university programs benefit from strong

relationships. But how do you keep them going?

One option is to invite college and university contacts to visit your site. Clark visits all of his school’s internship sites within 300 miles, and says it helps him stay on top of the industry. Though he reads constantly, he’s often surprised to see the day-to-day reality when he visits a partner company. “I didn’t know that was going on. When did that start happening?” he asks. The insights gained help him plan the school’s curriculum and schedule guest speakers to keep students up to date.

Accepting invitations to on-campus events is also key. Butts keeps his connections with Appalachian State current, sends staff to speak at the university, and stays in touch with Clark to stay abreast

of what’s happening. This doesn’t need to be a chore, he says: Just answer emails and pick up phone calls.

Finally, companies should take advantage of opportunities to shape a partner school’s curriculum. Webb’s advisory panel includes a broad swath of local businesspeople, from the local transit district to heavy equipment and commercial truck dealers. This group advises instructors on industry trends and the skills incoming employees will need.

The relationship between industry and academics is symbiotic, says Bingham. “We understand what we both need, and we’re helping each other.” **D**

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