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Applied Learning During a Pandemic

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Teaching Practice & the Need it Addresses

Experiential programming is particularly impactful when academia and industry collaborate to ensure curriculum is developed to meet business needs (Harkison, et. al., 2011). This type of instruction enhances students' learning and furthers skill development (Thompson, et. al., 2017) and in turn reinforces the relationship between practitioners and educators (Lashley, 2011).

In April 2020, a group of Hospitality College faculty members were tasked to create a culminating course to replace the internship degree requirement during the Covid-19 pandemic. This course, HMD 455, needed to provide a comparable experience to internship facilitating practical application of hospitality knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for a successful hospitality career.

The first set of classes occurred during the Summer of 2020 with sections offered in the following focus areas: Data Analytics, Hotel/Resort Industry, Human Resources, and Restaurant Management with options of Training and Development and Hospitality Statistics added for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, respectively. All sections included completion of Certification in Hotel Industry Analytics training (CHIA) which is a top certification for students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs related to hospitality and tourism.

An example of this applied programming is the Human Resources section of HMD 455, which examined human resources enterprise functions within the hospitality industry including talent acquisition, performance management, learning and development, and labor relations. Course requirements included:

- Weekly discussions on labor relations cases based on actual events.
- Interpretation of a current Las Vegas resort's Collective Bargaining Agreement to address common operational issues.
- Four major projects aligned with general operations and human resources functions related to the re-opening of a motel property.

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Evidence it Benefits Students

Similar to an internship experience, students were asked to use their resourcefulness, initiative, and creativity in completing course requirements.

The course provided the opportunity for students to complete degree requirements while linking theory and practice mastered in core hospitality courses.

Student comments from the summer Human Resources section included:

- I like that the assignments were real life.
- I can take the work I did here to future jobs and set myself apart.
- Because of this class, I know I have the skill to be an HR professional.
- Discussions pulled from actual events helped prepare me for employee issues that I will be dealing with.

How Others Can Adopt This Practice

Creating a substitute course for internship is difficult as it is challenging to replicate practical experience. It is important to seek inspiration and resources from industry partners who offer internships or other experiential learning opportunities for students. Your college's career or alumni relations staff can assist in providing industry contacts.

Resources and Where to Find Them

Work with industry employer partners who provide internships or regularly hire students to build course curriculum that closely aligns to what students will experience post graduation. Set-up an informational interview to discuss project ideas and create discussions based on actual events. Request documentation from the company (i.e. - public financial reports, employee handbook, union contracts) to simulate real-world projects.

References

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