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Interpreting the Las Vegas Strip

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INTERPRETING THE LAS VEGAS STRIP

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What is an interpretive talk?

Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice. — Anton Chekhov

Over 42,000,000 visitors came to Las Vegas last year (http://www.lvcva.com/stats-and-facts/), each leaving with different stories to share about their experience. Those experiences determine whether they will return or encourage others to visit. As the subject librarian for the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I have often wondered how visitors engage with the history of the city or the Las Vegas Strip. As a visitor to national monuments and parks, my perception of a place has been altered by the stories or interpretative talks given by guides or park rangers.

What is an interpretive talk?

- According to the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior:
- The Interpretive Talk is a prepared formal presentation delivered in-person, usually to a stationary audience.
- The interpretive talk provides a basic format for presenting audiences with opportunities to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings of a resource, without relying on a strong integration of media, demonstration, or resource immersion.
- Resource meanings may focus on the personal relevance or the national significance of a site and help guide the visitor towards an understanding or empathy regarding the importance of a place, object, person, or event.

The objective of this poster is to explore the concept of engaging hospitality/business students in the process of creating an interpretive talk in order to apply knowledge drawn from company research. Proposed resources for this research include subscription-based business-related databases, and materials from the Libraries Special Collections, such as oral histories, to develop a talk that will fully immerse an audience.

Background:

As the subject liaison for the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration, I am asked to teach workshops on researching company information for senior-level capstone courses. In those sessions, we primarily explore subscription online databases. Many times, I have only one opportunity to expose and engage the students in the resources that they will need to complete a final strategic analysis of a company or a business plan. It can be overwhelming for the student, instructor, and librarian.

I must confess that during my visits to museums, monuments, national parks, etc., I did not know that I was often participating in an interpretive talk. I was introduced to the concept of an interpretive talk by a faculty member who formerly taught in the Hotel College. As I assisted students in the preparation of their talks, I learned more about the skills and information needed to deliver and effective talk. I was intrigued by the idea of using an interpretive talk as an alternative to the traditional business presentation. Ideally, this would be embedded into a junior-level course that would serve a part of a prerequisite before enrolling in the final capstone course for hotel administration majors.

Stakeholders

Undergraduate Students:

- The opportunity for students to network with potential employers, develop competencies needed to be successful hospitality professionals.
- This concept is also a more engaging way to teach information literacy skills. It allows the student to immerse themselves in the research and apply it to a real-life situation in order to think critically about the research that they conduct.

The UNLV Libraries:

- Promotion of resources to this target population is often a challenge, and this project has the potential to increase exposure to library subscribed business-related databases, as well as local special collections that include digital projects, archival materials, and oral histories. These resources will add depth and richness to an interpretive talk.
- This assignment would be an opportunity to collaborate with faculty to integrate research into the curriculum in a meaningful manner.

UNLV Faculty:

- This project has the potential to help improve the quality of future business analysis research projects. Embedding the project in a junior-level course prepares students for the capstone course to bring all of the pieces of their education together.

Industry Partners:

- The Hotel College has long-established industry partners that make this an ideal project for the College. As potential employers seek future employees with specific competencies, this project can create a networking opportunity for students and employers while developing skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking.

Tourists:

- As Las Vegas welcomes millions of guests from around the world, a first-time visit to the Strip can be overwhelming. This concept could examine guests' experiences before and after participating in a property tour conducted by a hotel college students. Often tours are offered to select audiences with connections to the industry because they take away valuable staff time. Given the premise of an interpretive talk, the tour could be shaped by the visitor's interests, or features that the industry partners' want to highlight.

Concept

Concept Ideas and Considerations:

The following is a conceptual plan for implementing interpretive talks into a management course.

1. Identify a faculty partner
   - This could potentially align with any course that requires an in-depth understanding of company research to analyze a business.
     - Teaching sessions emphasizing research to write a basic SWOT analysis would facilitate gathering information from on-site property research, library subscription databases, and special collections research.
2. Foster a working relationship with the career or alumni office to enlist industry partners
   - The Hotel College currently has a mentoring program that pairs students with industry executives that could serve as a list of potential partner properties. In addition, there is an advisory board that could supplement this list.
   - Prepare a proposal outlining the benefits for potential partners.
     - Potential pool of future employees; the initial investment of time may reap long-term benefits
     - Create emotional connection for guests to encourage repeat visits or longer stays
     - Frees staff time from conducting some tours if the program is successful
3. Seek permission to adapt the foundations interpretation or develop curriculum from available textbooks
   - The National Park Service curriculum includes assessment of the talk; however a rubric is needed to measure the quality of research conducted for the talk.
   - Due to time limitations during the semester, the curriculum will need to be modified to create guidelines for developing a basic interpretive talk.
   - Supplemental materials using a guide for students should be created for the course.
4. Write a syllabus in collaboration with faculty to include library workshops and/or digital learning objects
   - Example Learning Objectives:
     - Students will be able to identify and search library resources to research a publicly-traded company
     - Students will be able to synthesize industry, trends and news, and historical research to develop an interpretive talk for a given casino property.
5. Establish parameters for working with industry partners and their properties to be respectful of their schedules
   - Organize a schedule for meetings to learn about the property from staff and access for students to practice their talks.
   - Develop a method for visitors to register for the tours.
6. Develop an assessment tool to gather feedback from guests, students, faculty, and industry partners to continuously improve or refine the project
   - A brief survey would be administered to guests after their tour.
   - A survey should be administered at the end of the semester to evaluate the project for the other stakeholders.

Next Steps:
A core management class like Organizational Behavior or Services Management would be a good match for this project, but the concept could be adapted to many non-hospitality industry partnerships with companies with rich histories or unique circumstances that draw regular visitors interested in tours.

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