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FACULTY AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of faculty and student perceptions of the importance of resource, interpersonal, information, systems, and technology management competencies in the hospitality industry
Background	The increasing complexity and technological dependency of the diverse hospitality and tourism sector raises the skill requirements needed, and expected, of new hires making education and competency development a strategic priority. Identifying the skills needed for hospitality graduates to succeed in a sector that is continuously being impacted by digitalization and globalization must be a continual process predicated on the desire to meet ever-changing industry needs. This study seeks to update and further explore an investigation started a decade ago that examined the skills and competencies valued by hiring managers in the hospitality industry.
Methodology	The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), comprised of representatives from business, labor, education, and government, developed the framework, of workplace competencies and foundation skills used in this study. This research used a survey methodology for data collection and descriptive and inferential statistical methods during the analyses. The data for this study were collected from faculty, staff, hospitality industry stakeholders, and students of a Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management located at a small eastern Historically Black University (HBU). An electronic survey was sent to 169 respondents and a total of 100 completed surveys were received for an overall return rate of 59%.

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Contribution	This study provides research on a population (first-generation minority college students) that is expanding in numbers in higher education and that the literature, reports as being under-prepared for academic success. This paper is timely and relevant and can be used to inform hospitality educators so that they can best meet the needs of their students and the companies looking to hire skilled graduates.
Findings	The findings of this study indicate there is inconsistent agreement among academicians and students regarding the importance of SCANS-specific competencies in hospitality graduates. At the same time, there is no argument that industry skills will be critical in the future of hospitality graduates. Overwhelmingly, participating students and faculty found all of the SCANS competencies important with the highest ranked competencies being interpersonal skills, which, given the importance of teamwork, customer service skills, leadership, and working with cultural diversity in the hospitality industry, was expected. Additionally, participating students indicated their strong agreement that internships are effective at building professional skills. Finally, the hospitality students included in this study who were enrolled in a skill-based curriculum were confident that their program is preparing them with the necessary skills and competencies that they will need for their future careers.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Higher education hospitality programs should be exploring the skills valued by industry, teaching faculty, and the students to see if they are being satisfied.
Recommendation for Researchers	This research should be expanded to additional institutions across the United States as well as abroad. This particular research protocol is easily replicated and can be duplicated at both minority and majority serving institutions enabling greater comparisons across groups.
Impact on Society	Several reports identify gaps in the 21st century skills required for the workplace and the effectiveness of higher education in preparing graduates for the workforce. This study helps to propel this discussion forward with relevant findings and a research methodology that is easily replicable.
Future Research	A follow-up study of employers is currently being conducted.
Keywords	SCANS, career readiness, workplace readiness, 21 st century skills, hospitality education, first generation college students, technology readiness, HBCU, minority learners, UMES, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, e-skills, lifelong learning

INTRODUCTION

Global competition in a changing market, and concerns about workforce preparedness, has generated several initiatives, commissions, coalitions, and national reports. Academia, private industry, and the U.S. government have been actively involved in developing programs and strategies to address the workforce skills gap and better prepare students for the economy of the future (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, 2014; Business Roundtable, 2017; Buzzetto-More, 2012; Council of Economic Advisers, 2018; Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Several factors in the United States economy bode well for employment opportunities. The U.S. economy has added more than 19 million jobs since 2010 contributing to the low unemployment rate of 3.7% in September 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an increase in new jobs of 11.5 million jobs from 2016 to 2026, increasing the total number

of jobs to 167.6 million (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017a). According to a Pew Research Study, *The State of American Jobs*, “the number of workers in occupations requiring average to above-average education, training and experience increased from 49 million in 1980 to 83 million in 2015, or by 68%” (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 1). The literature and research reports that the 21st century global marketplace has created a need for a workforce with requisite skills to ensure continued economic growth. Higher education and private industry must play a key role in producing the skilled workers the U.S. needs to maintain a competitive economic position (Business Roundtable, 2017; Buzzetto-More, 2012; Carnevale et al., 2010; Council of Economic Advisors 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; The Learning House, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2016).

In May 2017, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the leisure and hospitality industry had the highest job openings rate with 4.9%, followed by professional and business services at 4.8% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b). Deloitte’s *Travel and Industry Outlook* reports that the U.S. market is forecasted to earn 370 billion by the end of 2018 (Langford & Weissenberg, 2018). By 2020, the hospitality and leisure industry is expected to add more than 5 million jobs (Carnevale et al., 2010). By the end of 2024, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the leisure and hospitality industry will total over 16.5 million jobs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1886, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is a Historically Black, 1890 land grant institution. It is a member of the University system of the State of Maryland and primarily serves first-generation, low-income, and minority learners. The student population is approximately 4400, as of the fall of 2015, with a student body that is approximately 78% African-American, 9.6% white, 1.4% Hispanic, and 11% international, primarily coming from the continent of Africa and/or from the Caribbean region. The gender distribution of the University is 64% female and 36% male. The freshmen-to-sophomore retention rate is 71%, and the graduation rate is 41%. The student to faculty ratio is 15 to 1 and 85% of students receive financial aid. Situated in the historic town of Princess Anne, UMES enjoys an 1100-acre rural campus and is located on the far south eastern corner the State. Uniquely situated, it is the only research and doctoral degree granting institution of the University System of Maryland on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and its programs in Construction Management Technology, Aviation Sciences, and Hospitality and Tourism Management are unique to both the state and the region (Buzzetto-Hollywood, Wang, Elobeid, & Elobeid, 2018). UMES was ranked in the top 25 among Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU) in 2014 and the acceptance rate for applying students was 62.4% with the majority of students coming from the Mid-Atlantic region, more specifically the Baltimore and Washington D.C. urban centers (Buzzetto-More, 2014).

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore is committed to providing undergraduate and graduate programs that will equip its students with the knowledge and skills necessary for the challenges of a global society. To this purpose, and in order to assure the University, its students, and other stakeholders that learning is effectively promoted, program learning outcomes have been established, and recently reformed, that and are assessed for each program offered in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism via an aggressive assurance of learning program. Furthermore, the purpose of Assurance of Learning is to assess how effectively the programs are in facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, skills, capabilities, and attitudes required of management professionals as well as to explore and develop enhanced curriculum and learning resources (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2017; Quinn, 2016). In a cycle of continuous program improvement, curricula and learning experiences are re-fined, reviewed, and revised as needed.

As a result of the commitment of the Assurance of Learning Committee, and the larger HTM, changes, both subtle and profound, are occurring throughout the curriculum and include such innovations as: better communication of learning outcomes and course relationship to program mission, the development of rubrics, more project based learning, perception surveys, diagnostic testing, skill-

based performance assessment, simulation usage, e-portfolio usage, and adoption of assessment and remediation systems. These changes have led to a richer and more robust curriculum and greater student understanding of their academic progression and the relationship of course concepts to learning outcomes.

Much of the curriculum was completely redesigned in 2016-2017 to be more skill based. In addition to traditional hospitality and tourism content, the curriculum includes courses focused on the building of communication skills, ethical understanding and reasoning abilities, analytic abilities, management skills, e-skills and use of information technology, information management, understanding systems, resource allocation, and multicultural and diversity understanding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several reports identify gaps in the 21st century skills required for the workplace and the effectiveness of higher education in preparing graduates for the workforce. The Gallup-Lumina report found only 43% of Americans believe college graduates are prepared for success in the workforce and 34% of business leaders do not believe that educational institutions are graduating students with the skills and competencies their businesses need (Sidhu & Calderon, 2014; Gallup, Inc. 2014). For years hospitality educators themselves have questioned whether “hotel management programs are preparing hospitality students adequately” (Wilhelm, 2002, p. 54).

A 2017 report from the Business Roundtable referred to the lack of skilled workers as a “national crisis threatening our economic future” and stated the skills gap could result in unfilled jobs if nothing is done to prevent this phenomena from occurring (Business Roundtable, 2017, p. 1). A spring 2018 survey of 600 human resource managers, found that 52% of employers identified a skills gap in workers and 47% of these managers held higher education responsible. Twenty-nine percent of employers stated that the colleges and universities do not have a pipeline of talent with the right skills to fill current and future jobs. Seventy percent of these resource managers stated that up to 500 jobs at their company were not filled over the past year (The Learning House, 2018).

The Council of Economic Advisers (2018), in its report, “Addressing America’s Reskilling Challenge”, identified “an information gap between employers, workers, and educational institutions” and noted this information gap “makes it difficult to prepare the workforce employers seek” and that coordination will be necessary to meet the reskilling challenge (p.1). Thus, the challenge to academic leadership is the identification of the skills, the assessment of these skills, and the integration of the 21st century skills into curricula. Teaching methods and instructional strategies must ensure students acquire skills deemed crucial to the marketplace (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003; Cobanoglu et al., 2004; Geissler & Martin, 1998, as cited in Kay & Russette, 2000; Gursoy & Swanger, 2004; Nelson & Dopson, 2001). Partnerships among business, education, and the workforce are required to address workforce needs (Business Roundtable, 2017; Council of Economic Advisers, 2018; The Learning House, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2016).

The hospitality and tourism industry plays a significant role in economic development and job creation worldwide. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, (2018), travel and tourism directly contributes over 2.5 trillion dollars to the global economy which is 10.4% of global GDP. Travel and tourism provides 1 in 10 jobs worldwide or 9.9% of the global workforce and supports 313 million jobs worldwide. In 2016, the United States travel and tourism industry contributed \$1.5 trillion dollars to the economy and 7.6 million U.S. jobs. Revenues from international visitors in the United States were \$244.7 billion in 2016, representing an \$83.9 billion trade surplus for the year. In 2016, U.S. travel and tourism output represented 2.7 percent of gross domestic product. International travel to the United States is expected to increase 2.7% annually through 2022 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016).

Without a doubt, a skilled and productive labor force will be vital for continued economic growth in the hospitality industry. There are, however, some concerning trends. According to Carnevale et al.,

(2010), “by 2018, the postsecondary system will have produced 3 million fewer college graduates than demanded by the labor market”. The demographic and job growth projections indicate the United States will face a workforce shortage in the near future. Fewer people are entering the workforce, and more are entering retirement caused by slow population growth and retiring baby boomers. These trends have been discussed in numerous studies and there is a widespread concern that this could impact economic growth (Carnevale et al., 2010; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Karoly & Panis, 2004).

The increasing complexity of the diverse hospitality and tourism sector raises the skill requirements and makes education and skill development a strategic priority for this industry. Educators should be developing closer ties and increasing dialogue with all segments of the hospitality industry, so value can be added to the industry. Identifying the skills and competencies needed for hospitality graduates to succeed in the increasingly digital, global hospitality marketplace must be a continual process to meet current industry needs (Chung-Herrera,ENZ, & Lankau, 2003; Cobanoglu, et al., 2004; Geissler & Martin, 1998, as cited in Kay & Russette, 2000; Nelson & Dopson, 2001).

Several hospitality educators have developed competency-based curriculum, identifying broad skill categories such as communication, leadership, team work, technology, problem solving, and decision making (Brownell & Chung, 2001; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Maher, 2004; Sisson & Adams, 2013; Smith & Cooper, 2000; Wang & Tsai, 2014). Chung-Herrera et al., (2003) demonstrated that “a competency model is useful for building an integrated framework for developing a company’s human-resources system’ (p. 19).

Lowry and Flohr (2005) developed a competency-based framework to facilitate learning in a capstone tourism course and conducted a longitudinal study (a five-year period from 2000 to 2005) to evaluate its effectiveness “for mastering a core body of discipline-specific knowledge and fostering competency skills for successful managers, lifelong learners, and responsible citizens (p. 29). As a result of his work he presented the following skills as crucial to hospitality education:

- Critical thinking: logical and quantitative reasoning; awareness of the interconnections of business and society; creative problem solving (both individually and in a group setting); and self-reflection
- Communication: written; formal presentations; and interpersonal.
- Technological: information literacy; applied use of technology; research methods and evaluation tools.
- Leadership: self-direction; responsible decision-making and behavior; and the ability to work with and learn from people with diverse backgrounds to achieve group goals.

Based on the premise current industry skill requirements must drive curricula in order to graduate competent and skilled managers, Dopson and Nelson (2003) identified the content area hotel executives, hotel human resource specialists, and Collins School alumni found most important in Part Two of their 2001 study. The six most important subject areas selected identified were: accounting, human resource management, computers/MIS, marketing, sales, and public relations, and business management.

In another study by Tesone and Ricci (2005), central Florida hospitality and tourism management practitioners found the most successful competencies for entry level managers to be teamwork, communication skills, and customer service. The authors reported that lodging managers believed, these competencies are often developed through hands-on work experiences. The researchers assert these factors can be used as a profile “for educators to apply learning outcomes to prepare new workers for industry positions” and “may also be used by human resource practitioners as part of the employment selection process” (p.61).

Mayo and Thomas-Haysbert (2005) surveyed hospitality educators and industry professionals and found revenue management to be a key competency for both educators and practitioners. The posi-

tion of revenue manager is newly created in many hotels which would support the importance of this competency Mayo and Thomas-Haysbert went on to suggest that “these findings suggest competency based curricula can be developed to reflect a program that is relevant for the 21st Century” (p. 14). Further, Sisson & Adams (2013) examined essential competencies to determine if there were differences between managers in lodging, food and beverage, and meeting and event management. Their findings showed there were no differences in importance for 76% of the competencies between the functional work areas.

Wang & Tsai (2014) identified key job competencies, including leadership, professional management skills, technical skills and knowledge, work attitude, and personal characteristics, and asked mid-level managers in 15 international Taiwanese hotels to rank the importance of each competency. Additionally, students from a 4-year hospitality program, each of whom participated in an off-campus internship program were asked to rank the same competencies. There were discrepancies between the students and business managers in the ranking of importance of competencies in the leadership, professional management skills, and technical skills areas.

Green and Stahura (2014) introduced a business-education partnership (BEP) framework as a way for the casino industry to attract a prepared and sustainable workforce and improve recruitment and retention. This study reported that experiential learning opportunities, workplace visits, mentoring, job shadowing, and curriculum support are important strategies that can be employed to improve workforce skills.

In a SCANS competency study, Quinn (2013) reported the majority of industry respondents (lodging, food and beverage, tourism) placed the greatest importance on the following competencies: serving clients and customers, participating as a team member, exercises leadership, allocates time, teaches others, allocates human resources, and works with cultural diversity. Five of the highest ranked competencies in the study were from the interpersonal domain and two from the resources domain.

Commissioned by the Department of Labor in 1990, the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), comprised of representatives from business, labor, education, and government examined the demands of the workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, 1992). The primary objective of SCANS is to improve the information flow. The Commission advocates a partnership built around employment skills between two major groups, the world of work and educators (U.S. Department of Labor, 1992). The Commission also promoted a two-way flow of information between employers and educators through recruiting and employee development activities. Numerous studies used the SCANS framework in the late 1990s and early 2000s to assessment the workplace basics competencies in various industries. The Commission identified five workplace competency areas: the ability to manage resources, to work amicably and productively with others, to acquire and use information, to understand and master complex systems, and to work comfortably with a variety of technologies as workplace know-how (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, 1992). The SCANS framework was used as the basis for the design for the skills section of the survey used in this study.

THE STUDY

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of faculty and student perceptions of the importance of critical resource, interpersonal, technology, systems, and information management competencies in the hospitality industry This study surveyed students and faculty from a Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management located at a small eastern Historically Black University to determine perceptions regarding the importance of specific SCANS competencies in the hospitality industry, as well as perceptions of the an academic programs level of success in developing professional skills and readiness.

This survey-based study used quantitative methodologies, incorporating a descriptive and inferential research design to determine the importance of the five SCANS workplace competency domains (resources, interpersonal, information, systems, and technology) and several questions regarding professional development, readiness, and skill building. A three-part questionnaire was adapted from the instrument developed, validated, and utilized as part of an earlier study by Quinn (2008). The instrument was used to collect demographic data and quantitative data regarding the perceived importance of the SCANS competencies, as well as information about how effective the hospitality major was at developing professional skills and career and professional readiness.

A data set was collected using the Survey Monkey online survey distribution and collection system. The raw data was downloaded from the Survey Monkey system into Microsoft Excel where mean, standard deviation, and confidence interval at 95% were calculated. All SCANS competency ratings were subsequently ranked by mean scores. Additionally, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the differences regarding the level of importance ratings based on whether the respondent was a faculty member or student.

A total of 169 surveys were sent electronically to academic faculty, administrators, hospitality industry recruiters, advisory board members, and students using the web-based survey tool, Survey Monkey. Respondents were identified by their position of faculty, staff, administrator, industry internship coordinator, or student. One hundred recipients completed the survey presenting a 59% return rate.

Section I of the questionnaire included demographic questions regarding academic major, status, and age of the respondent. Section II collected data regarding the perceived importance of each of the SCANS competencies as measured with a five-point Likert-scale where 1 equaled very unimportant, 2 equaled unimportant, 3 equaled neutral/undecided, 4 equaled important, and 5 equaled very important. Section III of the questionnaire utilized Likert-scaled questions to collect data on how effective the university was in preparing students for a career in hospitality, whether the skills taught in HTM programs matched the skills valued by employers, and how confident students were in their career and professional readiness. Participating students were also asked additional questions relevant to measuring their perceived workplace readiness as well as what they feel are the priorities for hospitality programs. Finally, students had an opportunity to provide qualitative feedback through an open ended question.

SCANS has five main workplace domain areas which deal with of 1) use of resources, 2) utilization of information, 3) interpersonal skills, 4) understanding of systems, and 5) application of technology. Each of the five domains is further explored in terms of measurable competencies. Table 1 presents each of the five domain areas as well as the subsequent 20 competencies with definitions. These domains and sub competencies were used to develop 20 agreement statements utilized in the survey.

**Table 1. Secretary’s commission on achieving necessary skills (SCANS):
Workplace competencies (U. S. Department of Labor, 1991)**

COMPETENCY DOMAIN	DEFINITION
Resources	Identifies, organizes, and allocates resources
Allocates Time	Selects goal-relevant activities, ranks them, allocates time, and prepares and follows schedules.
Allocates Money	Uses or prepares budgets, makes forecasts, keeps records, and makes adjustments to meet objectives.
Allocates Materials and Facility Resources	Acquires, stores, allocates, and uses materials or space efficiently.
Allocates Human Resources	Assesses skills and distributes work accordingly, evaluates performance and provides feedback.

COMPETENCY DOMAIN	DEFINITION
Information	Acquires and uses information
Acquires and Evaluates Information	Identifies need for data, obtains it from existing sources or creates it, and evaluates its relevancy and accuracy.
Organizes and Maintains Information	Organizes, processes, and maintains written or computerized records and other forms of information in a systematic fashion.
Interprets and Communicates Information	Selects and analyzes information and communicates the results to others using oral, written, graphic, pictorial, or multi-media methods.
Uses Computers to Process Information	Employs computers to acquire, organize, analyze, and communicate information.
Interpersonal	Works with others
Participates as a Team Member	Contributes to group effort.
Teaches Others New Skills	Helps others to learn.
Serves Clients/Customers	Works to satisfy customers' expectations.
Exercises Leadership	Communicates ideas to justify position, persuades and convinces others, responsibly challenges existing procedures and policies.
Negotiates to Arrive at a Decision	Works toward agreements involving exchange of resources, resolves divergent interests.
Works with Cultural Diversity	Works well with men and women from diverse backgrounds
Systems	Understands complex inter-relationships
Understands Systems	Knows how social, organizational, and technological systems work and operates effectively with them
Monitors and Corrects Performance	Distinguishes trends, predicts impacts on systems operations, diagnoses deviations in systems' performance and corrects malfunctions
Improves and Designs Systems	Suggests modifications to existing systems and develops new or alternative systems to improve performance
Technology	Works with a variety of technologies
Selects Technology	Chooses methods or equipment including computers and other technologies
Applies Technology to Task	Understands overall intent and proper procedures for setup and operation of equipment
Maintains and Troubleshoots Technology	Prevents, identifies, or solves problems with equipment, including computers and other technologies

During the analyses of the data the following hypotheses were explored.

H₁- There is strong agreement among faculty and students regarding the importance of SCANS-specific competencies in hospitality graduates.

This hypothesis was examined by considering the responses to the Section II of the survey via the questions related to the SCAN specific competencies. Means were compared and a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with a p value set to .05 was used to examine the differences regarding the level of importance ratings based on whether the respondent was faculty or student.

H₂-Participating students believe that internships are effective at building professional skills

This hypothesis is predicated on the idea that internships help develop management competencies and can be used to determine skills and competencies that need improvement. It was explored by considering student responses to a Likert-scaled question included in Section III of the survey

whereas if a mean of >3.0 was achieved, then the threshold for affirming the hypothesis is viewed as having been met.

H₃- Hospitality students are confident that their hospitality degree program is providing them with the skills necessary for professional readiness.

This hypothesis was examined by examining student responses to a subset of questions included in Section III of the survey with means of >3.0 established as affirming the hypothesis.

FINDINGS

Of the 100 responses collected, 75 of the respondents were college students and 25 of the respondents identified as hospitality faculty, staff, or industry internship coordinator. Basic demographic information about these students was collected. Table 2 provides the frequency and percentages of responses related to the students’ academic status, major, and age.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of student respondents

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>FREQUENCY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE</i>
Academic Major		
Hospitality Management	49	65.30
Culinary Arts	2	2.67
Professional Golf Management	19	25.3
Business Management	2	2.67
Other	3	4.00
Academic Status		
Sophomore	7	13.3
Junior	35	46.7
Senior	30	40.0
Age		
18 – 22	42	56.0
23 – 29	26	34.6
30 – 39	2	2.67
40 – 49	2	2.67
Over 50	3	4.00

When students were asked if they had completed a hospitality related internship more than half (54.17%) responded in the affirmative these results are depicted in Figure 1.

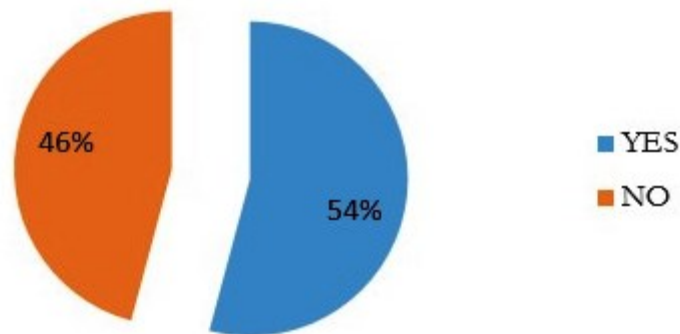


Figure 1: Hospitality Related Internship Completed

While 54.17% of the student respondents had completed a hospitality related internship, the overwhelming majority of students (87.84%) reported that they have experience in their major area of study. These results are presented in Figure 2.

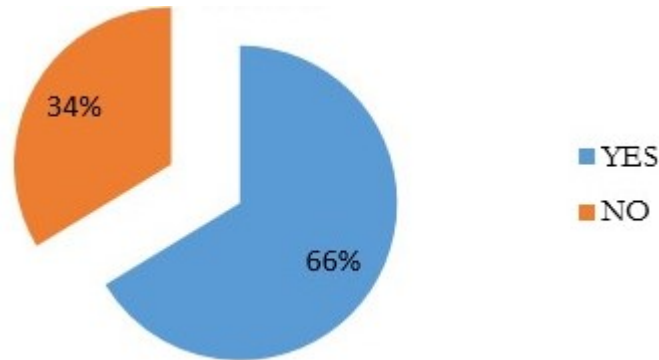


Figure 2: Professional Experience in Field of Study.

One hundred responses were received to the demographic questions in Section I of the questionnaire. Approximately 8 student respondents totally skipped the SCANS and professional readiness questions in Sections II and III and two others stopped responding after several questions. As such, the number of respondents completing each question is reported and variations can be observed.

The responses to 20 statements derived from the five workplace competency domains: resources, information, interpersonal skills, systems, and technology, were explored using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very unimportant, 2 = not important, 3 = neutral/undecided, 4 = important, 5 = very important). The mean score, standard deviation (SD), and a 95% confidence level interval were calculated for each resource skill. Additionally, the responses were ranked by importance as expressed by the mean. These findings are presented in Table 3 for all competency domains for both student and faculty respondents.

Table 3. Student & academia competency ratings comparison

Ranked Im-portance	SCANS Domain	SCANS Compe- tency	Student Mean	Student SD	n	Faculty Mean	Faculty SD	n
6	Resources	Allocates Time	4.57	0.6116	67	4.48	0.5073	25
5	Resources	Allocates Money	4.62	0.5780	67	4.55	0.9987	25
9	Resources	Allocates Materials and Facility Re- sources	4.38	0.7003	67	4.45	0.8256	25
7	Resources	Allocates Human Resources	4.45	0.6622	67	4.55	0.8256	25
14	Information	Acquires and Eval- uates Information	4.26	0.7761	66	4.35	0.8208	25
10	Information	Organizes and Maintains Infor- mation	4.36	0.6985	66	4.40	0.9947	25
12	Information	Interprets and Communicates In- formation	4.43	0.6366	66	4.30	1.0809	25
13	Information	Uses Computers to Process Infor- mation	4.46	0.6366	66	4.26	1.0976	25
1	Interpersonal	Participates as a Member of a Team	4.61	0.6073	66	4.70	0.8208	25

Ranked Importance	SCANS Domain	SCANS Competency	Student Mean	Student SD	n	Faculty Mean	Faculty SD	n
8	Interpersonal	Teachers Others New Skills	4.58	0.5560	66	4.41	0.9947	25
2	Interpersonal	Serves Clients /Customers	4.67	0.5361	65	4.61	1.0809	25
4	Interpersonal	Exercises Leadership	4.65	0.6366	66	4.55	1.0976	25
11	Interpersonal	Negotiates to Arrive at a Decision	4.45	0.6650	65	4.30	1.0976	25
3	Interpersonal	Works with Cultural Diversity	4.62	0.6267	66	4.60	0.9404	25
17	Systems	Understands Systems	4.33	0.7860	65	3.85	0.9881	25
15	Systems	Monitors and Corrects Performance	4.31	0.7484	65	4.20	0.8944	25
18	Systems	Improves and Designs Systems	4.20	0.7167	65	3.90	0.9679	25
19	Technology	Selects Technology	4.26	0.7132	66	3.75	0.9515	25
16	Technology	Applies Technology to Task	4.27	0.7181	65	4.00	0.9177	25
20	Technology	Maintains and Troubleshoots Technology	4.17	0.7958	66	3.50	1.0513	25

Competency Analysis – Resources

Student scores were in agreement (M = 4.50, SD = 0.1068, n = 67) that the four skills in the resource competency are important or very important. Participating academic and industry respondents (M = 4.53, SD = 0.0565, n = 25) also unanimously agreed or strongly agreed that the allocation of time, monetary, materials and facilities, and human resources are important skills.

Competency Analysis – Information

Processing, use, organization, interpretation, communication, acquisition, and evaluation of information were ranked as important skill sets by both academic and student respondents. There were no significant differences between the two respondent groups. Student scores (M = 4.38, SD = 0.0700, n = 66) and academia and industry scores (M = 4.34, SD = 0.0700, n = 25) in this competency domain were tightly grouped.

Competency Analysis – Interpersonal

Participates as a team member, teaches others new skills, exercises leadership, negotiates to arrive at a decision, and well with men and women from diverse backgrounds were ranked as important skill sets by both academic and student respondents. Mean interpersonal scores were closely clustered with overall low variability. Students ranked “serving clients and customers” the most important competency (M = 4.67, SD = .5361, n = 65), “exercises leadership” was rated second (M = 4.65, SD = .5709, n = 66), and “works with cultural diversity” (M = 4.62, SD = .6267, n = 66) third. In contrast, academia/industry ranked “participates as a member of a team” (M = 4.70, SD = .9234, n = 25) “serving clients and customers” as the second (M = 4.61, SD = .4278, n = 25), and “works with cultural diversity” (M = 4.60, SD = .9403, n = 25) first, second, and third respectively.

Competency Analysis – Systems

Student scores for systems skills were higher than faculty scores and there was much more variability in faculty responses. The mean score, standard deviation (SD), and a 95% confidence level interval were calculated for each systems skill. Interestingly, the students ranked “understands systems” most important (M = 4.33, SD = .7860, n = 65) while faculty respondents ranked it the lowest (M = 4.33, SD = .7860, n = 25). Faculty respondents ranked “monitors and corrects system” most important (M = 4.20, SD = .8944, n = 25). Both groups ranked “improves and designs systems” the lowest.

Competency Analysis – Technology

The students ranked “applies technology to a task” most important (M = 4.27, SD = .7181, n = 65) while academia respondents ranked it lower and with more variability (M = 4.00, SD = .9177, n = 25). Both groups ranked “maintains and troubleshoot technology” the lowest. .

H₁- There is strong agreement among faculty and students regarding the importance of SCANS-specific competencies in hospitality graduates.

These findings are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Using the data sets of both students and academia the mean ratings of each competency area were examined. Table 4 compares mean scores and standard deviation for each of the five competency domains (resource, information, interpersonal, systems, technology) examined in this study. Table 5 used the means across all domains and represents the findings of an ANOVA.

Table 4. Comparative competency ratings by student and faculty

SCANS Competency	Respondents	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
Allocation of Resources	Student	67	4.5038	0.1068	0.0114
	Faculty	25	4.5322	0.0564	0.0564
Information Skills	Student	66	4.3780	0.0884	0.0078
	Faculty	25	4.3407	0.0700	0.0700
Interpersonal Skills	Student	66	4.5977	0.0769	0.0059
	Faculty	25	4.5581	0.1764	0.1764
Systems Skills	Student	65	4.2797	0.0671	0.0045
	Faculty	25	3.9833	0.1892	0.1892
Technology Skills	Student	66	4.2312	0.0559	0.0031
	Faculty	25	3.7666	0.2516	0.2516

Table 5. ANOVA

	SS	Df	MS	F	p
Between:	0.474	1	0.474	78.171	0.000
Within	0.534	88	0.006		
Total:	1.008	89			

H₂Participating students believe that internships are effective at building professional skills

These findings are presented in Table 6 whereas this hypothesis was explored by considering student responses to a Likert-scaled question included in Section III of the survey. According to the findings, 87.1% of respondents ranked internship experiences as extremely important or highly important at building the professional skills of students with a mean of 4.529 and a standard deviation of .775.

Table 6. Importance of internships

	% of Students Ranking Extremely Important/Highly Important	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Dev
Internship Experiences at Building Professional Skills	87.1%	65	4.529	.775

H₃. Hospitality students are confident that their degree program is providing them with the skills necessary for professional readiness.

Seventy-five students were asked to respond to the statement “To what extent do you believe the skills taught in HRM programs match the skills valued by employers in HRM industries” and asked to choose from 5 = Very Much Matched, 4 = Quite A Bit, 3 = Somewhat / Moderate Extent, 2 = A Bit/Slightly Prepared, and 1 = Not at all. Sixty-five students responded to this particular question with findings are presented in Table 7 where 75.8% of respondents said that their program either matched very much or quite a bit with a mean of 4.292 and a standard deviation of .765.

Table 7. Effectiveness of teaching at building professional skills

	% of Students Responding Very Much/Quite A Bit Matched	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Dev
Effectiveness of Teaching at Building Professional Skills	75.8%	65	4.292	.765

Students were also asked their confidence with respect to their professional readiness in each of the domains under consideration whereas 5 = very much prepared, 4 = quite a bit prepared, 3 = somewhat/moderate extent, 3 = a bit/slightly prepared, 1 = not at all prepared by my university. These findings are presented in Table 8 where all means are greater than a 4.0.

Table 8. Effectiveness/importance ratings by student

Competency	% of Students Confident in Professional Readiness	Mean	Std. Dev
Technology Skills	77%	4.09	.94
System Skills	83%	4.12	.79
Interpersonal Skills	95.31%	4.47	.59
Information Skills	89.24%	4.31	.74
Resource Skills	86.15%	4.22	.75

Finally, students were asked two questions about the importance of alignment between university degree programs and industry expectations on a scale where 5=extremely important, 4=highly important, 3=somewhat important, 2=not important, and 1=extremely unimportant. In response to the first statement “It is important that colleges and universities adjust their programs to reflect changing workforce demands”, 93.85% of participating students said that it was extremely important or highly important with a mean of 4.63 and a standard deviation of .65. Similarly, in response to the second statement “It is important that college faculty have a current understanding of the skills desired by employers” 98.47% of participating students said that it was extremely important or highly important with a mean of 4.72 and a standard deviation of .48. These results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Importance of alignment between university and industry

	% of Students Reporting Extremely Important/Highly Important	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Dev
It is important that colleges and universities adjust their programs to reflect changing workforce demands	93.85%	65	4.63	0.65
It is important that college faculty have a current understanding of the skills desired by employers	98.47%	65	4.72	0.48

DISCUSSION

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), comprised of representatives from business, labor, education, and government, developed the framework, of workplace competencies and foundation skills used in this study. This research study used a survey methodology for data collection and descriptive and inferential statistical methods during the analyses which were reported in the findings section. In this discussion section, the meaningfulness of the findings is interpreted and related back to the larger body of literature related to the topic of e-skills and workplace competencies in the hospitality industry and hospitality education. Each of the SCANS competency areas will be addressed in turn followed by an analysis of the hypotheses examined as part of this study. It is important to note, for each competency domain a mean of >4.0 was considered positive confirmation that the competency was highly valued by respondents.

Competency Analysis – Resources

Students and participating faculty strongly agreed that all four skills in the competency domain were highly valued and very important with a mean of >4.5. These results are consistent with other studies which produced findings that reflect strong agreement among professionals from various industries regarding the importance of resource skills in graduates (Harrison, 1996; Heimler, 2010; McClain, 2002; Quinn, 2013; Wood, 2003; Yang, 1994).

Competency Analysis – Information

Both students and faculty reported that the ability to acquire, organize, interpret and evaluate information are highly valued and very important skills with a tight grouping of scores and an average mean of >4.3. These results are consistent with Harrison (1996) Heimler (2010), McClain (2002), Quinn (2012), and Yang (1994,) but are not supported by studies such as Wood (2003).

Competency Analysis – Interpersonal

According to the findings from this study, four of the five highest ranked competencies by the majority of all respondents were in the interpersonal competency category with a mean of >4.5. These findings were expected as the hospitality industry places high emphasis on effective guest services skills and teamwork. The results are also consistent with the literature such as McClain (2002), Quinn (2013), Wilhelm (2002), and Woods (2003) who each reported the highest ratings of the five competency groups in the interpersonal area in their respective SCANS studies.

Competency Analysis – Systems

The ability to apply and use systems was considered relatively important by all respondents with an overall mean of 4.0. Student scores for systems skills were higher than faculty scores and there was much more variability among the faculty responses. These findings are consistent with what has been reported in the literature (Harrison, 1996; Heimler, 2010; McClain, 2002; Quinn, 2012; Wood, 2003).

Competency Analysis – Technology

The ability to select technology, apply technology to tasks, and maintain and troubleshoot technology was found to be the least important domain among respondents with mean ranking scores the lowest of all competency groups and with the highest variability among respondents with a mean of 4.2 for students and 3.7 for faculty. Overall however, the mean was still greater than >3.5 clearly indicating that technology holds some perceived importance albeit not nearly as highly valued as the other SCANS domains. These findings are consistent with what has been reported by Buergermeister, (1983), Harrison (1996), Heimler (2010), McClain (2002), Quinn (2012), and Wood (2003).

Given the rapid growth and strategic use of the internet and social media in the hospitality industry, a higher rating in the systems and technology domains by those in academia was expected. In contrast, a study of hospitality management graduates from a Midwestern university working in the lodging, F&B, and event planning areas, 1 to 5 years after graduation, reported that using computers effectively ranked 2nd out of the 20 (Sisson & Adams, 2013). Additionally, the findings of these hospitality students and faculty differ significantly from studies that have considered students studying business management and early career management professionals such as Buzzetto-More (2011) who found that technology use and technology management and security were paramount.

The authors postulate that troubleshooting and maintaining technology is a narrow focus that would probably not apply throughout the broader organization. As such, this responsibility may be more likely to fall under specialists in a specific support or technology department. As such, it may not be perceived with the same significance as the other domains to hospitality students and faculty.

H₁- There is strong agreement among academia and students regarding the importance of SCANS-specific competencies in hospitality graduates.

This hypothesis was examined by considering the responses to the Section II of the survey via the questions related to the SCAN specific competencies. A comparison chart and an ANOVA were generated. The output of the ANOVA analysis produced a p value of <0.05 indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the group means. As a result, the authors were unable to positively confirm this hypothesis.

According to the findings, there was a high level of agreement in all competency areas except technology. There were no significant differences between students and faculty regarding the importance of the resource, information, and interpersonal skills needed in the hospitality industry. Surprisingly, the study revealed student and faculty respondent perceptions regarding systems and technology skills differed significantly, with students citing systems and technology skills as having a greater degree of importance than the participating faculty. The faculty reported the lowest scores in two of the five domains: systems (M = 3.98, SD = .1892, n = 25); and technology (M = 3.76, SD = .2517, n = 25). These results may be explained, in part, by the fact that students use technology extensively and, therefore, place greater importance on its application. The rapid advancement of internet, social media, and other technologies have impacted the way students exchange ideas, work, study, and manage their lives. The results of these findings are consistent with other SCAN studies such as Wang & Tsai (2014) but differ from what has been previously reported in a study by Mayo and Thomas-Haysbert (2005).

H₂. Participating students believe that internships are effective at building professional skills

This hypothesis is predicated on the idea that internships help develop management competencies and can be used to determine skills and that require improvement. It was explored by considering student responses to a scaled question “How important are internship experiences at building the professional skills of students?” whereas a mean of >4.0 was achieved thus affirming the hypothesis. Student responses regarding the importance and benefits of a professional internship compare with most of the literature. There is broad agreement that internships help develop management competencies and can be used to determine which skills need improvement. Studies have consistently

shown that learning through internships can increase professional readiness, improve management and leadership skills, provide targeted hospitality industry experience, and improve student learning in the classroom (Roy & Sykes, 2017; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013).

H₃. Hospitality students are confident that their hospitality degree program is providing them with the skills necessary for professional readiness.

Overall, students were confident that their hospitality degree program is providing them with the skills necessary for professional readiness. The results were reflected in Tables 7-9 and with all means >4.0 the findings affirmed the hypothesis. These findings are similar to those of Bauer-Wolf (2018) but differed from Wang & Tsai (2014). Further, when asked their opinion students overwhelmingly agreed that “it is important that colleges and universities adjust their programs to reflect changing workforce demands” and that “it is important that college faculty have a current understanding of the skills desired by employers.”

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to provide updated and relevant information regarding the importance of specific skills and competencies from the perception of academic and student respondents. The findings of this study may be used to support the efforts to improve curriculum and instructional materials. This study also supports the need for educators to develop closer ties and increased dialogue with all segments of the hospitality industry, as well as work with industry-sponsored education foundations. From an industry perspective, organizations can use the results of this study to develop lifelong learning organizations dedicated to building skills and competencies through training and education.

LIMITATIONS

The greatest limitation of this study is that is focused exclusively on students attending a single institution. However, at the same time, this study provides research on a population that is expanding in numbers in higher education and that many educators, and much research, reports as being under-prepared for academic success (Allen, 1987; Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2018; Morgan & VanLegen, 2005). This paper builds on the findings of studies that have been previously conducted at majority institutions; however, it would be enhanced by replication and expansion to multiple institutions in the United States and abroad.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that there is inconsistent agreement among faculty and students regarding the importance of SCANS-specific competencies. At the same time, there is no argument that industry skills will be critical in the future of hospitality graduates. Overwhelmingly, participating students and faculty found all of the SCANS competencies important (albeit to varying degrees) with the highest ranked competency being interpersonal skills, which, given the importance of teamwork, customer service skills, leadership, and working with cultural diversity in the hospitality industry, should be expected. Additionally, participating students indicated their strong agreement that internships are effective at building professional skills. Finally, the hospitality students included in this study, who were enrolled in a skill-based curriculum, were confident that their program is preparing them with the necessary skills and competencies that they will need for their future careers.

Career readiness and student perceptions of preparedness are big concerns and should be reviewed and analyzed for regularly. Hospitality programs should work closely with industry advisory board members, internship partners, and campus recruiters to ensure that the skills, competencies, and experiential learning opportunities students are being exposed to are relevant to what the industry desires in new entrants. Strong, consistent internships and work-study programs, both during the school year and outside of it, need to be developed and used as a strategy in career development.

Local hospitality organizations should be identified and work programs developed for students to participate in freshman through senior year. Working while in school can help students understand the specific facets of the industry, make coursework more relevant, and help them develop crucial workplace skills outside the classroom. This ultimately prepares students for the transition from higher education to full-time employment.

The leadership challenge for educators is to determine if curricula are meeting the constantly changing needs of the hospitality industry and formulate a strategy to adapt programs to what the industry needs.

This research highlights the competencies that the respondents believe are important for graduates and provides a framework for academic leaders, to strengthen student learning and better prepare students to compete and succeed in the 21st century. This study can be used to review curriculum and adapt courses to strengthen student learning in specific areas. Further studies should be done tracking graduates, determining how they are performing in the workplace, and identifying skills and learning opportunities that can improve hospitality programs. Additional studies can be undertaken to determine if students with off-campus internships are better prepared for future employment than those without internships and if companies believe internships benefit the employer.

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Management Skills in the Hospitality Industry

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