

Cougar Initiative to Engage (CITE) Proposal Application

The goals of the Cougar Initiative to Engage are

1. To improve the skills of University of Houston students in competencies essential to success in their lives and careers.
2. To increase the number of high-impact co-curricular activities at UH that prepare students for success in their lives and careers upon graduation.
3. To increase the number of UH students participating in co-curricular activity as part of their undergraduate education.
4. To ensure that students are well prepared for their lives and careers after graduation.
5. To ensure that UH graduates are well equipped to meet the needs of the workforce and to engage in the world as responsible citizens.

In addition to the CITE goals, final proposals are evaluated using the following rubric:

Proposal Section	Rating
Novelty: Co-Curricular Learning Experience (CLE) is either new or not otherwise provided within the university, college, department, or program. Or CLE is a significant expansion of an existing co-curricular program.	1. Not Satisfactory 2. Needs Improvement 3. Satisfactory 4. Good 5. Excellent
Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): CLE adequately and appropriately incorporates at least two of the SLO for CITE.	
Relationship to the Curriculum: CLE is connected to the SLOs, curriculum, or mission of a department, college, degree program, or certificate.	
Budget: Requested funding is appropriate for proposed activity and level of funding available.	
Sustainability: There is a viable strategy to continue the CLE beyond the CITE funding period.	
Community Partners: Appropriate community partners have been identified. Community partners will be incorporated in the development and evaluation of the project.	
Scaffolding: The proposed CLE would be connected to other programs at different instructional levels.	
Institutional Support: Relevant leaders (director, chair, dean, etc.) have indicated support.	

To aid the Advisory Board in reviewing your submission, please make sure that you explicitly address the appropriate CITE goals and all eight evaluation components.

Cougar Initiative to Engage (CITE) Proposal Application

Cover Letter

To assist the Advisory Board in reviewing your proposal, use the space below to outline any updates from your preproposal and/or changes that you have made in response to feedback and requests for information. In your narrative, include

- a brief summary of the change or update,
- the location of each change/update (page, question, and paragraph number), and
- the question or concern that you are addressing if the change/update is a response to a specific request from the CITE Advisory Board.

Dear CITE Advisory Board,

Included in this document is a detailed proposal that outlines our "Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition". While we have not submitted a pre-proposal, this submission will serve as both as advised by the CITE directors Dr. Anne Dayton and Dr. Fan Wu. We are excited at the possibility of obtaining a CITE grant to further the educational goals of our college and to bring a new and innovative offering to our students in the form of experiential learning.

Thank you for your consideration.

Arlene Ramirez

Scott Taylor

1. UH Team Members Proposing the Project

Provide the names, departments, titles, and contact information of all UH project team members and explain their roles within the project. One member of the team should be identified as the primary contact for the CITE Office. If desired, a team member can be identified as the secondary contact.

Primary Contact: Arlene Ramirez, Conrad N. Hilton College, Instructional Assistant Professor
Email: aramirez33@uh.edu

Secondary Contact: Scott Taylor, Jr., Ph.D., Conrad N. Hilton College, Assistant Professor
Email: sttaylo3@central.uh.edu

Both team members are the creators/designers of the "Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition". Both will be contacts for students and industry mentors/judges and have worked together to develop, organize and plan the competition guidelines, deadlines and logistics.

2. Program Description and Rationale

The overview should include a succinct description of the background, purpose, and central objective of the program or project and should address the questions below:

- What opportunities for student learning, discovery, and engagement will this experience provide students?
- How will it accomplish one or more of the goals of CITE?

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted the hospitality, travel and tourism industries. Many ventures, especially small and mid-sized business are in need of innovation that can help them get their businesses back on track. With that in mind the objective of this competition is to produce initiatives for local businesses that can be easily implemented and will address effects of COVID-19 on their business. The initiatives will address these challenges in an innovative way in order to increase revenues and profitability without necessarily requiring a significant capital investment.

Prior to the start of the Fall 2020 semester, students within the Conrad N. Hilton College will receive announcements regarding the competition. In this announcement students will be encouraged to form teams and submit an application responding to a scenario about a fictitious hotel situation. The project team members (faculty) will serve as mentors for this initial submission. From these initial submissions three industry judges will review and select the top five teams whose response to the fictitious scenario best addressed the spirit of innovation and resourcefulness which was main concept of the competition. The learning outcomes provided in this proposal will also be used as criteria to select the finalist.

Once the top five teams have been selected, students will continue to work with project team members (faculty) but also be assigned an industry mentor and a challenge being faced by a segment of the local hospitality, travel or tourism community. The challenges being presented will be solicited from local businesses over the summer months by the project team and will be organized with all the relevant information so that students can engage and find creative and innovative solutions. Students will be encouraged not just to reboot to get the business going but to reinvent processes or strategies to help overcome the challenge.

3. Co-Curricular and Experiential Learning

- What will the students be doing during the activity?
- Is this an outside of the classroom experience? How?
- How is the project experiential for students?

Once the final five student teams are selected, they will be working closely with the project team members (faculty) and industry mentors to develop their initiative and successfully present it so that it can be implemented. The teams will be given a challenge based on a local community hospitality, travel or tourism business that needs some innovative ideas to move forward as they try to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Students will be working outside of the classroom, either visiting the local business or meeting with their industry mentor via video or in person to discuss what they are proposing and working how to effectively communicate and develop the idea. The students will have a true experiential learning opportunity as the challenges are focused on real-life scenarios that industry professionals are currently trying to manage as a result of the pandemic.

The student teams will have the opportunity to:

1. Further develop those skill sets that will be necessary to succeed in this new 21st century reality
2. Stretch their critical thinking problem solving skills
3. Learn how to be flexible and adaptable in a changing environment
4. Learn the importance of teamwork
5. Design a concept that could become a deliverable and tool for the industry partner
6. Strengthen communication skills necessary to articulate a strategy/concept
7. Engage skills learned in the classroom and directly apply them to real scenario while engaging with community and affecting change

As with any project, the students will need to develop a plan, they will be encouraged to use project management software to track their progress and make sure all aspects of the challenged are addressed. In addition, they will need to present their concept in a succinct, engaging and professional manner. This will require them to find ways to do so whether it is in person or through a digital presence, so a focus will be placed on strong communication.

4. Learning Outcomes

- What [CITE student learning outcomes](#) are associated with this endeavor?

If relevant, please include any studies from the literature to support or provide a framework for your proposal.

Student teams participating in this competition will have several learning outcomes but two that are closely related with CITE would be problem solving and effective communication. The students will work on these outcomes as follows:

Problem Solving: Students will need to analyze the challenge presented and based on the information provided develop recommendations for how to increase the overall performance of the business. The first step is to provide a response to the case study of a fictional hotel. From these submissions the top 5 teams will be selected to move forward to the competition. The selected teams will be assigned a challenge from a specific segment of the hospitality, travel and tourism business located in the local community. Students will need to not only solve the problem but clearly indicate how it will be implemented and how success will be measured. Through this process several analytical, critical thinking and other problem-solving skills will be used and mastered.

Effective Communications: In order to develop proposals responding to a challenge being faced by businesses in the community, student teams will first communicate their general ideas in a brief abstract submission. In order to move forward this abstract needs to be clear and project ideas clearly. Teams that are invited to submit full proposals will then work with mentors to further develop their ideas, write a full report and deliver a digital or live presentation to a panel of judges. With limited time and a lot of information to communicate, students will be given advice and feedback to execute a strong presentation. Therefore, students are encouraged and forced to work on developing and mastering their communication skill in order to move their initiative/solution forward.

5. Students

- When in their academic career will students take advantage of this experience – as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and/or seniors?
- Where in your program(s) does this activity occur for students (entry level, bridge, capstone, etc.)?
- Provide an estimate of how many students this experience will impact.
- What skillset or knowledge base (if any) do students need to have to participate in this experience?

The "Navigating Hospitality in the New Realty" student competition will be open to undergraduate HRM students who are in their junior and senior years. These junior and senior students should have taken a minimum of two of the following courses:

1. HRMA 2343 Hospitality Cost Controls
2. HRMA 2350 Management Principles in Hospitality
3. HRMA 3341 Hospitality Managerial Accounting
4. HRMA 3358 Hospitality Industry Law
5. HRMA 3361 Hospitality Marketing

This program will occur in the junior or senior year for most HRM students. Therefore, this program could be a bridge towards preparing them for their capstone course or could run parallel and further reinforce the major concepts of critical thinking and communication.

In this competition, students will be asked to make preliminary submissions and then five final teams will be chosen. The team sizes will be between 3 and 5 students so approximately 15 to 25 students will be involved in this experience.

Students who are involved in this competition will use the skills they have learned in their financial, management, law and marketing courses to:

- Further develop those skill sets that will be necessary to succeed in this new reality.
- Stretch their critical thinking problem solving skills
- Learn how to be flexible and adaptable in a changing environment
- Learn the importance of teamwork
- Create a concept into a deliverable
- Strengthen communication skills necessary to articulate a strategy/concept

6. Relationship to the Academic Curriculum

- Is this experience tied to a course or a degree program?
- How does this experience support student learning outcomes in a course, department, or program? Please specify which outcome(s).
- How will this activity impact current courses or co-curricular programs?
- How will this experience provide students with opportunities that are not currently offered by your department, program, or college?
- What further experiences (if any) will the students have after their CITE experience that may deepen their learning from this experience?

The "Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition" will not be tied to a specific course; however, it will highlight the skill set and knowledge base of the HRM program. This competition supports student learning outcomes as each team is tasked with working to research and develop solutions for a real-life scenario that is currently impacting the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry includes lodging, food service, bars, airlines, cruise ships, spas, fitness centers, car rental agencies, convention centers, and meeting venues.

Part of our college's mission states that "we embrace and foster an environment that includes community, relevancy, collaboration, multiculturalism, experiential learning, innovation, integrity and passion. Overall the competition supports many of the goals set in this mission. The students will be involved in:

Relevancy	students will be addressing problems that need to be addressed in the present
Collaboration	students will be working hand in hand with industry to move it forward
Experiential	students will be putting into practice what they have learned in the classroom in a unique format
Innovation	Students will need to focus on re-inventing operations in order to move forward, so innovation is key

Many of the courses currently offered in the HRM program provide examples of ways to apply theory into practice. The impact of this competition will be to complement the current courses in the curriculum and enhance the connection between theory and practice in more effective and tangible manner.

The HRM program has many opportunities to interact with industry. However, there currently is no specific program or course in the undergraduate program that has students working directly with a business to help provide a solution to a specific/current challenge.

Students will be working with industry mentors and local businesses, to develop ideas and implement them into a real operation. This working relationship will allow the students to forge bonds with the business they assist as well as the industry mentor that will hopefully last far beyond the competition time frame. Perhaps this would also open opportunities for internships or employment.

7. Resources and Budget

Proposals that include faculty, staff or administrative stipends must show how the faculty or staff members' time commitments are above and beyond ordinary responsibilities. Please note that CITE funds cannot be used for travel to conferences or for open access publication fees. Funding from CITE is available for a maximum of two years. Funding for a second year is not guaranteed.

- What resources and support do you currently have to implement this experience?
- What resources and support do you require?
- How will your project be able to continue beyond the CITE funding period?

In addition to a written narrative, please include an itemized budget for the proposed activity (see page 10). You may use [this example](#) as a guide for your budget.

The two faculty members involved in developing, organizing, implementing and having oversight of this competition are doing so in addition to their fall course load, research and other administrative responsibilities so a stipend is included for their overload. A graduate student would be added to the team in the fall to help with logistics and scheduling of events and mentors.

In order to successfully complete this project and provide the students and faculty with tools to produce a quality product, the resources that would require support are:

- monetary rewards for students (prizes)
- stipends for team and graduate student to assist in administrative and oversight
- funds for purchasing presentation software subscription
- funds for purchasing project management software subscription
- laptops for each team to be able to efficiently run the programs and presentations

This project should be viable after the CITE funding as the plan would be to advertise the results within the local community and the industry. A next step would be to increase the participants to students from other college's on campus. Highlighting the accomplishments from this first contest should draw interest to the college and more so to the university as a source and resource to the community. Awareness could then encourage a more co-curricular program that could become an annual event for the university.

During this initial year of the competition, the goal would be to promote within the hospitality community via testimonials of the results achieved by the students. Financial support for the program would be via asking either the businesses that were helped to donate a small amount towards next year's program. Hopefully the financial situation for the industry will be stronger and then the reach could be broader to go beyond the local community and perhaps state/country wide. Once again, the results from the first competition will be used to provide evidence that tangible results are achieved. Another avenue we would explore after the initial CITE funding would be to work with the Small Business Association and identify if there are any grants available that could help provide support for the student efforts.

CITE Proposal: Budget Template

Program Name: Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition

	Project Budget
Direct Personnel Expenses	
Arlene Ramirez--Co-Developer/Organizer	5,000.00
Scott Taylor--Co-Developer/Organizer	5,000.00
Stipend for graduate student coordinator/assistant TBD	2,500.00
<i>Sub-Total Personnel</i>	12,500.00
Other Direct Expenses	
Presentation software Screencast-O-Matic (\$9.50 per month for 2 months for 5 teams)	95.00
Project Management Software Teamwork (\$9 per month for 2 months for 5 teams)	90.00
Prize Money for winners assuming 5 students per team: First Place \$500 per member	2,500.00
Prize Money for winners assuming 5 students per team: Second Place \$400 per member	2,000.00
Prize Money for winners assuming 5 students per team: Third Place \$300 per member	1,500.00
Laptops for teams 1 MacBook Air per team (to be kept by college for future competition) \$1,000 x 5 teams	5,000.00
Miscellaneous supplies needed for data gathering or presentations	500.00
TOTAL DIRECT EXPENSES (Personnel + Other Direct Expenses)	11,185.00
OTHER FUNDING SOURCES	
Total Other Revenue Sources	0
TOTAL CITE FUNDS REQUESTED	23,685.00

8. Performance Assessment for Learning Outcomes

Please complete the CITE Student Assessment form for the two CITE student learning outcomes that you selected for your project.

Using the provided template provide a brief description of the assignment that will be used to evaluate student performance on each learning outcome. Include a description of expectations for each of the five performance levels listed in the template. This scale will be used when rating and reporting individual student performance on the outcome.

One template should be completed for each learning outcome. Two learning outcomes must be selected from among the following: *problem-solving*, *effective communication*, *teamwork*, *cultural competency*, *social responsibility*, or *ethical decision-making*. Note that developmental level refers to the educational goal of the assignment/activity. For example, students in upper-level courses might be expected to achieve mastery of a concept or skill whereas first-year students are becoming familiar with new ideas.

Please contact the CITE Office (coogsengage@uh.edu) if you need assistance developing rubrics for your program.

The American Association of Colleges & Universities VALUE Rubrics are a resource that can help with the development of assessment rubrics. For more information, visit the [AAC&U website](#). UH is an AAC&U member institution, but you will still need to create an account to download the VALUE Rubric documents.

Learning Outcome 1: Problem Solving	
Assignment: Proposal Development	
Developmental Level: <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforcement <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mastery	
Performance Level	Description
Exemplary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the challenge presented and identifies all key elements involved and how they are interconnected. • Identifies all additional resources or information required to effectively provide solutions. • Proposes solutions for each problem that is identified, that are sensitive to the context of the challenge and evaluates potential outcomes of the solutions proposed before implementation.
Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a clear understanding of the challenge presented and identifies most key elements involved and how they are interconnected. • Identifies a majority of the additional resources or information required to effectively provide solutions. • Proposes solutions for most problems that are identified, that are sensitive to the context of the challenge and evaluates potential outcomes of the majority of the solutions proposed before implementation.
Competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates sufficient understanding of the challenge presented and identifies a few key elements involved and how they are interconnected. • Identifies a few of the additional resources or information required to effectively provide solutions. • Proposes solutions for a few of the problems that are identified, that are sensitive to the context of the challenge and evaluates potential outcomes for some of the solutions proposed before implementation.
Needs Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates minimal understanding of the challenge presented and identifies minor elements involved and how they are interconnected. • Identifies no additional resources or information required to effectively provide solutions. • Proposes minimal solutions for a few of the problems that are identified and there is minimal evaluation of potential outcomes for some of the solutions proposed before implementation.
Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates no understanding of the challenge presented and does not identify any elements involved and how they are interconnected. • Identifies no additional resources or information required to effectively provide solutions. • Proposes no solutions for the problems that are identified.

Learning Outcome 2: Effective Communication	
Assignment: Presentation of Proposal	
Developmental Level: <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforcement <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mastery	
Performance Level	Description
Exemplary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central message is compelling, stated clearly, repeated, strongly supported and memorable. • Delivery techniques and language choices make the presentation compelling and speaker appears confident. • Organization of the presentation and use of supporting materials is clear, cohesive and establishes presenters' authority on the topic.
Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central message is clear and consistent with supporting materials. • Delivery techniques and language choices are interesting, and the speaker appears comfortable. • Organization of the presentation and use of supporting materials is clear and generally establishes presenters' authority on the topic.
Competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central message is basically understandable but is not often repeated and is not memorable. • Delivery techniques and language choices make the presentation understandable, but the speaker appears hesitant. • Organization of the presentation is mostly clear and use of supporting materials partially establish the presenters' authority on the topic.
Needs Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central message can be deduced but is not explicitly stated in the presentation. • Delivery techniques and language choices detract from the presentation and the speaker appears uncomfortable in front of the audience. • Organization of the presentation is not clear and supporting materials do not establish presenters' authority on the topic.
Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central message cannot be deduced from presentation. • Delivery techniques and language choices are unacceptable for a professional presentation and the speaker appears uncomfortable. • There is no clear organization to the presentation and no supporting materials are utilized.

9. Campus and Community Partners

- Have you secured campus and community partners to implement this project? Please describe any agreements (formal or informal, MOUs, etc.) that may have been made with community partners. Include any relevant written agreements, including emails.
- Are any additional campus and community partners needed? If so, how will you secure any additional required partnerships? If assistance is needed from the CITE Office, please clearly indicate your needs.

The Conrad N. Hilton College currently has strong ties to the Hotel and Lodging Association of Greater Houston (HLAGH), the Texas Restaurant Association (TRA), Meeting Planners International (MPI), National Association for Catering and Events (NACE), Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) and Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP). All of these groups have student chapters in our college and have assisted us in the past in many endeavors. We will be reaching out to them to obtain mentors and to find businesses within their membership that are in the Houston area and would agree to participate in the competition.

Beginning in July the two organizers will begin to meet with each group to start the processes of identifying industry mentors and the businesses that will participate. We are confident that there will be many willing to assist and use the findings produced by the student teams. The same group will be used to select individuals willing to serve as judges. Currently we have verbal support from several individuals and can obtain written statements that will indicate the support for the project.

10. Statement of Support

Please attach, as a PDF, an email or emails from your director, chair, dean or other relevant supervisor that demonstrates her/his/their support of your proposal.

Letter from Dean Reynolds attached.

11. Supplemental Materials

You may attach supplemental materials that will assist the CITE Advisory Committee in assessing your application to this proposal. Please summarize any supplemental material in your answers to the questions above.

1. ***Detail of competition to be posted for students to apply.***
2. ***Study from the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education supporting experiential learning.***

Submitting Your Proposal

1. Save your proposal and all supporting materials as one document with the following naming convention:
 - Projected start for project: year, semester (fall-FA, spring-SP, summer-SU)
 - pro (for proposal)
 - Last name and first initial of *primary* contact, i.e. contact who will be actively engaged in meetings and conversations to revise your submission. You may list up to two names.
 - Short, descriptive title of proposal of no more than 45 characters
 - Original (for the version)
 - Do not include any spaces

Example: 2020FA_pro_Smith,A_(Marketing_Study_Abroad)_Original2020SU_pro_
 Smith, A & Johnson, P_(Marketing_Study_Abroad)_Original

2. Attach your preproposal to an email to coogsengage@uh.edu. Please include your name, title, and contact information in the body of your message as well as the name(s) and title(s) of any other team members. Once we receive your submission, the CITE Office will contact you to arrange a meeting with the Director regarding next steps in the proposal development process.

If you need to add additional documents to your proposal after you have submitted it, please save the additions and your original proposal as one document. Email the document to coogsengage@uh.edu using the naming convention outlined above, but include the version number instead of “Original” (e.g. _v2, _v3, etc.).

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management
Office of the Dean

May 29, 2020

Cougar Initiative to Engage (CITE)
CITE Advisory Board
coogsengage@uh.edu

Dear CITE Advisory Board:

It is with pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation supporting the CITE Proposal Application submitted by Arlene Ramirez, Instructional Assistant Professor, and Dr. Scott Taylor, Assistant Professor, at the University of Houston Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management.

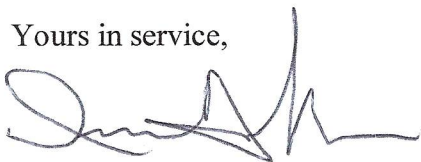
Their proposal titled *Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition* wonderfully meets the goals of the CITE program. Specifically, this project will improve UH students' essential competencies, increase co-curricular activities that lead to student success, increase the number of students participating in co-curricular activities, ensure that students will be prepared as they begin their careers, and ensure that UH graduates are well equipped to meet the industry needs and to subsequently participate as responsible global citizens.

In their proposal, they provide thorough explanations as to the novelty, student-learning outcomes, relationship to the curriculum, budgetary responsibility, sustainability, community engagement, appropriate scaffolding, and direct institutional support. Moreover, this is a unique project, one deserving of financial support.

I whole-heartedly and without reservation recommend this project as detailed in the proposal for CITE support.

If you would like more information, please call (713-743-7896) or email (der@uh.edu) me.

Yours in service,



Dr. Dennis Reynolds, Dean
Barron Hilton Distinguished Chair



Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management @ The University of Houston

Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition

Those of us who are part of the greatest industry in the world...hospitality, have been challenged in the last few months due to the affect this Covid-19 pandemic on travel and tourism. We know that hospitality will come back strong, but with success comes hard work and ingenuity to find new and improved ways to bring hospitality home and welcome our guests back. Whether a hotel, country club, restaurant, bar, spa, golf course, fitness center, meeting venue or any other segment of our diverse industry, the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management and The University of Houston would like to challenge the future leaders of the industry our students to the “Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition”. Many in our local hospitality industry community are in need of innovation that can help them effectively increase business levels and get their business’ back on track. With that goal in mind, the “Navigating Hospitality in the New Reality Team Competition” has the main objective to produce initiatives that can be easily implemented within any hospitality operation. A winning proposition will address innovative ways to increase revenues and profitability in without necessarily requiring significant capital investment or overhead. The winners of this competition will be able to provide a solution that a local hospitality industry partner can immediately incorporate, measure its effectiveness and ideally improve their operations and provide assistance on the road to recovery.

The Challenge

Students interested in this competition will need to form teams of no less than 3 and no more than 5 students. Each team will need to respond with some ideas to assist the fictitious Royal Ritz-Mare hotel. The responses will be reviewed, and the top 5 teams will move forward to the final round.

The strategy for most hospitality operations has focused on breaking even or reducing costs. Cost reduction strategies are helpful but alone are not sustainable, there is a need to incorporate innovate operation process or initiatives in order to increase top line revenue for the future viability of the business. The owners of the Royal Ritz-Mare have already invested significant capital in renovating the property prior to and during the pandemic and eventual stay at home orders. Due to the current performance of the owners will only consider initiatives that will improve performance and meet the following criteria:

- Must not require a significant capital investment, owners will consider initiatives that require only minimal costs
- Must be able to implement within a 30-day period or less
- Should have no negative impact on the guest experience but instead enhance it and therefore encourage repeat business
- Ideally would repurpose or redeploy resources already available (i.e. existing software, staffing, current expenditure levels, amenities, or other assets)
- Must comply with all local regulations

Proposals

All proposed initiatives should include the following:

- A focused initiative that is clearly defined so that it can truly be implemented by a hospitality operation
- A visual, rendering, sample marketing collateral, room layouts/designs, menus or other material that highlights the proposed initiative
- Measurement metrics that can be incorporated into current reporting to be used by management in determining the effect on the performance of the hotel
- Timeline for developing, implementation, and results
- Budget of costs, if any that would be required to successfully implement the initiative

Logistics

Conrad N. Hilton undergraduate junior and senior level students are invited to submit team proposals. Members of student teams should have completed at a minimum two of the following courses:

HRMA 2343—Hospitality Cost Controls
 HRMA 2350—Management Principles in Hospitality
 HRMA 3341—Hospitality Managerial Accounting
 HRMA 3358—Hospitality Industry Law
 HRMA 3361—Hospitality Marketing

- Students teams will need to submit a brief 2-page abstract of their idea no later than August 28, 2020 by 11:59 p.m. central standard time. The abstract should be typed, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1" margins all around. The abstract should briefly introduce the plan to address the issues faced by the Royal Ritz-Mare hotel.
- The abstract should include the items outlined in the challenge section above, any who do not address those items will not be selected.
- Abstracts will be reviewed and the top five (5) teams will advance to the final competition.
- Selected teams will be assigned an industry mentor and a scenario being faced by a local hospitality business. Each student will have until October 26, 2020 to develop a presentation and proposal to assist the business with overcoming their challenge.
- Teams will submit a final report outlining their initiative and give a 15-20 minute presentation for their plan. The reports and the presentations will be judged by a panel of industry professionals.

Timeline

August 28, 2020—Deadline to Apply at 11:59 p.m. central standard time

August 31, 2020—Teams selected to proceed announced

October 26, 2020—Team presentations and written proposal due

October 27, 2020—Winners announced

Awards

- First place team \$500 gift card for each team member
- Second place team \$400 gift card for each team member
- Third place team \$300 gift card for each team member

Background

The Royal Ritz-Mare is a fictional 150-room boutique hotel located in close proximity to a large metropolitan area. This hotel is located minutes away from great outdoor amenities (hiking, biking, etc.) as well as a quaint downtown district hosting multiple restaurants, bars and shops. A mere 20 minutes from a major airport, the Royal Ritz-Mare is the perfect location for commercial, group or leisure traveler.

For the commercial traveler or group, the hotel is an ideal location for either visiting the many corporate offices located nearby or hosting strategic planning, training programs or launching a new product. The hotel is equipped with 20,000 square feet of meeting space with the latest technology and all the amenities to provide attendees with a safe, productive and successful meeting environment. Leisure or Social business will find the many amenities the hotel has to offer enticing, like the two on-site restaurants, three bar spaces, on-site spa, pool, tennis, 18-hole golf course and full fitness center. The hotel has space with views that will create the ultimate wedding venue.

The Royal Ritz-Mare typically sees peak traffic from early Spring into late Fall; however, due to the pandemic business levels for 2020 have been dismal. Like many other hotels over half of the staff has been furloughed and operations were for nearly three weeks during April – May 2020. The hotel took advantage of the closure as it was in the middle of a renovation, which was completed at the end of May. During this time the hotel management also took the time to develop new safety and sanitation standards, the revenue loss has significantly impacted their business model. Recently the hotel has reopened its doors; however, while there has been interest most activity is in cancellations rather than bookings and the hotel is struggling to book events to fill all the empty meeting space.



Experiential Learning in Hospitality Education Through a Service-Learning Project

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Experiential Learning in Hospitality Education Through a Service-Learning Project

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ABSTRACT

The importance of experiential learning in hospitality and tourism education is widely noted. Effective learning can only be achieved by well-guided practice in the real world. Learning by doing is widely manifested in the hotel and tourism programs of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In this study, we explored the role of the service-learning subject in hospitality education. Through analyzing students' reflective journals, we found that, of all learning outcomes, teamwork and leadership had the highest number of reflections, followed by (a) developing cultural sensitivity and (b) identifying, defining, and resolving relevant problems. This real-life service-learning subject is highly valuable to students because it provides students with unique learning opportunities that are scarce in traditional classrooms.

KEYWORDS

Experiential learning;
hospitality education;
service-learning

Introduction

The division of theory and practice is a frequently cited issue in hospitality education (Ruhanen, 2005). Today various levels of education have implemented innovative and attractive teaching elements in and out of the classroom to enhance students' learning experience and to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Experiential learning has been one of the most popular approaches in recent years (Kiser & Partlow, 1999).

Experiential learning theory differs from other learning theories because of its distinguished emphasis on the central role of experience in learning (Northern Illinois University Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 2012). Within the concept of learning through experience or learning by doing, experiential learning offers interactive, vibrant, and multidimensional approaches to enhance and enrich students' learning outcome (Northern Illinois University Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 2012). *Experiential learning* is "the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; knowledge results from the combination of understanding and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

The benefits of experiential learning are well noted. In hospitality and tourism education, experiential learning is considered one of the key features of service industry

education. Students are required to put theory into practice to succeed in this industry. The classroom environment, case studies, guest speakers, laboratory activities, video presentations, and role playing are all part of experiential learning methods. Out-of-the-classroom experiences, internships, exchange programs, fieldwork, and service-learning experiences are also included in experiential learning methods. Therefore, experiential learning is important because it offers multidimensional functions to enrich students' learning experience.

Of all of the experiential learning approaches, service-learning is a method that offers students the opportunity to gain experience by offering services to the community.

Hospitality and tourism studies are closely related to commercial services, which emphasize practical experience. Practical experiences and food and beverage (F&B)-related activities obtained by working in kitchens, bars, and restaurants comprise experiential learning methods. Students may be assessed through individual/group projects, reports, and exams. However, few alternative assessment methods may be available to evaluate their learning progress.

The unique nature of service-learning subjects limits their inclusion in other hospitality and tourism-related studies. Unlike commercial service subjects, service-

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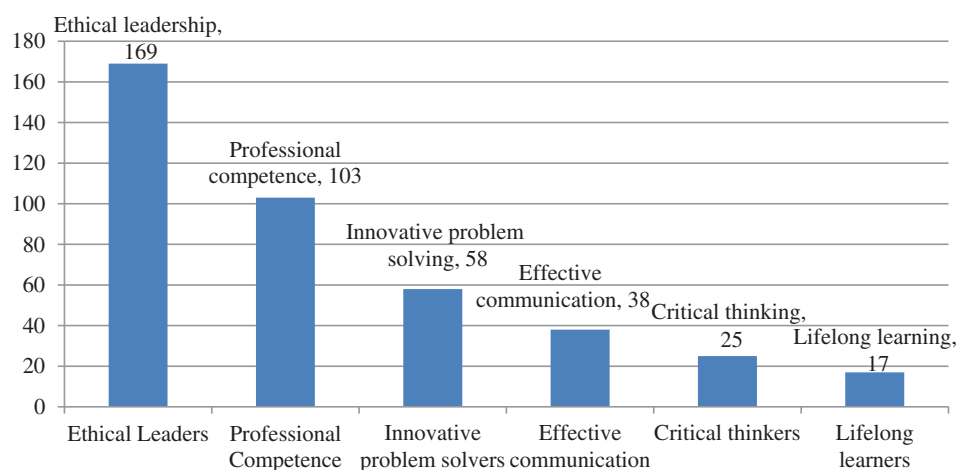


Figure 1. Frequencies of categories of learning outcomes.

learning offers students an opportunity to serve the community. Bringle and Hatcher (1996, p. 222) noted that service-learning offers “an additional means for reaching educational objectives, and academic credit is appropriate for service activities when learning objectives associated with the service are identified and evaluated.” Thus, service-learning can be a remarkable experience for students in their school life.

We aim to investigate the alignment of school-intended learning outcomes for community service and students’ reflective journals for the subject Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions. By analyzing the students’ reflective journals, we aim to understand the students’ achievement and learning outcome at the program level to provide recommendations for future subject designs. The specific objective of this study is to answer two questions: (a) How do service-learning subjects help students achieve required learning outcomes? (b) What specific benefits does this subject have for the students? These objectives are realized by analyzing the contents of the students’ reflective journals immediately after the subject. This approach may objectively present the students’ feelings and perceptions of the subject, which makes it valuable for gaining insights into the students’ perspective and adding to the existing literature. By studying a specific service-learning subject such as this, we also intend to provide more contextual explanations, because every real-life learning program is unique and context based.

Literature Review

Experiential learning often refers to exploration of the realities in the workplace by integrating various activities, such as internships, case studies, field trips, and activity involvement, to enhance the learning experience.

Experiential learning methods provide students with the opportunity to interact with educators and employers. Previous research has cited effective experiential learning activities, including role playing, laboratory exercises, listening to guest speakers, case studies, and virtual learning (Ruhanen, 2005; Yan & Cheung, 2012). This learning method emphasizes content and the process of experiential learning, in which the instructor acts as a facilitator and guide rather than someone who directs the steps (Northern Illinois University Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 2012).

The service-learning experience is considered a form of experiential learning that “combines academic study with service in the community” (Eyler, 2009, p. 2). Cecil (2012) considered service-learning a powerful pedagogy that integrates course content and community service experience to obtain a meaningful education outcome.

Bringle and Hatcher (1995, p. 112) pointed out that

service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience, in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Furco (1996) stated that service-learning is different from other experiential methods because it offers equal benefits to both the service provider and the recipient of the community service. Cecil (2012, p. 318) enumerated the four beneficiaries of service-learning as students, faculty, institutions, and communities.

Involvement in service-learning helps students become more proficient in communication, teamwork, and problem solving, thereby enabling them to become active knowledge consumers rather than passive learners (Aldridge, Williamson, & Harris, 2011). Service-

learning offers opportunities for students to reflect on their service, democratic values, and citizenship (O'Halloran & Deale, 2004). This learning method also benefits learning development and encourages students to find solutions for real-life community issues and meet important human and environmental needs (O'Halloran & Deale, 2004).

Cecil (2012) further discussed the fact that service-learning programs benefit not only students and communities but also faculties and institutions (please see Table 1 for details). Faculty members may incorporate additional practical techniques with problem-solving skills and active teaching methods. O'Halloran and Deale (2004, p. 66) noted that service-learning methods allow interaction within the community and the industry. Such opportunities "strengthen the ties between academic and real-world practice." Aldridge et al. (2011) discussed the benefits of service-learning for institutions, which include forming relationships between the institution and the community. Departments, schools, and universities can also "explore the critical skills that students will need to become successful global citizens" (Cecil, 2012, p. 321).

A community-based approach to hospitality and tourism education is unique because it offers a practical application to social hospitality. Instead of focusing on industry needs, the method provides opportunities to serve the community and transform it into a better place (Aldridge et al., 2011). Markey and Holsinger-Fuchs (2004) also contended that service-learning is not only about students' learning but also about what the program can offer to communities.

Moscardo and Pearce (2007) argued that focusing on the benefits of experiential learning can be an alternative way to evaluate this teaching method. The authors investigated the benefits that structured work experience can bring to three parties, namely, institutes, students, and employers (Moscardo & Pearce, 2007). The benefits that institutes target include "career development or testing, skills acquisition, skills application, and real world practice" (p. 24). The benefits as identified from students' perspective are mostly

pragmatic and related to future jobs, including students improving their resumes by gaining practical experience, developing networks, testing out different career options, and learning skills. However, from employers' perspective, this kind of program offers them a chance to carry out corporate social responsibility by helping students, reducing risks, and developing the potential for innovative approaches that students might bring about (Moscardo & Pearce, 2007).

Placing students at the center of teaching and learning, service-learning subjects are unique in their learning outcomes. Unlike other subjects that students take inside the classroom during the semester, service-learning provides students with the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and offer their services to people in need. Students are thereby empowered to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to the community. Students obtain the following learning outcomes: "demonstrate empathy for people in need and a sense of civic responsibility" and "reflect on their role and responsibilities, both as professionals in their chosen discipline and as responsible citizens" (Kwong & Lin, 2013, p. 2). Service-learning subjects also apply theoretical learning to practical settings, thereby emphasizing hands-on experiences and contributions to the community (Aldridge et al., 2011). Experts notice significant differences between students who participate in service-learning programs and those who do not, including higher learning motivation and better application of knowledge (Markey & Holsinger-Fuchs, 2004).

Although the benefits of experiential learning have been highlighted here, its negative effects have also been explored. In the literature concerned with structured work experience for tourism students, Moscardo and Pearce (2007) cited certain negative effects of experiential learning, including a mismatch between learning content and learning objectives, poor outcomes of skill acquisition, and inefficiency in teaching. We argue that with well-designed subject structures, instructors can overcome the disadvantages of experiential learning.

Table 1. Summary of benefits of service-learning (Cecil, 2012).

Students	Faculty
Communication	Active teaching methods
Teamwork	Strengthen academic and real-life practice
Problem solving	
Global citizenship	
Institution	Community
Relationship between the institution and the community	Achieve the community's goals and mission, reduce costs for service provided by service-learning
A medium through which the community and students can receive first-hand learning experience	Create new networking opportunities

The nature of hospitality and tourism fields requires young professionals to show positive attitudes, professional competence, responsible citizenship, and effective communication skills. Service-learning subjects in higher education should encourage students to become better global citizens. Therefore, we aim to explore the role of service-learning in hospitality and tourism fields by conducting a case study in a commercial guesthouse. The findings can help improve the subject and provide implications for future experiential learning programs.

Methodology

Background of the Study

Service-learning has been implemented as a mandatory 3-credit subject for all undergraduate degree students at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Students are required to choose a service-learning subject in Semesters 2 and 3 to fulfill the school's requirements before graduation. In 2014, schools in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Africa, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Vietnam offered more than 38 different service-learning subjects. Apart from the one under study, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) offered two other service-learning subjects in 2014, namely, Community Tourism: Tour, Training, Operator, and Event From and for the Community (conducted in Hong Kong) and Ecotourism in Rural and Developing Regions (conducted in Sichuan Province in Mainland China).

The service-learning subject Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions was offered for the first time by the SHTM at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The objective of this subject is to train students with hospitality knowledge and skills that they will impart to recipients in developing regions.

The recruitment process began by sending out interview invitations according to the online registration of students. More than 45 students attended the group interview sessions. They were asked to express their understanding of service-learning and their intention to join the particular subject. Finally, 17 students enrolled in the subject.

The class was designed to meet for nine out of 14 weeks in the academic calendar in Semester 2. In Semester 3, the class would spend 14 days in Cambodia. Students were required to work on various elements during Semester 2 to prepare for their service in Semester 3, as follows:

- Understand service-learning by e-learning
- Meet with the client (Green Pasture Inn) via Skype

- Prepare a business proposal and training manual according to their assigned teams, as follows: front office, housekeeping, F&B, and marketing
- Onsite observation and hands-on experience for the four assigned sectors in Hotel ICON (the training hotel of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Students gained knowledge on the cultural background, logistics, and service delivery tasks (business plan) during Semester 2. In Semester 3, the students spent 14 days in a field visit and service delivery in a guesthouse operated by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. They were briefed and debriefed daily by their group leader and instructors before and after service. At the end of the field trip, the students were required to hand in their individual reflection journals and team presentations, which were created based on their overall experience. The instructional methodology related to service-learning incites reflection from students (Markey & Holsinger-Fuchs, 2004). The instructors applied seven out of 18 experiential learning methods (video, training hotel, laboratory, talk by guest speaker, practicum, fieldwork, and student teaching) to enhance student learning in the subject.

Participants

The service-learning subject Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions accepted only 17 students, which included 11 SHTM students and six non-SHTM students. Based on the nature and needs of Green Pasture Inn, the students were divided into four teams, namely, marketing, F&B, front office, and housekeeping. The teams were required to propose the following for their assigned areas: a business plan that included a training manual and a training video for four divisions. The goal was to deliver a well-structured business plan that Green Pasture Inn could sustain after the students' service delivery.

Recipients

Green Pasture Inn is a 12-room guesthouse operated by a local NGO in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, under the leadership of Mr. Phany. Green Pasture Inn was an ideal collaboration partner for the following reasons:

- (1) The guesthouse was newly established in January 2014.
- (2) Management had very limited knowledge and skills in guesthouse operation.

- (3) The staff did not have any relevant experience in running a guesthouse.

After a site visit in December 2013, both instructors agreed that the small-scale guesthouse operation was manageable and would be an ideal collaboration partner for the student activities.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis of 17 Reflective Journals. The students were required to submit reflective journals after completing the project, as specified earlier. Each journal contained approximately 2,000 to 3,000 words. Upon submission, the research team used NVivo (Version 10) to analyze the content of the journals based on the predesigned learning outcome framework (see Table 2). NVivo can organize specific entries or nodes into specified categories and subcategories and could efficiently and objectively analyze qualitative data in the journals. Three researchers worked together to code the journals for consistency. Discussions on discrepancies in the interpretation of student reflections were conducted, and the discussion continued until the researchers agreed on more than 90% of coding.

Coding was conducted in terms of text units or sentence clusters expressing one complete idea according to the intended subject-level program learning outcomes (see Table 2).

Here are two examples of text units:

Sample Text Unit 1

As a Marketing Team manager, I am glad that I could use my Photoshop skills to design Green Pasture Inn Guesthouse Brochures and a Mini-Map for Green Pasture Inn. (Student 1)

Sample Text Unit 2

I will note down the work I will do in the morning, the learning process, and the performance of the staff.

Moreover, I will highlight any problems and suggestions so that I can discuss them with my teammates, and we can all solve the problems more effectively. (Student 2)

Sample Text Unit 1 was about the student's application of one particular marketing skill, Photoshop, and was coded as A2—Operational skills. Sample Text Unit 2 illustrates how the student learned to solve problems effectively and was coded as D9—Identify, define, and resolve relevant problems.

Findings

The coding process systematically categorized and subcategorized the text units. Frequencies were calculated for categories and subcategories. The categories included (a) professional competence, (b) critical thinking, (c) effective communication, (d) innovative problem solving, (e) lifelong learning, and (f) ethical leadership. Each category was further analyzed by subcategory. Detailed information on categories and subcategories is listed in Table 3. Under each subcategory, the salient points of the entries were summarized.

According to the results, the students' reflective journals covered all of the intended learning outcomes. Out of 410 entries, the highest number of reflections was on ethical leadership ($n = 169$) and professional competence ($n = 103$), followed by innovative problem solving ($n = 58$). Effective communication, which comprised only one subcategory, had 38 entries. Entries on critical thinking ($n = 25$) and lifelong learning ($n = 17$) were also found in the journals. Figure 1 visually presents the frequency of each category.

Table 3 summarizes the results developed from data analysis using the NVivo 10 software.

Table 2. Intended program learning outcomes.

Category	Subcategories
Professional Competence	A1. Management skills A2. Operational skills A3. Global understanding A4. Elements of entrepreneurship
Critical Thinking	B5. Critical thinking B7. Creativity and strategic thinking
Effective Communication	C6. Effective communication using multimedia and technology
Innovative Problem Solving	D8. Innovative and strategic thinking D9. Identify, define, and resolve relevant problems
Lifelong Learning	E10. Foster a desire for lifelong learning
Ethical Leadership	F11. Teamwork and leadership F12. Personal and corporate social responsibility F13. Cultural sensitivity F14. Specialist skills and knowledge in hotel management

Table 3. Content analysis of students' reflection writing ($N = 17$).

Category	Subcategories	Frequency (%)	Salient Points
F. Ethical Leadership (169/41.2%)	F13. Cultural sensitivity	58 (14.1)	Understanding another culture Awareness of cultural differences Different service strategies for different cultures
	F11. Teamwork and leadership	54 (13.2)	The importance of teamwork and leadership Reflections on the frustrations and difficulties of teamwork and how the students overcame them Tactics and changed beliefs about leadership Collaboration and cooperation among the team members Joy derived from successful teamwork
	F12. Personal and corporate social responsibility	38 (9.3)	Different roles and functions in a team Care for the global community Reflection on Hong Kong Motivation for further corporate social responsibility
	F14. Specialist skills and knowledge in HM	19 (4.6)	Enhanced understanding of HM Enhanced skills in HM Overall growth in HM
A. Professional Competence (103/25.2%)	A3. Global understanding	32 (7.8)	Broadening horizon Know more about Cambodia Changed beliefs about Cambodia Apply knowledge and skills in Cambodia A global understanding of HTM
	A2. Operational skills	31 (7.6)	Hotel operating skills: housekeeping practical skills, F&B service skills, front office operating skills Photoshop skills and other marketing-related technical skills Hotel information technology practical skills Apply knowledge on operating a guesthouse Learn the standard operating procedures in a guesthouse and obtain hands-on experience
	A1. Management skills	22 (5.4)	Generic skills such as people skills, coordinating and collaborating skills, presentation skills, managing and leading skills, communication and problem-solving skills, team motivating skills, and time management skills Training and teaching Tailor-made marketing activity development Developing and evaluating service tactics
	A4. Elements of entrepreneurship	18 (4.4)	Dedicate efforts to make the real-life project a success Novel experience in operating a guesthouse and applying knowledge and skills New challenges and experiences Making contributions to the operation of a nonprofit guesthouse A chance to design, plan, try new activities, and achieve success
D. Innovative Problem Solving (58/14.1%)	D9. Identify, define, and resolve relevant problems	45 (10.9)	Descriptions of the challenges, problems, and difficulties that the students encountered Descriptions of how the students tried to solve problems Adjustments and outcomes of the problem-solving process Reflection on how much the students learned from the problem-solving process Vivid examples of the aforementioned topics
	D8. Innovative and strategic thinking	13 (3.2)	Imaginative work in proposals Tailor-made marketing activities New solutions for improved performance Innovative practice to improve efficiency in HM operation Innovative problem solving
C. Effective Communication (38/9.3%)	C6. Effective communication using multimedia and technology	38 (9.3)	Understanding the importance of good communication among different individuals and among different departments Communication via different channels, such as gestures when using a language does not work Reflective thinking on poor communication Enhanced communication skills Understanding cross-cultural communication
B. Critical Thinking (25/6.1%)	B5. Critical thinking	15 (3.7)	Reflection on the practice and coming up with different plans Analysis of an identified problem Better understanding of HTM on critical analysis Critical evaluation of proposals, practice, and outcome
	B7. Creativity and strategic thinking	10 (2.4)	Changing proposals and plans to suit the real-life situation Modification of current practice in the guesthouse for better performance Creating new practice, such as creating a Facebook page for the guesthouse and new menu ideas for F&B
E. Lifelong Learning (17/4.1%)	E10. Foster a desire for lifelong learning	17 (4.1)	Experience in Cambodia made the students treasure what they had and increased their motivation to learn earned from the spirit and attitude of Cambodians Changed beliefs about life and the world, thereby resulting in the students' determination to learn differently

Ethical Leadership

The ethical leadership category had the most responses, with 169 out of 410 text units. This category described and reflected the students' perceptions of how the service-learning project helped them grow as ethical leaders. The category was further divided into four subcategories, namely, cultural sensitivity ($n = 58$), teamwork and leadership ($n = 54$), personal and corporate social responsibility ($n = 38$), and specialist skills and knowledge in hotel management (HM; $n = 19$). The following is a discussion based on each of these subcategories and their salient points.

Cultural Sensitivity

The nature of the project required the students to complete their service-learning in Cambodia, an underdeveloped and remote nation from the perspective of Hong Kong students. Many of the participants joined this subject out of curiosity about what it would be like to go to Cambodia. However, the result was beyond their expectations. Cultural difference is the major source of such perception, and the students had to adopt different service strategies to cater to such differences. The different culture also incited profound reflection from the students. This subcategory had 58 text units. Here is a sample statement for such reflection: "Cambodia is truly a nice country even if the people may not (be) very rich. After 13 days of service learning in Cambodia, I have a clearer appreciation of people and culture in Cambodia" (Housekeeping 1).

Teamwork and Leadership

The students revealed that they had learned and discussed teamwork on many occasions in school, but they had never practiced teamwork in a real-life work environment. Many students claimed that teamwork was not easy, but they managed to be cooperative and collaborative. The students emphasized how happy they were when they began working as a team. "Thankfully, after the three-day site visit, we began to mingle with each other. We started to work as a team and eventually operated as a team" (Project leader).

The students also gained a new understanding of the importance of leadership. The students who acted as leaders reflected on the challenges they faced and their changed attitude toward leadership.

Personal and Corporate Social Responsibility

In addition to discovering the culture, most students felt a sense of responsibility to help countries like Cambodia, where the people are friendly but underprivileged. The experience also helped the students reflect on underprivileged people in Hong Kong, thereby strengthening the

students' determination to help those in need. Here is a typical statement that the students made about responsibility: "After this service, I do feel the need to care more about the community. There are so many people living in miserable situations" (Marketing 1).

Enhanced Specialist Skills and Knowledge in HM

Ten students reflected on their enhanced specialized skills and HM knowledge. Six of the 17 students were majoring in other areas, such as marketing, building and real estate, business, nursing, and design.

As some students mentioned, the project was a real-life and cross-cultural project that was very different from conventional classroom lectures. The participants had the opportunity to practice what they had learned but never really understood, such as teamwork and leadership. This may have been the reason why the students expressed the most insights into these topics.

Professional Competence

Professional competence had the second highest number of reflections. The category comprised 103 text units, which were further analyzed into the subcategories global understanding ($n = 32$), operational skills ($n = 31$), management skills ($n = 22$), and elements of entrepreneurship ($n = 18$). The following is a discussion based on each of the developed subcategories and their salient points.

A Global Understanding of HM

A total of 32 text units stated how the project helped the students gain a better understanding of HM. Regardless of their majors, the students obtained a holistic understanding of the hotel business. This kind of reflection was more profound from students who majored in other subjects. One of the students said,

Through this subject, I have an overview of how a hotel runs and know some basic knowledge of some departments. The more I do, the more I realize that I still have a lot of things need to learn. I need to keep moving. (F&B 2)

These students also developed their understanding of HM in a developing country, where standard procedures and expectations were different because of limitations in resources.

Operational Skills

Student participants majoring in HM reflected on how they treasured the opportunity to practice what they learned in school on hotel operation. A total of 31 text units described the application of operation skills in the hotel business. The skills described were mostly related

to the assigned areas; the students were divided into four groups. The marketing team reflected on their application of Photoshop skills, video shooting, Web site creation, online marketing, and so on. The F&B team reflected on restaurant service, their adaptation to the environment, and how they helped create a new menu. The housekeeping team reflected on how they assisted the guesthouse staff in improving room standards and quality. The front office team reflected on how they learned related skills and how they imparted such skills to the guesthouse staff and managers. Here is a statement from one of the housekeeping team members:

We learned very fast, and soon they felt confident to let us clean the rooms without their supervision or help. They trusted that we could do as well as them. This was a great recognition for all of us. This experience also enabled me to have deeper understanding with the housekeeping department of the lodging industry, which was very valuable for my future career in the hotel industry. (Housekeeping 2)

Management Skills

The students noted their improvement on a wide range of abilities, from generic people skills to training skills, including presentation, communication, time management, and general problem solving. The marketing team, for example, reflected on the challenge of planning:

The most challenging situation that the marketing team faced was the Fun Day Proposal for Precious Women. We had to come up with games suitable for them as they all have different histories and backgrounds. We had to be very careful and considerate about the games we proposed.

In total, this subcategory had 22 text units.

Elements of Entrepreneurship

Several statements revealed how the students perceived their ability to help the business by contributing their expertise. They were satisfied and felt a sense of success. Their sense of achievement also came from the perception that the improved service procedures, menu, Web sites, and positive comments on Trip Advisor benefitted the guesthouse. For some participants, the opportunity to apply what they learned in school was already satisfying.

Innovative Problem Solving

Identify, Define, and Resolve Relevant Problems

This category on how the students identified and solved problems comprised a total of 45 text units. The students were allowed to practice their skills in a real-life situation, and they faced numerous problems and issues daily. Every

problem was unique, and their textbooks did not contain exact solutions for every problem. The students had to learn to identify and solve problems by themselves, which is similar to learning how to swim. The students treasured the experience because they could never have had similar opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills in a conventional classroom. The following statement illustrates how one student identified a language problem and managed to solve it:

We were so shocked and worried as most of the Green Pasture Inn staff members do not know much English. After that, we figured out that the solution to this problem is to simplify and translate most of the PowerPoint slides into Khmer. If necessary, we will explain it using body language to let them understand more about what we taught and immediately go on to Google Translate website for translation when they really did not understand. (Front Office 1)

Innovative and Strategic Thinking

Some reflections were on how the students demonstrated innovative problem-solving skills ($n = 13$). One student mentioned imaginative work in proposals, and another mentioned new solutions to improve performance. The project even required an innovative menu design. For example, the F&B team reflected,

After deciding that food always comes first and service follows, we had more jobs on designing menus and assisting the breakfast service in terms of cooking. Hence, starting from the second day, we had different designated menus every day, which meant I had to redesign the menu every day and our team had to prepare preference forms every day to facilitate the preparation process. (F&B 3)

Effective Communication

The students realized the importance of effective communication ($n = 38$) through the project, as reflected by vivid descriptions of communication barriers, including how they tried to communicate via alternative channels, how they tried to manage from shift to shift, and how they learned that language was not the only barrier to cross-cultural communication. The students were able to keep a detailed record of their use of willpower and process to conquer challenges. The reflections contained expressions of joy when the participants finally learned to communicate effectively with their fellow students and with the people in Cambodia. The following quote profoundly reflects the students' understanding of the importance of communication from a practical level:

I learned that it is very important for different departments in a hotel to communicate and cooperate with each other. This concept only remained in the

knowledge level. During this service learning, I realized that F&B needs to communicate with the front desk to confirm the number of guests who will have breakfast next day. Also, housekeeping and front desk need to cooperate closely to make sure which room is clean and available or dirty and occupied. (Group leader)

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking

This category contained 15 text units indicating that students demonstrated critical thinking by evaluating proposals and business plans and adjusting their plans to fit the real situation. Other students critically analyzed the problems they encountered. The following quote shows that one student started to use critical thinking by comparing the proposal and real-time operation: "I realized there were many differences between the proposal and the operation. We cannot just put everything we prepared into the real operation. After constant correction and adjustment, we did better the next day" (Front Office 2).

Creativity and Strategic Thinking

Creativity and strategic thinking had 10 text units. Examples included changing proposals and plans to suit real-life situations and implementing new practices, such as a Facebook page for the guesthouse. For example, one of the students said, "I improved a lot and was trained to be more sensitive to locating the problems and be detail-minded in formulating strategies to cope with difficulties" (F&B 3).

Lifelong Learning

The students described how the learning attitude of Cambodians affected them. For example, one student commented,

The GPI (Green Pasture Inn) staff members were willing to ask questions to know more, whereas the PolyU students were very passive in asking questions. This leads me to reflect on my attitude toward study and allows me to think about the purpose of the study. (Front Office 2)

The students felt ashamed for not appreciating the rich learning opportunities and resources available to them in their home country. They expressed their determination to learn from the Cambodians and to study harder in the future. This experience also gave the students a more positive outlook on life and the world. This category contained 17 text units.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study addressed the important outcomes of service-learning, which demonstrated unique points of service delivery in a commercial setting. Unlike with similar subjects, the students applied what they learned in school and practiced their HM and operation training on actual recipients (guesthouse staff).

From the aforementioned findings, the benefits of this service-learning subject for the students are evident. The four benefits that Cecil (2012) outlined (communication, teamwork, problem solving, and global citizenship) were reflected in the students' journals. As expected, the opportunity to apply knowledge in real-life working situations was greatly appreciated, which agrees with most literature on work-integrated learning, experiential learning, and service-learning (Aldridge et al., 2011; Eyler, 2009; Moscardo & Pearce, 2007).

Other benefits, such as increased awareness of cultural difference and motivation for corporate social responsibility, were due to the uniqueness of the service-learning subject under study. The fact that the subject, especially the latter half, was learned in Cambodia, helped the students understand more beyond the subject scope. It brought the students closer to the community, which is one of the starting points of service-learning programs (Markey & Holsinger-Fuchs, 2004). The project helped induce a sense of responsibility for the community, which, according to the students, had never occurred to them.

The aforementioned findings also highlight the enhanced learning experience of the students. Apart from being able to apply knowledge in a real-life working situation, this was also realized through the following: (a) cultivating a sense of achievement: the students felt proud of themselves when they saw changes in the F&B practice in the guesthouse and when they saw how the guesthouse benefited from the innovative practices that the students introduced; (b) an integration of learning and teaching: the students needed to learn and teach at the same time, and learning is usually more effective when students need to teach right after learning; and (c) memorable real-life situations: the students faced real-life problems, situations, cultural differences, and changes, and the fact that this happened in another country was memorable for the students.

In addition, this service-learning subject was valuable because it offered learning opportunities that traditional textbooks and classrooms cannot offer. Skills such as teamwork and leadership are easy to discuss in class based on theories and teachers' explanations. However, it is only when students are confronted with real-life situations that they can genuinely understand the issue. This is a good

example of expanding the students' learning beyond the four walls of the classroom (Markey & Holsinger-Fuchs, 2004).

The aforementioned findings were shared among lecturers who led two other service-learning subjects under the SHTM. When interviewed, the lecturers shared that most of the aforementioned findings were agreed on, except for the subcategory of cultural sensitivity. Because one of the service-learning subjects was carried out in Hong Kong, students from that subject did not have such reflections.

The findings in this study also helped us identify the shortcomings of such service-learning programs. It is difficult to control or manipulate students' achievement toward the intended learning outcomes. For example, the last category indicated in Table 3, lifelong learning, incited little reflection from the students. Furthermore, every service-learning program is unique but limited in scope. Thus, such programs may only offer limited areas of learning opportunities. Unlike with classroom teaching, it is difficult to include every desired aspect of knowledge in the subject. Contrary to our expectation, the students' reflection on management skill development in the field of hospitality comprised only a moderate amount compared with other subcategories.

The student participants had an unforgettable learning experience as a result of their exposure to their teammates, the recipients, the community, and the culture. The subject strengthened the learning abilities of students in delivering services to communities. "Students learn to act and think like managers in hands-on situations" (O'Halloran & Deale, 2004, p. 57). Moreover, the students were able to reflect on their learning environment and attitude in Hong Kong. The recipients from Green Pasture Inn were pleased with the students' service delivery. The 14-day trip not only improved the service standards and food quality of the guesthouse but also established a long-term partnership between the NGO and our institution.

The implication of this subject was beyond the expectations of all stakeholders, students, recipients, instructors, and the institution. First, the partnership between the commercial operation (Green Pasture Inn) and the institution (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) created a new business collaboration model for NGOs to sustain business operations and support local staff by providing training skills and knowledge. Many NGOs in Cambodia operate in F&B and tourism-related business but may not have all of the resources and knowledge support to operate. This case study can serve as a business model for NGOs working with an institution to build up the business and support local employment. Second, this collaboration can also serve as real hands-on experience for

students and instructors. By evaluating the needs of recipients, instructors can guide students to provide tailor-made service plans to support the operations of these NGOs. Third, the scale of the guesthouse fit the small class size of the service-learning subject (Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions). This subject fully incorporated the skills and the knowledge of students from various departments and backgrounds to support Green Pasture Inn training and operation. Still, the nature of the hospitality and tourism field is rather different from that of other fields. To replicate a similar experience, an instructor may consider the nature and scale of the recipient before considering the group size of the subject. In addition, for overseas service-learning subjects, site visits and communication with the recipient are crucial before the subject is conducted. Service-learning is a powerful experiential learning method that addresses the vision of transforming students into global citizens. Given these results, experiential learning needs to be practiced and implemented at the philosophical level of university learning and in school program design, delivery, and assessment to educate young people with a positive attitude, professional competency, and effective communication skills.

Limitations

The first limitation is related to the nature of guesthouse operations. The newly established guesthouse was a small-scale lodging service. Thus, participant service delivery focused on straightforward and uncomplicated standard operation and training for guesthouses. The issues and challenges in the guesthouse were manageable. Participants might not have had sufficient opportunities to apply their critical thinking skills.

The second limitation is related to the background of the participants. We used the journals of 17 students, consisting of 11 hotel and tourism students and six non-hotel and tourism students. Most participants were freshmen who had only received general education; the participants in their second year had limited hotel and tourism experience because of their majors. In addition, differences in background may have resulted in varied service delivery perceptions. Therefore, student background can be considered a limitation.

The last limitation is related to the nature of the subject, which required hands-on experience and implementing standard operating procedures to guesthouse staff and guests. Unlike in other service-learning-oriented subjects, the students participated in a noncommercial setting. The students' reflections on their guesthouse experience might have been different in a commercial setting.

These limitations may be considered when conducting future research on the implication of student learning experiences in commercial and noncommercial settings for service-learning subjects. Furthermore, future studies may consider investigating recipients' perspectives on service-learning subjects and also investigating the implementation of service-learning in a commercial setting (e.g., Green Pasture Inn). In addition, onsite recording of students' daily reflections can also be considered to improve their learning experience. Finally, collaborative research can be conducted among institutions, as in the overseas service-learning project.

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