



Rosen Research Focus | Carissa Baker

# THEME PARK KNOWLEDGE HUB OF THE FUTURE



UCF Rosen College is launching a Bachelor of Science in Theme Park and Attraction Management in Fall 2023.



The global attractions industry has grown in size and innovation in the last few decades. Encompassing theme parks and waterparks as well as cultural and natural attractions, this segment has diverse career opportunities and constant potential for growth in mature and emerging markets. Theme parks alone garnered a billion visitors in 2019. Post-pandemic, the industry bounced back quicker than expected, with most operators seeing increased attendance and revenue. The attractions industry continues to develop new concepts which provide amazing experiences for guests around the world. However, retirement during the pandemic, coupled with the industry's rapid expansion, created a greater need for formal, specialized education.

UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management has had curriculum in the Theme Park and Attraction Management field for more than

twenty years. A long-term Theme Park Advisory Board, comprised of leaders from key operators, helps maintain currency. Students have demonstrated engagement through taking courses, adding the program track or certificate, being involved in the Future Theme Park Leaders Association student organization, and using required internships at theme parks and attractions. Our two largest internship employers are Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, and students have shown high interest during recruitment events like Universal Day, Disney Day, and the Rosen College Career Fair.

To enhance this strong base of participation, UCF Rosen College is launching a Bachelor of Science in Theme Park and Attraction Management in Fall 2023. This full degree program responds to student demand, workforce needs, and our distinctive location in the heart of the 'Theme Park Capital of the World.' Six of the world's top fifteen theme

parks are nearby, as are dozens of attractions, design firms, suppliers, the world headquarters of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), and the annual IAAPA Expo trade show. Central Florida is a thriving hub of economic and creative activity, allowing students to learn in a living lab of themed entertainment. The degree's start is timely as it coincides with the opening of Universal's Epic Universe (expected 2025), which is located right next to our campus. Universal Orlando noted that this destination theme park will need 14,000 employees, and estimates are that the park will generate \$11.5 billion in economic impact.

The degree has a unique focus that will appeal to both domestic and international students. Industry legend Bob Rogers once said that theme parks are considered 'An art, as well as a science, as well as an enterprise.' The new degree takes this to heart. While drawing on

the College strength of hospitality, the degree will also introduce pillars of Management, Creativity, and Technology. The exciting new courses will be based on a variety of topics including culinary experiences, merchandise management, storytelling, technology and innovation, managing cultural attractions, managing natural attractions, and international theme park and attraction management. These complement existing courses in guest experience, employee experience, product development, risk management, and operational issues. The degree represents an interdisciplinary collaboration, as students may take select courses in other colleges. The industry is multi-faceted, and this approach allows students to get the breadth of knowledge necessary to be not only workforce-aligned, but well-informed innovators ready for high levels of responsibility.

The new degree will have an immediate impact on the region, creating a pipeline of leaders to significant theme park operators, with four of the global top ten having operations in Central Florida. Theme parks play a major role in Florida's tourism industry, the key economic driver. Florida has the most employees in the national amusement parks sector, and Walt Disney World is the industry's largest single-site employer. This is a global sector, however, and multiple alumni have had opportunities to open theme parks in several countries. Students will now be even more ready should those international opportunities arise.

UCF Rosen College has been a leading institution in theme park and attraction management research for decades. More than a dozen faculty members have contributed to the dissemination of knowledge on theme parks and attractions through teaching, publications, academic conference or industry presentations, and collaborations with scholars on multiple continents. We look forward to continuing to participate in the theme park and attraction industry and helping to shape its development through the education of future leaders and the sharing of knowledge for years to come.

## SELECTED RECENT RESEARCH IN THEME PARK AND ATTRACTION MANAGEMENT:

Li, B., Zhang, T., Hua, N., & Jahromi, M.F. (2021). Developing an overarching framework on theme park research: A critical review method. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(20), 2821–2837. [doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1849047](https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1849047)

### Management

Godovykh, M., & Baker, C. (2022). The effects of visit status on guests' attitudes and visit intentions in the theme park context. *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*. [doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2022.2153778](https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2022.2153778)

Milman, A., Tasci, A.D.A., & Panse, G. (2021). A comparison of consumer attitudes toward dynamic pricing strategies in the theme park context. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*. [doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2021.1988879](https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2021.1988879)

Torres, E.N., Milman, A., & Park, S. (2021). Customer delight and outrage in theme parks: A roller coaster of emotions. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 22(3), 338–360. [doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2019.1641455](https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2019.1641455)

### Creativity

Baker, C. (2023). The prevalence of storyworlds and thematic landscapes in global theme parks. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*. 4(1), 1–10. [doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2022.100080](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2022.100080)

Fu, X., Baker, C., Zhang, W., & Zhang, R. (2022). Theme park storytelling: Deconstructing immersion in Chinese theme parks. *Journal of Travel Research*, 62(4). [doi.org/10.1177/00472875221098933](https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875221098933)

Zhang, T., Li, B., & Hua, N. (2021). Chinese cultural theme parks: Text mining and sentiment analysis. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. 20(1–2), 37–57. [doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1876077](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1876077)

### Technology

Milman, A., & Tasci, A.D.A. (2022). Consumer reactions to different robotic servers in theme parks. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(2), 314–332. [doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-03-2021-0102](https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-03-2021-0102)

Milman, A., Tasci, A.D.A., & Zhang, T. (2020). Perceived robotic server qualities and functions explaining customer loyalty in the theme park context. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12, 3895–3923. [doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-06-2020-0597](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-06-2020-0597)

Wei, W., Qi, R., & Zhang, L. (2019). Effects of virtual reality on theme park visitors' experience and behaviors: A presence perspective. *Tourism Management*, 71, 282–293. [doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.024)



**Dr. Carissa Baker** is an Assistant Professor in theme park and attraction management at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. She received her doctoral degree in texts and technology from the University of Central Florida. Her primary research interests are in aspects of themed entertainment including narrative, culture, guest experience, technology, and emerging markets. In addition to publishing and presentations related to her research, Dr. Baker is active in global attractions, industry organizations, and academic-industry collaboratives.