

A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY THROUGH HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT EDUCATION



UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management commands a strong reputation in hospitality management education because it produces students who can hit the ground running when they graduate. They not only have knowledge of the sector they'll be operating in but also the essential skills the sector expects. So, what is the correct mix of pedagogical methods and content delivery in hospitality education? Research by Dr. Amy M. Gregory points to a potential pathway for academic staff to put students on the correct track.

Tourism and hospitality degrees are becoming increasingly popular worldwide, and the burgeoning hospitality sector has a growing appetite for highly educated and trained students. Importantly, those students need more than academic knowledge—they should be able to hit the ground running after graduating. Therefore, there is significant pressure on institutions training the next generation of tourism and hospitality staff to design courses and employ faculty with the depth and experience to ensure students are adequately prepared with the correct skills and, importantly, confidence that comes with knowing this. Research by Dr. Amy M.

Gregory, published in the *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, points to a potential pathway for academic staff to put students on the correct track.

Because hospitality and tourism are service-focused, providers must excel in areas directly affecting customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. While academic rigor is crucial in developing the necessary knowledge in this regard, there is no substitute for hands-on experience. The Rosen College has a strong reputation for academic staff that can boast both, and designing courses around the sector's needs. This is crucial because if its students are to be employable, they need



Dr. Gregory's research identifies pathways for bringing academia and the hospitality industry closer together to effectively prepare graduates for a growing and rapidly changing work environment.

the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and the confidence to do so. Self-efficacy—the ability to apply skills across different settings—is therefore critical. Self-efficacy is not taught, it is acquired; a resultant personal belief that grows through personal accomplishment, learning, social influence, and the correct emotional and physiological state.

Such a journey is transformational and, in students, is encouraged through teachers' transformational leadership. This is a teaching approach where educators inspire and motivate students to exceed their own expectations and achieve higher levels of performance and personal development. Teachers act as role models, earning the respect and trust of their students, and inspire and motivate students by setting clear visions and expressing them appealingly and compellingly. Teachers also challenge students to think critically and question their own beliefs and assumptions, and foster an environment of creativity and innovation, encouraging students to explore new ideas and solutions. They also support students' personal development by listening to their concerns and providing personalized feedback.

Theoretically, if applied successfully in management education and training, transformational leadership should equip students with the necessary self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, and confidence so they can step into any people and situation

Research has been done on this, but in other fields, including nursing and engineering and with general business students; hospitality management is relatively underexamined in this respect. So, Dr. Gregory turned to one of the richest sources of valuable data.

A WEALTH OF DATA

Over four years, from Spring 2017 to Fall 2020, Dr. Gregory conducted an online survey with junior and senior undergraduate Rosen College students enrolled in a specific elective course: timeshare. She designed the survey to address three research questions: Does transformational leadership positively predict students' self-efficacy and employability, does problem-based learning positively predict their self-efficacy and employability, and is there a difference in their self-efficacy and employability based on faculty members' context-specific industry experience?

Focusing on a specific elective—as opposed to the whole hospitality management course—provided several benefits. Firstly, it allowed for a deeper, more detailed examination of the impact of context-specific coursework on students' learning outcomes, self-efficacy, and employability. Secondly, studying the effects of pedagogical approaches and leadership styles within the confines of a single elective course allows for a more controlled environment. Thirdly, elective courses often allow for more pedagogical flexibility and innovation compared to core courses that

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a deep knowledge of the sector they'll be operating in and the essential skills it expects. But what is the correct mix of pedagogical methods and content delivery in hospitality education? Dr. Gregory suggests examining connections between employability, self-efficacy, problem-solving, and transformational leadership within a broader framework of social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Her research in this area has unearthed some surprising insights.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY

Hospitality is not a formula; it is a mindset. Because customers are human with concomitant idiosyncrasies, hospitality requires

management space and say, 'I can do this.' It's what employers look for; the issue is how to measure it, and this is where SCCT comes in.

SCCT is a theoretical framework that seeks to explain how people develop their career interests, make professional choices, and achieve career success. It considers self-efficacy, outcome expectations—beliefs about the outcomes of career-related behaviors—and personal goals as critical factors influencing career progression. Therefore, for Dr. Gregory, SCCT is an appropriate framework to examine the relationship between educational practices and students' employability and career progression.

might have stricter curricular requirements—conditions that encourage transformational leadership. Finally, timeshare is a unique and significant segment of the hospitality and tourism industry, with distinct business models, customer service challenges, and operational strategies. By focusing on timeshare, Dr. Gregory could gather specific, actionable insights to inform curriculum development, teaching practices, and industry collaboration efforts in hospitality education, especially related to enhancing student outcomes in this area.

The surveys carried multiple measurement tools that allowed students to rate their self-

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efficacy, the levels of problem-based learning within the timeshare coursework, their perceived employability skills, knowledge, and qualities that are attractive to employers, and the extent to which teachers exhibited transformational leadership characteristics, such as the ability to inspire and motivate, intellectually stimulate, provide individualized consideration, and model ideal behaviors.

Dr. Gregory distributed the survey within three weeks of a semester's end to 919 students across multiple academic years, ensuring a broad sample. Of the surveys submitted, 773 were valid—slightly more than an 84% success rate. Armed with a wealth of data, Dr. Gregory started connecting the dots, and a clear picture emerged.

A CLEAR PICTURE

The data showed that, indeed, when teachers exhibit transformational leadership qualities and employ problem-based learning approaches, students not only believe more in their capabilities but also become more

appealing to potential employers. What was surprising—and encouraging—is that, given the wide sample range, the study could compare differences among students enrolled in courses taught by different faculty and yet found no significant differences. This suggests that the overall educational strategies were broadly effective, not the influence of individual teachers.

The data also showed a definite link between problem-based learning, as opposed to simple instruction, and the development of students' self-efficacy and perceived employability. Essentially, Dr. Gregory's research underscores the importance of teaching styles and course content in preparing students for successful hospitality careers. It proposes that such educational practices can significantly enhance students' self-belief and job prospects. The research also supports the relationships of transformational leadership, problem-solving, self-efficacy, and employability within the framework of social cognitive career theory.

Importantly, this study provides a clear starting point for evaluating various pedagogical methods and content delivery in hospitality education. It also provides a method that can be replicated over different electives within hospitality management education to build a solid pedagogical framework for designing and delivering new courses, which is much needed. Dr. Gregory's research also identifies pathways for bringing academia and the hospitality industry closer together to effectively prepare graduates for a growing and rapidly changing work environment, something that benefits the industry, the education and training institutions that serve it, and the students they produce. That this research emerged from Rosen College faculty and students is notable.

Students choose Rosen College for various reasons, one of which is the impressive impact its name has on potential employers. Attending a hospitality education institution—and there are many—is of little use if it carries no weight with the sector. Students' employability cuts both ways—the sector must see the students as employable, and the students should see themselves as such. They should know that when they emerge from their studies, they will have the requisite technical and interpersonal skills and readiness for the hospitality industry—they should indeed be able to hit the ground running and tackle whatever comes their way. This requires more than academic staff telling them, 'Listen to this, do that.' It requires a committed, highly experienced faculty employing educational practices that are truly transformational.



RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Gregory applies the social cognitive career theory to investigate context-specific elective coursework and students' employability development in hospitality education.

REFERENCES

Gregory, A.M., Penela, D. (2023). Context-specific elective coursework and student's employability development: Application of social cognitive career theory in hospitality education. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*. Vol 33, doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2023.100465.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE

This study provides a method that can be replicated over different electives. What area within hospitality management education could benefit most from such a study, and why?

// The applications are limitless since the primary reliance is upon problem-based learning and student self-efficacy and employability. To be successful in preparing students for their next level course, internship, or career placement, faculty should examine their learning objectives and work with students to help them understand how they can achieve them and what success looks like. It is a shift in mindset from evaluating students in their achievement of correct answers on an assessment to progressing students through correct application of terminology and problem-solving from which they can justify their strategy, construct novel outcomes, and be confident in their ability to do so. //

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Dr. Gregory is an Associate Professor teaching various lodging courses at UCF. She is well published throughout leading hospitality management journals, and a recurring contributor to industry publications and conferences. Dr. Gregory is a previous corporate executive with more than 25 years of international sales, marketing, and business development experience.

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