

EXAMINING THE HOSPITALITY CURRICULUM FOR LAW AND ETHICS

Cho Tin Tun Kirkpatrick, Jean Hertzman

Colorado Mountain College, Steamboat Springs, CO, USA, chotintun@gmail.com

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM, USA, jhertzma@nmsu.edu

Introduction

Hospitality operators face a multitude of legal and ethical challenges, necessitating thorough preparation for students entering the industry. Research indicates that significant legal cases in hospitality predominantly involve employment law, negligence, procedural issues, franchise agreements, and contracts (Morris & Barber, 2019). Similarly, ethical concerns such as theft, sexual harassment, hazardous waste disposal, bribery, and fraud are highlighted as critical by industry perspectives (Yeung, 2004). Ethical leadership is underscored as pivotal in hospitality and tourism organizational behavior (Dimitriou, 2021), with a strong emphasis on fostering personal integrity in all hospitality programs (Vallen & Casado, 2000).

While hospitality law courses are prevalent, ethics education seems less systematically incorporated. For instance, only three out of 24 analyzed institutions explicitly integrate both law and ethics into their curriculum. This raises questions regarding the extent to which ethics education is dispersed throughout the curriculum, prompting the need for further examination and potential restructuring of hospitality education programs.

Methods

This qualitative study explored: 1) Which law and ethics courses are part of hospitality programs? 2) What topics do these courses cover? 3) How are materials and methods utilized? 4) What content do industry practitioners recommend for these courses? The study involved 12 participants: four curriculum designers/ administrators (Group 1), four faculty teaching law or ethics (Group 2), and four industry experts (Group 3). Zoom interviews, followed semi-structured questions and consent procedures, with thematic analysis and inductive coding conducted using NVivo.

Results/Discussion/Implication

All participants emphasized the necessity of integrating both law and ethics into mission and vision statements. Participant 4 from Group 1 (G1P4) noted, "I think ethics is articulated more frequently than law...". G2P4 stressed the importance of covering ethics in mission and vision statements for various reasons. G3P2, an industry expert, affirmed the significance of ethics training. The study revealed that while law classes are standalone requirements in the curriculum, ethics topics are woven throughout courses like leadership, management principles, sustainability, and capstone courses. Participants acknowledged that legal matters are typically handled by corporate lawyers, absolving managers from expert-level knowledge. Furthermore, teaching ethics in the U.S. varies based on state policies, with ethics often considered political, as asserted by P2G1. Nonetheless, all participants unanimously agreed on the critical importance of ethics and law, advocating for their enduring presence in hospitality education to meet the ongoing demand for comprehensive knowledge in these areas. This research identified overlaps, current teaching practices, and industry opinions on law and ethics to inform curriculum adjustments. Despite a small sample size limited to undergraduate 4-year programs, data saturation was achieved.

References are available upon request