

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE  
GLOBAL HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT CONCENTRATION

by

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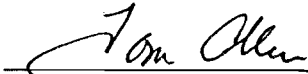
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of the online Administration (Global Hospitality Management) concentration in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree program, as it is currently being delivered, in a longitudinal format.

The review of literature discusses several key issues. In the hospitality and tourism industry, distance education plays an important role in today's global economy, in both education and training. Some of the other issues presented are: a comparison of traditional versus distance learning programs, impact of differentiated learning styles on courses and programs in distance education, and student attitudes and perceptions toward distance education. The attributes of effective online learners, instructors, and courses also need to be considered when analyzing student perceptions of online education. Lastly, program evaluation and consequent program

improvement based on data obtained through the process of program evaluation are also reviewed.

The research instrument was sent to students who have taken online courses in the Global Hospitality Management Concentration (GHMC) or Administration Concentration (AC), and was analyzed using SPSS. Basic descriptive statistics were computed for each variable to determine the actual response rate for each question. The findings of the study will be used by the Department of Hospitality and Tourism at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. These findings will assist the department to reevaluate the program and its administration, as it is currently being offered.

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Prema A. Monteiro

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Background of the Hospitality and Tourism Master of Science Graduate Program*

The Hospitality and Tourism Master of Science graduate program was created in the late 1970's based on early perspectives and needs. The program was focused toward research, an opportunity which was not widely available at the time. The program was approved in 1978 when Dr. Lee Nicholls was the department chair and Dr. Arlin Epperson was appointed program director ((University of Wisconsin-Stout,1982). However, it seems that due to a lack of funds, it was not until August 23, 1982 that the program with Dr. James Burke, as its director, opened with the registration of six students, to be joined by another six students in January 1983 (University of Wisconsin-Stout). The program continued to grow under the program directorship of Dr. William Gartner from 1985 to 1993. Its main focus was on research. It underwent a University of Wisconsin-Stout, in March 1988 (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1988) proposed by Dr. Gartner and the program advisory committee. The existing program titled "Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism" was now to be followed by "with concentrations in Hospitality and Tourism," to reflect newly acquired faculty expertise. The degree required students to complete 36 semester hours, including a thesis. Sixteen hours were comprised of required coursework, while selectives accounted for 18 hours, and electives, two hours (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1978). Enrollment fluctuated from 20 to 32 students per year from 1989 to 1997 (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1997). The "publishing option" known as the Plan D option was offered and one student was able to graduate with a published thesis-article. Dr. Randall Upchurch assumed the role of program director from 1994 to 1997. Under his

mentorship the program focused on applied research. This was achieved by introducing the option of a Plan B two-credit thesis. A student enrolled in the program now had the option of a Plan A six-credit thesis or the Plan B two-credit thesis.

Individuals who desired to continue on toward a terminal degree or to focus on in-depth research selected a Plan A thesis. Of the 36 semester hours required to graduate the program, required coursework comprised 16 credit hours. Students selected either a hospitality concentration or a tourism concentration for a total of 10 hours, and an elective block of 10 hours (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1997).

Plan B offered students the ability to conduct research that was more applied in nature, while having the flexibility to enhance the concentration component of their individual program plan. The Plan B concentration required students to complete 36 semester hours, including a two-credit thesis. Twelve hours were comprised of required coursework. Students selected either a hospitality concentration or a tourism concentration for a total of 10 hours, and an elective block of 14 hours. Enrollment grew to 32 students by 1997 with the new focus (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1997).

In the spring of 1998 the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Department of Hospitality and Tourism was awarded a UW System grant funded by CIF (Central Investment Fund). The CIF grant was awarded with the intent of developing and establishing a global online version of the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree in consortium with domestic and international universities (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1998). The collaborative effort of graduate faculty from the UW-Stout Hospitality and Tourism program, Marriott Hotels and Resorts, and faculty from a total of four other universities in England, Germany and Wisconsin resulted in a Plan B on-line Master of Science degree, which became known as the “Global Hospitality Management”

(GHM) concentration (GHMC). The GHMC was designed and implemented over a period of one year, and became UW-Stout's first comprehensive online program option (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2003).

The original premise of the GHMC as outlined in 1999 planned for the courses to be co-taught between the five university partners – The Nottingham-Trent University, UK; Oxford Brookes University, UK; University of Paderborn, Germany; the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, USA; and the University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA. However, in a year it became evident that the academic benefit, management costs and similar support programs that were originally proposed would not work without significant funding and reinvestment, and that the international partner universities could not devote dedicated instructional resources to the course(s) they were responsible for teaching. All European partners ceased involvement in the concentration within two years (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2003).

The innovative online concentration mainly used the Lotus LearningSpace course management platform that allowed students to complete courses online. Lotus Learning Space allows a client to offer learning courses that students and instructors can access whether they are online or off-line. Since LearningSpace courses are designed to be taken in your own time and from anywhere, learners benefit from the thoughtful interaction of all students in the course rather than relying on just those able to meet the schedule requirements of traditional face-to-face courses. An enhancement or alternative to traditional instruction, LearningSpace provides equal learning opportunities to participate without limitations of time or place. Features include five collaborative learning modules within an integrated environment that supports team-based, instructor-facilitated learning. These are the Schedule, MediaCenter, CourseRoom, Profiles and Assessment Manager.

The Schedule helps in structuring course assignments. Students navigate through the course's learning objectives, check assignment deadlines, review the course syllabus and offer a variety of graphical icons from which to select in order to categorize assignments. The MediaCenter is the knowledge-base of the course. It houses content related to the curriculum being delivered. It can contain any and all multimedia including audio, video, presentations, text-based info, materials on CDs, as well as access external sources such as HTML pages from the World Wide Web. The CourseRoom is an interactive, facilitated environment for secure student/team, student/peer and student/instructor communication. It is the 'virtual' classroom where, after receiving assignment objectives in the Schedule and reviewing the appropriate resources in the MediaCenter, students can separate into teams to participate in discussions or work on assignments. Profiles is a repository of student created "home pages" designed to facilitate the creation of the online community and group dynamics that supports effective team communication. It is a collection of student and instructor data that can include photographs, contact information and background on education, experience and interests. The Assessment Manager is a student evaluation and management tool designed for instructor use only. Instructors can quickly and easily create quizzes, exams, surveys or self-assessments and then post them for student access in the Schedule. Assessments completed by the students are returned to the Assessment Manager for automatic grading and private review by the instructor. Graded assessments are returned to the students' portfolio. This module also acts as a grade book for tracking student's progress and has a test bank repository of questions.

Blackboard was another online education software platform used to mount courses in the GHMC. It was used because at the time, UW-Stout selected it as their preferred course management software. It is flexible enough to support multiple approaches to teaching, learning,

research and collaboration in diverse settings and allows users to integrate external applications, tools, content, and services into the Blackboard Learning System ([www.blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com)).

Instructors use the tools available through the Content Areas section of the Course Control Panel to manage information, materials, assignments, and assessments used in the course.

The Content Areas allow instructors to post course documents, staff information, assignments, announcements, assessments, incorporate text, spreadsheets, slideshows, graphics files, audio and video clips, interactive simulations, and create sequential Learning Units.

The Course Tools contain communication and collaboration tools that enhance interaction between students and instructors with asynchronous discussion boards and synchronous chat tools. These tools allow users to share important information such as course calendar items and tasks; interact and learn from each other with threaded discussion boards; manage online discussions through features that sort messages by author, date and/or title, collect messages in a printer-friendly format, and archive discussions; share documents as discussion board attachments or through the Digital Drop Box; and hold virtual office hours or classes through Collaboration Tools.

An instructor can use the Course Options area to manage all aspects of the course. S/he can set the availability and accessibility of a course, manage the appearance of course features, archive and recycle courses, in addition to importing course content and course cartridges.

User Management enables the instructor to manage the users in their course Web site. Instructors may add and drop individuals or groups of students to and from a course, create new users, or create groups of users within in a course.

Instructors use Assessments to test student knowledge, measure student progress, and gather information from students. Tests and surveys are the two types of assessments offered.

When a Student completes a Test it is submitted for grading, and the results are recorded in the Gradebook. Questions on Surveys are not assigned a point value, and Surveys are not graded.

Being on-line, the GHMC attracted students that could not attend courses offered in the standard classroom format. Typical students enrolling in the online concentration were educators and administrators who were interested in furthering their education and mid-to-upper level managers (University of Wisconsin-Stout,, 1998). As with the other concentrations in the graduate program, the online concentration also required 36 credits to graduate. The concentration included a core of eight courses of three credits each for a total of 24 credits taken over a period of two years. The courses that constitute the core are similar to campus offerings such as Issues in Hospitality and Tourism, Strategic Management in Hospitality, Managing Finance, Managing Technology in Hospitality and Service Industries, Leadership and Personnel Management, Quality Assurance and Customer Service, H & T Research Interpretations – Applications in Hospitality, and Hospitality Operational Systems. The purpose of the core is to establish a base level of knowledge and skills in key areas of hospitality and tourism administration and management. Thus, while the first course Issues in Hospitality and Tourism, strives to cover a broad range of issues pertinent to the field of H & T, subsequent courses in the core seek to address specialized areas in the H & T industry.

Initially, two courses, each of eight weeks duration were taught successively. This time frame coincided with the academic year for campus courses. Students then got either a winter or summer break during which time, they were encouraged to take and complete their electives, before returning to begin their next sequence of courses for the semester. Students in the online concentration were required to complete a three credit applied research paper in substitution of a

thesis, and nine credits in elective coursework. It was suggested that students could complete the degree in two to three years.

The objectives of the program apply equally to the online concentration. The general goal of the Hospitality and Tourism program is to recruit quality students and provide them with an educational experience allowing them to make significant contributions to the profession. The program has the following specific objectives:

1. Understanding of societal needs for leisure type activities and the capability to implement Hospitality and Tourism programs responsive to those needs.
2. The capability to resolve problems at the management level with respect to Hospitality and/or Tourism Industries.
3. Provision of intra-, and inter-disciplinary research capability.
4. Knowledge of literature germane to Hospitality and/or Tourism.
5. Understanding of the network of relationships among the components of the Hospitality and/or Tourism Industries.
6. Familiarity with leading state, national and international organizations in Hospitality and/or Tourism.
7. Familiarity with federal and state involvement including regulations in the Hospitality and/or Tourism Industries.

The entire online instructional responsibility returned to the UW-Stout Department of Hospitality and Tourism. UW-Whitewater, which was one of the five original partnering universities continued to instruct courses until 2001, and currently continues to host the Lotus LearningSpace course management software for the program.

Since the implementation of the GHMC in fall 1999, program assessments and internal program review found that some program elements of the 1999 concentration did not meeting the needs of the typical online student. Dr. Randy Upchurch, the previous program director developed a standard survey which was modified by Dr. Christine Clements based on curriculum and delivery platform. Each term the students completed the surveys online as part of the course documents mounted in the assessments section of the course management system being used to offer that particular course.

Another key element of the program has been the program advisory committee, which met bi-annually, to review the curriculum for relevancy and content, and to suggest changes. The committee is comprised of faculty from across the UW-Stout campus, industry professionals and student representative(s). It was designed around the CIF grant and its governing body. These individuals formulated the online product and then set about to evaluate the product on a longitudinal basis. The initial program advisory committee was in place from 1998 to 2001 and then varied beyond the core members of these first three years to include individuals from Radisson Hotels in Human Resources and Training, Bakers Square Administrative Management, Hilton Hotels Corporate Management, online students, and educators outside of the department. In 2001 the evaluation process was combined with the campus evaluation process.

A University of Wisconsin-Stout, that modified the online program to include a non-thesis option and a new name was proposed in 2001. Three graduate certificates and new courses offerings were also developed and approved by the department, college and university.

The GHMC was renamed the Administration concentration (AC) to better reflect the new educational partnership with the UW-Eau Claire MBA program, and the loss of the international education partners. Students are offered a closed array of courses and can choose to do a Plan B,



a 3-credit thesis option; or a Plan C, the non-thesis option. It was deemed appropriate to remove “Global” from the program name to reflect program changes, the loss of the international partners and the limited participation by Marriott hotels.

The CIF grant committee and ultimately the advisory board indicated (University of Wisconsin-Stout, Spring 1999) that students seek or need a research foundation, but find little or no need for advanced research skills culminating in a thesis in the hospitality industry (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1999). It was also their global view that the historical weight within the program toward research was beyond the current needs of the hospitality and tourism industry. The main reason being that industry has moved toward consultants and specialists in research, and marketing and product development, as outlined by the Marriott Corporation in the initial CIF meetings. Marriott Hotels and Resorts determined that other than basic management and leadership skills together with the preparation of operating reports, applied statistics and awareness that research needs to be conducted are a hallmark of their needs. They sought MBA students for that expertise (Minutes of CIF meetings, Nottingham Trent England- Fall 1999). Representatives from industry on the program advisory committee surmised that an advanced, applied management skill set in operational techniques was most appropriate for mid-level graduate students. Alumni between 2000 and 2003 indicated that their thesis projects became writing exercises that had limited value in the hospitality workplace. This was gleaned from the existing surveys given to each student upon graduation and was found in the annual assessments.

Plan B, the 3-credit thesis option, enables students to develop research projects directly related to their workplace, industry and career objectives. Plan C, the non-thesis option, requires the student to complete an actual case study at a host site that has specific operational problems, which need to be addressed. Each student is required to submit a final researched document

addressing the issues identified. The graduate program also offers a Plan A, which is a 6-credit thesis option offered to students seeking an advanced degree or placement within an academic environment. All the graduate concentrations require a minimum of 36 credits to graduate (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1982-2004).

The graduate certificates were developed in 2001 and approved in 2002. Proposed to begin September 2004, are three 12-credit certificates – Foundations in Hospitality and Tourism; Strategic Management in Hospitality; and Service Administration. These certificates are designed for those seeking enrichment in specific areas, or needing to acquire skills that can be applied to their hospitality management employment. All courses are offered online and each 12-credit certificate is designed to enable completion in one year. The three certificates when combined may be used to satisfy requirements to graduate with a Master of Science degree in Hospitality, Tourism, or Service Administration concentrations.

Based on the CIF grant proposal this was the second phase of development beyond the online degree program. Moving toward meeting the objectives of the CIF grant, a new marketing and educational agreement was created with UW-Eau Claire (MBA). The agreement allowed for UW-Eau Claire online MBA students and UW-Stout Hospitality and Tourism graduate students to access online graduate courses between the two programs. The new partnership also enabled the philosophical completion of the 1998 CIF grant outreach to working professionals by offering graduate certificates.

The three research options now offered suggest the concept of learning through experience is actively being implemented in the program. All required courses provide student access to contemporary case studies, applied research and course projects directly related to the diverse industry of hospitality and tourism. As a graduate program, research and writing are still

regarded as the cornerstones of the program. The 2002 University of Wisconsin-Stout, also includes an internship field experience requirement for the non-thesis program option.

### *Statement of the Problem*

It is now more than five years since the commencement in fall 1999 of the GHMC or AC online in the Master of Science degree in Hospitality and Tourism. Several modifications have been made regarding its administration based on industry, advisory board, market changes and student assessments. Therefore, it is important to assess and analyze student perceptions of the program to assist in the evaluation of the online AC in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate program in conjunction with department interests.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of the online Administration (Global Hospitality Management) concentration in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree program, as it is currently being delivered, in a longitudinal format.

### *Research Objectives*

Specifically, this study will examine the following research objectives in relationship to the online GHMC or AC in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree:

1. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to content?
2. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to layout?

3. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to design?
4. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to the quality of instruction?
5. What is the extent to which administrative and support services meet the needs and expectations of the students?
6. What is the degree to which online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitate student learning?

To accomplish the above objectives of this study, a questionnaire will be used. The questionnaire will be sent to participants electronically via email and/or in the mail.

#### *Importance of the Study*

1. There have been many changes in a comparatively compressed period of time that have had an impact on the program. Some of these changes include the use of several versions of Lotus LearningSpace, Blackboard, the departure of the initial partners, the introduction of a new MBA partner, and the consequent instructor changes, all of which have left those behind with their hands full. It seems reasonable to assess the current status of the online concentration, since it has been considerably altered since it was introduced in fall 1999. This assessment needs to be done to outline the relationships that underlie an online program, such as this, for the future and the long-term viability of the program.
2. Data could be used to improve the online concentration.

3. Data could also be used to improve the other concentrations in the H & T graduate program.
4. The results of this study could be used by other online programs.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There are several limitations to this study.

1. One of the main limitations is having current email and mailing addresses, since the questionnaire is being emailed to the students enrolled in the online option. This is key to ensuring the questionnaire is accessible to all its intended participants. It is possible that email addresses may have changed, or are not currently in use. Additionally, university email addresses are not usable after graduation. Together, these factors may result in some participants not receiving the questionnaire. Should mailing addresses have changed as well, a follow up using mail, may not be effective.
2. Another limitation involves the validity and reliability of the research instrument. While every effort will be made to ensure validity and reliability, the instrument will be developed by a novice researcher.
3. Students who may have graduated in the first cohort might not recall specifics of the distance education program.

### *Abbreviations and Definition of Terms*

AC: Administration concentration. See GHM below.

CMS: Course management system.

DHT: Department of Hospitality and Tourism.

GHM or GHMC: Global Hospitality Management concentration. The online concentration in the Hospitality and Tourism, Master of Science Degree, first offered fall 1999. It was renamed Administration concentration in December 2002, effective January 2003.

H & T: Hospitality and Tourism.

UW: University of Wisconsin

### *Methodology*

A questionnaire will be sent via email to 100% of all alumni, special students and current students who have enrolled in the online program option between Fall 1999 and Fall 2003. A follow-up questionnaire may be sent using mail, if a current email address is not available. The data collected from the returned questionnaires will be imported into SPSS, for analysis and used to develop a summary. Basic statistical processes will be used since this is a descriptive study that will profile the current status of the program from the student perspective.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

This chapter is a review of the literature related to issues that affect student perceptions and attitudes toward distance education. A review of these issues and the role of distance education in today's global economy will briefly be explored; followed by a discussion on distance education in the hospitality and tourism industry; different learning styles; students' attitudes to distance education; and the attributes of online learners, effective online instructors and online courses.

"Effective online education is a blend of pedagogy, technology, and organizational support" (Yoon, 2003, p.19). "The need to understand the conditions necessary for facilitating this type of learning requires an understanding of the behaviors associated with autonomous learning coupled with self-efficacy beliefs" (Derrick, 2003, p. 5). "The application of web-based technology to education introduces a host of administrative, communication medium, one-on-one and face-to-face interaction, as well as technical concerns" (Valenta, Therriault, Dieter, & Mrtek, 2001, p. 112). The interactions of these concerns with the layout of a distance education course significantly affect an individual's perception of a distance education course. Andriole (1997) asserts that the uniqueness of technology-based instruction makes it necessary to adopt more rigorous course requirements, design, development, delivery, and evaluation.

Understanding student opinions can assist in better design for web-based courses (Valenta et al.). A review of these issues will assist in the compilation of the research instrument and the interpretation of the data, which in turn will support the development of a composite picture of

student perceptions of the GHMC. Biner (as cited in Valenta et al.) suggests that students' attitudes toward distance education are as important a metric as students' achievements in determining the effectiveness of distance education.

### *The Role of Distance Education in Today's Global Economy*

Distance education's birth in the United States began in 1873, according to Schlosser and Anderson (1994). Distance learning is not only beneficial to students, but also to business educators who need to keep current in their field of expertise (Denton, 1994). Distance and e-learning have the capacity to influence worker productivity and performance. They directly affect the economic growth of business and industry. Skills and expertise needed for the future will require workers who are learning-oriented and distance and e-learning are the catalyst for sweeping changes in the structure of the workplace environment and workforce (Derrick, 2003).

Distance learning allows geographically restricted students to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of educators in different physical locations utilizing two-way communication. It is a great benefit for reaching those who are outside the standard educational realm (Denton, 1994). Learners no longer need to spend time in a campus setting. Programs can be built in real work settings where there is natural enthusiasm generated by the need to know. It allows students to learn where there are the best teachers, even though they may be many miles apart (Portway, 1993).

The American business landscape is ever changing. The economic boom of the late 90s, was followed by a recession. Many businesses folded, with consequent job losses. However, even prior to these events, the American Society for Training and Development had projected that 55 million Americans, currently employed, needed to be retrained (Portway, 1993). This



tremendous need for retraining had to be accomplished in a way that was more efficient than sending employees off to school for traditional classroom training with “one size fits all” exercises (Moad, 1993, p. 46).

However, the new worker expects more freedom and does not appreciate the rigid leadership styles inherited from the era of the manufacturing-based economy (International Hotel and Restaurant Association, 2003). Instead, they want to be treated as free agents in the employment relationship, being valued for their knowledge, skills and competencies and compensated accordingly. They embrace lifelong learning in a quest for personal development. They also hold management to a higher level of social responsiveness, integrity and fairness which requires a leadership style that is radically different from the command-and-control approach embedded in industry of yesteryear.

These factors have combined to bring about changes in the workplace such as the flattening of the organizational hierarchy to reflect the growing individualism of those educated in a learner-centered environment (IHRA, 2003). Leaders favor a more participatory approach with managers developing a ‘first among equals’ style to motivate the new worker. Leadership is based upon competence, as opposed to seniority, and is maintained through successful performance alone. Today, leaders focus on achieving added value for owners and customers as well as employees.

Further changes in the workplace are being brought about by the global capital market system and its influence on all members of an organization to add value. “Business and industry no longer have the luxury of time to make changes in order to remain competitive and current in a global environment. The very survival of organizations depends on the rapidity in which change can occur” (Derrick, 2003, p. 7). As competition for business and capital increases, this

‘value adding’ criterion is being applied to all personnel within the firm (IHRA, 2003).

Technology has begun to pervade the human resource domain demanding higher levels of technological skill from all employees even in a ‘high touch’ industry like hospitality. It also affects the way products and services are offered and sold. While the consumer benefits from increased transparency, firms are forced to improve their offerings so that they can avoid the pressure to compete on price alone. Arguably, technology will greatly aid the improvement of each company’s individual products but there are also indications that effective investment by management facilitates overcoming this problem, provided it has a workforce that can deliver in the technologically complex world (IHRA, 2003).

The management of human resources has also been transformed by technology (IHRA, 2003). Everything from finding a new job or switching job functions to updating skills is done either exclusively by or with the assistance of technology. Record keeping, compensation and performance-evaluation are also impacted. Employees have opportunities to share knowledge-related work needs through intranets designed to allow employees to contribute to the firms’ needs. This element has become increasingly important in an industry constantly struggling to find and keep quality employees. “Human resource development (HRD) initiatives are used by business and industry as a means of improving the workplace performance of employees” (Garrett & Vogt, 2003, p. 89).

Converging on this need for increased corporate training and retraining is a plethora of technology applications and innovative instructional techniques generally referred to as distance education or distance learning (Portway, 1993). More recently online education has rapidly gained in popularity. Online learning using the Internet and computer technology is significantly changing the delivery of training and development initiatives (Garrett & Vogt, 2003). Within

business and industry, globalization, advances in technology, shifting demographics, economic change, and the ever-increasing need for skilled workers have cultivated an environment that is receptive to online learning.

### *Education and Training*

As the technologies for distance learning change and improve, it seems that no industry will be without it. Businesses want trained employees and now they can have their experts train recruits via network access (Denton, 1994). New leadership and value-adding skills are taught by new technologies as well as old methods: cyber universities are competing with traditional schools (IHRA, 2003). Education needs to be and is becoming increasingly customized to meet the individual learner's needs while students, as purchasers, are more discriminating as they pursue their self-development goals by customizing their learning experience and demanding the best both in content and delivery.

### *Distance Education and the Hospitality and Tourism Industry*

According to the International Hotel and Restaurant Association (2003) the complexity of the customer/employee interaction is growing everyday, driven by technology and the information age. This in turn is shaping the human resources needs of service-based industries, such as the hospitality and tourism industry. Just as the workforce continues to become more diverse and so too are its customers. Customers will want people waiting on them who can speak their language and are similar to them. Thus, as the industry works through these challenges, training becomes a significant concern (Moad, 1994).

The customer, armed with more information, expects *frontline* and other hotel staff to be at least as knowledgeable about the firm's offerings as they are themselves (IHRA, 2003). This is difficult in an industry characterized by low-skilled, low-paid personnel and a high degree of cultural and behavioral diversity among its employees. The transition from previous decades where the customer was not as knowledgeable to the present situation, of a knowledge-based economy brings the need for a new worker onto the scene. Customers and employees interact at a higher level and the modern worker needs to be able to rise to the intellectual challenge of solving the problems of the more informed customer.

A new form of excellence is reshaping hospitality education. Subject content has to be rethought. Hospitality education needs to move from a heavily skills-based focus with strong operational content toward a general management emphasis with value-adding at the central core (IHRA, 2003). This requires a new body of knowledge to be developed and shared where specific research is built upon industry relevancy and need. Importance is also being placed on thinking skills, decision-making capability and creativity as firms seek to compete in a more uncertain, complex environment.

The industry needs new educational programs (Harris & Cannon, 1995) that combine modern management principles with optimum technological support systems. Training that builds basic skills and develops increasingly complex management skills are needed by hospitality companies (Denton, 1994). While operational skills will always be required (the industry has not changed to such a degree that it can exist without them) there is an additional emphasis on personal skill development, primarily because of the more complex workplace and the new type of worker mentioned above (IHRA, 2003). It addresses the need to be more effective in all customer/employee and employee/employee interactions. As both areas grow more diverse, this

need will become greater.

Harris and Cannon (1995) conducted a study of hospitality training directors and suggested an investigation of technologies that will assist in program delivery to reduce current training problems. The larger hospitality companies are finally starting to realize that training and education have a positive correlation with professionalism, productivity and, ultimately, profitability. At the same time small and mid-sized entities are still reluctant to invest in training and education (Shepherd & Cooper, 1995).

Education and training will also have to focus upon technology (IHRA, 2003). The ability to manage information and use it for competitive advantage is currently not part of the industry's body of knowledge. Not only will it be necessary to teach managers and employees how the firm will use technology to compete, technology is also being used to train and develop individuals. Companies are looking for efficient ways to train their employees and view online learning as a tool that is geared to the needs and interests of the individual learner (Garrett & Vogt, 2003). Online learning has shown potential for reducing the costs of workplace-related education and training.

Computer-assisted instruction could be considered a good teaching tool for the hospitality industry. Computer-based programs can be used to train new employees in basic skills and introduce existing employees to the latest updates regarding company standards and policies in a self-paced independent work mode (Jaffe, 1989). These computer based alternatives would lend themselves quite suitably to more mature trainees since these individuals require flexibility in their schedules and they need training to be interfaced effectively with their other commitments and responsibilities. This group is definitely putting pressure on the hospitality and tourism industry to incorporate these new innovative methods of distance education (Shepherd & Cooper,

1995). Already, hospitality firms are developing 'personal coaches' using and harnessing multimedia components to guide the employee through everything from making pizza to providing a help desk for night auditors (IHRA, 2003). Today's worker is more familiar with this type of learning and rejects firms and trainers who fail to keep pace with these developments.

The greatest challenge facing the industry today in the area of human resources is the investment in and timing of the education and training process (IHRA, 2003). On the one hand, students expect a more learner-centered approach. On the other, the industry's management talent pool has been educated in the old school model. Orchestrating the transition is no small task, especially if the formal body of knowledge is presently inadequate. The industry has a great deal to do to compete effectively for quality labor in the current environment.

In summary, the industry is going through major change, much of it brought about by outside forces (IHRA, 2003). Nowhere is the change so fundamental, nor does it need to be so far-reaching, as in the functional area of human resources. The focus on adding value is reshaping the management skill set that has so long prevailed. Technology is altering the business and likewise the skills necessary to compete. It is changing the learning process and the learner who in turn alters the workplace and the worker and demands a new type of manager. However, the body of knowledge necessary to bring about this new manager and worker is almost non-existent and it will take considerable industry action and leadership to correct this deficiency.

To continue to remain competitive and meet business needs in a technologically advanced society, educational institutions today need to offer some form of online courses. Recently acquired knowledge on learning styles and the importance of lifelong learning has helped drive the need for online courses. Today's graduates are expected to have critical thinking skills,

analytical skills, and the ability to work collaboratively (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). Students also have increased demands on time. All these factors make online education a necessity.

### *Comparison of Traditional to Distance Learning*

Technology is playing a more important role in both distance and school-based education. The newest computer-mediated telecommunication systems are being proclaimed as the virtual equivalent of the traditional classroom experience, because they use various real-time interactive, multimedia communications (Weisburg & Ullmer, 1995).

Berube (1990), in his research, has found both advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. In addition to access, which is the most obvious advantage of distance learning, other advantages include: presentations by guest lecturers; accommodations of student's different learning modalities; class management via two-way audio; use of instructor- or student-produced videotapes; use of simulations; use of small size visuals; and rescheduling of canceled classes. The disadvantages of distance learning may include: neutralized personal teacher/student rapport; hindered comprehension for kinesthetic and tactile learners; limited spontaneity; wasted time as a result of mechanical/ technical problems; limited cooperative learning opportunities; and limited visual student-to-teacher feedback. Valenta et al. (2001) also cite flexibility and convenience – the associated advantages of time management; the perception of more access and individual interaction with the instructor; better student performance than in a face-to-face course; a collaborative learning environment; and a positive learning experience, as some of the potential positive aspects of distance education. In their study on student attitudes and learning styles in distance education, Valenta et al. noted the following negative aspects of distance education: (a) limitations on interactivity – asynchronous time lag versus synchronous, and mainly text-based

communications; (b) technological problems; (c) increased workload, with regard to time taken to learn new course management software, time spent on a web-based course versus time in a regular classroom, and the perception that online courses required more work; (d) lack of administrative and technical support; and (e) costs of equipment, online phone charges and so on.

In a study of 21 instructors in the State Universities of New York (SUNY) Learning Network the following instructors' impressions of the differences between online versus face-to-face courses were noted (Smith, Ferguson & Caris, 2001):

- Some instructors feel as if a lifetime of teaching skills is lost. They feel they can no longer use presence and classroom skill to get a point across, so they must find new methods. This also limits their ability to improvise, deal with behavior problems, and utilize teachable moments.
- Online courses must be carefully planned and laid out in great detail ahead of time to avoid misunderstandings. This means that course preparation is very time consuming. However, this provides the instructor an opportunity to look at and present material in new ways, than he may have previously done.
- Instructors indicated that it takes many hours to create an "online presence" so students feel there is someone responding to their needs. They noted that when students do not perceive this presence, they are more likely to drop the course or be dissatisfied with its quality.
- Instructors also noted that students usually develop an online identity which helps reassure them of the academic integrity of the teaching environment.



### *Learning Styles*

According to Keefe (1982), “the key to effective schooling is to understand the range of student learning styles and to design instruction and materials that respond directly to individual learning needs” (p. 43). The individual learning differences in students stem from differentiations in intelligence, drive, accomplishments, skills, cultural differences, and personal and family predisposition. Therefore, education should reflect the learning needs of the individual student to suit their different learning modalities (Gee, 1990; Keefe, 1982).

Learning styles consist of discrete behaviors that indicate how a person adapts to his/her environment and learns from it (Gregorc, 1979). A learning style is simply a strategy that one uses with some cross-sectional consistency (Schmeck, 1982). “Learning styles are cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment” (Keefe, 1982, p. 44). In his study, examining the effect of learning and its relationship to academic achievement, Burger (1985) found that there were no correlations between or among academic achievements, learning style, and student preference to computer-assisted instruction. Jaffe (1989) discovered that students using computer-assisted instruction did show learning gain equal to that of students instructed by a traditional mode - printed instruction. Different students have different learning styles and abilities. Education can be improved by matching instructional methods, environment, and programs with the students who were most able to learn from them (Vigna & Martin, 1982).

According to a field study completed by Biner, Bink, Huffman & Dean (1995), students enrolled in telecourses do have a unique personality profile and certain traits which can predict success for these students. Their findings go deeper:

Taken together, the data of the present investigation indicate that the most successful

telecourse students are those individuals who are resourceful and prefer to make their own decisions. Moreover, they are not overly concerned about following social rules or conventions and may actually disregard them altogether in some circumstances. Finally, these students are introverted, self-indulgent (probably with regard to the variety of activities they have chosen to engage in on a daily basis), and tend to meet their responsibilities in an efficient, expedient manner, i.e., without being overly compulsive about completing tasks. (p. 57)

Kolb's Learning-Style Inventory (1976b) assesses how people deal with ideas and learn in daily situations. He believes people learn in different ways. His instrument can help them understand their learning styles for future benefit since the test indicates their strengths and weaknesses. The Learning-Style Inventory (LSI) yields four chief learning styles: Converger, Diverger, Assimilator, and Accommodator. According to Gunawardena and Boverie (1993):

Convergers are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories; Divergers, at viewing concrete situations from many different points of view; Assimilators, at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form, and Accommodators have the ability to learn primarily from hands on experience. (p. 4-5)

Every person's learning style is a combination of each of the above learning styles. Most people are pulled in several directions during a learning situation (Kolb, 1976b). David A. Kolb (1976a) defined the LSI learning styles as follows:

Diverger, which combines the learning styles of Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation (Kolb, 1976a). People with this learning style view concrete situations from many different points of view. Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action. If the participants maintain this style, they may enjoy situations that require generating a wide range of

ideas, as in brainstorming session. Individuals have broad cultural interests and like to gather information. This imaginative ability and sensitivity to feeling is needed for effectiveness especially in service careers.

Accommodator, which combines the styles of Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1976a). Participants with this learning style have the ability to learn primarily from “hands-on” experience. Participants with this style will enjoy carrying out plans and involving themselves in new and challenging experiences. They may have a tendency to act on “gut” feeling rather than on logical analysis. In solving problems, they may rely more heavily on people for information than on their own technical analysis. This learning style is important for effectiveness in action-oriented careers such as marketing or sales.

Assimilator combines the styles of Abstract Conceptualization and Reflection Observation (Kolb, 1976a). Participants with the learning style are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise logical form. These individuals are less focused on people and are more interested in abstract ideas and concepts. Generally people with this learning style find it more important that theories have logical soundness rather than practical value. This learning style is important for effectiveness in information and science based careers.

The Converger combines learning styles of Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1976a). People with this learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. Participants with this learning style have the ability to solve problems and make decisions based on finding solutions to questions or problems. This individual would rather deal with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues. This learning skill is important for effectiveness in specialist positions such as accounting and science and technology based careers.

Kolb (1976b) also found that there was a positive correlation between career choices and individual learning styles. Looking at a sample population of 800 undergraduates and graduates in management, this generalization could be made between their initial academic specializations and their LSI scores. Their undergraduate education proved to be a major factor in the development of their learning styles. Kolb believes that, people choose fields that are consistent with their learning styles and are further shaped to fit the learning norms of their field once they are in it.

### *Perceptions*

There has been research that indicates student's perceptions of their learning abilities and the learning demands required from different media have noticeably influenced their overall learning performances and their attitudes (Coggins, 1989). Gee (1990) agrees with this precedent:

Considering the unique effects that different learning environments, different media applications, and differing conditions of instruction have on learner perception and behavior may be especially important when designing technology-based learning systems. The effects may also be equally important when implementing media as the major source of information transfer to students learning at a distance. (p. 4)

In another study (Thomerson & Smith, 1996), it was found that traditional classroom students rated enjoyment/satisfaction and the physical learning environment higher than the students from both remote-site and host-site distance learning centers. There were no significant perceived differences found among the three groups for student-teacher interaction and course structure delineation's.

Nadel (1988) discovered that students' perceptions and preferences contributed to their attitudes toward interactive television after conducting an analysis at the University of Southern

Maine. Another interesting bit of information uncovered was the indication that older students were more apt to perceive interactive television as an effective means of education.

### *Student Attitudes toward Distance Education*

One of the important issues in distance education is understanding how students react to learning in a class where members are separated by time and space. "Research data on student attitudes toward distance learning can be grouped into four categories: attitude toward the technology, attitude toward distance education teaching methods, attitude toward student and teacher interaction, and attitude toward being a remote student" (Reid, 1995, p. 1).

Research data indicates that student attitudes toward technology often evolve as student familiarity with the technology increases. Students new to a particular technology may initially exhibit some concern about the role of technology in the learning experience. If this occurs, these students typically demonstrate a reluctance to actively participate in the distance classroom (Barron, 1987; Smith & McNelis, 1993). However, a series of studies has shown that familiarity with technology over time erodes anxious feelings (Jones, 1992; Smith & McNelis; Riddle, 1990). Alternatively, another source of difficulty linked to technology has surfaced in some student comments about frustration resulting from equipment design or function problems, such as poor sound or an inability to see or speak with the instructor (Riddle). For this reason, it is important for distance educators to comprehensively plan an effective learning system for remote locations from both an instructional design as well as a technological design perspective. On balance, several studies have revealed no significant negativity in student attitudes about the use of technology in teaching and learning (Jones; Simmons, 1991).

Student attitudes toward distance learning are frequently affected by the teaching methods used. Research has suggested that teachers who understand and maximize utilization of the available technology are judged as more successful than those who approach technology as an add-on to a traditional class. Students prefer some teaching strategies over others in a distance learning environment. Most often this is directly related to their specific learning style. In addition, proctors well-trained in the special needs of distance learning students and the use of technology can greatly facilitate the teaching and learning process (Riddle, 1990). When instructors are not well-trained in the use of technology, they may spend time learning to use the equipment at the expense of teaching the class, as was the case in one study of distant student attitudes (Riddle).

Student-teacher interaction also plays an important role in student attitudes about distance learning. Studies have shown that student attitudes toward distance education can be significantly affected by facilitating some degree of interaction among students and teachers (Barron, 1987; Simmons, 1991; Ritchie & Newby, 1989; Hult, 1980). For example, at least one visit by the teacher to distant sites has positively affected distant learners' attitudes or alternatively, the students can be brought together for an 'orientation' session prior to the start of their course of study (Hult, 1980). Instructors can also facilitate interaction through regular individual contact with students via telephone or electronic mail.

Finally, student attitudes about being distance learners affect their outlook on distance education in general. Older students are typically more enthusiastic and structured in their approach to distance learning (Nadel, 1988). Perhaps this is due to maturity and recognition of the value of convenient distance course opportunities. Studies have also demonstrated that students believe that they learn as much, if not more, via two-way television as they do in a

traditionally delivered course (Jones, 1992). It is important to note that those who have taken distance courses have generally responded positively to the experience and would recommend it to other students (Jones; McElveen & Roberts, 1992; Nadel; Simmons, 1991; Simonson, Johnson, & Neuberger, 1989).

Frequently, student attitudes about distance learning are specifically linked to components of the distance education experience, rather than being generalized to distance learning overall. The use of a variety of teaching methods with little emphasis on lecture delivery is preferred by distance learning students. Positive student pre-disposition to being a remote learner contributes to learning enthusiasm. Attention to teacher-student interaction is important, since distance learners exhibit a strong bias toward personal contact with the instructor. Students who are initially anxious about using technology for learning usually become increasingly comfortable as their exposure to it increases. Thus, distance educators should examine the range of factors influencing student attitudes when planning a distance education course.

Institutional support is essential for the success of online learning. Many people are involved in the process of delivering online courses including the faculty that develop and teach, the support staff that coordinate registration and student issues, and the administrators who provide and support training. The bottom line is that the institution must believe in online learning in order for everyone to contribute (Palooff & Pratt, 2001). The institution must provide support in several areas. The first area is training. An instructor needs training in the technical aspects of courseware, but also, more importantly they need training in the pedagogy of online teaching (Schweizer, 1999). This is made clear by the implications of the Phipps & Merisotis (1999) research study, which indicated that institutions must look past technology to build collaborative learning communities. Faculty should be retrained from just being content experts

to becoming more of a learning process expert and facilitator. Faculty must also become effective motivators and mentors to guide students. Technology can be a useful learning tool, but it cannot replace face-to-face interaction, as in a classroom. "Learning tasks, learner characteristics, student motivation and the instructor" (Phipps & Merisotis, p. 31) still remain at the core of quality courses, essentially the art of teaching itself.

Another recurring theme in research that demands institutional support is the amount of time it takes to develop and instruct an online course. One instructor who has been working with online courses for many years states that time is needed for the development of online courses with the vast majority of that time being up front. For example, this individual estimated that it takes 40% longer the first time a course is developed and 20% thereafter (Schweizer, 1999). Again, this is because considerable attention must be paid to outlining course expectations; detailing course activities, discussions and assignments; creating assignments and rubrics; and making the course easy to navigate. This institutional support is also reinforced in a study by the National Education Association (2000) where more than half of distance learning faculty stated that they spend more hours per week preparing and delivering their online course that they would in a traditional setting. However, it is possible that faculty do not fully take into account all the hours they initially spent preparing a course offering in a traditional setting. One may well ask the question, "If instructors are not being compensated for the extra time they take to develop or teach online courses, why teach an online course?" Palloff and Pratt (2001) explain that the primary incentives for some instructors to teach online are personal or intrinsic rewards. Some faculty appreciate the opportunity to provide innovative instruction, use new teaching techniques and receive recognition. Nonetheless, the previously mentioned obstacles of the need for more time, training and support still remained.



Institutions can respond to these obstacles of online education by providing incentives (Palloff & Pratt, 2001), such as allocating funds for online course development, offering course development and training activities, and or a reduced course load to faculty teaching online to give the opportunity to provide a quality learning environment. Finally, an institution should provide a support system to help new online faculty gain some comfort in this new experience.

The training needs of students must also be addressed at a higher administrative level (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). It is simplistic to believe that most students are technologically savvy today. Students may want, and in fact need help in learning to use the course management software. They also need to understand the instructor's online course expectations of them. It would be prudent for the institution to consider providing an orientation for all online learners. Furthermore, instructors should be trained to provide additional orientation within specific courses.

#### *Attributes of Successful Online Learners*

In order to promote effective online learning, faculty and students must be aware of the differences in the online versus the traditional classroom learning process (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). Huber and Lowry (2003) suggest that a successful online student should be able to: (a) meet the program's minimum requirements; (b) have access to and a minimum proficiency in the use of the necessary hardware and software; (c) communicate through writing; (d) be self-motivated and self-disciplined; (e) be willing to commit sufficient time per week to course work; (f) be willing to speak up if problems arise; (g) accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process; and (h) be open-minded about sharing experiences as part of the learning process.

Online education with technology can have a significant impact on the learning process (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). The dynamics change from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches to learning. Students need to take a more active role in the process and are challenged to use course materials or interact with others to construct knowledge.

The instructor's challenge is to act as a facilitator and encourage a collaborative community of learning (Kumar, Kumar & Basu, 2002). This may be a significant challenge for both instructors and students. In this new paradigm, students may be asked to solve problems, experiment, discover, and complete hands-on projects. They may do independent projects or work in groups with peers. They may post thoughts on a discussion board and comment on other students' thoughts. Students must be prepared for the new way of learning.

An online learner must be independent and self-directed (Smith, et al., 2001). When the task of online learning is taken seriously and confidently, learning can extend far beyond the traditional learner in a classroom. One way to extend learning is through participation in a threaded discussion board where there is a greater emphasis on the written word. The learner also has time to reflect on a discussion before he or she reacts. This allows the student to think about the material at a deeper level. Additionally, since there is a feeling of anonymity, students are more willing to contribute more information. In fact, in one study, the "highest performing students reported the most peer interaction" (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999, p. 20).

Since the population of distance learners is one that is heterogeneous, and is becoming more so every day, it is difficult to profile a typical distance learner. Although an illusory "typical learner" exists, a variety of factors, including students' gender, age, and motivation, could explain different reactions among the student population (Peters, 2001). Add to this the variety of modes that distance education employs, and the data collected can be ambiguous at best. Despite

this, there are certain characteristics of distance learners worth mentioning, to enable meeting their individual needs. Generally, students who are attracted to online education are seeking further education, or training, are highly motivated, have higher expectations, and are more self disciplined (Palloff & Pratt, 2002). They also tend to be older than the average student and possess a more serious attitude toward their courses. The students most likely to succeed are independent active learners (Brown, 2002). They are able to structure and manage their time well. They are also risk takers and good problem solvers.

In addition to having an awareness of the profile of the typical online learner, faculty should also think about the needs of these students. The aim should be to empower the students to learn as effectively as possible while enjoying a rewarding experience. Moore (1999) suggests that distance learners want content which they feel is relevant; clear directions on activities; control over the pace of learning; procedures to address individual concerns; the ability to determine progress and receive feedback; and useful and interesting materials.

Beyond having the right personal characteristics to succeed in an online course, the learner must also be computer literate. In a 1998 study, 81% of students thought there should be a computer training and orientation course before the start of classes. This included the need for the students to be "Internet literate" (Nasseh, as cited in Aggarwal & Bento, 2002). Some institutions now require students to take an online orientation course before enrolling in online courses to ensure that technology does not interfere with learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). At a minimum, each course should provide some orientation material to inform the student on the difference between online and traditional learning, including course management issues, methods of assessment, feedback, and appropriate communication used in that course, and the like.

Dr. William Glaser, a psychiatrist, educator and philosopher who has been researching “learning” for over 40 years also indicates that students have basic psychological needs which ideally should be addressed when developing coursework (Schweizer, 1999). Some students have a need to belong. Peters (2001) notes that personal contact may be an important factor in students’ perceptions of online learning. “Some students who learn online report feelings of isolation and loneliness. These students miss the social contact and face-to-face interaction that an institutional setting provides” (Peters, 2001, p. 3). An instructor can address this need by trying to include face-to-face meetings where possible, post a self-introduction with some informal personal information as part of a welcome to the course, promote cooperative learning and stay in close contact with students by being an active participant. Yet other students need freedom, and power. Self-directed learning is the nature of online learning and is powerful for individual learners. Many students immediately thrive in this environment. However, the instructor must create interactive learning experiences for students to enable the sharing of information and construction of knowledge.

Finally, one study concludes that “current web-based online college courses are not an alienating, mass-produced product. They are a labor-intensive, highly text-based, intellectually challenging forum, which elicit deeper thinking and provide more equality between instructor and student” (Smith et al., 2001, p. 6). This needs to happen to engage the learner at all levels.

#### *Attributes of Effective Online Instructors*

All instructors are not necessarily suited for teaching online. Huber and Lowry (2003) suggest that effective online instructors should be able to:

(a) create a learning environment that uses work, life, and educational experiences to make the learning meaningful and relevant; (b) present the material in a way that facilitates translating theory to practice and application; (c) solicit and listen to feedback; (d) provide timely and constructive feedback on the students' efforts; (e) keep students informed on the status of course requirements; and (f) be readily available to answer student questions and address student concerns. (p. 85)

Experience has shown that successful online instructors are typically willing to give up some control of the teaching and learning process and focus on empowering learners (Palloff & Pratt, 2002). They use collaborative, active learning techniques and ideas; use real-life example; and build reflection into the teaching and learning process. An effective instructor may also respect and use the work and experience of various students in a collaborative relationship and must be able to manage real events and real problems of students (Stevens-Long & Crowell, 2002). Effective online instructors tend to be serious life-long learners (Brown, 2002). They favor experimental and collaborative styles and are good group facilitators. They set clear course expectations about participation requirements, assignment due dates and deadlines and provide frequent feedback. This results in a higher level of quality work, and communicates to students that there is a structure and a place waiting for their involvement (Stevens-Long & Crowell, 2002). Students may need to be taught to navigate the course. Courses can be made more user-friendly by providing support information upfront and more interesting by including scenarios and case projects (Schweizer, 1999). Online instructors realize the importance of the upfront preparation of course materials and then continued online interaction with students. An instructor must be dedicated to the cause and prepared for a major time commitment to online education.

Phipps and Merisotis (1999) remind us that technology can effectively utilize instructor time, but it cannot replace instructor and student interaction.

It is helpful for instructors to use the wealth of research now available about how people learn. This research can assist faculty in finding more effective and creative ways to teach online. The more of these concepts that are integrated into an online course, the better. In many ways, the online learning environment allows more obvious possibilities for addressing multiple learning styles and needs. Researchers contend that the teacher's presence and instructor's social interactions with students influence students' motivation, course engagement, and learning achievement (Jung, Choi, Lim & Leem, 2002; Shin, 2003). For example, brain-based research indicates that "learning is maximized in rich and complex learning environments which offer multiple opportunities for hands-on learning, dialogue with others, making connections across disciplines and various forms of expression" (Schweizer, 1999, p. 28). Instructors may include a variety of assessment tools such as writing assignments, portfolios, simulations, contests/games, or presentations.

An effective online instructor must also understand the learning environment. There are many different types of interaction available. In an effective learning community, the learner will interact directly with the content, the instructor and peers. This promotes an environment where the learner becomes actively involved. The course design should promote a variety of opportunities for this to happen using different formats to draw on the strengths and abilities of different types of learners, while at the same time providing them with positive reinforcement for participation.

### *Attributes of Effective Online Courses*

Online course development needs to follow established tenets of quality course development. One way to ensure this is to use performance based curriculum with clearly defined skills that the learner will obtain from the program, course, and unit levels (Schweizer, 1999). William Spady, an educator and researcher who devoted his career to the development of curriculum states that one should start with intended outcomes and then work backwards, continuing to define, derive, develop and organize the course or curriculum. Program and or course outcomes need to be clearly written and easily accessible (Schweizer, 1999).

The tone of the course is also important. A study at the University of British Columbia evaluated 127 online course for tone content and teaching process, and concluded that they appearance of a course can also impact the success of a course (Boshier, Mohapi, & Moulton, as cited in Schweizer, 1999). In other words, the instructor should spend time making the course format exciting rather than just using simple text based information. Some tips on ways to improve tone include using white space, keeping a site simple, integrating the entire site, making it visually welcoming, providing information about the instructor, including a fun splash page, and allowing for easy log in and out.

### *Program Evaluation and Course Improvement*

The primary aim of program evaluation is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning involved (Woodley & Kirkwood, 1988). In distance education the separation between teachers and students normally involves instruction or learning experiences being mediated through written or recorded materials. These 'published' materials will normally remain in substantially the same form for several (or many) cohorts of learners, although some

modifications and amendments can usually be arranged. In turn, this separation entails the absence of direct verbal and non-verbal feedback from students that is so important in all teaching. Just as assessment of individual students leads to improved learning by providing feedback and guidance at several points, program evaluation contributes to improved instruction by providing detailed feedback regarding input, processes, and outcomes to those who can make changes or programmatic decisions (Mehrotra, Hollister & McGahey, 2001). The evaluation of any distance education teaching materials may seek to provide information that can be used during the process of developing or preparing materials or learning experiences -*formative* evaluation procedures, or *summative* evaluation procedures, which provide information about a course or materials used in the course. In practice, it is often impossible to draw such a clear distinction, but it does provide a useful way of considering methods of evaluation.

Program evaluation can answer some of the following questions: Did the students learn what was intended? Did they find the experience helpful and productive? Were the instructional strategies effective? Were the students satisfied with the experience? What improvements would improve the learning experience? Areas of weakness in the learning experiences can be identified and revised for the next time the course is offered.

According to Woodley and Kirkwood (1988), formative evaluation includes critical commenting, developmental testing and revising draft materials with regards to formative evaluation. Critical commenting can be achieved through peer review of draft materials. Developmental testing can take place in the preparation phase and involves trying out draft materials with students. Summative evaluation can be obtained via feedback from tutors and students. Students can additionally provide information regarding the extent of utilization of



various resources, their overall view of the quality of teaching, general style of presentation and specific content issues.

In her book, “Distance Education: The Complete Guide to Design, Delivery, and Improvement,” Judith Johnson (2003) presents the research and several case studies to provide a comprehensive picture of the evolution and current status of distance learning. “We have learned many lessons that have helped us to promote increased access, enriched learning experiences, more flexibility and convenience, and students who are prepared to meet the challenges of today’s world” (p. 149). Many of the lessons learned have been through trial and error,

what was once acceptable has now fallen by the wayside. What was once ‘state of the art’ is now passé. The passage of time has changed the face of distance learning, and it is expected that many more changes will be witnessed over the next decade and beyond. (p. 149)

This is reason enough to continue to undertake the process of program evaluation to ensure that programs meet the needs of learners. Some of the lessons learned indicate that the format and pedagogy used in face-to-face courses are not appropriate for courses delivered via distance, faculty and students must have opportunities to learn about the technology used in distance courses, support services for faculty and students are a must for effective distance learning, and the administration of the institution must be actively involved and invested in the distance education undertaking for it to be successful (Johnson, 2003).

### *Summary*

The business world is expanding; business is conducted globally and doing this work does not necessarily mean going to an office to complete certain tasks. The workforce will need

to be able to share knowledge and talents. Subject matter experts with renowned specialties could benefit others in their region, state, country, or the world (Denton, 1994).

Distance learning may overcome the constraints of time and place; however, it is essential to ensure that quality learning continues to take place. The content of the learning must be of high quality and relevant to enhancing the required skills and knowledge of the end user (Weisburg & Ullmer, 1995).

The literature review reveals not only the importance of institutional support for online education but also highlights the need for learners and instructors to understand the online learning environment. The technology used in the online learning environment may not be as important as “learning tasks, learner characteristics, student motivation and the instructor” (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999, p. 31). Most importantly, an instructor will need to understand online learners and find ways to integrate best teaching practices into online education. Quality assurance and the continuous improvement of distance education courses and programs are fundamental to the viability of all programs. Program evaluation and improvement processes are an integral part of academic planning. Good teaching practice, suggests that individual instructors review the content and focus of their courses, reflect on their teaching through feedback from students and other stakeholders, and make appropriate revisions as required. However, the resources available to develop and sustain programs may affect their quality.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Description of Methodology*

This descriptive study assessed student perceptions of the Master of Science GHMC or AC in the Hospitality and Tourism program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. This was accomplished by evaluating the overall instruction of the courses and the course management systems used to deliver the courses. The administration of the courses and concentration, with respect to the effectiveness of these systems in enabling students learn, was also part of this assessment. The research instrument used to achieve the objectives of the study was a questionnaire.

#### *Research Design*

The variables of this study were the two different course management systems, namely Lotus LearningSpace (LSpace) and Blackboard; and the effective administration and management of the technology to promote student learning. Additionally, LSpace had eight improved versions, of which mainly three were used in the online concentration. Other variables in the study were the dates of student enrollment in, and graduation from, the concentration; and student skill sets with regard to technology and their perspectives of study since they were returning to university, i.e. non-traditional students.

### *Subjects*

All alumni of the concentration, special students and current students who have enrolled in the online concentration between Fall 1999 and Fall 2003 comprised the population for this study. It also included all degree-seeking students as well as those interested in taking a few select courses for credit, and those enrolled in the three 'certificates.' Of the 44 potential participants 39 were degree-seeking, four were interested in taking select courses for credit and one person enrolled in the 'certificate' option. 10 AC students were in education, and wanted to further their education by obtaining a graduate degree. The person enrolled in the certificate option was also in education, however, he already had a graduate degree and hence required targeted knowledge. The 'certificate' offered the perfect option. Some of the students from industry were either being offered additional benefits or incentives to obtain a graduate degree. The others realized that if they were to move forward in their careers, then needed to obtain a graduate degree.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey instrument was developed by the researcher along with the assistance of the research committee with a view to stimulating a smooth flow of thought processes and recollection; and ensuring clarity and ease of understanding by respondents. It was hoped that this would result in obtaining the maximum input from respondents in an efficient manner. Thus, the first two questions required the respondent to state the starting date of his/her first semester, and the date of his/her graduating semester. This in turn enabled performing the Mann Whitney test.

Several items on the questionnaire used a Likert-type rating scale. Rating scales or attitude scales determine distinctions of the degree to which an attitude is possessed by individuals. The Likert-type scale is also called a summative rating scale. It consists of statements expressing an idea or point of view on the topic being studied (Polit, Becker & Hungler, 2001). Rating scales allow attitudes and beliefs to be measured quantitatively and can be adapted to many needs of behavioral researchers (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 455).

The tool for this study uses a 5 point scale: 1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Average, 4 = Fair, and 5 = Poor. These ratings were reversed when analyzing the data to facilitate interpretation of the results with 5 = Excellent and so on.

Question number three on the survey listed 10 of the possible courses that students could have taken. Each course was listed along with a Likert scale of one to five offering rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. 'Not applicable' was another option which was offered in case a student had not taken that particular course.

Question four addressed student views of the quality of the courses in the online concentration in general, compared to regular face-to-face courses they had taken. Quality was further determined by offering the following aspects of a course, i.e. course syllabi, resources, design, layout, content, and rigor, and whether or not the course conformed to the published description. Here too, a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor was offered.

Question five requested respondents to assign overall ratings on the abilities of instructor to teach online. Five criteria were listed with a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor.

The next section focused on responsiveness, expertise, timeliness of action and student satisfaction with the end result of administrative and support services provided at both the university level and the program level, with a Likert scale of one to five. Rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor were offered.

Evaluating the online technology and supporting delivery systems was the next section with ten questions. The first nine questions described various facets of using online technology and delivery systems, and the degree to which they facilitated student learning and successful completion of the concentration. Question ten in this section was an open-ended question relating to the ease of using more than one course management system.

Five open-ended questions were added at the end of the survey to enable students to provide information and suggestions that they may not have been able to express when completing the previous sections of the survey.

In July 2005, the research instrument was sent to Ms. C. Ness, Research and Statistical Consultant, to obtain feedback on the layout and design of the instrument with a view to making improvements. A few changes were made to the wording of items on the survey.

### *Procedures*

On June 22, 2005, the researcher received notification from the UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) that this research project had been reviewed and that it did not need any further review and approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, since it was not defined as research.

The survey was piloted using a select group of students. This pilot testing resulted in a realignment of the questions on the instrument, as found in Appendix A. Question #3 on the

survey, was moved from being at the end of the survey to its current position. It was felt that this would help students recall their experiences with the AC, while they were completing the program. Questions #3, #4, and #5 in the section Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems were also re-worked using a 5-point Likert scale to standardize the ratings used in the survey. Previously a 3-point Likert scale was used.

In the first week of September 2005 a database was developed based on university records detailing contact information for the population. Forty-four potential participants were identified. On September 09, 2005, they were sent an email requesting their participation in this research project, while at the same time informing them that all responses would be anonymous and confidential. They were further requested to reply with their current mailing address so that a questionnaire with a prepaid return envelope could be mailed to them. They were also given the option of returning the completed questionnaire, sent as an attachment to the email, to the address provided at the end of the questionnaire.

On September 30, 2005, another email was sent to the list of potential participants thanking those who may have responded for their expeditious response, and requesting those who had not responded as yet to do so. An attempt was made to contact potential participants by telephone, to obtain a current mailing address. No contact was made with any of the potential participants by this method. Those who did not reply to the email were sent copies of the questionnaire in the mail, the questionnaire being mailed to the mailing address per university records. It was assumed that perhaps the email address was outdated and/ or not being used.

### *Data Collection*

Three participants replied to the initial email, providing an updated mailing address. Questionnaires and prepaid return envelopes were mailed to them. Additionally, five others responded by completing the questionnaire and mailing it to the researcher, as early as within the next 10 days. 15 completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher by October 31, 2005.

A total of 20 returned questionnaires were submitted to Ms. C. Ness on November 04, 2005 for analysis. The data was imported into SPSS which automatically analyzed their responses, compiled the results into a spreadsheet format and developed a summary per the tests requested for analysis. Eleven surveys were returned in the mail marked 'return to sender.'

### *Data Analysis*

Basic statistical processes were used since this is a descriptive study designed to profile the current status of the program from the student perspective. T-test and Mann Whitney *U*-test were run.

### *Limitations*

Since the questionnaire was emailed and/or mailed to students past and present, enrolled in the online option, having current contact information such as mailing addresses was key to ensuring the questionnaire was received by all its intended participants. It is possible that email addresses changed, or were not currently in use. Additionally, university email addresses were not usable after graduation. Together, these factors probably resulted in some participants not receiving the questionnaire. Mailing addresses and contact telephone numbers too have changed, in which case a follow up using these options was not available to the researcher.



The researcher considered clustering the respondents into groups based on the year of enrollment and/or graduation, for comparison but encountered two problems. First, that the population size was not large enough, and second, that although students in a cohort were intended to start and graduate together, most graduated on their own schedule.

Another limitation was a lack of validity or reliability measures established for the instrument, given that the survey was developed by the researcher.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of the online GHMC or AC in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree program, as it is currently being delivered, in a longitudinal format. This chapter described the methodology used in this study, including the research design, population, instrument design and development, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four will present the analysis of the completed surveys. Scores for each of the items will be added and a mean determined. Results will be evaluated with a view to achieving the objectives of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to determine student perceptions of the online AC or GHMC in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree program, as it is currently being delivered, in a longitudinal format. The results of this study are reported in this chapter. Descriptive statistics, the t-test and the Mann Whitney *U*-test were used to analyze the data and answer the research questions.

The Mann Whitney *U*-test is a non-parametric test (distribution-free) used to compare two independent groups of sampled data. Unlike the parametric t-test, this non-parametric makes no assumptions about the distribution of the data (e.g., normality). This test is an alternative to the independent group t-test, when the assumption of normality or equality of variance is not met. This, like many non-parametric tests, uses the ranks of the data rather than their raw values to calculate the statistic. Since this test does not make a distribution assumption, it is not as powerful as the t-test. The hypotheses for the comparison of two independent groups are that *one* group is made up of two samples which come from identical populations, and the *second* group includes two samples which come from different populations. The hypothesis makes no assumptions about the distribution of the populations. These hypotheses are also sometimes written as testing the equality of the central tendency of the populations.

The test statistic for the Mann Whitney *U*-test is *U*. This value is compared to a table of critical values for *U* based on the sample size of each group. If *U* exceeds the critical value for *U*

at some significance level (usually 0.05) it means that there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

### *Results*

Table 1 shows the total number of students and alumni of the GHMC (AC) to whom the survey was sent, as well as the number of respondents.

Table 1

#### Population and Number of Respondents

	N	Percentage
Population	44	100%
Return rate	20	45.5%

Questions #1 and #2 on the survey asked respondents for their enrollment and graduating semesters respectively. The enrollment date on the returned surveys enabled respondents to be categorized into two groups. These were the two groups used in the Mann Whitney *U*-test. Group 1 (original program) was comprised of students who enrolled in the GHMC (AC) between September 1999 and September 2000, per the data on the returned surveys. This group of students mainly used Lotus Notes or Lotus LearningSpace. Group 2 (recent/revised program) was composed of students who enrolled in the AC between September 2002 and January 2003, per the data on the returned surveys. This group of students mainly used Blackboard as their course

management system. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of respondents segmented by the course management system that they predominantly used.

Table 2

Students Segmented by Course Management System

	N	Percentage
Group 1 (original program)	8	40%
Group 2 (recent/revised program)	12	60%
Total	20	100%

Question #3 on the survey listed the 10 core courses and asked respondents to rate the overall quality of each of the courses on a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. One additional choice of 'not applicable' was offered, and was assigned the number '6' on the rating scale. Table 3 indicates the mean scores for the quality of each of the core courses in the AC as rated by respondents.

Table 3

## Overall Quality of Each Core Program Course

Core Program Courses		Mean	SD
HT 700	Issues in Hospitality and Tourism	1.35	.489
HT 751	Strategic Management in Hospitality	1.65	.933
HT 753	Managing Finance	2.75	1.333
HT 754	Managing Technology in Hospitality and Services	2.00	.858
HT 755	Leadership and Management in Hospitality Industries	1.75	.851
HT 756	Quality Assurance Customer Service	1.95	.887
HT 758	Hospitality Operational Systems	1.85	.987
HT 701	Hospitality and Tourism Research Interpretations	1.82	.636
HT 735	Plan B	2.38	.744
HT 747	Seminar	1.41	.507

Question #4 on the survey focused on determining student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to content, layout and design. A Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor was used. Table 4 indicates the mean scores for the general overall perception of students for all the courses in the AC based on these and four additional criteria listed below.

Table 4

## Overall Rating of Layout and Design of Courses in the Online Program

	Mean	SD
Course syllabi	1.4	.503
Course resources – textbooks and related materials	1.65	.745
Design	1.7	.733
Layout	1.9	.641
Content quality	1.6	.503
Appropriateness of the rigor of the courses in the program	1.4	.503
Conforming to published description	1.35	.489

Question #5 on the questionnaire required respondents to assign overall ratings on the instructors' abilities to teach online. Five criteria were listed with a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. The five criteria were: ability to create a meaningful learning environment, demonstrate the application of theory to practice, solicit and listen to feedback, provide timely and constructive feedback, and availability to answer student questions and concerns. The mean scores for the quality of instruction based on instructors' abilities are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

## Instructor Ability

Q. 5. Overall Instructor Performance	Mean	SD
a. Ability to create a meaningful learning environment	1.50	.513
b. Ability to demonstrate the application of theory to practice	1.75	.851
c. Ability to solicit and listen to feedback	1.65	.489
d. Provide timely and constructive feedback	1.95	.605
e. Availability to answer student questions and concerns	1.95	.686

Assessing the extent to which administrative and support services met the needs and expectations of the students was the next section on the survey. Student perceptions of the extent to which administrative and support services met their needs and expectations were determined by their responses to the ‘Administrative and Support Services’ section on the survey. This section was divided into two parts – the first focused on university administrative and support services, and the second, on program administrative and support services. The services of each of these two entities were evaluated on four criteria, namely their responsiveness, expertise, timeliness of action and student satisfaction with the end result of the services. Yet again, a Likert scale of one to five with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor were offered. The mean scores for administrative and support services are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

## Administrative and Support Services

Administrative and Support Services	Mean	SD
1. University Administrative and Support Services		
a. Accessibility/responsiveness of person(s) providing services	1.58	.507
b. Knowledge and expertise of person(s) providing services	1.58	.507
c. Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need	2.00	.577
d. Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact	1.58	.507
2. Program Administrative and Support Services		
a. Accessibility/responsiveness of person(s) providing services	2.00	.725
b. Knowledge and expertise of person(s) providing services	1.70	.657
c. Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need	1.95	.887
d. Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact	1.75	.716

Student perceptions of the degree to which online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitated their learning were determined by their responses to the ‘Online Technology and Supporting Delivery System(s)’ section on the survey. This section had 10 questions – the first nine used a Likert scale of one to five with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. Each question and the mean scores for the criteria listed under that question are



presented in Table 7. The tenth question was open ended and the results presented as the first open-ended question in the section titled 'Open-ended Questions.'

Table 7

## Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems

Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems	Mean	SD
1. How would you rate the UW-Stout website?		
a. General Information	1.45	.686
b. Admissions	1.65	.671
c. Registration	1.65	.671
d. Add/Drops	2.47	1.246
e. Billing statements	1.65	.671
f. Records	1.80	1.105
2. How would you rate the Department of Hospitality and Tourism website?		
a. Course access	1.70	.801
b. Course information	1.50	.513
c. Program information	1.70	.801
d. Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact	1.35	.489
3. How easy was it to learn to use the system?		
a. Lotus LearningSpace	2.00	.918
b. Blackboard	2.05	1.353

Table 7: Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems (continued)

Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems	Mean	SD
4. How easy was it to learn to navigate the system?		
a. Lotus LearningSpace	1.65	.671
b. Blackboard	1.84	1.214
5. How easy was it to log-on to the courses?		
a. Lotus LearningSpace	1.75	.967
b. Blackboard	1.95	1.311
6. Please rate your general level of computer expertise before taking the online degree.	2.25	.444
7. Please rate your general level of computer expertise after taking the online degree.	1.55	.510
8. Please rate the degree to which Lspace online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitated your learning.		
a. Course Room	1.65	.489
b. Profiles/grading portfolio	1.80	.696
c. Media Center	1.65	.745
d. Assessment Manager	2.10	.788

Table 7 continued on next page

Table 7: Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems (continued)

Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems	Mean	SD
9. Please rate the degree to which the Blackboard course management system facilitated your learning.		
a. Course Information	1.89	.994
b. Course Documents	2.00	1.202
c. Assignments	2.00	1.202
d. Communication	2.00	1.202
e. Student Tools	2.17	1.150

Overall students rated these items excellent or good, with the following exceptions. The mean for UW-Stout add/drops was 2.47, for ease of learning Blackboard was 2.05, general level of computer expertise before taking the online was 2.25, the degree to which LSpace facilitated learning was 2.10, and the degree to which Blackboard facilitated learning was 2.17.

#### *Open-ended Questions*

Respondents were given the opportunity to add comments and express ideas or suggestions of their own that the survey had not otherwise addressed through the use of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions and comments are as follows:

Q. 10 on the survey in section ‘Online Technology and Supporting Delivery Systems’ was “Did you find using more than one Course Management System challenging? If yes, please tell us why.”

Nine respondents chose not to specifically answer this question. Six of the respondents categorically noted that using more than one CMS was not challenging. Two students also noted that the changing CMS was an aspect of the program that they liked least. The remaining five respondents made the following comments:

- It was at first, but once experience was gained it was not difficult.
- The challenge was in not only using two different management systems, but also in understanding how to access either one. UW-Stout underwent some technical changes at the onset of my enrollment and then this was compounded by a massive computer virus attack that shut the system down. Evidently someone was not on their guard and did not utilize a variety of patches. As a consequence the first term was one of tremendous frustration in not only using a new delivery method, but also trying to overcome an off and on computer access. As to Blackboard it was a fiasco from start to finish. Fortunately I only had to take one course using this system. It was filled with glitches and hiccups. Add to that a professor 12 or more time zones distance and it was a course with absolute frustration. In the end I felt as though I had eaten a sandwich, but someone forgot to put any peanut butter or jelly inside the slices of bread.
- The irony in all of this is that I now teach a virtual course in Geography at Northwest Mississippi Community College and Blackboard is the CMS. Not only does it work precisely as it was designed, but it also offers some incredible features which were

never utilized in taking the course at UW-Stout. More than once I have found myself saying, “Is this the same Blackboard we used at UW-Stout?” Quite honestly the names of the tools are the same, but they certainly behave differently. I am using the same computer system as I did at UW-Stout and the same XP operating system. Consequently either the program has had major upgrades or it was not fully understood for the course in which I was enrolled (Finance).

- You had to re-learn the system each semester. It would have been much easier to stay with one CMS all the time. Instead, much of the start to the semester was consumed by learning the system.
- I liked it because I felt that it gave me exposure to another CMS. I find that of educational value in and of itself in today’s world of rapidly changing technology.
- Sometimes, just adjusting mentally to a new CMS distracted from the business of learning. I spent valuable time ‘learning’ how to use another CMS.
- A little annoying to get re-acquainted with the differences in each course management system.

Q. 1 on the survey in section ‘General’ was “What did you like most about the online program?”

All the participants chose to respond to this question. The initial orientation session was cited six times as being an aspect of the program that the students liked most about the program. Another opportunity students had to meet with their classmates and instructors was the Seminar in Hospitality Management course. Four respondents noted that this course was what they liked most about the online program. The ease of availability of a supportive and helpful program director was cited by two respondents as what they liked most about the online program. Other

aspects of the program that respondents liked most were the flexibility, asynchronous format, ability to get a graduate degree while still employed, not having to come to campus, being able to carry on with family obligations and life in general, learning how to use technology to communicate rather extensively with not only the instructor but also the other students, working in teams.

One particular respondent had a lot of feedback and comments to share about his/her perceptions of the program, and wrote:

Interaction between and among the students and the instructors was wonderful. It was the most invigorating educational environment in which I have been. The professors were most open, the exchanges timely, brisk and forthright. They were most open and accessible to offer ideas and constructive thought. Equally they would be encouraging or thought provoking. It is an intimacy that is not often available in a normal classroom. Having to do everything in a written format meant taking more time and studying harder than what I would have done in a normal classroom. In a regular classroom environment there is the opportunity to 'bob and weave,' or even duck. In a virtual classroom everything you do is on display for everyone to see. If you know your material it shows, conversely if you have not studied that also becomes apparent. As a consequence I found myself working harder than ever before not to look silly, lacking in knowledge, or in some circumstances just plain stupid. Even while completing this survey, I am gaining new insights into how much I learned.

Another important aspect was working with team members over long distances. In the current business environment this is not an unusual occurrence. Because of the Internet and advance telecommunication capabilities more and more businesses are de-

centralizing office functions. Thus the course became a real world laboratory for the modern work place.

Q. 2 on the survey in section 'General' was "What did you like least about the online program?"

All the participants chose to respond to this question. Four respondents mentioned that they missed not meeting classmates in person, as much for the human interaction, as using them as a yardstick by which they could assess their own performance in the class. Two respondents noted that lack of an immediate response to an impromptu question or clarification with regard to an assignment or feedback as one might have in a face-to-face course combined with the slow response of some the instructors took some getting used to. Students had to be organized and had to learn to plan ahead. It was noted that in an asynchronous environment it is more difficult to get a sense of where the instructor is coming from, due to a lack of visual and verbal cues.

Other individual respondents wrote that the program was so structured that they could not take as many of the courses they needed to enable them to graduate earlier; they had to keep pace with their cohort.

Q. 3 on the survey in section 'General' was "Do you have any suggestions for improving the online program?"

16 respondents had no suggestions for improvements to the program other than the comments they had already made in response to other questions. Other suggestions included one on the course offering format. Two formats were used. The first format offered one course every six weeks with four weeks off in between course. The second format offered two courses per semester – the first course of the semester was of six-weeks duration, followed by a week off, after which the second six-week course began. The program moved to this format based on

recommendations from the Marriott Corporation. One respondent specifically indicated a preference of the first format over the second.

Another respondent suggested that “there should be a forum or website where students can express their frustrations and euphoria,” like a chat room, or blogging ability, which would enable students to reach out to others who had taken the course. It would also serve as another source of assistance to students. The respondent also pointed out that this would help build the UW-Stout network of graduate students. In a world of IT networking and a course that uses IT as a teaching platform it seems obvious the program would use the Internet to build upon both graduate resources and industry connections.

Q. 4 on the survey in section ‘General’ asked respondents if they would recommend an online course/degree program to someone interested in higher education. Of the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ option, all the respondents selected the “Yes” choice.

Q. 5 on the survey in section ‘General’ was “Please add your comments/ suggestions.”

One of the respondents noted that s/he began to use course information in his/her profession even before the courses was completed. The program changed the way s/he approached business and it improved the product (management consulting) that his/her company offers. Of value too, was the discipline required in meeting course requirements, while working a fulltime profession and the experience gained in research, data analysis and their interpretation. The program was challenging and developed individuals personally and professionally. Eight students noted that the program earned their highest recommendation and was an excellent program. One participant believed that online offerings were necessary to help fulltime professionals continue their education. Another believes that virtual education offers the ability to do things that are not easily available in the classroom, and wrote:



Thomson Learning has materials available for students that could only have been dreamed about a few years ago. Students simply go to the website and have a plethora of educational materials available, from animation, to video, to statistical charts, etc. In addition the ability to add hyperlinks and other materials which provide quality learning experience to everyone whether they attended school in an impoverished or a wealthy community makes an online course valuable. If a student does not have a computer s/he can use the facilities at a college or library. Another student commented:

One of the great things at UW-Stout was the ability to access the Big Ten libraries online. The wealth of material available at the click of a button was staggering. Just seeing those libraries would be a thrill for me. Having had access to some of the greatest college libraries in the world was a fringe benefit to the UW-Stout experience that probably was overlooked or under appreciated by most students in the program. However, a virtual education gave me the same research advantages as a student in Lansing, Madison or Champaign.

The main themes that emerged from the responses to the open-ended questions were that students were overall very pleased with the quality of the GHMC/AC and that being able to complete a graduate degree online was invaluable. That many of them had to handle a combination of course management systems throughout their program paled in comparison to the advantages already stated.

The t-test was applied to test for significance within the population. Items of significance are as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

## T-test for Quality of Means

Item	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
HT 754 Managing Technology in Hospitality and Services	3.266	18	.004
University Administrative and Support Services Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need	-2.955	17	.009
Department of Hospitality and Tourism website Course access	-2.262	18	.036
Course information	-3.286	18	.004
Program information	-2.262	18	.036
Ease of navigating Lotus LearningSpace	-2.446	18	.025
General level of computer expertise after taking the online degree	-2.4	18	.027
Degree to which LSpace facilitated learning Course Room	-3.986	18	.001

The results of the Mann Whitney *U*-test indicate that of a total of 58 items that were run seven were significant, of which five items pertained to the section in the survey on 'Online Technology and Supporting Systems.' These five specific items were: Course information, Program information, and Satisfaction with the end result of service contact, at the department of Hospitality and Tourism website; ease of navigating Lotus LearningSpace; and the degree to which the Course Room in LSpace facilitated student learning. The sixth item of significance was 'Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need' at the university level, and the last

was the overall of quality of the HT 754 Managing Technology in Hospitality and Services course.

Table 9

Mann Whitney *U*-test for Quality of Means

Item	Mann Whitney U	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
HT 754 Managing Technology in Hospitality and Services	15.5	.010
University Administrative and Support Services Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need	18	.045
Department of Hospitality and Tourism website Course information	18	.020
Program information	21	.039
Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact	20	.031
Ease of navigating Lotus LearningSpace	22	.047
Degree to which LSpace facilitated learning Course Room	16	.012

These findings seem to indicate that indeed there was a difference between the two groups that were compared. The groups were created on the basis of the dates of student enrollment. This is because the course management system used when the GHMC was launched was different to that used in subsequent years. One group was comprised of students who enrolled between September 1999 and December 2002, while the other group was composed of the students who enrolled between January 2003 and September 2005. It is obvious that the

majority of the items of significance correlate to the section on the survey on ‘Online Technology and Supporting Systems.’

It is interesting to note that six of the eight items of significance in Table 8 are also of significance in Table 9 which has seven items of significance. These results show that indeed these are items of importance when offering online courses.

### *Summary of Findings*

In summary, the data from 20 surveys completed for this study have been analyzed. Descriptive statistics, the t-test and the Mann Whitney *U*-test were used. Data for all research questions were discussed. Written comments have also been included.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of the online Administration (Global Hospitality Management) concentration in the Hospitality and Tourism graduate degree program, as it is currently being delivered, in a longitudinal format.

The review of literature discussed the role of distance education in today's global economy, in both the education and training arenas, in the hospitality and tourism industry; a comparison of traditional and distance learning; different learning styles and their impact on distance education courses and programs; student attitudes and perceptions toward distance education; attributes of effective online learners, instructors, and courses; and finally program evaluation and consequent improvement based on data obtained through the process of program evaluation.

The research instrument was sent to students who have taken online courses in the Global Hospitality Management Concentration (GHMC) or Administration Concentration (AC), and was analyzed using SPSS. Basic descriptive statistics, t-test and the Mann Whitney *U*-test were run for each variable to determine the actual response rate for each question. The main themes that emerged from the responses to the open-ended questions were that students were generally very pleased with the quality of the GHMC/AC and being able to complete a graduate degree online was invaluable. This meant more stability in their lives since they could continue working in their careers and they did not need to come to campus and utilize valuable time in

doing so. That many of them had to handle a combination of course management systems throughout their program paled in comparison to the advantages already stated.

The findings of the study will be used by the Department of Hospitality and Tourism at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. These findings will assist the department to reevaluate the program and its administration, as it is currently being offered.

### *Limitations*

Some of the limitations of this study are:

1. Obtaining current contact information. Since the questionnaire is being emailed and/or mailed to students past and present, enrolled in the online option, having current contact information such as email and/or mailing addresses was key to ensuring the questionnaire was received by all its intended participants. It is possible that email addresses may have changed, or are not currently in use. Additionally, university email addresses are not usable after graduation. Together, these factors probably resulted in some participants not receiving the questionnaire. Mailing addresses and telephone numbers too have changed, in which case a follow up using mail, was not an option.

2. The small population size. The researcher considered clustering the respondents into groups based on the year of enrollment and/or graduation, for comparison but encountered two problems. First, the population size was not large enough, and second, although students in a cohort were intended to start and graduate together, most graduated on their own schedule.

3. The small sample size. Of a possible 44 respondents in the population, only 20 surveys were returned. It is unknown whether those students who did not respond did not receive the

email and/or mail requesting their participation, or whether they did not wish to participate in the research.

4. The survey was developed by the researcher, therefore there are no validity or reliability measures established for the instrument.

### *Conclusions*

Each research question will again be restated and answered based on the analysis of the data.

1. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to content?

Student perceptions of the value of courses with regard to content were assessed by their responses to question #3 and #4.e on the survey. Question #3 listed the 10 core courses and asked respondents to rate the overall quality of each of the courses on a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. One additional choice of 'not applicable' was offered, and was assigned the number '6' on the rating scale. It appears that students assigned a high value to the content of the courses based on their ratings of excellent or good. Question #4.e on the survey required respondents to rate the content quality of the courses in the online program in general, compared to regular face-to-face courses they had taken. Here too, it would seem that students perceived a high value with regard to the content quality of the online courses based on their ratings of excellent or good. The mean score was 1.60.

2. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to layout?

Question #4.d on the survey required respondents to rate the layout of the courses in the online program in general, compared to regular face-to-face courses they had taken, using a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. The mean score for this question was 1.90, indicating that students felt that the layout of the courses was excellent or good.

3. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to design?

Student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to design were assessed by their responses to question #4.c on the survey. Question #4.c on the questionnaire required respondents to rate the design of the courses in the online program in general, compared to regular face-to-face courses they had taken, using a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. Students mostly rated the courses as excellent with a few rating it as good. The mean score for this item was 1.70.

4. What are student perceptions of the value of courses offered within the program/online concentration, with regard to the quality of instruction?

Question #5 on the questionnaire required respondents to assign overall ratings on the instructors' abilities to teach online. Five criteria were listed with a Likert scale of one to five, with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. The five criteria were: ability to create a meaningful learning environment, demonstrate the application of theory to practice, solicit and listen to feedback, provide timely and constructive feedback, and availability to answer student questions and concerns. The mean score for ability to create a meaningful learning environment was 1.5, demonstrate the application of theory to practice was 1.75, solicit



and listen to feedback was 1.65, provide timely and constructive feedback was 1.95, and availability to answer student questions and concerns was 1.95. Students generally perceived there to be a high value with regard to instructor ability, indicated by excellent or good ratings. However, it seems that instructor ability to provide timely and constructive feedback, and availability to answer student questions and concerns was rated a little lower than the first three criteria.

5. What is the extent to which administrative and support services meet the needs and expectations of the students?

Student perceptions of the extent to which administrative and support services met their needs and expectations were determined by their responses to the 'Administrative and Support Services' section on the survey. This section was divided into two questions – the first focused on university administrative and support services, and the second, on program administrative and support services. The services of each of these two entities were evaluated on four criteria, namely their responsiveness, expertise, timeliness of action and student satisfaction with the end result of the services. Yet again, a Likert scale of one to five with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor were offered. The mean scores for both university and program administrative and support services indicate that students felt that the services were excellent or good, as can be seen from Table 2 in Chapter Four. The mean scores ranged from 1.58 to 2.00

6. What is the degree to which online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitate student learning?

Student perceptions of the degree to which online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitated their learning were determined by their responses to the 'Online Technology and Supporting Delivery System(s)' section on the survey. This section had 10 questions – the

first nine used a Likert scale of one to five with rating options of excellent, good, average, fair and poor. Each question and the mean scores for the criteria listed under that question are presented in Table 3 in Chapter Four. The tenth question was open-ended and the results presented as the first open-ended question in the section titled ‘Open-ended Questions.’

Overall students rated these items excellent or good, with the following exceptions: The mean for UW-Stout add/drops was 2.47, for ease of learning Blackboard was 2.05, general level of computer expertise before taking the online degree was 2.25, the degree to which LSpace facilitated learning was 2.10, and the degree to which Blackboard facilitated learning was 2.17.

The open-ended comments seem to corroborate that ‘online technology and supporting delivery systems’ were one area of the concentration that caused frustration, while at the same time recognizing that being able to obtain a degree online and not having to come to campus and take time off from work was invaluable. One student wrote, “UW-Stout underwent some technical changes at the onset of my enrollment and then this was compounded by a massive computer virus attack that shut the system down. Evidently someone was not on their guard and did not utilize a variety of patches.” It must be remembered that when the GHMC was implemented, in 1999, online education was considered to be implementing cutting-edge technology. The importance of the numerous special needs of online education were not as well understood nor accepted as a ‘given’ as they are today. E.g. the need for an entire network of support and technical staff. In 1999, instructors of online courses in the concentration grappled with handling these issues on their own. ‘Patch’ availability was not yet the norm. The student continued, “As to Blackboard it was a fiasco from start to finish. Fortunately I only had to take one course using this system. It was filled with glitches and hiccups.” Such experiences substantiate the 2.17 mean score for rating the degree to which Blackboard facilitated student

learning. Both CMS were rated lower than most other items on the survey. A student comment, “Sometimes, just adjusting mentally to a new CMS distracted from the business of learning. I spent valuable time ‘learning’ how to use another CMS,” explains these lower scores. So too does another student comment, “A little annoying to get re-acquainted with the differences in each course management system.”

### *Recommendations*

It is important to remember that in 1999, when the GHMC was implemented the online technology and CMS being used were considered to be at the cutting edge. As online education has become more common place it is essential that institutions are aware of the hallmarks of good online courses so as to be able to meet the needs and expectations of their stakeholders. In this regard the researcher has the following recommendations.

1. The institution needs to select a course management system after careful consideration of the capabilities of the CMS, the needs of the institution, the courses that will be offered using that particular CMS, and the needs of students taking the course.
2. The institution also needs to look to the future and try to assess the direction that both technology and stakeholders will take, and the ability of the selected CMS to keep up with these changes.

Specifically with regard to the AC, perhaps a forum, chat room, discussion board or website could be incorporated where students can post their experiences, and enable them to reach out to other students who may find themselves in similar situations. This would also help build the UW-Stout network of graduate students, an asset in the current business world where

networking and making industry connections is invaluable. Also, ensuring that for future cohorts the benefits of attending an orientation are a precursor to successfully completing the program.

This study has found that students both past and present in the GHMC or AC generally perceived there to be a high value in the graduate program they enrolled in.

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APPENDIX A

Research Instrument



5 Please rate the instructors **OVERALL** on the following criteria:

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Ability to create a relevant and meaningful learning environment ..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. | Ability to demonstrate the application of theory to practice .....     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. | Ability to solicit and listen to feedback.....                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. | Provide timely and constructive feedback.....                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. | Availability to answer student questions and concerns.....             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6 Typically, how many hours on average did you spend per week per course?

\_\_\_\_\_ hours/week

**Administrative and Support Services** refer to advisement, enrollment, admissions, records, transcripts, add/drops, special registrations, transfer credits, billing/payment etc:

1. To what degree did **University** administrative and support services meet your needs and expectations:
 

a.	Accessibility/responsiveness of person(s) providing services.....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Knowledge and expertise of person(s) providing services .....	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need .....	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact .....	1	2	3	4	5
2. To what degree did **program** administrative and support services in the meet your needs and expectations?
 

a.	Accessibility/responsiveness of person(s) providing services.....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Knowledge and expertise of person(s) providing services .....	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Timeliness of action in dealing with your service need .....	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact .....	1	2	3	4	5

**Online Technology and Supporting Delivery System(s):**

1. How would you rate the UW-Stout website?
 

a.	General Information.....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Admissions .....	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Registration.....	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Add/Drops .....	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Billing statements .....	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Records .....	1	2	3	4	5
2. How would you rate the Department of Hospitality and Tourism website?
 

a.	Course access .....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Course information.....	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Program information.....	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Satisfaction with the end result of your service contact .....	1	2	3	4	5
3. How easy was it to **learn** to use the system?
 

a.	Lotus LearningSpace .....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Blackboard.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. How easy was it to **navigate** the system?
 

a.	Lotus LearningSpace .....	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Blackboard.....	1	2	3	4	5

5. How easy was it to **log-on** to the courses?
- |                              |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Lotus LearningSpace ..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Blackboard.....           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
6. How would you rate your general level of computer expertise **before** taking the online degree? 1 2 3 4 5
7. How would you rate the general level of computer expertise after taking the online degree? 1 2 3 4 5
8. Please rate the degree to which LSpace online technology and supporting delivery systems facilitated your learning?
- |                                    |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Course Room.....                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Profiles/grading portfolio..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Media Center .....              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Assessment manager.....         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
9. Please rate the degree to which the Blackboard course management system facilitated your learning?
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Course Information.....   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Course Documents .....  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Assignments .....   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Communication (Send e-mail, discussion board, virtual classroom, roster, group pages).....              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Student Tools (Digital drop box, personal information, calendar, check grade, address book, etc.) ..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
10. Did you find using more than one Course Management System challenging? If yes, please tell us why.

### **General**

1. What did you like most about the online program?





APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

## Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

**Title:** Student Perceptions of the MS Global Hospitality Management Concentration

**Investigator:**

Prema A Monteiro  
Phone: 715 – 232 3501  
HMEC 446

**Research Advisor:**

Dr. Howard D. Lee  
Phone: 715 – 232 1251  
225A Applied Arts Bldg

**Description:**

The purpose of this research is to assess student perceptions of the MS Global Hospitality Management Concentration.

**Risks and Benefits:**

Any potential risks are exceedingly small. This information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. The benefit would be to have the ability to refine and/or modify the concentration based on collective recommendations.

**Time Commitment:**

Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on the survey. Answer completely and honestly to best express your perceptions. Blank spaces have been provided for you within the survey to enable you to provide information as you would like to express it. If you need additional space please feel free to use another sheet of paper. Upon completion, please return the survey using the prepaid envelope.

**Confidentiality:**

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been returned to the investigator.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator

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**Statement of Consent:**

By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the project entitled, "Student Perceptions of the MS Global Hospitality Management Concentration."