Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education

A thesis presented

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Abstract

The research study recognized that, although the knowledge obtained from academic textbooks and traditional classes are important to post-secondary hospitality management curriculum as they provide numerous insights and perspectives of different methods to manage a particular avenue within the hospitality industry; it is not the only aspect of the student’s education that needs to be considered, when considering readiness to enter the hospitality industry upon graduation. Therefore, there are two major purposes within this study: the study focuses on analysis and assessment of how students of hospitality management programs perceive experiential learning laboratories within their academic curriculum; and how these laboratories affect knowledge of hospitality management. Second, the study focuses on the examination and evaluation of qualitative data in the form of feedback from current students within a hospitality management program that have participated in experiential learning laboratories to understand perceived strengths and weaknesses of such learning opportunities. This doctoral thesis is focused on qualitative data using interviews; the results will be analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).
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Acknowledgement

Growing up in a small town and struggling with academics my entire life, obtainment of a doctoral degree was something I thought would never be achievable. Although, there are two people who never gave up on me and always pushed me to climb the mountain of education no matter how long it would take. They are my mom and dad and I can honestly say with no reservations that they are my heroes. They have been willing to sacrifice so much over my life to help me dream and never asked for anything in return. Without their love and support I can honestly say that I probably would have walked away from this journey some years ago, and just focused on a career. They never let me lose faith and pushed me when I was too tired to push myself, which was a lot towards the end of this doctoral thesis.

I would like to publicly thank you mom and dad for everything you do for me and the rest of our family. I will honor the both of you through this degree and do my part to better the educational environment so that future students are granted the opportunity to receive the best education possible.
Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how students enrolled in a hospitality program explain and utilize experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning has a healthy, positive role in the curriculum of undergraduate hospitality management, an applied discipline. Coordinating experiential learning with current industry trends and specific industry prerequisites improves student education. Yet a shortage of properly-educated entry-level management candidates has been an ongoing concern within the industry. This has resulted in increasing demand for skilled entry-level managers, which translates into a growing need for more focused hospitality management curricula. This, in turn, will help better prepare students to meet present and future demands in this ever-changing market. Knowledge gained from this study will benefit the students, the faculty involved in curriculum development, and the hospitality industry.

During the learning process, students need to be better aligned with the hospitality industry so it might help students become attached to the industry, or perhaps provide much-needed knowledge and experience within the educational setting. It is the responsibility of post-secondary institutions, and hospitality management departments to make such arrangements, so the learning process will help hospitality students succeed after graduation (Hayes & Miller, 2011). When students graduate, they will already have had some real-world experience, which will be instrumental in helping them find and keep employment, regardless of the economic climate. Opportunities for experiential learning will properly prepare them to practically apply what they were taught within the academic setting, as well as better prepare them for their chosen profession. The more practical applications and exposure that students receive while enrolled in a post-secondary institution, the better it is for both student and employer alike.
Context and Background

In 2014, there were more than 100 accredited hospitality management programs within the United States (Hotel Management, 2014). Each of these institutions undoubtedly has a curriculum that differs from its competitors. Thus, graduates of these programs will have a different skill set than their academic peers, some of which may not be as beneficial to them in an entry-level management position as one obtained from a better institution or even on-the-job training received without the burden of academic coursework. While many institutions are feeling the effect of economic changes while trying to attract students today, not every institution can, or will, make the moves necessary to find, keep, and train students for this field.

Student retention is an important issue at any educational institution. As need and costs increase, funding and employment opportunities decrease. This has resulted in significant challenges for hospitality programs, particularly in the provision of adequate source material, real-world internship opportunities, and introduction to employment possibilities outside of the United States (Rudd, Budziszewski, & Litzinger, 2014; ). Most universities focus on three major factors: academic support, student resources, and financial support from alumni and other outside sources (Rudd et al., 2014). Universities can no longer afford attrition losses, which has forced most of them to add additional programs geared toward attracting students—and keeping them (Rudd et al., 2014).

Thus, increasing importance has been given to integrating practical application and theoretical knowledge so hospitality management instruction is more effective for students. This is commonly conducted through experiential learning opportunities. Since each student had different experiences within these learning opportunities, they provided in-depth feedback about the effectiveness of experiential learning. The success rate of higher education students,
regardless of their discipline of choice, may be based on early experiences and administrative support. Factors that may increase retention rates include on-campus housing and ease of parking, as well as socially-driven activities designed to bring students together to promote camaraderie and school spirit.

Many hospitality management programs incorporate initiatives that focus on attracting students who will stay the course and graduate. (Rudd et al., 2014). Marketing for hospitality management programs is commonly generated through primary courses that all students can take, as well as by a positive reputation built on relationships with supporting companies and the involvement of alumni. (Rudd et al., 2014). International students are crucial to the success of hospitality management programs, in that they are generally more adaptable when it comes to location and language (Kim, McCleary, & Kaufman, 2010). Thus, international students are commonly more willing to consider on-line instruction as a viable option, which can decrease tuition costs while opening students to additional venues for education and employment.

Many institutions that focus on hospitality management programs face disappointment from a growing percentage of their students forcing them to try to improve customer satisfaction (Nightingale, 1985). For example, perceptions of the quality of service typically differ significantly between management, customers, colleagues, and staff, especially in relation to real-time concerns and crisis management (Nightingale, 1985). Management is typically not aware of this gap in perception. Management is commonly unaware of just how important they are for expediting service, as well as for providing guidance and knowledge.

One goal of the hospitality industry is to continually offer outstanding customer service and quality products across a spectrum of goods and services. These tasks are considered secondary, however, to the major goal of the hospitality industry, which is to provide people-
related amenities regarding lodging, food, drink, or other client-specific services (Nightingale, 1985). This primary goal is instrumental to setting the necessary standards needed to operate successfully within hospitality-focused businesses. Trends indicate that students have a far better chance to succeed when they can apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting (Lee, Olds, & Lee, 2012). Therefore, this study inquired to understand the relationship between experiential learning and the undergraduate student’s perspective of the experiential learning experiences throughout the curriculum.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study is the researcher’s interest in gaining a better understanding of how student preparedness translates to success in the hospitality industry, so institution faculties might examine current and future opportunities for experiential learning within their curriculum. This allows both educators and hospitality industry executives to be able to better define, quantify, and use the benefits of experiential learning. Although knowledge obtained through an academic setting and gleaned from source materials is important to hospitality managers, it should not be the only marker to determine a student’s readiness to enter the hospitality industry. The major focus of this study was on the analysis and assessment of qualitative data, in the form of detailed feedback from current students in a hospitality management program who have participated in experiential learning opportunities within their curriculum. This will help us better understand the strengths and weaknesses of such learning as perceived by the students.

Personnel in the hospitality industry, particularly recent graduates and long-term staffing managers, feel that students are not developing the proper skill-sets needed to succeed in hospitality management (Kim et al., 2010). This results in an unprepared workforce, which then can lead to dissatisfaction and problems with retention. Thus, this study focuses on the
perceptions of undergraduate hospitality management students, as they relate to the educational and practical value of experiential learning within their usual coursework, to determine whether students are being adequately prepared for entry-level management positions within the hospitality industry upon graduation.

Because reflection is often used to determine the value of education, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory is still pivotal. Kolb (1984) insisted that true learning is accomplished not only through a person’s experience, but through reflection upon that experience as well. It is important to contribute to the existing literature regarding student opinions about the educational opportunities provided to them through experiential learning. The significance of the study will be apparent through reflection on how these learning opportunities are beneficial in entry-level positions.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

According to Miller (1988), hospitality management programs differ across institutions based on their accrediting body and national standards. The hospitality industry and post-secondary institutions must align and integrate to achieve required educational outcomes (Reynolds, 1999). Alhelalat (2015) determined what skills were needed to become effective hospitality managers. This is of tantamount importance when we consider that the hospitality industry is responsible for 7.9 million jobs and that the industry is “likely to drive domestic employment growth over the next 10 years” (Johnson, 2015, p. 60). Initial industry research shows that graduates have “better communication, teamwork, situation analysis, operational skills, information search, critical thinking, initiative, organizing, and self-development skills than the non-hospitality graduate employees” (Alhelalat, 2015, p. 46). That study further suggested that “hospitality management program graduates have increased abilities relating to
operations, technology applications, knowledge of different cultures, information search, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork” (Alhelalat, 2015, p. 50).

Initial research suggests that there is little feedback received from students that would help ascertain what deficiencies exist within hospitality management programs, especially regarding experiential learning opportunities and whether such programs result in better preparedness for entry-level positions (Lee et al., 2012). Some studies question the effectiveness of hospitality training programs, arguing that these programs may not provide the leadership abilities required for the industry (Amos, Ristow, Ristow, & Pearse, 2008; Buys & Louw, 2012; Kotter, 1990; Paauwe & Williams, 2001; Zaleznik, 1977). It has been argued that there are obvious differences in the education, training, and overall improvement of management personnel (Buys & Louw, 2012). It has been debated whether there are differences in the education demonstrating these differences, so it is important to gather student feedback so we can improve existing hospitality management programs. Few such detailed studies exist. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question:

- Within an undergraduate hospitality management program, how do students perceive and make sense of their involvement in experiential learning?

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Learning Styles** is “long-term improvements in four aspects of teaching and learning: curriculum design, instructional methods, assessment, and student guidance. The application of learning style theory encompasses three pervasive problems: confusion in definitions, weakness in measurement reliability and validity, and identification of relevant learner characteristics” (Curry, 1990, p. 52).
**Experiential Learning** is the “process of learning through experience and is more specifically defined as “learning through reflection on doing” (Curry, 1990, p. 52).

**Reflection** “is the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual and/or educational perspective” (Curry, 1990, p. 52).

**Hospitality Programs** are where “students develop skills and competencies through courses in various subject areas. Thus, the hospitality curriculum needs to prioritize subject areas according to perceived importance by industry practitioners, and this prioritization needs to be an up-to-date reflection of the ever-changing needs of the industry” (Gursoy, Rahman, & Swanger, 2012, p. 32)

The following section of this chapter will describe and discuss experiential learning, which will serve as the framework for this research.

**Theoretical Framework**

Kolb defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p. 38). Because experiential learning provides a context in which recent graduates new to the hospitality industry can receive a solid knowledge base as well as the necessary skills with which to further their career, it is more relevant now than ever. It can also be used to leverage learning styles, promote critical thinking, and encourage active listening, all skills which are necessary for success in almost every endeavor, especially the hospitality management industry.

As Kolb’s theories on experiential learning are still the standard for theoretical concepts regarding academic relevance (Stavenga, Wierstra, & Hermanussen, 2006), this study used
Kolb’s experiential learning cycle to determine how hospitality graduates’ experiential learning opportunities have prepared them for eventual success within their positions. Kolb’s four-stage cycle of learning (experience, observation, conceptualization, and experimentation) was used to connect this study to relevant industry literature via qualified feedback from current students who have taken advantage of experiential learning opportunities.

Kolb published his learning styles model, which in turn helped him develop his learning style inventory, in 1984. Kolb's experiential learning theory is designed on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. A big component of Kolb’s learning theory is developed with the specific learner’s central intellectual methods. Kolb stated that education incorporates the realization of imperceptible insights that can be purposeful in an assortment of circumstances. In Kolb’s learning theory, the motivation for the expansion of new perceptions is provided by new understandings. “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38).

The Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner “touches all the bases,” as in Figure 1 below:
Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle (McLeod, 2013).

- Concrete Experience - A new experience of the situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience.

- Reflective Observation of the new experience. Of importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.

- Abstract Conceptualization Reflection gives rise to a new idea or a modification of an existing abstract concept.

- Active Experimentation. The learner applies practical application to the world around them to see what results).

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages: of (a) having a concrete experience followed by (b) observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to (c) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then (d) used to test hypotheses in future situations, resulting in new experiences, as seen in Figure 2.
Kolb (1984) viewed learning as a cohesive progression, with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical order. However, effective learning only occurs when a learner can execute all four stages of the model. Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is effective as a learning procedure on its own (McLeod, 2013).

Learning Styles

Kolb's learning theory (1984) established four distinct learning styles, which are based upon his four-stage learning cycle (see above). Kolb explained that different people naturally prefer different learning styles. Various factors, such as the social environment, educational experiences, and even their own fundamental thought processes, can influence a person's preferred style (McLeod, 2013).

A typical presentation of Kolb's two continuums is that the east-west axis is called the Processing Continuum (how we approach a task), and the north-south axis is called the Perception Continuum (our emotional response, or how we think/feel about it).
Knowing what drives and supports a person's learning style can allow educators to teach per the preferred method; however, everyone responds to and needs the stimuli that are associated with each of the learning styles.

Kolb’s four learning styles are diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (McLeod, 2013).

**Diverging (feeling and watching).** These people are able to look at things from different perspectives. They are sensitive. They prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations from several different viewpoints (McLeod, 2013).

Kolb called this style “diverging” because these people perform better in situations that require the generation of ideas, such as a brainstorming session. People with a diverging learning style have broader cultural interests. They enjoy gathering information. They are interested in people, tend to be more imaginative and emotional, with stronger artistic tendencies. People with the diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind, and to receive personal feedback. A person with this style of learning would make an excellent hospitality management candidate (McLeod, 2013).

**Assimilating (watching and thinking).** The assimilating learning predilection is for a more exact, rational approach. Thoughts and notions are more significant than individuals. These people require good clear explanation rather than a practical opportunity. They excel at comprehending comprehensive data and forming it in a pure rational arrangement. People with an assimilating learning style are less attentive to people and more concerned in philosophies and
intellectual concepts. People with this learning style are more likely to be attracted to rationally sound philosophies, rather than methods grounded on any practical value.

This learning style is important for usefulness in scientific professions. In traditional learning environments, individuals with this learning style prefer readings, lectures, systematic representations, and having time to contemplate things completely through before a conclusion is determined.

**Converging (doing and thinking).** Individuals with a converging learning style can resolve situations and will use their previous knowledge to find resolutions to applied issues. These individuals favor practical application and are less concerned with individuals and social characteristics. People with a converging learning style are most adapt at discovering applied practices for concepts and philosophies. People with a converging learning style are more fascinated to methodological tasks and complications than societal or personal problems. People with a converging style like to test new concepts, to enhance situations, to examine, and to work with applied applications.

**Accommodating (doing and feeling).** The accommodating learning style is practical in application and is based on the individual’s instinct rather than their reason. This individual uses previous examinations, and prefer to take a hands-on, practical method. They are fascinated by new opportunities, and performing specific plans.

They frequently act on instinct rather than rational examination. People with an accommodating learning style are inclined to trust other individuals for data, rather than performing their own study. This learning style is predominant within a wide-range of the populace, and these types of students can also make excellent hospitality management trainees.
Educational Implications

Both of Kolb’s (1984) learning stages and cycle may perhaps be utilized by faculty to more critically assess educational requirements typically accessible to students, and to utilize more suitable learning opportunities to better enhance the educational experience. Because not all individuals obtain knowledge in the same manner, educators should safeguard that learning modules are crafted and applied in ways that enhance each individual learner as well as engage each of them in the manner that suits them best. Also, individuals can be aided more effectively by the identification of their lesser preferred learning styles and the strengthening of these styles through practical application of the experiential learning cycle.

The goal of hospitality managers is to ensure delivery of pleasant experiences (Reese, 2014). This goal is met by quality customer service, including conflict resolution with clientele and/or staff, training and monitoring staff, monitoring returns, and generally ensuring that their establishments are being run with the utmost efficiency and profit. (Reese, 2014). Furthermore, hospitality programs are designed to prepare students to meet the needs of the hospitality industry, even though not all post-secondary institutions or hospitality programs meet these needs.

Thus, experiential learning should focus on preparing hospitality management students for realistic day-to-day situations they might face within the industry. A diverse learning environment is important, considering “the continuing changes taking place in the United States’ ethnic profile and because of the effects of globalization on business practices” (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2007, p. 294). Despite this assertion, the data in published research comes primarily from hotel employees, especially upper management, and hospitality management program faculty members. Little evidence has been collected from current and former students.
regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning opportunities, nor have their perceptions regarding the influence of effectiveness of such experiential learning opportunities on turnover rates been seriously researched or documented.

Additionally, limited student information is available regarding program deficiencies, so this study’s significance will reflect the importance of experiential learning opportunities within hospitality management programs. The level of preparedness that these graduates experience may have a tremendous influence on turnover rates throughout the hospitality industry. The research study considered how effectively hospitality management programs provide graduating students with the basic knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for success in entry-level management positions. This was achieved through detailed analysis and assessment of undergraduate student perspectives regarding the experiential learning opportunities within their hospitality management curriculum.

The results of this research study could result in modifications to the curriculum in hospitality management programs, so they better meet the needs of graduates entering the hospitality industry, and thereby reduce attrition. This study emphasized this need for change, through the detailed experiences and reflections of those students taking part in experiential learning opportunities in their undergraduate curriculum.

**Critics of This Theory**

Kolb’s experiential learning theory is an all-inclusive learning viewpoint that entails insight, involvement, conduct and reasoning. According to Kolb (1984), learning is a process through which knowledge is created by transforming the experience. Kolb provides six propositions characterizing the transformation of experience: (a) learning is a process, (b)
learning is continuous, (c) learning encompasses resolving conflicts between opposing modes of
adaptation to the world, (d) learning is holistic, (e) learning includes transactions between the
individual and the environment, and (f) learning is the process of knowledge creation. Although
many management practitioners and scholars view experience as vital to management learning,
the idea of experience in learning has not been without criticism.

Much of the criticism of Kolb’s theory has been on the theory’s empirical validation and
instrumentation, and its theoretical limitations. The learning style inventory (LSI) is a self-
reported instrument that illustrates the empirical limitations of Kolb’s theory. Kolb’s theory has
also faced theoretical criticisms, which are largely based on the fact that it removes the learning
process from its context and focuses on only a few factors affecting learning. According to
Holman, Pavlica, and Thorpe (1997), experiential learning theory places emphasis on individual
learning while neglecting social, psychodynamic, and institutional learning aspects.

One of the biggest critics of experiential learning theory is Vince (1998), who criticized
the theory from a psychodynamic perspective. Vince believed that Kolb’s theory neglects the
context of power relations, including gender, social status, and cultural dominance (Vince,
1998). Vince went further in asserting that Kolb’s theory ignores unconscious learning, does not
offer a higher meta-learning process, and fails to appreciate the “here and now” experience.
Another critic of experiential learning theory is Reynolds (1999), who argued that Kolb’s theory
advocates for a highly-individualized perspective, while neglecting political and social
influences.

Other critics, such as Holman et al. (1997), criticized experiential learning theory from a
social perspective. Holman et al. (1997) drew on Vygotsky’s theory of social learning to argue
that learning is a process that cannot be separated from the historical and social status of the

Overall, the criticisms of the theory center on the fact that it focuses mainly on the experience of the individual. Compared to other commonly referenced theories, Kolb’s theory is still unexplored as it pertains to certain arenas. Nevertheless, the lack of institutional, social, and psychodynamic aspects of learning is its major drawback. Consequently, in many cases there are better theories that could be used in its place. For example, social learning theory, argues that learning is a cognitive process that occurs in a social context. However, social learning theory is a behavioral theory and Kolb’s theory is humanistic. While Kolb’s experiential learning theory has several strengths and weaknesses, it may be more appropriate in certain situations than other theories.

**Rationale**

Reflection is a specific technique utilized in multiple fields of study such as hospitality management, but it is thoroughly clarified by Kolb (1984) in his concept of experiential learning theory. Kolb explains that true knowledge is obtained through a precise combination of practical experience and instantaneously reflecting upon that experience which just took place. Kolb believed it vital to complete the four-part experience-reflection sequence for learning to be properly utilized in future situations. Contemplation, either completed through verbal or written, is a crucial component of experiential learning theory. In an academic environment, oral
examinations are frequently utilized where the instructor guides the students through a designated set of queries to produce specific information about a particular experience.

While oral examinations have traditionally been used in all levels of academia, written examinations and periodicals have also been utilized throughout and are considered of value as a way of granting the same opportunity for reflection of an individual about a specific experience. In fact, when written debriefings necessitate reflection upon an individual, they may allow for a more profound processing than oral debriefings due to the time allotted to write specific thoughts on an actioned performed. When these periodicals are written out, faculty can assess more readily whether students have learned the targeted educational concepts and underlying principles as well as a plan to use them in new experiential learning opportunities. Further, analysing the written responses of current undergraduate students to experiential learning opportunities might lead to a more enhanced comprehension of the mental processes occurring during reflection, an area in which there is little research.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a general overview of the importance of successful experiential learning opportunities within a hospitality management program as viewed through Kolb’s theory of learning. Undergraduate students’ perspectives provide much-needed feedback on their experiences with experiential learning. This, in turn, gives credence to the increasing importance integrating practical application with theoretical knowledge, so hospitality management students can be effectively prepared for entry-level management positions within the industry. However, student success is commonly defined by their early experiences and the support they receive. Therefore, many hospitality programs incorporate initiatives that focus on “recruiting for retention” (Rudd et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2012).
Instruction within the hospitality management program curriculum generally comes by way of theory and practical application, so this study analyzed and assessed how current students of a hospitality management program perceived their experiential learning opportunities. Reflections during interviews revealed how such environments affected their knowledge of hospitality management and what more can be done to further these curricula, by focusing on the analysis and assessment of qualitative data in the form of feedback and reflection from current students in hospitality management programs where experiential learning opportunities are already included.

Research suggests that increased integration between education and industry is required for better education outcomes and better industry inputs (Alhelalat, 2015). Much like Alhelalat’s study, this project focused on examining the skills needed for hospitality management graduates within the industry and how experiential learning affects these skills. Because curricula differ between hospitality programs, this study determined how experiential learning can better be utilized to improve graduates’ chances for future success in this field, as well as how experiential learning opportunities have benefitted them individually.

This study is significant because experiential learning is a vital element of undergraduate hospitality management programs. According to research, it is commonly seen that implemented programs often do not meet the standards needed within the hospitality industry. Even when a curriculum is prepared with a focus on industry standards, there are often key components missing that prevent this focus from being maintained. Thus, students may not be receiving congruous lessons, either in the traditional classroom or experiential learning laboratories, and the programs may not be effective in meeting the needs of their students or of the hospitality
industry. This was explored further through existing literature and qualitative comparison in the chapters that follow.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Hospitality management graduates face many challenges finding employment in an increasingly competitive and global job market. Industry concerns abound regarding how post-secondary educational institutions are responding to the hospitality industry’s needs and expectations (Christou, 2000). Today’s hospitality management programs are not always designed to teach theoretical knowledge along with practical application – a combination that would better prepare undergraduate students for the changes demands and challenges of the industry. Scholarship has identified that a stronger blend of theoretical knowledge and experiential approaches to learning could close the gap between knowledge gained in an academic setting and the eventual application of that knowledge in practice. Therefore, it is important to obtain in-depth knowledge of the experiential learning trajectories hospitality students receive as part of their curriculum to assure that the education these students are provided bridges theory and practice to meet the complex needs of the tourism and hospitality field (Goodenough & Page, 1993).

Hospitality management scholarship clearly argues that the educational experience should allow the graduate to manage today’s industry by addressing increased competition, changing consumer attitudes, and employer demands (Alhelalat, 2015). For students in the sector to develop the strong job competency required by industry, Sisson and Adams (2013) asserted that a combination of hands-on “activities and a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills [must be] correlated with performance…measured against standards…and improved through educational initiatives” (p. 132). Responding in part to directives like theirs, this doctoral thesis looked at the intersection of the theoretical and practical teaching of students in the hospitality and culinary industries.
The dilemma for the proper execution of the training and education of hospitality management students is which combination of curricular education and experience will best shape these students. They need to simultaneously develop a fundamental combination of hard skills consisting of technical and operational efficiency; soft skills consisting of good communication, capacity for teamwork, and a friendly and approachable personality; and even more intangible visionary skills related to future planning and technology. These will enable students to succeed in an industry whose parameters and demands are constantly and radically changing. Post-secondary institutions of hospitality management state that their mission is to educate graduates to be competent and competitive enough to face these new challenges in the service economy sector. New graduates must have an advantage over their colleagues who seek the same job opportunities in a challenging economy (Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Pendergast, 2010).

Research has shown that graduates who encounter experiential learning opportunities while pursuing their undergraduate degrees in hospitality management will be in a better position to practice the theoretical skills and knowledge acquired from post-secondary learning institutions and therefore will be more successful not only in obtaining employment but also in retaining it and moving into leadership positions. They will have staying power in the establishments where they obtain employment because their theoretical knowledge and practical competencies intersect in a work environment that corresponds to the comprehensive training they have received. This is a key factor for sustainability in employment and leadership management in the hospitality and restaurant environment (Chung, 2000).

The way graduates obtain general knowledge and applied skill sets during their course of study is essential for establishing a foundation for success in the hospitality industry. This
literature review will discuss scholarly studies related to variables in the hospitality management curricula, particularly as they relate to experiential learning and its application of the required hard and soft skills essential to effective management success. This chapter will begin with a broad review of literature related to experiential learning in hospitality management education and will analyze the gap identified in scholarship about preparing students through an effective combination of theoretical knowledge and practical application. As this literature, has identified, the competencies of experiential learning from which new skill sets are derived and theory is applied are key elements in determining success in the field.

The literature on this sector has found that the experiential component of the curriculum is relatively poor at fulfilling the needs of students who must effectively combine theory and practice upon graduation. Early foundational research in the industry by Cooper and Shepherd (1997) asserted that employers seek practical and general transferable skills, while educators in the post-secondary sector emphasize the conceptualization of theories and materials specific to the discipline. Moscardo and Norris (2003) further claimed that the challenge of bridging the theoretical and experiential aspects of training and curriculum is particularly critical for tourism and hospitality; they identified that this is a comparatively new area of study within post-secondary institutions that have historically drawn faculty members directly from an industry that usually focuses almost exclusively on practical application. Scholarship has also identified a need to contract faculty who are prepared adjust how curricular concepts and assessments are delivered so they emphasize effective integrated experiential learning techniques. Finally, adjusting experiential learning alone will not address a third problem discussed in the literature: the general lack of or uneven availability of resources such as career advisement for hospitality management students. In summary, post-secondary education institutions are not providing the
proper blend of theory and practice, or comprehensive career support services, to help students move from the academic context into employment appropriate for their level of skills.

**Hospitality Management Education**

Scholarship in hospitality management has largely ignored the need to document the lived experiences of students regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning opportunities afforded them in hospitality-focused, post-secondary education programs. There is a dearth of either quantitative or qualitative studies that explore the extent to which the experiential learning component of the curriculum properly prepares students for positions in the hospitality industry and whether training is flexible enough to respond to the changing demands of this field (Alhelalat, 2015). Current industry trends recognize that, although knowledge obtained from academic textbooks and course lectures is important to hospitality managers because they provide insights into different ways to run an organization, other less tangible elements of the learning process are also essential for assuring graduates enough readiness and hands-on competence to enter and succeed in the diverse and changing world of hospitality management (Okeiyi, Finley, & Postel, 1994).

One area particularly ignored in scholarly studies examining this aspect of the field is the relationship between experiential learning opportunities in a hospitality management program and students’ perceptions and feedback regarding them, which in turn has created a disconnect between theory and application. Foucar-Szocki and Bolsing (1999) defined experiential learning as an “educational plan that integrates classroom study with practical work experience” (p. 37). Continual interaction between theoretical and practical application, combined with dialogue between academia and industry practitioners regarding curriculum components, is particularly
important to the success of hospitality management educational programs. Student input and perceptions, which are under-documented, could further enrich course design.

More than 100 accredited hospitality management programs exist in the United States, and each undoubtedly offers a somewhat different curriculum with diverse anticipated outcomes (O’Mahony, McWilliams, & Whitelaw, 2001). Therefore, graduates will have differing sets of skills, some of which may not transfer to entry-level management positions. This diverse set of skills students bring when beginning entry-level management positions – and the efficiency of the training these graduates have received, particularly through experiential learning and its application -- is the focus of this study. Although knowledge obtained from academic sources is important to hospitality managers because it provides insights in how to run an organization, it is by far not the only aspect of a student’s readiness considered by employers considering graduates for management positions (Johnson, 2015). The essential bridge between academic study and lived experiences is the experiential learning component of the curriculum.

As hospitality management programs vary, so too does the quality and nature of the experiential learning component that they provide. Feedback from both the hospitality industry and post-secondary institutions suggests a need for proper integration between the hospitality industry and educational programs to refine the scope and content of both the theoretical aspects and the experiential learning components offered to students. According to Sisson and Adams (2013), “To meet the needs of the rapidly changing hospitality industry, educators must continually investigate and identify the essential competencies demanded by the industry and revise the curriculum to meet these needs” (p. 131) to achieve much-needed integrated educational outcomes.
Figure 4: Caption (SOURCE).

The hospitality industry is continually evolving, as is the hospitality curriculum. Both are driven by industry standards and demands for a constant and adaptive supply of competent managers. Recognizing leadership talent and the skills needed to assume management positions can give businesses in the hospitality industry a distinct competitive edge. Still, many hospitality management programs are specialized rather than general, and are lacking in several key areas, such as providing a general business perspective (Pavesic, 1993). According to Riegel (1995), hospitality management education curricula should consist of three key elements: (a) a substantive theoretical knowledge component, which is essential for the preparation of students to enter the hospitality industry; (b) a practical skill set component, which provides the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practice; and (c) a values component, which fosters career ethics necessary for ultimate success personally and professionally.
Success in the hospitality industry is derived from two essential components, recruiting the best graduates in the field and then retaining them (Burns, 2010). Academic training that combines theoretical aptitude and practical application provides students with leverage upon graduation as they seek employment opportunities. Employers in the hospitality industry prefer to recruit graduates who are strong academically, with an expectation they have received a certain level of experiential training that will allow them to quickly adopt the most effective techniques. The industry seeks individuals, particularly at the managerial level, who will be able to convert theoretical knowledge taught in academia into practical applications that will help strengthen the establishments they join (Alhelalat, 2015).

As Alhelalat (2015) asserted, a strong and integrated educational model in the training academies is essential to the success of the industry. The purpose of hospitality management education is to develop industry knowledge and comprehension of material which is deemed necessary for success upon graduation. According to Alhelalat (2015), “the new paradigm in hospitality education calls for considering preparing future industry leaders as the main aim of education; there is a role, therefore, for hospitality education in shaping the future of the hospitality industry” (p. 47).

*Figure 5: Caption (SOURCE).*
In summary, having recruited qualified graduates competent in theoretical and practical application, organizations in the hospitality industry can then give leaders additional relevant technical training, which affords these students the necessary competencies that will help them succeed in their areas of specialization and in the business world in general (Johnson, 2015). In addition to these demands for specialization, the hospitality industry is simultaneously very dynamic as it is customer driven, with expectations and demands that are constantly evolving. Key stakeholders in the industry are continually recruiting the most qualified graduates who will help the industry meet its needs in a constantly changing, interactive, and globalizing market (Gursoy et al., 2012).

Gursoy et al. (2012) outlined this complex combination of theory, practice, specialization, and adaptability that characterizes hospitality education and the industry as a whole. The primary objective of academia, according to Gursoy et al. (2012), “is to have their graduates leave with more knowledge, skills, and abilities than when they entered” (p. 41). The diverse landscape of hospitality management education, its unique educational derivation, and its increased connection to the hospitality industry make hospitality management curricula an exceptional field of study. For a hospitality management program to effectively prepare its graduates for post graduate employment, the continually fluctuating requirements of this industry must be reflected in the curriculum. The multidisciplinary nature of hospitality education, its diverse institutional origin, and its increased connection to the industry make hospitality programs a unique field of study. For a hospitality program to successfully prepare its graduates for industry employment, the ever-changing needs of this enormous industry must be reflected in the curriculum.
The goal of post-secondary hospitality management programs is to have their current students graduate with a stronger theoretical knowledge base, better practical application skillsets, and educational competencies than when they entered the hospitality management program. Hospitality programs are no exception. The multidisciplinary nature of hospitality education, its diverse institutional origin, and its increased connection to the industry make hospitality programs a unique field of study. For a hospitality program to successfully prepare its graduates for industry employment, the ever-changing needs of this enormous industry must be reflected in the curriculum.

Gursoy et al. (2012) expanded on this premise by emphasizing the importance of ongoing communication between industry representatives and educational institutions, so this complex and dual demand for hospitality employees can be met by programs that adequately prepare that workforce. According to Gursoy et al. (2012), “programs need to provide an education that not only improves employability of hospitality graduates but ensures their success in the industry” (p. 32). Employability and success of future hospitality management graduates will not increase until they can demonstrate the practical skill sets and aptitudes required in the workplace. In hospitality programs, students develop skills and competencies through courses in various subject areas. Thus, curriculum needs to prioritize subject areas and this prioritization needs to be an up-to-date reflection of the ever-changing needs of the industry (Gursoy et al., 2012, p. 32). Furthermore, a continuously growing demand for hospitality employees can be translated into an increasing demand for post-secondary hospitality management programs to adequately prepare the workforce for further expansion.

In addition, programs need to provide an education that not only improves the employability of hospitality graduates but also ensures their success in the industry and long term
retention at establishments they join. However, the employability and career success of future graduates will not increase until and unless these professionals convincingly demonstrate the skills and competencies required in the workplace. In hospitality programs, students develop skills and competencies through courses in various subject areas. Thus, the hospitality curriculum needs to prioritize subject areas based on what industry practitioners consider important, and this prioritization needs to constantly incorporate an up-to-date reflection of the ever-changing needs of the industry.

**Effectiveness of Hospitality Management Education**

Goodman & Sprague (2011) noted that hospitality management education, as we know it, faces the challenge of adapting to the complexities and concerns described above, as it is in danger of vanishing as a separate program. In their study of how hospitality educators must revamp their curricula to more closely meet the updated needs of the hospitality industry, they stressed that, if this change does not occur, these programs risk losing potential students to a general business program. This is a trend that characterizes similar specialized programs such as those in the insurance, banking, and transportation fields, which mostly have been absorbed into general business programs in the United States (Goodman and Sprague, 2011). Their analysis echoed concerns expressed earlier by Ramdeen-Joseph (2003), who emphasized that it is vital for hospitality management education to be dynamic and adaptable in its educational application, particularly in the ways through which it develops curriculum in post-secondary institutions. Ramdeen-Joseph (2003) established that it is crucial for hospitality management education to be particularly creative and innovative if it is to avoid the fate that related programs have faced in the recent past.
Returning to the key factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of that effective, creative edge in hospitality management education, Gursoy et al. (2012) reviewed studies by Dopson & Tas (2004), Kay & Russette (2000) and Okeiyi et al. (1994). They concluded that “developing a hospitality curriculum broadly involves three major components: substantive knowledge, skills, and values. Operational issues, such as a working knowledge of hospitality services, are important” (p. 32). However, communicative issues, such as administrative competencies, are often considered more imperative. Effective hospitality management courses need to educate students the vital operational skillset essential for competent managers. To achieve this, the hospitality management curriculum must integrate the perspectives of industry professionals.

Scholarship over time has reiterated the importance in education of industry partnerships, which are frequently identified as an effective means to narrow the gap between what academia produces and what industry says it wants. Reviewing literature from management, Roberts (2009) found that this “disconnect” can result in serious consequences for four key groups of stakeholders: (a) current students who may not acquire the salient knowledge and skills that they need to compete in a highly competitive global environment, (b) graduates who may become disillusioned about their career choice and contribute to the high cost attributed to turnover within the industry, (c) the industry, which may have to spend time and money retraining graduates, and (d) tourism and hospitality management degree-level qualifications, whose status may be undervalued. Roberts (2009) aimed to explore the issue of quality gaps in relation to the design, delivery, and value of a university-level tourism and hospitality management qualification, and to suggest that engagement between industry and academia must be a transformational experience for all key stakeholders if both hope to close these gaps.
As Roberts (2009) further asserted, gaps may exist about the design, delivery and perceived value of tourism and hospitality management education, just as they do with the provision of any other service. This has a stark effect on quality—of the professionals entering the industry and ultimately of the industry. Roberts (2009) concluded that effective industry/academic partnerships can reduce design, delivery, and value gaps “to date, many hospitality and tourism management programs have struggled to achieve status parity, both internally and externally; far too often they have been undervalued both within and outside of academia” (p. 136).

Sigala and Baum (2003) ascertained that the status of hospitality management programs will remain unchanged unless both the hospitality industry and post-secondary institutions work together to develop competent administrators. Barrows and Johan (2008) recommended that hospitality management programs need to concentrate on conveying quality instruction, participate in practical research, and develop strong partnerships with the hospitality industry to further professionalize the field.

As with many other service industries, the quality of tourism and hospitality management education is reliant on three factors: the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the delivery, and the perceived value of the qualification by key stakeholders. Continuous improvement is required to reduce quality gaps, all available resources must be efficiently and effectively used, and the institution must be able to convincingly differentiate its product from that of competitors. Industry partnerships have been identified as a vehicle to positively influence the perceptions and expectations of key stakeholders in the delivery of tourism and hospitality management education.
Using several best practice examples, a range of international industry partnership initiatives designed to facilitate engagement have been identified. Previous research suggests that strong links between industry and academia are essential to best meet the needs of all stakeholders involved in the educational process. The issue of quality in relation to these partnerships has also been addressed. High quality partnerships result in participants not merely experiencing and learning from the interaction but also being transformed by it to commit themselves to the increasingly higher standards. Active industry engagement during the pre-entry phase, during study, and after graduation has been offered as a means to close quality gaps, but further research is needed to determine if, and to what extent, key stakeholders’ perceptions and expectations are affected as a result of this interaction. Barrows and Johan (2008) recommended that tourism and hotel management programs need to focus on the delivery of quality education, engage in applied research, and develop strong ties with industry to further professionalize the industry (p. 161).

Pressure for secondary education institutions to increase financial efficiencies has put constraints on hospitality management programs, many of which are perceived to mirror business programs in general, despite the unique demands of their curriculum. If the specialized characteristics essential to hospitality management are not clearly defined, students pursuing this career may opt instead for a general business management option, driving down enrollments in hospitality management programs. These lower enrollments often propel institutional administrators to merge specialized programs like hospitality management into business or other programs; those that do survive must look for ways to offer contemporary education supporting the specific areas of the hospitality industry they serve (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009). The continuing challenge to educators and program administrators is to determine clear objectives for
specialized curriculum that meet the constantly changing needs of the hospitality management industry.

Thus, it is essential that these programs close the gap between what is taught to students and the industry’s expectations of the graduates they hire (Okeiyi et al., 1994). This specialized curriculum review and revision must be a faculty-driven process that not only responds to industry needs, it must also remain abreast of, and drive and implement, innovation. Faculty must continue to review and revise curricula, and watch for signs of changes in the industry. Involvement of students and alumni in this analysis is key in a constantly changing hospitality management culture and economy. Curriculum review – particularly of the experiential component – must be an ongoing process, as Pavesic (1993) observed; compartmentalized learning doesn’t reflect the real world, thus the experiential classroom must work to create an interdisciplinary learning experience that mimics real-world learning (Wurdinger, 2005, p. 24).

**Deficiencies in Hospitality Management Curricula: Technological Challenges**

With changing global market demands, the hospitality and tourism industry is seeking to train students in skill sets that enable expertise and productivity among its various elements. Within this dynamic, technology and social media have become essential areas where leaders must develop creative and adaptive skills to succeed (Khan, 2012). As Lee, Sun, Law, and Lee (2016) observed, summarizing previous studies “Sweeping changes in society and the development of technology have had a significant impact on education. These changes and the adoption of new technology in academic programs affect all areas of education” (p. 116). Technology is rapidly evolving and new technologies are being implemented in learning environments. Lee et al., reiterated that “universal learning forms a new educational paradigm by
adopter new media and technology resources based on the principles of mobility, collaboration, and active participation” (p. 116).

Despite research emphasizing the need for technological training in hospitality management, per Raybould and Wilkins (2005) the sector previously lacked a focus on such training for students headed into management careers. Awareness has grown significantly, however, particularly with the advent of social media, regarding the need to remain current and innovative in this area. Raybould and Wilkins (2005) concluded, the research into the changing role of management in the hospitality industry, graduate competency needs and the hospitality curriculum has identified the need for graduates to have a range of generic interpersonal and human relations skills whilst technical skills were comparatively unimportant. (p. 205).

“Research has also emphasized the continuously evolving environment of the hospitality industry and the need for ongoing research to ensure hospitality management curriculum reflects current industry needs” (p. 205). The industry’s demands for technologically savvy managers is putting additional pressure on the educators who are designing and implementing hospitality management programs in post-secondary institutions.

Indeed, experiential learning and application are important for the technology aspect of hospitality management training because managers must learn these new operating systems in real time. Students must acquire up-to-date technological knowledge and hands on training through powerfully simulated experiential learning so they can rise to this challenge. Simultaneously, each new class of students brings with it its own combination of technological expertise (or lack of it) and creative, innovative ideas in this area. In this sense, understanding the experiences of students in relation to the experiential learning component of hospitality
management training programs can provide keen insights about how to enhance both curriculum design and innovation in technology.

As Li, Lee, & Law (2012) asserted, managers traditionally learn through theoretical knowledge and practical application. With the hospitality management education sector in general playing catch-up in becoming current with both practical industry and technological trends, the pre-designed and outdated educational programs and training courses that are commonly the backbone of the curricula may indeed be limiting learning opportunities. A need exists for research that will assist in making appropriate changes in these programs so that they reflect constantly changing work practices and dynamic industry trends.

Li, Lee and Law (2012), noted that ongoing education and performance in the field is also contingent on maintaining technological skills and access to current trends. “Hospitality managers use a variety of technology applications to acquire management knowledge. Furthermore, social knowledge and personal knowledge are the key components of the hospitality managers’ learning. Much of technology-mediated learning is self-directed and integrated with their work” (p. 457). Therefore, it is crucial for managers in the hospitality industry to have access to different technologies so they can pinpoint and recognize critical social and personal knowledge, responding to increasingly well-informed customers and the continuously evolving business environment.

In turn, it is critical for hospitality managers to have access to hands-on, experiential learning in technological training in the academy so, once in the workplace, they will have skills honed to locate and identify critical social and personal knowledge. They will use this to respond to increasingly worldly and demanding customers, as well as to the continuously changing trends in both technology and the hospitality industry.
Conclusion

This section has outlined the importance of refocusing hospitality curricula to better integrate theoretical knowledge with experiential learning to both improve educational and employment results for students of post-secondary hospitality management programs, and to maximize retention of alumni in business establishments once they enter the hospitality industry. This crucial re-focusing depends on co-operation between post-secondary institutions and the hospitality industry to design educational curricula and undergraduate experiential opportunities that challenge students and capitalize on scholarship.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning in educational institutions is a catch-all category that incorporates numerous hands-on or simulated real-world learning programs within an organized academic setting. Moore (2010) described some of the origins and definitions of – and contradictions inherent to --experiential learning. “The various approaches to experiential learning share some philosophical and theoretical foundations, as well. Nearly everyone cites John Dewey drawing out the simple principle that ‘experience is the best teacher’” (p. 3). More precisely, they use Dewey’s theory of learning as a dynamic progression of “grappling with conditions and problems in the world; constructing and testing solutions; and interacting with others to make sense and make progress” (p. 3). Previous research acknowledged with Dewey that not all experience is educative, that some experience can halt or even discourage further scholarship. Ongoing debate exists as to whether or not, and to what extent, these types of learning experiences belong in the university, where it is common to emphasize learning concepts and theories through abstract study and reflection.
Post-secondary institutions in disciplines like hospitality management must move beyond the latter view and embrace the approach outlined by Dewey because the purpose of their programs is to help students know what to do concretely in an employment situation, to foster applied learning and regularity in practice, and to adapt to innovation and change. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), “According to the theories of situated cognition and situated learning, learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice and people think and learn differently in different social contexts” (p. 31). Experiential learning acknowledges unpredictable situations in an authentic social context and supports students in formulating and solving problems in different ways and improvising upon best practices to create new learning opportunities.

The debate over the place of experiential education in higher education is weighed against the desire to respond to what we know about how learning works and the pressure to have the university weave theory and practice together to support student success in the 21st century. It leads to a great opportunity for dialogue and fresh ideas related to research and to how universities and training programs can provide viable solutions to practical problems. This debate is particularly important, as McIver, Fitzsimmons and Flanagan (2016) recently observed, because decisions about instructional methods are becoming increasingly more complex, with options that combine theory and practice ranging from problem sets to experiential service-learning projects. They described the challenges facing instructors working from within this integrated approach and noted that “given the proliferation of options for instructional methods, now may be an appropriate time to provide additional direction about when to adopt specific instructional methods” (p. 70). McIver et al. (2016), concluded that “alternative instructional methods are cost-effective or convenient, administrators, policy makers, and instructors can
evaluate which mix of methods is best suited to their learning objectives” (p. 70). Learning is expected to transpire when educators categorize the fundamental structure of learning objectives, integrate them with a suitable learning process, and intertwine the appropriate instructional methods.

McIver et al. (2016) expressed concern that “instructors not trained in instructional design may make these important decisions based on convenience, comfort, or trends” (p. 45). Their study suggested a theoretical framework drawing on both a knowledge management approach and a knowledge-in-practice framework to ground such decision-making. It emphasized that it is essential for educators working from an experiential learning approach to match “the knowledge structure with instructional methods that will be the most appropriate fit for students working toward [a particular] learning objective” (McIver et al., 2016, p. 45). Thus, in addition to keeping up with a rigorous teaching and curriculum design schedule, educators need to become more mindful about when and how to apply specific instructional methods as they grapple with the complex integration that experiential learning programs demand.

As Lee (2008) asserted, experiential learning is a broad term referring to multiple programs and systems for providing students in educational institutions with work-based applied learning opportunities. Lee commented, “Cooper, Bottomley, and Gordon (2004) claimed that industry-based experiential learning assignments afford students opportunity for deeper levels of learning and application of classroom learning” (p. 38). Cooper et al. (2004) assumed that deeper learning occurred as the student increased his or her level of involvement in the activity. Lee (2008), ascertained that “this idea fits well with Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle. Kolb explained that there are four stages of learning: (a) experience, which leads to (b) observation and (c) reflection, which leads to the development of new ideas and (d) experimentation, which leads to
further experience” (p. 38). Learning is most effective when it is grounded in experience. According to Cooper et al. (2004), “Dewey stated that it is not sufficient for the teacher to merely transmit information to the student or for the student to participate in active tasks in order for learning to occur” (p. 12). Dewey (1938) claimed that for real learning to occur at deeper levels, education needed to be grounded in experience, and experience needed to be accompanied by the student’s active reflection on his or her experience. In short, experiential learning in the secondary education setting, if it is well designed and dynamically in sync with current industry trends, can provide the precise combination of theoretical learning and practical skills – hard and soft alike – essential to the success of hospitality management professionals.

According to Hoover and Whitehead (1975), referenced as foundational thinkers in various studies, “experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement” (p. 25). Experiential learning is participative and active, rather than passive, demanding that the student is fully involved in the experiential learning process. The experiential learning process draws upon the concept of experiential education, which infuses direct experience into the learning process.

More recently, scholars have confirmed and expanded upon Hoover and Whitehead’s (1975) findings. For example, Chavan (2011) discussed the dynamic, mutually enhancing relationship between experiential learning, the theoretical acquisition of knowledge, and integration into and advancement in the social world of employment. “Real experiences help the individual learn advanced abstract concepts. The experiences might result in paths, which allow the individual to actively collect information to learn and become a member of the community of practice” (p. 127). The process of critical thinking and reflection may improve conceptualization.
and lead the individual to consider alternative possibilities. Each phase potentially leads to another and builds upon the former. In a consumer-driven sector like hospitality management, the experiential learning experience is both theoretical and practical knowledge gained in the classroom carried over into the marketplace.

In this context, educators, designing experiential learning curricula, particularly in a field like hospitality management, face the constant challenge of remaining up-to-date with current industry practices and integrating these dynamically with theoretical concepts. These designs are complex; in addition to teaching “hard” or tangible skills (e.g. inventories, budgets, schedules), curricula must also teach and cultivate “soft” aptitudes -- career-specific developmental tasks which help students identify values, demonstrate socially responsible behavior, develop intellectual skills and competencies, and select and prepare for employment. Because experiential learning is a process of changing behavior and acquiring knowledge through experience, experience should be viewed as the bottom line for these programs.

The importance of experiential learning may seem obvious; however, as Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) found, the clear majority of teaching and training in education and work continues to be conventional, narrow, and highly prescribed, rather than experiential. “It is hard to argue that experience will not lead to learning under the right conditions” (p. 269). However, subsequent learning can be in error unless care is taken to assure that those conditions occur. “Experience per se is, therefore, only the first step in the learning process, and for learning to be drawn from it, the experience must be followed by the vital step of reflection” (p. 269). The ability to reflect on an experience, and on initial reactions to the experience, is the “missing link” that defines the relationship between experience and learning.
Thus, Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) asserted, experiential learning is not just “field work” or “praxis” which connects learning to real life situations. It is more deeply defined by including phases of reflection designed to help the learner relate a current experience to past and future ones. Students need to reflexively take charge of and direct their learning to enhance their autonomy as students by making these connections. This shift in the research has brought about an increased interest in the students themselves, as learners in general and as future practitioners. The increased interest in both the reflexive process students undergo in training and in their transition to the professional world in a field like hospitality management is a primary focus of this dissertation.

**Experiential Learning and Employment Acquisition and Retention**

Regardless of the type and duration of experiential learning, it all potentially has value in the workplace. There are many benefits beyond the arena of the classroom for students who participate in such forward-thinking education programs, including personal, academic, work, and career related outcomes (Dressler & Keeling, 2004). Experiential learning has been found to have a particularly positive effect on the acquisition and retention of employment. One reason for this is that these programs provide ample opportunity for students to meet with experts and professionals in their field of study. Through these interactions, students are granted an opportunity to better understand what is expected of them in the corporate world, which enables them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations that will help shape their careers once they graduate. In this case, experiential learning can be considered mainly instrumental: it provides graduates with the opportunity to network even before they enter the job market.

In the context of experiential learning experience, when students interact with various experts and professionals in the field, they must present themselves as if they were in fact
engaged professionally and undertake their duties in a very diligent and proficient way. They are given the opportunity to model the high standards of behavior that will impress management teams in charge of recruiting and vetting new professionals. Experiential learning can provide an opportunity for students to begin to seek future employment. Through the exchange of contacts with experts involved in experiential learning opportunities, students learn the soft skill of creating a good rapport with people in the ranks of the various organizations, which moves them a step closer to obtaining permanent employment (Glenn, et al., 2012).

Ideally, graduates will take advantage of the opportunities offered through experiential learning by creating links that will lead to job opportunities once they are done with their schooling. Making students undergo experiential learning has been essential to developing the careers of hospitality management graduates within the last decade. As Gursoy et al. (2012) asserted “programs need to provide an education that not only improves employability of hospitality graduates but ensures their success in the industry. However, employability and career success of future graduates will not increase until and unless they convincingly demonstrate the skills and competencies required” (p. 32). In short, experiential learning itself becomes a career-building tool. For post-secondary institutions, one of the recognized benefits of experiential learning opportunities is the increased connection with potential and returning employers (Christou, 2000).

In addition to helping the students long-term, this connection also aids educational institutions in different ways. Primarily, it helps institutions by providing recruiting opportunities for students, as well as direct placement opportunities for students who do well in the program. Student success enhances the institution’s reputation, securing stronger enrollments, and ultimately, in some cases, the very survival of the programs themselves. Furthermore, this bridge
to real-life employment also helps these institutions keep current on procedures and technology that are relevant in the hospitality industries. Curricula can then be specifically designed to transform the classroom into a more relevant experience for the students (Gursoy et al., 2012).

The recruitment opportunities that these linkages with business establishments and other organizations provide have been essential to reducing the number of unemployed graduates in many disciplines, hospitality management included. Therefore, both educational systems and students need to acknowledge the importance of programs that actively link students to industry establishments and leaders (Gursoy et al., 2012).

While applying theoretical skills effectively and successfully networking and interacting with industry personnel, students’ professional self-esteem is enhanced. Consequently, students are likely to improve their performance in the academic setting, which will improve their chances of graduating with higher grades and in turn positively influence the job opportunities available to them (Kirkley, 2013). In addition to cooperative skills and a capacity for teamwork and collaboration, the student’s academic performance is essential during recruiting.

In summary, research has documented that experiential learning creates a positive and reflexive feedback loop between collaborative and networking skills and individual performance by motivating students through providing conditions that optimally support student learning. When students are engaged in learning experiences that they perceive as highly relevant and applicable to a “real world” setting, they have greater motivation to learn. Students are also more motivated when they are provided opportunities for practice and feedback based on lived experiences. Experiential learning meets these criteria and more (Ambrose et al., 2010).
Particularly in an industry like hospitality management, most of the students who have undergone experiential learning exhibit higher competency in both academic performance and practical skills application than those who did not have access to such programs. Graduates who have developed practical competencies integrated with academic learning have been found to cope more effectively with the various challenges they face while performing their duties in the workplaces. In general, they will more easily adapt to the corporate world and become successful at the tasks developed during their post-secondary education.

**Long-Term Effects of Experiential Learning on Industry Development**

Experiential learning generates knowledge through reflection on everyday experiences, some of which may be generated by the learners themselves inside and outside the traditional classroom setting (Neill, 2006). Experiential learning teaches students competencies they need not only for long-term real-world success, but also to become innovative and adaptive leaders in their respective industries. This is because, as Kolb (1984) emphasized, students who are trained through experiential learning programs acquire a comprehensive and adaptable set of competencies, of which reflection is particularly important, that allows them to continue to flexibly incorporate new information into practice in order to adapt to change and solve problems.

As Kolb (1984) observed, “learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities—concrete experience abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualization abilities and active experimentation abilities” (p. 83). That is, they must be able to integrate themselves entirely, willingly, and without hesitation into new experiences. The participants must be able to contemplate and perceive their involvement from multiple viewpoints. They must be able to generate perceptions that integrate their observations into
logically sound theories, and they must be able to use these theories to make conclusions and resolve difficulties. Therefore, experiential learning generates knowledge that comes about through reflection on everyday experiences, some of which may be generated by the learners themselves (Jeffs & Smith, 2011). This capacity for knowledge generation can mold professionals who make significant contributions to industries that are constantly changing, where adaptability and innovation are crucial to success.

As pointed out by Kolb (1984), personal experience gives “life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts” while simultaneously providing “a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process” (p. 42). What is key here is that experience alone is not a sufficient condition for learning or for the application of learning over time. Experiences also need to be processed by consciously reflecting on them. Experiential learning is thus a cyclic process that integrates immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and action. This is essential in the constantly changing hospitality management industry, particularly in this era of economic, social, and cultural globalization, which rapidly brings new trends and technologies to the sector.

As Caulfield and Woods (2013) found, globalization has revived the importance of experiential learning. Today’s students are exposed to world events that require considerable cross-cultural understanding and recognize that education is far more than learning facts about specific disciplines and diverse groups while sitting in a classroom. Caulfield and Woods (2013) observed, “college curricula are becoming more interdisciplinary in practice as evidenced by the interweaving of topics such as civic engagement, ethics, global studies, leadership, and social responsibility within course work across curricula” (p. 2), with the projected outcome of prompting students to become more socially accountable citizens. Learning is increasingly taking
place within communities rather than solely within classrooms. Educational perceptions of the optimal conditions for teaching and learning in post-secondary education are important focal points of literature around the globe about experiential learning concepts and application.

To summarize, the process of garnering experience that students can integrate effectively in the workplace is essential to career development. Application of the competencies acquired through experiential learning programs can put graduates in a position where they can effectively address the complex and constantly changing problems facing rapidly globalizing industries. Through the process of experiential learning, graduates will increasingly be in a strong position where they conceptually understand developments in the industry and can effectively reflect upon them and implement innovations and changes that will keep their sector dynamic. Experiential learning, when effectively designed and delivered, can give graduates the requisite skills to properly understand the various processes occurring not only in their respective organizations or establishments, but in the industry a whole, and to implement innovations so that the sector can be more industrious and active in the process of realizing its key components in the global economy.

Conclusion

Students in experiential learning situations cooperate and learn from one another in a semi-structured approach. Instruction is designed to engage students in direct experiences that are tied to real world problems and situations in which the instructor facilitates rather than directs student progress. The focus of experiential learning is placed on the process of learning, not the product of learning. What is essential in experiential learning, however, is “that the phases of experiencing (doing), reflection and applying are present…the stages of reflection and
application are what make experiential learning different and more powerful than the models commonly referred to as learning-by-doing, or hands-on learning” (Proudman, 2008, p.240).

**Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education**

With demand for skilled graduates and trained professionals in hospitality management steadily on the rise, educational training programs at the post-secondary level continue to face both a pressing need and a particularly acute challenge in delivering an integrative approach to learning through a curriculum that skillfully combines theoretical knowledge with experience (Moscardo & Norris, 2003). Because of the inherently practical nature of the industry, its relative newness as a formalized university degree, and the dynamic and relentless changes it faces particularly with the onslaught of economic, social, and cultural globalization, as discussed above, academic programs preparing professionals for this sector must be on the cutting edge of curriculum development and application. As Ruhanen (2005) summarized, “tourism and hospitality degree programs are now offered at several universities around the world, and both undergraduates and postgraduates in ever increasing numbers are studying in these areas” (p. 35). This shows that post-secondary graduates are essential in the hospitality industry despite its traditional association with a predominantly low-skilled, service-based labor force. However, there is still considerable pressure on post-secondary institutions to balance the theoretical base found in a university degree program with the practical skills required by the hospitality industry that will ultimately employ the students.

Ruhanen (2005) continued by asserting that the experiential learning component of hospitality management training programs, when designed with input from industry representatives, is particularly well suited for bridging the cognitive-practical gap that is
characteristic of this sector. Reviewing literature on experiential learning and tourism and hospitality, Ruhanen (2005) noted:

“not only do such approaches address the teaching and learning gaps identified by Moscardo and Norris (2003) that there is a need to improve the education of students in this field and develop new interesting and motivating teaching methods to enhance knowledge retention.” (p. 39)

The literature also supports the concept that such learning approaches do encourage students to engage in deeper learning behaviors. According to Ruhanen (2005), a well-designed experiential learning component helps “students become involved with the materials they are learning by applying theory to real-life situations (p. 39)”. This transforms the learning approach from “passively listening and taking notes” to an engagement in “higher-order thinking as they personalize the subject matter to develop a deeper understanding of the material” (p. 39).

Hertzman, Moreo, and Wiener (2015) found that “many researchers within the last two decades have recognized proficiencies that hospitality management programs should teach in order to prepare their students for successful careers in the industry.” (p. 423). However, very little research has investigated the attributes and competencies of experiential learning, which bridges broader skills to practical application – a vital component of preparing hospitality management students to develop career planning goals and strategies to not only obtain employment that is a good fit for them, but to pursue leadership tracks (Bridgstock, 2009; Chuang, 2011). Instead, research related to careers remains focused on overall perceptions of what a career in the hospitality industry involves, which segments students are interested in, and how they form their opinions of hospitality companies.
Benefits of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education

There are many benefits for students who participate in experiential learning opportunities, including personal, academic, work, and career related outcomes. For instance, students in a hospitality management program with an emphasis on experiential learning can learn about different jobs, different industries, and specific occupations. This helps students who may not know what they want to do after they graduate start exploring some viable options. Dressler and Keeling (2004) described what many cooperative education practitioners have experienced: “Most practitioners can tell story after story of students who come to their program as hesitant and confused freshmen or sophomores and leave as seniors with grace, confidence, and a bright future ahead of them” (p. 217). Experiential learning allows hospitality students to see how they personally fit into the hospitality industry, leading them to not only obtain employment, but also find career paths that will engage them long term, facilitating retention and the development of leaders in the industry (Lee, 2008).

Of all the benefits to students who participate in experiential learning, specific outcomes that address both hard and soft skills are the most essential. Identifying specific learning outcomes associated with participation in an experiential learning program is a powerful way to demonstrate the academic value of experiential learning. This need to develop and acknowledge a specific set of skills for the unique demands of the industry is a primary reason why absorbing hospitality management programs under the broader umbrella of business administration programs would be highly problematic. Thus, the placement of students in various hospitality organizations as “trainees” has become an academic requirement so students will have necessary work experiences to supplement their theoretical training.
Hospitality management programs have seen a growing emphasis on “soft skills” such as communication, team working, and time management. Experiential learning approaches have been demonstrated to enhance these skills effectively in students. Therefore, greater adoption of these approaches further fosters the employability of graduates of these programs.

**Challenges of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education**

The practical knowledge acquired by students at their experiential learning placement impacts their classroom experience, although Cooper and Shepherd (1997) asserted that experiential learning or work experience placement may simply add a vocational slant to what might otherwise be a predominantly academic curriculum. Even though Herman Schneider launched the first cooperative education program 100 years ago, because he was convinced that many professional concepts and skills were not learned effectively in the classroom, experiential education never was intended to address vocational issues alone, isolated from an integrated curriculum, (Sovilla & Varty, 2004). Over time, the goal has been to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical education. The “academic” and the “vocational” were meant to exist in conversation and to be mutually constitutive; neither was meant, within the framework of cooperative education/experiential learning, to be acquired in isolation.

Indeed, research examined in this literature review has documented that, in hospitality management, a well-integrated, well designed experiential learning curriculum is both academically and practically worthwhile; nevertheless, educators need to know if and why experiential learning remains valid from an industry perspective. Present literature (Lee, 2008) has demonstrated that curricula designed to incorporate the perceptions of hospitality management professionals about students who fulfilled their experiential learning requirements in hospitality establishments have succeeded only on a limited basis. While the occupational
nature of the industry lends itself very nicely to experiential components, as seen in many hospitality management courses, these approaches can sometimes be disconnected from the changes occurring in the industry. This underscores the vital importance of an approach that is designed in dialogue with representatives from the sector and that is constantly revisited and updated. Additionally, new theoretical curricular designs need to be consistently integrated with experiential learning approaches, ensuring that these are embedded throughout the coursework, including the business and marketing aspects.

According to Ball (1995) and Beckett (1996), all students in higher education need to acquire extensive technical skills, the associated skills needed to apply their knowledge within a profession, and the skills that are required by employers. However, Moscardo and Norris (2003) claimed that this challenge is particularly acute for tourism and hospitality as it is a relatively new area of study within academic institutions. They highlighted the need to devise new ways to improve the education of students in this field. Barron and Henderson (2002) also identified a need for academics involved with vocational programs such as hospitality management to develop new methods of presenting information that will interest and motivate students, resulting in better retention long after the subject has been assessed. There is a need to use teaching and learning methods that encourage and facilitate deeper learning in tourism and hospitality management education, which can also provide students with the skills they will need in their future workplace.

Higher education administrators and instructors are under pressure to provide more effective and efficient services, in general and in the hospitality education sector in particular. As Hsu (1999) found: “[at] colleges and universities, teaching serves as an important vehicle for achieving institutional goals of increased effectiveness, efficiency, and the enhancement of
student learning. Therefore, educators always are looking for ways to make their educational initiatives more effective” (p. 17). However, understanding how people acquire knowledge, which is extensively viewed as imperative, receives little ongoing and explicit attention by educators and their institutions. Educators must have extensive theoretical knowledge and comprehension of how individuals learn so they can design and implement more effective curricula.

Learning is an interactive process, the product of student and teacher activity within a specific learning environment. One key to effective education is understanding the range of student styles and designing instruction and materials that respond directly to individual learning needs. When integrating theory and practical experience in a sector like hospitality management, understanding both the interactive nature of the learning process and styles of learning is important. As Hsu (1999) found: “Learning styles are characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment.” (p. 18). This directly underscores the need for studies in hospitality management education that fully consider the experiences of current students and how they are comprehending the knowledge of a specific course outcome.

**Conclusion**

To bridge the divide between the theory base of a university degree program and the practical skills desired by employers, learning experiences that place students in situations where they are required to apply theory to the real world can be immensely valuable. Approaches such as experiential learning can also contribute to the student developing an enhanced interest, motivation, and participation in the topic, which increases retention of knowledge and skills.
Not only do such approaches provide practical learning experiences, which can be valuable in terms of future employment, but they can also facilitate the development of deep learning.

Purcell and Quinn (1996) suggested that students have commonly had unrealistic expectations of the types of responsibilities they may be given and consequently the types of skills they will be expected to have when they enter the hospitality industry. At the same time, the industry tends to discount a student’s formal qualification on the grounds of lack of experience, and frequently faculty hear the complaint that students are “overqualified but under-experienced” for even entry-level management positions (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Prioritizing a strong experiential learning component in a hospitality management curriculum addresses both dilemmas, as this chapter has outlined.

Industry professionals agree with educators about the importance of teaching real-world skills in hospitality management training curricula, and in vitalizing the curriculum by integrating these with theoretical concepts. Managers in the sector face a particularly complex challenge in combining theoretical knowledge, hard technical skills, and the “soft” integrative abilities that leadership in the industry demands. Scholars studying this sector have emphasized the importance of an integrated curriculum that accomplishes this task and have critiqued the structure and content of experiential learning programs, but few have captured the experiences of the students themselves to more adequately inform both theory and practice.

Quality feedback from students’ experiential learning opportunities is important in designing more effective hospitality management curricula. The documented experiences of the students, if considered in curriculum design, could better enhance the overall quality of these hospitality management programs. While the hospitality industry’s perspectives and insights are
also essential in the process of curriculum design and execution, feedback from students can provide valuable and reliable data that will inform quality improvement decisions.

Chapter Summary

Quality feedback from students’ experiential learning opportunities is important because it allows designers of curricula to address crucial aspects of policies, procedures, and practice. The participants’ viewpoints expressed through this research project could be incorporated into curriculum design to better enhance the overall quality of hospitality management programs. While quality assurance procedures must be used in concordance with traditional curriculum, feedback from students in the form of an in-depth interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) can provide valuable and reliable data that will inform quality improvement decisions in both the theoretical and the experiential learning components of hospitality management education programs. This is crucial to their future success – and even their very survival.

Using student interviews to determine the effectiveness of experiential learning in their academic careers, as well as their overall preparedness, retention, and success within real-world hospitality industry settings, will prove to be both effective and essential. Similar to Purcell and Quinn’s (1996) graduate survey project, this dissertation will clarify good practice in achieving a best fit between hospitality management education and hospitality industry requirements.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students enrolled in a hospitality management program describe and make sense of experiential learning opportunities that are a key component of their post-secondary education training and preparation for employment. As an applied discipline, experiential learning within undergraduate hospitality management curricula is a dynamic aspect of training because it gives students a chance to give live application to theoretical knowledge in an industry that is extremely hands-on. This component of the curriculum implements a close to real-time learning experience that brings together the acquisition and application of both hard skills as a combination of technical and/or cognitive knowledge and skills and soft skills as personal behavioral attributes, values, or traits, including ethics, communication, leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills; it also allows for students and instructors to coordinate learning with current industry trends and specific industry prerequisites. Brewster and Tyson define the term “skill” as: “Highly ambiguous... in that it is used to mean both a learned sequence of activities involved in performing a particular task… and the recognized capacity to respond to the unexpected and the unpredictable” (1991, p.15).

A deficiency of properly-educated, entry-level management candidates who effectively bring theory into practice, however, has been an ongoing concern within the industry in recent decades. This has resulted in the recognition of the need for more dynamic and adaptable hospitality management curricula to better help in the preparation of students to meet present and future demands in this ever-changing market. Knowledge from this study is expected to benefit the students, the faculty involved in curriculum development, and the hospitality industry by providing insights into which aspects of the experiential learning component of the curriculum
effectively prepare students for employment and which need to be refocused or developed further.

This study asks the following research question:

- Within an undergraduate hospitality management program, how do students perceive and utilize their involvement in experiential learning?

This chapter first outlines the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm in qualitative research which frames this study. It then describes and justifies the specific methodology /strategy of inquiry used (IPA) including the research design. Finally, it explains the procedures that will be used to identify and recruit participants, develop interview instruments, collect and analyze the data, and assure full compliance with human subject’s protocols.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

This qualitative research study was situated within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, as it best considers an individual’s identity or personal development within an experiential learning environment. The purpose of qualitative research is to concentrate on the complexity of lived experiences and to collect data from a small number of participants to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or event, rather than quantitative or positivist research which focuses on surface descriptions of a large sample of a population. Qualitative research allows the researcher to discover information on a problem without making claims to assumptions in advance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Willig, 2003). As qualitative research is based on understanding the experience of individuals who are inherently different and experience the world as such, a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm aids in interpreting data with this understanding.
Regarding the specific research strategy, the interconnection between Interprevist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in education. Willis (2007) asserts that “interpretivists tend to favor qualitative methods such as case studies and ethnography” (p.90). Qualitative methods, as Willis explained, provide rich, in-depth reports that are necessary for interpretivists to fully understand contexts. Consistent with Willis, Thomas (2003) maintained that the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods both lend themselves to a portrayal of “a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing” (p.6).

In qualitative research, the focus is on learning the meaning that participants hold regarding an inquiry into how and why they learn. The research questions herein are compatible with a qualitative method for discovering those qualities that best affect the participants’ careers and lives. Developing a complex picture of the simple premise of experiential learning’s corollaries with the transition into hospitality management employment involves examining multiple perspectives and identifying factors to construct an emergent, holistic account. The questions that guide this inquiry also guide the selection of the research approach.

Despite many proposed differences between quantitative and qualitative epistemologies, ultimately, the heart of the quantitative-qualitative “debate” is philosophical, not methodological. Philosophical assumptions or a theoretical paradigm about the nature of reality are crucial to understanding the overall perspective from which the study is designed and carried out. A theoretical paradigm is thus the identification of the underlying basis that is used to construct a scientific investigation; or, “a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, and propositions that orientates thinking and research” (Bogdan & Biklan, 1982, p. 30). Likewise, a paradigm can be defined as the “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). 
Positivism predominates in science and assumes that science quantitatively measures independent facts about a single apprehensible reality (Healy & Perry, 2000). In other words, the data and its analysis are value-free and data do not change because they are being observed. That is, researchers view the world through a “one-way mirror” (Healy & Perry, 2000). According to Krauss (2005) the positivist epistemology is defined as,

“science is seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that it might be predicted and controlled. The world and the universe are deterministic, they operate by laws of cause and effect that are discernable if we apply the unique approach of the scientific method.” (p.760)

Thus, science is largely a mechanistic or mechanical affair in positivism. The positivists believe in empiricism, the idea that observation and measurement are at the core of the scientific endeavor. The key approach of the scientific method is the experiment, the attempt to discern natural laws through direct manipulation and observation.

The interpretive paradigm is based on the view that people socially and symbolically construct and sustain their own organizational realities. Research by Gioia and Pitre (1990) suggested that the goal of theory building in the interpretive paradigm is “to generate descriptions, insights, and explanations of events so that the system of interpretations and meaning, and the structuring and organizing processes, are revealed” (p. 588). Interpretive theory building is inclined to be more inductive. Through this progression, re-searchers attempt to interoperorate a specific phenomenon with little prior knowledge.

The interpretive paradigm lends itself to allowing researchers to capture the perceptions and experiences of the participants and to use those experiences to construct and interpret a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. This author’s study seeked to explore the lived
experiences of hospitality management students when their curriculum contains experiential learning modules, with the purpose of uncovering how experiential learning affects theoretical and practical learning development in hospitality management curricula. To support the use of an interpretive paradigm, a larger baseline of specific physiognomies of interpretivism are further elucidated. Although the interpretive paradigm is not a dominant model of research, it is preferable in studies such as this because it can accommodate multiple perspectives of the human subjects.

Interpretivism, in terms of its paradigmatic characteristics and in its adoption of qualitative methods, obtains an understanding of reality, thus dissimilarities with the positivist paradigm. According to Glesne & Peshkin (1992), with the propensity of observing an environment through evident and quantifiable evidences, the positivist paradigm frequently supports quantitative style methods. McQueen (2002) noted that interpretivists interpretation of the world through a “sequence of distinct eyes” and select applicants who “have their own understandings of authenticity” to find commonalities and variances between their individual views (p.16)

The interpretivist paradigm is grounded on the principle that a knowledge base of the framework in which any form of research is preformed is vital to the clarification of data gathered (Willis, 2007: p.4). According to Willis (2007), interpretivism seeks to comprehend a particular framework, it does not simplify as it hypothesizes that authenticity is based on how a specific individual defines meaning through their experiences. Willis asserted (2007) that the objective of interpretivists is to appreciate objectivity – how individuals from several viewpoints make sense of their lived experiences – and that they “eschew the idea that objective research on human behavior is possible” (p.110). Interpretivism thus does not seek a fixed explanation but
rather includes “accepting and seeking multiple perspectives, being open to change, practicing iterative and emergent data collection techniques, promoting participatory and holistic research, and going beyond the inductive and deductive approach” (p. 583).

Applied to experiential learning in education, interpretive inquiry engages educators as reflective practitioners in developing improved acquisition of knowledge through their students by constantly asking questions such as: Who are these students who sit before me? Who is the self that teaches? (Palmer, 1998). A deeper understanding involves a broader focus on the social, political, historic and economic forces shaping the pedagogies, curriculum policies and educational curriculums in which educators are immersed. Such an interpretive orientation is essential for educators wishing to adopt more student-centered pedagogies (experiential learning opportunities) such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learning.

Thus, this is research through forming and underpinning multiple understandings of the individual’s worldview. According to Willis (2007), the idea of numerous perceptions ascends from the certainty that peripheral authenticity is adjustable. Willis goes on further to specify that “different people and different groups have different perceptions of the world” (p.194). The accepting from a multitude of various perceptions in interpretivism frequently leads to a more inclusive understanding of the situation (Klein & Meyers, 1998; Morehouse, 2011). This will simplify research such as this one on undergraduate student’s perspective of the experiential learning opportunities in hospitality management where the researcher believes he may require “in-depth” student information and “understanding” from the interviewess rather than quantitative numbers gathered by statistics done through a survey.

To explore the understandings of participants, an interpretive methodological approach works from within a specific context from which meaning is derived through an interaction
between the researcher and the participants to provide an interpretation of what the participants say about their experiences. Like Willis, Smith (2007) propose that interpretivists are “anti-foundationalists” because “there is no right or correct path to knowledge, no special method that automatically leads to intellectual progress” (p.120). Advocates of interpretivism traditionally do not support the concept of general standards for research, in its place the standards controlling research are “products of a particular group or culture” (Smith, 1993 p.5). Interpretive researchers do not pursue the responses for their studies in inflexible traditions. Instead, they comprehend meaning from subjects upon it which is prejudiced by the specific society to which an individual belongs.

Contradictory to positivists who regularly accept only one correct response, interpretivism is far more comprehensive, due to it allows for numerous viewpoints of different individuals from different groups. As indicated above, the interpretive paradigm commonly seeks answers to questions by “describing the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Creswell (2009) states that “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). An in-depth analysis and understanding of these interpretations is gleaned through a process of capturing data that involves “deep attentiveness” and “empathetic understanding” on the part of the researcher. In this study, the researcher aimed to understand how students actively enrolled in a post-secondary hospitality management program experienced the experiential learning component of the curriculum, and how they made sense of this aspect of their training as they matriculated through the curriculum. Thus, a qualitative interpretivist approach was chosen because the researcher wished to
understand the lived experiences of the participants during the learning and applied learning process.

Marguerite, Dean, and Katherine (2006) present the following characteristics of qualitative research. Research studies are performed in a realistic setting related to what is being interoperated. Researchers ask a wide-ranging set of questions intended to discover and understand the common context. Participants of the study are chosen through specific procedures based on whether the individuals have vital insight to the specific queries being asked. Data collection methods encompassed observation of the interviewee and individual interviewing that granted the researcher close contact with the participants. The researcher took a collaborative role where he got to know the individual participants in which they attend the post-secondary institution. Hypotheses were designed after the researcher began data collection and were adapted throughout the study as new data was composed and analyzed. The study reports data in narrative form. (Marguerite, Dean, and Katherine (2006: p.21).

The above characteristics of qualitative methods are more likely to be suitable for this researcher’s intended study which investigates the experiences and perceptions of a group of students. On reflections of the researchers’ implications, in the intended study, the researcher worked within the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach in this study. As a researcher, the author wanted to understand the experiences of the study’s participants (Cohen and Manion, 1994) through obtaining understanding into their experiences, opinions and knowledge (Cresswell, 2003; Yanow and Schwartz-She, 2011).
**Strategy of Inquiry**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach to understanding participants lived experiences in order to describe what a topic is like for them within a specific context (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008; Smith, 2004). However, the IPA strategy of inquiry extends simple description and makes sense of participants lived experiences by developing an interpretative analysis of the description in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical contexts. Thus, the analyst offers “an interpretative account of what it means for the participant to have such concerns within their particular context” (Larkin et al., 2008, p. 113).

IPA is informed by three key positions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology describes the “what” and “how” of individuals’ experienced phenomena, develops descriptions of the essences of experiences, but does not explain or analyze descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation concerning textual meaning, as in the techniques used in speaking and writing that divulge the intentions and context of the speaker/writer (Smith et al., 2013). Finally, ideography relates to details and thorough analysis of individual cases, which differs from mainstream psychological studies that are nomothetic in nature (Smith et al., 2013).

Smith (2004), a pioneer in IPA research, noted “IPA is idiographic because a detailed analysis of one case occurs before moving onto the next, as well as IPA is inductive, meaning research questions are broadly constructed to allow for unanticipated themes to emerge” (p.64). Smith (2004), stated “results are discussed using existing literature, creating an interrogative element. Also, researchers are influenced by their biographical backgrounds and knowledge of extant literature and must interpret data through their own lens when developing themes” (p.64). These four key characteristics of IPA research stem from the three positions mentioned above.
Larkin, Watts, & Clifton (2008) recommend that researchers be open to adjusting their ideas and responsive to interpretations of data based on participants’ responses. Researchers should understand that participants’ experiences are within a specific context, which relates the person to the phenomena at hand (Larkin et al., 2008). Aligning with an interpretative tradition, IPA includes a double hermeneutic: the researcher tries to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences (Smith, 2004).

Smith (2011) developed guidelines for judging the quality of IPA studies. He noted that IPA studies “should have a clear focus that provides detail of a particular topic, the analysis should be descriptive and interpretative and include both convergence and divergence in themes, and papers should be carefully written to account for these guidelines” (p. 64). Although helpful, these guidelines specifically aid with assessing products of IPA.

In conducting this qualitative study with a focus of IPA, the researcher constructed meaning in attempt to understand common experiences of undergraduate students who have taken or are currently enrolled in experiential learning laboratories within their hospitality management curriculum. Once the researcher better understood the participants’ experiences and their sense-making, the researcher then analyzed the semi-structured interviews for patterns, convergences, and divergences, while also keeping in mind the individual experiences and how these patterns influence each participant (Smith, 2011).

Participants

This IPA study focused on analyzing the specific experiences of individuals and therefore the sample will reflect a particular demographic to maintain a small homogeneous group of participants. A total of twelve undergraduate students were selected for interviewing to analyze how these individuals make sense of their experiential learning experiences while
pursuing an undergraduate degree in hospitality management. To research how hospitality management students perceive or make sense of their involvement in experiential learning in an undergraduate hospitality management program, this qualitative research study interviewed current undergraduate hospitality management currently enrolled at community college. The face-to-face interviews represented a cross-section of the participants, including gender, age, number of experiential learning laboratories and other variables drawn from the prospective program.

Voluntary purposeful selection was used to obtain participants. The sample was purposefully selected based on several criteria: (a) students’ academic focus within hospitality management education; (b) minimum of one and half years in the hospitality management program; (c) minimum of four experiential learning laboratories. Participants for the interviews were then chosen in proportion to the summary data from the questionnaire responses and to maximize heterogeneity. The author’s intent was to develop a purposeful sample that would adequately reflect the diversity of the questionnaire participants. Conveniently sampling volunteers geographically located within driving distance from the researcher’s home base allowed the interviews to be conducted face-to-face. The author chose twelve undergraduate hospitality management students that adequately represented a cross-section of the data that was collected from the questionnaire. The interviews were scheduled according to a timeline established, in accordance with of the questionnaire, its submission, and receipt of legitimate, viable responses to the questionnaire. The author utilized current students of an accredited hospitality management program, in an effort to utilize the reflections of those participants who are still involved in experiential learning modules, and those whose memory of the experiences of experiential learning’s effect on professional preparedness is relatively recent. Observational
protocols included demographic information about the time, place, and a description of the setting where the interviews took place. As a resource, a copy of the participants’ online questionnaire was made available as a reminder of the responses to the specific questions that participants had previously given.

When the researcher obtained approval from both the academic institution where the study took place and from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University to begin collecting data, the researcher sent a letter of intent via email along with an attached participant selection questionnaire through the listserv at the institution that is the focus of this study of all currently enrolled students. In this email, the researcher requested responses to be sent to the researcher’s Northeastern University Student email address within two weeks of email distribution. The researcher selected participants on a rolling basis until twelve participants were selected and until variation of the sample was achieved by having students from each experiential experience included. The study was voluntary in that participants were given the opportunity to choose to take part in the collection of data by voluntary response to the questionnaire through email. Participant selection was done on a first-come, first-serve basis so long as the participant fits the needed educational experiences.

Once twelve participants were selected, the researcher contacted them letting them know the next steps to take and further outlining what was required of them to participate. Those willing participants who respond to the questionnaire had the opportunity to volunteer for a face-to-face interview after signing an informed consent form. From the questionnaire responses, only those individuals who volunteered to be interviewed and were within a reasonable distance from the researcher’s base were considered. After the face-to-face interviews were complete, the interviews were transcribed via Rev.com and the researcher
contacted all participants to ensure accuracy among the transcripts and allow for any questions or follow-up information.

**Procedures**

The following section outlines the step-by-step protocol the researcher followed in data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, potential research bias, and limitations that will be examined. The researcher received IRB approval before starting recruitment procedures of the study.

**Data Collection**

The process of data collection is described by Creswell as a “circle” of interrelated activities...process of engaging in activities that include but go beyond collecting data” aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions (Creswell, p.117). Data collection can be divided into information sources: people (interviews), observation of events and physical documents (products such as student portfolios), assessments (tests) and various forms of documentary evidence, such as evaluation reports (Mertens, pgs. 343-344).

The use of face to face interviews was critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenological investigation. This strategy added rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Primary data was collected in the form of interviews, observations, and document review. Interviews and observations are central to the design approach in qualitative studies. Interviews with the hospitality management students were audio-taped and based on an interview protocol. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to understand the perceptions of experiential learning opportunities while obtaining an undergraduate degree in hospitality management. The questions are a narrowing process of the
central question to sub-questions (Creswell, p. 132). The topics of questions used as the interview protocol were semi structured. There was a set of open-ended questions presented, but the interviewer had latitude in exploring perceptions, opinions or values, knowledge and feelings about the leadership learning process.

Due to the time commitment of transcribing, the researcher used Rev.com, a professional audio recording and transcription service, to record and notate the interviews. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, the researcher listened to the audio recordings and matched the audio to the written transcripts. Any edits the researcher made to ensure accuracy.

The researcher is strategically choosing a small sample size due to the quantity of interviews and paperwork that follows phenomenological studies (Smith, 2011).

**Data Analysis**

The analysis in qualitative research inductively builds from instances to general themes. Qualitative research develops a comprehensive description through analyzing significant statements and generates meaning units (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This commenced once the researcher has IRB approval from Northeastern University and a community college in Tennessee.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) offer numerous proposals concerning investigation approaches, empirical context, and edifice, all underlined by the clear reminder that investigative consideration should center on the individual participants’ efforts to make sense of their lived experiences. The method is primary and continual, each individual interview and matching transcript, field notes, and other secondary data are addressed in a dependable manner, configuring the exclusive accuracies of each case by:
**Reading and Rereading an Interview Transcript.** Once the data collection process was concluded, the researcher began the analysis process by immersing himself in the data through reading the transcript of the interviews. Once the researcher was finished familiarizing himself with the data, the researcher then re-read the transcript numerous times, some with the audio recording playing to hear the tones and moods of the participants’ voices. At this stage, the researcher was just focusing on the individual participants and listening to their lives experiences in experiential learning opportunities (Smith et al., 2009). However, it was important while reading the text, the researcher attempted to suspend presuppositions and judgements in order to focus on what is actually presented in the transcript data. This involves the practice of bracketing (D. Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Husserl, 1999)

**Initial Noting.** Once the researcher understood each participant lived experiences, the researcher the began the initial noting portion where he maintained an open mind and note anything of interest with the transcribed transcript for each individual interview (Smith et al., 2009). This process allowed the researcher to familiarize himself with the transcript and began to identify specific ways the participant talks about, understands, and thinks about experiential learning (Smith et al, 2009).

It has been noted according to (D. Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) that “IPA analysis revolves around the close reading and re-reading of the text.” (p.9) To effectively complete this analysis, the researcher made notes of any thoughts, observations and reflections that occurred while reading the transcript. Such notes included any recurring phrases, the researcher's questions, their own emotions, and descriptions of, or comments on, the language used (D. Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; J.A. Smith et al., 1999).
**Developing Emergent Themes.** Data was transcribed and coded using NVivo 11. This allowed the researcher to determine themes in relation to the data results. Based on this information (especially the themes), the researcher could implement IPA. The researcher then focused on what was most prominent from each set of remarks from the initial notes and will pared down the transcript so it reflected themes and phrases representing the participants’ words. The data analysis for this study involved preparing and organizing raw data, then reducing the data into emerging themes using a coding process. This then allowed for critical themes to emerge out of the data and for placing raw data into logical categories and analyzing and interpreting the data to inform the research question. (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1982, p. 145).

**Searching for Connections Across Themes.** The researcher will then look at each participant’s transcript to see how each candidate makes meaning of his or her own experiences in experiential learning and put the emergent themes in NVivo 11. The researcher plans used abstraction as his process for discovering connections amongst the participants. With abstraction, the researcher then put similar themes together and create a new cluster title to denote the newer generated theme (Smith et al., 2009).

**Moving to the Next Case.** Once the first transcript was thoroughly analyzed according to the first four steps, the researcher then moved on to the next participant and his or her transcripts. Due to hermeneutics, it is only expected that the researcher was influenced by previous analyses. However, it was important according to (D. Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2208: Husserl, 1999), “while reading the text, the researcher attempts to suspend presuppositions and judgements in order to focus on what is actually presented in the transcript data. This involves the practice of bracketing.” (p.9) The researcher did his best to bracket out the ideas that emerged from the previous analysis and view each transcript as a new case.
Looking for Patterns Across Cases. Finally, the researcher then created a final table to provide an overall structure to the analysis by relating the identified themes into ‘clusters’ or concepts. The aim, at this stage, was to arrive at a group of themes and to identify superordinate categories that suggest a hierarchical relationship between them. Any additional patterns or themes were then identified. Ultimately, the themes were translated into the researcher’s narrative account.

To ensure the results were trustworthy, the final interaction was designed to ask for clarifications where needed, allow subjects to change, increase data, and to remedy errors in transcription. However, since there was one interview, it is possible that participant attitudes may change, affecting results.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted under the informed consent of the participants. Participation in this study was not expected to cause any risk greater than those encountered in everyday life. There were no adverse consequences (physical, social, economic, legal or psychological) of a participants’ decision to withdraw from the research at any time. In the event of withdrawal, the participant’s data was not being used for this study and the data was destroyed. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and the participant may have refused to participate and/or discontinue their participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. The participant was also informed that participation, or a decision not to participate, will in no way affect any grades in the current or future curriculum. The participant’s identity (individual names and academic information) will remain confidential. The participants were coded and each one were identified by a pseudonym, which did not represent their real name. The raw data is filed
and stored by the researcher off-premises from the research site and protected from unauthorized individuals.

Upon completion and publishing of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office. All digital data will be stored in a password protected folder on the researcher’s personal laptop.

**Trustworthiness**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students enrolled in a hospitality management program describe and make sense of experiential learning opportunities that are a key component of their post-secondary education training and preparation for employment. Therefore, the study is an exploration of subjective experiences of the participants. As such, it is critical that the researcher adheres to the four basic tenets of trustworthiness for qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a study is credible when it has proven confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings. They also posit that a study is transferable if it is clear to the reader how the study could be applied in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that a study is trustworthy if there is a distinct line of data so the study could be replicated multiple times in exactly the method. In conclusion, the study has confirmability if it exudes neutrality and does not promote any personal researcher interest or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure that the study was conducted with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the researcher made certain that a number of validation strategies have been properly utilized.

**Credibility.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that member verification is the best procedure for authenticating credibility in a qualitative study. As such, the researcher guaranteed that the active participants of the study received a copy of the transcripts of the interviews and
were given sufficient time to review the transcripts for accurateness or to amend the data. Also, the researcher created multiple data sources by making sense of all participants’ responses both individually and compared to one another to observe uniformity. Moreover, through in-depth interviews with participants, the researcher was then able to build relationships with the participants and between interview texts to make decisions about what was most pertinent and significant to the study (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, the researcher included extensive quotes from participants to focus on the participants’ views rather than on potentially biased interpretations.

**Transferability.** Furthermore, providing thorough explanations about the participants will provide transferability, or the proficiency of conveying data in alternate locations. Robust explanations of each participant were then incorporated to ascertain external validity and the phenomenon was defined in adequate detail to aid the researcher and other scholars in assessing the transferability.

**Dependability.** Per the exigencies of the Northeastern University guidelines for dependability, the researcher maintained a rigorous audit trail so that if an external audit examining the final report were ever necessary, all processes could be replicated and analyzed. This trail would include “field notes/research journal/audio tapes, annotated transcripts, tables of themes, draft reports, …” and, logically, the final report (Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, April 2016, p.8). This audit trail will provide a clear description of the research path (Yin, 1989).

**Confirmability.** Furthermore, to continue promoting reliability, there was extensive clarification of researcher bias through commentary on biases and past experiences that have possibly formed the researcher’s method to the study. By disclosing the researcher’s positionality and by consistently identifying biases throughout the process, trustworthiness was strengthened.
and internal threats to validity can be circumvented. In addition to showing understanding of researcher bias, the researcher kept a reflexive journal where he recorded methodological decisions, reflections, observations, opinions, and reasoning as to his decision making throughout the process. Additionally, methodically writing an interview summary shortly after each interview concluded recorded the author’s impressions, personal thoughts, and reflections on how to improve the next interview process. Recording descriptive and reflective notes during the interviews added to accuracy. Miles and Huberman note that preliminary analysis during data collection is recommended, and the emergent design in this study will allow the opportunity for the researcher to learn through reflection on the process of the design and to begin to summarize and analyze the data during the process of the interview (as cited in Weiss, 1994).

**Potential Research Bias**

In qualitative research, the researcher explored subjective experiences, and the meaning participants ascribe to those experiences. Suspending currently-held beliefs is critical to understanding new meanings from participants (Creswell, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The awareness of personal biases allows a stepping back from what is currently known to gain a broader view, as in Heifetz’ description of a balcony view (Heifetz, 1994, p. 253). From this vantage point, the observer could see key patterns from a wider perspective. Stokes (2010) states that major threats to validity in any research are pre-conceptions and researcher’s biases. Revealing the biases allowed a greater degree of transparency and brings to the forefront how the analysis will be connected. The beliefs and the meanings this researcher has constructed of his lived experiences will be a lens he used to make meaning of the data. The author recognized himself in this research by understanding that his background in hospitality management affected
the interpretation of the data. The author also acknowledges personal, cultural, and historical experiences, per Creswell (2014).

Experiential learning is a key component of the conceptual grasping of knowledge obtained through a post-secondary degree in hospitality management. As the hospitality industry evolves, post-secondary institutions need to adapt their curriculum to meet the educational expectations. As curricula are developed, traditionally, administration, faculty, and strategic partners are consulted but very little research is done on the undergraduate's perspective of the experiential learning opportunities. As a former student, faculty member, and administrator, having a deeper understanding of the undergraduate student's perspective of experiential learning in a hospitality management program is key, tantamount not only to the success of the author’s own program but all undergraduate programs currently affected by the hospitality industry growth.

Exploring the relationship of experiential learning and success in the hospitality management field is limited in current research. From student’s perceptions of the relationship, a better understanding of those factors that lead to or aid in success can be obtained. These factors will likely include soft and hard skills such as “better communication, teamwork, situation analysis, operational skills, information search, critical thinking, initiative, organizing, and self-development skills than the non-hospitality graduate employees” (Alhelalat, 2015, p.46). Every participant in this study will have something to add to the development of experiential learning’s effect on hospitality management curricula, and the multiple perspectives increase the depth of the description and create a composite sketch of what the participants do and do not feel aided them in their transition from an academic setting to a professional hospitality management position.
The researcher herein brings a practical worldview to this inquiry and believes that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. These many constructed meanings are subjective, varied, complex, and lead to multiple interpretations of experiences. Examining the participants’ understanding of the experiential learning in which they took part will inductively allow patterns to develop. Drago-Severson (2009) states that each of us has a way of knowing that filters our experiences of others, our relationships, and ourselves.

As a researcher, the author approached the individual interviews with an open mind while distinguishing that he was affected by what he already knew and believed. The search for understanding is a essentially combination of preceding principle and original detection; methodical thoroughness and accommodation of the unanticipated. The tacit knowledge of the researcher can illuminate how the data is approached. As the researcher chose which questions to focus on, and how to dynamically adjust questions during the open-ended interviews, he could understand more fully the interviewees’ responses. By asking clarifying questions to support the original query and subsequent interviews, the author then arrived at a clearer level of communication between the researcher and participants in this study.

As both a teacher and a chef, the author has come to understand that teaching is, by its very nature, creative. It is also experiential. As such, the researcher understands that his epistemology is linked to his positionality, and he acknowledges that deeply ingrained biases may not always be accessible, but the researcher’s awareness of the role as researcher in this endeavor is key.

The procedures used to validate the findings in this study were used to check for accuracy and add to the credibility in the design of the study. The intentionally-selected participants for the face-to-face interviews were chosen in proportion to the responses from the questionnaires.
Variables were balanced between the questionnaire responses and interview participants and where be based upon the focus of this study and the information contained in previous chapters.

This research study’s themes were established based on multiple perspectives regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning from all the participants, and stringent measures were taken to justify the integrity of the researcher’s interpretation. Adequately representation of a wide range of responses on the positive and negative comments on experiential learning permitted for similarities and differences that was described in this study’s greater analysis.

Limitations

IPA has distinct limitations for research studies. Significantly, IPA is time-consuming, many themes can emerge, and important data can be overlooked. Thus, IPA is not cost effective. Additionally, the analysis portion of the study focused on what was said by the respondent and researcher’s interpretation, which could have created inaccuracies in the results. Furthermore, IPA is limited to research question reflections in terms of analyzing the data. IPA is subjected to researcher bias; therefore, it emphasizes the importance of thorough analyses and strict adherence to procedures that assure the highest level of neutrality possible to indeed make a substantial and rigorous contribution to the existing literature (Jonathon A. Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Conclusion

Conducting an IPA qualitative study allowed the researcher to use in-depth interviews to collect a comprehensive overview of the participants lived experiences with the experiential learning component of hospitality management curriculum. A qualitative, IPA approach was the best method of inquiry due to its adaptability and construction of meaning from real, lived experiences. Once the data was collected, the researcher the analyzed the phenomenon and
cluster similarities and differences. Upon completion, the researcher then created a narrative account of the findings.

**Summary**

This chapter outlines the method and procedures demonstrated in this study. The chapter explained the research design, the subjects interviewed, and the instrumentation development. The instrumentation development included specifics about the survey instrument. There was also a section in this chapter about the procedures followed to collect the data in this study. In following chapter, this study analysis’s and findings will be presented in greater detail. The findings in Chapter Four will be arranged according to themes, research questions, and key issues identified by both this study’s author and the responses of the participants of both the questionnaires and the interviews.
Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how students enrolled in a hospitality program explained and utilized experiential learning opportunities within their current curriculum. A phenomenological method was used to capture the lived experiences of undergraduate students and their process of learning at a community college. A qualitative study was suitable for the research because the purpose was investigative (Creswell, 2011). Meaning attributed to the phenomenon of experiential learning within the hospitality program was examined through hermeneutic methods (Creswell, 2011).

The analysis of the interview data yielded three super-ordinate themes and eight corresponding nested themes. The super-ordinate themes and their nested themes were: 1) Industry Expectation (1.1 Industry Support, 1.2 Technical Competencies); 2) Program Design (2.1 Student/Faculty Interaction, 2.2 Practical Application, 2.3 Collaboration, 2.4 Significance of Experiential Learning); and 3) Student Strength and Weakness (3.1 Educational Assets, 3.2 Educational Deficiencies). Super-ordinate themes and nested themes were identified as those recurring in at least nine of the twelve participants’ interview data. Table 1 provides a listing of the super-ordinate and nested themes that manifested through the analysis process, as well as the recurrence of each theme across participants.
Each of the participants in the study responded to a series of interview questions with answers that included not only what, “Industry Expectation” means to them as undergraduate students enrolled in a hospitality management program, but how they understand the application of experiential learning opportunities within their current curriculum. Through their individual responses, participants indicated an emerging theme of what industry expectation is to them as an undergraduate student. These explanations provide insight into how community college

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Amy</th>
<th>Bob</th>
<th>Cliff</th>
<th>Donald</th>
<th>Edward</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Howard</th>
<th>Ilene</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Luke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nesting Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Industry Expectation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Industry Support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Technical Competencies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Program Design</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Student/Faculty Interaction</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Practical Application</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Collaboration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 Significance of Experiential Learning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Student Strength and Weakness</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Educational Assets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Educational Deficiencies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

**Industry Expectation**

Each of the participants in the study responded to a series of interview questions with answers that included not only what, “Industry Expectation” means to them as undergraduate students enrolled in a hospitality management program, but how they understand the application of experiential learning opportunities within their current curriculum. Through their individual responses, participants indicated an emerging theme of what industry expectation is to them as an undergraduate student. These explanations provide insight into how community college
students enrolled in a hospitality management program understand the current needs of their industry and the importance it has for professional development.

As interviewees discussed skill sets that would be needed to succeed in their careers upon graduation, the participants recognized that the experiential learning opportunities granted them an understanding of why it was important that industry representatives be included in the design of the experiential curriculum within a hospitality management program. As part of the discovery process of the interview, participants described examples regarding how they viewed the importance of industry support. The superordinate theme of Industry Expectation developed because of the participants’ continual discovery process which occurred during the interview session.

Capturing participants’ perceptions of Industry Expectation is extremely important in figuring out whether or not experiential learning laboratories were preparing them properly for job acquisition upon graduation. By completing a hospitality management degree, students’ employment opportunities were enhanced with a strong foundation of theoretical knowledge with practical application. Therefore, two subordinate themes emerged under the superordinate theme of Industry Expectation; Industry Support and Technical Competencies. Experience by itself, in many cases, was not enough when employers were seeking to hire staff that had skills that were needed for current industry management trends. This was where a combination of practical application of experiential learning in educational settings could enhance professional development for effective future career development and industry growth.

**Industry Support**

Each participant in the study described what they believed Industry Support means through their own individual experiences. While participants had differing ideas of what
constitutes industry support, they all shared some perceptions of what it entailed within their curriculum. This point was illustrated by Cliff whom expressed the importance of being able to have strong, industry-supported internship opportunities: “if there are more restaurants who are willing to have a well-rounded internship available for the different students, we're limited in that when you go to work for a restaurant.” Flexibility and availability of students who were trying to obtain an undergraduate degree was an ongoing concern that was not restrictive to just hospitality management but others career fields as well.

Respondents commented with significant admiration that this kind of educational opportunity and industry support meant a great deal to their professional development as developing industry connections while obtaining their degree would better enhance employment opportunities upon graduation. They also mentioned that particularly for the industry of hospitality management, these networking opportunities were essential in their educational growth, particularly having industry leaders mentor and take an interest in students who aimed to become leaders themselves in both daily the operations and in the industry.

In short, as Amy stated in the interviewee that:

“If all you're doing is working in the salad station, you're not learning any other part of running a restaurant. You're not learning about the inventory, you're not learning about braising, you're not learning about, keeping up with cost control. I think to have more restaurants, different types of restaurants available for that well-rounded internship; I think that would be the biggest benefit. Because not everybody wants to go work for a major catering business, which is the only kind of operations that is open to the well-rounded internships.”
Amy discussed the need for a well-rounded educational experience through various facilities in the hospitality industry as it would be more beneficial to her career growth verse just certain avenues of true experiential learning in the industry which may not be of interest.

The desired connection from hospitality industry representatives with current students to share their lived experiences as well as network with students emerged as a theme of vast importance. As stated by Cliff, “when they have some information, they share that information with us, or we can go, there is some place they need graduate student. I think we require more networking too, to get success. We need more networking from them”. Through the ability to network with the hospitality industry, students were granted an opportunity to interact with future employers as well as develop relationships that would benefit them as they pursued a career in the industry.

Furthermore, Cliff stated that when granted an opportunity for inclusion with industry, it was a positive educational opportunity. “They're always very positive. They're always willing to answer questions. You know, come stop by a restaurant and see you and me, you can go through the kitchen. They're always very welcoming”. Through the inclusion of the hospitality industry, students are granted an opportunity for practical knowledge which grants them an opportunity to see and experience the hospitality industry from a different perspective than that of an educational setting.

Of those interviewed, it was found that collaboration between the post-secondary institution and the hospitality industry was of extreme importance in their educational growth. By students having a chance to meet and tour various hospitality facilities, it granted them an opportunity to identify future employment opportunities which they may not have traditionally considered. Donald mentions, “I believe we need a bridge between the school and the hotel too,
to get a connection.” By building a gap between education and the industry, Donald further mentioned, “Sometimes you have a degree; you're trying to get a position; they don’t know you; I think if the school do that, like to make the bridge between school and hotel that will be an excellent opportunity to grow.”

During the interview process, Donald stated that curriculum inclusion with the hospitality industry would be of great value. Within the touring of these facilities, “it would probably be a good idea to at least give at least one or two days out of the semester to come into the kitchen”, Through these experiential learning experiences, students developed a deeper understanding to the actual workings of a facility as well as exposed them to experiences traditionally taught in the classroom.

Edward shared his thoughts regarding industry inclusion through experiential learning demonstrations; “there are some, people like that that have come in here and done, demonstrations for us”. This was a traditional form of expanding upon industry techniques that were taught throughout the current curriculum. Edward also went on to state, “it's really hard to grasp what they're doing because you're, you're taught this way and they're showing you this way, and you only see it for that brief moment”. Educational application was limited in time which was a barrier for some students in comprehension of knowledge. Repetition of skills was developed through the courses outcomes which were determined on a class-by-class basis through the governing board of higher education within their accrediting association.

By integrating industry professionals within the experiential learning curriculum, students were granted an opportunity to be exposed to knowledge and skillset outside the traditional classroom techniques. Edward mentioned, “the people that they send in to do the demonstrations are very vocal. If you have any questions, they can answer them. They know exactly what they're
talking about. They know exactly what they're doing with their demo”. Through the interaction of students and the hospitality industry in such demonstrations, students were granted an opportunity to network with the professionals in a manner that developed confidence for the student in a protected environment of an educational setting.

George stated that through various interactions within the hospitality industry, “they have supported us by linking us up with people in the business” which was a form of future networking. George also said that collaboration and networking were key in, “linking us with jobs, or people outside of the school that can teach us things”. Interviewee I reiterated this concept by stating, “They always need help, and they're always willing to hire people if they hard work. When they come in and see if you're a hard worker, they will offer you a job.” Ilene also mentioned, “They come here, because our door is always open. Allowing students to go there just to see how the kitchen runs, to learn how they do ... how their kitchen runs.”

Kevin expressed a desire for the industry to expand on their connection by stating, “I would want the hospitality industry to have workshops and seminars on cooking at their institution and just in general.” Combining education and a practical skill set was an ongoing process which needs continuous support. Kevin continued, “I still think that, it's still a learning process even when you're a professional chef, you always if you work as a chef still need to go to seminars and workshops.” Also, mentioned in the interview was “the industry need to have seminars and workshops on the hospitality industry so that when the students come there, food service institutions will have workshops and seminars on just various aspects because I think you never stop learning.”

Continual growth of knowledge through industry interaction, whether in an educational aspect such as obtaining a degree in hospitality management or through professional
development was a common theme. By granting students the opportunity to meet with industry professionals through classroom demonstration as well as industry internships students saw the value of this potential growth.

**Technical Competencies**

Part of hospitality management is an ability to effectively perform every aspect of the organization toward a singular, unified purpose. Amy and Bob stated skills such as knife cutting as a skill set that needs constant practice to develop a comfort level of proficiency. Bob specifically mentioned, “there is something I didn’t know before, even though when I used a knife, when I went to the program, now when I do something I know better how I can use a knife”. Through practical application of theoretical knowledge, students are granted an opportunity to apply what is obtained in the traditional classroom. Examples of this would be the different knives required for specific tasks in the kitchen.

Bob also went on to describe, “cross contamination” was a competency learned through their education in classes such as safety & sanitation. “It's like something I didn’t learn before, like cross contamination. The different way you need to deal with meat. It's like some new things I learn with my culinary now.” The interview also mentions the following flavoring techniques which is traditionally a skill learned through experience, “I learned so many things about like seasoning; how can I taste better. If I'm cooking something, or before I didn’t realize like what taste mean for me. Now I got so many knowledge about those things.” Even though knowledge such as safety & sanitation could be taught in the traditional academic setting, other competencies are better learned through trial and error.

Bob mentioned the importance of time management “Sometimes we are doing something, I need to know I got the time. I need to learn better how I can manage my time.” As
Cliff stated, being able to adapt to a changing schedule was a competency that is of value, “being willing to always adapt to whatever situation you're in, that day.” Bob continued, “in the kitchen you could be doing one thing, another day you can be doing a totally different thing. So always being willing to adapt, being willing to listen to other people, how you should be doing something”.

Cliff also stated a competency such as performing an inventory, which was traditionally acquired through industry experience as having significant value. “I think figuring out how to do inventory, if there's ever a time when I'm going to be the person who's doing the inventory, other than purchasing cost control class, I've never done that.” This is an aspect that was traditionally done by someone within management after training had been performed. In theoretical application, students were granted a broad base line of exposure to this topic with the understanding it was not traditionally performed by entry level employees without specific guidelines set for the individual.

Donald stated that various other skillsets required for competency included, “sanitation, organizational skills and what do I need to go into this field and how could I prepared with what's going to come with it?” Donald also stated, “practicing what I'm learning, me personally just organizing step by step what I need to do, how I need to do it and things that I can't do I need to work on.” Through repetition, students were able to adapt their preferred learning style in a way that best suites the skills needed for success.

Kevin went on to mention, “I've heard the different type of ingredients, how to prepare them. I've learned about various kinds of vegetables.” This competency of preparation learned through experiential learning granted Kevin, “hands on” application learned through theoretical knowledge. John and Luke spoke about very unique characteristics of industry competency not
taught through a text or traditional class but through practical experience. John specifically mentioned “if I want to apply for a sous chef, you’re a leader in a certain way” which is a competency learned through experience. Interviewee J went furtherer on to explain “you still have to give orders to people and like people will see you as an example of a kitchen crew member”.

John and Luke spoke further about industry competencies that were not traditionally taught in an educational environment but rather obtained through industry experience. As hospitality management education requires different skillsets, a more in depth curriculum will need to be developed to enhance student success rates.

Similarly, on the theme of adaptability, Luke mentioned, “you've got to be able to take stuff, 'cause there's going to be times where you get yelled at for no good reason, but you can't yell back, can't do anything.” They explained in more detail, “don't take things personally, and that's probably the 1 thing that people need to have”. The ability to maintain a professional demeanor through adverse situations was an underlying competency that students developed through practical experience and rely less on the traditional theoretical knowledge obtained in their education.

The current industry emphasis on an entry level employee’s ability to perform is often well-thought-out, in collaboration, as the provision of student’s insight of their experiential learning opportunities in regards to hospitality management education. This stems from interactions and exchanges related via hospitality management through curriculum integration of student and industry professionals. Students interviewed stated that there were areas such as industry support as well as technical competencies that could be strengthened within the current curriculum to better enhance their educational experience.
Conclusion

Industry expectations, in regards to graduating student’s ability to perform, required skillsets through their experiential learning opportunities in hospitality management education was one that will continue to evolve as new trends and techniques are developed. This interaction of industry and education from all the interactions needs to be integrated through hospitality management curriculum collaboration of the student and industry professionals. Current students whom participated in this research study stated in various stages throughout the super-ordinate theme of Industry Expectations that there were areas of the current curriculum design such as industry support through demonstrations, networking opportunities, ect… as well as technical competencies, such as basic knife skills and safety, sanitation, ect… that could be enhanced within the current curriculum to better strengthen current student’s opportunity for employment upon graduation.

Program Design

As part of the interview process, participants were asked questions regarding the program design and their interpretation of it in reference to experiential learning opportunities in hospitality management education. Their responses conveyed perceptions that a proper, well-designed program was key to undergraduate college students’ success and engagement in hospitality management programs. The theme of Program Design carried great depth as it outlined how faculty members played an essential role in influencing student engagement both within the experiential learning laboratories and beyond to help them seek networking and industry collaboration opportunities, and ultimately, career success. The participants described the impact of program design within experiential learning laboratories, and they analyzed how these opportunities helped or restricted them from developing the required competencies needed
to be successful in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge acquisition. Participants of the interviewees shared primarily positive examples of program design and participation in the hospitality management program as it transformed their educational experience from a traditional classroom to an experiential laboratory.

The participants reflected on how their perceptions of the hospitality management program related to the techniques used to apply theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom to the practical application in experiential learning laboratory. By being granted the opportunity to contemplate upon the superordinate theme of Program Design four separate subordinate themes emerged: Student/Faculty Interaction, Practical Application, Collaboration, and Significance of Experiential Learning. These four separate subordinate themes encapsulate the participant’s insight of how educational opportunities within an undergraduate hospitality management program allowed them the opportunity to acquire the skillset desired for entry level positions upon completion of their academic endeavors.

**Student/Faculty Interaction**

In the educational setting, the participants described multiple times and situations where building student/faculty relationships and trust were a beneficial component to their success. Some expressed that having a relationship with engaged faculty was very effective in their development of reaching their career goals. In short, when students perceived that faculty were effectively connecting them to both theory and practice within the curriculum design, they said they were more motivated to excel scholastically; for them, this balance and the interaction with engaged faculty facilitated a more well-rounded educational experience than when these factors were absent.
Those interviewed expressed satisfaction with the student-faculty interactions as it was one with great benefits. For example, as Amy stated “any questions that I have had concerning information not readily given during a lecture or a lab class, I've been able to ask my teachers and they've been more than willing to give that information to me”. By Amy developing open lines of communication with faculty relationships were enhanced.

Amy continued in describing the positive relationship with faculty: “I have loved interacting with all of the faculty involved in the culinary program.” Amy also mentioned the openness to communication: “They've all been very open to discussion, very open to suggestions, and more than happy to answer any questions or concerns that I've ever had, each in their own unique way.” Through positive interaction with faculty, Amy could demonstrate a comfort level which was a key component to communication.

Cliff was even more enthusiastic about the support received from the faculty: “they pushed me to do the best that I could do. You know, they weren't about to let us slack, for the most part.” Cliff also discussed that it was important that faculty gave, “enough direction to know what to do, but also give you enough freedom to have your own, the way you interpret it.” This flexible creativity, combining theory and practice in the student/faculty interactions and throughout the learning process was a common theme that emerged, even when participants admitted that faculty repeatedly challenged them. Cliff went on to mention that what stood out was that the faculty would be “challenging me where I have to have figure out what exactly I want the product to be, but [I was] given enough instruction in the beginning.”

Donald discussed how faculty members took the initiative to develop a relationship with the students that moved beyond the traditional classroom setting, providing mentorship and career developing coaching. “A few of my teachers have asked me the question, why have I been
doing this? They gave me a basic understanding of myself as in I'm asking myself, why am I doing this?” This participant concluded the following and expressed motivation because of these interactions: “basically my teachers are giving me a basic need of why am I doing this, why am I not doing this or how can I do it better.” Through the expansion of knowledge, Donald is able to view topics in an educated manner through the development of critical thinking techniques. These techniques were enhanced through the interaction of faculty challenging their students to think deeply.

As further elaborated, the student/faculty interactions influenced the proficiency of the acquisition of practical application skills. In experiential learning opportunities, the relationships between students and the faculty members were essential, especially in an educational setting such as the experiential learning laboratories. As Edward stated, during the educational processes practical application is first demonstrated, “when we get in the kitchen and we're doing something that they're pretty sure that we have no experience with, they will set it up and they will show us one or two times.” Edward also stressed the importance of repeated positive reinforcement and trust with faculty: “They'll walk us through the process until they're comfortable enough for us to just do it by ourselves.”

Edward went on to mention that, in the relationship between faculty and student, a back and forth between instruction and: “They'll give me like the guidelines of like what I'm asking for, and then see what I can come up with.” This student expressed that this kind of interaction permitted them to determine how to apply theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to the practical application in an experiential learning opportunity.

George shared that faculty understanding different learning styles in this process was essential; the faculty were sensitive to responding to the individual student’s needs based on the
dynamics of the interaction; “everybody learns differently, and by everybody learning differently, everybody retains stuff differently too.” George also said they felt, “I may not retain what somebody else retains. So, I might need a refresher.” This appeared to be common with hospitality management due to the complex combination of intertwining the theoretical knowledge with the practical application which plays a vital role in the individual learning process. George also responded, “I think it's all in getting to know your students and building that relationship to understand how they learn, you can't teach somebody if you don't know how they learn. You don't know how to reach them.” George also stated, “the biggest challenges for me are the big projects, so I guess, like assigning me those projects. It makes me come out of comfort zone” which was a process that requires time and experience to develop.

Howard mentioned the importance that faculty should, “get to know their students don't just be a professor, like be involved don't just be instructor. Be somebody that they can actually feel like they look up to, or actually feel like they can call on”. Thus, trust and communication were important factors to the student/faculty interactions in hospitality management curriculums particularly in the experiential learning laboratory where faculty attempted to simulate actual industry conditions of pressure in a way that was educational for the student. Taking individual learning styles into account and being approachable helped students to realize that faculty would help them combine theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom to a practical application to negotiate the changes that leadership in hospitality management careers increasingly required.

**Practical Application**

The interviewees stated that they believed that practical application was particularly significant in the experiential learning process because it allowed students to get involved with
true, “hands on” learning, to test knowledge with trial and error, learn from their mistakes, and to explore the potential gaps between theory and practice. The respondents asserted that students who had access to experiential learning opportunities that integrated theoretical knowledge with practical application had much higher success rates after graduation in obtaining and maintaining career positions. Amy described the importance of practical application experience:

“Maybe a little more dealing with the decorating icing, with cakes. Learning more about how to make the flowers and the things like that. There's so much you have to learn in the, in the advanced baking class. I think, maybe that would be something, maybe more classes or additional classes that dealt more with the more advanced baking. You know, the decorating of cakes the pastries and things like that.”

Through practical application, Amy mentioned that there still needed to be further development of skillsets. Advanced Baking techniques such as decorating cakes was an area that experiential learning could be enhanced through further application.

Bob made the following point that integration of technology in the labs had helped in the student’s ability to observe practical application in real time while being granted an opportunity to ask questions and receive instant feedback. “They have cameras with large screens in the, the kitchen, in the lab itself.” This, Bob stated, meant that practical application demonstrations could “be done in a way that if you're short, if you're tall, you can still see it, if you're not quite positioned right, you can still see it, cause it's up on a huge screen, right there in the kitchen.” The adaption of technology to practical application could be enhanced in a manner that granted students of different learning styles an opportunity to ask questions in real time demonstrations to further their understanding of a specific topic.
Bob replied sympathetically “I, myself am more of the hands-on learner. I learn better when I'm doing than when I'm being taught. I think it's, especially in an industry like the culinary industry.” The interviewees stated the fact that practical application has many benefits for them as students which enhances their educational experience. A true hands-on experiential learning environment can give undergraduate students a stronger baseline for the how to apply theoretical knowledge to the actual industry situations they will placed into upon graduation.

One component in a hospitality management curriculum (of the experiential learning component) was one that replicated what truly happened in the hospitality industry could be under emphasized due to lack of resources. Cliff mentioned this in his interview and spoke upon curriculum gaps that needed to be addressed for future student success, “Probably working with customers, because I think in the class, we focus so much on the production that you forget that I mean, you're cooking for people to eat.” Curriculum in experiential learning focused on certain aspects of practical application, but some basics of communication and the balance between cooking, serving, and customer service could be lost in translation if management was not adeptly trained and constantly aware of the service institution’s dynamics. Cliff emphasized the importance for leaders to understand this intersection of needs in the hospitality management setting: “It's not like math, or something like that, where it's all on paper, like someone's going to pay the money that they earned for whatever you're making, so you have to be willing to talk to them.”

Translating this need to the training setting, despite these limitations of creating true simulations, Donald responded, “labs are really beneficial to me…” The labs, Donald said, helped him make customers, “feel more comfortable with the food I'm making and the food that is being distributed to my customers and help my boss understand where I'm coming from.”
Donald also stated a theme that was expressed by other participants that when it came to practical application, more attention to learning styles of the individuals would be beneficial: “I'd spend less time on things that I already know how to do for sure.” This was a common thread amongst students with prior industry experience. Donald went on to mention, “I do need to learn some knife skills, some fabrications because I haven't done much fish”.

Kevin reflected on how experiential learning opportunities integrated the different components of the hospitality management training experience in the college setting. “the hands-on part, help me get ready because it teaches me how to use my senses,” which this individual said plays a vital role in production. Kevin went deeper in the description of the integration/application of theoretical knowledge and practical application:

“I can basically use my senses to determine if things are prepare correctly, because I've been through the experience of what food looks like as it's going through the preparation process, it enables me to use my five senses to prepare food and know if it's been properly prepared so that's what I like about the hands-on component.”

Through the hands-on application, Kevin developed the ability to problem solve through the process of trial and error. Through these experiences, Kevin was able to draw on previous experiences and apply skills he had learned.

The participants interviewed admitted that they understood that practical application permits students to see and figure out what is happening directly within the learning simulation. This was a proven way to apply theoretical knowledge in practical application particularly in an industry such as hospitality management. This was the reason why hands-on, experiential learning and curricula have become better received in educational settings in the industry and why vocational courses are increasingly committed to industry collaboration through direct
Donald made the statement that, having hands on experiences made students more efficient in application of desired skillsets. Cliff supported these claims:

“They're helping me, because even if I've done an aspect of whatever we're learning that day in class, I still get more of an explanation in the lab of what is to be done with that, so they're helping me because I'm getting more experience with every recipe that we're doing. I haven't thought about it, but show the person, do that with them, and then, let them do it on their own.”

Donald mentioned that the biggest benefit of experiential learning was the chance for recurrent practice of industry specific competencies. Skills are acquired by constantly repeating them. The interviewees expressed that they felt self-assured to apply a skill learned in the experiential learning laboratories with increased proficiency.

The respondents stated that the goal of experiential learning was the anticipation that students would be able to subsequently make on-the-spot choices that could affect an expected outcome; this, they noted, was gleaned from an experiential learning environment, which was critical in the way it stimulated the work experience.

**Collaboration**

Students interviewed expressed that faculty/student collaboration created an atmosphere of and a sense that they belonged to something bigger than themselves. They observed that faculty who were open to listening to the learning needs of students and could provide more effective instruction. In this sense, collaboration took on a different meaning; it move into a place of one generation of learners identifying with another.
To illustrate this assertion, Bob discovered that students could be heartened to ask faculty for overall scholastic guidance beyond the traditional curriculum. Such conversations supported students in defining how they would move forward in their professional and academic passions. As told by the Amy, “I have loved interacting with all the faculty, involved in the culinary program. They've all been very open to discussion, very open to suggestions, and more than happy to answer any questions or concerns that I've ever had”. Through interpersonal communication Amy developed a level of comfort in reference to guidance on future endeavors whether it be scholastically or professionally.

Bob expressed that conversations and hands-on experiential education with faculty helped along the spectrum of role modeling and future academic pursuits. Bob mentioned that the faculty were very helpful due to they had the capacity to help these conversations happen. In the hospitality management industry, like any experts in their field, faculty wanted their students to achieve recognition, and they wanted their students to become leaders in the profession. In this study, the theme of these informal conversations – or “collaborations” – emerged as important components in the training process, although these interactions were highly unrecognized in the literature. Cliff made the point, "Most...faculty members enjoy conversation with students – that's why we turn out to be professors – and will happily do so when the chance comes up."

Faculty members play an essential role in influencing college students’ engagement, particularly in the community college setting, through their interactions with students both inside and outside of classrooms and in providing them networking guidance so they could move into the hospitality management industry. Most of those interviewed agreed that an experiential learning environment could give undergraduate students not only a much better feel for training
material, and the capacity to pass it on, but they received examples of mentorship that would also help them model behaviors in the work setting to be effective leaders and managers.

**Significance of Experiential Learning**

The interviewees understood that experiential learning is defined as, "learning by reflection on doing." (Steel & Sanders, 2007) The interviewees stated that they understood that most students would depend on their experience and reflection in the specific subject matter both in their educational and workplace experiences. Interviewees expressed that they believed that higher education could play a significant role in addressing problems of industry trends by increasing the possibilities for both experiential learning and industry collaboration, to build skill sets and networking. This combination, will offer hospitality management programs an opportunity to guarantee that graduates are well-trained upon graduation.

The dynamics of both the institutions and the hospitality industry as it changes are complex. Yet, Amy and Cliff both spoke about the importance of how experiential learning benefits students. They said this aspect of their training program left them with a, "more profound understanding of the soft skills companies in today's market so significantly pursue."

Due to the experiential learning component of the curriculum, students said they were capable of applying theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom and cohort with both individuals and in a team setting. They had a chance to actively assess their abilities through experiential learning experiences and to apply it to their specific vocation.

Amy said the following: “hands-on learning, actually doing that which I am taught in a lecture setting”. This was true application of experiential learning and a component that students had a stronger grasp of as they matriculated through the program. Bob said, “experienced education mean to me so many things because there are so many things I didn't know when I get
to culinary school.” This was a common response amongst interviews but Bob went on to mention, “I learn some new tools help me better in my life on my cooking experience in my workplace”. Cliff said the following about learning in the program “you're not just sitting at a desk beside someone talk to you actually, in the field, or in the classroom”.

Amy, Bob and Cliff agreed that students search to achieve certain skillset and results from experiential laboratories as well as: applying theoretical knowledge they had obtained in the traditional classroom, being valued as an individual with the opportunity to share their knowledge and education, and finally securing future employment.

Donald said the following about experience in learning the techniques: "It gives me a boost and personal experience in learning the techniques, the ingredients and what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. Then, gives me more experience than just reading it from a book." Though learning through experience was a baseline for experiential learning, the core was comprehended differently as Edward stated the following about being intrigued by hands-on work: “it means a lot more hands on work, which intrigues me because I can't sit and do book work as well as I can physical work with my hands.";

Frank mentioned the necessity required for job acquirement “Well, for me, it means learning what's necessary to get into a job that I want.” As George viewpoint was from an educational perspective “experiential learning, for me, is vital to my education. It's helping me gain experience in the field that I'm trying to work in.

Within this theme of experiential learning, to the interviewees, they understood that experiential learning is the procedure of learning through experience, and is more precisely well-defined as "learning by reflection on doing." This theme explored the fact that the hospitality industry is progressively looking for an increase in positions that ask for a bachelor's degree.
This theme explored the lived experiences of those that were aware of this setback in the industry. Most of the participants believed that experiential learning was beneficial to them and that it needed to be offered more.

**Conclusion**

Program design in regards to those whom participated within the current research study was an area that needs continuous adaption as the industry expectations for those whom are graduating become greater and the students will require greater depths of knowledge to be successful. Within the super-ordinate theme, students expressed that the current design of the curriculum was one where they are educated in a manner through which experiential learning was consistent and well-integrated throughout the academic experience. Experiential learning laboratories intertwined within the current curricula allowed students to acquire theoretical knowledge through practical application. This technique is one in which students are granted educational experiences that will not only help them better prepare for future employment in the hospitality industry but how to collaborate and problem solve; two key components of a successful career.

**Student Strengths and Weaknesses**

This theme revealed how experiential learning was central to the undergraduate programs for students in hospitality management. By tradition, the hospitality business does not have many managers who have acquired management skills through a recognized educational track. However, for managerial positions, the hospitality industry progressively seeks employees who have a least of a bachelor's degree; therefore, there is a short supply of competent workers for upper-level positions inside all sections of the hospitality industry. This theme explored the lived experiences of students aware of this gap in industry leadership and how they sought to fill it.
The manner through which graduates obtain general knowledge and applied skill sets in the course of their study is essential to establishing a foundation for their success in the hospitality industry. The interviewees discussed both strengths and weaknesses related to various variables, particularly as they related to experiential learning and its adaptation of the required skills essential to effective entry level success. As the interviewees have identified, the competencies of experiential learning from which new skill sets were derived where theory was applied were key elements in determining success in the field.

**Educational Assets**

Experiential learning is an educational format where participants are granted opportunities to apply application to theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom. The students interviewed for this study pointed to this aspect of their training as the greatest strength within their hospitality management education. For example, Amy explained: “All of the experience, that I've gained, by being here, in particular through the intern program, it enables you to learn more about the back-of-the-house issues and to order and to keep up with inventory and things like that.” Amy also mentioned that experiential learning increased their confidence to enter the workplace proficiently. She said, “I think that because of all of that as well as the excellent information I gain through the individual classes, I'd be great in any position I was given and hopefully will run my place one day”.

As already mentioned, experiential learning is characterized by experience through application. Most of those in the interviewees found that this style of education granted them opportunities to better enhance their learning through true application. Amy stated “I tend to be very open-minded, so I would have to say that as opposed to my opinion changing, I have gained an idea, which is that this is a great program." Similarly, Bob also commented that experiential
learning helped to transfer classroom knowledge for hands-on use with multiple processes and multi-tasking in the high-powered kitchen setting: “I think I got more strength for the kitchen, when I say cooking how can I deal with, food”. As students matriculated through their educational experience, comfort levels developed in areas more so than in others. This was a form of practical application to theoretical knowledge based on positive reinforced experiences.

Amy said that experiential learning helped students apply logic learned in the classroom to the preparation of ingredients in the fast-past commercial kitchen setting, particularly jumping into the high-paced world of hospitality management. The combination of classroom learning and experiential learning, the interviewee said, helped to become more efficient in the field even when feeling ill-prepared for changing situations. “I had no idea what I would get into when I got into culinary arts…I just basically jumped into it.”

Cliff mentioned that the combination of classroom instruction and hands-on practical experience helped increase attention to detail, which was a key asset, “I take the time to make sure that I've read the recipes, I've looked at them, I've gotten what I need, and I'm not just taking a recipe and not taking the time to read it.” This attention to detail and application of knowledge was applied through various segments of the curricula.

George asserted that experiential learning was powerful to customer service and teamwork skill building; these abilities cannot be learned strictly through theoretical knowledge but required praxis, “I'm a people person, but it's more confirmed with the experience that I've gained in going to school all these years and working in the industry part time, it’s helping me learn how to use that skill more”. Through educational experiences George had been able to develop a level of confidence through which they considered to be a positive asset.
Howard similarly said that one of the biggest strengths that experiential learning revealed was the ability to work in a team environment and to adapt to all kinds of personalities. “My greatest strength is working with people because I get along with people very well…some of them, they can be, I mean, feisty out there, but we [learned we] have to get along with them”.

John talked about being a hard worker as a strength, and that was reinforced through the experiential learning process which reaffirmed that success in leadership in the hospitality industry requires time and dedication. John said that one lesson acquired from the experiential learning process was, “I want to give to other people, that you can work hard and achieve what you want. I’ve never been fired before, like never had terminated. I think my, my real strength is that I, I work hard.”

Ilene mentioned that through the education process – combining theory about the changing industry with experiential learning -- they came to an understanding that imagination was a strong asset to have in hospitality management because it was continuously evolving. “My head will sometimes go with food, it starts from point A and ends up on point Z in no time.” The combination of theoretical instruction and practical application in the program, brought a recognition that it was important to, “hone in on that, and not just be as wild, but have, give that imagination direction”.

The strengths of students were individually defined primarily through the application of skills learned with experiential learning opportunities. By taking theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom students were granted an opportunity to apply practical application. Each interviewee had different concepts of strengths but the core related back to their hospitality management educational experiences.
Educational Deficiencies

The challenges of the program combining theoretical/classroom instruction and experiential learning, respondents said, helped them identify weaknesses and areas for continuous improvement. This process, they noted, helped them identify that, in order to succeed in such a fast-paced industry constantly undergoing change, their skills, vision and knowledge must continuously evolve.

Amy stated, “I’ve had prior experience just cooking at home, but other things, like the knife skills and with more practice you gain speed. My biggest weakness and where I would need to do the most work on.” This was common amongst hospitality management education as not all students had prior industry experience. Donald made the point that, by walking through the experiential learning experience, and working on a team, they learned more about their weaknesses. “In a dynamic setting like a fast paced, high quality kitchen, all team members need to own up to their shortcomings for the enterprise to succeed.” Donald also stated, “My weaknesses are …, I’ve been working on them, and I’ve been working really hard trying to make my weaknesses either into a strength or get rid of my weaknesses so far.” Being able to identify weaknesses that needed improvement was continuously reinforced in education as a way to grow within as an individual.

In the interview process, Edward shared, “my main weakness when I first came here was I thought, on the culinary side, I was going to do terrible”. George also mentioned that previous material taught throughout the program needed to be reiterated -- skills could be forgotten if not reinforced on a daily basis. Teamwork was essential to this process. “I need refreshers on the technical stuff, like measuring, and ... Well, not really measuring, but measuring conversions. Like, I don't think that I got enough practice with that.” This was a traditional thought process to
someone entering hospitality management educational without prior industry experiences to draw from.

Ilene mentioned in their interview, “I forgot how to do all the standard recipes, and what was it, popularity index.” By being able to see this deficiency as a student, this individual was able to internalize that “I need to work more”. Ilene also mentioned, “Being able to remember everything that you need to know in the kitchen is very hard. I don't have a great memory.”

Teamwork and a modicum of peer pressure was important for Kevin when regarding overcoming professional deficiencies: “I would say my greatest weakness is trying to work at the same pace as everybody else in the food service institution”.

Interviewees also identified that becoming distracted in such a high paced environment was problematic. This identifies an area in which experiential learning instructors in hospitality management could improve by training leaders to provide employees with regular breaks and workshops to improve focus.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, with the superordinate theme of Students Strength and Weakness, the participants could identify that individual learning within hospitality management education is one in which they were granted academic experiences where theoretical knowledge gained within the traditional classroom could be applied in practical applications to strengthen their knowledge required upon graduation. This super-ordinate theme was able to identify that current students had a greater opportunity for success when they were able to apply current knowledge in scenarios that were relevant to the career they have chosen. Through this application of “trial and error” they identified areas where they had confidence in as the progress through the current
curriculum such as basic culinary skills as well as areas that needed further development such as managerial responsibilities.

Summary

Within an undergraduate hospitality management program, how students perceived and made sense of their involvement in experiential learning opportunities within the curriculum was an area of research that would continue to evolve as the hospitality industry expectations increase and students desire for a stronger baseline of skillsets advance. This trip discussed the results from a qualitative study by using the data analysis gathered from twelve undergraduate students enrolled within a hospitality management program focusing on the educational benefits obtained through experiential learning laboratories within their current curriculum. The chapter involved an overview of the purpose for the study, data results gathered through individual interviews from the participants, and a detailed description of the current results. The super-ordinated themes of 1) Industry Support, with subthemes of 1.1 Industry Support and 1.2 Technical Competencies 2) Program Design, with subthemes of 2.1 Student/Faculty Interaction, 2.2 Practical Application, 2.3 Collaboration and 2.4 Significance of Experiential Learning and 3) Student Strengths and Weaknesses, with subthemes of 3.1 Educational Assets and 3.2 Educational Deficiencies emerged from the data were described through the various sections. Finally, a composite description of the student’s perception of the experiential learning opportunities were shared and analyzed against the research question.

The findings in this chapter conveyed that student’s perceptions of experiential learning differed based on their learning style. Even though the diverse curriculum of hospitality management education granted students the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical application, it was one that needed continuous adaption to industry expectations and standards.
Those whom participated within the research study understood the benefits of achievement through experiential learning laboratories. This information will add significantly to the current research as it would allow hospitality management programs an opportunity to not only satisfy the current need of the industry and students but would allow for future curriculum growth.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications of Practice

In hospitality management education at the post-secondary level, the obtainment of proper hospitality industry required skillsets through a specifically designed undergraduate curriculum with multiple experiential learning modules was the best way to maintain sustainability, as constant evolution is necessary for new professionals to succeed in the hospitality industry upon graduation (Nelson & Dopson, 2001). Specific industry skillsets unique to each undergraduate course in a hospitality management curriculum required adaptive learning according to the evolving dynamics of the hospitality industry. Chapter Five discusses how the various qualitative approaches attempted to make use of the undergraduate student experiences gained through experiential learning laboratories as it contributed to hospitality management undergraduate curriculum development. A multitude of opportunities existed to promote the infusion of hands-on experiential learning through the traditional aspect of program design. The present study, by reviewing existing peer reviewed literature, guided by the framework of Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, and by incorporating new data through an interpretive phenomenological analysis, has found that experiential learning improved both the educational experience of undergraduate students in hospitality management education, and it effectively assisted undergraduate students in not only obtaining future industry employment, but in meeting current hospitality industry expectations of current graduates.

While examining the different findings from individual interviews conducted of current undergraduate students enrolled in a hospitality management program at a community college, multiple educational aspects were considered, including industry expectations which consisted of industry support and technical competency, program design which consisted of student/faculty interaction, practical application, collaboration, significance of experiential learning, and student
strengths and weaknesses which consisted of educational assets, educational deficiencies. Literature examined in Chapter Two supported many of these findings analyzing experiential learning opportunities and corresponded with the perceived benefits outlined by Kolb’s (1984) assessment of learning styles and the experiential learning cycle.

Chapter five discussed specific recommendations that could help current undergraduate hospitality management programs adapt to the challenges and issues they may face with current curriculum design about experiential learning opportunities/laboratories where hands-on application was applied through trial and error. It focused simultaneously on current undergraduate students’ perspectives of their curriculum as well as the hospitality industry expectations. In addition, Chapter five discussed future recommendations for relating hospitality management curriculum to the needs of hospitality industry expectations. In conclusion, it suggested venues for future research about hospitality management education and the integration of experiential learning laboratories to better enhance an undergraduate’s educational experience.

The phenomenon of experiential learning in hospitality management education is a continuous process of development that evolves as new procedures and techniques are developed on a continuous basis within the industry. The new desired model in hospitality management education is looking for properly prepared industry professionals as the primary focus of post-secondary education; therefore, of hospitality management education in cultivating the future of the industry (Alhelalat, 2015). Current hospitality industry techniques required for success advance with rapidity, and consistently incorporating them into post-secondary curriculums to keep pace with the desired outcomes of undergraduate students within a hospitality management program is essential for the student’s success upon graduation and entrance into the industry (Alhealat, 2015).
The multidisciplinary technique of experiential learning laboratories helped students gain both theoretical knowledge in the traditional classroom and hone their practical application of a multiplicity of practical skillsets in an experiential learning laboratory. There is not one, finite undergraduate curriculum that could be universally applied across separate divisions within the hospitality industry; variety, creativity and flexibility in teaching strategies/techniques and their dynamic implementation are required to meet student, industry and ultimately managerial and employee demands of the hospitality industry. Experiential learning curriculums need to have the innovativeness and flexibility to meet these theoretical and applied objectives, by incorporating various close to “real life” laboratories and scenarios within the set curricula; providing internship and networking opportunities was also essential to student success in the professional environment as not all educational outcomes could be implemented in a specific curriculum. The primary objective of academia is to have their graduates graduate with a better foundation of theoretical knowledge and practical application skillsets than when they entered the hospitality management program (Gursoy, Rahman, & Swanger, 2012). Faculty and students alike must learn to adapt to the diverse and dynamic hospitality industry, which, as the present study has documented, presented unique challenges to the students and to the administrators who oversee structuring and implementing post-secondary programs that facilitate the type of education and praxis.

Scholarly research, as outlined in previous chapters, had affirmed the validity and practical applicability of Kolb’s (1984) theory outlining learning styles and experiential learning cycle. The results of the individual student interviews presented in Chapter four confirmed that it was through positive interactions within a specific experiential learning task that an individual could comprehend complex and evolving theoretical and practical concepts for effective hands-
on application of the material at various entrance points of the spectrum of learning, achieving a specific desired outcome of a set task. Keenly designed experiential learning curriculums in hospitality management education could effectively bridge the theory-practice-employment opportunity gap; it is the bridge between theory, vocational skills training, and sustainable professional success. The results presented in Chapter four revealed, students in general and specifically within hospitality management experiential learning curriculums, simultaneously acquired and integrated several sets of knowledge to achieve several different levels of competency on a specifically designed task.

Hands-on simulations of the hospitality management industry environment in an experiential learning laboratory setting combined with multiple internship opportunities where students are expected to apply practical application and theoretical knowledge daily within a setting where the consequences of their decision-making and actions are concrete. The traditional methods of learning which have taken place within the current curriculum and the ability to apply acquired theoretical knowledge was reinforced in the professional setting, completing Kolb’s (1984) full cycle of education and application of concepts learned. In the context of the findings of this study, and in light of the theoretical framework chosen as a lens, the following themes and components provide conclusions to the data analysis, policy recommendations, and suggestions for future research: Industry Expectations, Program Design, and Student Strengths and Weaknesses.

**Industry Expectations**

Successful post-secondary hospitality management programs have educated, well-versed faculty who fully understand what the students’ needs are per the trends of current industry
expectations. In hospitality management education, great depth of knowledge in the hospitality field is needed to successfully guide students within experiential learning laboratories, and to combine that hands-on acquisition of required industry skills with knowledge and theory presented in the traditional classroom setting. It is extremely difficult to satisfy the hospitality industry expectations for current students with traditional academic curriculums that do not apply various forms of practical application to theoretical concepts learned. Early foundational research by Cooper and Shepherd (1997) asserted that the hospitality industry seeks practical and transferable skills, while post-secondary institutions emphasize the conceptualization of theories and materials specific to the discipline. Furthermore, Moscardo and Norris (2003) asserted that the bridging the theoretical and experiential aspects of training and curriculum was particularly critical, thus, the desired format of the curriculum design must consider both the rationale of the hospitality industries expectations, in combination with the specific curriculum designated by an accrediting body.

Hospitality Management programs need to offer an educational outlet that not only strengthens employability opportunities of current hospitality management graduates but grants them a strong foundation in the industry (Gursoy, Rahman, & Swanger, 2012). As the presented study revealed, this integration of input from students, faculty, and industry professional’s was even more important, and it confirmed the demand for valid experiential learning opportunities to be inculcated, particularly because of the rapid evolutions and changes that characterize hospitality management (Kwortnik Jr, Robert J, 2003).

Cognitively and practically, students may rapidly forget, for example, what they read in a text on knife skills, safety, or sanitation. But, through experiential learning it might be said that proficiency becomes part of their muscle memory, creating a reservoir beyond thinking,
grounded in having done the action, on which they can draw in a high paced environment.

Sissom & Adams (2013) emphasized that for strong job competency, a combination of hands-on practical application combined with a collection of interrelated theoretical knowledge and practical skillsets could be enhanced through proper educational initiatives integrated throughout a properly design curriculum. The current notion was grounded in the concept that theoretical knowledge gained in the traditional classroom, when applied through practical experience, reinforced and enhanced clearly defined outcomes of a set curricula. The undergraduate hospitality management program adopted this technique as an approved way of training/educating, and the programs increasingly acknowledged the importance of seeking guidance and support from a broad spectrum of industry representatives.

To summarize and further support previous research of Sisson & Adams (2013), the current hospitality industry expectations of practical exposure for students as well as unique and initiative experiential learning opportunities must become more strategically incorporated to the curriculum to enhance student success. Post-secondary institutions must realize that they need to not only meet the student’s goals within the curriculum and program, but they must respond to the complex and transformative trends in the hospitality industry as well, particularly as the food and service industry continues to be constantly energized and renovated by globalizing trend (Johnson, 2015). By considering not only the undergraduate student but the hospitality industry as a whole, the educational opportunities for interactive learning, educational institutions need to create a dynamic environment for the acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and practical application that can effectively respond to the challenges the hospitality industry faces daily (Okeiyi, Finley, & Postel, 1994).
According to Sisson & Adams (2013), to satisfy the desired requirements of the continuously evolving hospitality industry post-secondary institutions must continually adapt and modify the critical proficiencies necessitated by the hospitality industry and revise the current curriculums to meet these requests to achieve much-needed integrated educational outcomes. As the current study has documented, industry representatives are concerned that current post-secondary institutions which offer undergraduate hospitality management programs cannot properly prepare graduates whom need to be equipped with the latest techniques and skills acquired through practical applications. The intensity and rapidity of change in the hospitality industry requires institutions of post-secondary education focusing on hospitality management to continuously revisit, evaluate, and adapt their curriculum, at least on a yearly basis to help prepare students for success upon graduation according to current and previous literature.

**Program Design**

The unique situation faced by the post-secondary institution is the current lack of effective program models that properly incorporate and execute true experiential learning. Foucar, Szocki and Bolsing (1999) defined a properly designed curriculum as one that assimilates theoretical knowledge received in a traditional classroom with true practical application for students, largely due to educational time restraints placed upon the curriculum from the institution in which they reside. Unlike other fields of education, hospitality management is extremely vocational in nature and becoming competent within a specific skillset such as decorating a cake or using a knife properly to produce a specific knife cut requires years of continuous repetition to become competent at the individual task. After Gursoy, Rahman & Swagner (2012) reviewed previous studies by Dopson & Tas (2004), Kay & Russette (2000) and Okeiyi, Finely & Postel (1994), they concluded that establishing a hospitality management
curriculum for post-secondary institutions involved three mechanisms: applicable theoretical knowledge, practical skillset, and standards. Thus, designing curriculum for undergraduate programs in hospitality management education must ensure that experiential learning opportunities implement both the foundational components of hospitality management and the latest techniques of the hospitality industry to assure that the education these students are provided bridges theory and practice to meet the complex needs of the hospitality management field (Goodenough & Page, 1993).

However, when the experiential learning techniques are not properly integrated within the curriculum with very specific outcomes replicated, post-secondary institutions face possible rebuffs from industry leaders for not producing graduates whom can perform with excellence and in a comprehensive manner. Barrows and Johan (2008) recommended that hospitality management programs needed to focus on the delivery of quality education, engage in applied research, and develop strong ties with industry to further professionalize the industry. The hospitality management program design should be such that the students continuously apply theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom to the practical applications gleaned through experiential learning opportunities throughout all levels of the curriculum. Again, allotting ample time to the experiential learning component in the curriculum is essential, due to the constant repetition of a specific task and the hands-on, real life simulations so that industry required skills become almost instinctual for students upon graduation.

Gursoy et al. (2012) outlined the complex combination of theory, practice, specialization, and adaptability that characterized hospitality management education and the current industry. The primary objective of academia, according to Gursoy et al. (2012), was to have current graduates complete a program with stronger theoretical knowledge and practical skillsets.
Traditionally, undergraduate hospitality management curriculums sequence the courses within the program that are more basic or fundamental in nature at the beginning of the sequence to allow for a controlled integration and advance in technique and knowledge through more difficult skillsets to maintain the students’ interests in the hospitality management program; this in turn helps to develop fundamentally sound competencies which commonly lead to direct placements of the graduates after they complete their undergraduate program. Thus, the hospitality curriculum needs to prioritize subject areas per perceived importance by industry practitioners, and this prioritization needs to be an up-to-date reflection of the ever-changing needs of the hospitality industry (Gursoy et al., 2012).

Leadership is a trait that remains imperative to the hospitality industry, and it develops as a student progresses through their curriculum, both in the traditional classroom and in the context of experiential learning laboratories. As a student progresses through the desired curriculum of hospitality management, the faculty or hospitality industry representatives give a large amount of direction. The experiential learning aspect of the set curriculum helps students internalize both theory and concrete skills, as well as leading the student to apply past educational/industry experiences to dynamic, present situations to find solutions to the lesson or task being performed within the experiential experience. As Roberts (2009) emphasized, gaps may exist regarding the design and delivery being instructed on appropriate leadership techniques within experiential learning laboratories strategically placed within the curriculum which are crucial in the educational development of undergraduate students because it gives the student the freedom to apply theoretical knowledge obtained in the classroom with practical applications in an educational setting where trial and error are commonly excepted.
Barrows and Johan (2008) recommended that hospitality management programs
concentrate on conveying quality instruction. The desired educational outcome can be
accomplished/modified through varying experiential learning opportunities within the program,
design such as leadership of a student run event or in collaboration with the hospitality industry
through their internship experience. Through various experiential learning opportunities, the
faculty can strategically align relevant theoretical knowledge such as safety and sanitation
guidelines with practical application within a laboratory as students see leadership modeled by
faculty and other professionals within the institution. In addition, students are afforded a vast
amount of opportunities for practicing their acquired skills and sharing their wisdom with peers
through the experiential learning process of laboratories. Therefore, it is essential that these
programs close the gap between what is taught to students and the industry’s expectations of the
graduates they hire (Okeiyi et al., 1994).

As Pavesic (1993) observed, curriculum review, particularly of the experiential
component, must be an ongoing process. Compartmentalized scholarship does not replicate the
“real world”, thus, the experiential learning laboratory must be adapted to create an
interdisciplinary learning experience that is similar to what is considered “real-world” learning.
Previous chapters elaborated on the trend that students prefer enrolling in classes that have
extensive opportunity for practical applications required for the hospitality industry upon
graduation. These educational opportunities allow the students to use the theoretical knowledge
they are receiving in the traditional classroom in a setting that allows for practical experiential
growth. As Li, Lee, & Law (2012) emphasized, students traditionally learn through theoretical
knowledge and practical application. Undergraduate hospitality management programs offering
curriculum design that incorporates various experiential learning techniques should focus on
developing strategic relationships within the hospitality industry that support their programs to better enhance the educational experience for their students. The combination of experiential laboratory experiences, which often include demonstrations from highly qualified industry leaders, are vital to the student’s educational development and to their professional and future employment success. Program design, therefore, needs to not only focus on the academic requirements placed upon them from their accrediting body: it must be balanced with the concrete acquisition of practical skillsets taught through strong and relevant collaboration offered through the hospitality industry support. This is the significance of experiential learning and its application to the hospitality industry.

Practical knowledge gained through experiential learning opportunities such as the laboratories as well as theoretical application of the traditional classroom instills different industry levels of aptitude within the graduate. Moore (2010) described some of the origins and definitions of and contradictions inherent to experiential learning. Numerous methods used for true experiential learning share common theoretical fundamentals. Many cite John Dewey (1938) drawing out the simple principle, ‘experience is the best teacher’. It becomes evident that proper and continuous communication between the industry strategic partners and the hospitality management programs should be ongoing to shape the development and design of all experiential learning opportunities, with the goal of training qualified employees who can rapidly and adeptly become leaders in the hospitality industry after graduation.

Not only should there be experiential learning opportunities, but the very curriculum academic and practical should be in tune with the preferences and needs of the hospitality industry. McIver, Fitzsimmons and Flanagan (2016) observed that decisions about instructional methods are becoming increasingly more complex and should reflect the changing trends of the
workforce and of student demographics. Through experiential techniques, hospitality management students should graduate as industry competent professionals who are equipped with applied theoretical knowledge and sharpened sets of practical skills.

When it comes to designing the hospitality management program in a technique driven manner, the curriculum sequence across semesters of experiential learning courses are an essential component that must be evaluated and adapted on a continuous basis. McIver et al. (2016), concluded that post-secondary institutions should assess which educational techniques are best suited to the learning objectives of the institution. The effectiveness of a proper course and curricula design within hospitality management programs is based on the student’s perceptions gained through applying theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom to practical applications of experiential learning laboratories to properly place them in the hospitality industry upon graduation. It emphasized that it is essential for educators working from an experiential learning approach to match the desired learning objective of the students. Graduates from hospitality management programs are being welcomed into the industry with high levels of expectations. There is a strong emphasis being placed on the undergraduate hospitality management programs, as well as the hospitality industry, to ensure that industry specific techniques and outcomes are being implemented and taught in a manner that drives student success.

**Student Strengths and Weaknesses**

Hospitality management education at the undergraduate post-secondary level is advancing in a way that students can overcome their current weaknesses through experiential learning opportunities. This allows them to further develop their strengths as both students and
professionals. The educational needs pertaining to specific curriculum design and proper execution for current undergraduate students is evolving continuously. The goal is for students to comprehend theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom with practical applications in experiential learning laboratories relevant to hospitality management. Cooper et al. (2004) assumed that deeper learning occurred as the student increased his or her level of involvement in the activity. Lee (2008), ascertained that this thought blends well with Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle, learning is most effective when it is grounded in experience.

Compared to years past, today’s hospitality industry leaders have established higher expectations of graduates, a trend which has instilled in undergraduate’s students the desire to move far beyond traditional academic training history and theory of the industry. According to Cooper et al. (2004), Dewey (1938) specified in the literature that it is not adequate for the instructor to simply communicate the desired material to the student or for the student to contribute in an activity in order for proper education to transpire. Students heading for mid-21st Century leadership careers in the hospitality industry are focused more on experiential learning opportunities such as practical hands-on laboratories that apply applicable hospitality industry techniques essential to their incremental success in the hospitality industry after graduation.

As previously explored in earlier chapters, McLeod (2013) discussed the crucial importance of employing different types of knowledge-based learning approaches and techniques that not only focus on the theoretical knowledge of a specific topic but the practical applications of the topic as well. Dewey (1938) claimed that for real learning to occur at deeper levels, education needed to be grounded in experience, and experience needed to be accompanied by the student’s active reflection on his or her experience. Students interviewed in this research study recognized this need when reflecting upon their current curriculum design of their undergraduate
hospitality management courses, which related back to their own personal perceptions of their educational strengths and weaknesses as they matriculated through the curriculum. According to Hoover and Whitehead (1975), true experiential learning occurs when a participant thoroughly processes desired information in an educational environment summarized by a high level of dynamic participation.

The current research study revealed that experiential focused learning opened multiple domains for practical application opportunities to students whom traditionally failed in a curriculum that was solely based on a traditional theoretical competence. Chavan (2011) discussed the dynamic, mutually enhancing relationship between experiential learning, the theoretical acquisition of knowledge, and integration into and advancement in the social world of employment. In short, there was something profound that occurs cognitively and educationally for many students in the learning process when they could connect theoretical information to its real-life application through experiential learning experiences.

Practical application, through various industry-standard techniques, are known to bring student success through the reiteration of knowledge obtained previously in a traditional classroom by trial and error. As Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) found the vast majority of teaching and training in education and work continued to be conventional, narrow, and highly prescribed, rather than experiential. Student motivation to succeed and eventual success is even more enhanced if students perceived that industry specific practical experiences will help them access continuous and incremental opportunities for career advancement, particularly leadership positions in the hospitality industry.
Reflecting on the data gathered from this study, and the researcher’s background in the hospitality industry, students’ strengths and weaknesses might be attributed to the current program design itself, rather than to their perceived incompetence. Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) emphasized, experiential learning was not just, “field work” or “praxis” which connects learning to real life situations. Students entering the hospitality industry upon graduation are expected to perform very detailed hospitality industry competencies at accelerated and varied levels, specific to the establishment or facility in which they obtained employment.

Many students, depending on their undergraduate hospitality management program and their choice of courses within the curriculum, may not have sufficient educational opportunities to reach a high level of competence in certain skills. This might be due to the limited amount of time granted within some experiential learning laboratories. Regardless of the type and duration of experiential learning, it all potentially has value in the workplace. There are many benefits beyond the arena of the classroom for students who participate in such forward-thinking education programs, including personal, academic, work, and career related outcomes (Dressler & Keeling, 2004).

Therefore, the question remains, is the lack of skill proficiency due to the “weakness” of the student, or of the specific hospitality management program? Simultaneously, undergraduate students may become frustrated about the mismatch between the level of proficiency they have obtained in their program, and the expectations for competence put forth by the hospitality industry. Often, the hospitality industry is far more intricate and advanced than what the student has been taught through their curriculum. Thus, we return to the importance of providing the student with the most ample and applicable opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge and to enhance their practical skills through experiential learning in the undergraduate setting.
The hospitality industry has had difficulties intertwining the educational goals set for by the institution with the desired outcomes of a true experiential learning module. Through the exchange of contacts with experts involved in experiential learning opportunities, students learn the soft skill of creating a good rapport with people in the ranks of the various organizations, which moves them a step closer to obtaining permanent employment (Glenn, et al., 2012). The current deficiency needs to be addressed at all levels of the current curriculum, because with an appropriate level of mentorship, what was previously thought of as student weaknesses can be transformed into student strengths. Gursoy et al. (2012) emphasized that representatives from the hospitality industry who engage with hospitality management programs and student internships/mentorship must use their resources to guide the student towards true practical application of theoretical knowledge by providing them with directed and engaged learning opportunities that permit them to grow educationally in practical knowledge, and to apply what they have learned in their undergraduate curriculum. Undergraduate students should be given every opportunity to identify their strengths and address their weaknesses through these learning experiences, a process which will help them internally evaluate their progress and to seek the support they need to succeed and advance.

A multitude of experiences can facilitate experiential learning, such as advanced level laboratories for students through which they can strengthen their knowledge through trial and error and identify “soft skill” areas of concern that need to be developed such as collaboration amongst fellow classmates. Curricula can then be specifically designed to transform the classroom into a more relevant experience for the students (Gursoy et al., 2012). These experiential learning opportunities, when accompanied by engaged guidance from faculty, can lead to very insightful outcomes in the comprehension of the intersection between theoretical
knowledge and different practical application techniques; however, each student brings their own combination of ability to integrate classroom knowledge with its intended application. The goal, however, from the vantage point of the faculty member, should be to help the student take full advantage of the whole curriculum design to strategically incorporate all of its components, and to challenge themselves to advance integrally in ways that they may not have thought of. Industry internships, for example, when they are well designed and in sync with the curriculum, help students set benchmarks often weekly through which they can evaluate their successes and setbacks.

Experiential learning generates knowledge through reflections of everyday experiences, some of which may be generated by the learners themselves inside and outside the traditional classroom setting (Neill, 2006). The transfer of learned information from the classroom to the industry deeply enhances the student’s ability to make industry-type decisions with confidence. Students are more motivated when they are provided opportunities for practice and feedback based on lived experiences (Ambrose et al., 2010). The experiential learning opportunities should be such that the student is provided different scenarios within which to apply theoretical knowledge to practical application. The technique ideally should be accompanied with time to individually, collectively, and/or with a mentor interpret the experience through reflection, and be granted time to adjust process regarding the desired outcome (Kolb, 1984).

In this interactive context, a student can develop an aptitude that hones decision-making proficiencies, allows them to reflect upon previous experiences (positive or negative), and leads them to conceptualize how they can address their weaknesses and further develop their strengths in a way that will grant them an opportunity to succeed. The capacity to self-evaluate, analyze, and adjust is essential to the success of hospitality management professionals in general. As Kolb
(1984) emphasized, students who are trained through experiential learning programs acquire a comprehensive and adaptable set of competencies, of which reflection is particularly important, allowing them to continue to flexibly incorporate new information into practice in order to adapt to change and solve problems. This process is essential if students are to successfully bridge the gap between the educational and the career settings.

**Conclusion**

As Kolb (1984) observed that for students to be engaged in an educational activity, they need four separate abilities—real experience, philosophical reflection, intangible conceptualization and dynamic experimentation. The goal of the current research study was to gain greater insights regarding the experiences of undergraduate students in hospitality management education and to document the student’s perceptions of the experiential learning opportunities they were given within the curriculum of a community college hospitality management program in the southern region of the United States. It sought to record their reflections regarding the current curriculum at this institution to determine how their program’s design could be revamped or improved to better prepare them for positions in the hospitality industry.

The study explored the perceptions of twelve undergraduate students in a hospitality management program with a focus on (a) Industry Expectations, (b) Program Design, and (c) Student Strength and Weakness. The results revealed that current undergraduate students in the hospitality management program view experiential learning opportunities in the curriculum as well as internships as a vital component of their educational trajectory. The more a student was granted the opportunity for practical application through trial and error, the more confidence they acquired in applying theoretical knowledge obtained in the traditional classroom to the skills
they were required to employ in a professional setting upon graduation. A rigorous analysis of the data suggested that post-secondary institutions must dynamically and consistently interact with industry representatives if they aim to keep their curriculum design current theoretically and experientially in a way that meets the changing needs of the hospitality management industry. It was this iterative relationship between the industry leaders and the post-secondary institutions that might promote effective curriculum design relevant to industry expectations as well as proper and acceptable implementation.

A properly designed curriculum with current and relevant experiential learning opportunities would help with student comprehension while developing student’s weakness into strengths so that young professionals in the hospitality sector could meet industry expectations. Ruhanen (2005), asserted that the experiential learning component of hospitality management training programs, when designed with input from industry representatives, was particularly well suited for bridging the cognitive-practical gap that was characteristic of this sector. The study documented that, from the vantage point of undergraduate hospitality management students, the complex integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application was the key to success for students who must follow industry trends with flexibility and hands-on adaptability. This was grounded in conceptual knowledge of the economic, environmental, and social-demographic factors that characterize this industry. Therefore, experiential learning generates knowledge that comes about through reflection on everyday experiences, some of which may be generated by the learners themselves (Jeffs & Smith, 1995, 2005, 2011). As Chapter four documented, the most common reflections from participants revealed that they needed increased opportunities to connect theoretical knowledge gained in the academic setting with practical application in the experiential learning context. The study affirmed that this needed to be implemented not only in
the experiential laboratory setting, but also through internships and networking with industry settings and representatives.

This qualitative study documented the perceptions of students in a hospitality management program. A significant finding was the assertion by those interviewed that the most essential aspect of the program was the opportunity to not only apply this knowledge concretely, but also to be in a setting where they could, through trial and error, make the concept learned come alive. They expressed that experiential learning opportunities, increased industry demonstrations and concentrated efforts to continually enhance the program led them to their professional success.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Hospitality management programs within post-secondary institutions are particularly attuned to the practical advantages of experiential learning opportunities as evidenced by the large volume of institutions that have incorporated these techniques into their current curriculum. According to Ruhanen (2005), a well-designed experiential learning component helps students become actively involved with the desired learning outcome by applying theoretical knowledge to real-world environments. The length and nature of ideal experiential learning experiences has yet to be determined for undergraduate hospitality management programs. This is primarily due to the continuously evolving industry expectations upon graduates of these programs. Until post-secondary institutions involved in teaching the current hospitality management curriculum come together as a whole to define relevant educational priorities and to dynamically define what is considered a universal, “industry expectations” of each specific level of desired skill sets, this will continue to be an ongoing situation within the educational advancement of undergraduate students.
In addition, not all experiential learning opportunities within a hospitality management program will nurture the same acquisition of desired industry skillsets. As Kolb’s (1984) Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle model explains, each student comprehends, integrates, and applies information differently at different stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle. However, the failure to universally identify what could be considered as the minimum requirements for experiential learning opportunities in a post-secondary hospitality management programs will lead to the credentialing of graduates who are significantly underprepared for the competitive and dynamic industry environment.

The recognition of the vital importance of practical application for undergraduate students through experiential learning opportunities to promote proper educational development of hospitality professionals is a meritorious first step. However, post-secondary institutions may tend to disregard, chose not to seek, or fail to maximally use current data generated by experiential learning opportunities and to embrace the benefits these provide to students upon graduation. Essential to the excellence and credibility of undergraduate hospitality management programs are institutional accreditations through such organizations as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or the American Culinary Federation. This could build strong strategic partnerships, collegiate reputations, and stimulate conversations which, combined, could help educational institutions and industry experts discern which aspects of experiential learning are considered beneficial, and which need to be reformulated or eliminated for optimum training results of the current undergraduate students.

One of the vital ways to which undergraduate hospitality management programs can continue to adapt current curriculum and practical applications is through the development of mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with industry establishments. These multi-beneficial
collaborations between the educational institution and the hospitality industry may be effortlessly
developed through industry demonstrations within the current experiential learning laboratories,
directly providing students with the opportunity to understand and adapt to industry expectations
of both theoretical knowledge and desired practical skillsets. It is essential that faculty members
who direct and teach the experiential learning components of hospitality management programs
create a well-developed curriculum providing this kind of interaction and networking with
reputable professionals from whom the students can glean real-life perspectives and knowledge.
Experiential learning opportunities such as these could be further utilized to help hospitality
management programs meet projected educational challenges, improve program successes, and
instill both current theoretical knowledge and practical application in their current and future
graduates. An educationally comprehensive approach to curriculum design will help identify
how well graduate skillset preparedness is meeting industry expectations and will send
knowledgeable graduates into an industry with high expectations and demands.

The researcher will take the findings from this research study and share the findings with
current faculty and strategic partners of the hospitality management program to help identify
areas of the curriculum that can be better enhanced in reference to experiential learning
opportunities for current and future undergraduate students in hospitality management education.
Through the curriculum adaption, students will be granted an opportunity to strengthen
weaknesses and further advance strengths.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on a review of the current literature in hospitality management education and the
independent data collected in this study, the researcher has identified the following directions
future research could take to enhance knowledge regarding experiential learning in hospitality management education.

Additional research by the researcher will replicate this study with a larger pool of undergraduate students involved within a hospitality management program at various post-secondary institutions throughout the country, with the goal of comparing and interoperating different post-secondary institutional curriculums, accredited verse non-accredited programs, different external influences such as demographics, and different experiential learning opportunities granted to the students through laboratories incorporated within the hospitality management program. This replication would add nuance and complexity to an understanding of the current challenges and successes undergraduate students perceive within experiential learning environments. This knowledge obtained from future research studies could enhance common norms and standards for curriculum design and provide a deeper understanding of the iterative pedagogical process involved in providing an interaction between the theoretical knowledge obtained with the traditional classroom and practical application of this knowledge through experiential learning opportunities.

The researcher will conduct a longitudinal study that addresses the issues raised in this research study. It would permit an examination of how the design of a curriculum that combines traditional classroom application of knowledge and practical experiences of experiential learning affect individual students as they progress through the undergraduate hospitality management program within their particular post-secondary institution, and it could document their specific challenges and progress – and map their trajectories -- as they develop professionally in the hospitality industry after graduation.
Future research could be conducted focusing on institutions that currently are facing financial restrictions due limited institutional support such as lack of experiential learning laboratories and their ability to offer them. Through this research, hospitality management programs might be able to access educational outcomes that could be implemented through the curriculum to help lessen the financial burden on the post-secondary institution while enhancing the educational experience for the undergraduate student.

This study and subsequent research projects addressing this topic could prove advantageous for post-secondary undergraduate hospitality management programs that currently do not incorporate experiential learning components such as laboratories and internships into their hospitality management curriculum. Ascertaining how other post-secondary programs were able to successfully implement the theoretical component with the practical application of experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum could be of value to future curriculum design for institutions new to or struggling with this integration.
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: October 12, 2016  IRB #: CPS16-09-02
Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
                        Paul Brennan
Department: Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
         Northeastern University
Title of Project: Experiential learning in Hospitality Management
                 Education
Participating Sites: Nashville State Community College permission pending

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: OCTOBER 11, 2017

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection
Participant Recruitment letter

TO: CURRENT/RECENT GRADUATES OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM at NASHVILLE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

My name is Paul Brennen and the reason I am contacting you because I am a candidate for an Ed.D. degree at Northeastern University, in Boston, MA conducting a qualitative study titled *Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education*, which researches the perceptions of undergraduates enrolled in hospitality management programs with a particular focus on the effectiveness of experiential learning opportunities in the culinary and hospitality industries. I am looking for eight to twelve current and recently graduated students with broad demographic diversity to interview for the purposes of this study. Only students from those institutions with the highest levels of quality and excellence are being approached. You attend a program of excellence in hospitality management; therefore, you are a strong candidate for participation in this study.

The study is entirely voluntary, and no compensation for participation will be offered. The information shared in this study will be held under the highest standards of confidentiality, with your name and all contact information remaining completely confidential. Interviewees will be coded by a letter/number sequence. Only established census categories of identification and year of graduation will be reported. You may withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason.

If you are willing to volunteer for this study, there will be three separate interactions. The first step is a brief questionnaire conducted via email, and it will take only a few minutes to complete. The questionnaire focuses on introductions and general demographic data. The second step which is an interview will be conducted at any location you choose in person and will focus on the attached set of questions. It is expected that this process will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The third and final step is a follow-up email to review the transcripts from the previous interview to ensure all information gathered is accurate. You will have the chance during this session to correct any errors and elaborate on important points. Again, the results of all questionnaires and interviews will remain confidential by assigning you a pseudonym of your choice for the purposes of submission to the academic authorities at Northeastern University and in the case that any part of this study is published. The final study results will be available to you if you wish to see them. Any questions about procedures may be directed to my email address.

I would be very grateful if you would consider participating in this study. My broad goals in conducting it include improving both the theoretical and experiential teaching of hospitality management programs so that graduates can have a seamless transition to employment and become dynamic industry leaders.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration and support. If you are interested in volunteering to participate in this research study, please complete the short attached survey/questionnaire through email *brennen.p@husky.neu.edu*, only, and let me know if you are interested in becoming involved in the second stage of this process.

Paul Brennen, EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
Brennen.p@husky.neu.edu
Appendices C- Participant Informed Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

**Name of Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator Dr Kimberly Nolan Ed.D., Student Researcher Paul Brennen

**Title of Project:** The Perspectives of Undergraduate Students in Experiential Learning within Hospitality Management.

**Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**

We are asking you to be in this study to better understand how students who graduate from secondary level culinary arts programs perceive the effectiveness of the experiential learning component of their curricula.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this research is to develop a valid and reliable instrument that will provide qualitative data that can be analyzed to support future curriculum decisions for undergraduate students in culinary arts in reference to experiential learning.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to be interviewed face to face regarding your experiences with experiential learning opportunities. As a second option, when direct access is not practical, telephone and or Skype interviews will be conducted.

The interview protocol will consist of open-ended questions designed to understand students’ perceptions of experiential learning opportunities while obtaining an undergraduate degree in culinary arts.

The interview protocol will be semi structured and the questions narrow the central questions to sub-questions. There will be a set of open-ended questions presented, but the interviewer will have latitude in exploring perceptions, opinions or values, knowledge, and feelings about the experiential learning process.

After the interview, the researcher will send you a copy of the interview transcript via email within 1 months and will ask you to confirm its accuracy. The total time for participating in this study is less than two hours.
Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at any location you choose, so as to moderate any coercion. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes. Within 5 business days the initial interview copy of the transcripts will be emailed to you for clarification and any specific area you feel is inaccurate.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no adverse consequences (physical, social, economic, legal, or psychological) from your decision to withdraw from the research at any time. In the event of withdrawal, your data will not be used for this study and the data will be destroyed.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about how hospitality management students perceive the effectiveness of the experiential learning component of their curricula.

Who will see the information about me?
Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. That means no one, not even the researchers, will know that the answers you give are from you. Only the researchers (myself and my advisor) will know that you specifically participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you or your institution as being part of this project.

You will be coded and identified by a letter only, which will not represent your real name. The raw data will be filed and stored by the researcher off-premises from the research site and protected from unauthorized individuals.

Upon completion and publishing of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office. All digital data will be stored in a password protected folder on the researcher’s personal laptop.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. Participation, or a decision not to participate, will in no way affect any grades in your current or future curriculum.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Paul Brennen, the researcher who will have direct contact with you, at brennen.p@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact Kimberly Nolan, Ed.D. the Principal Investigator, at k.nolan@neu.edu.
Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any further questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, you may also contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish if any complaints arise.

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
This study will be of no cost to you as a participant other than your time.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Date
participant above and obtained consent

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendices D- Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Topic
Undergraduate Students Perspective of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee #:
Position of Interviewee #:

Ask permission to begin recording. (Turn on recorder) Review Unsigned Consent Document.

Introduction/Description of Project
• Interviewer/Interviewee Introductions
• Provide an approximation of how long the interview will take
• Explanation of the purpose of the study
• Explanation of the sources of data being collected
• Explanation of what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the participant

Interview Questions:
• Can you tell me about your major as well as time in the program?
  o What year of study are you in currently?
  o Within this context, have you been with the same institution for your entire enrollment in this program? If not, how long have you been with this institution and enrolled in this program?
    ▪ How many other institutions have you been enrolled in while majoring in hospitality management?
    ▪ How long were you at these institutions?

• Can you tell me what experiential learning means to you?
  o How many have experiences have you had in reference to culinary labs?
    ▪ Can you provide examples of these experiences?
    ▪ What skills have you learned if any?
- What skills have you wished you would have learned if any?

- When you think about going to work in the hospitality industry can you describe in detail what skills you think you already have? How did you acquire those skills?
  - Could you expand on how they prepared you if any?
  - What skills do you think you will need in the industry that you don’t already have?

- Can you describe what you believe will be your greatest strengths in the hospitality industry upon graduation will be?
  - How has your opinion changed throughout your education?

- Can you describe what you believe will be your greatest weaknesses in the hospitality industry upon graduation will be?
  - How has your opinion changed throughout your education?

- Can you describe in your own words what you believe is necessary to succeed within the hospitality industry from your educational experience?
  - Can you provide examples how what you feel is necessary to succeed in the industry?
  - In what ways would you suggest that the industry could more sufficiently support students preparing to enter the workforce as hospitality managers?

- Let’s move into a discussion of curriculum. Can you describe in your own words which you feel is important: theory or experience, or perhaps a combination of both? Why?
  - How do you feel your faculty create effective in class demonstrations within your culinary labs?
- Do you feel student input on existing courses and program design is welcome?
- Can you describe any changes you would make to current courses or the program? If so, what would those suggestions be?

- **Can you describe your interaction with faculty in the program?**
  - In what ways did they challenge you?
  - What advice would you give them for future classes?

- **Can you describe how the hospitality industry interacts with you and your program?**
  - What have you learned from them?
  - What advice would you give them?

- **Now I would like to talk about how the hands on opportunities prepared you or is preparing you for employment after graduation?**
  - Please explain the ways in which the hands on component of your training was effective in helping you find employment at the level you desired or will help you find employment?
  - Can you describe that components of the hands on experiences that could be adjusted to improve your current and future employment prospects?
  - Are there any hands on opportunities you would like to have more experience with whether it be internally or externally of the program?
  - Do you feel that hands on opportunities have been beneficial to assisting you to have ‘real-time’ experience in the industry and how has those opportunities better prepared you for a future in the hospitality industry?
Prompts to be used during interview

- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you provide an example?
- Can you provide any documentation I can take with me?

Thank the individual for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and inform the individual the interviewer will send an email to confirm the accuracy of transcripts within 5 business days.


References


doi:10.1080/07294360.2011.555390


Scarecrow Education.
