
From the Center

The Industry-Academe Connection

Relevance Matters

I recently returned from two conferences in San Francisco where I interviewed more than fifty candidates for two faculty openings we have in the School of Hotel Administration (SHA). In hiring faculty members, the SHA is often in competition with business schools. In talking to the faculty candidates, I had the chance to tell them about the characteristics of the SHA that distinguish it from business schools. For the record, my master's and doctoral training were in business schools, and I spent eight years as a faculty member in a business school before joining the SHA, so my comments are based on personal observations. My observations are as follows:



Gary M. Thompson

- By and large, business schools are out of touch with business. In part, this is a result of how business schools attract candidates for Ph.D. programs. It is not uncommon for students to enter a Ph.D. program straight from an undergraduate program, without the

students' having any real-world work experience. Moreover, mathematical elegance has overshadowed real-world relevance in a number of business school disciplines, at least in terms of the research driving the "publish or perish" phenomenon.

- In the SHA, by contrast, reality matters. When faculty members in the SHA select research projects, they look for studies that can make a contribution both to their academic discipline and to hospitality practice. Finding such projects is not particularly difficult. All one needs to do is talk to managers and listen to what they say. (As an aside, if you are an academic and writing for this journal, please accept my thanks. Our readers are people both from industry and from academe, as are the reviewers of every paper we publish. Clearly you understand the importance of doing industry-relevant work.)
- The SHA does several distinctive things to help ensure that our faculty members embrace reality. First, we put an industry representative on faculty tenure committees. To my knowledge, we are the only institution to make such a commitment to its industry.

Tenure—the decision to grant lifelong employment—is not one that we take lightly. We put the industry representative on the committee to help us determine whether the faculty member's work contributes to knowledge in the hospitality industry. Second, we seek the input of other industry representatives during the tenure process. This is likewise an uncommon practice. By contrast, most academic institutions commonly send out examples of a faculty member's research papers to academics at other institutions for their evaluation of the quality of the research, begging the question of whether that

research is valid for the industry. Is it any wonder, then, that academics in business schools are out of touch with business?

If you work in the hospitality industry, and the institution from which you graduated does not value relevance, then make your voice known. Contact the dean of the school and let him or her know your feelings. Make your giving contingent upon relevance. Change can be slow to come from within academic institutions. Do your part to make it obvious that change must come. Relevance matters.—*G.M.T.*

THE CENTER FOR HOSPITALITY RESEARCH

Gary M. Thompson, Executive Director
Joseph D. Strodel, Jr., Managing Director
Glenn Withiam, Director of Publications
Jennifer Macera, Administrative Assistant

About The Center for Hospitality Research

A unit of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, The Center for Hospitality Research (CHR) sponsors groundbreaking research designed to improve practices in the hospitality industry and publishes the award-winning Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly. Under the lead of CHR's 43 corporate supporters, experienced scholars work closely with business executives to discover new insights into strategic, managerial, and operational issues. To learn more about CHR and its projects, visit <http://www.chr.cornell.edu/>.