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THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TOURISM RESEARCH CENTER:  
THE DICK POPE SR. INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM STUDIES

BY

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ABSTRACT

The Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies is located in the University of Central Florida. The Institute, funded both by state and commercial research projects is involved in research, education, and public awareness activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies is located at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. Its main mission is to improve the quality of the tourism product and increase the benefits of tourism accruing to the industry, the State of Florida, and the local community.

Established in 1979, and named for the late founder of Cypress Gardens and the "father" of Florida tourism, the institute is involved in a variety of programs in the fields of research, education, and public awareness.

While original funding of \$20,000 was provided by the Central Florida's tourism industry, the Institute's budget consists of a line item of the University of Central Florida budget, earnings from commercial research projects conducted for public and private organizations, and donations from the Florida tourism industry.

The Institute's staff includes a Director, a Research Director, and a part time graduate research assistant. In addition, five faculty of the Hospitality Management Department contribute to the educational component of its mission.

The Institute's activities are guided by an Advisory Board made up of leaders representing all major sectors of the tourism industry and the

State of Florida. The Advisory Board meets four times a year and moves resolutions with regard to the Institute's activities.

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The research activities of the Institute includes the collection, development, and dissemination of information relevant to the tourism and hospitality industry. Research projects fall mainly into two categories: proprietary research and in-house research.

### Proprietary Activities

These research activities are custom tailored to the needs of individual enterprises. Among the institute's patrons are governmental tourism promotion agencies attractions, hotels, food service establishments, ground and air transportation companies, travel agencies, tour operators, and other related businesses.

Once the needs of a particular client have been identified, the study's methodology is developed. This usually includes a combination of focus group interviews, telephone and personal interviews, mail surveys, or analysis of secondary data. An agreement between the University and the patron is usually signed, detailing payment and progress schedule.

It is important to note that due to the limited availability of staff, it is sometimes necessary to sub-contract other companies nationwide which assist in the collection and coding of data (like personal and telephone interviewers, data keying staff, and so on).

Although the magnitude of a research project determines its completion deadline, projects are usually finished within ninety days. Once a project is completed, the results of the study are presented to the management team of the organization that commissioned the study. A comprehensive report with an executive summary is also submitted as a final delivery.

### In House Research

These research activities are sponsored by the Institute's internal budget and is aimed to provide the public with relevant information on the value of tourism and the hospitality industry.

The information is provided to the public free of charge and is published through local, national, and international media, academic publications, and the Institute's quarterly publication, TOURISM BAROMETER II.

TOURISM BAROMETER II has a mailing list of about 300 subscribers, and provides forecasts of tourist arrivals into the State of Florida

three quarters ahead from its quarter edition. The forecasts use a model consisting of data obtained from the Florida's Division of Tourism's air and auto arrival estimates, and traffic figures of ten Florida airports. In addition, the publication includes statewide activity index of hotel/motel occupancy and airport passenger activity.

Table 1 indicates examples of proprietary and in-house research activities undertaken by the Dick Pope Sr. Institute.

#### EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

The educational activities of the Institute cover credit and non-credit programs. Since 1984, the Hospitality Management Department offers a four-year baccalaureate program in Hospitality Management.

The program intends to prepare students for managerial positions in the hospitality and tourism industry. Courses are offered in the areas of tourism and travel administration, accommodation management, food service management, and conference and convention management.

The Hospitality Management program also established exchange programs with universities in Australia, Austria, China, and Switzerland.

Non-credit programs include short courses, seminars, workshops, and conferences intending to satisfy the educational and training needs of managers employed in the hospitality and tourism industry. Short seminars like "effective selling in the travel industry" or "effective telemarketing" have been offered to the local industry.

#### PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Institute devotes significant efforts to increase public awareness of the tourism industry in Florida and the entire United States. To meet this goal the Institute has produced and distribute written information on the value of tourism to the community.

Other public awareness activities are implemented through extensive interviews by the local printed and electronic media (nationwide) and publication of short articles in local newspapers and magazines.

Annual events like a new-year-eve party or end-of-the-year student banquet also increase the exposure of the Institute to the local industry.

TABLE 1

## TYPE OF RESEARCH PROJECTS CONDUCTED BY THE DICK POPE SR. INSTITUTE

Project	Beneficiaries from the results
PROPRIETARY:	
"Arabian Nights: Marketing Study for a New Theme Park Development."	A local attraction
"Silver Springs New Commercial Testing."	A local attraction
"Watermania Customer Satisfaction Survey."	A local attraction
"Sears Travel New Tour Operation Venture."	A local tour operator
"Government of Spain Marketing Study in the United States."	A foreign government
IN-HOUSE RESEARCH	
"The Role of Theme Parks as a Leisure Activity for Local Communities."	Local community
"The Social Impact of Tourism on Central Florida as Perceived by its Residents."	Local community
"A Comparison of Images and Attitudes Before and After Tourism Visitation: U.S.A. and the Soviet Union."	International community
"Hospitality Educators' Salary and Working Conditions Survey."	Hospitality educators
Tourism Barometer II	Hospitality and tourism industry