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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S INSTITUTE FOR
TOURISM RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

USC's Institute for Tourism Research was created in November 1985, due to the direct growth of the state and region's tourism industry and the demand the industry created for research and service. The lack of sufficient numbers of nearby programs offering Master's and Doctoral degrees further enhanced the concept of USC's Institute for Tourism Research. By networking with private and public sector leaders, the Institute for Tourism Research establishes realistic goals, objectives, and programs to meet ongoing needs of today's tourism industry. The Institute is self-supporting, with Economic Impact Studies, Visitor Satisfaction Surveys, and Longitudinal Occupancy Studies for area hotels and motels the main thrust of the Institute's funding to date. Job training and educational development services are future areas of emphasis that will be met through networking with professional organizations and other university tourism centers.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM
RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

In September of 1984, The University of South Carolina's Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Administration sought to establish a tourism institute designed to complement its existing educational programs by providing a vehicle for attracting grants and contracts. This need was directly related to the tremendous growth the State of South Carolina was experiencing with its travel, tourism, and hospitality industry.

Private and public sector interests affiliated with the State's hospitality and travel industry were in need of timely information, research, and training programs that addressed specific and immediate industry needs. USC's Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Administration (HRTA) was receiving numerous requests on a daily basis from many of these state and regional entities who were aware that USC offered a major in this field. Due in part to the growth of South

Carolina's tourism industry, The University of South Carolina's hospitality program experienced a dramatic increase in numbers of declared majors. USC's enrollment of undergraduate students majoring in HRTA skyrocketed from 150 in 1983 to over 550 student majors, making it one of the ten largest hospitality programs in the U.S. today.

It was determined that although the undergraduate program ultimately prepared students for positions in hospitality and travel-related fields, the program alone needed a research component designed to support the State's tourism industry. Consequently, a proposal was developed and submitted to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) for approval. In November 1985, the Institute for Tourism Research was approved by the CHE and established at The University of South Carolina.

The basic purpose of the Institute is to further improve the quality of life in the State of South Carolina and regionally through the development of research and informational programs for the tourism industry. A review of specific goals identifies these three missions:

1. To promote and support the development of the tourism industry by establishing a central administrative office designed to conduct research in support of the tourism industry.
2. To assist in the promotion of tourism research and the development of educational programs through the University educational setting.
3. To collect and disseminate information that provides benefits to both the public and private sectors of the tourism industry.

In order to encourage the development of exceptional tourism research and development programs, USC's Institute has appointed internal and external advisory boards. The Internal advisory board is represented by faculty from departments within the University framework who have been instrumental in conducting research or educational program directly related to tourism and hospitality. These department representatives are assembled by the research director to provide guidance regarding the development and execution of future research projects. Typical University departments represented on internal advisory boards may include, but are not limited to, the following: Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Administration; Marketing; Economics; Management; Geography; Sociology; Statistics; Computer Services; Marine Sciences; Recreation, Sport and Leisure Studies; Home Economics and Nutrition; Engineering; Psychology; Education; and Media Arts. In addition, USC's Institute includes University representatives responsible for the administration of services related to grants and contracts in order to accurately and expediently address funding issues, proposal development, and the attraction of research dollars. The internal advisory board, in effect, creates an interdisciplinary team of experts ready to address virtually any research issue regarding tourism and hospitality. This internal networking system is paramount to the success of USC's Institute for Tourism Research. Advisory boards are appointed by the Dean of the College in conjunction with the tourism institute director to serve one- to two-year terms on the advisory board.

The external advisory board consists of industry leaders from both public and private concerns. These executives are identified by the internal advisory board and invited to serve one- to two-year terms. Their responsibilities are predominantly to advise USC's Institute for Tourism Research on areas including potential funding sources, areas of research direction as identified by industry, and service/educational programs deemed important for implementation. Through networking, external advisory boards are most helpful in the identification of future areas of concern within the tourism industry. In this capacity, external advisors are able to help seek resolution of potential or existing problems by directing the Institute for Tourism Research into areas that provide immediate benefits to their respective interests. Public and private external advisory board members have included representatives from the following: state travel office, hotel and restaurant association officers, local convention and visitor's bureau executives, state highway/transportation officials, airport managers, hospitality consulting firm affiliates, legislators, and attractions managers.

The primary scope of USC's Institute for Tourism Research addresses three areas: research, education, and service. Each area depends significantly upon networking in order to achieve success. With respect to research, support is generated through grants and contracts that assist faculty in conducting tourism research projects. At The University of South Carolina, most of the funded research has been supported by statewide accommodation tax dollars allocated to counties and subsequently to local entities. For example, during this past year, USC's Institute for Tourism Research has achieved success in developing and administering visitor studies for the Hilton Head Island, S.C. Chamber of Commerce, the Columbia, S.C. Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and the York County, S.C. Visitor and Convention Bureau. All three projects represented over \$78,000 in funding dollars through hotel/motel accommodations taxes specifically allocated to these respective organizations for tourism development. Networking with local tourism leaders, state and local media (including newspaper and television reporters), city councils, University faculty and statewide legislators occurred on a direct and indirect basis in order to achieve contracts for these projects. In addition, networking with University tourism centers in nearby states played an important role in convincing sponsors that comparisons with competitive areas could be established through the development of longitudinal data bases by University centers. Thus, overall profiles of such potential and actual markets including pleasure travelers, group tour operators, meeting planners, and business travelers could be made by season and geographical area (coastal vs. mountain visitors). Other typical research projects which USC's tourism center has been called upon to develop include the following:

Economic Impact Studies. Focuses upon the direct impact tourism activities, facilities and services provide to a given area. These include such tourist-related activities as festivals, events, tournaments, and community-sponsored attractions. One recent project included studying the Columbia, S.C. MayFest Event. Over 1900 people were interviewed during a three-day period. Results indicated that this event accounted for nearly \$750,000 in direct expenditures. Another project recently undertaken involves the economic impact of the U.S.

Tennis Association's Clay Court Championships held at Wild Dunes, S.C., in April 1989. This project will be administered in conjunction with the Department of Sport Administration at USC.

Hotel-Motel Occupancy Study. A major contribution the Institute for Tourism Research has provided to the community, state and region has been directing and coordinating a comprehensive study involving the area's hotels and motels. For several years, monthly information has been collected on the number of available hotel rooms, area demand, average daily rates, and monthly occupancy by property size, location, and trip purpose. The information has not only been of great assistance to local hoteliers and sales representatives, but it has been frequently used by consulting firms such as Pannell, Kerr and Forster, Laventhol and Horvath, John Q. Hammonds, and many others in their efforts to complete feasibility studies and property appraisals.

Other research areas in which the Institute for Tourism Research has been involved include the following:

Needs Assessment Studies. A comprehensive overview of tourism needs in regions, counties, and communities that includes an inventory and analysis of all existing facilities and services.

Market Segmentation Studies. Particularly useful to local convention and visitors bureaus, these studies are designed to identify specific groups of potential guests, customers, and tourists based upon their similarities, lifestyles, and needs.

Image Studies. Determines how properties, services, or areas are perceived by guests and how those perceptions may vary between different markets and regions.

Advertising Effectiveness. Determine what methods of media are best suited for area or property promotional purposes and what percent of requests for information actually result in on-site visits.

Positioning Analysis. Helps determine how and where to position products, properties, or areas in the competitive market place.

Visitor Studies. Collects general and specific information on guests, including their overall level of satisfaction with their on-site experience.

Feasibility Studies. Assistance in determining property site location, supply and demand figures, and business for hotels, restaurants, resorts and other hospitality services.

Situation Analysis. The development of short-term and long-term marketing plans that detail the property's strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities and possible threats imposed by competitive enterprises.

Perhaps the greatest potential area in which USC's Institute for Tourism Research will contribute to the public and private sector in the future lies in the area of service, including training, development, and

education. USC's hospitality faculty represent a broad cross section of talents and many faculty have achieved accreditation in specific professional organizations. Through networking, educational programs may be successfully provided by linking existing services offered through organizations such as the American Hotel and Motel Association's Educational Institute with University professors certified to conduct such educational seminars. The University location and its facilities also offer attractive alternatives for hosting such seminars given that educational support materials are already in place. The Institute for Tourism Research serves nicely in this capacity as a liaison between industry and education. Table 1 identifies commonly offered educational seminars through USC's Institute for Tourism Research.

The University of South Carolina's Institute for Tourism Research is one such program that has taken a leadership role in this area. Education and training programs have already been developed and completed in areas such as Mexico, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas. Team building and networking played a paramount role in the successful completion of these projects. Most recently, by networking with Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, USC's Institute provided assistance to their tourism center with a job training program for a hotel property in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In summary, USC's Institute for Tourism Research emerged due to the direct growth of the state and region's tourism industry and the demand it has subsequently created for research and service. The lack of sufficient numbers of nearby programs offering Master's degrees and Doctoral degrees further enhanced the concept of USC's Institute for Tourism Research. By networking with private and public sector leaders, the Institute for Tourism Research guarantees that realistic goals, objectives, and programs are established to meet ongoing needs of today's tourism industry. Economic Impact Studies, Visitor Satisfaction Surveys, and Longitudinal Occupancy Studies for area hotels and motels have been the main thrust of the Institute's funding to date. Job training and educational development services are future areas of emphasis that will be met through networking with professional organizations and other university tourism centers.

Note: Dr. Bonn was formerly Director, Institute for Tourism Research, Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina from its creation in 1985 until December, 1988.

TABLE 1

TYPICAL TOURISM EDUCATION AND SERVICE PROGRAMS
OFFERED THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S
INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM RESEARCH

Short Courses and Seminars

Trends in the Hospitality Industry
Planning for Conferences and Meetings
Strategies for Resort Management and Marketing
Positioning Your Property for Success
Conducting the Sales Blitz
How to Develop a Marketing Plan
Tourism and What It Means to Your Economy
Customer-Guest Relations
Planning for Festivals and Events
Hospitality Security Management
Resort Planning and Development
Profit Planning
Bar Management
Wine and Spirits
Menu Planning and Standardized Recipes
Facility Layout and Design
Stress Management
How to Measure Your Visitor's Satisfaction
