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Academic Perspectives of US Hospitality Programs: A Ranking Report

Mary Jo Dolasinski
DePaul University

Chris Roberts
DePaul University

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Introduction

Universities are considered among the oldest types of organizations, playing a key role in the creation and distribution of knowledge and a central role in society (Olcay & Bulu, 2017; Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015). Historically, universities relied on reputations created over time to shape opinions and attract the best talent in their faculty and staff. Those same reputations attracted the next generation of students, too. The evolution of technology has created an environment where the consumers know more and have access to detailed information. It is also a time when consumers are relying more so on ratings and rankings to assist in making choices. This is especially true in the hospitality industry (Lee & Blum, 2015). While already dominant in retail and e-commerce, there is increased demand for more information and ratings/rankings related to universities. This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the growing number of hospitality and tourism programs/schools. Finally, this growth is punctuated by multiple year declination of student enrollments in university programs (NSC Research Center, 2019). The increase in hospitality and tourism educational supply and the decrease in the student supply pool have created a need for universities and programs within universities to establish their unique brand and develop marketing strategies to garner competitive advantage in attracting potential students to their program/school. Part of that brand includes reputation. University and program rankings are one of the tools to help build that reputation.

Since the 2003 Academic Ranking of World Universities (also referred to as Shanghai Ranking) was published, there has been an increasing number of studies dedicated to analyzing the various components of higher education (Guironnet & Peypoch, 2018) and university ranking systems. Rising tuition costs, changing requirements from industry and a greater expectation for information on academic quality are putting increased pressure on higher education to gather,

analyze and deliver comparison data (Neyazi, Arab, Farzianpour, & Majdabadi, 2016). These issues combined with the growth in the number of programs and schools in the hospitality industry have created an increase in demand for updated ranking studies of hospitality programs.

Many of the university ranking studies currently published are done by "for profit" organizations including studies such as U.S. News Best Colleges, US College Factual, etc., who have two goals; a) provide information to its readers or stakeholders and b) drive revenue for its publication (Dearden, Grewal, & Lilien, 2014).

Building on the approach of Gould and Bojanic (2002), the purpose of this study was to develop a hospitality and tourism program/school ranking study that incorporates the perspectives both industry and academic leaders.

Review of Literature

Trends in higher education are changing the way universities consider how they attract students and drive enrollment (Frain, 2019). One trend is declining enrollments in many universities across the US. Changing demographics and less tolerance for increasing tuition costs are two causes cited for this decline (Murray, 2019). The decrease in the number of students puts greater pressure on institutions to attract potential students to their universities. In response, creating a brand for the school or program that prospective and enrolled students can identify with is an imperative. Part of the brand identity is derived by reputation (Hazelkorn, 2014). University and program rankings play a role in reputation.

Another trend to be considered is the pervasiveness of social media and e-commerce, which has provided enormous amounts of data and has disrupted more traditional decision-making practices including the proliferation of rankings/ratings (Liu, Huang, & Zhang, 2016).

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These rankings often influence consumer actions (Ghose, Ipeirotis, & Li, 2014). In academia, this phenomenon has permeated decision-making practices in both current and future students (Clermont & Dirksen, 2016). University rankings are becoming increasingly important for public recognition and perception (Clermont & Dirksen, 2016). Utilizing the sorting and ranking of attributes to assist in selecting one alternative over another has become commonplace (Quaschning, Pandelaere, & Vermeir, 2014).

University Rankings

Rankings of universities are not new. Ranking studies date as far back as 1911 (Gould & Bojanic, 2002). Since those early studies, ranking studies have continued to proliferate. Some of the more common or widely recognized national and international ones include, U.S. News and World Report, the bestschools.org, successfulstudent.org, collegefactual.com, ceoworld.biz, Bloomberg Businessweek Ranking Survey, topuniversities.com, the Shanghai Rankings (ARWU) and the QS rankings. These studies use varied ranking systems and methodologies. Vernon, Balas, and Momani (2018) suggested that the studies have shown a heavier weight on research than teaching or academic quality and that over half of the ranking systems relied on reputation surveys. Because each "for profit" company conducting rankings are competing with the others, there is no one universal system or method for determining rankings. Consequently, there is no standardization or consistency and are subjective (Loveless & Betz, 2019).

Several recent studies have explored the cause and effect of rankings and their impact on decision making regarding university choice (Meyer, Hanson, & Hickman, 2017). Rankings can be a way of helping students reduce the number of choices for consideration by providing performance measures that ensure comparability (Clermont & Dirksen, 2016). In their study,

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Luca and Smith (2013) found that salience or simplification of information that produced rankings affected choice of school or to which school potential students would apply. Assante, Huffman and Harp (2010) asserted that "…rating/ranking systems are becoming increasingly more popular in the decision-making process that a potential student employs when identifying the academic program quality indicators of the college or university they might choose to attend" (p. 166). Williams and de Rassenfosse (2016) argued that rankings not only influence students but also influence the universities themselves.

Universities fulfill the role of connecting the efforts of its research activities and teaching students with those in associated external related industries (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015). As part of this role, universities are concerned with the perceived value of individual universities. One way this is done is through rankings. "Rating/ranking systems help in identifying programs' strengths and weaknesses in a competitive environment. Furthermore, ratings and rankings suggest how programs are positioned by various constituents such as recruiters, administrators, and industry professionals" (Khan, Lee, & Park, 2013, p. 193).

While the popularity of university rankings continues to grow, some critics question the nature of the process including bias based on exclusivity and process (Millot, 2015). One critique is that each institution operates differently making it difficult to create direct comparisons (Millot, 2015). One way to create parity comparisons is by combining specific data into overall categories, combining micro data into macro level data (Millot, 2015). Ranking studies must also show validity and transparency in their methods (Williams & de Rassenfosse, 2016). Notwithstanding the somewhat controversial nature of rankings, the competitive nature of today's landscape and the growing number of college programs provide the backdrop of why rankings can be an important data point for students, industry recruiters and universities.

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Hospitality Schools

The hospitality industry is experiencing exponential growth and change. Hospitality educational programs are also facing growth and change. Kent, Lian, Khan, and Anene (1993) posited that in the early 1970s there were about twenty-seven hospitality bachelor's programs, seven master's programs and only two doctoral programs in the United States. After an Internet search for this study, it was estimated that there were over 280 distinct US institutions offering some type or combination of hospitality degrees (Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and/or Ph.D.) This growth has made it more confusing for students to choose. Ranking these programs provides a way for potential students to compare the institutions.

Hospitality School Rankings

Most rankings in US often do not include hospitality education within their rankings by discipline in their schools or universities. For example, the business school may be ranked but the hospitality program within the business school is not looked at individually. This current study is targeted specifically at hospitality and tourism programs.

There is a comparatively small number of hospitality program ranking studies conducted by "not for profit" individuals/organizations. One of the first studies ranking hospitality programs was completed by Thomas Calnan (1988). He surveyed administrators of hospitality management programs seeking their perceptions of hospitality programs in the United States. Building on this study, Kent, e.al. (1993) conducted a similar ranking study. In addition to program administrations for academia, their study included industry executives from hotel and restaurant companies. Their goal was to rank academic hospitality programs using reputation.

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In 2002, Gould and Bojanic replicated the Kent, et al. (1993) study with additional questions of whether stakeholders use rankings, what the preferable ranking scale was, does school affiliation bias rankings, and what attributes are perceived as most important in determining quality of the hospitality programs. Several additional ranking studies using different ranking criteria have since been conducted. Ranking studies conducted within the academy and not by "for profit" individuals/organizations are summarized in Table. 1. Similar to the Kent, et al. (1993), and Gould and Bojanic (2002) studies, this current study is focused on the ranking of US hospitality programs within schools of higher education. This study replicated the Gould and Bojanic (2002) with minor modifications.

--- Place Table 1 about here ---

Methodology

This is a quantitative study to investigate hospitality school rankings as determined by academic leaders of hospitality programs in the US. Consistent with the Gould and Bojanic (2002) study, the definition of ranking for this study is "…a regular effort by some organization or person to gather numerical data on two or more programs, display the information in a way which depicts program performance/quality and provides evidence of some external audience, usually the public-at-large" (p. 24).

A questionnaire was replicated from the Gould and Bojanic (2002) study with only minor updates necessary to reflect the time difference of 16 years between the two studies. Written permission by both authors was granted for use of their original data collection instrument for this study. One change in the questionnaire was the list of schools included for the ranking.

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Based on the time element between the two studies, additional hospitality programs/schools have opened and needed to be considered for ranking. To account for this, the list of schools to be ranked in the questionnaire was developed by aggregating recent ranking data of US hospitality programs from three well know college ranking lists including: Best Schools (the bestschools.org, 2018), 25 Best Hospitality Schools (successfulstudent.org, 2018) and 2018's Best Hospitality Management Colleges (collegefactual.com, 2018)). These studies were chosen because they had the most robust inclusion of hospitality and tourism programs/schools in their ranking studies. Any school ranked in the top 25 from each of the three studies was included. Consequently, if a school was not in the top 25 for ranking year 2018, they were not included regardless of their age, size or media status. This process was necessary as there are over 200 hospitality programs in universities, schools, and community colleges. This compilation resulted in a list of 38 schools.

The 38 schools were listed alphabetically on the questionnaire. Participants were asked to rank the list of schools based on their perceptions of program quality. Additional questions that were asked included the use of rankings by the participant, which attributes were most important in the ranking process, and basic demographic information. Results of the survey data were analyzed to determine each school's program rank. Demographic information was collected but no effort was made to ascertain individual information or identity. Note that the researchers recognized that there might be additional universities in the US with excellent programs not included in this study. This study was limited in scope by using only those programs ranked in the top 25 of three above mentioned ranking studies.

Participants

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Subjects for the study included deans, directors, or program heads from all U.S. 4-year and larger 2-year hospitality programs. A common practice in universities is the posting of name, position, and contact information of academic deans, directors or program heads listed on their respective school's website. These names were collected and a list for sample population of academic program executives was compiled. This list was used to target potential participants for the study.

Data Collection

To ensure anonymity, the questionnaire was developed and distributed using Qualtrics Survey Software (QSS). There were two data collection periods over a period of 18 months. Through QSS, an initial email was sent to each participant outlining the study, requesting his or her participation in completing the survey, and providing a link to the survey. A follow-up reminder email was sent out one week later. A third email with a final request was sent three days prior to the due date. The initial response was low resulting in a 22% response rate. A second round of survey requests was emailed in early 2020. Since the survey was anonymous, the second round of surveys was sent through QSS using the email system to send to only those who had not responded in the first data collection round. The same email protocol from the first data collection round was followed for the second round.

The analysis was performed using the Statistical Program for Social Science version 23 (SPSS). Descriptive statistics including means and frequency were used to summarize the data. A common method used in ranking studies is to consider each data point or attribute and scale or normalize it using the mean or average score for equitable comparison (Williams & de Rassenfosse, 2016). Similarly, overall program rankings were determined by first calculating the

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mean ranking for each hospitality program/school from participants' completed surveys and then rank ordering the means for comparison.

Results

In total, 233 web-based questionnaires were distributed to educational administrators of hospitality programs in the US. Of the questionnaires distributed, 77 survey questionnaires were received (33%). Of those received, 57 (74%) had completed the school ranking, the importance of attributes and demographic sections. The remaining 20 (26%) survey questionnaire responses only completed the importance of attributes sections and demographics. Descriptive statistics included primary employment, participant age, years of work experience in industry, and years of work experience in higher education (see Table 2). Participants were also asked if they used program rankings in any manner when performing their job. Of the 77 valid responses, 53% responded "yes", 42% responded "no" and 5% did not respond to the question.

Of the 77 questionnaire, the over half of the respondents (78%) have over 10 years of work experience and the majority (92%) had well over 10 years of experience in higher education (see Table 2). The majority of respondents (69%) were over the age of 50 (see Table 3).

--- Place Table 2 about here ---

--- Place Table 3 about here ---

As was mentioned earlier, 38 schools were listed in the questionnaire for ranking. The results of school ranking can be found in Table 4. Consistent with three of the previous four academic ranking studies shown in Table 1, this study found Cornell University in the top five.

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While Purdue University was ranked in the top five in all of the previous studies, it ranked eleventh in this study. University of Nevada, Las Vegas was named in three of the top four previous studies, but was ranked ninth in the current study.

--- Place Table 4 about here ---

In addition to ranking the hospitality schools, participants were asked the importance of various attributes when evaluating hospitality programs. As shown in the Pareto chart displayed in Figure 1, experience/internships and curriculum were identified as more important whereas number of faculty and program size were considered least important.

--- Place Figure 1 about here ---

Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusions

Measuring the quality of a program, department, school or university is somewhat controversial by the nature of the ranking process. One challenge is the lack of consistent methodology for ranking school programs (Law, Fong, & Fong, 2015). Many frameworks have been proposed and subsequently used but none has emerged as the best practice (Guironnet & Peypoch, 2018).

Research in higher education ranking systems, conducted by Vernon, et al. (2018), found 24 ranking systems through their search with 13 used in studies published in 2015 or 2016. The number of systems can lead to a wide inconsistency among rankings. Many ranking studies focus on research activities, teaching activities and enrollment statistics (Filippakou, 2011;

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Guironnet & Peypoch, 2018; Zhang, Bao, & Sun, 2016). Others have incorporated different measures including statistics on international students, budgets, placement, and success of its alumni (Reddy, Xie, & Tang, 2016). Still others consider "the quantity and quality of resources such as finances, employees, facilities, time and technology" (Neyazi, et al., 2016, p. 89). Yet other studies are ranked based on reputation and perception of leaders in their respective program/discipline.

Similar to Kent, et al. (1993) and Gould and Bojanic (2002), this study is a reputational ranking study. This study chose to rank programs/schools by surveying deans, directors, and program heads in higher education in the hospitality industry. As noted in their study, Kent, et al. (1993) stated that, "…those who supposedly know about academic quality in a discipline can be and often are employed as raters" (p. 93). While there can be challenges with this method, including perceptions based on size of program or well established brand names, there is evidence that raters that are informed are able to ignore their bias.

The hospitality industry is experiencing exponential change and growth. Hospitality professionals need graduates prepared for the changing workplace. Schools that provide for this growing demand are sought after by these industry professionals. Ranking studies provide a way to assist in providing stakeholders with information to assist them in their decision-making process.

Online access to information and the competitive nature of today's landscape provides a backdrop for why rankings can be valuable to the consumers of the information. With the growing number of college programs creating seemingly limitless choices for prospective students and industry recruiters, rankings can provide some clarity and assistance. Rankings can serve to assist perspective students in choosing the best fit for their academic experience. For

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parents, rankings can serve to provide information to them for the purposes of assisting their children in choosing the right university/program for their needs. Industry recruiters can use the rankings to search for schools that produce students that fit their organizational culture and needs. Similarly, rankings can serve to assist schools in attracting top students into their programs. Rankings can also be used to strengthen grant proposals and their success in obtaining grant funding.

While perhaps imperfect in design and application, ranking studies continue to be useful tools in society. Readers are cautioned to keep the limitations noted here in mind when using the findings of this study or of any ranking report. Future research is needed to continue the efforts to develop a ranking study approach that consistently captures and measures essential elements that satisfies stakeholders and does so in a manageable and affordable manner.

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Table 1. Previous Academic Studies Ranking Hospitality Schools

Study	Author (s)	Year	Measurement	Method	Rankings
Colleges' hospitality programs: Perceived quality	Kent, Lian, Khan, & Anene	1993	Reputation based on peers	Questionnaire	1. Cornell, 2. UNLV, 3. FIU, 4. Purdue, 5. Univ of Houston
Exploring hospitality program rankings	Gould & Bojanic	2002	Replication of Kent Study	Questionnaire	1. Purdue, 2. UNLV, 3. Cornell, 4.Michigan State, 5. Penn State
A world ranking of the top 100 hospitality and tourism programs	Severt, Tesone, Bottorff, & Carpenter	2009	Scholarly contribution	Frequency of university author contributions in journals over 5 yrs.	2. Cornell, 3. UNLV, 4. Penn State, 6.Virginia Poly, 7. Purdue
A longitudinal study of hospitality and tourism management graduate program quality assessment rankings: 2002-2012	Khan, Lee, & Park	2013	Graduate school longitudinal rankings: 2002-2012	Questionnaire	1. Purdue, 2. Kansas State, 3. Virginia Tech, 4. Penn State, 5. IU

Table 2. Work Experience

Yrs of Work Experience in Industry	Percent	Yrs of Work Experience in Higher Ed	Percent
0-1 year	6%	0-1 year	0%
2-5 years	10%	2-5 years	3%
6-10 years	17%	6-10 years	18%
11+ years	61%	11+ years	74%
No Response	5%	No Response	5%
Total	100%	Total	100%

Table 3. Age Demographics

Age Group	Percent
20-29 years old	3%
30-39 years old	5%
40-49 years old	17%
50-59 years old	39%
60+ years old	30%
No Response	6%
Total	100%

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Table 4. Hospitality Program/School Ranking

Ranking Results (n=57)

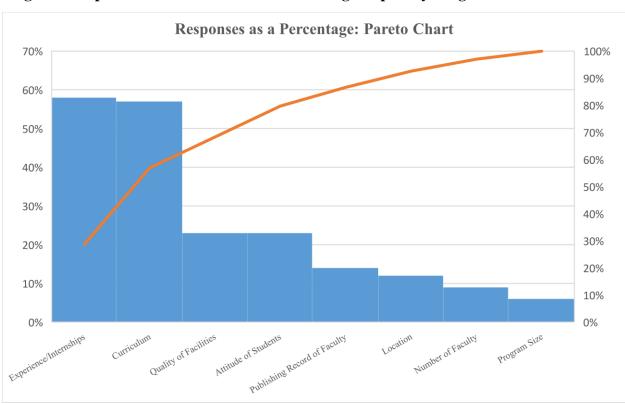| University	Mean	Rank
Cornell University	3.32	1
California State Poly Technical	8.88	2
Florida International University	10.30	3
Michigan State University	11.44	4
Florida State University	11.88	5
DePaul University	12.09	6
Pennsylvania State University	12.89	7
Johnson & Wales University Providence	13.25	8
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	13.67	9
Boston University	13.75	10
Purdue University	14.37	11
Drexel University	14.42	12
Iowa State University	14.81	13
Fairleigh Dickinson University	15.11	14
George Washington University	15.81	15
Georgia State University	17.02	16
James Madison University	17.70	17
University of Central Florida	17.82	18
Kansas State University	18.07	19
University of Houston	18.12	20
Oklahoma State University	18.42	21
New York University	18.91	22
Kendall College	19.28	23
Northern Arizona University	21.82	24
Ohio State University	21.82	25
University of Delaware	24.82	26
Texas Tech University	25.26	27
University of Massachusetts, Amherst	25.77	28
Virginia Polytech Institute & State University	25.88	29
University of Denver	26.11	30
Temple University	26.30	31
University of Alabama	28.21	32
University of South Carolina	28.49	33
University of Alaska, Anchorage	28.56	34
University of North Texas	30.89	35
Washington State University	31.79	36
University of San Francisco	31.95	37
University of Wisconsin - Stout	32.00	38

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Figure 1. Importance of Attributes for Evaluating Hospitality Programs

Responses as a Percentage: Pareto Chart