

## **Tapping into Your Local College or University**

By Thomas F. Cannon, Director, Tourism Management Program, University of Texas at San Antonio

“Nothing but low paying jobs!” That mantra has been associated with the hospitality industry for years, especially among one of the most attractive employee pools: College students. But for this highly desirable group of potential employees, hotels are the very face of that “low-paying” industry.

So, why would any college student consider working for you, at your property? They might – if they knew you. And the best way to introduce yourself (and your hotel), is by getting involved at the local college or university. Whether your local school has a hospitality or tourism curriculum is not important. Your focus needs to be on capturing the interest of these educated, potential employees who are just sitting down the street.

Remember, you are vying for their attention like every other industry. Use the strategy you use every day when you prospect for customers, but first understand how to reach this student market. At every turn, educate them about the value of a hotel career. That means you need to “get in their face.” But how?

### **Be a Guest Lecturer**

Put a face to the brick and mortar of your hotel. Whatever your role, your expertise is welcomed by the professor, and is a great change of pace and scenery for the students.

Just offer. Check the university’s web site for the appropriate department (e.g., management, sales, engineering, information technology, etc.). Contact the Dean or department chairperson. Outline your expertise and explain how it might fit in with the goals of the class. Your offer to guest lecture will be sent to the appropriate faculty member for follow-up.

### **Sponsor Internships**

Through your new contacts or the university’s Career Service Office, offer a paid semester-long internship for students. Make their experience substantive rather than filled with menial tasks. Outline clearly what they will be doing and let them know you expect them to be a contributor. Students talk to other students the same as your customers. What better promotion than a third party positive testimonial?

### **Fund Scholarships**

A college degree is not cheap! Just one textbook can exceed \$100, on top of tuition, fees, rent, gas and lots of pizza! Establish a scholarship in the name of your hotel, or better yet, an endowment whose interest will provide scholarships in perpetuity. Students seeking financial aid (which is most) will see your hotel’s scholarship listed amongst other generous donors. Often there is a special ceremony for donors and student recipients, which includes photo coverage for university and local publications. This can bring lots of goodwill.

### **Make a Lunch Date**

Once you have identified an interested professor, program advisor, or sharp student, invite them as your guest to your local HSMAI chapter's monthly luncheon. They will meet other professionals who have made the hotel industry their chosen career. Your guest will benefit from the networking experience and the hotel industry will have spawned an enthusiastic spokesperson.

### **Offer Jobs**

Students need jobs while in school – even entry level positions. Work with their class schedules and you will have a loyal employee for several years. But, do not take them for granted. Just as with your customers, it costs more to prospect for another than to retain the loyal one you have now.

Offer work related incentives, appropriate pay increases, increasingly more responsibility, and training to demonstrate that you not only value them but are investing in them. Talk with them about “next steps” if they stay with your hotel and what they can expect after they graduate. If you do not have a management trainee program – create one.

Send your job listings to the university's career service office. Most have online systems for easier access. Ask about Career Fairs and send your representative ready to sell the benefits of your hotel. Sounds simple, but too often company representatives just hand out brochures and cannot answer questions. Students are turned off and they definitely understand “you only get one chance to make a first impression.” Send your best, since they reflect your hotel.

### **Need a Consultant?**

Universities not only educate but many conduct research as well. A faculty member or a university research center can provide you with expertise in a variety of disciplines to help you solve and /or analyze problems. Some research consulting is fee based and others might qualify for a class project. For unbiased reliable research, check first with your area university.

### **Reap the Rewards**

For some of you, what I have shared is nothing new. You are already successfully partnering with your local university and reaping the rewards. Congratulations and thank you. If you are not, I have just outlined how easy it is to get started. Partnering with a university not only benefits your hotel and the students, but it will enhance the image of the hotel industry and you will be an important contributor to the workforce development of your community. Now that is a real “win-win”!

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