

Career Decision-Making and Intention: A Study of Hospitality Undergraduate Students

Abstract

This study determined factors influencing undergraduate hospitality students' career intentions in the hospitality industry. 360 hospitality students completed a survey that assessed career decision-making, expected outcomes, and items focused on academic-related decisions and demographic background. Logistic regression analysis revealed that career intentions in hospitality were significantly associated with students' gender, work experience, transfer status, and outcome expectations in the industry. Rewards most frequently reported by students focused on intrinsic outcomes of the industry (opportunities for career accomplishment and self-fulfillment). Implications are discussed for education and industry along with suggestions for future research.

Key Words: Career intentions, decision-making, intrinsic motivators, hospitality students

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INTRODUCTION

Retention of young professionals in the hospitality industry is an important concern (Walsh & Taylor, 2007; La Lopa & Ghiselli, 2003; Stalcup & Person, 2001). In response, researchers have sought to identify factors that could lead to greater retention of hospitality graduates in the industry. Walsh and Taylor (2007) surveyed 718 hospitality alumni (401 responded) from Cornell University and found that career commitment can be promoted with the presence of specific job features. These included competent leadership, challenging jobs that offer growth opportunity, and fair compensation. After surveying hospitality graduates from Michigan State University from 1982 to 1987, Knutson (1989) maintained that “understanding expectations, perceptions of reality, and resulting satisfaction are a major key in the retention effort” (p. 463), and “faculty and industry recruiters share the responsibility of helping students set realistic expectations of the industry” (p. 467). Similarly, Riegel (1985) asserted that faculty “play an important role in enhancing and developing a sense of commitment to a career in hospitality management” (p. 2). Boles, Ross, and Johnson (1995) speculated that identifying employees’ intentions to quit is useful in order to reduce turnover rates in the hospitality industry. These researchers examined applicants’ pre-employment demographics and found education, overall work experience, and income were significant predictors of turnover intention. In general, researchers have focused on hospitality graduates and alumni’s career expectations (Altman & Brothers, 1995; Cho, Erdem, & Johanson, 2006; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2003; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Walsh & Taylor, 2007) and factors associated with retention (Boles et al., 1995; Pavesic & Brymer, 1989). Current studies on hospitality students’ career-related behavior and intention while still in school are less common; Jenkins (2001) noted that

“relatively little research has been undertaken to establish hospitality students’ perception of the industry” (p.13). Further understanding of hospitality students’ career decision-making process and career intentions has important implications for educators. Knowing the values and expectations of young people, allows hospitality programs and faculty “to guide them into right employment settings and this will ensure person-organizational fit” (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986 cited in Ayca & Fikret-Pasa, 2003, p. 142).

STUDY OBJECTIVES AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study focused on a sample of hospitality undergraduate students and had three main objectives: First, to determine factors that impact their career-related decisions; second, to explore motivations for pursuing a hospitality career; and third, to examine whether the interaction of selected variables significantly predicts the probability of hospitality students’ career intentions. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) provided a conceptual frame for our study. This theory has been used to explain factors that impact students’ academic major selections, career interest exploration, goal development, and career persistence behaviors (Lent et al., 1994). The SCCT highlights three social cognitive variables and how they interrelate with person and contextual variables during the career development process (Lent et al., 1994). Therefore, this study focused on three central components of the SCCT: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (or intention) and their interaction with environment and learning experiences.

Self Efficacy. This concept dominates career development theories and may be best described as “Can I do this?” (Lent et al., 1994, p. 83). Self-efficacy serves as a mediator to motivate people to achieve a special goal (Feltz & Payment, 2005), such as pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. Career decision self-efficacy is about individuals’ belief in their ability

to carry out the following five tasks: self-appraisal, vocational information gathering, plans for the future, problem-solving, and goal selection (Crites, 1961). Performing these five tasks is essential to achieve career maturity. These five tasks were measured in our undergraduate sample by having students complete the Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) scale. This scale has been used to evaluate the level of confidence a person possesses when making career decisions (Lokan, 1984).

Self-efficacy can be developed and modified through four sources, including career performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1986). In this study, we explored whether hospitality students' self-efficacy may be influenced by their work experiences in the industry (i.e., performance accomplishments) and the encouragement of significant others (i.e., social persuasion).

Outcome Expectations. This factor is an important determinant of “career interests and choice goals” (Gore & Leuwerke, 2000, p. 238) and may be best described as “If I do this, what will happen?” (Lent et al., 1994, p. 83). Outcome expectations are both the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that career choices and goals are based on (Lent et al., 1994). In addition, expected outcomes toward a particular career option can be physical (e.g., work conditions), social (e.g., power), or self-evaluation (e.g., achievement) (Bandura, 1986). Among these three, self-evaluation plays “a particularly influential role” in career interests (Lent et al., 1994, p. 90). Perceptions and employment expectations in the hospitality industry were measured in our undergraduate sample by having students complete the Career Outcome Expectations (COE) scale.

Career Intentions. This factor is defined as “the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior” (Warshaw & Davis,

1985, p. 214). Both self-efficacy and outcome expectations are predictors of “career intentions and persistence behavior” (Betz & Vuyten, 1997, p. 179). Previous research indicates that students’ intentions to choose an occupation associated with their chosen majors can be predicted if their career beliefs and interests match their career goals (Gore, 2002; Schultheiss, 2000). In this study, career intentions were measured by students’ response to one item measuring whether or not students plan to work in the hospitality industry after graduation.

Personal and Contextual Variables. According to the SCCT, personal characteristics, contextual factors, and learning experiences play important roles in influencing one’s career exploration and career development process. Lent et al. (2002) assert that personal and contextual variables help “constrain or enhance personal agency” in the career choice process (p. 62). In this study, we examined whether the following four variables predicted the probability of hospitality students’ pursuing careers in the hospitality industry: gender (personal variable), academic and transfer status (contextual variable), and internships/work experience in the industry (experiential variables). The rationale for selecting each variable is literature-based.

First, although gender has been a main focus in the career development research (Gati, Osipow, & Givon, 1995; Lent et al., 1994; Swanson & Tokar, 1991), little attention has been directed toward whether this variable impacts hospitality students’ career decision-making. Second, the impact of academic status was explored on career-related behaviors by comparing the responses of freshmen and seniors. These two groups were chosen because each is in a transitional stage and making major academic- and career-related decisions. Although freshmen students’ concerns often focus on declaring an academic major, this decision is part of the career development process (Blustein, 1992). According to Gore (2002), freshmen students’ ideas about future careers are easily confirmed by information and training in their chosen majors. Third,

prior research indicates that industry experiences have positive influences on hospitality students' career-related behaviors (Christou, 1999; McMahon & Quinn, 1995). Fourth, transfer is becoming an increasingly important issue in higher education as "only one-third of the people receiving their diplomas actually matriculated at the schools conferring their degrees" (U.S. Department of Education, 1986 cited from Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995, p. 323). This study builds upon prior research (e.g., Eimers & Mullen, 1997; Okun, Benin, & Brandt-Williams, 1996; Townsend, 1995) by exploring the impact of transfer status on hospitality students' career intentions. A single item was used to determine students' transfer status.

Hypothesis Testing

The conceptual underpinnings of this study are illustrated in Figure 1., and the four hypotheses tested in this study included:

Hypothesis 1: There will be significant relationships among decision self-efficacy and career outcome expectations.

Hypothesis 1a: There will be significant relationships between vocational exploration commitment and the two social cognitive variables (career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations).

Hypothesis 1b: There will be significant relationships between career intentions and all other career related variables, including career decision self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and vocational exploration and commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Students' career intentions can be significantly predicted by career decision self-efficacy, outcome expectations, vocational exploration commitment, and students' background variables.

METHODOLOGY

Pilot Test

A pilot test was carried out with 64 students enrolled in undergraduate hospitality related courses at a southwestern university. The pilot test was conducted to solicit students' comments on the wording and understanding of the questions. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire,

students were notified that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary. A confirmatory reliability analysis was performed during the pilot test. Item-total correlations for all the measurements were acceptable, ranging from .69 to .91.

Participants

A convenience sampling method was used in this research and surveys were administered to 400 undergraduate students enrolled in a hospitality program at the same university. Forty of the surveys were not used because the participants did not return the survey, were not hospitality majors, or not all of the questions were completed. Consequently, our analysis was based on 360 surveys.

Measures

Students who volunteered to participate, completed a self-report survey that included three measures: Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF) scale, Career Outcome Expectation (COE) scale, and Vocational Exploration Commitment (VEC) scale. The CDSE-SF, developed by Taylor and Betz (1983), includes 25 items with five subscales: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, career planning, and problem solving. This scale has been used to evaluate the level of confidence a person possesses when making career decisions. Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) is associated with levels of career decidedness (Betz & Luzzo, 1996) and a good predictor of career decision making (Betz & Voyten, 1997; Luzzo, 1995). Example items are “Decide what you value most in an occupation” (self-appraisal), “Talk with a person already employed in a field you are interested in” (occupational information), “Make a career decision and not worry whether it was right or wrong” (goal selection), “Get involved in a work experience relevant to your future goals” (career planning), and “Persistently work at your major or career goal even when you get frustrated” (problem-solving). Students used a 5-point response scale (1= No confidence at all; 5= Complete confidence).

The COE assessed students' expectations of pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. The original scale was modeled after an outcome measure designed by Hackett, Betz, Casas, and Rocha-Singh (1992) consisting of 12 items that assessed engineering students' expectations. In this study, the measure was expanded to 22 items on a 7-point scale (1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree). The additional items are based on Bandura's outcome expectations theory (1986), expert interviews, and prior research on students' perceptions and employment expectations in the hospitality industry (e.g., Altman & Brothers, 1995; Gilmore & Hsu, 1994; Jenkins, 2001; Johns & McKechnie, 1995; Knutson, 1989). This measure used in this study begins with a statement about "A career in the hospitality industry would... and example items include "allow me to succeed in a well-paying job" and "allow me to succeed in a job I like doing." Examples of additional items were: "allow me to achieve a balance in my personal and professional life," "provide me with good opportunities for ownership/entrepreneurship," and "make me worry about my interpersonal/people skills (reversed item)."

The VECS, developed by Blustein, Ellis, and Devenis (1989), includes 19 items on a 7-point scale (1= Never true about me; 7= Always true about me). Example items include: "I have a good deal of information about the occupational fields that are most interesting to me," "I find myself changing academic majors often because I cannot focus on one specific career goal," "I worry about my ability to make effective educational and career decisions," and "I am not very certain about the kind of work I would like to do."

Students were also asked to complete a 12-item semi-structured survey assessing demographic and career related background information. Items focused on four general areas: (a) age, gender, grade point average, ethnicity, academic status; (b) use of career-related facilities, activities, and services; (c) person's influence when choosing a college major and future career;

and (d) current and past work experiences in the hospitality industry. Students were also encouraged to respond to one open-ended question regarding career motivations: “Please indicate the major reason(s) why you are considering a career in the hospitality industry after graduation?” Students took an average of 15 minutes to complete the entire self-report survey.

Measurement Quality

The reliability and validity for CDSE-SF, COE, and VEC scales have been confirmed by previous researchers (Betz, 2000; Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Gore & Leuwerke, 2000). However, a maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis was employed in this study to assess the validity of the combined instrument by using structural model. Results of the goodness-of-fit indices, including the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), and other indices, showed all measurements had an adequate fit to the data; CDSE ($\chi^2 = 700.92, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.65, RMSEA = 0.068, TLI = .98, CFI = 0.986, NFI = 0.978$); COE ($\chi^2 = 1217.76, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 4.52, RMSEA = 0.09, TLI = .97, CFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.963$); and VEC ($\chi^2 = 668.43, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 4.39, RMSEA = 0.097, TLI = .96, CFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.956$).

Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was computed to assess the internal consistency reliability for the CDSE-SF, COE, and VECs. The values of coefficient alpha for each scale were .94, .94, and .92 respectively. The alpha coefficients for the data exceed reliability of 0.7, the minimum standard for basic research (Nunnally, 1978). The high coefficient alpha indicated that the measurement used in this study was highly reliable.

Data Analysis

Three methods of data analysis were performed in this study. First, a series of bivariate correlation analyses was conducted to test the first three hypotheses on the relationships among career related variables. Second, logistic regression analysis was performed to test the fourth

hypothesis and identify background and career related variables that significantly predicted the probability of students' intention to work in the hospitality industry after graduation. Third, students' responses to one open-ended question were thematically analyzed. This question encouraged students to express their own views and opinions about pursuing careers in the hospitality industry. Each respondent's comments were read several times by the first author to identify prominent themes. Prominent themes were then used to guide categorize and quantify (i.e., frequency) students' career motivations. Associates read students' responses independently and discussed the emergent themes with the primary researcher. Consensus was achieved after discussion. The prominent themes were then compared with Mayo's (1997) findings to assess whether students had realistic sense of the industry.

The qualitative method allowed us to explore specific reasons that motivate students to the hospitality industry and complement information that may not be found in quantitative data. A total of 394 responses were provided and twelve themes (reasons) emerged from the analysis (Table 4). A frequency was computed for each theme and ranked from most reported to least.

RESULTS

Sample Description

The sample was almost gender-balanced (178 females and 182 males) and included 13.9% freshmen, 22.2% sophomore, 34.7% junior, and 29.2% senior levels, respectively. The mean age of students was 20.93 ($SD = 2.82$) and their mean GPA was 2.96 ($SD = .51$). The largest proportion was White/Caucasian (86.1%, $n = 310$), followed by Hispanic (7.2%, $n = 26$), Black/African American (3.1%, $n = 11$), Asian (2.5%, $n = 9$), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.1%, $n = 4$). The majority of students (91.7%) were hospitality management (HM) majors and 8.3% were completing a minor in HM. Among the 360 participants, over one-third

(37.2 %) were transfer students and about half (52.5%) were currently working in hospitality related establishments; an average of 13 work hours per week. Breakdown of transfer students revealed that: (a) 30% students were from community colleges, 17% transferred from other four-year universities, and 54% transferred from other majors within the same university; and (b) one-third had transferred from Business Administration (30%), followed by Art/Sciences (28%), Engineering (13%), General Studies (6%), Pre-med/nursing (6%), Mass Communication (5%), Agricultural Sciences/Natural Sciences (4%), Human Sciences (4%), Architecture (2%), and Education (1%).

The majority (83%) of students intended to pursue careers in the hospitality industry after graduation. Regarding specific career choices, the largest proportion of students reported food and beverage-related segment preferences (29.7%), followed by hotel and other accommodations (17.8%). Although almost equal proportions of freshmen and senior students reported that they would pursue careers in hospitality, more seniors indicated they were not planning to enter the industry than freshmen (7.7% vs. 4%).

Factors that Impact Students' Career Decisions

Students' career decision-making ability is viewed as a learning process that can be reinforced or refined through role models and persuasion from important others. Therefore, participants were asked who had the most influence on their decision of an academic major. Almost half (46.1%, $n = 166$) reported that they decided on their own, followed by the deciding influence being friends (16.7%, $n = 60$), parents/siblings/relative (13.3%, $n = 48$), others (10%, $n = 36$), employer (8.1%, $n = 29$), and high school counselor or teacher (1.4%, $n = 5$). Participants were then asked who had the most influence with regard to their decision on a future career in the hospitality industry. Again, the largest proportion (40.3%, $n=145$) reported that they held the

most influence in making their career decisions, followed by the deciding influence being faculty (16.1%, n=58), parents/siblings/relative (11.6%; n=42), employers/co-workers (11.4%; n=41), friends (6.9%; n=25), and others (5%, n=18).

Students' career decision influences were then compared based on the personal (i.e., gender) and contextual variables (i.e., academic status) (Table 1 & 2). Gender comparisons revealed that large proportions of both male (45.6%) and female (34.8%) students reported they decided on their own. Other deciding influences for male students included friends (11%) followed by faculty (10.4%); for female students, faculty (21.9%) followed and then parents (12.9%). Employers were ranked fourth by both male and female groups (9.0% vs. 9.3%).

Knutson's (1987) survey of college students showed that seniors' perception of faculty's influence on their employment decision was lower than that of freshmen. The same result was found in this study, 20 years later, with the influence of faculty members decreasing for seniors when compared to freshmen. Regardless of the decline, the influence of faculty members on students' decision to work in the hospitality industry was relatively high compared to other influences.

Table 1 and 2 Go About Here

Awareness and use of career resources have been found to reflect maturity in career decision-making (Lokan, 1984). Therefore, students in this study were asked if they used any career-related services and which services did they find the most helpful in their career decision-making. Approximately, two-thirds of the students (63%) reported they did not use any of the on-campus career services.

Our descriptive findings suggest that students' use of career related services was associated with academic status and gender. As shown in Table 3, the college advising and

recruitment office was reported most useful (57% of freshmen and 41% of seniors). Also, for senior students, the department career service center (21%) and class instructors (21%) were equally helpful. Furthermore, females (22.4%) were twice as likely as males (10.4%) to seek career assistance from faculty.

Table 3 Goes About Here

Career Intentions and Motivations

85% (n=306) of students responded to the one open-ended question regarding their motivations to pursue careers in the hospitality industry. Twelve themes emerged regarding their expected outcomes as well as the rewards they anticipated in a hospitality career. As shown in Table 4, the most frequently reported reason for pursuing a career in the hospitality industry focused on “people interactions” (n=82). Examples of students’ statements illustrating this theme include: “I love to interact with people,” “I love to serve people,” and “the reward is great when helping people”.

Table 4 Goes About Here

The second and third commonly reported motivations for pursuing a hospitality career focused on “personal interests and fits” and “passion for the industry.” Examples of students’ comments reflecting these themes include: “It fits my personality,” “This is what I always wanted to do,” and “Love the industry and this is what I enjoy doing.” The nature of the work, employment opportunity, and work environment were reported as the fourth, fifth, and sixth motivations for pursuing a hospitality career. Students’ comments reflected that they: (a) valued the variety of job choices and alternative options in the hospitality industry; and (b) appreciated the unique ownership opportunity, the changeable and hands-on work nature, and the fun

environment. Whether it is the nature of the work or personal interests that attracted students to this industry, their comments revealed that they were pleased with their career choice in hospitality and placed more value on intrinsic outcomes than extrinsic.

In order to identify which outcomes the students valued the most, a descriptive analysis was run on the Career Outcome Expectations (COE) scale. The COE scale includes three subcategories: physical, social, and self-evaluation. Examples of physical outcomes include monetary incentives and pleasant working environment, while social outcomes include social approval and power. Examples of self-evaluation include fulfillment and job satisfaction (Bandura, 1986, 1997). The results revealed that hospitality students in this study valued self-evaluation outcomes (mean score 5.6 out of 7) the most, followed by social ($M=5.52$), and physical outcomes ($M=4.79$). Both social and self-evaluation are intrinsic outcomes.

Relationships among Career Variables

To test the first three hypotheses, a series of bivariate correlation analyses was computed to examine relationships among each pair of career-related variables (career decision self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, vocational exploration commitment, and students' career intentions). The summary is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Goes About Here

Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) was found to be positively related to career outcome expectation ($r = .54, p < .01$) and negatively related to vocational exploration commitment ($r = -.547, p < .01$) and students' career intentions ($r = -.16, p < .01$) (see Table 4). (As noted, both VEC and intention are reverse scales.) The correlations among the social cognitive variables were consistent with those of Hackett et al.'s study (1992), indicating that self efficacy was moderately related to outcome expectations and interests among engineering students.

Relationships among career self-efficacy, outcome, intentions, and indecision were also reported among university students ($n = 350$) enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a mid-western university in Betz and Voyten's research in 1997.

Career intentions in this study were interpreted as students' intentions to work in the hospitality industry after graduation. A low score on career intentions meant having higher intentions to work in the hospitality industry after graduation. The results of this study showed that the factor of career intentions was negatively related to career decision self-efficacy ($r = -.15, p < .01$) and outcome expectation ($r = -.26, p < .01$), but was positively related to vocational exploration commitment ($r = .21, p < .01$).

Thus, the first three hypotheses were supported. The social cognitive variables, career decision self-efficacy and career outcome expectations, were significantly correlated to each other in this study. Vocational exploration commitment was found to be significantly correlated to career decision self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and career intentions. Career intention was also found to be significantly correlated to all three career related variables. These findings were consistent with prior research (e.g., Betz & Voyten, 1997; Blustein et al., 1989; Hackett et al., 1992).

Career Variables that can Significantly Distinguish Students' Career Intentions

This study used logistic analysis to identify factors, from career related variables and students' background variables, which can significantly predict the probability of students' intentions to work in the hospitality industry after graduation. Logistic regression was used rather than discriminate analysis because logistic regression "requires no assumptions about the normal distribution of the predictor variables, linearly related, or equal variances within each group" (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p. 314). Logistic regression analysis was performed, with freshmen

($n = 50$) combined with sophomores ($n = 81$). This data analysis decision was made because the number of subjects in these two groups was relatively small when compared to the number of junior ($n = 125$) and senior students ($n = 104$).

The resulting regression model did significantly predict student career intentions ($\chi^2 (37) = 94.2, p < .001$). Cox and Snell R square indicated that 27% of variation in the dependent variables (career intentions) can be accounted for by all predictor variables (career-related variables and background variables) included in the equation. The results also showed that 96.4% of students with hospitality career intentions and 41.5% of students without intentions were correctly classified. Together, these results confirmed that this model was highly accurate (86.8%) in classifying subjects according to their career intention behavior. The summary of Beta, Wald statistics, and odds ratios are all included and presented in Table 6. *B* (Beta) refers to “the regression coefficients or weight for each variable that is included in the equation” (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p. 315). Wald statistics indicate the significant value of predictor variables on students’ career intentions. Odds ratios are the probability of students with career intentions in the hospitality industry over students without such intentions.

Table 6 Goes About Here

Table 5 shows that career intentions to work in the hospitality industry after graduation are associated with students’ gender, transfer status, current employment status, and career outcome expectations (COE). Specifically, females had stronger career intentions than males while transfer students had stronger career intentions than non-transfer students. In addition, students who currently worked in the industry showed stronger intentions than their peers who were not employed at present. Students who scored high on the career outcome expectations

scale also reported stronger career intentions to work in the hospitality industry after they graduate.

DISCUSSION

Conceptual Contribution

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Betz & Vuyten, 1997; Blustein et al., 1989; Hackett et al., 1992; Lent et al., 1994), this study's findings supported two assumptions of the Social Cognitive Career Theory: (1) career self-efficacy and outcome expectations variables guide individuals to have control over their career path; and (2) personal, contextual, and experiential variables influence career self-efficacy and outcome expectations which in turn direct one's career choice or intention behaviors (Lent et al., 1994). Consistent with assumption (1), analyses revealed that the career intentions of hospitality students were significantly correlated to career decision self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and vocational exploration commitment. In support of assumption (2), regression analysis indicated that hospitality students' career intentions to work in the industry after graduation were associated with gender, transfer status, current employment status, and career outcome expectations (COE). It is important to acknowledge that this study tested selected aspects of the SCCT. The full model involves a whole array of personal attributes, behavioral influences, and social-economic conditions that can influence individuals' career choice (Lent et al., 1994). Therefore future researchers, when examining hospitality students' career decisions, are encouraged to include other personal and environmental variables (e.g., culture, social support systems, barriers, aptitudes, and campus experiences).

Implications for Hospitality Educators and Industry

As discussed in this section, our results hold three main implications for both hospitality educators and industry. First of all, hospitality students in this study identified themselves as the most influential factor in making career decisions and also reported intrinsic rewards as more

valuable outcomes or motivators for pursuing careers than extrinsic. Implications of this finding suggest that hospitality firms continue to create industry positions that promote 'self-reliance,' 'autonomy,' 'advancement,' 'opportunities for personal and professional development,' and 'sense of achievement' (Aycan and Fikret-Pasa, 2003; Savicki, 1999). This recommendation is consistent with Walsh and Taylor's (2007) data from hospitality alumni at their respective university. These researchers concluded that "money alone does not motivate a young manager" (p. 164), "the strongest driver of commitment is the intrinsic nature of the job," and "one of the most important job features focuses on challenging job that offers growth opportunities" (p. 179). Industry may also find our qualitative data on students' motivations for pursuing a hospitality career valuable. Their responses matched with industry professionals' views regarding qualifications for hospitality graduates in the 21st Century (Mayo, 1997), and included service attitude, flexibility, enjoy serving people, enjoy what you do, dedication, and commitment.

Second, hospitality educators may find our regression analysis on factors impacting undergraduate students' career intentions worthwhile when planning curriculum. For example, female students were found to show stronger intentions to work in the hospitality industry than male students. This finding is consistent with Kusluvan and Kusluvan's (2003) data that females, more so than males, "see their personality and identity as congruent with working in the tourism/hospitality industry" (p. 92). These authors also found that female students "perceived promotion opportunities for women as more limited compared to males" (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2003, p. 92). Thus, hospitality educators are encouraged to continue to: (a) build their female students' confidence by exposure and mentoring by successful women leaders in the industry; and (b) direct attention to barriers that confront females in their professional life. Female

hospitality graduates who are better prepared to successfully tackle gender-related professional challenges are more likely to experience career longevity in the industry.

Our regression analysis revealed that students who had experiences (work or internship) in the hospitality industry showed stronger career intentions than students who do not. Therefore, educators are encouraged to continue to refine hospitality internship programs that promote students' professional growth and leadership as well as realistic expectations of the industry. This recommendation is consistent with prior research demonstrating that these experiences strengthen students' realistic expectations and perceptions of the hospitality industry (Christou, 1999; Knutson, 1989; McMahon & Quinn, 1995).

In addition, transfer students were found to show stronger career intentions to work in the industry after graduation than non-transfer students. The greater intention to commit to career choices found among transfer students may be due to having "a clear sense of one's occupational preference." (Blustein et al., 1994, p. 344). However, based on prior research, transfer students may progress through the remaining stages of the career planning process in a foreclose fashion (Blustein et al., 1994). Therefore, hospitality educators are encouraged to continue to provide advising assistance that further develops transfer students' realistic expectations of their future in the industry. Mentoring and orientation programs tailored to this sometimes underestimated student population are also recommended (in this study, they comprised of 37% of total sample). An increase in the retention and graduation rates of transfer students may positively impact the industry. While not all students have strong intentions/motivations in the hospitality career, those who have should be encouraged.

The third implication focuses on our logistic regression revealing that outcome expectations significantly predicted students' career intentions (goals) in the hospitality industry

($p < .05$). This finding is consistent with Lent et al.'s (1994) assertion that outcome expectations are a major contributor to "motivating career choices or goals" (p. 90). Therefore, hospitality educators are encouraged to continue to assess whether their students' motivations to pursue careers in the industry are realistic. While students may have realistic knowledge about this industry, they must realize that along with "the fun and people-interaction environment" (as cited from students in this study) come serious responsibilities, difficulty decision-making, and the confidence to exhibit leadership skills. We believe that these are the keys to sustain recent graduates in the industry and promote them to next level of management positions.

Ensuring that students have realistic knowledge of the industry is not the sole responsibility of hospitality educators and may not be sufficient for students to succeed professionally. Therefore, it is important that industry friends and partners are willing to offer opportunities to nurture and mentor hospitality students. Industry is also encouraged to extend its focus from training potential managerial trainees to cultivating future leaders. Both hospitality programs and industry can work together to help students not only build realistic knowledge of the field but also to (a) instill/enhance key hospitality attitudes while they are in school, (b) improve their transformable leadership skills, and (c) be sensitive to the culture of industry. Once hospitality students have a vision and clear goals regarding their future career, and support from industry professionals, they are likely to be more committed to their jobs. Thus, programs will fulfill their goals of preparing future hospitality managers and industry will have identified and attracted the right people (hospitality graduates) that may in turn reduce their turnover rates.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

Four key limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the convenience sampling method used in this research limited the generalizability of our results. Therefore, large scale, nationwide

studies are recommended to substantiate our findings. Second, our investigation was limited to students enrolled in one hospitality management program. Future studies with samples drawn from campuses across the country are recommended. This sampling approach would include students from multiple hospitality cultures (e.g., Business, and Family& Consumer Sciences) and would enable researchers to investigate the impact of program culture and professional emphasis on students' career motivations, career expectations, and career goals. Third, although our data revealed that transfer students have greater intention to pursue careers in the hospitality industry, future research is needed to substantiate our findings. Investigations are needed that examine the reasons influencing students to transfer among or between majors. Fourth, this study's results may be more meaningful to hospitality educators than to industry. Our data provided theoretical meanings or explanations to students' career expectations and behavior toward their future jobs. According to Lent et al., (1994) "socio-cognitive factors are important to career entry and also influence subsequent career choices and adjustment. However, once implemented, career choices may be revised by a variety of additional factors which extend beyond the scope of the present framework" (p.81). Thus, this study is limited in its scope to students' future career performance.

In summary, despite these limitations, the present study contributes by providing a conceptual understanding of hospitality students' career decisions, choice, and intention behaviors from a social-cognitive perspectives. This investigation also provides a foundation to build upon for future research on hospitality students using social-cognitive variables and exploring their relationships with personal, contextual, and experiential variables.

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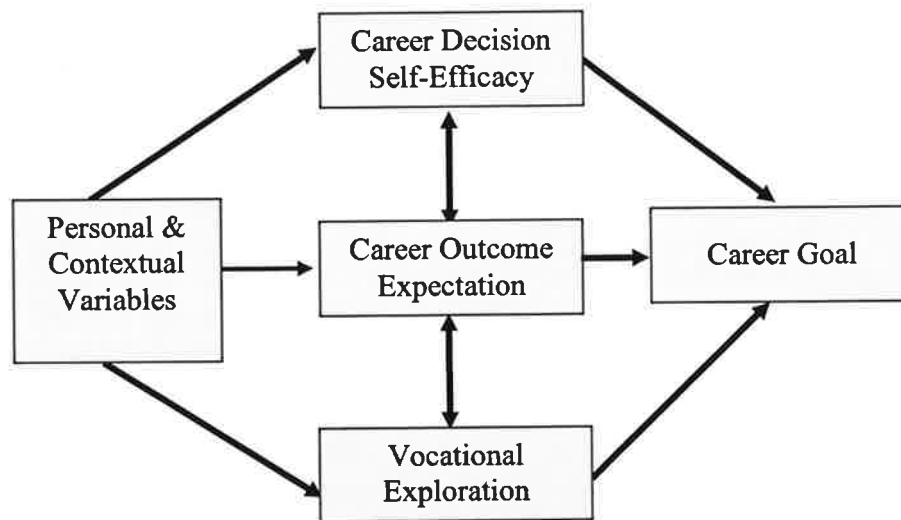


Figure 1. The conceptual underpinnings for this study.

Table 1.
Students' Career Decision by Academic Status

	Freshmen (n = 42)		Senior (n = 97)	
	%	Ranking	%	Ranking
Myself	25 (59.5%)	1	35 (36.1%)	1
Faculty	8 (19.0%)	2	14 (14.4%)	3
Friend	4 (9.5%)	3	8 (8.2%)	5
Parents/guardian	3 (7.1%)	4	9 (9.3%)	4
Employer	2 (4.8%)	5	18 (18.6%)	2
Others	0 (0%)	6	4 (4.1%)	6
Co-Worker	0 (0%)	6	3 (3.1%)	7
Brother/sister	0 (0%)	6	2 (2.1%)	8
Relatives	0 (0%)	6	2 (2.1%)	8

Table 2.
Students' Career Decision by Gender

	Male (n = 162)		Female (n = 167)	
	%	Ranking	%	Ranking
Myself	83 (51.2%)	1	62 (37.1%)	1
Friend	20 (12.3%)	2	5 (3.0%)	7
Faculty	19 (11.7%)	3	39 (23.4%)	2
Employer	17 (10.5%)	4	16 (9.6%)	4
Parents/guardian	11 (6.8%)	5	23 (13.8%)	3
Others	7 (4.3%)	6	8 (4.8%)	5
Brother/sister	2 (1.2%)	7	3 (1.8%)	8
Co-Worker	1 (0.6%)	8	7 (4.2%)	6
Relatives	1 (0.6%)	8	2 (1.2%)	9

Table 3.
Usefulness of Career Related Services Indicated by Students

Facilities	Freshmen (n = 21)	Senior (n = 56)	Male (n = 182)	Female (n = 178)
College advising/ recruitment office	57.1%	41.1%	57.3%	49.5%
Department career services	19.0%	21.4%	10.4%	14.1%
Class instructors	9.5%	21.4%	10.4%	22.4%
Others	9.5%	8.9%	7.3%	8.2%
University career service center	4.8%	1.8%	10.4%	3.5%
Use two or more services	0.0%	5.4%	4.2%	2.4%

Note. Others= students organizations, career fair, etc.

Table 4.
Summary of Students' Reasons for Pursuing a Career in the Hospitality Industry

Reasons to Pursue a Hospitality Career	Frequency	Rankings
People interaction (e.g., love serving/helping people)	87	1
Personal interests and fit (e.g., passions; fit my personality/career goal)	52	2
The industry (e.g., love the industry, the field, enjoy it)	48	3
Nature of the work (e.g., love travel; love cooking)	47	4
Employment opportunities (e.g., a variety of job options, ownership)	47	4
Environment (e.g., entertaining, fun, fast pace, always new, changeable)	45	6
Monetary reward (e.g., decent pay in this industry)	23	7
The degree or the major	17	8
Personal capability (e.g., this is what I able to do, jobs are easy)	10	9
Past/current work experience	8	10
Family business	7	11
Job security/stability	3	12

Table 5.
Summary of Correlations Among All Career Related Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. CDSE	-	.534**	-.547**	-.152**
2. COE		-	-.524**	-.265**
3. VEC			-	.210**
4. Intentions				-

Note. n = 360; CDSE = career decision self efficacy; COE = career outcome expectation; VEC=vocational exploration commitment; Career intentions= intentions to work in the hospitality industry after graduation (the last two are reverse scales)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6.
Summary of Logistic Analysis

Variables in the Equation	B	Wald	Odds Ratio
Age	.008	.010	1.008
GPA		16.53	
Gender	-1.09	6.525*	.336
Academic transfer status	1.48	9.714**	4.40
Persons' influence in choosing a hospitality major	-.088	.290	.916
Current employment status		9.524	
Not employed in the hospitality industry	-.973	2.426	.378
Hotel/lodging	8.181	.062	3572.69
Food & beverage	1.002	4.050*	2.724
Attraction/entertainment	.029	.002	1.030
CDSE	.235	.273	1.265
COE	.860	7.813**	2.364
VEC	.115	.174	1.12
Academic status		.602	
Freshmen/sophomore	-.423	.520	.655
Junior	-.303	.394	.739
Constant	5.148	.011	172.123

Note. GPA= grade point average; CDSE = career decision self-efficacy; COE = career outcome expectations; VEC = vocational exploration commitment; $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

