

# COLLEGE FRESHMEN PERCEPTIONS OF HOSPITALITY CAREERS:

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## GENDER AND ETHNIC INTEREST

Abstract

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This study reports the results of research designed to determine which factors influence college freshmen perception of hospitality careers at two institutions - one a small, historically black college and the other a large, land-grant, public university. Results of the research yield interesting information regarding how male, female, and minority students develop perceptions of hospitality careers. Implications for educators and company recruiters are presented.

### Introduction

Hospitality and tourism businesses continue to provide fertile ground for both entry-level employment and long-term careers. At present, nearly one of every twelve workers in the United States works in the hospitality and tourism industry and employment growth is predicted well into the future (Reigel, Mike need to check CHRIE Annual Report? 1995). Further, recent research has suggested that the hospitality industry will need approximately 560,000 new managers by the year 2000 just to keep pace with retirement trends. (Woods and Withiam, 1992). From a global perspective, the estimated growth in worldwide travel and tourism related jobs from 1996 (255 million) to 2006 (385 million) reflects a growth rate of 50.1% (WTTC Progress and Priorities, 1996). In an effort to keep pace with employment opportunities, a proliferation of colleges and universities are offering degrees in hospitality management. Over the last two decades, the number of U.S. four-year hospitality management programs has grown from around 40 to nearly 170. Additionally, over 1000 other programs (i.e. associate degree and certificate) currently exist (Reigel, CHRIE Annual Report 1995).

As hospitality employment and higher education has grown, so has the body of literature devoted to the study of hospitality student perceptions of hospitality career and employment related issues (for example, Casado, 1992; DuRocher & Goodman, 1991; Sciarini & Woods, 1996). Recent demographically-segmented studies have examined female as well as racial and ethnic minority hospitality student perceptions of hospitality careers, employment decision factors and college major choice variables. For example, Umbreit and Diaz (1994) studied a sample of 120 female undergraduates at Washington State University and found that 84% were attracted to the hospitality management major after entering college. Most were not strongly influenced by any particular person when selecting their major, and most aspired to become general managers or higher in terms of their career goals. Roy and DeMicco (1993) surveyed undergraduates at five predominately minority colleges and found that family contacts and working hospitality professionals were influential in these students' career decision making. Further, students in this sample chose hospitality as a major because of the job opportunities available. Other recent studies have focused on hospitality student perceptions of specific industry segments such as club management (Barrows, Partlow and Montgomery, 1993) and quick service restaurants (Diaz and

Samenfink, 1991). Each of these studies and others like them have added to the understanding of hospitality students and the impact of their perceptions upon their career choices.

While the study of hospitality management students has proliferated, there is a dearth of literature related to the study of college students not majoring in hospitality management and their perceptions of hospitality careers. It has been estimated that between one-third and two-thirds of all students change their career choice during college (Astin, 1977; Feldman and Newcomb, 1969). It has also been estimated that 50-70 percent of college students change majors prior to graduation (Foote, 1980; Kojav, 1971; Slaney, 1980; Titley and Wolf, 1976). This group of students represents a large and very accessible potential market to fill hospitality classrooms in the short term and hospitality management positions in the longer term.

At the same time there exists employment opportunities for college students, the hospitality industry faces a pervasive image problem (Elder, 1987). A commonly held belief among the public seems to consider hospitality jobs as low paying and lacking career advancement potential. This was expressed by the father in the recent movie, Reality Bites (citation). Further, recent well-publicized allegations of discriminatory practices by hospitality firms (Prewitt, 1995; Carlino 1994; Romeo 1995) cannot have helped improve the perceptions of the industry, especially among minorities. There is in fact, evidence of gender, racial and ethnic diversity across lower levels of employment within hospitality (NRA Employee Profile, 1993). However, female and minority representation at the executive levels of hospitality has not (yet) kept pace (Rueben, 1994; Walkup and VanWarner, 1993). Further, minority enrollment within major U.S. hospitality management programs has been below overall minority enrollment levels at the same universities as a whole (Stanton, 1989).

Based both on the current labor market dynamics within the hospitality industry and societal perceptions of it, a study of entering freshmen career interests with respect to the hospitality industry was deemed appropriate. This paper examines the perceptions and interests of a group of first year students from two institutions: a large public land-grant university and a small historically Black college. Particular attention has been given to gender and ethnic similarities and differences in these students' career expectations and their views of the hospitality industry.

## Methods

**Respondents and Procedures:** A sample of first-semester freshman at the land-grant institution was selected from a pool of no-preference and pre-business majors, identified at the time of their enrollment in the fall of 1994. All multiracial students in this subpopulation were identified (567) and 950 majority students were selected randomly for a total of 1,517 first year students to be surveyed.

A survey was mailed to these students in late September, 1994. In an effort to enhance the overall response rate, a cover letter advised the recipients that if they returned the completed survey by December 15, their name would be entered in a drawing for a variety of prizes including dinner at a local restaurant, theatre and athletic tickets, and bookstore gift certificates.

A reminder letter with a survey was sent in early November to all non-respondents. By December 15 a total of 346 completed and useable surveys had been returned: a response rate of 23%.

First year, first term students at the Black institution enrolled in a freshman seminar course were administered the survey as a class assignment. The pool of students in this course numbered 180.

Measures: A 79 item survey was developed to measure general career awareness as well as specific knowledge and perceptions of hospitality careers. *Career characteristics* that people consider when selecting a career consisted of 18 items. Responses were made on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not very important" to "very important." Factor analysis with varimax rotation of the land-grant university sample (confirmed by the Black institution) resulted in a five-factor solution: Salary/prestige (REWARDS) (4 items,  $\alpha = .7547$ ); autonomy/flexibility (AUTONOMY) (3 items,  $\alpha = .6305$ ); work environment (ENVIRON) (4 items,  $\alpha = .6924$ ); BENEFITS (3 items,  $\alpha = .6151$ ); and travel/external features (TRAVLEXT) (4 items,  $\alpha = .5956$ ). Only one item failed to load over .50, actually .48; thus all items were retained. The first factor accounted for 30.3 percent of the variance while the other four factors accounted for an additional 19.1 percent (see Appendix A).

Thirteen items were listed as potential sources that *influenced* the recipients in their *career choice*. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strong negative influence" to "strong positive influence" with the midpoint "no influence," captured responses on each item. A five-factor solution resulted from the varimax-rotated factor analysis: family/friends (FAMFRDS) (4 items,  $\alpha = .5899$ ); high school faculty and courses (HSSCH) (3 items,  $\alpha = .7284$ ); company representatives at career fairs (INDUSTRY) (2 items,  $\alpha = .7507$ ); media coverage (MEDIA) (2 items,  $\alpha = .7646$ ); and experiences gained through work or observing people at work (EXPER) (2 items,  $\alpha = .3943$ ). All items loaded over .56 and were retained. The FAMFRDS factor accounted for 21.3 percent of the variance; HSSCH school 14.6 percent; INDUSTRY 11.7 percent; and the remaining two factors 17 percent.

Nineteen items describing the *hospitality industry* asked recipients to respond to a 4 point Likert scale ranging from "disagree" to "agree" with a "don't know" option available as point 5. Submitted to a varimax rotated factor analysis, a six factor solution resulted. However, upon interpretation of the Scree plot and loadings, the six factor did not hold. Based on the loadings a second factor analysis forced the items to load on four factors. Two variables failed to load on any factor (discriminate in hiring practices and flexible work schedules) and were treated separately. One item, customer service oriented, which loaded equally on two factors was placed in factor 1. Factor 1 (5 items,  $\alpha = .7843$ ) was named JOBCHAR, as it described job features, and accounted for 29.5 percent of the variance. Factor 2 (4 items,  $\alpha = .7523$ ) covered pay and leadership (PAYLEAD) and accounted for 10.1 percent of the variance. The final two factors, workforce stability/opportunity (STABFUT) (4 items,  $\alpha = .7343$ ) and industry characteristics (INDUSVW) (3 items,  $\alpha = .5354$ ). Four items had to be reverse coded to account for wording of the items. These changes are identified in Appendix A.

Respondents were asked to *compare a career* in the hospitality industry to other career opportunities they were considering. Fifteen characteristics were provided and responses were made on a 3 point scale ("better," "same," and "worse"). Factor analysis (varimax) revealed four common factors which contained all 15 items: skill development (LEARN) (5 items,  $\alpha = .7338$ ); pay/status (PAY) (4 items,  $\alpha = .7627$ ); job conditions (CONDITNS) (4 items,  $\alpha = .6536$ ); and EQUITY (2 items,  $\alpha = .6696$ ). All loadings were greater than .50 with only one item having to be recoded. LEARN accounted for 31.7 percent of the variance while PAY contributed 11.8 percent and the remaining two factors combined for 16.7 percent.

Four items based on the realistic job preview literature (Wanous, 19??) were used to determine the characteristics of career/job information respondents currently had available to them (specific, broad, important, and accurate). Additional items asked how much the respondent knew about the hospitality industry; their interest in a hospitality career under two scenarios -- one with no job characteristics provided and one with a salary and working conditions specified.

A series of questions captured their work experiences in the hospitality industry (duration, type of position). A set of demographic questions completed the survey, including age, gender, ethnic affiliation, parents' education levels, and academic major.

### Respondent Profiles

The typical respondent from the land-grant institution was an 18.5 year old, white (72 percent), and female (66 percent). The minority respondents' 28 percent exceeded the composition of the freshman class (as a whole) which was 16 percent. Approximately 51 percent of their fathers and 38 percent of their mothers had earned bachelor's or higher degrees. Less than 3 percent of respondents parents had not completed high school. Fifty-six (56) percent intended to earn a business degree while one in five (20 percent) were undecided. The other 24 percent were dispersed among pre-law, education, pre-medicine, and communication majors. More than half (54 percent) had worked at one point in the hospitality industry, primarily in fast food establishments and restaurants. On average, these students had worked between 6 and 12 months in their hospitality jobs.

The typical respondent from the Black institution was a 21 year old, female (51 percent). Only 4 percent of the respondents were white. Approximately 25 percent of their fathers and 23 percent of their mothers had earned a bachelor's or higher degree. Twenty-seven percent of the mothers had received associate or equivalent degrees. Slightly less than 12 percent of their fathers and 4 percent of their mothers had not completed high school. Twenty three percent intended to earn a business degree while one in four (27 percent) were undecided. Twenty percent indicated they were interested in education. The remaining 40 percent selected pre-law, pre-medicine, communications, and natural sciences as their majors. Less than half, (43 percent), had worked in the hospitality industry; those who had held hospitality jobs stayed for an average of 12 to 16 months.

A comparison of socio-demographic characteristics (t-tests) between the samples from the land-grant and Black institution found significant differences on age, gender, parents' education, and previous work experience in the hospitality industry. In additional analyses with these characteristics controlled, the location at which the sample was drawn still produced several significant results. Based on these preliminary findings, the decision was made to present the descriptive statistics separately based on the location from which the sample was drawn. In the models, for interest in a hospitality career, the samples have been combined as this factor can be controlled in the regression.

### Career Influences and Expectations

Careers that students wish to pursue are shaped by a variety of experiences. Among these students, two factors stood out as major career influencer, EXPER and FAMFRDS. Their own work experiences, combined with their observations of other people in the occupations they were considering, had a strong positive influence on career choice for both groups. Students from the Black institution placed a higher value (4.22) than did students from the land-grant institution (4.07).

Family and friends was the second influencer. While the Black institution's score was slightly higher on this factor, the underlying pattern was interestingly different. Students from the midwest institution relied heavily on input from both their parents and less on siblings and friends. At the Black institution, students reported that their mother had the strongest influence on their career decisions, followed by their siblings. Fathers or male guardians had a much lower level of influence.

With the exception of company representatives at career fairs, which was viewed neutrally, the other factors played minor, yet positive roles. Prior to college, land-grant students were more likely to derive career guidance from their high school coursework while Black institution respondents received more assistance from counselors and teachers.

Students selected their career options around three central characteristics: benefits, salary/prestige, and work environment. The most important set of criteria, BENEFITS, included health insurance, vacation time, and most importantly, job security. The REWARDS associated with a career path, salary, advancement opportunities, prestige (social status), and professional recognition, were also very important. ENVIRON which offered friendly co-workers, variety of assignments, teamwork opportunities, and pleasant physical surroundings was a highly preferred aspect of one's future career. While all these dimensions received ratings greater than 4 (on the 5 pt. scale), ratings from students at the Black institution were significantly higher than those at the Midwest institution. These data are presented in table 1.

(Table 1 about here)

Trailing behind these factors, yet still viewed as important for both sets of student participants, were AUTONOMY and TRAVLEXT. Students sought careers which provided flexible work

schedules, freedom from continual supervision, and the ability to move easily in and out of the workforce. External characteristics which extended the student beyond individual job tasks and rewards by offering opportunities to be involved in community service, exercise leadership, travel extensively, and move to various job locations were equally as important as AUTONOMY. Students from the Black institution considered these external factors, particularly the opportunities to move to new locations, to be of higher importance than students from the land-grant institution.

When asked to compare the career(s) they were considering with the careers of their parents or guardians, the average rating of 2 indicated that their careers were only somewhat related. Among Black institution respondents (52 percent) stated their career plans were "very little" to "only somewhat" similar to their parents' careers. Only 21 percent modeled their career plans to a "great" or "very great" extent on what their parents did. Among land-grant respondents the move away from their parents' careers was even more pronounced with 66 percent indicating "very little" to "somewhat" and only 15 percent at a "great" to "very great" extent.

#### Career Knowledge

The knowledge students currently possessed about their careers was evaluated across four dimensions commonly mentioned in the realistic job preview literature (Wanous, 1992). Students described their career information as highly accurate and moderately broad in scope. They also believe they have some of the specific information they need to make a decision but realize that important information may be missing because they were not aware of it. Black institution respondents claimed they had more specific, as well as broader, information than students at the land-grant institution. Table 2 presents these data.

The respondents general knowledge of the hospitality industry was limited. The average response (both samples) to the question "how much do you know about the hospitality industry?" was "a little amount," (mean 2.2 to 2.5). Only 9 percent of the land-grant students believe they possess more than a moderate amount of information on the industry compared to 25 percent of the Black institution respondents. Similarly, more Black institution students were aware of recent discriminatory episodes within the industry: 24 percent compared to 11 percent of those responding at the Midwest institutions.

(Table 2 about here)

When asked to describe the hospitality industry, students generally believed that hospitality was an exciting and growing enterprise that utilized technology and innovative practices to support customer service. They also perceived the industry to be composed primarily of large companies. Specifically, hospitality was viewed this way:

Job Characteristics: The highest percentage of students believed the industry provided exciting opportunities through the use (development) of a wide variety of

skills and competencies and technological applications directed toward customer service.

Pay/Leadership: Salaries and benefits were competitive, as well as equitable for women and minorities, and that opportunities for increased responsibility and leadership existed.

Stability: The industry provided career opportunities for college graduates characterized by steady advancement, even though the industry is perceived to experience higher turnover in personnel than other industries.

Industry Characteristics: The industry is perceived as growing, comprised primarily of large companies, and jobs within the industry are not considered to be demeaning.

On the two items that were treated separately, students "somewhat agreed" that hiring discrimination was not practiced in the industry and that the work schedules tended to be flexible. Students from the Black institution tended to hold a similar opinion as the land-grant students on this issue. However, they viewed the industry somewhat more unfavorably than land-grant students in terms of pay equity and demeaning jobs.

### Interest in Hospitality Careers

Within the previous year, approximately one-third of the respondents had engaged in a conversation, either at school, home or at work, about career opportunities in the hospitality industry. Still, when presented the simple question, "are you interested in a career in the hospitality industry?" only 25 percent expressed an interest. Another 35 percent among land-grant respondents and 25 percent among Black respondents were "not sure."

When presented with detailed information on a starting position in hospitality, respondent interest heightened. Entering as a management trainee with training across several business segments (such as marketing and human resources) that involved cutting edge information technologies and a starting salary in the mid-\$20's, interest doubled to more than 50 percent.

This shift was also captured in the type of position participants would be willing to enter in the industry. There was very little interest in hourly positions in the kitchen or housekeeping areas and only mild interest in similar positions in the dining areas and at the front desk. Instead, students desired to start at some designated "managerial level," such as assistant manager. While interest in top management positions (at least titles) was expected, respondents expressed the strongest interest in starting as a management trainee at company headquarters. Table 3 presents these data.

(Table 3 about here)

While the Black institution respondents' interests were high (over 50 percent for assistant manager or management trainee), it was not as high as the expressed interest among respondents from the land-grant institution. Even without as strong an interest, Black institution respondents

compared a hospitality career favorably to other career opportunities they were considering. From the means in Table 3, the comparisons cluster around two or "the same" on the three item scale (better - same - worse) which was utilized. LEARN (apply skills, learn, challenging work, decision making), CONDITNS (satisfaction, travel, meet people), and EQUITY were considered by 50 percent or more to be the same or better than other careers being contemplated. However, among land-grant respondents, the status of hospitality careers in terms of pay, benefits, advancement, and prestige was believed to be not as good as their alternatives. In general, Black institution respondents held more favorable opinions of the hospitality industry in general than land-grant respondents.

Prior experience in the hospitality industry, regardless of the segment of the industry one worked or the position held, generated more interest in pursuing a hospitality career. A mean of 2.93 was reported by those with work experience compared to 2.55 without experience on the general question of interest in a hospitality career. This interest was mediated, however, by the length of time an individual worked in the hospitality industry. Interestingly, those with longer tenure had less of an interest in pursuing a hospitality career.

Finally, overall students believed their parents would be "somewhat" to "completely" supportive should they elect to pursue a hospitality career: 80 percent of land-grant and 69 percent of Black respondents, respectively.

#### Gender and Hospitality Interest

Comparisons between men and women were made using t-tests for the latent variables derived from the factor analysis and selected singular items. T-tests were followed by ANOVAs during which college was specified as a covariate and entered first to control for its influence. From this we learned that men and women held similar patterns in terms of career influences and expectations. Men, however, were more likely to pursue careers similar to their parents ( $t = 2.08$ ,  $p = .038$ ). The environment of friendly co-workers, teamwork and pleasant surroundings (ENVIRON and BENEFITS), especially job security, were of more importance to women than to men ( $t = 3.22$ ,  $p = .001$ ;  $t = 2.06$ ,  $p = .040$ , respectively). Men were more interested in the REWARDS; particularly higher salaries ( $t = 2.05$ ,  $p = .041$ ) and AUTONOMY work situations ( $t = 2.59$ ,  $p = .010$ ) than women. The ability to contribute to society was rated significantly higher by women than men ( $t = 4.75$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and women also attributed more influence to company representatives (INDUSTRY) in their career decision than men ( $t = 2.20$ ,  $p = .028$ ).

We also noted differences between male and female descriptions of the hospitality industry. For example, women were more likely to view the industry as exciting and high tech with opportunities to develop new skills and competencies than men (JOBCHAR,  $t = 4.66$ , and  $.000$ ). Women also felt more strongly that hospitality was innovative and offered advancement and career opportunities for college graduates in spite of possibly high turnover (STABFUT,  $t = .217$ ,  $.030$ ). Further, women were more likely to view pay as equitable than men ( $t = 2.30$ ,



.022). Compared to women, men view the industry as not growing, comprised of smaller companies and more likely to provide demeaning jobs (INDUSVW) ( $t = 2.47, .014$ ).

Few significant differences were found between men and women on the four latent variables used in comparing a hospitality career to others they were considering. However, on both pay and benefits, women indicated that the hospitality industry compensation and benefits were slightly worse than other careers they were considering. These differences were significant: pay ( $t = 2.15, .032$ ) and benefits ( $t = 2.59, .010$ ).

While women appeared to be more aware of the characteristics of the hospitality industry (job conditions, opportunities, and industry dynamics) and compared a hospitality career at least equivalent to other careers they were considering, they still expressed less interest than men in a hospitality career, regardless of the scenario provided. While t-tests found no statistical difference in the means, women's averages were 2.68 and 2.85 (between "uninterested" and "not sure") while men's were 3.43 and 3.48 (between "not sure" and "interested") for the two scenarios, respectively.

Upon controlling for location of the samples, the gender differences found for ENVIRON, BENEFITS, INDUSTRY, JOBCHAR, and INDUSVW were unaffected. In all cases, gender differences remained statistically significant. College did affect STABFUT, reducing the gender difference to non-significance. A comparison of gender and race segmented data is presented in Table 4.

(Table 4 about here)

### Ethnicity and Hospitality Interest

The same procedures were followed to compare white and minority students. An initial comparison between Afro-American students with minority students of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-Pacific origin on the variables revealed only two incidents where variable differences were significant: TRAVLEXT and MEDIA, both significant at the .05 level. This overall similarity in ratings among these multicultural groups allowed these groups to be combined, creating a dichotomous ethnic variable of whites and multiculturally diverse students.

All students held high expectations regarding what their career will embrace in terms of rewards (pay, benefits, status), variety, travel, co-workers, and physical surroundings. Multicultural students' expectations were higher, being statistically significant on nine of the eighteen items. Multicultural students, in particular, placed a high importance on REWARDS (salary, prestige, and professional recognition) with the difference being significant at .000 level. The ENVIRON was also of higher importance, especially influenced by the teamwork item, ( $t = 2.71, .007$ ) as was TRAVLEXT ( $t = 5.16, .000$ ). Having the opportunity to travel or at least relocate to another city, combined with contributing to society and the leadership possibilities by hospitality, were factors playing a prominent roles in shaping multicultural students' career interests.

Students, regardless of color, expressed similar patterns regarding events and individuals which influenced their career choices. Even though the latent variable for family and friends was not significant, individual items, as mentioned previously, were significantly different. White students rated the influence of their parents/guardians, mother and father, equally. Multicultural students, however, rated the influence of their mother much higher than that of their father. In both cases, the comparable ratings of mother to mother and father to father were statistically significant (mother  $t = .294, .003$ ; father  $t = 2.82, .005$ ). Minority students were also more likely to seek advice from their siblings ( $t = 2.96, .003$ ). Early introduction to company representatives through career fairs, class presentations, and recruiter visits to schools also appeared to have a stronger influence on minority students. The rating difference on INDUSTRY was statistically significant ( $t = 2.78, .006$ ).

Both groups of students agreed to the same extent that the information they had about their careers was accurate, though they may not be aware of some important information. Minority students, however, believed they possessed more specific knowledge on their career choices than white students (mean 3.32 and 2.87 respectively,  $t = 4.82, .000$ ). Further, they described the information they had as broad in scope (mean 3.34 and 3.11, respectively  $t = 2.62, .009$ ) more so than did white students.

While both groups indicated that they knew only a little about the hospitality industry in general, differences appeared on how they viewed the industry and future potential for careers. Minority students viewed the industry as comprised of smaller companies which were not growing and comprised of jobs that were demeaning (INDUSVW,  $t = 4.32, .000$ ). While minority students agreed that career and opportunities existed within the hospitality industry they were not as strong in their beliefs as white students (STABFUT,  $t = 2.56, .011$ ). Minorities believed that hospitality work schedules were more flexible than whites ( $t = 2.94, .004$ ) and they also felt differently about the delivery of quality customer service. For instance, they only agreed "somewhat" to this characteristic while whites agreed much more strongly ( $t = 2.63, .009$ ).

A pattern emerged in the comparisons between a hospitality career and other careers being considered. Whites generally felt that a hospitality career was, at best, "the same" as their other career choices and was worse in the areas of pay, prestige, challenging work, and job satisfaction. Only in the areas of work schedules, advancement opportunities, and gender equity did hospitality careers show an advantage. For minority students, however, hospitality careers were viewed more favorably. For these students, hospitality careers fell short in the areas of pay, prestige, work schedule and job satisfaction. Although in each case the mean was close to 2 (or "the same.") for minority respondents hospitality careers appeared better in terms of equity (both racial and gender), advancement opportunities, and ability to learn new skills and competencies.

Several significant differences appeared among the latent variables. Multicultural students provided a rating more favorable to hospitality careers on these factors: LEARN ( $t = 3.85, .000$ ), PAY ( $t = 3.85, .000$ ), CONDITNS ( $t = 2.35, .019$ ) and EQUITY ( $t = 2.29, .022$ ).

The interest in a hospitality career was about the same in both groups, approximately 2.75 (mean). This figure indicated that they were "uninterested or not sure." The figure jumped to the interest side with the description of a management trainee program. An important factor that would certainly influence their interest in a hospitality field would be the support of their parents in this decision. Minority students felt that their parents would be only "somewhat" supportive while white students believed their parents would be "very supportive." The scale difference was significant ( $t = 1.95, .05$ ).

The inclusion of the location of the university/college where the sample was obtained as a covariant had only a minor impact on ethnic differences. Only three variables experienced a shift of significance to non-significance: ENVIRON, STABFUT, and CONDTNS. These variables dealt with the environment of work, such as co-workers, teams, ability to meet people and travel, and the future of the hospitality industry in terms of opportunities.

### Expressing an Interest in a Hospitality Career

Regression analysis was utilized to determine which independent variables accounted for the variance in the student's expression of interest of a hospitality career (dependent variable). The stepwise regression method, using the standard protocol of P (IN) at .05 and P (OUT) at .10, was used to determine these results. Separate regression models were conducted for the two interest scenarios: scenario 1: general interest case, and scenario 2: information about management trainee program and specific job characteristics.

The results for scenario 1 shown in Table 5 indicate that this model was significant ( $F = 20.62, p < .01, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .4196$ ). Those students who had recently discussed a hospitality career with a counselor, teacher, or company representative held more interest in a hospitality career by nearly one point on the interest scale ( $\beta = .74, p < .01$ ). Business majors were also more inclined to a hospitality career ( $\beta = .40, p < .01$ ) as were students whose parents were more supportive (family support) of their decision ( $\beta = .13, p < .10$ ).

When a hospitality career compared favorably to other careers being considered, especially with regards to CONDTNS ( $\beta = -.43, p < .01$ ) and PAY ( $\beta = -.36, p < .05$ ), students were more interested in hospitality. JOBCHAR ( $\beta = .31, p < .05$ ) where hospitality careers were perceived to be more exciting and technically oriented also raised interest in hospitality careers. Gender was also positively related to interest ( $\beta = .36, p < .05$ ) as men appeared to have more interest in a hospitality career than women.

In scenario 2, the model was significant ( $F = 11.22, p < .01, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .2440$ ). With specific information on an entry level management trainee position, the variables that entered changed with the exception of Family Support ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) and Recent Discussion ( $\beta = .35, p < .05$ ). Therefore, we found that the more support which a family would give in the student's decision to pursue a hospitality career was associated with higher interest and that having recent discussions on a hospitality career also spurred more interest in the industry.

When opportunities to LEARN, developing new skills and competencies, ( $\beta = -.42, p \leq .01$ ) were perceived to be better in hospitality than other career options, interest was nearly 10 percent higher than when it's the same and 20 percent higher when viewed as worse. When considered an important influence, student contact with INDUSTRY representatives also raised interest in a hospitality career ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ).

When career expectations for pay, status, and other REWARDS were perceived to be consistent with the rewards offered in hospitality, students were more interested in a hospitality career ( $\beta = .43, p < .01$ ). On the other hand, when BENEFITS were viewed as less important in a career, interest in hospitality was higher.

(Table 5 about here)

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our aim has been to explore the career expectations of college freshmen; especially their possible interest in a hospitality career. The results suggest students would consider a hospitality career if this career opportunity compares favorably with other career options they are considering and if their career expectations are satisfied. The interest, however, is contingent upon a variety of factors, from parental support to perceptions of the stability of hospitality jobs, as well as the gender and ethnic attributes of the student.

The college the students attended was not expected to influence their interest in a hospitality career. While college did not appear in the final regression model, this variable did capture a portion of the variance. Because of the racial composition of the historically Black institution, a problem with multicollinearity existed with the ethnic or race variable. After addressing this issue, college location still accounted for some of the variance in the interest level of students. We cannot be sure what to attribute this variance to, as it may represent several characteristics. For instance, one possible characteristic is a regional difference. The Black institution is located within a major tourist area where the hospitality industry plays an important role in the local economy. Residents depend on the industry for employment and the community economic vitality. Students from this institution may be more aware of the connection of the hospitality industry to their lives. Students from the land-grant institution (which is not located in a tourist area), may view the industry differently. This argument suggests that regional differences may exist in how the industry is perceived. The existence of regional differences should be probed in future research.

Gender proved to be a significant factor in student perceptions of hospitality careers. At least at the freshmen level, women were less interested than men in hospitality careers. Women, however, comprise approximately half the enrollment in hospitality programs. Women may develop their interest later, as Umbreit and Diaz (1994) suggested by the high level of post-first year transfers found among women. Since the gender variable failed to be significant in the second scenario, we may assume that the provided information may not have influenced the interest of female participants. The scenario did uncover two important issues, especially for

women: job security and turnover. Many college students give priority to finding a secure job because they are well aware of recent changes in the workplace which have resulted in significant job changes and losses. This would suggest that it would be wise for industry representatives to provide students with information about hospitality careers, including figures on employment tenure, as well as career opportunities. This information may help foster broader interest in hospitality.

Even though race did not enter the regression model, minorities did perceive the industry differently than non-minorities. Minority students have very high expectations for their careers, particularly a combination of wages, recognition, and status. Minorities also believed they possessed more knowledge of the hospitality industry and compared a hospitality career more positively to other careers they were considering than did non-minorities. This knowledge and positive comparison failed to translate into stronger interest, however. For minorities in particular, parental (often maternal) support is needed in their pursuit of a career and their parents (mother) may not be as supportive of a hospitality career. It's possible that many minority mothers associate hospitality careers with what they or others they know have experienced in hospitality employment situations (i.e. menial housekeeping and kitchen positions or part-time position with fast food companies). Also, for many minority families, their college student may be the first to attend college and a hospitality career is not an acceptable alternative in comparison to other professional possibilities.

These results would suggest that it may also be necessary to involve parents earlier when working with minority students. For example, high school career nights could offer a forum for educating parents on the management career potential within the industry. A scholarship program for children of hospitality employees may also be an approach that would stimulate more interest and support, particularly in regions where hospitality is a major segment of the economy, in a hospitality career.

The key appears to be information. When more information on job characteristics and career opportunities was provided, a shift occurred in how these college students viewed hospitality. With very little information provided (scenario 1) student interest was driven by their perceived comparisons with other career possibilities; a very external view which might suggest that the expressed interest was tentative. With specific career information, student interest is driven by intrinsic values; hospitality careers are more consistent with their deeply held career expectations. Obviously wages and rewards play a major factor in this shift; but it is interesting that students with lower expectations for benefits (especially job security) were more inclined to be interested in hospitality. These students may hold a more flexible position with regards to the early development of their career, which acknowledges the recent restructured workplace, or they may simply not be knowledgeable about benefits in general and are only being stimulated largely by salary considerations.

The use of information corresponds to Wanous' (1992) long-held argument for employers to provide realistic job previews. For example, these results suggest that hospitality employers would be remiss not to target high school students with factual information on career options in

hospitality. In many ways, this information may counterbalance the early, sometimes unpleasant, work experience many high school students have in the fast food/restaurant segment of the industry. Short-term exposure to the industry perks interest; but with longer tenure, interest wanes. With career specific information, in conjunction with exchanges with company representatives who can articulate a variety of career paths which utilize current work experiences and future educational aspirations, high school students can arrive at college with heightened interest in hospitality.

Once on campus, the fertile ground for recruiting hospitality majors is among pre-business majors. These students have a strong desire to be in a business environment and can quickly align hospitality career options with their own expectations. Another potential pool of students is the no-preference student. While we were disappointed that the "no preference" variable failed to make the final regression model, the "no preference" student variable was significant in the initial regression steps, only later being kicked-out by the career expectation variables. Many no preference students lack a career focus, making it difficult for them to make a career choice. Assisting these students with some career development activities may provide the encouragement to major in hospitality. For example, these activities may be prudent if a hospitality program receives its students in much the same fashion that Umbreit and Diaz reported at Washington State University, i.e., through the transfer process after entering the University.

Hospitality employers and faculty still have to deal with lingering, often deeply held, perceptions that hospitality jobs are demeaning and dead-end. The "burger-flipper" mentality is prevalent in many media messages, highlighted as we noted previously in the film *Reality Bites* (popular among the age-group participating in this study). What really grabs students attention is the opportunity to begin their careers in a management training program. The knowledge that a variety of these programs exist throughout the industry may offset, at least for some students, other negatively held beliefs.

This research contributes to our understanding of first year students interest in hospitality careers prior to selecting an academic major. It also has extended the hospitality literature particularly as it pertains to gender and racial interest in hospitality. From this research we know that when students recognize an alignment between their expectations and hospitality career opportunities, interest increases. However, a number of questions remain to be addressed. Future research on regional differences in hospitality perceptions should explore relationships between youth work experiences, local economic dynamics, and eventual employment in the hospitality industry. Another future research issue is the role of parental support in the career decision. We believe that research in this area could determine the beliefs of adults toward hospitality and how these beliefs are conveyed to their children. Finally, attention needs to be given to how students select hospitality as a major once they have entered college. For example, what features of the major and characteristics of the industry attract students? We may learn from this that some students are simply backing into hospitality by default -- not being able to identify other appropriate options.

**TABLE 1. Career Influences Among Respondents from Midwest and Black Institutions**

	Land-Grant Institution		Black Institution	
	Mean (SD)	% Positive	Mean (SD)	% Positive
<b>INFLUENCES</b>				
Family/Friends (FAMFRDS)	3.72 (.59)	37 **	3.86 (.77)	52
High School (HSSCH)	3.52 (.66)	30	3.51 (.92)	38
INDUSTRY	3.23 (.64)	19	3.29 (.94)	30
MEDIA	3.50 (.69)	35	3.52 (1.01)	44
Own Experiences (EXPER)	4.07 (.63)	70 *	4.22 (.79)	76
<b>CAREER CHARACTERISTICS</b>	% Important		% Important	
REWARDS	4.09 (.71)	74 *	4.33 (.63)	79
AUTONOMY	3.67 (.72)	43	3.79 (.81)	52
ENVIRON	4.07 (.66)	66 *	4.24 (.62)	75
BENEFITS	4.32 (.61)	79	4.36 (.68)	82
TRAVLEXT	3.65 (.69)	39 *	3.94 (.72)	58
	% Great Extent		% Great Extent	
<b>CAREER SIMILAR TO PARENTS</b>	2.10 (1.27)	15 *	2.42 (1.37)	21

Significant at : \* .01, \*\* .05.

**TABLE 2. Career Knowledge**

	Land-Grant Institution		Black Institution	
	Mean (SD)	% Great Extent	Mean (SD)	% Great Extent
<b>GENERAL KNOWLEDGE</b>				
Specific Information	2.85 (1.02)	24 *	3.60 (1.03)	51
Broad (scope)	3.08 (1.00)	33 *	3.52 (1.05)	49
Important Information (missing)	3.65 (1.06)	57	3.58 (1.09)	52
Accurate	3.50 (.87)	51	3.65 (1.09)	56
<b>GENERAL HOSPITALITY KNOWLEDGE</b>		<u>% Great Deal</u>		<u>% Great Deal</u>
Knowledge	2.20 (.98)	9 *	2.51 (1.06)	15
Discrimination Aware		11 %		24 %
<b>SPECIFIC HOSPITALITY KNOWLEDGE</b>		<u>% Agree</u>		<u>% Agree</u>
JOBCHAR	3.36 (.53)	84	3.27 (.58)	74
PAYLOAD	3.39 (.57)	82	3.29 (.68)	78
STABFUT	3.31 (.63)	80 *	3.13 (.57)	71
INDUSVW	3.26 (.63)	78 *	3.00 (.65)	58
Hiring/Discrimination	3.12 (.99)	75 **	2.89 (1.07)	67
Work Schedule (flexible)	2.90 (.85)	75 *	3.20 (.82)	84

Significant at: \* .01, \*\* .05.



**TABLE 3. Interest in Hospitality Career**

	Land-Grant Institution		Black Institution	
	Mean (SD)	% Interested	Mean (SD)	% Interested
Spoken about opportunities	32%		36%	
Scenario 1: Interest	2.79 (1.11)	24	2.68 (1.29)	25
Scenario 2: Interest (with infor)	3.51 (1.13)	56	3.34 (1.18)	50
Entry Level Position				
Hourly - dining/fd	2.79 (1.22)	34	2.74 (1.34)	27
Hourly - kitchen/hk	1.81 (.98)	8 *	2.15 (1.27)	16
Assistant dept. manager	3.65 (1.10)	62	3.44 (1.43)	57
Department manager	3.87 (1.07)	69 *	3.57 (1.45)	58
Assistant general manager	3.89 (1.08)	71 *	3.54 (1.45)	56
Management trainee	3.96 (1.11)	74 **	3.71 (1.40)	62
Comparison to Other Careers		<u>% Same or Better</u>		<u>% Same or Better</u>
LEARN	2.05 (.49)	53 *	1.92 (.42)	76
PAY	2.21 (.53)	43 *	1.95 (.50)	67
CONDITNS	1.90 (.50)	69 **	1.79 (.52)	77
EQUITY	1.94 (.38)	91	1.96 (.45)	83
Parents Support		<u>% Supportive</u>		<u>% Supportive</u>
	4.25 (.96)	80	4.06 (1.10)	69

Significant at: \*.01, \*\*.05.

**TABLE 4. Comparison of Means for Gender and Race**

Variable	GENDER			RACE		
	Women	Men	t	White	Multicultural	t
REWARDS	4.16	4.19	.53	4.03	4.30	4.66*
AUTONOMY	3.69	3.75	.89	3.68	3.75	1.09
ENVIRON	4.20	4.01	3.22*	4.05	4.20	2.71*
BENEFITS	4.38	4.26	2.06**	4.31	4.35	.77
TRAVLEXT	3.80	3.68	1.87	3.59	3.90	5.16*
FAMFRDS	3.78	3.74	.58	3.73	3.80	1.30
HSSCH	3.56	3.45	1.53	3.48	3.55	.94
INDUSTRY	3.31	3.16	2.20**	3.16	3.34	2.78*
MEDIA	3.50	3.51	.07	3.48	3.52	.57
EXPER	4.16	4.05	1.80	4.11	4.13	.39
JOBCHAR	3.42	3.18	4.66*	3.35	3.30	.94
PAYLOAD	3.40	3.30	1.66	3.37	3.35	.47
STABFUT	3.29	3.17	2.17**	3.32	3.18	2.56*
INDUSTVW	3.23	3.08	2.47*	3.30	3.05	4.32*
LEARN	1.99	2.04	1.18	2.09	1.93	3.85*
PAY	2.16	2.08	1.74	2.25	2.00	5.26*
CONDITNS	1.85	1.88	.71	1.91	1.81	2.35**
EQUITY	1.95	1.95	.08	1.99	1.91	2.29**
INTEREST 1	2.68	2.85	1.65	2.76	2.74	.20
INTEREST 2	3.43	3.48	.50	3.53	3.38	1.46

Significant: \*.01, \*\*.05.

**TABLE 5. Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis for Interest in Hospitality**

Variables	Scenario 1		Variables	Scenario 2	
	$\beta$	t		$\beta$	t
Recent Discussion	.7395	4.96*	LEARN	-.4254	-2.58*
CONDITNS	-.4354	-2.55*	INDUSTRY	.3212	2.91*
Bus Major	.4010	2.82*	Family Support	.1995	2.61*
PAY	-.3612	-2.33**	REWARDS	.4279	3.43*
Family Support	.1319	1.79***	Recent Discussion	.3516	2.11**
Gender	.3630	2.51**	BENEFITS	-.2758	-1.98**
JOBCHAR	.3103	2.094**			
Intercept	1.1362	1.378	Intercept	1.455	1.72
R <sup>2</sup>	.4410		R <sup>2</sup>	.2677	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.4196		Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.2440	
F	20.6208*		F	11.2209*	
df	190		df	190	

\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .10$

## REFERENCES

Wanous, John P. 1992. Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, Orientation and Socialization of Newcomers. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

## APPENDIX

Results of Exploratory Factor Analyses of Items with Varimax Rotation: Leading,  
Eigenvalues, Variances Explained, and Alpha (Reliability)

	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance	Alpha
<b>I. Career Characteristics</b>				
<b><u>REWARDS</u></b>		5.447	30.3	.7547
Professional Recognition	.7548			
High Salary	.6799			
Advancement Opportunity	.4841			
Prestige/Social Status	.7842			
<b><u>AUTONOMY</u></b>		1.627	9.0	.6305
Control of Work Schedule	.7356			
Freedom from Supervision	.7275			
Movement In-Out Workforce	.5137			
<b><u>ENVIRON</u></b>		1.356	7.5	.6924
Friendly Co-Workers	.6722			
Pleasant Physical Surroundings	.5591			
Variety of Assignments	.6554			
Work in a Team	.6039			
<b><u>BENEFITS</u></b>		1.220	6.8	.6151
Health/Dental Insurance	.7037			
Job Security	.6944			
Vacation	.5453			
<b><u>TRAVLEXT</u></b>		1.044	5.8	.5956
Travel Opportunities	.5760			
Opportunity to Relocate	.6468			
Contribute to Society	.6293			
Leadership Opportunity	.5240			
<b>II. Career Influencers</b>				
<b><u>FAMFRDS</u></b>		2.766	21.3	.5899
Mother	.7558			
Father	.7180			
Siblings/Relatives	.7315			
Friends	.5634			
<b><u>HSSCH</u></b>		1.897	14.6	.7284
HS Guidance Counselors	.6161			
HS Teachers	.8388			
HS Courses	.7867			
<b><u>INDUSTRY</u></b>		1.522	11.7	.7507

Career Fair Reps	.8466			
Company Recruiters/Reps	.8234			
<b>MEDIA</b>		1.195	9.2	.7646
Television	.8447			
Books, Magazines, Newspaper	.8058			
<b>EXPER</b>		1.016	7.8	.3943
Own Work Experience	.7370			
Observation of Others at Work	.7971			
<b>III. Hospitality Characteristics</b>				
<b>JOBCHAR</b>		5.610	29.5	.7843
Boring Jobs <sup>1</sup>	.7023			
Uses Technology	.7653			
Exciting Jobs	.7225			
Learn New Skills	.5378			
Deliver Quality Service	.4582			
<b>PAYLOAD</b>		1.923	10.1	.7523
Leadership Opportunity	.5405			
Equity Pay (Racial)	.7004			
Equity Pay (Gender)	.7202			
Competitive Salary	.6366			
<b>STABFUT</b>		1.626	8.6	.7343
Career Opportunity <sup>1</sup>	.5895			
Innovative	.5468			
Advancement Opportunity	.6971			
Turnover	.6583			
<b>INDUSVW</b>		1.3655	7.2	.5354
Growing	.7114			
Jobs Demeaning <sup>1</sup>	.7168			
Typically Small <sup>1</sup>	.6528			
<b>IV. Career Comparison</b>				
<b>LEARN</b>		4.758	31.7	.7338
Opportunity to Learn	.6735			
Apply Skills	.7597			
Challenging Work	.7278			
Decision-Making	.5977			
Work Schedule <sup>1</sup>	.5126			
<b>PAY</b>		1.763	11.8	.7627
Pay	.7776			
Benefits	.7429			
Prestige	.7245			
Advancement	.5589			
<b>CONDITNS</b>		1.306	8.7	.6536
Working Conditions	.6241			

Meet People	.6150			
Job Satisfaction	.5551			
Travel	.7237			
<u>EQUITY</u>		1.206	8.0	.6696
Racial/Ethnic	.8453			
Gender	.8051			

<sup>1</sup>These items were reverse coded.