EXPECTATIONS OF HOSPITALITY STUDENTS REGARDING ENTRY LEVEL POSITIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

A study which included eleven four-year hospitality programs was conducted to identify specific expectations of students regarding their first job. Expectations relating to salary, hours, time span for promotion and importance of various fringe benefits were identified. ***Key Words:*** *Career, Job Expectations, Hospitality, Student.*

BACKGROUND

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the hospitality industry in the future is the problem of attracting good employees to the various industry segments. This problem is recognized by the National Restaurant Association and reflected in its "Ours Is A Special World" program. *Business Week's* cover story of Aug. 10, 1987, points to a scarcity of workers lasting to the year 2000. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, quoted in the article, point to the restaurant industry as one of the industries where problems will be most acute (Bernstein et. al., 1987). Echoing this theme, *Lodging* magazine points to a need for 800,000 new workers in the hotel industry and a shortage of 1.1 million in the food service industry by 1990 (*Lodging*, 1986: 82).

Awareness of labor shortage problems has been growing in both the corporate world and in academia. Stories relating the need for hospitality firms to provide free transportation to workers in the Atlanta area, and of Boston fast food chains starting counter workers at US$5/hour are difficult to ignore. As the need for hourly workers grows, so does the need for college educated management.

The human resources problem is compounded in the hospitality industry by a high rate of turnover. For graduates of hospitality programs, expectations can impact job satisfaction just like expectations regarding customers' experiences in a hotel or restaurant affects their level of satisfaction with the service. Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is considered to be a major contributor to intent to leave an organization (McFillen, et al., 1986). Thus it would seem important to understand what future managers' expectations are in terms of job requirements and benefits so that these expectations can either be met or an attempt made to adjust them.

Ley and Sandler (1982) stressed the need for students to understand the desires of corporate recruiters. Today, it is equally important for companies trying to market themselves to hospitality graduates to understand the expectations of these future managers. This understanding requires more than armchair philosophizing as is sometimes seen in trade journals (see Smith, 1986, for example). A true understanding of young people requires empirical study of their values and expectations relative to potential industry positions.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

In order to determine specific expectations of hospitality students regarding the jobs they will seek upon graduation, a survey of 11 four-year hospitality programs was conducted during the fall of 1986 and spring of 1987. Questionnaires were mailed to a professor at each participating school and administered primarily to junior and senior level students. A total of 705 students completed the survey providing the data base for the study. Table 1 presents a profile of the sample and Table 2 includes a list of participating schools.

The questionnaire developed for the study consisted of over 100 questions not including demographic questions. Because of the broad scope of the data, not all of it can be reported in one article. In the portion of the study reported here, students were asked specific questions regarding expectations of salary, hours, fringe benefits and time before their first promotion. They were also asked their career preference in terms of the segments of the industry they would like to enter (hotels, fine dining etc.). This allowed for crosstabs to be run in order to determine if expectations were different for different targeted segments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study was to gain an understanding of what is important to a diverse geographic sample of hospitality majors in selecting a job. More specifically, objectives included: 1. to determine the expectations of students with regard to salary, hours worked, eight types of fringe benefits and the time span for their first promotion; 2. to determine the relative importance of salary and 3. to determine if expectations vary based on the industry segment for which students stated a preference.

RESULTS-COMPOSITE SAMPLE'S EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THEIR FIRST JOB

Table 3 presents the results of the composite sample for the students' expectations regarding salary and hours on their first position after graduation and how soon they expect to be promoted after training. The data indicate that over 50 percent of the sample expects to receive between US$18,000 and US$22,000 in compensation and that 80 percent of the sample falls into a range from US$16,000 to US$24,000. As pointed out in another article (McCleary and Weaver, 1988), regional differences may occur. Indeed, a comparison with research conducted at Michigan State University (Knutsen, 1987) during a similar time period revealed generally

Table 1
Selected Demographics of the Sample (N=705*)

Demographic Variable	Number*	Percent of Those Responding to the Question
Sex		
Male	342	49.6
Female	348	50.4
Age		
18 years and older	15	2.1
19	50	7.2
20	134	19.3
21	221	31.8
22	141	20.2
23	64	9.2
24	18	2.6
25	22	3.2
26 years and over	31	4.4
Marital Status		
Married	39	5.7
Single	648	94.3
Class Standing		
Freshman	21	3.0
Sophomore	73	10.4
Junior	251	35.8
Senior	346	49.4
Graduate Student	4	.6
Other	6	.8

* The totals do not equal 705 because of a small number of nonresponses in each category.

Table 2
Colleges Which Participated in the Study (N=705)

Colleges	Sample Sizes
Central Michigan University	84
Cornell University	52
Florida State University	90
James Madison University	65
Kansas State University	17
Michigan State University	56
Oklahoma State University	93
University of Denver	75
University of New Hampshire	31
University of San Francisco	49
Washington State University	87
Unknown	6

higher salary expectations by MSU students than was demonstrated by the total sample in the research reported here.

Students generally are prepared to work more than a 40 hour work week with only 8.8 percent of the sample expecting 45 hours or less. On the other extreme, only 14.8 percent expect to work more than 60 hours per week. Unfortunately, 60 hours or more are probably far more common than in only 14.8 percent of hospitality positions.

Companies hiring new graduates should be aware of their promotion expectations. Almost 90 percent expect promotion to occur within 18 months after their training and being placed in an entry level position. Almost 69 percent expect promotion within a year and 19.7 percent within six months.

While salary is a major concern of graduates, its importance relative to other job related concerns may be overstated. Students were asked, "if you were offered less than your desired salary but everything else was satisfactory, would you reject a job offer?" Only 15.9 percent leaned toward rejecting the offer, 20.8 percent were neutral while 63.3 percent indicated they probably would not reject a compatible job offer based on salary alone. Caution should be exercised here, as degrees of differences between ideal and offered salaries were not measured.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Students were asked to rate eight fringe benefits on a seven point scale from very unimportant to very important. Table 4 presents the mean responses in rank order. Medical insurance is a top priority with students, followed some distance away by a retirement plan. Dental insurance, paid vacations and disability insurance are

Table 3
Composite of Job Expectations (N=705)

Beginning Salary Expected	Percent of Respondents
Under $14,000	2.8
$14,000 - $15,999	3.9
$16,000 - $17,999	14.6
$18,000 - $19,999	32.1
$20,000 - $21,999	23.4
$22,000 - $23,999	10.7
$24,000 - $25,999	7.3
$26,000 - $27,999	2.3
$28,000 - or more	2.9
Hours Expected to Work Weekly	
35 - 40	1.1
41 - 45	7.7
46 - 50	22.7
51 - 55	25.6
56 - 60	28.1
61 - 65	8.5
65 or more	6.3
Expected Promotion Time Frame (After Training)	
Within 6 months	19.7
6 months - 1 year	49.1
1 year - 18 months	20.1
18 months - 2 years	9.7
2 years to 30 months	.4
30 months - 3 years	1.0

Table 4
Fringe Benefit Expectations - Composite Sample
(Rank order by means - highest first)

Benefit	Mean
1. Medical Insurance	6.187 •
2. Good Retirement Plan	5.795
3. Dental Insurance	5.522
4. Paid Vacation	5.481
5. Long Term Disability Insurance	5.419
6. Paid Life Insurance	4.933
7. Meals Provided Free While Working	4.304
8. Provision of a Car	3.139

• 7 = Very Important, 1 = Very Unimportant

grouped together in terms of importance. Life insurance and free meals appear to be less important, and having a car provided was ranked last.

INDUSTRY SEGMENT PREFERENCES

In order to determine if expectations regarding future jobs varied by segments of the hospitality industry, students were asked to state their career preference. Table 5 presents a breakdown of career preferences by segment. Because some students selected more than one category of career preference, total responses are greater than the number of students in the sample. Students who indicated a preference for food service were asked to further specify the specific type of food service they preferred. Again, some students selected more than one food service industry segment, causing the total number of segment responses to be greater than the number for food service in general. Students were also given the opportunity to select a category marked "other" and to explain their response. Careers listed in this category covered a wide range of possibilities and thus were not analyzed.

Through the use of crosstabs, a comparison was made of how each industry segment responded to the questions regarding salary, hours worked and how soon promotion was expected. In looking at the results of the crosstabs, it should be noted that only six students stated a preference for the commercial cafeteria segment, 17 for fast food and 22 for institutional food service. The small number of responses in these categories severely limits the generalizability of the results for these segments. Therefore, discussion will not include the fast food, commercial cafeteria and institutional segments. The responses in these categories will be listed in the tables only to allow for a comparison base for future research.

Table 5
Industry Segment Career Preference

Segment	Subsegment	Number of Respondents
Food Service		210
	Fine Dining	134
	Fast Food	134
	Commercial Cafeteria	17
	Institutional	22
	Family Dining	94
Hotels		410
Travel Industry (airline, travel agency, government)		86

SALARY

Table 6 presents the percentages of responses by industry segment for each salary category. A perusal of the data shows very little difference among major segments. The travel industry segment shows slightly higher percentages in the lower salary ranges, while food service responses are relatively greater in the US$22,000–US$26,000 ranges. All three major segments reflect the composite sample with the majority of responses in the US$18,000–US$22,000 range.

One interesting comparison in the subsegments of food service is between fine dining and family dining. Those with a preference for family dining showed relatively higher percentages indicating a salary expectation in the mid-ranges of US$18,000–US$26,000 while fine dining salary expectations were higher in the US$16,000–US$18,000 and the US$26,000 and higher categories.

HOURS

Perhaps one of the reasons that so many students these days are expressing a preference for hotels over food service is the perception that the hours are better in the hotel segment. Table 7 shows that a higher percentage of those with food service preferences expect to work longer hours than those stating hotel preferences. Only 28.1 percent preferring hotels expect to work 56-60 hours, 7.7 percent expect to work 61-65 hours and 5.2 percent expect to work over 65 hours per week. In the same categories, those preferring food service tallied 31.4 percent, 13.8 percent and 8.6 percent respectfully. On the lower end of hours expectations, of those with hotel preferences 7.7 percent expect 41-45 hours and 24.6 percent expect 46-50 hours. Food service percentages were 4.8 percent and 16.2 percent for the same categories. Those stating a preference for the travel fields expect fewer hours than their hotel and food service counterparts, in general. In the subsegments of food service there was a slight tendency for those listing family dining to expect fewer hours than those stating a preference for fine dining.

Table 6
Salary Expectations by Industry Segment

Industry Segment	Total Number of Responses	Expected Salary (% of respondents)								
		Under $14,000	$14,000 $15,999	$16,000 $17,999	$18,000 $19,999	$20,000 $21,999	$22,000 $23,999	$24,000 $25,999	$26,000 $27,999	Over $28999
Hotels	402	2.7%	4.0%	15.0%	35.2%	22.2%	11.5%	5.0%	2.5%	2.0%
Industry Travel	87	4.6	7.0	16.3	31.4	23.3	5.8	7.0	2.3	2.3
Food Service	210	3.9	1.4	12.9	32.4	25.7	17.9	8.1	2.4	3.3
Subsegments										
Fine Dining	134	2.9	1.5	15.7	27.6	26.9	10.4	7.5	3.0	4.5
Family Dining	94	3.2	2.1	8.5	34.0	27.7	13.8	9.6	--	1.1
Institutional	22	9.1	9.1	9.1	31.8	18.2	--	9.1	9.1	4.5
Fast Food	17	--	--	47.1	23.5	5.9	5.9	5.9	11.8	--
Commercial Cafeterial	6	16.7	16.7	33.3	16.7	--	--	16.7	--	--

Table 7
Hours Expected Per Week

Industry Segment	Total Number of Responses	Expected Hours (% of respondents)						
		35-40 hours	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	65 or more
Hotels	402	1.0	7.7	24.6	25.6	28.1	7.7	5.2
Industry Travel	87	3.4	13.8	28.7	25.3	19.5	3.4	5.7
Food Service	210	1.4	4.8	16.2	23.8	31.4	13.8	8.6
Subsegments								
Fine Dining	134	1.5	3.7	15.7	24.6	34.3	14.2	6.0
Family Dining	94	--	3.2	20.2	25.5	31.9	11.7	7.4
Institutional	22	--	4.5	22.7	22.7	22.7	13.6	13.6
Fast Food	17	--	5.9	11.8	17.6	23.5	23.5	17.6
Commercial Cafeterial	6	16.7	16.7	33.3	16.7	16.7	--	--

PROMOTION

Nearly all hospitality students expect a promotion within two years of training and, as was noted earlier, most expect advancement even sooner. Table 8 reveals that more of those with food service preferences (24.3 percent) expect promotion within the first six months than those preferring hotels (18.9 percent) or travel (19.5 percent). For expectations of promotion within six months to a year the hotel category is highest with 50.7 percent, food service is next with 48.6 percent followed by travel with 44.8 percent.

A look at the food service subsegments shows that family dining is closer to the general segments of hotel and travel in the promotion within six months category. It is interesting to note that even though the responses for institutional, fast food and commercial cafeterias are limited, taken as a group the percentage of respondents expecting promotion within six months is so high that it impacts the overall food service percentage.

CONCLUSIONS

The bulk of hospitality students enrolled in college during the winter of 1987 expected a starting salary of between US$16,000 and US$24,000 with the largest percentage expecting US$18,000-US$20,000 followed by US$20,000–US$22,000. Firms offering below $18,000 should expect some difficulty in hiring. With only 12.5 percent of the sample expecting over US$24,000 starting salary, most firms will be competitive at figures below that amount. The exception may be firms seeking advanced degree candidates or the very top undergraduate students. Although salary is important, most students would not reject an attractive offer based on a lower than expected salary alone.

Firms that require more than a 60 hour work week are operating beyond the expectations of most students. While only a small number of students expect to work less than 46 hours a week, not many expect to work more than 60 hours.

Young people in general are restless and anxious for success. Hospitality students are no exception. They expect promotion to be rapid. Nearly 20 percent expect promotion within six months of training while another nearly 50 percent expect promotion within six months to one year. This does not bode well for firms that delay the first promotion for an extended period.

Students also anticipate an ample fringe benefit package. Medical insurance is a must and retirement plans, dental insurance, paid vacation and disability insurance are placed fairly high in importance.

Although there are not extremely large differences among the expectations of students relative to the various industry segments they might target for a career, some differences do exist. For example, generally it is expected that hours worked per week will be less in hotels than in food service, but slightly higher salaries and more rapid advancement is expected in food service.

Hospitality companies need to be aware of what student expectations are. If expectations are in great contrast with the reality of the working conditions within the company one or the other needs to be changed. Most people like to have an accurate

Table 8
Expected Time Span for First Promotion
(After Completing Training)

Industry Segment	Total Number of Responses	Time Span					
		Within 6 Months	6 Months to 1 Year	1 Year to 18 Months	18 Months to 2 Years	2 Years to 30 Months	30 Months to 3 years
Hotels	402	18.9	50.7	19.9	9.2	.2	1.0
Industry Travel	87	19.5	44.8	20.7	11.5		3.4
Food Service	210	24.3	48.6	14.8	11.4	.5	.5
Subsegments							
Fine Dining	134	23.9	48.5	15.7	10.4	.7	.7
Family Dining	94	20.2	55.3	12.8	10.6	1.1	
Institutional	22	31.8	45.5	13.6	9.1		
Fast Food	17	29.4	52.9	11.8	5.9		
Commercial Cafeterial	6	50.0	50.0				

picture of what they are getting into. By understanding expectations of potential managers, industry and education can work together to achieve a better match between reality and anticipation.

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