

## **Building a Stronger Future: Balancing Professional and Liberal Education Ideals in Tourism and Hospitality Education**

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The question of what constitutes a tourism and hospitality degree has received considerable attention in other countries. There has also been significant debate over issues such as core knowledge requirements and accreditation. In Australia, despite having a range of well-established and internationally recognised degrees for over 20 years, there has been little debate or clarity over what constitutes a tourism or hospitality degree, or exactly what such degrees should deliver. The aim of this project is to map the tourism and hospitality (TH) education curricula including core knowledge requirements and the pathways that students can take within the curricula space (e.g. from professional/vocational education to liberal education) in order to clarify what constitutes TH education in the higher education environment. For the purposes of this project, 'curricula space' is used to denote the full range of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that shape Australian TH education. Mapping this curricula space will then be used to produce outputs that will:

- Inform strategic decision-making within universities about TH education;
- Provide practical level guidance to program coordinators and degree administrators in the process of curriculum renewal and to those who are constantly dealing with articulations admissions, credit applications and partnership arrangements with other universities and education providers;
- Inform curriculum content, graduate skills and knowledge requirements of graduates from within these various pathways;
- Provide information for the growing diversity of the study body by informing students about the TH curriculum that can be used to assist in decision-making about a range of issues including pathways, work integrated learning (WIL) and employer expectations; and
- Inform discussions about TH accreditation.

This two year project will involve an analysis of current programs in the Australian TH education environment. Data will also be collected from university managers, students, TH educators and employers about the future of TH education, core knowledge and skills and the ideal balance between liberal and vocational education in higher education.

The outcomes from the project will inform evidence-based discussion around a range of issues of emerging and continuing importance in the Australian TH education sector. These issues include (1) the need to clarify and better understand the balance between liberal and vocational education available in Australia in the light of increasing domestic and international competition by a variety of tertiary and non-tertiary education providers; (2) the need to address the demands of an increasingly diverse study body in terms of ethnicity, experience, background, goals and aspirations and maturity and the level of vocational versus liberal education experience they seek; (3) the growth in student demand for WIL and employer demand for work ready graduates which has implications for the vocational/liberal education balance; and (4) growing interest in accreditation and other quality assurance mechanisms as a means of distinguishing programs and the learning experiences on offer.

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