

Online Education and Workforce Development: Ten Strategies to Meet Current and Emerging Workforce Needs in Global Travel and Tourism

Kristen Betts^{1*} and David L. Edgell Sr.²

¹Online and Blended Learning, Division of Academic Affairs, Armstrong Atlantic State University, USA

²Professor of Tourism, School of Hospitality Leadership and Research Scholar, Center for Sustainable Tourism, East Carolina University, USA

Abstract

The travel and tourism industry provides extensive opportunities to expand economic and human capital development worldwide. By 2020, the World Travel & Tourism Council projects that the travel and tourism industry will increase to 10 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), approximately US\$10 trillion, and account for 328 million jobs— 1 in every 10 jobs worldwide. To meet this projection, educational policy and the quality of the workforce will be quintessential. Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) are primed to develop curricula that align with the current and emerging needs of today's workforce. Through online education, IHEs can also meet the increasing demand of non-traditional students seeking certificate and degree completion programs through flexible delivery formats. The authors provide ten strategies for developing online education programs to meet current and emerging workforce needs in global travel and tourism. Additionally, the authors provide ten travel and tourism issues to consider when developing online programs.

Keywords: Tourism; Travel and tourism; Economic development; Human capital development; Online education; Distance education; Higher education; Program development; Workforce development; Sustainability

Introduction

“The highest purpose of tourism policy and planning is to integrate the economic, political, cultural, intellectual, and sustainability benefits of tourism cohesively with people, destinations, and countries in order to improve the local and global quality of life and provide a foundation for peace and prosperity.”

- David L. Edgell, Sr. and Jason R. Swanson, *Tourism Policy and Planning* [1]

Educational attainment is a critical driver for economic and human capital development. Research indicates that increased educational attainment expands career choices consequently increasing social and economic opportunities for individuals [2,3]. In examining educational attainment on a global scale, between 1950 to 2010, Barro and Lee state, “It is widely accepted that human capital, particularly attained through education, is crucial to economic progress” [4]. However, increasing access to higher education is not enough. Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) must develop curricula and delivery formats that align with the current and emerging needs of today's workforce and today's learners.

The travel and tourism industry is one of the largest contributors to the global economy. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, the travel and tourism industry in 2011 “contributed 9% of global GDP, or a value of over US\$6 trillion, and accounted for 255 million jobs” [5]. Over the next decade, the travel and tourism industry is expected to increase to 10% of global GDP, approximately US\$10 trillion, and “account for 328 million jobs, or 1 in every 10 jobs on the planet” [5]. To meet this projection, educational policy and the quality of the workforce will be quintessential. Travel and tourism education is particularly primed to meet the current and emerging needs of the tourism industry by transforming traditional curricula into “an experiential and fluid” curricula and building upon theory and literature while simultaneously engaging students in “real-life” assignments that align with industry needs and projections. Online

education, in particular, provides flexible tourism education program formats, for today's “next generation” learners to have the knowledge, skills, and experience to lead in one of the world's greatest economic industries.

This article focuses on leveraging the ubiquity of technology and online education with innovative curricula and workforce development to support global economic development through the travel and tourism industry.

Review of Literature

Demand for higher education

At no time in history has there been a greater demand for higher education attainment. In the United States, it is projected that employers will need 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees by 2018 but will fall short by three million workers without strategies to increase the number of graduates to meet this need [6]. As the demand for employees with postsecondary education degrees continues to surge, it is projected that “high school graduates and dropouts will find themselves largely left behind in the coming decade” [6]. Today's reality in the United States –there is increasing critical demand for accessible and affordable college degrees, certificates, and industry certifications.

Globally, there is also increasing demand for higher education attainment. According to *Education at a Glance*, published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):

***Corresponding author:** Kristen Betts, Director, Online and Blended Learning, Division of Academic Affairs, Armstrong Atlantic State University, USA, Tel: 912-257-8336; E-mail: kristen.betts@armstrong.edu

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Education is important for both the present, giving individuals the knowledge and skills to participate fully and effectively in society, and for the future, as it helps expand scientific and cultural knowledge. The level to which adults have studied is often used as a proxy for the level of human capital—the skills available in the population and labour force. The global economic crisis has provided an additional incentive for people to build their skills, in difficult economic circumstances [7].

Although education varies from country to country, the demand for increased education attainment has shown “few signs of slowing” [7].

Benefits of educational attainment

Research shared by the United States (U.S.) Bureau of Labor Statistics and the College Board shows that educational attainment benefits individuals economically and socially. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shares that the money an individual earns over the course of a career, the Synthetic Work-Life Earnings (SWE) estimate, varies based on level of attainment. According to the U.S. Census Bureau:

How far one goes in school can mean a difference of about \$3.2 million. Even within one level of attainment—the bachelor’s degree—what one chooses to study in college and the careers pursued after college can also mean a difference of \$2.8 million [8].

Additionally, as the level of educational attainment increases, the risk of unemployment decreases as shown by the U.S. Census Bureau (Chart 1) [1].

There are extensive benefits linked to increased educational attainment. According to the College Board, “Adults with college degrees are more likely than others to receive health and pension benefits with their jobs. They are less likely to be unemployed or to rely on public income support payments” [3]. The economic and

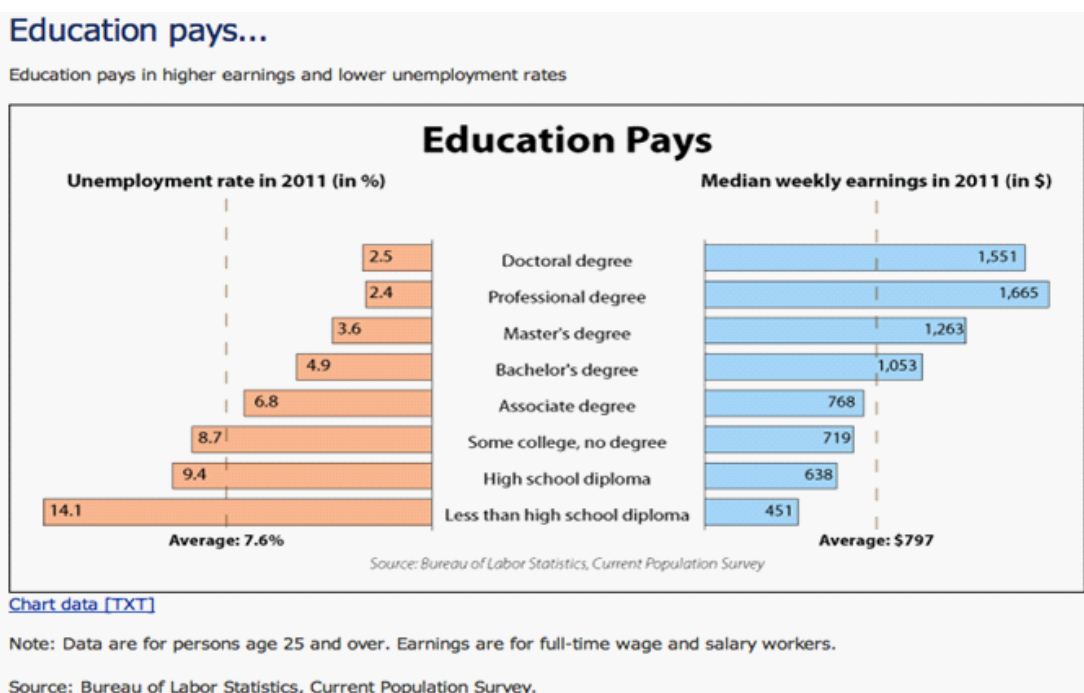
social benefits of educational attainment also include increased voting behavior, lower rates of incarceration, and higher rates of good health, and charitable activity [3,9].

Globally, there are many similarities in the social and economic benefits of increased educational attainment as shown in the United States. Research indicates that individuals living in OECD countries with higher levels of education have better job prospects. Tertiary graduates are also more likely to be employed than non-graduates [6]. Furthermore, research indicates that adults with higher levels of educational attainment are “likely to live longer, show higher levels of civic engagement (e.g., higher levels of voting), exhibit greater signs of life satisfaction” [7].

Today’s college students and completion rates

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2012 “a record 21.6 million students are expected to attend American colleges and universities, constituting an increase of about 6.2 million since fall 2000” [10]. Of these 21.6 million students, non-traditional students represent a large percentage of this population. A paradigm shift has occurred within higher education enrollments over the past 20 years. The cliché terms “typical college student” and “traditional college student” used to refer to 18 to 22 year old students living on-campus and enrolled full-time. However, as shared by the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, “Today’s typical college student is no longer an 18 year-old recent high-school graduate who enrolls full-time and has limited work and family obligations. Students today are older, more diverse and have more work and family obligations to balance” [11].

While higher education enrollments have continued to increase in the United States, challenges still exist with completion rates. Research indicates that only 29 percent of students enrolled in public 4-year



Source: http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

Chart 1: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011.

IHEs graduate within four years, 54.7 percent graduate within six years, and 58.3 percent graduate within eight years. Within two-year public IHEs, 11.5 percent of the students graduate in two years, 22 percent graduate in 3 years, and 28.4 graduate in four years [11].

Internationally, higher education has also been experiencing increased enrollments. According to the OECD, “entry rates for university-level programmes increased by an average of nearly 25 percentage points across OECD countries between 1995 and 2010 [7]. In 2012, the OECD reported, “An average of 62% of today’s young adults in OECD countries are expected to enter university-level programmes and 17% to enter vocationally oriented programmes over their lifetimes” [7]. While enrollments are continuing to increase annually, OECD countries are also challenged with completion rates. The OECD reports that “on average 39% of young people are expected to complete university level education in 27 OECD countries” [7]. Furthermore, graduation rates vary across countries. For example, graduation rates range from “25% and below in Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, to 50% and above in Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Poland and the United Kingdom” [7].

Workforce needs

Historical trends reveal that during weak economic times, the demand for postsecondary education enrollments increases. According to Mark Kantrowitz, “Unemployment is a key driver to increases in college enrollments during a recession. When the job market is tight, people return to college to get training and skills to make themselves more marketable to prospective employers” [12]. The challenge—people are increasingly returning to college to get training and skills; however, research indicates that current curricula are not aligned with workforce needs.

In December 2011, in the United States, the results of a survey commissioned by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools revealed that “54% of hiring decision-makers report that the process of finding applicants with the necessary skills and knowledge set is difficult” [13]. Furthermore, the decision-makers’ ratings revealed gaps between “stated importance and applicant performance” and the importance of “future skills” and current job applicant performance [13].

ManPowerGroup released the results of its annual Talent Shortage Survey in May 2012. According to the results, “49 percent of U.S. employers are experiencing difficulty filling mission-critical positions within their organizations” and “globally, 34 percent of employers say they are having difficulty filling positions” [14]. The reasons cited by U.S. employers for having difficulty filling positions included “lack of available applicants, applicants looking for more pay, and lack of experience” [14]. Global employers cited “lack of available applicants and lack of technical skills” as reasons for having difficulty filling positions [14].

Educational attainment is a critical driver for economic development. However, IHEs must focus on increasing both accessibility and completion rates. Furthermore, IHEs need to partner with industry leaders to ensure curricula align with current and emerging workforce needs. According to the OECD:

Tertiary education indicates a country’s capacity to produce workers with advanced, specialised knowledge and skills. Countries with high graduation rates at tertiary level are also those most likely to be developing or maintaining a highly skilled labour force. While

both of these statements are true, they must be actualized within higher education today through teaching, learning, and assessment [7].

Online education

Online education enables IHEs to reach extended student markets, particularly non-traditional student populations, seeking degree and certificate programs for career placement, advancement, or transition. IHEs, in collaboration with industry leaders and industry partners (e.g., corporation, non-governmental organizations, associations, etc.), have the unique opportunity to develop dynamic online education programs (e.g., online and blended programs) to support economic development through travel and tourism. As shared by Edgell, “Because tourism can promote economic development more quickly than is true in many other industries, it can attract much-needed financial capital, increase awareness of a country’s potential as a tourism destination, improve infrastructure and provide new job opportunities” [1]. Through online education, IHEs worldwide can increase higher education accessibility, educational attainment, and socio-economic mobility for today’s multigenerational student population.

Online education in the United States has grown exponentially over the past 15 years. Between 2001 to 2009, enrollments in online programs grew from 229,363 to 2,139,714 representing an 832 percent increase [15]. Online enrollments are projected to increase to 25 million by 2015 [16]. Globally, the OECD states, “It is extremely difficult to calculate the numbers of students engaged in online education worldwide but the existence of nearly 24 mega-universities, a number of which boast over one million students, speaks to a quantitatively significant phenomenon” [7].

Ten Strategies for Developing Distance Education Programs to Meet Current and Emerging Workforce Needs in Global Travel and Tourism

Betts provides ten strategies for developing distance education programs to meet the current and emerging workforce needs in the global travel and tourism industry. These strategies support the development of new online and blended programs as well as restructuring current traditional campus programs to online and blended formats.

Branding and market positioning

Technology has greatly transformed higher education, particularly marketing and student recruitment. Bricks and mortar institutions that previously relied upon local and regional student markets are now actively recruiting students nationally and internationally through virtual campus tours, online open houses, and social media. Today, competition is just “one click away.”

For IHEs seeking to develop new programs or to transition on-campus programs online in the travel and tourism industry, branding will be critical – not just institutional brands, but program brands. The proliferation of online degree and certificate programs worldwide requires that IHEs be strategic and targeted in their approach. What differentiates one online program from other programs (e.g., curriculum; faculty; adjunct faculty; collaborative partnerships with travel and tourism organizations, corporations, etc.)? Who are the target markets in terms of students and graduate placement? Why would potential students select this program? Why would employers seek future graduates from this program?

Online programs can be very costly to develop and maintain;

therefore, student enrollments will be critical to long-term program sustainability. Market positioning will be linked to program success. According to Lyon, market positioning includes three essential elements: (1) brand, (2) value proposition, and (3) differentiating attributes [17]. What comes to mind when individuals in the field of travel and tourism, employers, and potential students discuss this online program? Brand will be linked to program mission and stated outcomes that drive the aspirational concept that defines and differentiates this online program from the others. Value proposition is important since it is linked to expectations, value, services, etc., and ultimately affects perception and brand. Differentiating attributes are critical since they will set the program apart from other programs and will be central to marketing. Identifying differentiating attributes will assist a program with identifying its “niche” or area of specialization within a highly competitive online market. As shared by the Wall Street Journal, the extensive information available online has made “niche marketing more important than ever” and “finding sweet spots in the market is especially important in these tough economic times” [18].

Stackable and portable credential programs

IHEs are strategically developing stackable and portable credential programs to support student success and program completion. Enrolling as a part-time student in an online program that requires 120 credits for graduation can be daunting. In the United States, there is an increasing percentage of students enrolling in online courses annually [15,16]. While a large percentage of these students may be earning college credit, the reality is many will end up ultimately with no degree and in some cases staggering student debt.

Stackable and portable credentials through online programs provide an innovative way to increase student success and program completion. According to the U.S. Department of Labor:

A credential is considered stackable when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs [19].

IHEs in the United States are launching stackable programs in which students are able to complete a certificate program and then continue their education through one or more degree programs. For example, an adult returning to higher education for career transition may enroll in a 15-24 credit certificate program in Hospitality Administration in which those credits can be applied at the same institution for a two-year degree program (e.g., Associate of Arts degree in Travel Services Management). The credits from the two-year degree program can then be applied at that same institution toward a four-year degree program (e.g., Bachelor of Science in International Hospitality and Tourism Management). By breaking down the four-year degree program using a *stackable approach*, students are able to successfully complete a certificate and one or more degree programs that can greatly benefit them professionally as they continue to move toward their goal of obtaining an undergraduate degree. IHEs also benefit from being able to report student completion rates across all three programs. Stackable credential programs can also combine undergraduate programs and graduate degree programs such as a bachelor’s and master’s degree (e.g., four plus one program, three plus one program) depending upon the IHE and field of study.

Online education provides excellent opportunities to develop stackable credential programs for today’s growing non-traditional students (e.g., 25 years old and older, working full-time or part-time, taking care of dependents, military, veterans, individuals with

disabilities, etc.) who are returning to higher education for career placement, advancement, or transition. In the United States, the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning and the National Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning are bringing national attention to stackable credentials initiatives and working closely with non-traditional students.

Alignment with federal regulations and accreditation

The online degree program development of requires a detailed understanding of federal regulations and accreditation. In the United States, IHEs that receive Title IV funding (e.g., federal student aid, Perkins Loans, Pell Grants, work study programs, etc.) have specific regulations and policies that guide “online education” also referred to as “distance education.” For example, the U.S. Department of Education and accrediting agencies have definitions that differentiate “distance education” from “correspondence education.” The definitions for distance education and correspondence education provided by the U.S. Department of Education are as follows:

Title 34 Education: C.F.R. § 600.2

Distance education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include: (1) The internet; (2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (3) Audio conferencing; or (4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition [20].

Correspondence course: (1) A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. (2) If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course to be a correspondence course. (3) A correspondence course is not distance education [20].

In the United States, there are national accreditors, regional accreditors, and specialized and professional accreditors for higher education institutions and programs. Each accreditor has definitions and terms that it uses as part of accreditation. For example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the regional body responsible for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in eleven Southern states in the United States. SACSCOC provides the following definitions for distance education and correspondence education, which are similar but slightly different from the definitions used by the U.S. Department of Education:

For the purposes of the Commission on College’s accreditation review, distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet;

one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

Correspondence education is a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced [21].

Why are these definitions so important? IHEs that are not in alignment with these definitions may be faced with federal audits. In April 2012, the U.S. Education Department notified Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, in Indiana, that the institution needs to repay \$42 million in grant and loan funds because the "college classified many students as being in telecommunications courses when their proper category was correspondence courses" [22]. Telecommunications courses refer to distance education courses. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, "The aid and loan funds provided are not permitted at institutions with a large share of students in correspondence courses" [22].

Examples of other critical regulations and guidelines relating to distance education in the United States include, but are not limited to, the credit hour policy, attendance verification, state authorization, and satisfactory academic progress. Globally, regulations and policies will vary from country to country. Therefore, it is very important that IHEs be familiar with current regulations and policies as they begin development and conduct on-going reviews of all online programs.

Backward design: innovative and practitioner-based curricula

Program development is critically linked to long-term sustainability. Therefore, backward design is recommended when developing online programs or transitioning on-campus programs to online formats. Curricula should be innovative and practitioner-based. Online education provides unique opportunities to engage students in utilizing new technology and software, including social media, as part of the curricula. The fact that students are separated from each other as well as the instructor in online programs provides optimal opportunity for students to develop and enhance communication skills that will be utilized in today's technology-driven economy.

- Backward design is important to curricula development since it requires the IHE to "begin with the end" in mind. Questions that must be asked up front include: What are the learning outcomes for the curriculum?
- What are the learning outcomes for the courses?
- How do the course learning outcomes link to the program outcomes?
- What is acceptable evidence to verify if the student has achieved and met the learning outcomes?; and
- How do we plan the experiences, assignments, and instruction that support the achievement of the learning outcomes?

Wiggins and McTighe provide a model on backward design. Their model has 3 stages:

1. Identify desired results (learning outcomes)

"What should students know, understand, and be able to do? What is worthy of understanding? What enduring understandings are desired?"

2. Determine Acceptable Evidence (means to assess if learners have learnt)

"How will we know if students have achieved the desired results and met the standards? What will we accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency?"

3. Plan learning experiences and instruction. This includes:

- Definition of knowledge (know-that), skills and procedures (know-how) students ought to master
- Definition of materials
- Definition of learning /teaching activities (scenarios) [23].

Wiggins and McTighe focus much of their research on engaging students in the learning process so their understanding goes beyond rote learning and includes higher order thinking and actualization of concepts, principles or processes.

Dynamic and diverse faculty: Instructors/researchers, scholars and practitioners

Faculty is the key to a successful online program. While technology and curriculum are both essential, faculty are the one consistent "high touch" points of contact that students will have from matriculation to graduation.

Within an online program, there should be a blend of faculty with different professional areas of expertise and experience. Full-time faculty is important to an online program since they provide stability. Students can reach out to full-time faculty on a regular basis throughout their enrollment since students have more limited contact with part-time and adjunct faculty as their involvement is primarily contract based. It should be noted that the terms "part-time faculty" and "adjunct faculty" are used interchangeably at some institutions, but have distinct meanings at other institutions; therefore, both terms are used. Full-time faculty typically includes instructors who have professional experience and who are often engaged in research at the IHE within areas relating to the discipline. Having faculty within online programs who are involved in current and emerging research greatly adds to online discussions, online panel presentations, faculty advising, and capstone courses.

Scholars and practitioners are also important to online programs and can be hired as part-time or adjunct instructors. Within a discipline there are often renowned individuals who have had very successful careers and may have retired or are at a point in their careers where they would like to teach at an IHE on a part-time basis. Scholars, who are recognized for their contributions and/or publications, can be excellent online instructors. In some courses, students may read refereed publications by the instructor or review legislation in which the instructor was involved. Current practitioners are also excellent to hire as part-time or adjunct faculty. Practitioners are "in the field" and are actualizing what is being taught in the online program which brings the curriculum to life. Both scholars and practitioners provide students with external viewpoints, mentoring, and in some cases, employment leads or career opportunities. For online programs, having a diverse

faculty can have many benefits and can serve as a value proposition and differential.

Online faculty development: Teaching, learning, assessment and retention

As previously shared, faculty are the key to a successful online program. However, this key is based on hiring faculty who has professional experience, expertise in a particular discipline, and can teach online. While online education is not new to higher education, teaching online can be new to full-time faculty as well as part-time and adjunct faculty [24]. Faculty development is essential to ensure that all course developers and instructors have the same understanding of any federal regulations or accreditation guidelines that may affect an online program. For online programs that do not offer faculty development, the direct, indirect, and opportunity costs related to part-time and adjunct faculty attrition can greatly affect a program's brand and long-term sustainability. According to *Financial Bottom Line: Estimating the Cost of Turnover and Attrition for Online Faculty and Adjunct* "the short and long term effects of online faculty/adjunct who are not properly trained through recruitment and retention plans can result in faculty/adjunct attrition, student attrition, low graduation rates, legal action, and negatively affect the reputation of an institution" [25].

All online instructors (i.e., full-time, part-time, and adjunct) must have clear expectations of their role regarding instruction, engagement, response time to emails, response time to providing feedback in discussion boards and grading of assignments, office hours (if required), etc. Additionally, instructors need to fully understand the learning outcomes for the program and the learning outcomes for the course(s) s/he will be teaching. Instructors also must understand and be able to answer questions and support assignments and assessments that are part of the online course. If instructors are teaching courses that were developed by another instructor, they will need to know if they can modify course content, discussion boards, assignments, and/or assessments.

Faculty development needs to include an overview as well as training on the types of technology that will be utilized in the course. For example, instructors need to know how to work within the Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard Learn, Desire2Learn, Moodle, Canvas, etc.) that is being utilized by the IHE and how to use any webcasting platforms that may be part of the course (e.g., Blackboard Collaborate, Adobe Connect, WebEx, etc.). Instructors will need to know how to accommodate a student who has self-identified as having a disability and is working with the Office of Disability Services. The instructor will also need to understand their valuable role in regards to student retention. Online students infrequently or never come to campus so online instructors are a primary point of contact. Instructors need to be able to teach the course, recommend support services if needed, and provide student support through the course. It is recommended that faculty development be comprehensive, required for all new hires, and offered on an on-going basis since federal regulations and accreditation guidelines may change during the year. Program Directors are also encouraged to review faculty evaluations and conduct annual or bi-annual program evaluations to collect valuable quantitative and qualitative data to assist with continuous quality review.

Accessibility: New student and faculty sectors

For students with disabilities, online programs provide extensive opportunities to enroll in degree and certificate programs. In the

United States, research reveals that approximately 20% of the general population and 11% of postsecondary students self-identify as having a disability. However, IHEs often state that student reporting is less than what is shared nationally [26]. For IHEs, this means that students with disabilities may not be getting the services they need to succeed in their courses and programs.

Faculty development is critical to supporting students with disabilities. A national study completed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's (WICHE) Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications and the Campus Computing Project Campuses in 2010 revealed that IHEs "often lack formal policies to ensure that their online courses comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act" [27]. The report further indicated that many IHEs may be "vulnerable to complaints about accessibility issues in online courses because of the decentralized way they handle compliance with a federal law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination" [27].

The unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is often much higher than for individuals without disabilities. In October 2012, unemployment in the United States was 7.3% for individuals without disabilities and 12.9% for individuals with disabilities. According to the US Bureau of Education, persons with a disability who have completed higher levels of education are more likely to be employed. Therefore, it is recommended that IHEs integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into program and course development. UDL provides guidelines that "assist curriculum developers (these may include teachers, publishers, and others) in designing flexible curricula that reduce barriers to learning and provide robust learning supports to meet the needs of *all* learners" [28]. The three primary principles of UDL include providing:

1. *Multiple means of representation*, to give diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge;
2. *Multiple means of action and expression*, to provide learners options for demonstrating what they know; and
3. *Multiple means of engagement*, to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation [28].

The integration of backward design and UDL in online courses offers significant opportunities for course developers and instructors to integrate multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement that align with course learning outcomes.

Student engagement: online classroom and co-curricular initiatives

In the United States, student interaction is one of the primary differentials between a distance education course and a correspondence course. Student engagement, which includes interaction with the instructor and with other students, must be strategic and should be linked to the course and program outcomes. Student engagement can include interaction within the online classroom and in co-curricular initiatives.

Student engagement in online education is also important for student persistence. According to the literature, online attrition in the United States is often cited as 20 percent to 50 percent [29,30] or as 10 percent to 20 percent higher than traditional on-campus programs. Student departure research reveals the more opportunities provided for student engagement within the college community, the more likely students will become engaged and connected consequently leading to higher student persistence [31,32].

Within the online classroom, students have the opportunity to interact with the instructor and other students through text discussion boards, voice discussion boards, group presentations, and group projects. A Learning Management System (LMS), webcasting platforms, and “freeware” can be used so students can engage in one-on-one meetings with the instructor, work collaboratively in group study sessions, and conduct peer reviews. It should be noted that online programs often have high percentages of non-traditional students seeking degrees and certificates. In many cases these students are returning to higher education seeking career placement, advancement or transition. To gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to further their careers, they need to be involved in active learning and need to be engaged in a variety of assignments both inside and outside of the online classroom such as research projects, internships, cooperative experience, and clinical placements.

Co-curricular initiatives can include scheduled online panel presentations with program faculty, guest lectures from experts in the field, and mentoring programs. Institutional co-curricular initiatives can include an Online First-Year Experience, Online Research Showcase, and an Alumni Speaker series. Technology provides extensive opportunities for online programs to “bring the campus” to students locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

Distinguished program offering: Capstone courses, internships and cooperative education

The emergence of new online programs is escalating competition for students in an already saturated market. Therefore, IHEs will need strategies to distinguish their online programs from the competition. The integration of capstone courses, internships, and cooperative education (i.e., work-integrated learning) provide great opportunities to increase program recognition.

Drexel University, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, provides an excellent example of how a distinguished program offering can bring national and international recognition to an IHE. Drexel University has been a pioneer in cooperative education (co-op) since 1919. Students enrolled in on-campus programs have the opportunity to alternate academic study with full-time employment which provides practical experience within their fields of study [33]. In fall 2005, Drexel University launched a fully online Master of Science in Higher Education (MSHE) program. As part of the “Drexel Difference” for this new online degree, the MSHE program worked collaboratively with the Steinbright Career Development Center to design a 9-credit co-op course for the online students [34]. While there were many higher education programs in existence when the MSHE program was launched, none of them offered a co-op experience for online students. Enrollments in the MSHE Program grew from 26 students in the first cohort to over 250 students in less than five years. The MSHE program also received a “Best Practices Award in Distance Learning Programming” from the United States Distance Learning Association [35]. Today, an extensive number of programs offer online degree programs in higher education; however, the MSHE Program’s co-op course still brings national and international attention to the MSHE brand.

With competition continuing to increase in online education on an annual basis, IHEs must find ways to differentiate their programs from other IHEs. Developing signature programs in which students are engaged in research or leading real-life projects are excellent strategies to bring recognition to a program and the IHE.

Data driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement

Long-term sustainability of an online program requires data driven decision-making. Department Heads and Program Directors will need to start with the estimated “bottom line” – what it will cost to offer an online program. They will then need to identify and monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to student enrollment, retention, attrition, graduation rates, satisfaction, etc., since this data will be directly and indirectly linked to program sustainability. Danford and Clippard define KPIs as “quantitative measures used to evaluate performance against expected results; they link objectives to measures and actions” [36].

With any new online program there are start up costs for personnel, course development (e.g., payment, legal fees for course contract development), and marketing (e.g., market segment analysis, strategic enrollment marketing plan, lead generation, ad placement, etc.). Questions relating to intellectual property rights will be central to program development – who owns the course materials? This question must be addressed early on since in many cases courses will be developed by faculty internal as well as external to the IHE. Legal contracts need to explicitly define expectations for course development, ownership of the course, timeline for course development, etc. Other critical costs will include licenses (e.g., learning management system, software, curriculum fees, computers/laptops, instructional materials relating to course development, etc.). Administrative, faculty, and personnel salaries and benefits will also need to be integrated into overall annual budgeting and planning. Having a clear understanding of overall costs will provide essential information for establishing enrollment and retention targets.

Student enrollment will drive program growth. Therefore, IHEs need to identify and monitor data that will assist with student recruitment and retention as well as proactively address student attrition. Student data relating to the KPIs should be collected to identify current and emerging trends. KPIs may include retention, attrition, graduation, graduate employment, graduate satisfaction, employer satisfaction, student satisfaction, etc. Each KPI provides critical information for data driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement. For example, a marketing campaign would greatly benefit from KPI data, particularly when examining the common factors shared by students who are “most likely to graduate.” When developing an early alert system for students at risk of dropping out, examining KPI data is essential. The examination of factors shared by students who previously withdrew would provide a collective insight as to why students are leaving.

When conducting a three or five-year program review, KPIs provide an excellent comparative overview of what has occurred each year in the program. KPI data can provide an overview of how certain changes during a year may have affected the KPI positively, negatively or not at all. For example, student attrition data may show that students who opted not to complete the Online Student Orientation have slightly higher rates of attrition. Concurrently, data may show that students who are most likely to persist and graduate all completed the Online Student Orientation. Therefore, the Online Student Orientation may then become required. Within two years of tracking this new requirement, student data may reveal an increase in student persistence and graduation rates. While other factors may have changed, one of the primary factors that were strategically addressed was the new requirement of the Online Student Orientation.

Data management and data analytics are very valuable to online programs. It is recommended that online programs consider the development of data dashboards to identify and monitor KPIs so that decision-making and continuous quality improvements are data driven and strategic. According to Wishon and Rome (2012), "...dashboards deliver not only a single version of research activity but also a visual spark line of 36 months to help identify trends..." [37]. It should also be noted that accrediting agencies within the United States, such as SACS, require comparative data with on-campus programs so data collection and data analytics should be a key part of online program development, growth, and long-term sustainability.

Travel and Tourism: Issues to Consider when Developing Online Education Programs

Edgell identifies "Ten Important World Tourism Issues for 2013" [38]. These issues require leaders in the field who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to proactively address them. It is recommended that IHEs develop curricula for travel and tourism programs that challenge students to develop innovative and collaborative solutions to these issues. It is through active and experiential learning, research, and engaging course assignments that students are able to actualize skills needed to both manage and lead.

Commentary on the "Ten important world tourism issues for 2013"

Global recession: *Repercussions on the travel and tourism industry resulting from the global economic slowdown.* The global recession that has impacted negatively on world economies caused global tourism arrivals to decline in 2009, the first time in many years. However, in spite of such economic conditions, tourism arrivals increased in 2010-2011 and are expected to do so in 2012.

Safety and security: *Concern for safety and security remains an important issue for the travel and tourism industry.* Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 most countries have sought increased measures to protect international visitors. The sometimes onerous inspections at international airports resulted from concerns for the safety of world tourists.

Global socio-economic progress: *The transformative impact that travel and tourism has on global socio-economic progress.* Tourism has proven to be an important part of economic development in both developed and developing countries. Because the tourism industry is so large and provides immediate short- and long-term economic benefits to lesser developed countries, it has been an important transformation agent for reducing global poverty.

Consistency in prices and policies: *Negative impact on the travel and tourism industry of increases in fuel prices and airline fees.* When fuel prices increase it raises havoc in the transporting of tourists whether by automobile or by the airlines. In addition, the inconsistency and inconsiderate airline policies with respect to airline fees has caused great confusion amongst the traveling public.

Conservation and sustainable tourism: *Importance of maintaining a destination's social, cultural, natural and built resources.* Sustainable tourism has become an international cause celeb as far as the global tourism industry is concerned. Increasingly international visitors are becoming more concerned with the protection and conservation of not only the natural environment, but also the history, heritage and culture of a destination.

Natural and manmade disasters: *Effect on travel and tourism from natural and manmade disasters and world political disruptions.* In 2011-2012 the world spent more on recovering from natural and manmade disasters than ever before. When disasters do occur, international visitors usually avoid such areas with the result being a negative economic and image impact with respect to the disaster area.

Technology and ecommerce: *Influence of increased use of electronic and other technologies on the travel and tourism industry.* No industry has been impacted more with the increased usage of ecommerce tools and other technologies than the travel and tourism industry. As we move deeper into the space age, we will see dramatic changes taking place in technology usage in the travel and tourism industry.

Demand for travel and tourism: *Changes in tourism demand resulting from increased travel by emerging nations.* With a world population of over 7 billion people it becomes important to note where the population growth is taking place. Five countries, China, India, United States, Indonesia, and Brazil account for half the world's population and rapid tourism growth is taking place in these countries, especially with respect to China, India and Brazil.

Climate change: *Greater interest in potential long term consequences of climate change on tourism.* No industry depends on weather conditions more than the tourism industry; it determines when people travel, where they travel, and often how they travel. As a result, it is necessary for the travel industry to better understand the issues of climate change and seek to mitigate any negative impacts that might result.

National and local leadership: *Need for increased national/local leadership in tourism policy and strategic planning.* Tourism policy provides the guidelines for sound tourism development whether it is at the local or national level. Good tourism policy, accompanied by strategic planning that takes into account a vision, mission statement and appropriate goals, objectives, strategies and tactics, will determine the quality growth for tourism in the future.

Discussion and Conclusions

The demand for online and blended programs continues to increase. However, just like traditional on-campus programs, the focus is and should continue to remain on quality and value. An article published by Reuters in April 2012 asks in its rhetorical title, "How Much is That College Degree Really Worth?" The response provided--"That depends on your major. It turns out that some undergraduate and graduate diplomas are worth a lot more during a lifetime of work" [39]. Travel and tourism represents some of the most relevant and "portable" college majors for today's workforce and in the future. Therefore, course content, discussion boards, and assessments must go beyond readings and simple postings. Assignments, including group and individual projects, and assessment must be strategic and intentional so students develop the needed skills and confidence to make informed decisions, to serve as instrumental contributors on teams, and to serve as leaders.

Higher education is critical to economic development and sustainability. In *Post-Secondary Education and Technology: A Global Perspective on Opportunities and Obstacles to Development*, Clothey, Austin-Li, and Weidman report:

Higher education has been identified in nations worldwide as an avenue for developing the local human resources and delivering the skilled expertise needed to promote economic development.

This recognition has driven individuals, corporations, educational institutions, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations to make education a top priority [40].

Quality education and training is crucial to the growth of the global tourism industry. Creative and innovative online education programs in the tourism industry have the potential for increasing efficiencies in communications, research, marketing, planning and management. The travel and tourism industry will continue to play an even larger role in the future with respect to world economic development and job creation. Therefore, the perceived real and potential benefits of online education programs in this field are critical at this juncture.

The “Ten Strategies to Meet Current & Emerging Workforce Needs in Travel and Tourism” provide key initiatives to form the foundation of online tourism education policy. Concurrently, these strategies represent best practices and expectations that an institution can employ to increase and ensure quality education and training in the travel and tourism field. The opportunity that tourism offers for positive economic and social benefits for *tomorrow* depends on the quality tourism education decisions being made *today*.

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