

Academic success predictors: case study of the CUT Hospitality Management diploma

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Background:

For more than twenty years, admission and selection processes for the Diploma in Hospitality Management have remained relatively the same. No research could be found on how these processes were developed, or what the success of it was in choosing the best prepared applicants.

A careful selection process is vital as it could ensure worthwhile long-term benefits both to the students' future, and hospitality industry affiliations. According to a leading international hotel school, Hotelschool The Hague (HTH specialising in hospitality management), careful and thorough selection procedures are linked to their relative low dropout rates. It is mentioned that an effective student selection process promotes students to graduate within the prescribed period. While higher education institutions are tasked to produce employable graduates, timely graduation ensures that graduates gain access to employment and start contributing to the South African economy.

One of the recommendations from a study, conducted by the researcher on South African Universities' Hotel Schools, was to improve the quality of students enrolled for associated qualifications. It was recommended that "rigorous selection processes" be applied to ensure that the best possible applicants are selected from the pool of candidates. It was mentioned that the focus of the selection processes should be to test the "course and industry awareness" of the applicant.

The vision of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), and therefore also that of its Hotel School, is to strive towards delivering quality graduates, that complete their studies within the prescribed minimum period. The Diploma in Hospitality Management is a 3-year full time course. This program offers a wide variety

of subjects, as well a full year Hospitality Management Work-integrated Learning at the end of their second year. The Hospitality Management students are exposed to long hours of experiential work, which include hard mental and physical work. Part of the CUT's mission is to promote access with success in attracting and retaining potentially high quality and successful students to ensure they become employable and entrepreneurs. Admissions criteria should clearly specify what students need to prove in order to be considered for admission to an institution and to a specific programme/course of study within the institution. The university/institution has the authority to the final decision of student selection.

The assumption for this study was that if the "right candidate" can be selected using appropriate and applicable success predictors, the chance of drop-out might decrease and the possibility of a minimum-time graduation increase. It should also be noted that students who graduate in minimum time, gain access to employment at the earliest possible time, and can start supporting their families and contributing to the South African economy quicker.

Admission requirements for the Diploma in Hospitality Management include: a minimum Admission Point Score (APS), a minimum mark of 50% for English as Home Language or First Additional Language, a successful completion of an interview and psychometric testing. It is also seen as an advantage to applicants to have had Accounting and Hospitality related subjects at school. The psychometric test is a standardised, tested and unbiased assessment, developed by professional psychologists. These are said to be objective ways in assessing strengths and weaknesses, abilities (verbal, numerical and non-verbal skills), interests, problem solving and spatial skills. The interview is conducted by CUT Hotel School staff and consist out of questions enquiring about the applicants passion, strong and weak points, and long-term goals.

Aim:

The aim of this project was to identify academic success predictors used in the selection processes for Diploma Hospitality Management students, and if applicable, recommend the adaptation and/improvement of the selection process towards

increasing the probability of selecting a better academically prepared student, and ultimately expedite students' progress towards employment.

Approach/methods:

A quantitative document study was conducted, analysing the selection documents for all admitted Hospitality Management students from 2014 to 2018. From these selection documents, the success predictors, used during the selection process, was identified. The graduation lists for the department of Hospitality Management for the years 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2000 was also analysed. Using statistical analysis, the relationship between the success predictors and the academic success (graduating within three years) of each student, was investigated and analysed. SPSS version 19 computer software was used for the statistical analysis, and Pearson Chi-Square tests were conducted.

Outcomes/Achievements:

Results were categorised into two broad categories:

- the statistical significance of the influence of the factor on minimum time graduation, and
- the relationship between admission & selection factors and minimum time graduation.

Admission requirements/selection factors analysed in this study included:

- A minimum AP score;
- Hospitality related school subject (above 50%);
- Prior experience in the hospitality industry; and
- Successful completion of a psychometric test (score above 20).

Results showed that there was a statistical significance of the influence of the selection factor *minimum AP score*, on minimum time graduation for cohorts 2015 and 2017. There was also a statistical significance of the influence of the selection factor *Hospitality related school subject*, on minimum time graduation for the cohort 2017. In addition, a statistical significance of the influence of the factor *prior experience in the*

hospitality industry of graduates on minimum time graduation, was found in three of the five analysed cohorts. A statistical significance of the influence of the factor *Psychometric test result above 20* on minimum time graduation, was identified for four of the five analysed years.

In the second category of results, it was deduced that there is a relationship between admission and selection factors and minimum time graduation for the factors *minimum AP score* for cohorts 2014, 2015 and 2018, while a relationship could also be identified for the factor *Psychometric results above 20*, for all the analysed cohorts.

Conclusion

It could therefore be concluded that the use of the psychometric test, as well as the minimum AP score can be used as academic success predictors in the selection processes for Diploma Hospitality Management students. It can also be concluded that the selection and admission process can be adapted to continue applying these predictors, while revising the other factors that are used.

Challenges:

Due to interview schedules used during the cohorts that have been analysed for this study, not being of a standardised nature, the researcher could not make use of this selection factor to determine whether it can be seen as an academic success predictor.