

# Perception of Associate Degree Students of the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

*The Case of Hong Kong*

Rob Law and Jocelyn Lai

School of Hotel & Tourism Management  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

**Abstract:** It is well-known that expectations can affect career decisions. In this study, a survey was conducted to identify specific expectations of students towards the hospitality and tourism industry. The sample encompassed 185 Associate Degree [AD] students majoring in business program, with a specialization in hotel and tourism management. The factors affecting the students' career choices were analyzed. Frequency distributions and independent samples t-test for statistical significance were mainly the techniques used in the analysis. This study is expected to provide useful information for consideration by decision makers in the hospitality and tourism industry, as well as policy makers in the higher education sector, for developing education programs in this area.

**Keywords:** Associate Degree Students, Hong Kong, Hospitality and Tourism Industry

## Introduction

The Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government has announced that Disneyland has been opened since September 12, 2005. This news, together with the substantial increase in the number of tourist arrivals at the territory from Mainland China (from 2,627,000 to 8,467,000 in the past five years), and the burgeoning number of new hotels (from 88 to about 100 between 1998 and 2004) (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2005), strongly indicate that the hospitality and tourism industry in Hong Kong will keep growing in the coming years. Such a growth inevitably needs a large number of professionals working in the hospitality and tourism industry.

The job nature of most workers in the hospitality and tourism industry is characterized by unstable working hours and the challenge of dealing with customers from all over the world. Farmer and Tucker (1988) attempted to assess the working conditions of workers in the hospitality industry by conducting a survey on 112 employees. Their finding showed that workers in restaurants, whether stand-alone ones or affiliated within hotels, tended to work more than 50 hours per week. Farmer and Tucker's study is consistent with the findings of McCleary and Weaver (1988a), who studied the

expectation of students at entry level positions in the hospitality industry. The latter authors claimed that most students were prepared to work long hours with only 8.8% of the sample expected to work 45 hours or less in a week. Still, there is no indication whether students have a thorough understanding on the real situation in the hospitality and tourism industry.

According to the research by Farmer and Tucker's (1988) study, there was a discrepancy between the expectation of students and the real working environment in hospitality and tourism, and that the most frequent problem areas were low wages, long and unpleasant working hours, lack of challenge and recognition, and unstructured evaluation process. About 50% of the surveyed students had changed jobs at least once, and 10% even left the industry altogether. This study showed the perception of students is different from the real situation in the industry. In other words, the inappropriateness of the perception of university graduates usually underestimates the harshness of the working conditions in the hospitality and tourism industry.

In this study, students in a local community college (hereafter named as College A) in Hong Kong that offers 2-year associate degree business programs (AD programs) are examined on their perception of the hospitality and tourism industry. Students pursuing studies in the Associate in Business program can choose up to eight courses in hotel operation and management courses during their two-year study. Although further study opportunities are available, many students prefer to take up employment after graduation. Therefore, a detailed study of the growing number of AD students' perception of the hospitality and tourism industry would help assess the future manpower supply in this burgeoning sector. It would also provide useful information for potential employers as well as academic staff to formulate teaching methods and programs to better prepare students for the industrial setting. It should be noted that it is not appropriate for employers or college professors to compel students to have an either positive or negative view of the industry, but a correct and realistic perception is essential for their career development.

Although many hospitality and tourism management graduates wish to start their career in this promising sector, some studies reported that a substantial number of Hospitality and Tourism Management graduates has left the industry due to reasons of low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating incentives (Pavesic & Bryrner, 1990; Zacerelli 1985). This, in turn, resulted in a high turnover rate and wastage of trained and experienced personnel. Hence, there is a need to accurately assess the success of solving the problem and put the issue into proper perspective for students who have aspirations of pursuing a career in this industry.

Prior studies on students' perception of the hospitality and tourism industry have predominately concentrated on bachelor degree students and the perception and expectation of AD students have rarely been investigated. Thus, little is known about AD students' view of the industry. AD students are different from bachelor degree students as the former group is trained to be operational staff whereas the latter group is trained as managerial staff. If the AD students have an unrealistically high expectation of the working environment in the industry, it can lead to low morale in the future workforce and culminate in even higher staff turnover rate in the industry.

The aim of this research is to ascertain the general perception of AD students (using College A as the sample) towards the hospitality and tourism industry, and to provide recommendations to educators and employers. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to examine the perceptions of AD students on the working environment in hospitality and tourism, and to assess whether prior working experience has any influence on their perceptions. Drawing on the findings of the study, recommendations to educators and industrial leaders are made on how to project the industry's image to current AD students in order to promote better matching of students' expectation with the working conditions in the industry.

Having discussed the research background, the next section reviews published articles that are pertained to the issues of job selection by hospitality and tourism graduates. After that, there is a section to present the methodology used in this study. A section on findings and analysis is then followed, and the last section summarizes the study and offers suggestions for future research.

## **Literature Review**

### **University Studies and Career Decision**

Lau and Pang (1995) argued that the relevance of a program of study at a university is not important when a student selects his/her first job. In contrast, Kingston and Wolfe (1972) had an opposite finding, which showed that university education could affect the job functions that one worked in. In other words, the subject area that a student majors in at a university will affect his/her career decision. For a student who majors in hospitality and tourism, he/she will likely work in this industrial sector. Andrew (2001) supported the view of Kingston and Wolfe (1972) by advocating that the learning and teaching strategies applied at universities influence students' perception of the industry.

### **Factors Affecting Career Decisions**

Prior studies have been conducted to understand how university graduates

choose their first job. According to the findings of Kingston and Wolfe's (1972) survey, most graduates selected their first job based on their personal interests. Besides, the expected prospect of the industry, expressed in terms of financial reward, opportunities for early responsibilities, travel and general opportunities for career development, were also the critical factors for graduates to determine the selection of their first job.

Ginzberg et al. (1951) suggested that parents could directly influence their children's career aspirations, expectations, and maturity by means of instructions; and indirectly, by means of parental role models. Furthermore, Almquist and Angrist (1971) stated that students' career decisions were influenced strongly by college professors and occupational role models. Additionally, Lau and Pang (1995) suggested that the five most important criteria for graduates to choose their first jobs were: (1) opportunities for professional development, (2) good promotion prospects, (3) attractive salary, (4) match with career plan, and (5) good training.

Fringe benefits can also largely influence graduates' selection of their jobs. In the hospitality and tourism context, McCleary and Weaver (1988b) defined fringe benefits in eight areas of (1) medical insurance, (2) retirement plan, (3) dental insurance, (4) paid vacation, (5) long term disability insurance, (6) paid life insurance, (7) free meals provided while working, and (8) provision of a car. Although their study did not require students to identify the importance of each of the above variables, McCleary and Weaver (1998b) did provide useful definitions on how students perceived the term fringe benefits. Up till now, little research has been done to analyze the relationship of fringe benefits with students' perception of the hospitality and tourism industry. This aspect will be examined in this study.

## Hospitality and Tourism Education

Previous studies on students' perception of the hospitality and tourism industry have commented that the structure of many hospitality and tourism programs could be old-fashioned and hence they failed to address the industry's real need. To demonstrate, Nowlis (1996) stated that hospitality education must undertake a comprehensive curriculum reform to better serve the hotel and restaurant industry. Similarly, Ford and Bach (1996) argued that the traditional skill-based focus of hospitality programs was being challenged by the rapidly changing needs of the industry for more general managerial skills and interpersonal competencies. Lefever and Withiam's (1998) findings pointed out the inadequate areas of hospitality education. They concluded that hospitality practitioners would like academia to produce students who not only have appropriate technical abilities, but also have a realistic view of

the industry. Summarizing the results of previous studies, students' perception of the hospitality and tourism industry is strongly influenced by their university studies, which tends to provide a brief overview rather than the working environment in reality. What is taught at universities usually can lead students to have an over-optimistic view of the real working conditions of the industry.

### The Image of Potential Employers

Sciarini and Woods's (1997) research showed that the top five factors that influenced students' perceptions (in descending order of importance) were (1) experience of the potential employer's organization as a customer, (2) word-of-mouth from faculty members, (3) word-of-mouth from alumni, (4) company representative's personality, and (5) word-of-mouth from other students. Although their research did not further elaborate these factors, Sciarini and Woods's study is important because they pointed out that the students' past experience as a consumer help generate their perceptions of the potential employer's company, and these perceptions will very likely affect their career choice. Thus, the image of the company transmitted to the student through various social channels has a significant influence on the students' perceptions of the potential employer, which in turn, may affect their opinion of the industry as a whole.

### Work Values

Researchers usually used the theory of "work values" to underpin the discussion of career decision and career choice, and that many authors have defined the meaning of work values. For example, Riegel (1983) proposed that work values in general were personal values that lead to expectations about work. These expectations lead people to choose occupations that they believe can fulfill these expectations. Rosenberg (1957) compared the work values of university students with their occupational choice, and he found that students were likely to choose occupations that are congruent with these values. Similarly, Blau et al. (1956), as well as Holland and Nichols (1964) have conducted studies that confirmed a person's work values could determine his/her choice of occupation. Although there should be a close relationship between work values and career decisions, they are connected with a person's intrinsic values and this becomes a complex psychological issue. If work values were included, the allocation of cause to consequence and agency to eventuality would become a task of such analytical complexity.

### Pre- and Post-entry Analyses

Prior studies on students' expectations often involved the use of "pre-entry" and "post-entry" analyses (Mabey, 1986). A pre-entry analysis is used

to explore students' perceptions of potential employers prior to their employment; whereas a post-entry analysis studies the perceptions of graduates after they have joined the organizations. Ward and Athos (1972) conducted a study using pre-entry analysis to investigate the students' perceptions of prospective companies and successfully compare students' expectations with recruiting organizations' average description of their companies. In this present study, the sample is taken from two main groups of students: (1) Year One AD students who have normally just completed high school education and have no, or very little, working experience in the hospitality and tourism industry; and (2) Year Two students who usually have some working experience in the field during their industrial placement. With this sampling approach, it is possible to perform both pre-entry and post-entry analyses in this study.

## **Methodology**

The sample was selected by the cluster sampling method. A number of clustering units was selected from mutually exclusive sub-sets, and all individuals within the selected cluster were surveyed. The subjects in this study were the AD students in College A who had studied hospitality and tourism related courses. Both Year One and Year Two students were included in the survey.

## **Research Design and Data Collection**

A quantitative research method aiming at determining causes to consequences and frequency distribution of opinions was employed in this study. Data were classified into primary and secondary groups. The former was obtained directly by the investigators through their own research; whereas the latter was derived from results generated by other sources such as published articles.

The questionnaire appeared in bilingual descriptions in English and traditional Chinese. Since conducting surveys using the same set of questionnaires ensured consistency in the replies to the questions by the subjects surveyed, the questionnaire largely followed the ones used by Lau and Pang (1995), and McCleary and Weaver (1988b). In general, the questionnaire consisted of three parts.

Part one contained a qualifying question aimed at filtering out those subjects who were not interested in the hospitality or tourism industry. A question "Have you ever planned to work in the hospitality and tourism industry?" was asked in this part. Only the students who provided a positive answer were requested to complete the whole set of questionnaire.

Part two aimed at collecting information on the perceived importance of the factors that influence AD students' choice in job selection in the hospitality and tourism industry. Twenty fixed response questions were asked in this part. These questions were for the factors that could affect students' choice in job selection. Should respondents have more to add, they could do so in the open-ended question. Subjects were requested to indicate their level of agreement on each item, with a score of '5' represented strongly agree and '1' represented strongly disagree.

The final part was designed to collect demographic characteristics of the subjects surveyed. Data such as age, year of study, gender and monthly family income were obtained in this section.

Prior to the wide scale survey, 15 subjects were selected to conduct a pilot test. The main purpose of this preliminary trial was to test the clarity of the questions and to provide constructive feedback on the design of the questionnaire. Results of the pilot test showed that the question style and structure of the questionnaire were reasonable and reliable.

In addition to collecting primary data, secondary data were obtained from a review of the information and statistical figures published by the government, and from journal articles, newspaper clippings, and books.

## **Data Analysis**

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for data processing and analysis. Firstly, the collected data were analyzed in order to find out the frequency of the subjects' demographic characteristics. Also, as mentioned previously, pre- and post-entry analyses were employed in order to discover changes in students' perceptions as a result of exposure to the industrial environment. To achieve this goal, an independent samples t-test was used to test whether there were any significant differences between the perceptions of Year One and Year Two students.

## **Findings, Analysis and Discussion**

### **Demographic Distribution**

At the end of March 2005, 213 completed questionnaires were returned by students from College A. Among these returned questionnaires, 28 did not follow the instructions and they were thus discarded. In other words, a total of 185 valid questionnaires were received, representing 86.85 percent of the original sample size that responded positively to the qualifying question.

The 185 subjects who were in AD program comprised 45 male and 140 female students (Table 1). One hundred and thirty-one of them were Year

One students and 54 were in Year Two. A majority of the students (119 out of 185) were in the age group of 20 to 21. The rest of the population distribution was: 48 students aged between 18 and 19, 17 students aged between 22 and 23, and only 1 student aged above 23.

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent (%)</u>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	45	24.3
Female	140	75.5
<b>Year of Study</b>		
Year One	131	70.8
Year Two	54	29.2
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-19	48	25.9
20-21	119	64.3
22-23	17	9.2
Above 23	1	0.5
<b>Monthly family income</b>		
HK\$ 10,000 or below	37	20.0
HK\$ 10,001 – 20,000	74	40.0
HK\$ 20,001 – 30,000	50	27.0
HK\$ 30,001 – 40,000	12	6.5
Above HK\$ 40,000	12	6.5
<b>Preferred career industry</b>		
Travel and Tourism	41	22.2
Hotel and Hospitality	125	67.6
Food Service	19	10.3

In terms of family income, the largest group, with 74 students, had monthly family income between HK\$10,001 and HK\$20,000 (HK\$7.8 = US\$1). In addition, 50 students reported that their monthly family income was between HK\$20,001 and HK\$30,000, and 37 students belonged to the low-income group with a monthly family income of HK\$10,000 or below. For the high-income groups, 12 students reported that their monthly family income was from HK\$30,001 to HK\$40,000, and another 12 had monthly family income above HK\$40,000.

Besides the obtained demographic information, it appeared that the most attractive industry to AD students was the hotel and hospitality industry, with 67.6% of the sample selected this as their preferred career industry. For the rest of the respondents, 22.2% were interested to work in the travel and tourism



industry, and 10.3% preferred to work in the food service industry.

## Differences in Perception by Year of Study

As previously stated, a major aim of this study is to determine whether there were any significant differences in perception towards the hospitality and tourism industry between Year One and Year Two students. The latter group should have more working experiences in the hospitality and tourism industry during their industrial placement. It is tempting to think that previous working experience in the hospitality and tourism industry would produce significant differences in students' attitudes towards the industry-specific items. Empirical evidence showed this was true for seven out of 20 of the variables. Specifically, Year One students placed a significantly higher level of importance on: (1) opportunity for promotion, (2) future growth of the industry, (3) work that keeps me interested, (4) good working conditions, (5) job challenge, (6) attractive salary, and (7) opportunity for traveling (Table 2). No statistically significant difference was found by year of study for the other 13 variables. The following sub-section discussed the variables that have exhibited significant differences between years of study.

**Table 2 A Comparison of the Perceptions of Year One and Year Two Students**

	Total (N = 185)		Year One students (N = 131)		Year Two students (N = 54)		Mean Difference	Sig.
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Future growth of the industry	4.1784	0.63893	4.2595	0.61504	3.9815	0.65849	0.2781	<b>0.007*</b>
Work that keeps me interested	4.0270	0.79695	4.1221	0.77482	3.7963	0.80984	0.3258	<b>0.011*</b>
Attractive salary	3.8595	0.76024	3.9389	0.69896	3.6667	0.86874	0.2723	<b>0.026*</b>
Good fringe benefits	3.8054	0.74087	3.8321	0.74578	3.7407	0.73164	0.0913	0.447
Good training program	3.7946	0.80147	3.7939	0.79147	3.7963	0.83281	-0.0024	0.985
Job challenge	3.7676	0.79059	3.8473	0.81781	3.5741	0.68960	0.2733	<b>0.032*</b>
Opportunity for promotion	3.7568	0.78038	3.8931	0.70440	3.4255	0.86005	0.4672	<b>0.000*</b>
Good working condition	3.6865	0.85280	3.8092	0.86036	3.3889	0.76273	0.4203	<b>0.002*</b>
Nice people to work with	3.4270	0.79148	3.4580	0.78701	3.3519	0.80464	0.1062	0.408
Appreciation of work performance	3.4162	0.79040	3.4046	0.80172	3.4444	0.76889	-0.0399	0.756
Opportunity for traveling	3.3514	0.89127	3.4427	0.89580	3.1296	0.84778	0.3131	<b>0.029*</b>
Job security	3.3243	0.82929	3.3511	0.79347	3.2593	0.91497	0.0919	0.495
Enhancement of sense of responsibility	3.2811	0.79872	3.3511	0.80311	3.1111	0.76889	0.2400	0.063
Meeting career plan	3.2649	0.80765	3.2443	0.79510	3.3148	0.84282	-0.0705	0.591
Good geographical location	3.2378	0.79924	3.2748	0.76514	3.1481	0.87755	0.1267	0.328
Work loyalty to the company	3.1892	0.80885	3.1832	0.81147	3.2037	0.80984	-0.0205	0.876
Reasonable working hours	3.0324	1.04727	3.0458	0.97557	3.0000	1.21314	0.0458	0.788
Comments from parents and teachers	2.9514	0.81615	3.0153	0.83191	2.7963	0.76182	0.2190	0.97
Access to superiors	2.9081	0.68142	2.9389	0.62948	2.8333	0.79503	0.1056	0.339
Assistance for personal problems	2.6865	0.68293	2.7176	0.67110	2.6111	0.71154	0.1064	0.336

\* Highlighted figures with sig. value > 0.05 represents a significant different between the perception of Year One and Year Two students.

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

## Factors Relating to Job Selection

This subsection firstly discusses the factors that had exhibited significant differences between Year One and Year Two students. Other factors are discussed afterwards.

### *Future Growth of the Industry*

As indicated in Table 2, future growth of the industry was rated as the most important factor with an overall mean at 4.1784. This result was not unexpected since the Hong Kong government had made a large amount of investments to develop the hospitality and tourism industry. Some analysts forecasted that the number of inbound tourists will grow rapidly in the coming decade. Such news should provide enough confidence to the students on the job prospects of the industry. Since a good future growth of the industry implies more job opportunities will be available, students studying relevant programs would feel more secure as they will have a good chance to find employment after their graduation.

A comparison between Year One and Year Two students' responses showed statistically significant differences on this factor. Generally, Year One students had a higher expectation towards the future growth of the industry. The reason for this discrepancy might be caused by the structure of the AD program. In College A, Year One business students were required to study ten courses in total, with nine compulsory courses in general business and one elective course. Year One students who were interested to work in the hospitality industry could select a course named Hotel Operation, which was an introductory course that only provided some general ideas to students. Whereas Year Two students, on the other hand, had an opportunity to select up to seven hospitality or tourism related courses, at both operational level and managerial level. Seemingly, the former group had less understanding about the industry; their exposures to the industry were relatively less than the latter group. The expectations of Year One students were based on their limited knowledge and information provided by the media about how they foresee the future development of the industry. However, with relatively more industrial experience during their industrial placement and academic knowledge, Year Two students were likely to be less influenced by the media than Year One students.

### *Work that Keeps Me Interested*

In the study of Taylor and Allene (1987), the value of interesting work was rated as the most important factor that influenced students in starting their career in the hospitality and tourism industry. In this study, the factor of "work that keeps me interested" was rated as the second most important factor (mean = 4.0270). With such a high priority placed on interesting work, it was natural that new recruits could be disappointed when they were put in routine positions with little responsibility. The result of unrealistic perceptions was likely due to the lack of, or insufficient, prior industrial exposure. Once they

have worked in the industry, they would realize that the daily operations are routine and little responsibilities would be given to entry level employees. Using waiters in a food and beverage outlet as an example, it usually takes them a minimum of two to three years to be promoted to senior waiters. They seldom have a chance to make managerial decision until they are promoted to a higher level. The lack of challenge usually discourages them from continuing their career in the industry.

While deciding whether to choose to work in the industry, Year One students were more concerned with interest in the job than Year Two students. Year One students generally had a significant higher expectation of interest in the job. The main reason for this difference could be due to the difference in the working experiences of two groups. Year Two students who had gained some experience from their industrial placements programs would have a better understanding of the job nature. Therefore, Year Two students had a relatively lower expectation of interest in the industry.

### *Attractive Salary*

Another important factor that influenced AD students' career selection decision was the attractiveness of the salary offered. It was rated as the third most important amongst twenty variables, with an overall mean at 3.8595. The result was consistent with the findings of Lau and Pang (1995) on a similar survey on undergraduate students. A comparison of the perceptions of Year One and Year Two students showed statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level with the former group having a higher expectation towards the salary of the industry. The main reason for such a difference could be because Year Two students were at the final stage of their studies and started to look for jobs. They were more likely to read career related magazines and recruitment advertisements. Therefore, they would have more understanding towards the average salary of different industries. Moreover, their expectations towards the salary of the hospitality and tourism industry should be more realistic and rational.

### *Job Challenge*

Previous studies have shown the increasing importance of job challenge in relation to a person's job selection and satisfaction. According to Pavesic and Brymer (1989), lack of job challenge was an important reason for leaving the industry. This is consistent with the findings of this research, which confirmed that most AD students attached large importance to this factor in their job selection, with a mean at 3.7676. When they discovered the lack of job challenge in their first job, they were likely to be disappointed and move to other jobs. As discussed before, substantial work responsibility is seldom

given to entry level employees, who may become disillusioned and decided to change their jobs.

This study showed a statistically significant difference between Year One and Year Two students. Apparently, prior experience was one of the reasons for causing the difference. The Year Two group who had more industrial exposure should be aware of the structure of labor division in the industry. As a result, their expectation on job challenge was lower. This was particularly true when most of Year Two students' past experiences were at the low level of the management hierarchy. The Year One respondents, on the other hand, had not much working experience, and they would hope to have great responsibilities and exciting challenges when they take up employment in the industry.

### *Opportunity for Promotion*

This factor was rated the seventh among the 20 job selection criteria, with a mean at 3.7568. Similarly, Lau and Pang (1995) stated that according to the career perceptions of undergraduate students, a good promotion prospect was viewed as an important criterion. This result showed that most AD students had relatively high expectation towards the chance of promotion in the industry.

On the contrary, according to the findings of Pavesic and Brymer (1989), most hospitality graduates left the industry because of the lack of opportunity for promotion (41.2%). Since the chance for promotion was not high, and the time needed for career advancement may be lengthy, AD students might thus have inappropriate attitudes towards the industry. A reason for their inappropriate attitude might be their unclear vision of the nature of hospitality and tourism. With education at the tertiary level, students believed that they should have the knowledge and skills to handle the work in the industry adequately. In other words, they believed that they were quite competitive in the job market. As a result, AD students thought they had the ability that made them worthy for early promotion.

There was a statistically significant difference between Year One and Year Two students in this factor, with the expectation of Year One students higher than Year Two students. Again, the level of working experience and industry exposure might be the reason for the dissimilarity. With more exposures and experiences, Year Two students were more realistic about the promotion criteria and requirements.

### *Good Working Condition*

This factor was rated eighth amongst the twenty variables, with the mean

at 3.6865. Generally speaking, most AD students considered good working conditions as a fairly important criterion for job selection. According to Farmer and Tucker's (1988) research on working conditions in the hospitality industry, half of the hospitality employees changed jobs and 10 percent left the industry completely for the reason of dissatisfaction with working conditions. Apparently, AD students had overoptimistic expectations on the working conditions in the hospitality and tourism industry. With the beautiful infrastructure and luxurious appearance, especially in hotels, it is easy to generate an illusion to students who had little working experience about the actual working conditions.

Year One and Year Two students showed a statistically significant difference on this factor at the 0.05 level. As discussed before, people with limited exposure to the industry tended to have false impressions on the actual working environment and conditions. With experience of the working atmosphere of the hospitality and tourism industry, Year Two students' perceptions towards the industry's working conditions were more realistic. However, it should be noted that, even though the latter group had a better understanding of the working conditions, their expectations might not be completely correct. The perception could also depend on the job nature of previous experience. For instance, a person with clerical experience in a hotel might give a higher score on the working conditions than a person with housekeeping experience.

### *Opportunity for Traveling*

This factor received a mean of 3.3514. The result showed that it was not considered as highly important by the respondents. However, an interesting finding of the figures was a statistically significant difference in the perceptions between Year One and Year Two respondents in which the former group had a higher expectation. A reason for the difference between Year One and Year Two students could, again, be attributed to the unequal backgrounds of these two cohorts in industrial exposure and experience.

### *Other Factors*

Apart from the previously mentioned nine factors, Year One students tended to rate higher than Year Two students on (1) Enhancement of sense of responsibility, (2) Job security, (3) Nice people to work with, (4) Good fringe benefits, (5) Good geographical location, (6) Reasonable working hours, (7) Assistance for personal problems, (8) Access to superiors, and (9) Comments from parents and teachers. However, the differences were not found to be statistically significant.

On the other hand, Year Two students placed more importance on career development related factors such as: appreciation of work performance, good training programs, loyalty to the company, and meeting one's career plan. The differences of these factors, however, were not statistically significant between the two groups.

### *General Discussion*

The results of the survey showed that Year One students had higher expectations towards the tourism and hospitality industry. The perceptions of Year Two students were, however, more appropriate and realistic. This finding strengthens the importance of internship programs for students as empirical findings showed those who had working experience tended to have a more realistic view of the industry.

Another important factor that affected students' perceptions toward the industry was the program structure. The results of the survey showed that, the more hospitality and tourism related courses that they had taken, the more knowledge they had and the more appropriate and realistic their perception of the industry became.

It is worthwhile to point out that although Year Two students appeared to have a more realistic perception towards the tourism and hospitality industry, their understanding of the real situation could be incomplete and inconsistent. In fact, most Year Two students acquired their working experiences through the internship programs provided by College A. The responsibility given to trainees, who were usually paid HK\$2,500 (US\$1 = HK\$7.8) per month or less, was far below of that of what full time staff received. Moreover, due to the time span of the training programs, which usually lasted for only a couple of months, students were unlikely to acquire an in-depth understanding on all aspects of the industry.

## **Conclusion**

### **Summary**

Findings of the research showed that AD students tended to have an over-optimistic view of the actual working conditions and the potential rewards of employment in the hospitality and tourism industry. Students were over-optimistic on salary and fringe benefits, and on factors such as interest in the job and challenges of the industry. The unrealistic expectations could, inevitably, render in future high staff turnover in the hospitality and tourism industry.

It is interesting to note that some factors like access to superiors,

assistance with personal problems, and comments from parents and teachers were rated as relatively unimportant among the 20 items listed on the questionnaire. This appears to be a reflection of the fact that young people nowadays usually tend to ignore the recommendations provided by their seniors.

Fortunately, AD students seemed to have more reasonable perceptions towards the working hours of the industry. The relatively low score given to this factor suggests that they appreciate the need to work long hours with overtime and unpopular work shifts.

## Implications

The findings should provide insights for hospitality and tourism educators to put more efforts to educate students about the real industrial situations. Career development seminars should be provided to students during their studies, with a view of offering information to them and let them know about the reality of actual working conditions. Speakers may include recent graduates or professionals with intimate knowledge of the industrial conditions.

The industry is partly responsible for not projecting an entirely appropriate image to prospective employees, since their daily operations are usually not disclosed to the public or only limited information is provided. The general public could find it difficult to search for information about the industry. This has caused a gap between the expectation of prospective employees and the actual working environment. It is, therefore, recommended that the industry should be more open to provide first hand information to students on a regular basis.

## Future Research

There are a number of implications following from the findings of this study, which suggest several issues that merit further research. For instance, the research could be expanded to include a larger sample size and more educational institutions. Instead of solely studying the perception of AD hospitality students from College A, research on the perceptions of other institutes' AD students in hospitality and tourism related programs may also be performed. In addition, when time and resources permit, in-depth interviews with the students are recommended in order to explore the main reasons that underpin their expectations and perceptions.

## References

Almquist, E.M. & Angrist, S.S. (1971). Role Model Influences on College Women's Career Aspirations. In A. Theodore, ed. *The Professional Women*. (pp. 79-91.) Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing,

- Andrew, K. J. (2001). Making a career of it? Hospitality students' future perspectives: An Anglo-Dutch study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(1), 13-20.
- Blau, P.M., Gustad, J.W., Jessor, R. & Parnes, H. (1956). Occupational choice: A conceptual framework. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 9(3), 531-543.
- Farmer, S.W. & Tucker, D. (1988). A Comparative Study of Working Conditions in the Hospitality Industry: Expectation versus Realities. *Hospitality Education & Research Journal*, 12(2), 19-26.
- Ford, R.C. & Bach, S.A. (1996). Hospitality management students' image of the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 5(5), 5-8.
- Ginzberg, E. Ginsburg, S.W., Azelrad, S. & Herma, J.L. (1951). *Occupational Choice: An Approach to a General Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Holland, J.L., & Nichols, R.C. (1964). Explorations of a theory of vocational choice: a longitudinal study of change in a major field of study. *Personal and Guidance Journal*, 43, 235-242.
- Hong Kong Tourism Board (2005). *A Statistical Review of Tourism*. Hong Kong: HKTB.
- Kingston, N. & Wolfe, P.D. (1972). Graduates in Industry. *Management Survey Report*, 14, 1-5.
- Lau, A. & Pang, M. (1995). Undergraduates' Career Perceptions and First Job Needs in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Career Management*, 7(3), 14-24.
- Lefever, M.M. & Withiam, G. (1998). Curriculum review: How industry views hospitality education: The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 39(4), 70-78.
- Mabey, C. (1986). *Graduates into Industry*. London, England: Gower Publishing.
- McCleary, K.W. & Weaver, P.A. (1988a), The job offer: What today's graduates want. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 12(4), 19-26.
- McCleary, K.W. & Weaver, P.A. (1988b). Expectations of Hospitality Students Regarding Entry Level Positions in the Hospitality Industry. *Hospitality Education & Research Journal*, 12(2), 163-173.
- Nowlis, M. (1996). Perspectives on International Hotel Management Education. In Kotas, R., Teare, R., Logie, J., Jayawardena, C. & Bowen, J. (Ed.). *The International Hospitality Business* (pp. 141-144). London: Cassell.
- Pavesic, D.V. & Brymer, R.A. (1989). Industry Retention/Attrition of Hospitality Graduates. *Hospitality Education & Research Journal*, 13(3), 267-273.
- Pavesic, D.V., & Brymer, R.A. (1990). Job satisfaction: What's happening to the young managers. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 31(1), 90-96.
- Riegel, C.D. (1983). Career Choice, Work Values, and Career Commitment of Food Service and Housing Administration Students at the Pennsylvania State University: A social Learning Perspective. Ann Arbor, Michigan: A Bell & Howell Information Co.
- Rosenberg, M. (1957). *Occupations and Values*. Glencoe, N.Y: The free Press.
- Sciarini, M.P. & Woods, R.H. (1997). Selecting that first job: How students develop perceptions about potential employers. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 38(4), 76-81.
- Taylor, D. & Allene, G.V. (1987). Career Decision in Hospitality Management. *Hospitality Education & Research Journal*, 11(2), 51-63.
- Ward, L.B. & Athos, A.G. (1972). *Student Expectations of Corporate Life: Implications for Management Recruiting*. Boston: Division of research, Harvard University Press.
- Zacerelli, H.E. (1985). Is the hospitality/food service industry turning its employees on-or off? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 4(3), 123-124.

## About the Author

**Dr. Rob Law** is an Associate Professor of Information Technology in School of Hotel & Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include modelling and forecasting, Internet/ E-Commerce and tourism/hospitality IT applications.

**Jocelyn Lai** is a graduate of the same School.