

UNIVERSITY AND SMALL TOURISM BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS: THE CASE OF THE ISLE OF SHOALS STEAMSHIP AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Abstract: To date there has not been much of a focus on partnerships between educational institutions and small tourist attractions. This is unfortunate since small tourist attractions represent the heart and soul of the industry in many locations around the world. This paper examines the range of partnership activities that occurred between a Land Grant University and a local small tourist business (5-40 full and part-time employees). This paper uses a case study approach to provide a description of two "partners", an overview of the partnership activities, and the motivations for and benefits of the partnership. The paper concludes with a summary of the lessons learned about partnerships from the case study.

Introduction

There is increasing experimentation with the use of partnerships, alliances, and networks to design and deliver goods and services throughout the public, private and non-profit sectors (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Partnerships between institutions of higher education and for-profit, non-profit and public sectors with a focus on experiential and/or cooperative education have been around since the early 1900s (Wilson, 1971). Many hospitality and tourism programs require some type of experiential or cooperative learning (Downey, 1979). This type of learning has various names, such as internships, externships, field work, independent study project, class projects and cooperative education. These types of programs and initiatives offer a unique

opportunity to forge partnerships for the mutual benefit of all parties.

A majority of the top hospitality management and tourism programs at United States colleges and universities have experiential education components as a part of their education curriculum and a number have formal cooperative education requirements (Archer, 1991). In most cases the experiential education components are based almost entirely on the engagement of the faculty and their professional contacts. The major hospitality employers in private and public sectors sponsor co-op programs. For example, Marriott Hotels and Resorts and Walt Disney World Company have the most well recognized co-op programs in the country. In the public sector the Student Conservation Association has an excellent co-op/internship program. For the most part formal long-term co-op programs have been initiated by the industry focus on labor force development or coordination of volunteer workers.

There has been limited focus on the value of co-op programs and partnerships between small tourist attractions and educational institutions. This is unfortunate since this segment of the industry represents the heart and soul of the tourist industry around the world. This paper provides an overview of the partnership between the Isles of Shoals Steamship Company of Portsmouth, New Hampshire and the University of New Hampshire's Tourism Planning and Development Program. It will provide a preliminary understanding for of the range of experiential or cooperative education programs that have taken place over the course of a ten-year period. More specifically, this paper utilizes a case study approach to provide (1) a brief description of the each of the partners; (2) an overview of partnership activities; (3) a description of some of the motivations/benefits of the partnership; (4) a discussion of some of the challenges facing partnerships, and (5) the lessons learned about partnerships from the case studies.

The Partners

The Isles of Shoals Steamship Company: The Isles of Shoals Steamship Company (ISSCO) is the exclusive ferry to Star Island located five miles off the New Hampshire coast. ISSCO makes two trips daily to the Isles providing water, food and

supplies for the Oceanic Hotel that has been in operation since the turn of the century. ISSCO also offers a wide range of party ships (i.e., Rockin' on the River, Reggae on the River, Brews Cruise, etc.), lighthouse and sunset cruises, historic Portsmouth Harbor tours, lobster ad clambakes, weddings and a wide variety of educational tours, non-profit fund raising events, corporate and private charters aboard the M/V Thomas Loughton. The M/V Thomas Loughton is a Victorian style Excursion boat with three decks (two fully enclosed and heated), a beautiful brass hand railed balcony with two full functioning bars and a top (open) deck tiki bar, two dance floor on the top and lower decks, galley services and many other amenities. M/V has a total passenger capacity of 348 people with interior seating for 150 (weddings/dinner cruises). ISSCO has a year round staff of four (Director of Marine Operations, Director of Cruise Operations, Office Manager, Director of Marketing and Sales). ISSCO has a seasonal full-time staff of 20 (season is from April 1st to January 1st) and an additional 10-20 part-time staff. ISSCO is located on state property administered by the NH Port Authority (and the Pease Development Authority). Portsmouth Harbor is a unique working port with tugboats, tankers, and the nation's oldest working navel yard, a closed castle-like prison, five historic forts, three lighthouses, and the fastest tidal river current in the east. ISSCO interacts on a daily basis with many federal, state and local agencies and organizations. ISSCO was named the Portsmouth Area Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year because of its contribution to the people and resources of the Portsmouth, NH region.

The University of New Hampshire's Tourism Planning and Development Program: The University Of New Hampshire System Board Of Trustees approved the Bachelor of Science degree program in Tourism Planning and Development Program (TPDP) in 1993. The program is one of three bachelor of science degrees offered by the Department of Resource Economics and Development (i.e., Tourism Planning and Development; Environmental and Resource Economics; and Community of Development). The Department is the only social science department in the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture. The mission of the Tourism Planning and Development Program is to provide students

with the skills and knowledge necessary to plan, develop, market, and manage the human, physical and financial resources of tourism regions in an environmentally responsible manner. The program utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to provide students with a strong liberal education supplemented by a broad professional understanding of tourism with a specific focus on planning, marketing and economics. The program emphasizes the practical application of planning, marketing and economic theory to the development and management of tourism resources. Students study both the social and environmental sciences in order to better understand the complexity of natural and social systems. Upper division courses (e.g., Tourism Planning, Economics of Tourism, Social Impact Assessment, Marketing Tourism Places, etc.) include a "special project" component in cooperation with the public and private sectors of the tourism industry. The program requires that students complete both an independent study and a professional internship (500 hours/40hours a week). The program average enrollment is about 45 students for the past 7 years. The program has one FTE and another 1.5 FTE made up of faculty teaching seven required courses (Marketing, Economics and Planning).

Methods

This paper uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to prepare this case study of the partnership activities between the Isles of Shoals Steamship Company (ISSCO) and the University of New Hampshire's Tourism Planning and Development Program. The primary source of information and insights for this paper are derived from the direct experiences of the President of Isles of Shoals Steamship Company (and owner of the M/V Thomas Loughton), Robin Whittaker and Coordinator of the Tourism Planning and Development Program, Rob Robertson.

Ms. Whittaker has a bachelor's degree in marketing from The Pennsylvania State University. She has worked for the ISSCO for the past 20 years and she has been the President/Owner for the past 10 years. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce and was recently elected vice-chair and she will share the Chamber in 2004. She was a founding member and chair of the Tourism

Committee of the Portsmouth Chamber. She also serves on the Boards of Directors of a number of non-profit organizations with a focus community and environmental resources. She is a governor appointed member of the NH Workforce Opportunity Council Board.

Rob Robertson is an associate professor and coordinator of the Tourism Planning and Development Program at the University of New Hampshire. He has interdisciplinary degrees that blend the social science with natural and cultural resource management from Western Illinois University, Oregon State University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has been at UNH for the past 10 years prior to that he was an assistant professor at Iowa State University. He has wide range of life and work experiences including positions with the National Park Service, a county forest preserve system, a program for juvenile delinquent boys, bartending and spent four years in the US Coast Guard. His current position at UNH includes a research appointment with the NH Agriculture Experiment Station. His research focuses on the issues associated with the management and development cultural and natural resources and the application of social science research to the management and development of these resources. He is responsible for the instruction of undergraduate and graduate courses entitled; Introduction to Tourism Planning and Development, Tourism and Global Understanding, Coastal Tourism Development, Communication for Natural Resources and Community decision makers, Nature-based tourism development and Social Impact Assessment. He serves on a variety of technical boards and advisory committees that addresses a variety of marine and coastal development issues.

Overview of Partnership Activities

Small-scale tourism attractions and educational partnerships are important. There is considerable potential for mutually beneficial relationships across a wide range of topic areas. This section provides an overview of partnership related activities between UNH's Tourism Planning and Development Program (TPDP) and the Isles of Shoals Steamship Company (ISSCO). Initial contact between the TPDP and ISSCO occurred when the ISSCO leadership was invited to serve on the TPDP Industry Advisory Committee with the

creation of the TPDP at UNH in 1993. ISSCO's involvement with the advisory committee was minimal. Over the course of next ten years next three years there were a number of interactions that established the foundation for partnership. A brief description of each broad category of activities is briefly described.

- **Internships.** ISSCO is a site for internships across a variety of programs. Three TPDP students have completed an internship at the ISSCO. The student interns worked in the broad areas of marketing and sales or event planning/cruise directing. ISSCO paid the student interns and stressed the importance of treating interns like employees. The exit interviews between the student intern, TPDP faculty and ISSCO management staff provided an opportunity for constructive dialog about the student interns learning outcomes. It also provided a foundation of trust between the TPDP and ISSCO. The exit interviews also facilitated communication on the issues facing both entities and the many potential benefits of establishing the partnership. Each intern brought the relationship between the partners closer together.
- **Research Site.** ISSCO was the site for data collection for two projects. The first was a regional tourism assessment for the Route 1A/1B Corridor. ISSCO was one of ten sampling locations for an assessment of tourist behaviors, perceptions and evaluation of a wide variety of issues associated with tourism development in the seacoast region. TRPD faculty provided ISSCO with the final report and offered to do additional data runs specific to ISSCO customers. The second study was focused specifically on passengers who took cruises or whale watches within New Hampshire's coastal region. ISSCO management participated in the questionnaire design and sampling strategy. ISSCO provided access to their customer data base. The TPDP faculty shared the results from the study with ISSCO management. ISSCO reviewed the results and made some changes to interpretive programs aboard the M/V Thomas Loughton during sightseeing cruises. TPDP faculty prepared professional publications and presentation with data collected from these studies.

- Classroom participation. ISSCO staff has made numerous guest lectures in a variety of courses. ISSCO President Robin Whittaker guest lectures in Introduction to Tourism Planning and Development Course (150+ undergraduates from across campus). She shares stories about the “boat business”. The stories provided a real world context to the topics discussed in class. This real world context is important. The stories focused on relationships and interactions with regulatory agencies, radio stations, customers, staff, advertising companies, employees, State Liquor Commissioners, Newspapers, Coast Guard, Local Police Department, Banks, musicians etc. This evaluation was one selection out of three for the first and second “active learning exercise”. Only ten out of 150 took ISSCO up on its offer. ISSCO President made an offer of a free cruise to any student who signs up to complete a detailed class evaluation of the cruise experience. Those ten students each prepared a 6 to 8 page typed paper. ISSCO management shared the papers with staff and operational changes were implemented. As a result of the guest lectures, ISSCO hired two students, who developed an interest in ISSCO as a result of the presentation

The chief of Marine Operations for ISSCO made a presentation to an undergraduate/graduate course in Nature-based Tourism Planning. He spoke on some of his experiences with local and national governments in a variety of ports-of-call in a variety of exotic locations around the world. ISSCO staff also made guest lectures on “marketing” and “event planning” and they assisted in the planning of independent study projects.

- Independent Studies Projects. A number of students have completed Independent Study projects in cooperation with ISSCO. The Independent Study course requires that students to identify sponsors representing the tourism industry and the TPDP. Over the years ISSCO has been the sponsor of five independent projects.

For the first project, two students prepared a detailed study evaluating the feasibility of

ISSCO and TPDP sponsored education cruise up the Intercoastal Waterway from Daytona Beach, FL to Portsmouth, NH aboard the M/V Oceanic. The M/V Oceanic is a two-deck 110-passenger excursion boat with interior seating for 50. The feasibility study included an educational itinerary (a collaborative project with Penn State University), cost estimates, travel schedule, budget and funding mechanism (ISSCO would allow the program to sponsor a number of fundraising event of the boat and at the property). The project was determined feasible, but ISSCO elected to get out of the whale watch business and leave the M/V Oceanic in Daytona Beach permanently).

The second independent study project was completed by two students. It was a special event, sponsored by UNH Tourism Club, entitled “Halloween on the River”. The students organized the Halloween Party aboard ISSCO’s M/V Thomas Loughton for students and the general public. The event was a success with a small but well satisfied crowd. The income from the ticket sales were split between ISSCO and TPDP Tourism Club.

The third event was a Holiday Cocktail Cruise aboard the M/V Thomas Loughton. Two students planned, promoted and managed a “formal cocktail cruise” on board M/V Thomas Loughton for UNH students. Eighty UNH students attended the events. It was a great night and a good time was had by all. The ticket price included round trip bus transportation. The event lost a little money, but the student acknowledged that planning the event was the seminal event their degree program. An interesting but related outcome was about 50 or 60 of the students who bought tickets for the cruise had taken the introductory to tourism planning and development course. The cocktail cruise provided a valuable opportunity for an adult discussion about the course and their university education.

The fourth event was a graduation cruise. Two students planned, promoted and implemented a cruise on board the M/V Thomas Loughton (to include round trip bus transportation from

campus to the Portsmouth). The event attracted nearly one hundred students and still did not make any money, but the event did not lose any money (not counting ISSCO's contribution). The students prepared a detailed evaluation of the event and were extremely grateful for the opportunity. One of the students was hired by ISSCO as a seasonal cruise director position.

The final independent study project was a feasibility study for the educational wall that would educate ISSCO customers and the general public about the various governmental and non-governmental organizations with a focus on various attributes of the marine environment. This project was completed by a single student and included interviews with ISSCO management, TPDP faculty and other marine related non-profit organizations, the Port Authority, neighbors and other stakeholders. The wall was determined feasible and Ocean Bank contributed \$2000 and staff supervision to get the project started.

- Team Taught Courses. The President of ISSCO and TPDP faculty teamed together to teach a Special Topics in Tourism Development course entitled "Coastal Tourism Development". Twenty UNH students enrolled in the course. ISSCO President, Robin Whittaker donated her time to teach the course. The objective of the course was exposing students to the many different stakeholders with a stake in coastal tourism development and exposing the stakeholders to student. ISSCO facilitated meetings with a wide variety of leaders in NH Tourism industry and local government. The course included field trips throughout the seacoast. The course culminated with a "networking" cruise that brought together the various guest lecturers and UNH faculty. Only three UNH faculty and administrator attended (even though over 100 were invited) and 20 industry people attended (150 were invited). ISSCO donated the vessel and students secured donations for food and non-alcoholic beverages. Two students obtained full-time employment (with benefits) as a direct result of the course.

The ISSCO President and TPDP faculty also teamed together to offer a course entitled "Tourism and Global Understanding". Sixty-six students enrolled in the course. The course was experiential in nature and required a wide variety of "life seeing" tourism experiences. This course focused on getting student to think out of the "student" box and to see what life and world has to offer. A major course assignment required planning a special event. The course focuses on improved understanding of other cultures (domestic or international). A group of student organized, planned and implemented an "Italia Cruise" aboard ISSCO's M/V Thomas Loughton. The final essay exam asked student to critically evaluate the course. The exam suggested that this course fulfilled an important, but previously ignored role, getting students that there it is a big wonderful world if they open their minds to it.

- Class Projects. The TPDP course in "Marketing Tourism Places" completed a detailed image assessment of "Star Island" in cooperation with the ISSCO. ISSCO President provided the focus for the study and some financial resources (i.e., purchased the sample for a WWW survey). The students completed all phases of the research project, to include a final presentation to ISSCO staff and TPDP faculty. ISSCO has commissioned a television commercial based upon the results from the image study. One of the TPDP students who participated in the design and implementation of the image was hired as a marketing intern by ISSCO.
- Miscellaneous Activities. There are a number of additional partnerships or cooperative activities between the ISSCO and the TPDP. These activities include: (1) TPDP use of the M/V Thomas Loughton as a meeting location /research platform; (2) ISSCO sponsorship of TPDP student club; (3) Part-time work for TPDP undergraduates and graduate students; (4) joint proposal writing; (5) co-authoring presentations and professional papers at professional conferences and meetings from both the industry and academic perspective; and (6) integration of experimental research designs into routine ISSCO marketing programs/activities.

Motivations for and Benefits of the Partnership

The proceeding section provided a brief overview of the range of partnerships and collaborations activities between ISSCO and UNH's TPDP. This section provides some insights into the motivations for participating in these types of partnership activities. It will also include a very general discussion of some of the benefits of this partnership. ISSCO and TPDP share many of the same motivations for participation in the partnership. The following represents some examples of the motivations/benefits:

- Access to highly motivated part-time/seasonal employees. Undergraduate and graduate students need practical experiences relevant to their academic programs. With the cost of a four year education, students need to earn money while they go to school. Students can be highly motivated employees when the pay is fair and if they are able to make the connection between their position and their education. The University of New Hampshire has over 11,000 undergraduate students in five colleges. There are eight distinct programs with direct application to a small marine based tourism attraction in five separate colleges. The Hospitality Management, Business Management and Marketing Departments in the College of Business and Economics, the Department of Recreation Management and Policy in the School of Health and Human Services, the Tourism Planning and Development, Community Development, and Environmental and Resource Economics and Environmental Conservation Programs in the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, the Department of Communication in the College of Liberal Arts, and Environmental Education Program in the College of Education. This many programs at a single university make it very difficult for a small business to navigate. As a result of this awareness, a TPDP faculty member organized a special session at NH's Governors Conference on Tourism. This session served to educate the industry on the wide range of programs with application to the tourism industry. An important advantage of students as part-time and seasonal employees, is that there is limited pressure to provide them with benefits, and they have a special skill sets.
- Access to Academic/Small Business Resources. The partnership activities serve to make each of the partners aware of the resources that are available to the mutual benefit of the partners. This is particularly true for this type of partnership. UNH and any other research university have a wide variety of resources that are typically difficult to access without a personal guide (e.g., academic programs, research an outreach faculty and staff, students, etc.). Likewise, small business, particularly small marine-based tourism attractions have access to a wide variety of resources (i.e., business contacts, meeting place, a vessel with a 300 passenger excursion boat, etc.). The partnership also provides access to potential customers for ISSCO. ISSCO has improved its access to UNH as an important customer base since the formation of the partnership (i.e., alumni association, student organizations, faculty and service groups, etc.). UNH is the largest employer in the NH seacoast.
- Market research and strategic planning support. The ISSCO and TPDP partnership provides a venue for creative application of applied research activities. For example, ISSCO obtains valuable data and strategic planning support, while the TPDP faculty and students have a venue to develop skills and apply research that often sits on the shelf. The partnership provides a mechanism for longitudinal studies (e.g., tracking products and outcomes) and experimental research designs with relevant dependent variables (i.e., sales, customers, students, etc.).
- Professional Development. ISSCO and TPDP are members of different professional organizations for different reasons. Both partners benefit from each others membership based or professional organizations. For example, the ISSCO is a member of the all the regional Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Associations, as well as the national Passenger Vessel Association (PVA) and the regional "Original Colonies" chapter of the PVA. While, the TPDP is actively involved with the Northeast Recreation symposium, the Rural Sociological Society, Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association and others. Both partners directly benefited

from expanded networking capability. These synergistic activities are further enhanced by the fact that a current member is introducing “new blood” with a unique (but relevant) perspective, interests and skill set. TPDP faculty and collaborators completed a study of PVA members to understand the perceived value of new ocean mapping technology. The President of ISSCO provides a breath (and much needed) fresh air to the staunch and some stagnant academic meetings.

The above are just a few examples of the many different motivations and benefits associated with small-tourist attraction and educational institution partnerships. This partnership served to stretch scarce resources and to advance programmatic and business goals through difficult times. In a very real sense, this small-scale partnership allows faculty to actually implement some of the activities that senior UNH Administrators are talking about but lack fiscal support to implement on a broader scale. Some of the greatest benefits of the partnership activities are related to self-confidence, and personal and professional growth. More specifically, it allows faculty to become better faculty and business owners to become better business owners.

Challenges faced by the Partnership

This section briefly highlights some of the challenges facing the small business-education partnerships. One of the first and foremost challenges encountered was small businesses owner’s attitude towards academics (students, faculty and administration) and academic attitudes towards small businesses. Some of the most common perceptions were that faculty do not get the day to day challenges facing a small business, students don’t know how to work, faculty have a lot of time on their hands, since they do not spend 8 hours a day in the classroom, and that the University is not a very good manager of their fiscal resources. Each of these attitudes is related to each other. From the other perspective faculty have a number of less than favorable attitudes or perceptions towards small tourist attractions. The first is that small businesses want something for nothing. Faculty think that small business view students and faculty as free labor and that businesses do not know how to get the most out of students and faculty. They view students, as free

labors because they will learn from the work experience and faculty are free because they are paid with “tax payer” dollars. There is a general belief among faculty that small businesses don’t get the big picture of how different facets of the “community” integrate. A vast majority of the challenges are a direct result of lack of understanding and a lack of trust. The ISSCO and TPDP partnership have served to educate the partners on what it means to be a small-tourism business owner and what it means to be a university professor. This improved understanding serve to promote a more trusting relationship.

Summary and Final Remarks

This section briefly highlights some of the lessons learned about partnerships and collaboration between faculty and owners of small tourism businesses. First both faculty and business owners are independent thinkers who are more used to talking than to listening. The partners learned that it is important to listen and understand even when it is difficult. Listening allows the partners to understand each other’s experience and expertise. A second major lesson related to listening is that both partners do not and typically will not lose track of their own interests and concerns. Not surprisingly businesses and faculty take different approaches to addressing their own issues and concerns. Partners must be sensitive to the fact that there will not always be equal benefits. Another important lesson is the dangers associated with stereotypes. All faculty and all business owners are not alike. Some faculty/business people are more involved and easier to engage than others. These lessons tend to conform in substance to the some of gaps in the education employment interface identified by Haywood and Maki (1991). In summary, this paper stresses the importance of partners understanding each other’s needs and interests. It also makes clear the value of being honest, sincere, down to earth, willing to listen, open-minded, flexible, realistic and practical. The partners must be willing to commit some of themselves to this process. They must be aware that attempts at collaboration are not always going to work and the importance of building trust over a period of time. Business and faculty have diverse interests and perspectives, conflict will happen. It is very important to work through the conflict and to find creative ways to make the partnership work. Educators need to mentor small business owners

on what it means to be an educator. Likewise small business owners need to mentor faculty on what it means to own your own business.

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