

Title - Personal Development Planning for Tourism Students

Keywords - Personal Development Planning, Employability

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Activity - Understanding the tourism industry and the potential role of the students within it. Identifying strengths and weaknesses and where these need to be worked upon. Setting of personal goals and designing individual plans to develop student skills and knowledge in the field of tourism management.

Group - Level 1, Semester 1 compulsory core module for students studying BA (Hons) Tourism and Leisure and BSc (Hons) Sustainable Tourism Management.

Aim

- To help students focus upon the tourism industry and identify where they would wish to operate within it;
- To identify the skills and knowledge required to enter the appropriate section of the industry and to map these against existing individual skills and knowledge bases;
- To enable students to set priorities within their learning and to design individual development plans to guide their future career options;
- To provide an ongoing forum in which students can reflect upon their learning and share experience and examples of good practice.
- To aid students in evaluating their reasons for enrolling upon their particular courses at the University and what they are seeking to achieve at the end of their studies.
- To introduce the complex and heterogeneous nature of the tourism industry and the range of opportunities and niches available therein.
- To help students to identify relevant skills and skill deficits and to identify ways in which to develop these accordingly.

Context / Background - The main reasoning behind the design of the module content was the perceived need to provide an opportunity for students to identify and build upon their existing skills and to relate these more specifically to their future career opportunities. In this way, the relationship between cognitive and experiential forms of learning were viewed as fully compatible and, as staff, the module contributors would act as facilitators in helping students to design their own long-term plans stretching beyond the duration of their University studies.

Example - The module was delivered once a week (two hours in duration) across semester 1 of the first year. It was taught primarily by two members of subject-specialist staff, bringing in experts from other fields to contribute to the wider learning philosophies involved. The teaching involves students individually as well as in groups, beginning in the first few weeks with brief individual presentations in which the students sought to identify where they would like to be, both professionally and personally in three, five and ten years time. This helped to focus the students on looking beyond their studies and in identifying longer-term career goals. This was followed by the students assembling in groups, from different interests and backgrounds, and reflecting back on their presentations, drawing out a series of values and skills, auditing these and compiling action plans to address the key themes raised.

The module is supported by a progress file (University generic) and supporting CD-ROM. It is expected that students will manage their plans outside of the formal classroom environment and work through the various exercises and components included in their files. Assessment for the module is divided into a number of component tasks, with the module delivery staff recommending a simple 'pass' or 'fail' distinction rather than individually defined marks. The assessment criteria for success relates to the undertaking of a series of skills-based tasks and their translation into individual personal development plans. This includes an honest assessment of existing skills and a strategy for developing these throughout and beyond the duration of the study programme. The process also requires students to identify experience 'deficits' that could be remedied whilst registered at APU, particularly in terms of voluntary and summer-paid work. Each student is then required to prepare an ongoing plan that would be developed and updated throughout their studies via the tutorial process.

Other comments

Envisioned benefits of this process include:

For the student

1. The creation of a forum for students entering the initial phase of their courses in which they can develop an understanding of their specialist programme and link their future career demands to their studies;
2. A more informed student cohort in control of their programmes and able to navigate more effectively through the various choice options;
3. Enabling students to analyse their strengths and weakness and devise ways to improve their employability;

For the University

1. Aiding in the creation of a self-motivated student body, working independently towards their future career goals;
2. Increasing the University's employability statistics and retention levels;
3. Increases in levels of academic achievement.

These envisioned benefits need to be considered in the context of certain negative feedback surrounding the similarity of personal development planning with prior learning in schools and FE institutions. Staff experience in this regard suggests the importance of tailoring the personal development plan to be more discipline-specific.

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