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Tourism education: a strategic analysis model

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Abstract

A market-oriented approach and a competitive higher education environment challenge the ability of degrees in tourism to satisfy stakeholders' needs. The purpose of this paper is to describe through strategic analysis the tourism degree in order to detect its strengths and areas for improvement in the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), taking into account the importance of employee qualification in such a labour-intensive industry. In general, a closer relationship between professionals and academics is required in the design of tourism studies course syllabi.

Keywords: Tourism degree; Graduates; Skills; Expectations

Introduction

Tourism has a significant role in the world economy, in the Spanish economy and, specifically, in the Valencia region (Alicante, Castellon and Valencia). It is the strongest growing industry in the world, and there is nothing to suggest a downturn in the 21st century. According to forecasts by the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2007), international tourist arrivals will reach one billion people by 2010 and international tourism receipts will reach \$1.55 trillion by 2010.

According to the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, Spain received a total of 55.6 million international tourists in 2005, which was one of the most dynamic years on record. Also in 2005, tourist expenditure by non-resident tourists totalled 46,060 million euros, an increase of 4.3 per cent when compared with the same period in the previous year. This increase in total expenditure is mainly explained by the increase in the number of tourists, since the average expenditure for each tourist fell by 2 per cent during that period.

A strong space concentration continues to be a significant characteristic of international tourism flows in Spain, with six regions accounting for 90 per cent of the received international arrivals in 2005. According to their position in the ranking, these are: Catalonia, Balearic, Canary, Andalusia, the Valencia region and Madrid.

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The weight of the tourism sector in the Valencia region is increasing all the time. The Exceltur Report (2006) sets out the impact of tourism on the Valencia economy for 2005 below. Tourism in the Valencia region represents:

- 13.8 per cent of regional gross domestic product (GDP), i.e. 12,017 million euros (over 11 per cent of GDP for Spain as a whole)
- 14.1 per cent of total employment (over 9.6 per cent at national level), i.e. 289,326 tourism-related jobs
- 69.3 per cent of total service exports, i.e. 8,633 million euros in income
- 4.2 per cent of total investments
- 5.4 per cent of public expenditure, i.e. 742 million euros
- 16.5 per cent of total tax income, i.e. 2,672 million euros

The Valencia tourism sector is in fourth position in regional rankings in terms of number of companies and production. Thus, the Valencia region is a strategic area for growth and development in the tourism sector. In a highly competitive environment, academic training is required in this area in order to respond to socio-economic, professional and labour needs (Litteljohn & Watson, 2004; Ramos, Rey-Maqueira, & Tugores, 2004). The role of tourism education is vital in providing network management and communication, which are essential for delivering excellence in tourism services.

In 1996 tourism degree studies were included in the Spanish higher education (HE) system, introducing a new period for training professionals in the sector and opening up new possibilities for research development in the tourism field. The degree is defined as: "Education for the adequate provision of theoretical and practical training for managing tourism-related organizations and institutions" (ANECA, 2004, p. 69). Since its introduction, the number of students enrolled in the first year of a tourism degree course in Spain shows an upward trend, with some stabilisation in more recent years similar to that seen in other degrees.

Tourism degree studies provided by the University of Valencia are organised by the Faculty of Economics. Compared to other more well-established degree courses provided by this centre, such as business administration or economics, the degree in tourism represents only a small proportion of teaching staff and registered students (during the academic year 2005/06 there were 735 students in tourism compared with 2,713 in business administration and 2,485 in business administration and management).

Along with many other Spanish higher education institutions, the University of Valencia has started a process for designing its strategic plan. This requires a reflection on what has been done until now in order to configure the provision of its future degree studies portfolio within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Currently, European universities are immersed in a process of transformation (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Bologna Process Bergen, 2005; Prague Declaration, 2001; Sorbonne Declaration, 1998), aimed at establishing a European EHEA by 2010. For universities in Europe – in Spain, in particular – this involves numerous challenges (Ramírez, Lorduy, & Roja, 2007): increasing competition with other organisations, such as the new public and private universities, and with companies providing education through corporate universities contributing to the lifelong learning process of their own employees; the increasing internationalisation of education; the pressure to harmonise the different national university systems; and the need to improve the teaching quality in universities. Since the Bologna process enhances the globalisation of European HE, this represents a historical opportunity to acquire a stronger image for tourism education (Munar, 2007).

We consider this journal to be an appropriate forum for discussing the configuration of the tourism degree as an education vehicle for training future professionals in a very competitive and dynamic sector. The objective of this paper is, therefore, to stimulate critical thinking and discussion on policy dimensions concerning tourism education.

Literature review

Despite the importance of tourism as an economic sector, as described above, tourism degree studies are discussed in relation to five basic issues in the literature:

- A lack of agreement on the content of tourism syllabuses, which leads to confusion on the part of applicants to courses, students and potential employers and a lack of professional recognition (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Ernawati, 2003). (This is reflected in the discussion around the value of general subjects (King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003) vs. specialisation (Dale & Robinson, 2001))
- The consequences of labour mobility into tourism (King, et al.; Szivas, Riley, & Airey, 2003)
- The informal links between the tourism industry and academic research, which prevent the efficient transfer of knowledge (Cooper, 2006)
- Issues related to the importance and implementation of co-operative education in tourism studies (Leslie & Richardson, 2000)
- The need for a transnational debate when dealing with educational issues in tourism in the context of the emerging international content of the curriculum and the global distribution of tourism graduates (Richards, 1998)

Tourism employers often recruit non-tourism graduates (for example, graduates in business studies) who are able to demonstrate the generic skills required for a vocation in tourism (Dale & Robinson, 2001). Once recruited, the employer might have to train the graduate in specialist skills that have not been directly taught on their programme of study. Cooper and Westlake (1998) recognise that curriculum planning of tourism courses 'involves the need to demonstrate efficiency, flexibility and responsiveness to stakeholders'. Thus, in recent years, there has been a drive towards a more coherent approach to the content of tourism education, focusing on the need for the student to learn how to learn and be flexible (Christou, 1999).

Specialisation in tourism education would contribute towards building closer relationships between employers and institutions, enabling network management and communication between tourism stakeholders. Employers would gain from being able to recruit graduates who have acquired a combination of generic and value-adding specialist skills, thus enhancing the overall tourism experience for consumers (Dale & Robinson, 2001).

The tourism degree at the University of Valencia

This research is part of a larger research project developed for each of the degrees offered by the University of Valencia. As part of the process of strategic planning at the University of Valencia, research was entrusted to a consulting company. Data were obtained through a phone survey to a stratified sample of graduates at the University of Valencia. In the case of the tourism degree, the sampling error is 0,08 ($p=q=0,5$). All items in the survey were scored on a 0-10 scale, except loyalty, first preference applications and intention of being a tourism professional (operationalised as dummy variables), as well as general characteristics of the current or last job.

The tourism degree was established at the University of Valencia in 1998/99 and was based in the Faculty of Economics. It consists of three academic years with 180 credits (see Appendix for further details), 45 of these are practicum, consisting of external training in tourist organisations and institutions, with a clear internationalisation orientation that is reflected in the high number of universities with Socrates-Erasmus arrangements for tourism graduate studies (see Table 1). In fact, during 2005/06, 20 foreign students were received, and 43 of the university's students were sent to other international universities.

Nowadays it is possible to do a tourism degree course in more than nine different public and private centres, which provide almost 1,000 university places in the Valencia region. These figures give an idea of the competitive environment and the need to offer solutions to professional demands in this sector. Amongst public universities: at the University of

Valencia, demand for places exceeds supply; at the Jaume I University in Castellón, the ratio of demand-supply is around 90 to 100 per cent; and at the University of Alicante and the Polytechnic University of Valencia the ratio is between 75 and 90 per cent. The ratio for the University of Valencia is therefore favourable in comparison with the other public universities in the Valencia region.

First-year groups are quite large. Data from the Faculty of Economics Secretary mentions groups of 80, 92 and 104 students. The exception is the so-called 'international group', taught in English, which has 'only' 52 students this year.

University	Website	Months	No. of seats
International School of Management (ISM) Dortmund	www.ism-dortmund.de	9	2
Fachhochschule Oldenburg/Ostfriesland Wilhelmshaven	www.fh-oow.de	5	2
Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (oder)	www.euv-frankfurt-o.de	6	3
Freiberg University of Mining and Technology	www.tu-freiberg.de	9	2
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen	www.uni-goettingen.de	6	3
Université de Cergy-Pontoise	www.u-cergy.fr/	6	4
Institute Universitaire de technologie de Le Havre	www.univ-lehavre.fr/iut/	6	2
Université du Havre	www.univ-lehavre.fr	10	2
Université de Paris Val-de-Marne Paris XII	www.univ-paris12.fr	6	2
Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Crete	http://www.teiher.gr	6	2
Università degli studi di Foggia	www.unifg.it	9	2
Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca	www.unimib.it	9	3
Università degli studi di pisa	www.unipi.it	6	2
Università degli studi di Siena	www.unisi.it	10	2
Università degli studi di Trieste	www.univ.trieste.it	10	5
Informācijas Sistemu Augstkola	www.isma.lv	9	3
Hogeschool Drenthe	www.hsdrenthe.nl	10	2
University of Lapland	www.ulapland.fi/english	9	2
Laurea Polytechnic	www.laurea.fi	6	4
Yasar University	www.yasar.edu.tr/	6	2
University of Hertfordshire	www.herts.ac.uk	5	2

Table 1: Universities with Socrates-Erasmus arrangements for Tourism Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Economics – University of Valencia

Source: Facultat d'Economia. www.uv.es/economia

Demand for the tourism degree

Table 2 shows that the tourism degree is one of few degrees with an upward trend in demand. However, it should be noted that the minimum grade for accessing these studies is quite high, which means that the demand is greater than the supply of places for final admission. In fact, the tourism degree occupies 18th position in non-satisfied demand out of 58 degrees (three and five-year courses) provided by the University (University of Valencia, 2006).

	First preference applications	Offer	Registration	Minimum grade for access
1998-99	443			
1999-00	449			
2000-01	352	125		7.02
2001-02	380	220	219	6.59
2002-03	443	220	219	6.59
2003-04	392	220	170	6.59
2004-05	287	220	233	6.33
2005-06	338	220	235	6.43

Table 2: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Evolution of first preference applications; offer, and minimum grade required for access.

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006) and data provided by Facultat d'Economia.

Quality of the tourism degree

When revising elements related to the quality of the degree, two issues should be taken into consideration: the large number and heterogeneity of university departments involved in the degree development and, therefore, the complexity of co-ordinating all of the academic staff involved.

A number of objective indicators of quality can be highlighted (University of Valencia, 2007):

- The average time taken by students to finish the degree is 3.4 years. This is less than the average duration of the 20 three-year degree courses provided by the University of Valencia.
- Efficiency rate (passed credits/registered credits) is 77 per cent and is above the University average, which is around 67 per cent
- Rate of success (passed credits/examined credits) is 89 per cent, slightly higher than the average for the University of 88 per cent
- Rate of examined credits (86 per cent) is much higher than the average for the University (76 per cent).
- The drop-out rate is 8.6, somewhat greater than the rate for the University as a whole (7.44). In-depth analysis of the reasons for this high drop-out rate is required. Perhaps external factors, such as a high number of students being employed during their studies, and internal elements, such as the programme's lack of adjustment to student expectations, or the excessive size of the academic groups, are potential causes.

Among other objective measures for assessing the degree, an analysis of the quality of the tourism degree was made during 2003/04, resulting in the following conclusions:

- The training programme showed an absence of formative objectives and, although accessible to the public, the syllabus lacked homogeneity.
- Mechanisms for departmental co-ordination existed, but there was a lack of interdepartmental co-ordination.
- There was a lack of curricular itineraries for specialisation, although some specific subjects – for example, Market Research in Tourism and Distribution Systems in Tourism – may provide a better insight into tourism marketing management.
- Content is updated and research in tourism seems informally tied to lecturers' classes.

Regarding more subjective indicators of quality, students perceive a low level of difficulty (2.3) but higher levels of usefulness (3.42) in the programme. These last figures invite reflection. Concerning the students' experience of practical training in tourist companies and organisations, according to surveys of graduates in 2005, 70 per cent of graduates at the University of Valencia received external training in 2004/05. Although the evaluation in general was not very positive, there is evidence of active promotion of relationships with society, with the number of companies exceeding the number of students wishing to participate. According to the vice-dean of relations with society in the Faculty of Economics, in spite of this low valuation over 30 per cent of students who have work experience in a company are contracted to work there afterwards.

First and present job

Some very interesting conclusions relating to the tourism degree can be drawn from research developed by OPAL (University of Valencia, 2006). Computer-assisted telephone interviews were performed on the basis of structured questionnaires, obtaining a stratified random sample of 87 respondents for the tourism degree.

Centre satisfaction (0-10)	Centre loyalty (%)	Degree loyalty (%)	First preference applications (%)	Intention of being a tourism professional (%)
6.69	95.20	35.30	78.20	75.90

Table 3: Three-year university degree on Tourism: General Indicators

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

As shown in Table 3, it is remarkable that satisfaction, loyalty to the institution and first preference applications at the university are high (6.69 on a scale of 0 to 10 for satisfaction, 95.2 per cent for loyalty and 78.20 per cent for first preference), but much lower scores were obtained for the tourism degree (35.3 per cent), the lowest at the University. Seventy-five per cent of respondents declared their intention to become professionals in the tourism sector.

Table 4 shows that perceptions of the quality of the theoretical training, practical training and external stages in the tourism degree were all above 5. Although these scores can be considered high, theoretical training (6.64) and work experience (5.82) obtained the lowest scores of all social science degrees at the University.

Received formation			Professional Orientation			
Theoretical formation	Practical formation	External practice	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4
6.64	5.24	5.82	5.44	5.16	4.10	5.10

Table 4: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Perceptions of quality in training and professional orientation (0-10)

Topic 1. To carry out external practices provide a good preparation for a professional exercise.

Topic 2. Professors/lecturers show the relationship between the academic contents and the professional practice.

Topic 3. During the studies enough information is received on the different professional jobs of the Tourism degree.

Topic 4. Teaching methods facilitate the acquisition of competences and professional abilities.

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

Students also assess professional orientation positively: it provides preparation for work; lecturers connect theory and professional practice; and teaching methods facilitate the development of professional skills and capabilities. However, information on employment in the tourism sector needs to be improved. Regarding the level of professional skills achieved during their studies (Table 5), all areas received positive valuations, although they were not very high in some cases. For instance, 'problem-solving' scores lowest (5.85) among the

social science degrees, and others, such as 'critical analysis' (6.74) and 'social abilities' (6.31), obtained scores that, although above 5, in a sector such as tourism, are not brilliant when compared to other degrees.

Interpersonal skills			Professional Orientation			Cognitive skills		
<i>Social abilities</i>	<i>Team-working</i>	<i>Oral and writing communication</i>	<i>Time and resources planning and management</i>	<i>Decision making</i>	<i>Management skills</i>	<i>Problem resolution</i>	<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Critical analysis</i>
6.31	7.21	6.92	6.11	6.02	5.47	5.85	5.74	6.74

Table 5: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Valuation of acquired skills and abilities (0-10)

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

Table 6 shows the perceived utility of the different skills for finding a first job. In the case of the tourism degree, exchange programmes abroad (7.55) achieved the highest score, together with English language (6.62), computer skills (5.86) and active job search (5.76). Other factors, including academic record (3.79), obtained scores below 5.

To have a university degree	To have a determinate degree	Study at UVEG	Academic file	Postgraduate or similar formation	External practices during the studies	International Exchange programs (ERASMUS)
5.94	5.84	4.29	3.79	4.57	4.50	7.55
English	Valencian	Other languages	Computing skills	Personal contacts	To look for employment actively	To know search employment techniques
6.62	4.30	5.35	5.86	4.51	5.76	4.76

Table 6: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Utility of different factors to find the first paid job (0-10)

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

In Table 7, information on the usefulness of several skills, including academic training, languages and computer skills, for performing the current or last job is provided. Graduates indicate that English language (7.41) and computer skills (7.51) are the most useful. These results are consistent with those obtained by King et al. (2003). Furthermore, academic training and the Valencian language are valued above the midpoint of the scale.

Academic training			Computing and languages		
<i>Theoretical formation</i>	<i>Practical formation</i>	<i>External practices</i>	<i>English language</i>	<i>Valencian language</i>	<i>Computing skills</i>
5.17	5.78	5.20	7.41	5.70	7.51

Table 7: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Utility of different factors in current or last job (0-10)

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

Oral and written communication skills (8.06), in addition to team-working (7.94) and social skills (7.58) – all interpersonal skills – were highlighted as being the most useful for the present or last work role (Table 8).

Interpersonal skills			Management skills		
<i>Social abilities</i>	<i>Team work</i>	<i>Oral and writing communication</i>	<i>Time and resources planning and management</i>	<i>Decision making</i>	<i>Management skills</i>
7.58	7.94	8.06	7.10	7.45	6.36
Cognitive skills					
<i>Problem resolution</i>	<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Critical analysis</i>	<i>Information searching</i>		
7.49	6.45	7.17	7.48		

Table 8: Three-year university degree on Tourism: Utility of different skills for present or last job (0- 10)

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

When analysing the characteristics of the present and last job of our tourism graduates (Table 9), we observed that few were working outside the Valencia province (4.65 per cent). Most had a relatively permanent job (47.67 per cent) and high levels of satisfaction with the contract (6.98), the job (7.64) and the salary (6.08), although the average salary is not very high (around 1,121 € per month) compared to the average salary of graduates in other industries. The REFLEX survey (ANECA, 2008) shows the average salary for recent graduates in Spain to be around 1,414 € per month.

Outside residential Province (%)	Indefinite contract	Professional category: with people to its position	Monthly pay per worked weekly hours	Satisfaction with work	Satisfaction with pay	Satisfaction with type of contract
4.65	47.67	39.53	1000.07	7.64	6.08	6.98

Table 9: Three-year university degree on Tourism: general characteristics of present/last work

Source: Extrapolation based on University of Valencia (2006).

Statistics for the tourism degree in relation to employment prospects for its graduates is very positive: 81.40 per cent found their first job within six months or less and 93.10 per cent are working at the present time. These results are very positive in comparison with those obtained for universities in Australia and Hong Kong (King, et al., 2003), where only half the respondents obtained a job in the hospitality and tourism field.

Exchange programmes

As mentioned above, international exchange programmes are appreciated by graduates and students as being a very important factor in helping them to find their first job. Data shows (University of Valencia, 2006) that the tourism degree is the only programme offered by the Faculty of Economics that has a lower number of received students than sent students (20 foreign students were received while 43 Spanish ones were sent). In general, the University of Valencia attracts more foreign students (56 per cent) than those it sends to foreign universities (44 per cent).

Conclusions, discussion and further research lines

Tourism is an economic activity of critical importance for the Valencia region, generating demand for professionals in a highly dynamic and competitive sector. This means tourism degrees have a high level of demand from students who also need quite high average grades to access it.

Tourism at the University of Valencia is a degree where the number of applications exceeds the number of accepted students and there has been no reduction in the number of registered students. However, the number of students per group is quite high. This is incompatible with innovative methodologies (Sigala & Baum, 2003) that have been introduced through convergence with the EHEA, which involve the implementation of the European credit transfer system measuring total workload where individual learning plays a major role (European Commission, 2007).

The average time required by students to complete tourism study degrees is only slightly higher than its theoretical duration. Students perceive the degree as not being very difficult or very useful. The latter is a surprising finding and may be a reflection of the high demand for employees in the tourism industry as students appear to find jobs easily. This fact could also explain the quite high student drop-out rate.

Although data relative to the first and last remunerated job are very positive – it does not take tourism students a long time to find their first job and the contract is of a high quality (indefinite) type. The low importance of having a degree to obtain their first remunerated job opens a line for reflection in the tourism sector and the types of professionals it employs.

So what do students expect from the degree in tourism compared to what we are actually offering them? And what is the tourism industry expecting from its HE students? As Churchward and Riley (2002) state, commercial aspects of tourism are central to both public and private sector jobs. King, et al. (2003) observe that business-related subjects and internships are ranked by graduates as being more important to students' ability to acquire first jobs than specialised subjects. By contrast, Dale and Robinson (2001) defend the idea that tourism education should become more specialised. Further research should be conducted on this topic. In particular, a deeper analysis of market orientation and the intensity of the competitive environment could be of great interest.

Another point for analysis is that although tourism graduates consider international exchange programmes to be important for their training and future employment, they are not taking advantage of them by actively participating. How can we promote students' eagerness to leave Spain and go abroad to complete their training in other countries?

The tourism degree has undertaken a PEMRA (Programme for Improving its First Academic Year Results) and a Programme of Institutional Evaluation that have detected clear routes for continuous improvement and a greater adaptation to the requirements of society. The three-year degree in tourism offered by the University of Valencia is vital in the context of the socio-economic environment in the province of Valencia. The above analysis opens the way for strategic improvements in graduate and postgraduate degrees to be imparted within the context of the EHEA. Approaches successfully employed in strategic management and marketing such as the systemic approach applied to tourism training and education (Mayaka & Akama, 2007) can provide ways to stimulate improvements in the design and implementation of tourism training for this multidisciplinary industry.

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Appendix: Formative plan

1 st Course			
Subjects	Credits	Type	Duration
English language for Tourism I	4.5	C	S
German language for Tourism I*	4.5	C	S
Italian language for Tourism I*	4.5	C	S
French language for Tourism I*	4.5	C	S
Law and legislation fundamentals	9	C	A
Business administration I	4.5	C	S
Business administration: Human resources	4.5	C	S
Territorials tourism resources	9	C	A
Accountancy	6	C	S
Market structure	6	C	S
Tourism marketing	6	C	S
Introduction economics	6	C	S
Total	60		
2 nd Course			
Subjects	Credits	Type	Duration
Cultural heritage	7.5	C	S
Production operations and processes	6	C	S
English language for Tourism II	4.5	OB	S
German language for Tourism II*	4.5	OB	S
Italian language for Tourism II*	4.5	OB	S
French language for Tourism II*	4.5	OB	S
Tourism social psychology	6	OB	S
Information technology in tourism	4.5	OB	S
Art as a tourism resource	4.5	OB	S
Quantitative techniques	4.5	OB	S
Environment and tourism development	4.5	OB	S
Tourism policy I	4.5	OB	S
Option 1	4.5	O	S
Option 2	4.5	O	S
Total	60		
3 rd Course			
Subjects	Credits	Type	Duration
Practicum	15	C	S
Option 3	4.5	O	S
Option 4	4.5	O	S
Option 5	4.5	O	S
Option 6	4.5	O	S
Option 7	4.5	O	S
Option 8	4.5	O	S
Free choice	18	FC	S
Total	60		

Options

- English language for Tourism III
- German language for Tourism III
- Italian language for Tourism III
- French language for Tourism III
- Market research techniques
- Financial management
- Interpersonal skills and human relationships
- Tourism and sustainable development
- Tourism conjunctural analysis
- Geography of the tourist Mediterranean regions
- Organization and selling systems of tourist products and services
- Financial analysis
- Financial accountancy in tourism businesses
- Quality management in tourism sector
- Taxation for tourism sector
- Basic tourism supply management
- International financing of tourism businesses
- Tourism labour market
- Psychology of tourism groups and organizations
- Art as a tourism resource II
- Tourism Economics
- Tourism Policy II
- Tourism Sociology and anthropology
- Automatic treatment of accountancy information
- Computer science applied to tourism data bases
- Strategic management of tourism businesses
- Creation of tourism businesses
- Strategic thinking and games for tourism managers
- Marketing for hotels and restaurants
- Tourism business law and employee hiring
- Management of tourist agencies

Abbreviations

C = Core

OB = Obligatory

O = Optional

FC = Free Choice

S = Semester

A = Annual

* Students have to choose one of these subjects per course