



Job Ready Graduates: A Tourism Industry Perspective

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Suitable skills and attributes have always been an important part of effective and successful participation in the tourism workplaces. This study aimed to explore tourism managers' perceptions of the skills and attributes required in the tourism industry in Australia. The method involved a content analysis of tourism skill sets and a survey to identify the required skill sets sought by employers. Importance-Performance Analysis revealed differences between graduate attributes and skills and manager's perceptions of their importance and level of performance. These results provided industry-based information about skills and attributes for the improvement of curriculum design. It will enhance the abilities of tourism education to provide job-ready graduates for the future global tourism industry.

Keywords: tourism education, skills shortages, tourism industry careers

In order to meet the needs of the forecasted 9.4 million international visitors and 338.8 million domestic visitor by 2010 (DITR, 2002), it is important for the Australian tourism sector to attract highly skilled workers with relevant skills to meet industry needs. Tourism higher education, as a major platform for human capital development for the tourism industry (Ladkin, 2005), has a mission to assure the quality of graduates and equip them with the particular skills and attributes to enable them to function as sophisticated professionals. Questions are generated consequently: what are the tourism managers' perceptions towards the universities' graduates skills and attributes? Are these skills and attributes all important, or performed very well?

Although some studies have been carried out in the field of tourism employment as discussed later in this paper, little information is available on the outcomes from current tourism education that best equip graduates for employment in the tourism sector. This paper reports on a study exploring the managers' perceptions of skills and attributes required in the tourism industry in Australia and compares:

1. the generic skills and tourism discipline attributes developed by tourism higher education in Australia with
2. the skills and attributes perceived as important by tourism industry practitioners.

The study is grounded on previous research into desirable graduate attributes in tourism education (Airey and

Tribe, 2005; King and Craig-Smith, 2005; Pearce, 2005; Ayres, 2006) and addresses the concern for an ongoing pool of skilled employees to facilitate growth in the Australian tourism industry. The results of this research should benefit both tourism higher education providers in Australia and those involved in human resource development in the tourism industry.

In Australia, the graduate attributes or skills may differ from institution to institution (Pearce, 2005). Each university develops generic skills according to its location and unique offerings. These are often a reflection of universities' missions and educational philosophies. It is therefore not surprising that the attributes of graduating students developed by the many tourism programs may be diverse.

The findings from this study will highlight industry's perceptions of the relevance of these educational outcomes.

Literature Review

The academic community has investigated a variety of different areas related to tourism employment. For example, a range of issues relating to interest in tourism and hospitality employment, including work motivation, success perception and job acquisition strategies has been explored by Ross (1992, 1993, 1997). The attitudes to career from UK and Greek perspectives in tourism have been examined by Airey and Frontistis (1997). The professionalism in tourism employment, the movement of labour into tourism in terms of attraction to and satisfaction with the industry, and seasonality issues as being problematic in terms of labour supply have been investigated respectively by Hjalager and Andersen (2001), Szivas et al. (2003), and Jolliffe and Farnsworth (2003). Despite the rapid growth of the tourism industry, the subsequent increase in the number of jobs and the growth in educational courses, few studies about education needs

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for the tourism industry are reported in the literature and little information is available to those who are involved in human resource management in the tourism industry (Ayres, 2006).

The Australian Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations noted that the tourism sector is of critical economic importance in Australia, especially for employment in regional areas. A major concern is that a lack of suitable staff will undermine the industry's ability to meet the expectations of service quality that tourism promotions have created. The demand for tourism services to meet international standards led to an increasing trend to employ a highly skilled labour force. In addition, the ongoing development of tourism policy and guidelines for innovative best practice is underpinned by a pool of highly skilled tourism professionals.

The present tertiary education system in Australia consists of higher education (universities) and vocational education (TAFE institutes). The differences between the two are often characterised in terms of the qualifications they deliver (e.g., higher education refers to Bachelor, Masters and PhD degrees, while TAFE refers to Certificates and Diplomas). This distinction is, however, blurred because some universities now offer diplomas and some TAFE institutes offer degrees. It is therefore more important to note how the educational goals of each level differ. As Young (2007) states, TAFE education is heavily influenced by the immediate needs of industry. Thus, tourism vocational education appears to emphasise the specific skills needed by employers. In contrast, higher education highlights innovation and critical thinking. Tourism degree graduates are exposed to a broad range of tourism economic and planning issues that relate to the industry's development and growth. The combination of theory and practice aims to prepare students to analyse tourism markets, assess regional weaknesses and strengths, and understand security, marketing, infrastructure and costs associated with tourism. The development of tourism higher education is essential to maintain the supply of talents suitable for the rapid growth of the tourism industry in quantity and quality.

Tourism degrees are important. Tourism education must do much more than reflect the immediate needs of the workplace or the immediate demands of entry-level employment positions (Tribe and Airey, 2005). Tourism education, aiming to provide new insights into the management of tourism activity, will make itself relevant for the future. An improved understanding of how best to educate would bring benefits to both individuals who wish to develop a career in tourism and the tourism industry as a whole (Ladkin, 2005).

The curriculum for tourism higher education aims to meet the needs of students, employers and government funding bodies, but there is no agreement on how best to do this (Morgan, 2004). In the academic literature, the debates about the tourism higher education curriculum have focused on issues of standardization or diversification, more specialised or broader subjects in the curriculum (Tan & Morgan, 2002; Fayos-Sola, 1997; Koh, 1995; Airey & Johnson, 1999; Riley et al., 2002; Airey, 2005;

Amoah & Baum, 1997; Cooper, et al., 1996; McKercher, 2002; King et al., 2003). The emphasis of the debates, however, have tended to be on the form rather than the essence of curriculum design. Tourism education has the aim to provide job ready graduates who are able to apply their skills and knowledge to tourism management practice. It is without doubt that the vitality of tourism education relies on a robust relationship with the tourism industry.

In Australia, professional accreditation has not been implemented in university-based tourism education programs (Tan and Morgan, 2002) and most tourism management programs were designed by educators with little or no empirical input from the industry (McKercher, 2002). Thus, there is a need for the industry and education providers to bridge the gap and to work closely together. Industry and education must work in partnership to promote the professionalisation of tourism as an activity and ensure the education for a tourism career is relevant to employers within the sector. This could lead to a market-based tourism curriculum, which is positive for all parties since it would be developed based on industry needs rather than on the judgements of tourism educators (Koh, 1995) or formal government policy. More empirical input from the tourism industry will assist tourism curriculum design to stride over the limitations from educators and policy makers (Wang, 2008). This study provides an avenue by which the tourism industry is given a voice that will influence future tourism curriculum decision-making.

Method

As mentioned, the purpose of the study reported in this article is to understand what skills and attributes best equip graduates from tourism education for employment in the tourism sector. The method involved two steps: a content analysis of tourism skills sets and a survey to identify the required skills sets needed by the tourism industry in Australia. Because there is no comparable framework of tourism skills sets identified, content analysis is useful in this case as it enables analysis of non-structured skills and attributes information to be identified. Examples of content analysis in tourism education research include studies of an analysis of British postgraduate courses in tourism (Flohr, 2001), a content analysis of teaching methods (Okumus & Wong, 2004), and an analysis of research in tourism education (Tribe, 2005). A content analysis method was conducted to analyse tourism graduates skills and attributes. In order to investigate what education institutions provide in the way of tourism skills sets, graduates' generic skills and tourism discipline-specific attributes were examined as the foundation of this study in seven Australian member institutions of the International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE). These seven universities are some of Australia's leading institutions in the field of tourism and hospitality education and research. Considering they are all very different universities, located in different places in Australia, it is expected that they are representative of tourism higher education in Australia (Wang et al., 2008).

According to Pearce (2005), a more widespread trend in tourism education across the country has been attention not just to the content of tourism degrees but also to the qualities of graduates. The skills and attributes have been variously referred to as generic skills and graduate attributes. In the Australian context, the Commonwealth Government has provided each university with a mandate to build up a list of generic skills. This applies not just to the university body, as many tourism programs in Australia have also developed discipline-specific attributes for tourism and travel students. For many tourism programs, the task of building these skills into the subjects in tourism curricula is an ongoing and critical issue in Australian tourism education (Pearce, 2005). A collation of skills and attributes was conducted in this study as an attempt to understand what students need to develop through tourism education for the purpose of employment in the tourism sector.

As a second step, and building on the content analysis, a web-based questionnaire survey was conducted to explore the tourism industry's perception of the skills and attributes needed for employment in the tourism sector in Australia. This survey was conducted within a sample of Australian tourism managers who had access to email and Internet.

Content Analysis of Skills and Attributes

For the purpose of this study, the collation of skills and attributes not only focused on university generic skills, but also on tourism-specific attributes which are deemed essential for tourism employment. All seven THE-ICE institutions present information about skills and attributes on their homepages, including the University of Queensland (Statement of Graduate Attributes, UQ, 2006), the University of Canberra (Policies and procedures, UC, 2002), Murdoch University (The nine attributes of a Murdoch graduate and the sub attributes, 2006), Charles Darwin University (Graduate attributes and employment skills, CDU, 2006), Southern Cross University (A guide to flexible teaching for quality learning, SCU, 2006), Victoria University (Employability skills, VU, 2006), and Griffith University (Griffith policies on graduate skills, 2006). Detailed information is provided in Appendix A.

University generic skills tend to include the following: critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork skills, creativity, organisational ability, work ethics and technology. According to the Department of Education, Science and Training, some skills and attributes can be explained in more depth. For example, communication refers to oral communication and written communication; initiative and enterprise refers to being creative and translating ideas into action; planning and organising refers to being resourceful, managing time, and allocating people and other resources to a task; self-management refers to having knowledge and confidence in one's own vision and goals; and technology refers to computer skills (DEST, 2006). The list of skills and attributes in this study therefore includes these more detailed skills.

Tourism discipline attributes tend to include the following: customer service skills, attention to detail,

adaptability at work, relationship management skills, marketing and sales skills, management skills, and industry knowledge. According to *A Guide to Flexible Teaching for Quality Learning* (Southern Cross University, 2006), students graduating from the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management demonstrate 11 attributes, including a substantial knowledge of tourism and hospitality industries within both local and international contexts, and a deep understanding of those skills relevant to working and managing in tourism and/or hospitality (See details in Appendix A).

According to *Graduate Attributes Challenge Report* (Palenthiran et al., 2006), a well-rounded employee is a person who has a balance of academic achievements, technical and personal skills acquired at university, personal values through family upbringing, and any work experience. Work experience is highly regarded because it shows that an employee is well-equipped with knowledge and practical understanding of a particular job (Palenthiran et al., 2006). Communication skills and good grades are the key to graduate employment (Graduate Career, Australia, 2007). These attributes, including relevant work experience, academic grades, and practical skills, have also been added into the list.

The collation of a total of 27 skills and attributes forms a comprehensive list of university generic skills and tourism-specific attributes needed for employment in the tourism sector, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
A List of 27 Skills and Attributes

Graduate attributes: Skills and Attributes	
1	Academic Grades
2	Adaptability at Work
3	Attention to Detail
4	Computer Skills
5	Confidence
6	Creativity
7	Critical Thinking
8	Customer Service Skills
9	Decision Making
10	Events Management Skills
11	Industry Knowledge
12	Leadership Ability
13	Legal Understanding
14	Management Skills
15	Marketing and Sales Skills
16	Negotiation Skills
17	Networking Ability
18	Oral Communication
19	Organisational Ability
20	Practical Skills
21	Problem Solving Skills
22	Relationship Management Skills
23	Relevant Work Experience
24	Research Skills
25	Team Working Skills
26	Work Ethics
27	Written Communication

Note: * list in alphabetical order.

Survey Research

Based on the content analysis of the skills and attributes provided by the seven THE-ICE education institutions, a web-based questionnaire surveys was developed. A convenience sample of Australian tourism managers ($N > 1042$) was drawn from seven tourism sectors (accommodation; transportation; travel agency and tour operator services; café and restaurant/food and beverage; meeting, incentive, conference and events; government and non-government tourism organisation; and others). Utilising the clustered stratified sampling technique, the manager sample was randomly selected from various organisation lists and websites. The online newsletters of STCRC was used (further details of samples can be found in Wang, 2008). A total of 200 (less than 19.2% response) surveys was received from industry managers. This article provides results on an Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) on the tourism industry's perception of skills and attributes for the purpose of employment in the tourism sector.

Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA)

The importance–performance theory was first developed by Martilla and James in 1977. It provides management with a useful focus for developing marketing strategies. IPA is a low-cost, easily understood technique for measuring attribute importance and performance, and can further the development of effective marketing programs (Martilla & James, 1977). IPA is an appropriate approach in this study, for the importance of attributes reflects the needs and expectations of the tourism industry, while the performance of attributes reflects the satisfaction about the products that are actually delivered.

IPA was conducted to identify the needs and expectations of the tourism industry. A structured self-administered questionnaire was first distributed to managers in tourism industries. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance and performance level of several variables in regard to the skills and attributes that the tourism industry needs. The results were typically presented on a two-dimensional grid which consisted of vertical and horizontal axes scaling the importance and performance of mean values of both importance and performance scores (Byeong-Yong & Oh, 2002). Once the importance and performance of each attribute had been plotted, the resulting importance–performance space was divided into four quadrants. The cross that separates the quadrants can be based on different principles, although a cross point made up of the average importance and the average performance seems to be the one most frequently applied and is called the data-centred quadrant approach (Jacob & Kai, 2006). This study used the data-centred quadrant approach to analyse the data. The cross point of these quadrants was determined by the average importance and the average performance.

The total score of each skill and attribute was obtained from a sum of scores coded from the responses. A high score showed a positive attitude, while a low score showed a negative attitude. The mean score of perspectives towards each attribute of skills was calculated from the skills' total scores. The possible responses for the impor-

tance of each skill and attribute were *Extremely Unimportant*, *Unimportant*, *Neutral*, *Important*, *Extremely Important*, and *N/A*.

Results and Discussion

In the survey, the participants were asked to provide their views on the merit of skills and attributes needed to work in the tourism sector.

The Important Skills and Attributes in the Tourism Industry

The participants (tourism managers) were asked to rate the level of importance of 27 skills and attributes (See Table 1) on a 1–5 five-item Likert Scale questionnaire: 0 = *N/A*, 1 = *Extremely Unimportant*, 2 = *Unimportant*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Important* and 5 = *Extremely Important*. This list of 27 attributes was developed from the generic skills of Australian universities and specific graduate attributes of tourism degree programs in THE-ICE institutions. The mean scores of the perceptions on each attribute by tourism managers are presented in Table 2. The results indicate the importance attributed to skills and attributes by tourism managers ranged from 3.18 to 4.86, with 4.26 as the mean value.

According to the tourism managers' perceptions, the top three important attributes are Oral Communication, Relationship Management Skills and Work Ethics in the tourism industry. The three attributes ranked as the least important include Research Skills, Legal Understanding, and Academic Grades

This sample of tourism industry professionals highly value operational skills, such as Work Ethics (no. 3), Customer Service Skills (no. 4), Adaptability at Work (no. 6), and Attention to Detail (no. 8). Tourism practitioners, however, appear to rate strategic skills as less important, such as Decision Making (no. 12), Management Skills (no. 14), and Leadership Ability (no. 17).

'How to do' skills such as Customer Service Skills (no. 4), have higher priority than 'How to think' skills such as Critical Thinking (no. 21).

In addition, the Industry Survey also asked participants to provide OTHER skills and attributes that they considered important for the tourism industry but which were not shown in the survey list. Their responses are summarised below:

- some attributes for business purposes, such as partnership building, government and local shires relationship, business focus based on client needs
- some general skills, such as public speaking, foreign language, stress management
- some personality and background attributes, such as enthusiasm, high emotional intelligence (EI), etiquette and cultural differences, life and travel experience.

The Performance of Skills and Attributes of Employees/Co-Workers

Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their employees'/co-workers' skills and attributes

Table 2
Tourism Managers' Views on Skills and Attributes

Graduate attributes: Skills and Attributes	Importance b			Performance c			T test		
	Mean	SD	Ranka	Mean	SD	Ranka	Mean Difference	T value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Oral communication	4.86	0.41	1	4.07	0.68	6	0.80	13.043	0.000
Relationship management skills	4.67	0.55	2	3.89	0.73	13	0.78	11.407	0.000
Work ethics	4.61	0.60	3	4.121	0.77	3	0.49	6.731	0.000
Customer service skills	4.59	0.60	4	4.15	0.81	1	0.45	5.852	0.000
Team working skills	4.57	0.57	5	4.09	0.80	5	0.48	6.583	0.000
Adaptability at work	4.52	0.60	6	4.03	0.72	7	0.49	6.968	0.000
Written communication	4.51	0.65	7	3.86	0.82	16	0.65	8.291	0.000
Attention to detail	4.49	0.58	8	3.89	0.82	13	0.60	8.023	0.000
Confidence	4.41	0.62	9	4.122	0.62	2	0.29	4.387	0.000
Problem-solving skills	4.41	0.61	9	3.87	0.68	15	0.54	8.015	0.000
Organisational ability	4.40	0.61	11	3.97	0.77	8	0.43	5.925	0.000
Decision-making	4.38	0.59	12	3.77	0.76	20	0.61	8.452	0.000
Negotiation skills	4.36	0.66	13	3.74	0.73	22	0.63	8.552	0.000
Management skills	4.31	0.60	14	3.77	0.74	20	0.55	7.704	0.000
Practical skills	4.31	0.72	14	3.93	0.74	10	0.38	4.905	0.000
Industry knowledge	4.30	0.73	16	4.1	0.69	4	0.20	2.678	0.008
Leadership ability	4.26	0.55	17	3.79	0.80	19	0.47	6.372	0.000
Marketing and sales skills	4.26	0.68	17	3.82	0.82	18	0.44	5.614	0.000
Networking ability	4.26	0.72	19	3.93	0.82	10	0.33	4.052	0.000
Computer skills	4.22	0.59	20	3.95	0.74	9	0.27	3.852	0.000
Critical thinking	4.18	0.72	21	3.71	0.78	24	0.47	5.896	0.000
Creativity	4.10	0.72	22	3.73	0.75	23	0.37	4.71	0.000
Events management skills	3.85	0.82	23	3.85	0.79	17	-0.01	-0.061	0.951
Relevant work experience	3.84	0.81	24	3.90	0.72	12	-0.06	-0.725	0.469
Research skills	3.72	0.85	25	3.60	0.78	26	0.11	1.313	0.190
Legal understanding	3.54	0.76	26	3.41	0.78	27	0.14	1.653	0.099
Academic grades	3.18	0.84	27	3.62	0.70	25	-0.44	-5.166	0.000
The total average score		4.26			3.88			0.387	

Note: a: Rank in order of importance: 1 = highest mean score, 27 = lowest mean score.
 b: Level of importance: 1–5 scale; 1 = *Extremely Unimportant*, ... 5 = *Extremely Important*.
 c: Level of performance (satisfaction): 1–5 scale; 1 = *Extremely Dissatisfied*, ... 5 = *Extremely Satisfied*.

using another 1–5 Likert Scale questionnaire: 0 = *N/A*, 1 = *Extremely Dissatisfied*, 2 = *Dissatisfied*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Satisfied* and 5 = *Extremely Satisfied*. The mean score of perceptions towards each attribute are presented in Table 2. The results indicate the performance (satisfaction) attributed to skills and attributes by tourism managers ranged from 3.41 to 4.15, with 3.88 as the mean value.

According to the tourism managers' perceptions, the top three satisfactory attributes relating to their employees'/co-workers' skills and attributes are Customer Service Skills, Confidence and Work Ethics. The three attributes rated as the least satisfactory include Academic Grades, Research Skills and Legal Understanding. The attribute perceived as the most satisfactory is Customer Service Skills, while the attribute perceived as the least satisfactory is Legal Understanding.

Gaps Between the Importance and Performance Level of Skills and Attributes

T tests in Table 2 indicate statistically significant importance–performance gaps (Sig. =0.000) in 23

attributes out of a total of 27. No significant importance–performance gaps were recorded for Research Skills, Legal Understanding, Events Management Skills, and Relevant Work Experience (Sig. > 0.05). Table 2 illustrates that the importance of attributes with a t value > 0 exceeds their performance ratings, (e.g., Oral Communication). In other words, according to respondents, tourism employees/co-workers do not perform as well as expected. In contrast, the importance of skills and attributes with a t value < 0 is lower than their performance (e.g., Academic Grades). A visual summary of the importance- performance of the skills and attributes in the tourism industry is illustrated in Figure 1. The differences between the importance level and performance level on each attribute are highlighted. In summary, an overall evaluation of the skills and attributes in the tourism industry shows that the mean score of the importance (mean = 4.26) is higher than the performance (mean = 3.88), which indicates skills and attributes are not at a level reflective of the importance assigned to them by respondents (Mount, 2000; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004).

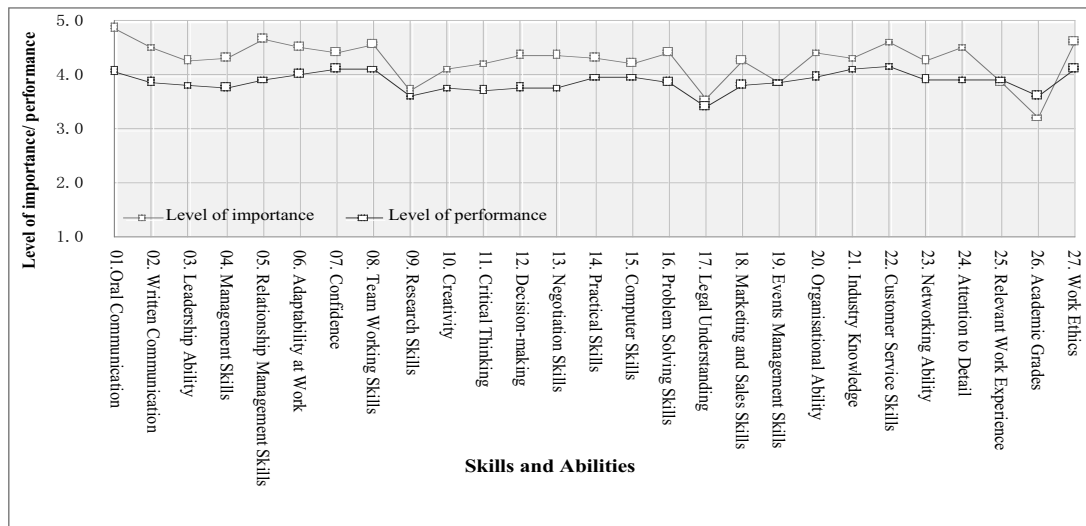


Figure 1

The importance and performance level of skills and attributes.

Note: * Data from Table 2, presenting the mean scores of the level of importance and performance.
 1: Level of importance: 1–5 scale; 1 = Extremely unimportant, ... 5 = Extremely important.
 2: Level of performance (satisfaction): 1–5 scale; 1 = Extremely dissatisfied, ... 5 = Extremely satisfied.

Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) of Skills and Attributes

In the last section, IPA was used to present the gaps between the importance and performance level of each attribute (See Figure 1). It was shown that the importance level is generally higher than the performance level of skills and attributes. In this section, an importance-performance matrix was used to present the overall positions of skills and attributes in relation to mean importance and performance. The results of tourism managers’ perceptions towards the 27 attributes are plotted graphically on a two-dimensional grid, which consists of vertical and horizontal axes scaling the mean values of the importance and performance scores (See Figure 2). After plotting each attribute on an importance-performance space, the resulting space was divided into four quadrants, A = *Concentrate here*, B = *Keep up the good work*, C = *Low priority*, D = *Possible overkill*. The cross that separates the quadrants represents the mean importance (= 4.26, horizontal axis) and the mean performance (= 3.88, vertical axis). This traditional importance–performance matrix assists in a quick and efficient interpretation of the results. This matrix can provide guidance for strategy formulation and can be used to prescribe prioritisation of attributes for improvement (Kitcharoen, 2004).

Quadrant A: Concentrate here. Quadrant A reflects the fact that certain attributes have not been developed as well as they should, considering the importance placed on them. For example, the respondents felt that Negotiation Skills (Attribute 13) are very important, but that there is low satisfaction in terms of performance. Five skills and attributes are plotted in this quadrant: Written Communication (Attribute 2), Problem-Solving Skills (Attribute 16), Decision-Making skills (Attribute 12), Negotiation Skills (Attribute 13) and Management Skills (Attribute 4).

It should be noted that all attributes in quadrant A in Figure 2 are generic attributes across universities.

Quadrant B: Keep up with the good work. Attributes plotted in quadrant B have both high importance level and high performance level. For example, the respondents were pleased by their employees’/co-workers’ Oral Communication Skills (Attribute 1) and Work Ethics (Attribute 27). Nearly half (11 of 27) of all the skills and attributes are in this quadrant, which indicates overall satisfaction about employees’/co-workers’ skills and attributes in the tourism industry. According to Figure 2, more than half (6 of 11) of skills and attributes in quadrant B are discipline-specific attributes.

Quadrant C: Low priority. Quadrant C indicates low prioritisation of attributes for improvement. At the high end of the quadrant are Leadership Ability (Attribute 3) and Marketing and Sales Skills (Attribute 18), which are well below the average performance level, even though these attributes are deemed to be important. However, Academic Grades (Attribute 26), Legal Understanding (Attribute 17) and Research Skills (Attribute 9), which are in the same quadrant, would be deemed to have lower priority because of both lower importance and lower performance levels attributed to these attributes by the respondents. It is interesting to note that even though Academic Grades (Attribute 26) has low priority for improvement according to the industry perceptions, Industry Knowledge (Attribute 21) is regarded as an important attribute. It appears a gap of importance level between Academic Grades and Industry Knowledge. Further study might be useful to be conducted to interpret the differences. Two discipline-specific attributes, Marketing and Sales Skills (Attribute 18) and Events

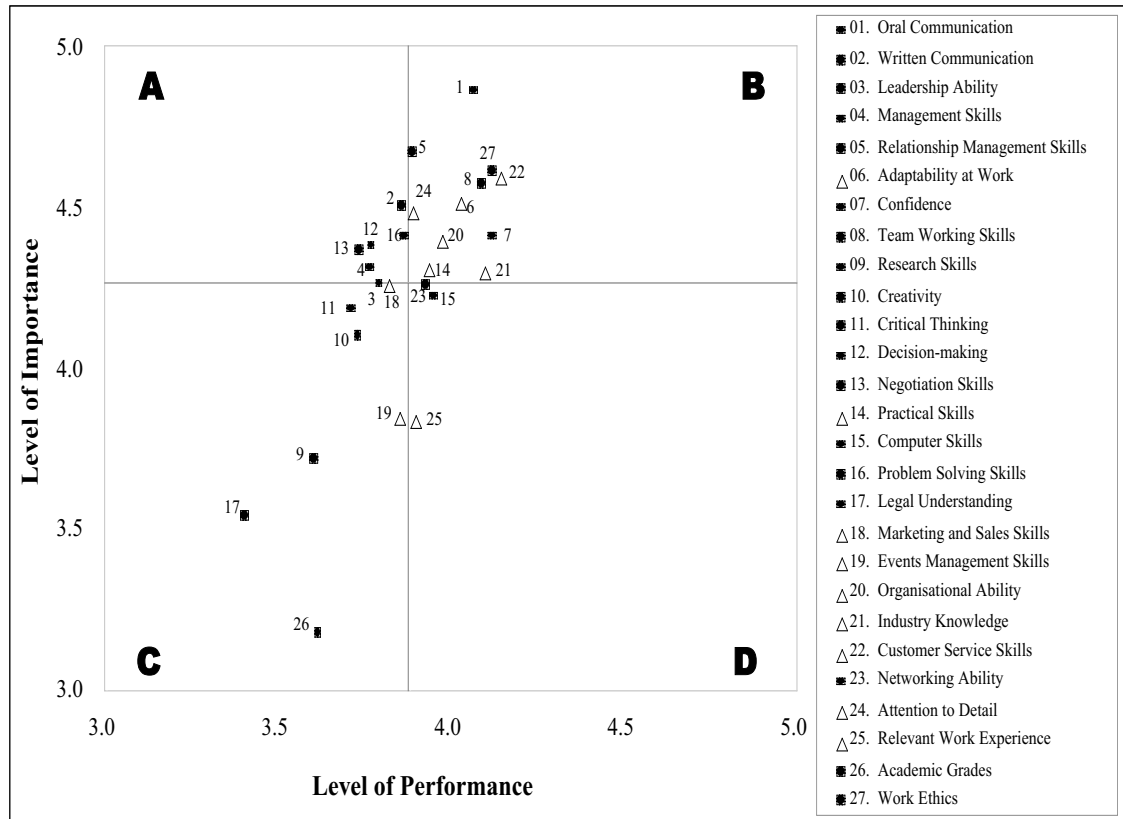


Figure 2
Skills and attributes in the IPA matrix: Cross (3.88, 4.26).

Note: ■ = Generic skills in universities; △ = Taught/discipline-specific attributes in tourism programs.
 Level of importance: 1–5 scale; 1 = Extremely unimportant, 2 = Unimportant, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Important and 5 = Extremely important.
 Level of performance (satisfaction): 1–5 scale; 1 = Extremely dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied and 5 = Extremely satisfied.
 Aiming for more clarity and focus in the graph, the scale in Figure 2 is from 3 (Neutral) to 5 (Extremely important/Extremely satisfied), also because all attributes are in this area (O’Neill & Palmer, 2004).

Management Skills (Attribute 19), are in quadrant C in Figure 2.

Quadrant D: Possible overkill. Quadrant D reflects the fact that certain attributes are very strong, but deemed relatively unimportant by the respondents. For example, Relevant Work Experience (Attribute 25) was judged to be stronger than the average performance level, but the respondents attached relatively little importance to this attribute. At the high end of the quadrant are Computer Skills (Attribute 15) and Networking Ability (Attribute 23), which are well above the performance level, but a little bit below the average importance level. Only one discipline-specific attribute, namely Relevant Work Experience (Attribute 25), is in Quadrant D in Figure 2.

Comparison of Perceptions of Skills Between Senior and Junior Management

Table 3 presents a comparison of respective views of skill and attributes between senior and junior tourism managers. It is interesting to note there is no considerable variance between senior and junior management and results of a *t* test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences. The differences between the views

of senior and junior managers are mainly on several skills and attributes presented as below.

First, senior managers place a higher value on Practical Skills than junior managers do. However, junior managers place a higher value on Industry Knowledge than senior managers do. Second, it is not surprising to find senior managers consider the attribute of Leadership Ability as important, while junior managers consider the attributes of Networking Ability and Negotiation Skills as more important.

Conclusions and Recommendation

The research under discussion provides a snapshot of the perceptions of the tourism industry in respect to the skills and attributes necessary in the pursuit of a career in tourism, and provides useful information for the curriculum design of university level tourism courses. Australia is a knowledge-based economy and universities have become an engine for developing human capital. One of the clear purposes of higher education is to produce graduates with the skills that are highly regarded by employers and that enable them to contribute to the country’s prosperity and social capital (Nelson, 2002; Cleary et al., 2007).

Table 3
Perceptions of Skills Compared Between Senior and Junior Management (n = 200)

Skills and attributes	View of Senior		View of Junior		Difference of rank	t test	
	Mean b	Rank a	Mean b	Rank a		T value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Oral communication	4.83	1	4.89	1	0	-0.876	0.383
Relationship management skills	4.64	2	4.69	2	0	-0.672	0.503
Customer service skills	4.54	3	4.63	4	-1	-1.014	0.312
Team working skills	4.53	4	4.6	5	-1	-0.753	0.453
Work ethics	4.52	5	4.67	3	2	-1.648	0.102
Adaptability at work	4.48	6	4.54	7	-1	-0.643	0.521
Written communication	4.43	7	4.56	6	1	-1.351	0.178
Attention to detail	4.43	7	4.53	8	-1	-1.187	0.237
Problem-solving skills	4.39	9	4.43	9	0	-0.397	0.692
Confidence	4.38	10	4.43	9	1	-0.629	0.530
Organisational ability	4.38	10	4.42	11	-1	-0.451	0.653
Decision-making	4.37	12	4.39	13	-1	-0.198	0.844
Practical skills	4.35	13	4.29	17	-4	0.565	0.573
Management skills	4.31	14	4.32	15	-1	-0.047	0.962
Negotiation skills	4.29	15	4.42	11	4	-1.343	0.181
Leadership ability	4.26	16	4.26	20	-4	-0.042	0.967
Marketing and sales skills	4.22	17	4.29	17	0	-0.686	0.493
Critical thinking	4.19	18	4.18	21	-3	0.185	0.854
Industry knowledge	4.18	19	4.38	14	5	-1.792	0.075
Networking ability	4.17	20	4.32	15	5	-1.380	0.169
Computer skills	4.14	21	4.28	19	2	-1.527	0.129
Creativity	4.08	22	4.11	22	0	-0.341	0.734
Events management skills	3.78	23	3.89	24	-1	-0.952	0.342
Relevant work experience	3.71	24	3.92	23	1	-1.707	0.090
Research skills	3.58	25	3.81	25	0	-1.784	0.076
Legal understanding	3.48	26	3.58	26	0	-0.924	0.357
Academic grades	3.14	27	3.2	27	0	-0.462	0.645

Note: a: Rank in order of importance: 1 = highest mean score, 27 = lowest mean score.
 b: Level of importance: 1-5 scale; 1 = Extremely unimportant, 5 = Extremely important.

Higher education institutions, including universities have been pushed to use funding effectively and to design curricula close to the needs of the workplace as a result of economic rationalism. Education in current political thinking, particularly since the 1990s, is about equipping people for work. If education cannot supply job-ready people, then why would governments fund it and why would students choose it? Knowledge for knowledge's sake is an idealistic unaffordable luxury, and higher education must be relevant to the needs of employers. Tourism higher education, with its strong vocationally oriented nature, needs to be relevant to the needs and expectations of the tourism industry. As Fayos-Sola (1997) stated, the adoption of the UNWTO's TEDQUAL methodology in the tourism education could benefit all stakeholders during the process. Students acquire smooth placement and promotion; employers find the right staff to lead the prospects of the industry; and government bodies effectively manage the labour market (Magablih, 2009). With the emphasis on stakeholder engagement (particularly from the tourism industry), this research provides industry-based information for the development of professionals for the global tourism industry through the improvement of curriculum design, as well as tourism human resource management.

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Appendix A

University Generic Skills and Tourism Specific Attributes

Southern Cross University need students graduating from the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management to demonstrate the following 11 attributes:

1. A commitment to excellence in all scholarly and intellectual activities
2. A substantial knowledge of tourism and hospitality industries within both local and international contexts
3. An awareness of the cultural, environmental and economic impacts of tourism and hospitality management
4. A deep understanding of those skills relevant to working and managing in tourism and/or hospitality
5. The ability to communicate effectively, and be self-aware and empathetic
6. Be culturally tolerant and demonstrate appropriate intercultural competence
7. Have an understanding of ethical standards and professionalism
8. Be lifelong independent learners, reflective in practice, and information literate
9. Be creative, strategic and critical thinkers with highly developed problem solving skills
10. Have an understanding of team dynamics and the ability to be effective team members
11. Exhibit a positive work attitude and work ethic in order to achieve successful outcomes
(*A guide to flexible teaching for quality learning*, SCU, 2006).

Griffith University adopts the following 12 graduate skills:

1. Rigorous standards of scholarship
2. Equity and social justice
3. Sense of civic responsibility
4. Respect for social and international diversity
5. Communicate effectively
6. Be information literate
7. Solve problems
8. Make critical evaluations
9. Work autonomously and in teams
10. Be creative and innovative
11. Behave ethically in social, professional and work environments
12. Be responsible and effective citizens
(*Griffith policies on graduate skills*, 2006).

Murdoch University describes nine attributes for a graduate:

1. Communication
2. Critical and creative thinking
3. Social interaction
4. Independent and lifelong learning
5. Ethics
6. Social justice
7. Global perspective
8. Interdisciplinarity
9. In-depth knowledge of a field of study
(*The nine attributes of a Murdoch graduate and the subattributes*, 2006).

The University of Canberra has developed the following 10 skills and attributes as generic skills:

1. Communication
2. Information literacy and numeracy
3. Information and communication technology
4. Problem solving
5. Working with others
6. Effective workplace skills
7. Professional ethics
8. Social responsibility
9. Lifelong learning
10. Personal attributes
(*Policies and procedures of UC*, 2002).

Charles Darwin University has developed the following eight skills:

1. Technology skills
2. Problem-solving skills
3. Planning and organising skills
4. Self-management skills
5. Initiative and enterprise skills
6. Learning skills
7. Communication skills
8. Team work skills

(Graduate attributes and employment skills of CDU, 2006).

The University of Queensland provides a list of 13 tourism graduate attributes for tourism and travel students:

1. Ability to speak another language (a definite advantage).
2. Ability to think logically
3. Attention to detail
4. Enjoyment from dealing with people
5. Excellent interpersonal and supervisory skills
6. Good grooming and presentation
7. Good health (passing a medical examination may be required in some positions).
8. Good marketing skills
9. Organisational/management ability
10. Patience and tact
11. Understanding of a range of services
12. Well-developed oral and written communication skills
13. Willingness to work irregular hours

(Statement of graduate attributes, UQ, 2006).

Victoria University highlights following eight attributes as employability skills:

1. Communication
2. Team work
3. Problem-solving
4. Using initiative and enterprise
5. Planning and organising
6. Self-management
7. Learning
8. Technology

(Employability skills, VU, 2006).