



ASTA Foundation

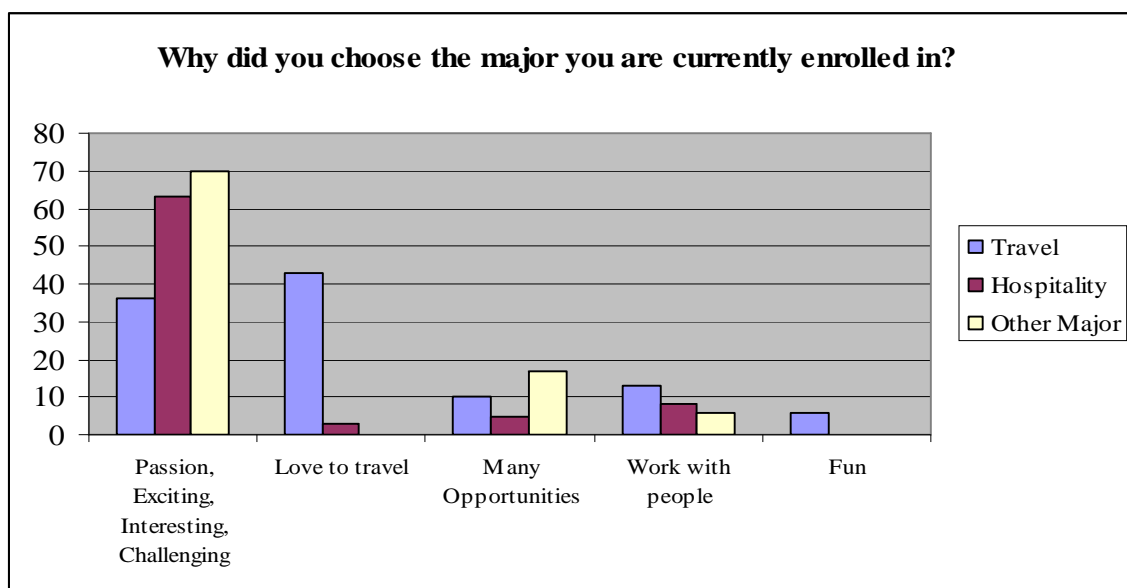
SUNY Research Study Summary

May 2007

The ASTA Foundation funded a research study by The State University of New York at Morrisville titled “Why Students Do Not Choose Travel as a Career.” The study was conducted from February 2006 to February 2007. The hypotheses proposed by the researchers were that “the attractiveness of selecting a career in travel will vary, based upon advisement and experiential characteristics” as well as the fact that “technological innovations and media coverage of travel-related events have negatively impacted the perception of careers in travel.”

The methodology included interviewing college students, college professors, and high school guidance counselors from New York State to find recurring themes with regard to the attractiveness of travel as a career. The data collected from the interview phase aided in the development of the surveys that went out to a randomly selected sample consisting again of college students, college professors, and high school guidance counselors. The survey data was then analyzed and reported back to the ASTA Foundation with recommendations for ASTA and the industry as a whole.

The 309 students sampled from various colleges throughout New York were asked to respond to a six question survey that asked about their major and their knowledge of the travel industry. When asked their major, 79 (25.6%) stated they were travel and tourism majors while 95 (30.7%) were hospitality majors. The remaining 135 (43.7%) were non-travel/hospitality majors. The majority of students majoring in travel and tourism (53%) stated that they chose their major because they love to travel. Other responses stated that their major field was their passion and it was exciting, interesting, and challenging (45%).

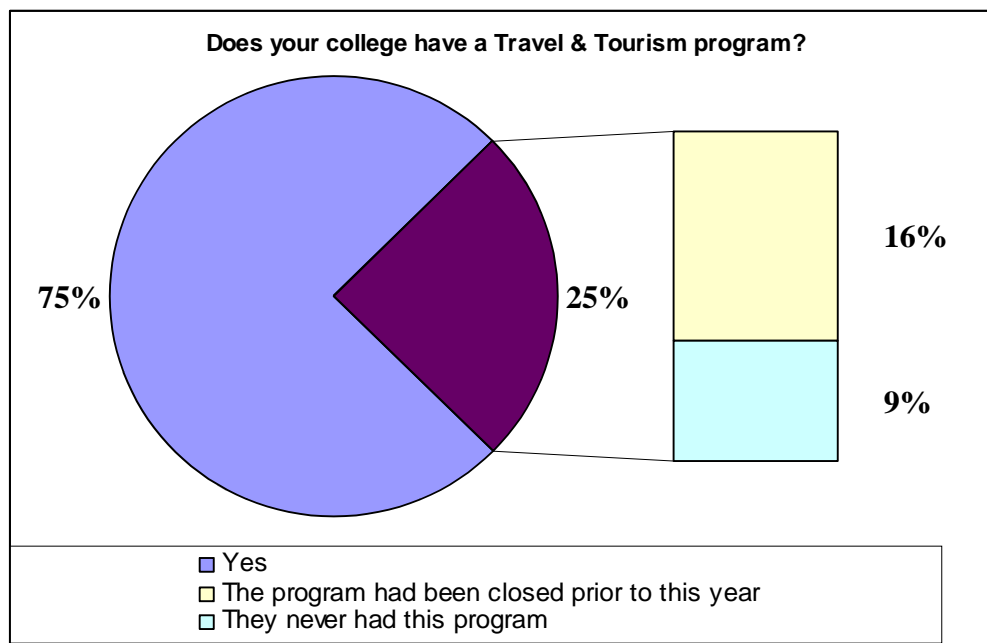


Parents topped the list of most influential when students chose their college major with 51 percent while only 14 percent were influenced by their high school guidance counselors. Of nine possible factors for what was most important when choosing their major, an interesting career was the first choice followed by employment opportunities. Since income ranked fifth, the researchers found it an “interesting statistic when considering the perception of many that the travel industry does not pay well.”

Next, students were asked to list their opinion of travel agents with regard to courtesy, knowledge of the field, service in general, follow up to requests made, salary, and other. The responses they could choose from were high, medium, and low. Of the six, courtesy (59%) and knowledge of the field (58%) were the top choices. Only 17 percent thought that the salary was high. The “other” category consisted of various answers from “don’t know any,” to “stuck in an office all day.” A vast majority knew that the careers in the travel industry included travel agents, tour guides, tour planners, hotel guest service and reservationists, cruise line reservationists, airline reservationists, airline flight attendants, and car rental guest service and reservationists.

The final question asked was “If you are not a travel and tourism major, why did you not choose travel and tourism as a career?” This open-ended question resulted in a majority (63%) indicating that they were not interested while 14 percent responded that it is a “failing career/limited opportunities and salary.” The travel and tourism majors did not answer this question.

Out of 17 college professors, 13 completed the 10 question survey. They were selected from New York institutions. When asked if their college had a travel and tourism program, 75 percent stated that they did while the remaining 25 percent said no. Of that 25 percent, the majority stated that their college’s program had been recently closed because of low enrollment, reduction of employment opportunities, or that the program had been updated and changed completely. Those who do have travel-related programs indicated that enrollment in the program has decreased over the last five years.



The professors were asked who they thought had significant influence on students career choices. 83 percent felt that parents had the most influence while friends and guidance counselors both came in second with 67 percent. Respondents were able to select more than one answer. Over 90 percent of professors stated that employment opportunities was the most important factor students cited as having an influence on their career choices.

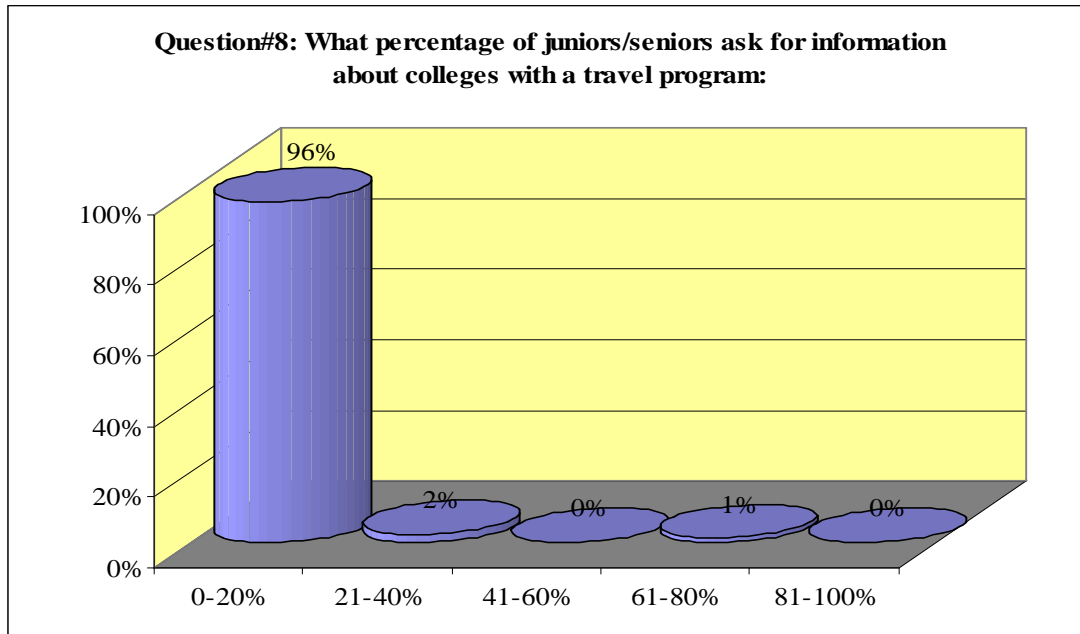
Respondents offered numerous answers when asked what specific information they share about travel careers when a prospective student visits their institution. The top answer was numerous industry opportunities and industry segments. 67 percent of professors have never not recommended travel as a career option. Of those who do not recommend it, answers varied from salary to long hours to the need for a well defined career focus. The majority of professors (80%) stated that 20 percent or less of incoming freshman come to them interested in a career in travel. When recommending jobs for students who want to study travel, professors ranked event coordinator highest with 17 percent while destination marketing and hotel/resort were ranked second each with 13 percent. 7 percent recommend students to work in a travel agency.

Professors were then asked to list their opinions of travel agents. Courtesy and knowledge of the field were ranked high while salary was ranked the lowest. Based on their experience, professors ranked the professionalism of travel agents. On a scale of 1 to 5, 45 percent of respondents ranked them with a 5 or most professional. The last question asked professors to list additional information about why students do not choose travel careers. The researchers found that a “few responses echo the perception held by many that since 9/11 the industry has a negative perception and is a declining industry.”

High school guidance counselors were asked a total of 12 questions. Out of 310 distributed, 90 surveys were completed. A majority of respondents (93%) stated that their school does not have a travel program. When asked if their BOCES offered a travel program, 13 percent said yes. Of that 13 percent, half said their enrollment has increased within the past 5 years while the other half said it has decreased. The guidance counselors had similar responses as the professors when asked why enrollment in the travel program has changed stating that the media and world events have impacted student’s career choices.

Again, parents topped the list for having a significant influence on student’s career choices (92%). 71 percent of guidance counselors said friends while another 70 percent said guidance counselors. Please keep in mind respondents were able to pick more than one answer. Respondents also thought that income (93%) and college programs offered (87%) were factors that students cite as the most important influences on their career choices.

When asked what specific information they offer to students who ask about a career in travel, respondents offered a variety of responses. 18 percent stated that “tell them which colleges and BOCES have travel programs.” Other responses included discussing salaries, job placement, internships, and career opportunities. Those who do not recommend travel as a career to students were asked why. Most stated that they were neutral but many had a negative response such as “not many jobs” and “internet services made travel agent an unnecessary middleman.” This confirms the misconception that because of the internet travel agents have become obsolete. 99 percent of respondents indicated that 20 percent or less of juniors and seniors come to them with



an interest in a travel career. In addition, 96 percent stated that 20 percent or less inquire about colleges with a travel program. Most of the guidance counselors who do recommend colleges to interested students recommend programs that no longer exist. Unfortunately, many colleges who do offer travel programs were not mentioned by respondents. Their lack of information may negatively sway any advice they would give and therefore the attractiveness of a career in travel diminishes.

Courtesy (77%) and knowledge of the field (69%) ranked high when respondents were asked to rate travel agents. As with college students and college professors, a travel agent's salary ranked low with 31 percent. The majority of respondents ranked the professionalism of travel agents between 4 (46%) and 5 (24%). This was based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most professional. When asked to provide additional information on why students do not choose a career in travel, those who responded felt that they did not know enough information about travel careers (37%). Other responses included "concerns regarding salary and benefits" and "concern regarding available jobs."

The final portion of the research study provided recommendations for ASTA and the travel industry. The suggestions are listed below:

- The industry should consider these findings and **develop various mechanisms to assist high schools and colleges**. These efforts could focus on providing current information and perhaps career seminars along with mentoring efforts that partner industry professionals with students, teachers and guidance counselors.
- The industry should embark on a campaign to **enhance the professional image of the industry and travel agents**. Much needs to be done to **identify career options along with benefits and rewards of working in travel**. Since many guidance counselors indicated that

they did not have information about travel careers and their students had limited or no knowledge in this area, the time is right to respond to this call for help.

- Salary issues were mentioned by all cohorts, perhaps the industry needs to **reconsider the salaries of travel professionals.**
- Technology can be a wonderful enhancement; however, it is a tool. The industry needs to **inform society of the capabilities and limitations of internet travel bookings.**
- **A marketing campaign focused on parents, friends, professors and guidance counselors** may well benefit the travel industry. Direct mailings or perhaps seminars and sponsorship at conferences attended by teachers and guidance counselors might be prudent actions on the part of the travel industry.
- Travel industry leaders need to focus on a **public relations campaign that helps students to understand the interesting facets of a career in travel** and the number of employment opportunities available to those pursuing a career in travel.
- The travel industry might consider **partnering with colleges offering travel programs to extend the reach of current marketing efforts** made by these colleges.
- **Identify a process to provide current and accurate information about travel careers** to students, guidance counselors and professors.
- **Repeat this study and expand the population to include travel agents and other travel industry professionals;** as well as students, college professors and guidance counselors. **A comparison of responses to the future study may provide valuable insights** upon which to base future marketing campaigns and industry-wide initiatives.