

Who Gets on the Bus? An Analysis of the Educational Pathways of Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) Employees

Stephen W. Litvin ^{1*} , Charlotte Heinrich ¹

¹School of Business, College of Charleston, USA.

Meridia
Press

JBTM 2026,
Volume 2 (Issue
2): 1-9

ISSN (print):
3101-3260
ISSN (online):
3101-1950

Received: July 1,
2026

Revised: July 13,
2026

Accepted: July
15, 2026

Published: July
27, 2026.



Copyright, 2026 by
the authors.
Published by Meridia
Press and the work is
licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution 4.0
International License.
To view a copy of this
license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

What educational degrees are most likely to lead to a position working for a Convention & Visitors Bureau? If such a position is a student's goal, what is their best educational path to pursue to find success? This paper shares results of an analysis of CVB employment patterns of American CVB employees, determining the undergraduate and graduate academic degrees of these employees. The findings provide guidance for undergraduate Hospitality & Tourism Management students with an interest in this career path, for faculty creating curriculum and advising these students, and for CVB Human Resource Managers as they make their hiring decisions.

Keywords: CVB; Hospitality; Tourism; Career; Education.

*Corresponding author: Stephen W. Litvin, litvins@cofc.edu
<https://doi.org/10.64976/jbtm.19>

1. Introduction

The genesis of this research was the response to a student question in an introductory hospitality and tourism (H&T) class by a guest speaker – a high-level executive from the local Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). The question asked by the student related to her desired career path. As she indicated to the speaker, nothing would be more attractive to her following graduation, reinforced by his talk to the class that morning, than having the opportunity to work for her hometown CVB. The straight-forward question

she asked: “As a student interested in working for a CVB, what degree should I pursue and what specific classes would you recommend taking?”

The response she and the class received was surprising:

A lot of people [at my CVB] just majored in business or majored in English, or whatever...Don't feel you have to have a hospitality degree. To have a good understanding of tourism is certainly helpful, but I think you can go into it with any kind of degree. The term we like to use is: We need to find somebody who needs to be on the bus and then we find out what seat on the bus they need to be in...At the end of the day, what we are looking for is people who have that sense of service, that want to make other people happy by helping them out and who just have a good attitude.

The co-authors of this paper are the professor and the student from that class, both of whom were disappointed with the answer received, as it certainly seemed to diminish the value of the H&T program in which we are both invested.

The research described below had as its goal to determine if the opinion expressed regarding a student's area of study, as described by the speaker, was a localized view reflecting the management of our local CVB, or was the bureau's staffing strategy representative of a generalized approach to hiring by CVBs. We sought to answer this query by studying the educational backgrounds of a sample of American CVB employees, determining the academic fields they had studied prior to obtaining their current positions. What we wanted to learn was if there was a specific educational path that would be best for a student hoping to secure a coveted seat on the CVB 'bus' following their graduation.

2. Literature Review

Our review of the existing literature revealed no prior research on the specific relationship between CVB employment and educational expectations. However, several tangential studies offer relevant insights and are discussed below. First, however, we share some essential background context regarding H&T education and industry employment.

For decades, scholars and industry practitioners have engaged in an ongoing dialogue regarding the practical utility of a specialized H&T higher education degree versus a traditional broad-based education (Tran 2022). While defending the discipline's inherent value, Giousmpasoglou (2025) expressed his concern that such programs risk losing relevance and attractiveness to both students and employers. Much of the debate centers on the need for finding an appropriate balance between the vocational and academic orientation of these programs (Airey et al., 2014). Even as hospitality programs have proliferated globally in recent years, Millar et al. (2010) indicate that industry hiring managers across the broader H&T sector have expressed a persistent skepticism regarding the efficacy of translating academic credentials to on-the-job proficiency. Research suggests that this “readiness-gap” reflects a disconnect between classroom competencies and the real-world skills required for work-related success, particularly in customer-facing and managerial roles (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006). This gap likely explains why some employers, including our local CVB, appear willing to look beyond specialized hospitality credentials when evaluating candidates.

As noted by Lugosi and Jameson (2017), H&T programs must increasingly focus on developing well-rounded, reflective graduates, able to best serve the industry, and such graduates are indeed what H&T recruiters are seeking when hiring employees. Per Raybould and Wilkins (2006), employment studies have found industry recruiters to heavily prioritize communication, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal competencies, over the technical, industry specific skills traditionally emphasized in hospitality curricula. Supporting this, Kim and Jeong (2018) highlighted the critical role of soft skills, to include team dynamics and relationship building, arguing that educational institutions fall short of adequately cultivating these leadership essentials. McKercher et al. (2024, p. 182) similarly noted that while university hospitality programs have recognized the dilemma, they have yet to balance “education in the classic sense of whole person development with more prosaic training needs that will equip graduates with the necessary skills demanded by industry.” Batra (2016, p. 81) discussing the same challenge, noted the tendency of tertiary H&T programs to focus on providing students with educational qualifications, while failing to understand that industry employers looking to hire their graduates are “increasingly giving attention to transversal skills, such as communication, design, analysis, ethics and management skills,” while discounting the technical skills that are generally the focus of tertiary educational institutions. Finally, one additional example among many, is Hsu’s (2018) commentary directed to H&T educators that implores them to ensure their graduates possess the critical thinking and lifelong problem-solving skills required for career success in their chosen industry. For readers looking for a broader discussion of these topics, one finds these as a recurring theme among the multi-author contributions compiled in *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism Education* (Dredge et al., 2015).

While none of the aforementioned articles specifically examined CVB employment, each provides essential context regarding the broader relationship between H&T education and the workforce. The remainder of this literature review, as noted previously, relates to the backgrounds of management level employees only. Although these studies do not directly address the specific theme of the current research, they provide interesting background and offer insights that help place in context the research that follows.

Morrison et al. (1997) surveyed CVB executives to learn more about the operations of their organizations. It should be noted that the term ‘executive’ is not defined in the article, thus their sample likely comprised employees from a range of positions within these organizations. The key findings presented that relate to our study were that two thirds (66.6%) of their respondents had at least an undergraduate degree, and that 16.6% had earned post-graduate degrees. No data were provided, however, that disclosed the areas of study the executives had pursued. A later article by Ford and Peeper (2009) did provide some information regarding the study areas by CVB executives. Their qualitative research, based upon interviews conducted with CVB executives, revealed their subjects’ most common undergraduate degree was in business. No additional educational background information regarding fields of study was provided, other than sharing the fact that 15.1% of their interview subjects continued their studies and had earned a master’s degree. One additional paper, by Weiler and Mahendra (2007, p. 7), looked at tourism jobs in general, with no focus upon CVB employment. These authors, however provided a hint of what we would find from our study, as they shared their finding that H&T employees who had graduated from programs with a “business brand enjoyed a higher rate of success in gaining relevant employment than did graduates with a tourism brand.” Again, while these three articles were of value as we conducted our study, providing some foundational data points, they left unanswered our specific question regarding the educational path best pursued by students wishing to pursue a post-

graduation CVB career. The specific approach taken to address this lacuna is discussed below, crafted to test our hypothesis, derived from the preceding literature, that the hiring practices of our local CVB represent the broader norm for this industry sector.

3. Method

The data collected for our study reflected the educational backgrounds of 400 USA CVB employees. It was felt that a sample of 400 current CVB employee profiles would provide a sufficient sample size from which findings could be generalized. The 400 profiles were collected using a two-step process:

1. A random 'baby name' generator website was utilized to provide a list of first names, which we could then use to search for employees to include in our dataset. We rotated our search by gender, requesting 'boy,' 'girl,' and 'gender-neutral' [e.g., Alex, Kim, Riley] name classifications.
2. Alternating names provided by the website from the three lists, we entered the name into the search box of LinkedIn, along with the additional descriptor 'convention and visitors bureau.' The first three profiles provided by LinkedIn of current CVB employees with the first name we had entered and whose profile included adequate background data were then selected for review. If the LinkedIn search produced fewer than three CVB employees, as was often the case, and more often when using male names, we collected the information from the available profiles and simply moved on, entering the next name on the list. This process was repeated until we had generated a dataset that provided the backgrounds of 400 current CVB employees, each with at least an undergraduate degree.

We are confident that the sample population extracted from LinkedIn provided a random and representative listing of CVB employees. These employees worked for CVBs that ranged from small organizations (e.g., Fargo-Morehead, ND, Villa Rica, GA) to those representing major destinations (e.g., Boston, MA, San Francisco, CA) and was of sufficient size to provide accurate and representative findings. Some general background on the sample members:

- The sample included employees from 236 CVBs in 39 USA states.
- The sample was 62% female. The manner by which we collected the data, as discussed above, did not favor the selection of those of either gender. As such, we suspect the lack of gender balance of our sample is likely a reasonable reflection of a heavily female skew of the USA CVB workforce.
- The period of time the members of our sample had been with their CVB ranged from several months for the 12 new hires in the sample, to a high of 40 years for a professional photographer. The median term of employment was 7.8 years (SD=8.2).
- The positions held at their CVB were as follows:
 - o There were 81 (20.3% of the sample) bureau leaders, which included those with the titles of CEO, Executive Director, and President;
 - o There were 43 (10.8%) members of the CVB's executive team, reflecting those with the titles of VP, CFO or Senior Director;

- The largest number of profiles captured, 174 (43.5%), were at the Manager or Director level;
- The remaining 102 employees (25.5%) held staff level positions within their organization.

4. Results

The key question this study sought to help answer, in its simplest form: What educational paths are most likely to prepare a current student hoping to be hired by a CVB? Analysis of our data provided interesting answers.

4.1. Undergraduate degrees of CVB employees

We took a bit of liberty combining various degree listings under consolidated titles. This included combining those degrees listed by employees with titles that included hospitality, tourism, event planning, hotel management, restaurant management, etc. under the general category of 'Hospitality & Tourism.' Similarly, we combined as 'Communications' degrees in communications, public relations, journalism, and English. The category 'Business' also included multiple degrees. These included business administration, marketing, international business and management. Perhaps combining these degrees into consolidated baskets created overly broad categories, but we felt comfortable doing so as each category encompassed degrees based upon highly related skills, producing similarly skilled candidates for the workplace.

What was learned: Of the 400 LinkedIn profiles, 119 did not indicate their undergraduate major. For the 281 that had listed their major, it was determined that the largest share (n=75; 26.7%) of our CVB employee sample, had earned their undergraduate degree in Communications, making this the most productive area of study to prepare one for a career with a CVB. The next largest number with 61 (21.7%) CVB employees was Business. H&T then followed, with 47 (16.8%) CVB employees. These three classifications and the other, less popular, undergraduate majors of those in our sample are reflected in Table-1. The key point of this finding, disappointingly, was the small share of H&T graduates among CVB employees in our sample.

Table 1. CVB Employees Categorized by Undergraduate Degree/Field of Study¹.

Major/Field of Study	Number of Profiles	% of Profiles
Communication	75	26.7
Business	61	21.7
Hospitality, Tourism	47	16.8
Sociology, Psychology	11	3.9
Political Science	10	3.6
Math, Accounting, Finance	8	2.8
Education	7	2.5
History	7	2.5
Video Production	5	1.8
Foreign Language	5	1.8
Miscellaneous ²	45	16.0
Total ³	281	100.0

Notes: ¹. Both associate and bachelor's degrees are included. An additional 119 LinkedIn profiles of graduates did not include their major area of study. ². The Miscellaneous grouping includes the LinkedIn profiles of CVB employees with a major not listed above – i.e. those with less than five reporting the major. ³. The total sample size was 400 profiles. Of these, 119 profiles were of college graduates who indicated the university/college they had attended, but whose LinkedIn profile did not indicate a field of study.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4.2. Graduate Degrees

We then determined how many of our captured employees had graduate degrees, to see both how prevalent these were among CVB employees and again, what disciplines had been studied. We were surprised by the relative lack of advanced degree holders in our sample, with only 51 (12.8%) of the 400 having continued their education beyond their undergraduate studies. This is a significantly smaller percentage than the overall USA population of college graduates, as, per The Education Data Initiative (Hanson, 2024), 21.4% of USA college graduates have earned their master's degrees. Of those 51 with graduate degrees, only three (5.9%) had earned their advanced degrees in H&T. The most common advanced degree was in business (n=13; 25.5%), with the next most popular area of graduate study Communications (n=11; 21.6%).

It was interesting to note who among the sample had their master's degrees. While many recent undergraduates continue their studies following graduation, this was not the case with these employees. Of the 102 CVB employees in our sample holding staff positions, only four had their masters, none of these in H&T. Conversely, of the 81 organizational leaders, almost a quarter (n=19, 23.5%) had earned an advanced degree. This percentage improves upon the above cited, albeit now quite dated Morrison et al. finding that 16.6% of CVB executives had such degrees. The most popular degree for the 19 bureau executives with master's degrees in our sample was in business, with five of the executives having such a degree. Only two of the 19 bureau executives had a master's degree in H&T.

5. Discussion and conclusion

It would appear that our CVB speaker's comment that "you can go into it with any kind of degree" is on target, and it was disappointing to learn just how few H&T majors are in the CVB workforce. The hiring approach of our local CVB therefore seems reflective of the hiring practices of CVBs across the country; where candidate attitude likely trumps educational background, and specialized skills are more valued than the more general H&T industry foundation we provide our students. As such, it seems evident – unless an alternative explanation is that students in H&T programs simply do not have an interest in a CVB career, which we doubt – that studying H&T simply does not provide an advantage for students when applying for a CVB position following their graduation from our programs.

What can H&T educators do to change this? It would seem the clear implication is the need to work with one's local CVB to learn what their program can do to modify its course offerings to provide their students the marketable skills these employers seek from our graduates. In line with this, it would seem important that H&T academic programs work to develop enhanced CVB internships, allowing students to gain knowledge that will make them more competitive when positions are available, while providing them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and attitude during their internship placement.

The above suggestions can help as we move forward, but we also need to understand the current landscape to better advise today's students with an interest in CVBs, hopefully helping them to best prepare for such a career. Nhuta et al. (2015) warn: "It is difficult to precisely define the skills and competencies a tourism curriculum graduate should exhibit as proof of achievement of learning outcomes of tourism curriculum." However, as a practical suggestion, in line with what we learned from this study, it would seem students with an interest in working for a CVB upon graduation would be wise to consider adding a communications or a business minor to their H&T degree, as these seem to be the fields of study most desired by the bureaus and likely provide some of the soft skill development perhaps lacking in their major.

That said, hospitality and tourism educators should not have to rely on external academic minors to ensure their graduates are work-ready and hireable. Instead, academic programs should pursue concerted, deliberate enhancements in collaboration with CVBs and other potential employers. Sisson and Adams (2013) suggest embedding specific soft-skill competencies directly into core H&T course syllabi as measurable learning objectives. These classroom foundations should translate directly into industry experiences, granting students the opportunity to practice and develop their interpersonal communication skills in supervised settings. Furthermore, practical applications, to include student projects and targeted volunteer initiatives, can serve as effective platforms for developing personal responsibility, teamwork, and problem-solving creativity. To support such initiatives, Sipii et al. (2024) suggest educators require student self-assessments, supplemented by formal feedback loops from industry mentors. Finally, Xu et al. (2022) suggest that students be encouraged to be active in club activities, taking on leadership roles that mirror real-world managerial responsibilities.

Ultimately, H&T education must ensure that it looks beyond passive knowledge, providing students with strong interpersonal skills equipped for lifelong learning and successful careers. Equipped with such skills, it is hoped that these students will enjoy greater success securing a coveted 'seat on the CVB bus,' or any other industry segment 'bus' they desire, when they graduate.

As a final comment, we recognize the limited scope of this research and encourage continued study. The findings are USA based only, and we do not know how they would apply elsewhere. It would be interesting to learn how generalized these are in other settings. And if the findings do not generalize, and CVBs elsewhere are more likely to hire H&T graduates than in the USA, it will be interesting and valuable to learn more about these differences, providing guidance and assisting USA academic programs to do a better job for the future of our students.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the College of Charleston School of Business Office of Tourism Analysis for the funding provided to support this research project.

References

- Airey, D., Dredge, D., & Gross, M. J. (2014). Tourism, hospitality and events education in an age of change. In D. Dredge, D. Airey, & M. J. Gross (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of tourism and hospitality education* (pp. 2-14). Routledge.
- Batra, A. (2016). Bridging the gap between tourism education, tourism industry and graduate employability: Intricacies and emerging issues in Thailand. *ABAC Journal*, 36(2), 78-89.
- Dredge, D., Airey, D., & Gross, M. J. (Eds.). (2015). *The Routledge handbook of tourism and hospitality education*. Routledge.
- Ford, R. C., & Peeper, W. C. (2009). Skills, training, and experiences associated with success in the role of a convention and visitors bureau executive: An exploratory study. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 10(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15470140902750952>
- Giousmpasoglou, C. (2025). Reclaiming hospitality education: A critical reflection. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*. Advance online publication. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9225-3475>
- Hanson, M. (2024). College graduation statistics," update March 24, 2024, Education Data Initiative, accessed online at: <https://educationdata.org/number-of-college-graduates%20>.
- Hsu, C. H. (2018). Tourism education on and beyond the horizon. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 25, 181-183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.022>
- Kim, H. J., & Jeong, M. (2018). Research on hospitality and tourism education: Now and future. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 25, 119-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.025>
- Lugosi, P., & Jameson, S. (2017). Challenges in hospitality management education: Perspectives from the United Kingdom. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31, 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2016.12.001>
- McKercher, B., Tolkach, D., Lee, A., Macionis, N., & Jin, X. (2024). How successfully do we educate tourism, hospitality, and events graduates? *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 36(2), 182-191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2023.2172421>
- Millar, M., Mao, Z., & Moreo, P. (2010). Hospitality & tourism educators vs. the industry: A competency assessment. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 22(2), 38-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2010.10696975>
- Morrison, A. M., Bruen, S. M., & Anderson, D. J. (1997). Convention and visitor bureaus in the USA: A profile of bureaus, bureau executives, and budgets. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 7(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1300/j073v07n01_01

- Nhuta, S., Tawanda, M., Regina, M., & Abednigo, C. (2015). The disparity between the tourism education/training and the needs of the tourism and hospitality industry manpower needs. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research*, 2(5), 65-83.
- Raybould, M., & Wilkins, H. (2006). Generic skills for hospitality management: A comparative study of management expectations and student perceptions. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 13(2), 177-188. <https://doi.org/10.1375/jhtm.13.2.177>
- Sipii, V., Deshchenko, O., Honcharova, N., Hrytsenko, A., & Hrytsiuk, O. (2024). Analysis of the prospects for the development of soft skills in future education: trends and risks. *Conhecimento & Diversidade*, 16(44), 107-128.
- Sisson, L. G., & Adams, A. R. (2013). Essential hospitality management competencies: The importance of soft skills. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 25(3), 131-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2013.826975>
- Tran, L. N. (2022). A review and reflection on the liberation of hospitality higher education. *Cogent Education*, 9(1), 2153432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2153432>
- Weiler, B., & Mahendra, G. (2007). Exploring the relationships between university course branding, length of study and employment outcomes in undergraduate tourism education. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 32(2), 7-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2007.11081272>
- Xu, J., Tavitiyaman, P., Kim, H. J., & Lo, S. K. J. (2022). Hospitality and tourism higher education in the post-COVID era: Is it time to change? *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 34(4), 278-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2022.2056044>

Author Bios:

Stephen W. Litvin is a Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the College of Charleston (SC). Academia is Steve's third career, following his first as a CPA auditor and consultant with international CPA firms and his second as a travel industry entrepreneur. His Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree in International Commerce is from the University of South Australia. Steve's primary areas of research focus on tourism issues affecting communities and tourism consumer behavior.

Charlotte Heinrich was an Honor's College student at the College of Charleston (SC) before completing her undergraduate degree at the University of Nottingham (UK). Following graduation, Charlotte continued her studies, recently graduating as Valedictorian from the MS Marketing program at Durham University (UK). Charlotte's post-graduate career goal is to obtain a destination marketing position with a CVB.