Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School
An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Exploring How Tourism Majors’ Perceived Professional Competence Influences Their Choice of Tourism Careers in China

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Place: Remote

Abstract
With the rapid development of tourism in China, various economic sectors such as agriculture, sports, food and beverages, cultural heritage, and outdoor adventure have become integrated into the tourism industry. China's tourism industry has changed and these changes now require tourism practitioners to adapt. Chinese universities must also adapt their tourism curriculum and educational practices to reflect changes in the tourism sector. Research suggests that university training programs should increase their emphasis on developing students’ professional competency and expand the range of competencies they address in their curriculum. At the same time, tourism enterprises in China are unable to recruit enough competent employees, resulting in a shortage of qualified workers. To improve the professional competence of tourism students in China, tourism education departments must respond to the needs of, and changes in, the tourism industry.

The purpose of this two-phase, mixed-method exploratory design study is to identify the professional competencies that tourism experts in China believe tourism students must acquire, and examine the relationship between these competencies, tourism students’ perceptions of professional competence, and their intent to pursue a career in the tourism sector. The present study began with basic qualitative research in the form of interviews with Chinese tourism experts in China to identify the professional competencies that Chinese tourism students need. During the second stage of research, these results were incorporated into a written questionnaire that was distributed to approximately 800 tourism majors in China. Through the analysis of survey data, we examined the relationship between student demographics, their perceived professional competence, and their intent to pursue a career in the tourism sector.

The study results indicate that the causal relationship between students’ perceived professional competence and students’ intention for a career in tourism is valid. These findings provide theoretical support for improving tourism students’ perceived professional competency. The results also suggest strategies to increase the percentage of tourism students who will choose to work in the tourism sector upon graduation.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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