

## *Special Report*

# **Tourism Management on the Defensive**

## **An Investigative Series on CoB Faculty Credentials**

Emma James' 24-Feb-08 article for *The Hattiesburg American*, entitled "The inn crowd: USM tourism management offers cross-discipline training," inadvertently highlights a number of problematic facets of the CoB's current staffing situation. It also shows how "defensive" CoB administrators are becoming, perhaps in response to reports of an unprecedented faculty flight. This *Special Report* installment covers the most interesting aspects of James' article.

### **Why Was David Paster Hired? And, What is He Teaching?**

James' article quotes CoB tourism management *instructor*, David Paster, at length. Of particular interest are the following passages:

"Teaching tourism management in Mississippi was illegal until two years ago, when the state government lifted the restrictions in response to the swath Hurricane Katrina cut into the state's gaming professionals. 'After Katrina, the state recognized that gaming was an integral part of their revenue stream,' said USM Instructor David Paster, a MBA/MUC/CMC who came on board to restructure the university's tourism management program. 'They made the decision to lift that restriction in order to help the industry recover.'"

There are a number of problems with Paster's quotes above:

- Certainly the State of Mississippi recognized the importance of gaming to its revenue stream *before* Hurricane Katrina hit in August of 2005. Some might say that Paster is speaking just to hear himself speak in this particular instance.
- What's with the "MBA/MUC/CMC" string? It would seem that the CoB is becoming hyper-sensitive to the fact that many of its faculty, including Paster, appear to be under-qualified (if not unqualified) to hold the positions they hold.
- If Paster was indeed brought to USM to "restructure the . . . tourism management program," as James states, then no one other than Paster and a select few, including James, knew that before 24-Feb-08. Paster is not qualified to hold a permanent position in the CoB, much less to "restructure" any of its programs. This whole claim raises another question: Where are TM's Cheri Becker and Catherine Price? Both of these faculty hold *PhDs* in tourism management, and from Virginia Tech. They are so deep under cover these days that their names are never mentioned. Yet,

while they hide from view, the CoB is having to rely on three (or more) non-terminally qualified and/or visiting TM instructors to prop up the program.

- Again, Paster appears to be speaking simply to hear himself speak with the statement about why Mississippi decided to lift the "restriction" on "tourism management." First of all, the restriction was on the "gaming" aspect of the academic program, not "tourism management." Secondly, Katrina had nothing to do with the issue, as the IHL passed the casino management degree on 15-April-2004, or about 1.5 years in advance of Katrina.<sup>1</sup> A chancery judge overturned Jim Hood's (MS Attorney General) May 2004 opposition to the IHL decision just before the Fourth of July holiday in 2005, or about 60 days before Katrina.

The nonsense involving Paster doesn't end with the passages above. James' article continues with the following:

"Paster has spearheaded the gaming emphasis of the program on the Gulf Coast campus by providing students with a mix of economics, accounting, financial resources and operations classes geared toward managing casinos as well as practical experience."

What is Paster doing teaching courses in economics, accounting and finance? It is understood that by moving economist Farooq Malik from the coast to Hattiesburg's finance unit, the CoB-GC was left without any economists. However, this should not excuse CoB administrators from staffing these courses with Paster and the like. For years the CoB has complained that other colleges have been offering what appear to be "business" courses. Now, it looks as though certain departments in the CoB are usurping the right to offer courses that fall under the umbrella of other CoB departments. This passage, then, only highlights the real decline in the CoB over the past few years.

### **What Did Henthorne Tell *THA*? What Didn't Henthorne Tell *THA*?**

James' article quotes CoB tourism management Chair, Tony Henthorne, at length. Of particular interest are the following passages:

"'The tourism management program was relocated to the business school in 2004 and when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, we had to reorganize,' said Dr. Tony Henthorne, Department of Tourism Management chair. 'Now we're back on board with a very strong program.'"

What is Henthorne talking about [by saying that USM had a tourism management program before 2004]? Paster said that USM didn't have a tourism management program until after August of 2005. Of course, Henthorne is correct and Paster is way off base. However, Henthorne's comment about the program being "very strong" seems forced.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://media.www.studentprintz.com/media/storage/paper974/news/2004/04/22/News/Ihl-Approves.New.Degree-1995437.shtml>.

That's probably because all it (the program) has to tout is the work of *instructors* Paster and Evelyn Green, who is also quoted extensively in James' article.

What Henthorne failed to tell James is that he (Henthorne) is leaving the CoB for the Harrah College at the University of Nevada -- Las Vegas. So, with Henthorne's departure, Paster becomes the #1 guy. Does that sound like the making of a "very strong program?"

The text of James' article is inserted below:

## **USM tourism management offers cross-discipline training**

By EMMA JAMES

OLLIE MOSES leads a double life. The guest service manager at the Hilton Garden Inn, Moses, 23, supervises the guest service agents that work the hotel's front desk, schedules employees and pays the bills, among other duties.

Two days a week, Moses is also a student at the University of Southern Mississippi, pursuing a degree in business administration with an emphasis in hotel management. The classroom experience that USM offers, Moses said, is an introduction to the real world and what students can expect when they are on the job.

"The classwork lays out what is expected of you when you are on the job," Moses said, "but actually working at a hotel and getting that on-the-job experience is essential."

About 200 schools around the nation now offer bachelor's degrees to students majoring in hospitality management, a five-fold increase over the past quarter century. Related fields such as tourism, restaurants and gaming are also creating academic programs as well as job opportunities for graduates.

The University of Southern Mississippi offers a bachelor's degree in tourism management, offering students the opportunity to declare an emphasis in casino resort management or hospitality management. The department also requires students to complete at least one internship before graduation.

"The tourism management program was relocated to the business school in 2004 and when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, we had to reorganize," said Dr. Tony Henthorne, Department of Tourism Management chair. "Now we're back on board with a very strong program."

USM's Hattiesburg and Gulf Coast campuses have 98 tourism management majors combined and Henthorne said that the program is growing, especially on the Coast where courses in casino management are based.

"There aren't a lot of tourism programs that specialize in the gaming business," Henthorne said. "It made sense to have one here because the Gulf Coast campus is in

such close proximity to the casinos. It has been an asset to our program."

Teaching tourism management in Mississippi was illegal until two years ago, when the state government lifted the restrictions in response to the swath Hurricane Katrina cut into the state's gaming professionals.

"After Katrina, the state recognized that gaming was an integral part of their revenue stream," said USM instructor David Paster, a MBA/MUP/CMC who came on board to help restructure the university's tourism management program. "They made the decision to lift that restriction in order to help the industry recover."

Paster has spearheaded the gaming emphasis of the program on the Gulf Coast campus by providing students with a mix of economics, accounting, financial resources and operations classes geared toward managing casinos as well as practical experience.

"We're not teaching students to deal cards down here," Paster said. "What we offer isn't vocational training, it's management training. Students can take what they learn here and apply it to running a casino, Disney World or a Holiday Inn."

A January trip to downtown Las Vegas to evaluate casino operations on Fremont Street for a Casino Enterprise Management class kicked off the spring semester for four Gulf Coast students, and that trip highlights the practical experience USM gaming courses offer, Paster said.

"We've gotten some corporate sponsorship that will allow our students to do case studies from within the gaming industry," Paster said. "That practicum gives students the opportunity to get real experience and network with professionals in the field."

The recent growth of the casino industry on the Gulf Coast -more than \$758 million in construction projects among the 10 casinos, according to the Mississippi Gaming Commission - is attracting more and more students to the gaming side of the tourism management industry.

"Our enrollment in the program has doubled since the first semester," Paster said. "These casinos are desperate, not for warm bodies, but for people who have quality skills that can walk in their first day of work and do an analysis or accounting. That's what they are looking for."

The tourism management program also utilizes advanced technology such as online classes, the Wimba Live classroom and podcasting to help students connect with industry professionals and provide networking opportunities, USM instructor Evelyn Green said. Green, who teaches hospitality classes and an introduction to gaming class, has arranged podcasts with professionals such as Craig Ray, director of the Mississippi Development Authority's Tourism Division, Rick Taylor, the executive director for Visit Hattiesburg and Webster Franklin of the Tunica Convention and Visitors Bureau to have live interaction with students over the Internet.

"The podcasts have both visual and audio, and they allow students access to industry professionals, which is something that most students never get the opportunity to do," Green said.

For senior tourism management major Patrick Cliburn, the podcasts are the most beneficial part of online classes.

"You not only get to listen what industry professionals get to say, you get to ask questions and really interact with them," he said. "We're not talking about a cocktail waitress or a front desk clerk, although they're an important too. We're talking about the big dogs, people that have been in the industry for years."

As the tourism industry continues to grow and develop, Moses said, more and more opportunities will come to light for himself and his fellow students. Tourism management is a diverse industry and that, in the end, is what drove him to choose to make it his career.

"I love the industry because it's never the same day twice," Moses said. "One day things could be running perfect, then you walk into work the next day and 50 pipes have busted and faucets are flying off of Jacuzzis all over the hotel. I thrive on that."