

The Journey towards Excellence at City College Angeles, Philippines: Achieving APIEM International Centre of Excellence Accreditation for the BS Tourism Management Degree

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This paper explains how the BS Tourism Management degree at City College Angeles (CCA), Philippines has been accredited by the Asia Pacific Institute for Events Management (APIEM) as being of an international standard for its curriculum in events management. APIEM is an international organization that supports the professionalization of the events/MICE industry in Asia Pacific. One way that it does this is to audit events/MICE programs of study to determine if they are of an international standard. Programs that meet the APIEM audit criteria can be assured that they are one of the best in Asia Pacific for the study of events/MICE management. This paper explains the process that CCA went through to become the first community college in Asia Pacific to be accredited by APIEM as an International Centre of Excellence**** for its events curriculum.

Keywords: accreditation, curriculum enhancement, events management, tourism management

Introduction

The City College of Angeles (CCA) envisions itself as an institution of hope producing highly competitive and technically capable professionals as future leaders for community development and nation building (CCA Student Handbook, 2012). In response to this vision, there is a need for CCA to design agile and responsive academic programs to meet the diverse needs of students, communities, and employers in the 21st century. The College must design and offer programs that prepare students for a diverse range of careers upon graduation. Curricula offerings at CCA should be innovative and responsive to the complex and rapidly changing work environment to ensure that its graduates are able to gain employment locally, regionally and nationally.

According to Stabback (2016), curriculum development and enhancement lies at the crossroads of the four key aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 4: that

education should be inclusive and equitable, characterized by quality learning, promoting lifelong learning, and relevant to holistic development. It should provide the bridge between education and development – and it is the competencies associated with lifelong learning and aligned with development needs, in the broadest, holistic sense of the term, that span that bridge. Rocamora (2014) mentions that the trend now in educational institutions is to have an outcome-based approach where competencies are included in the learning objectives for the program.

One of the programs offered at CCA is the Bachelor of Tourism Management degree. According to the Philippines Council of Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 30,s. 2006 (Approved as per Board of Regents Resolution No. 266 s. 2013 dated March 12, 2013 effective 1st Semester SY 2013-2014), graduates should obtain functional knowledge and skills in: travel and tour operations; events management; transportation management and

other tourism related establishments; carry out work activities successfully and efficiently to the standards expected in the operation of various tourism establishments; communicate with confidence to people both verbally and non-verbally; plan and assess tourism development programs; have the ability to examine conditions (e.g. relationships between the different tourism sectors, tourism impacts); recognize problems, create solutions and apply remedial and/or mitigating actions; become environmentally sensitive, socially aware, responsible and sincere service providers; and be proud of one's identity as a Filipino, responsive of his values, culture, traditions and the environment.

Under the aforementioned memorandum issued by CHED, the course content in the curricula must incorporate subjects based on international standards, practices and competency standards that are required by the industry. The learning outcomes must include the ability of the students to perform the functions of the position in the industry that they will soon occupy upon graduation.

As part of CCA's mandate to improve the quality of education at the college curricula were revisited and evaluated in order to determine the possible ways to innovate the currently offered programs. Through this process it was decided to include a study of events/MICE management in the BS Tourism Management degree - a study of Meetings, Incentives, Convention, Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism as an area of specialization. The tourism faculty team believed that such an innovation was timely as the MICE sector of the Philippine tourism industry is flourishing as manifested by a number of major international events held in the country since 2015. With the focus of the Philippine tourism industry on MICE, the decision to produce graduates with a specialization on events management became all the more relevant.

The organization that provides accreditation for international recognition in terms of events/MICE management is the Asia Pacific Institute for Events Management (APIEM). This is a United Kingdom-based accrediting body that brings together events industry employers and education providers who are

committed to establishing high quality courses for students and events professionals who want to develop their skills and abilities to work in the global events industry – see <http://theapiem.com>

APIEM is a non-profit making organization that has been established to contribute to the professionalization of the events/MICE industry in the Asia Pacific region through its accreditation scheme whereby training providers, colleges, polytechnics and universities that offer an events/MICE management program can apply to become an APIEM Centre of Excellence. The accreditation audit is based on four criteria: the Management and Content of the Curriculum; Teaching and Learning Standards; Resources and Learning Environment; and Welfare and Student Services – for information on the APIEM Centre of Excellence Audit scheme see: <http://theapiem.com/conducting-apiem-centre-excellence-audit/>.

The APIEM Centre of Excellence accreditation process comprises two elements: 1) recognising the applicant's institution as being an appropriate organization to collaborate with; and 2) accrediting the events management courses as being of an international standard.

In the process, APIEM Centre of Excellence accreditation affirms that the quality of delivery of the college's event management courses is comparable to other APIEM Centre of Excellence accredited courses and demonstrates good practice in the design, delivery and support of events management courses and their students. Once the college is accredited, Centre of Excellence status is conferred for a four years period.

Based on the aforementioned information, the tourism faculty members at CCA aimed to develop a new brand for the BS Tourism Management degree by including a study of events/MICE management within the curriculum to make it different from similar degrees offered by nearby colleges and universities in the city of Angeles. In reviewing the degree the faculty members decided to answer the following questions:

- 1) How may the BS Tourism Management program be enhanced following the standard procedure as required by the Commission on Higher Education?
- 2) How may the BS Tourism Management program be at par with the programs offered in the nearby colleges and universities in the region?
- 3) How may the enhanced BS Tourism Management program be designed, validated and finalized based on APIEM standards?
- 4) What are the implications of the results of the study for tourism management education?

Answers to the above questions would help the faculty team to design an innovative and demand-driven curriculum to make the BS Tourism Management degree able to serve the needs of the local, regional and national economies. Further, the enhancement could also improve the employability skills of graduates and enable them to make a significant contribution to the events/MICE industry in the Philippines.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive and qualitative research design, more specifically documentary analysis. In the process, the BS Tourism Management curriculum was enhanced using the Six-Step Approach in reviewing and revising a curriculum program (Eisner, 2017): 1) Problem Assessment and General Needs Assessment; 2) Needs Assessment of Targeted Learners; 3) Goals and Objectives; 4) Educational Strategies; 5) Implementation; and 6) Evaluation and Feedback. This was done by conducting a series of meetings with the CHEDRO III officials, school administrators, parents, students, and industry partners during the months of February and March 2017.

All data were analyzed using the required competencies of the curricular program based on CHED Memorandum Order No. 30, s. 2006. Also, requirements of the accreditation process

by the Asia Pacific Institute for Events Management (APIEM) were taken into account by the tourism faculty team members.

Results and Discussion

I. Enhancement of the BS Tourism Management Curriculum Program following the Standard Procedure as required by the Commission on Higher Education

The faculty and staff of the Institute of Business and Management at CCA conducted a meeting to revisit the BS Tourism Management curriculum. Needs assessment was conducted to improve the competencies of the graduates and to make the curriculum responsive to the changes in the local and global industry.

The members of the committee for curriculum development and enhancement were identified. These are the vice president for academic affairs, dean of the institute, program coordinators, faculty, student representatives, chief librarian, and industry partners. Functions were stated.

The Dean organized the members of the committee on the revision and enhancement of the program and consulted the faculty on the revision or design of programs/syllabi following CHED Memorandum Order No. 30, s. 2006. The enhancement of the program is governed by two different need-requirements, namely: 1) the need to modify a course/curricular program based on the guidelines set by CHED and 2) the need to make the curriculum distinctive from the same program offerings of the colleges and universities in the region. It was justified that Meetings, Incentives, Convention Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism as an area of specialization of the program should be added to the BS Tourism Management degree. This is to make the curriculum responsive to the needs of the industry and improve further the MICE tourism management expertise in the region.

With the inclusion of the new courses in the BS Tourism Management curriculum, requirements for their offerings were identified and provided. These are the facilities,

laboratories, books and other references, obedized syllabi, and hiring of instructors with qualifications as required by the courses.

The revised BS Tourism Management curriculum was then submitted to CHEDRO III for content noting. All documents required for the said enhancement were attached as evidences. After a month, CCA received the approval of CHEDRO III of the revised program.

II. Enhancement of the BS Tourism Management Curriculum Program to be at par with the Programs Offered in the Nearby Colleges and Universities in the Region

The BS Tourism Management enhanced curriculum was designed by benchmarking from notable international organizations in the events, tourism and hospitality industries such as the Asia Pacific Institute for Events Management (APIEM) and Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Hotel & Tourism Management (POLYU).

Generally speaking, POLYU's emphasis on MICE Tourism was what inspired CCA to design the specialized subjects according to four specific courses, namely: Event Tourism, Special Events & Incentive Programs, Exhibition Management and Meetings Management & Conference Planning. APIEM's course modules were also benchmarked for the content of each course. In the enriched curriculum, specialized subjects were developed with the goal of professionalizing students with various skills such as project management and production, events marketing and event ethics.

While other colleges and universities in the region offer events management as part of their degree programs, and some even offer the program as a form of specialization, the approach of CCA is different since it not only provides an in-depth study on events management in general, but focuses specifically on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Convention and Exhibit) Tourism. Such an approach is believed to be more practical and allows the student to gain an edge over other

students who are also specializing in events management. This becomes all the more relevant since the Philippine government has expressed its plans of reprioritizing the MICE market as a key mandate of the Department of Tourism. In a news article published by the PhilStar dated December 19, 2016, it was also mentioned that MICE Tourism was identified as one of the priority tourism products under the country's six years tourism master plan.

Effective execution of the curriculum was also carefully planned which is why the CCA also added to its roster of tourism management faculty members, reputable industry practitioners from the events sector. Students are being taught not just the theories and concepts found in books, but real-life industry scenarios that ultimately prepares them to take on actual challenges.

The events/MICE subjects offered are not just being delivered through classroom discussion, but through actual exposure in real life events organized in the city of Angeles. Students gain practical work experience by volunteering on various events in Angeles, most of which are considered as large-scale or socio-civic events. This is made possible through the existing and active partnership of CCA with event-oriented organizations such as Angeles City Tourism Office, Sinukwan Kapampangan, and Red Velvet Productions – resident organizers of Mutya Ning Angeles.

Aside from the competitive design and effective delivery of the curriculum, CCA ensures that its programs undergo regular review to enable the subjects being offered to be kept up to date for the needs of the employment market into which the graduates will be entering.

III. Designed, Validation, and Finalization of the Enhanced BS Tourism Management Curriculum based on APIEM standards

CCA aimed for international centre of excellence recognition for the revised BS Tourism Management degree and sought accreditation by APIEM. The college complied with the following requirements of APIEM's accreditation process. CCA provided a:

1. Description of CCA in terms of type of organization, source of funding, license or government approval, financial status, organizational structure.
2. Description of CCA as a compatible partner of APIEM. This includes the vision/mission, history, existing links between the College and APIEM, nature and scope of the College with other professional bodies/associations in tourism or events management, award levels offered at CCA in tourism and events management, details of the events management curriculum offered by the College – type of courses/qualifications, subject areas covered, overall student numbers at the College on events management courses, and internship opportunities provided for events management students by the College.
3. The portfolio of the academic staff who contribute to the events management courses and their qualifications and number of support staff who contribute to the events management courses.
4. Evidence of the number of general classrooms, lecture theatres at the College and the type of laboratories or specialist facilities available for the events management courses.
5. The number of tourism and events management books in the library, the number of tourism and events management journals in the library, details of other learning resources to support the events management courses, IT resources to support the events management courses, and other resources to support the events management courses.
6. Finally, in terms of international/national reputation, CCA provided a description and evidence of the list of the events management academic publications of its faculty members, a list of the events management research and consultancy undertaken by its faculty members, examples of events management

employment record of alumni, recognition of the College by international or national tourism and events associations and government agencies and departments, and other factors that enhance the international or national reputation of CCA.

Documentation was designed and prepared as evidence of the above criteria and were presented to the APIEM auditors during the accreditation visit.

Following the APIEM audit CCA was delighted to receive confirmation that its programs BS Tourism Management and BS Tourism Management with a Specialization in MICE Tourism had received APIEM Centre of Excellence **** accreditation – APIEM's highest level of accreditation – a tremendous achievement.

In an interview conducted by Sunstar (a regional newspaper), the CCA President, explained that the college underwent a stringent auditing procedure to achieve APIEM Centre of Excellence **** accreditation. He also added that CCA included MICE as one of the college's areas of specialization in order to improve its overall curriculum. According to the President CCA wanted to introduce a study of events/MICE management into additional degree programs – not only BS Tourism Management. This would help CCA graduates from other subject disciplines to gain employment in the local, regional and national events/MICE industry. (Sunstar, http://www.sunstar.com.ph/pampanga/local-news_/2017/09_15/city-college-angeles-named-apiem-center-excellence-564212).

In the same article, Mayor Edgardo Pamintuan, lauded CCA for its continuous dedication in delivering high quality but affordable education to the city's students. He said:

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"I am ecstatic that our city college was awarded with a four-star distinction by an international institution - a first in the whole of Asia Pacific. Our very

own city college is making history."

Furthermore, he added:

"Our government in accordance to our social contract, the Contract with the Angeleños (CWA), is doing its best to produce globally competitive students who are soon-to-be valued contributors of the community."

The above-mentioned recognition is proof that CCA is doing its function as an arm of the government to improve the life of the Angeleños through the quality education that is delivered to the students.

I. Implications of the Results of the Study for Tourism Management Education

The audit conducted by the Asia Pacific Institute for Events Management resulted in the awarding of the APIEM Centre of Excellence **** accreditation to CCA's BS Tourism Management degree and BS Tourism Management with a Specialization in MICE Tourism degree. Following the accreditation audit Professor David Hind, President of APIEM commended CCA for :

1. It's ethos in providing education opportunities for students from families who are not financially strong and in particular the opportunity to be educated in events and MICE management;
2. The support from the City Mayor and local government unit for all program and projects of the college;
3. The appointment of Dr Richard Daenos as President of CCA and for his vision, strategy and leadership in promoting events and MICE management for both the City of Angeles and CCA as a form of economic opportunity in the whole of region 3;

4. Strong and efficient administration of CCA in ensuring high quality education provision for the programs in tourism; and
5. Committed, enthusiastic and dedicated BS Tourism teaching faculty who are devoted to providing exciting and real-world events management experiences for their students.

Aside from the commendation given by Professor David Hind, the implications of being an APIEM Centre of Excellence are the following:

1. Students on CCA's BS Tourism Management and BS Tourism Management with a Specialization in MICE Tourism degrees can be assured of the relevance of their qualification for careers within the MICE/events industry.
2. MICE/events industry employers when recruiting graduates from CCA can be assured that their program of study has been assessed by APIEM as being appropriate and relevant for the needs of the MICE/events industry.
3. CCA can use the APIEM Centre of Excellence logo on its promotional literature and websites, course, module and teaching materials.
4. CCA can use its APIEM recognition as a means of recruiting and retaining students by demonstrating that they are one of the best places to study for a MICE/event management qualification in the Philippines.
CCA can demonstrate to MICE/events industry associations and organizations that its tourism courses have been assessed through a rigorous process of accreditation to recognize excellence in MICE/events management education.
5. CCA will receive guidance from APIEM on how it can continue to improve its educational provision in MICE/event management.
6. APIEM will share with CCA best practice in curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment methods in MICE/event management.
7. APIEM will promote CCA's courses through the APIEM website, social media publications and at

conferences/workshops where APIEM participates.

8. CCA will benefit from being part of APIEM's international network of MICE/event management scholars and researchers providing opportunities for collaborative research and joint publications.
9. Tourism faculty at CCA will receive professional membership of APIEM for four years and will have access to APIEM's closed Facebook site for Professional Members.
10. Tourism students at CCA receive student membership of APIEM for four years and will have access to APIEM's closed Facebook site for Student Members

Conclusions

As a result of the accreditation by APIEM, CCA is the first community college in Asia Pacific to be accredited as an APIEM Centre of Excellence. This success is due to the vision of CCA's President Dr Richard Daenos who has established MICE/events management as a key feature of tourism degrees at CCA – BS Tourism Management and BS Tourism Management with a specialization in MICE tourism.

Angeles City is situated near the Clark International Airport (to the north of Manila) which is being established as a location for the Philippines MICE industry so that it is able to host major international events and exhibitions. Students at CCA will have many practical opportunities to develop their MICE/events management expertise by supporting the many festivals and events that take place in Angeles every year. These experiential learning opportunities when combined with the students' academic subject knowledge will make them great events organisers of the future.

This paper has explained how an ambitious college under the leadership of a visionary

president can gain international recognition for the quality of its academic programs. The journey towards excellence is an on-going process and CCA continues to identify opportunities for the accreditation of its programs by international bodies.

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