

Engaging With Others to Assist With Festival Research...A Partnership Between Festivals/Events And Universities

This past September, I had the pleasure of attending the IFEA Convention, Expo & Retreat in Tucson, Arizona and connecting with colleagues who are also passionate about the festival and event industry. It is always a rewarding experience, and this year the positive feedback I received from a session on *"Festival/Event University Partnerships: Building Community and Mutually Beneficial Outcomes"* led me to dedicate this column to one portion of the presentation, working with colleges/universities to assist with research.

Community-Based Learning is a "hot" topic on college and university campuses; although a movement for over three decades, the concept of an academic institution achieving its objectives by working outside the institution's four walls, and alongside the industry is becoming more mainstream. It is a teaching methodology designed to integrate student learning in academic courses while engaging with the community. This work is based on reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships between instructors, students, and community organizations. This new trend formalizes relationships with the community and is largely based on a Kellogg Commission report (2001, 2002) suggesting colleges/universities "become more engaged with communities through collaborative partnership, rather than as experts with pre-conceived solutions to complex problems" (Fitzgerald, 2012).

As a result of this movement, higher education institutions are revisiting how they educate students to become productive members of society, better preparing them for integrating into their professional fields, and enhancing learning within the classroom, and industry. This movement has been prevalent in the festival/events industry ranging from formalized internships being a historic part of festival practices, or graduate students conducting research for festivals/events. However, there are opportunities to integrate further

through other coursework including undergraduate courses in event design, marketing, human resource, and research courses. These other ways to engage together, including research courses, create new and exciting prospects for the festival/event industry.

The timing is right for finding ways to access, collect, and utilize festival/event research. Never has it been more important, and never has there been such an abundance of research being completed by the industry. In the past twenty years, the industry has moved from handfuls to hundreds of journals dedicated to peer-evaluated research within the industry. Several of the more specific research journals dedicated to festivals/events include those in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:
LIST OF FESTIVAL AND
EVENT JOURNALS**

- Event Management
- International Journal of Event and Festival Management
- International Journal of Event Management Research
- International Journal of Hospitality and Event Management
- Journal of Convention and Event Tourism
- Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events

Although it is more often completed, access to this research can be an overwhelming, costly, and time intensive. Industry professionals have shared their desire for this research insight, however, the barriers prove too great. Publications such as IFEA's "i.e." Magazine are of such value as they provide condensed, and authentic industry assistance to real issues and problems. However, there is a great deal more available, and CBL is one way to move the festival/event industry from limited research integration to more active access to this insight.

There are several ways a course designed to teach students "research" could assist a festival/event with data/insight:

1. Students analyze the myriad of existing festival/event research and condense the findings into secondary research reports/executive summaries.
2. Students design recommended research methods for a festival/event to achieve specific objectives.
3. Students collect data during festivals/events (see Figure 1).
4. Students complete exploratory studies for the festival/events industry regarding global issues/topics of concern to many.
5. Students analyze previously collected data and report on the findings.

**FIGURE 1:
STUDENTS COLLECT DATA WITH FESTIVAL VOLUNTEERS/
VISITORS AT THE NATIONAL CHERRY FESTIVAL.**



and the festival/event industry brings. Connecting more closely will allow each to better achieve the respective industry and educational goals, and, in this research example, fully take advantage of the research available.

Therefore, reach out! Contact colleges/universities with hospitality/tourism/event curriculums to see how you can work together. These institutions do not need to be in your back door. Most of my past projects were an hour to three hours away. And, educators should do the same. We will continue to find ways to “connect” and create win-win partnerships that further both our missions.

In 2017, I will launch another CBL project outcome to further assist festival/event managers with access to both existing research (condensed) and exploratory research studies completed by students. Figure 2 highlights a website homepage that

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**FIGURE 2:
WEBSITE FOR SPRING 2017
LAUNCH ON ACCESS TO INDUSTRY RESEARCH VISITORS AT THE
NATIONAL CHERRY FESTIVAL.**



In the past several years, I have had the pleasure of working within the festival/event industry with students in each of the ways aforementioned. These interactions proved incredibly valuable to student learning and educational outcomes. In addition, the industry suggested there is incredible value to doing so as well. Event coordinator for the Grand Haven Arts Festival, Courtney Geurink, stated, “...students presented several quality (research) suggestions that were narrowed down and actually implemented at our event. We have continued to tweak the process the past couple of years, but have used the class’ work as the foundation for our survey methods as we move forward, testing and adjusting their suggestions. Overall, the

experience was phenomenal, as it saved me countless hours of time, provided knowledge and thought-processes that I may not have come up with on my own, and gave me a solid foundation to move forward from. In turn, it is my hope that by sharing this event experience with the students, they gained a better understanding of the facts and facets of not only creating a survey process but also implementing and analyzing the data. A truly win-win opportunity for all. ”

As a result of these positive interactions and outcomes there will be more opportunities than previously available to engage and benefit each other. It is an exciting opportunity and time to find ways to grow, learn, and develop as an industry utilizing each of the unique offerings both the colleges/universities

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will be launched in spring 2017 providing research access to the industry. Should you be interested in access, click on this link, and we will let you know when it is launched.

YES, I WANT ACCESS TO INDUSTRY RESEARCH

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