Hospitality Management Curriculum and Potential Market Competencies: An Assessment of the Compatibility of AUST Graduates with that of the Lebanese Hospitality Job Market

Hussin Jose Hejase[1*], Bassam Hamdar[1] and Fadila Maraouch[1]

[1]*Faculty of Business and Economics, American University of Science and Technology, Beirut, Lebanon.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author HJH managed the literature searches, designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors BH and FM supervised the analyses of the study and reviewed the statistical analysis. Author FM contributed in the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Background: The recurring dilemma encountered by the academic programs in the Hospitality Management field is how applicable these programs are to the realities of the job market. That is, matching academic preparation to desired competencies sought by the market. This paper provides a positive insight into the elements that have led to the success of the curriculum of the Hospitality Management Department at the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) in Lebanon. It is a unique case which offers lessons to be learned, and which are applicable on a larger scale.
Aims: This paper presents a brief description of the travel and tourism sector in Lebanon, and the requirements necessary in the development of adequate human resources to cover the market's needs. The paper provides necessary facts to assess the potentiality of the university's graduates and what the Faculty of Business and Economics of AUST can offer to create a value-added workforce.

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*Corresponding author: E-mail: hhejase@aust.edu.lb;

Study Design: This study is exploratory in nature using literature reviews and followed by a questionnaire survey which was distributed to a convenient sample of employers. Descriptive statistics was employed to offer a first-hand interpretation of the collected data. Statistical analysis using regression analysis and reliability calculations are used to study employers' choice of competencies observed in AUST graduates.

Place and Duration of Study: Sample: Lebanese hotels and restaurants, between June 2013 and October 2013.

Methodology: The study used a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches needed to build the necessary literature review, using secondary data and reported interviews with prominent hospitality employers and experts, in addition to a questionnaire survey conducted on 33 human resource managers who were willing to provide feedback on AUST's Hospitality Management employees' performance. Descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS-20 software.

Results: The analysis of the results and findings furnished significant proof necessary to provide evidence that the current curriculum at AUST fits the job-market environment in Lebanon.

Conclusion: This paper posits that continuous improvement in the Hospitality Management Curriculum is a must to keep abreast of the needs of the job market. It also offers recommendations and discloses limitations as to the definition of the mutual relationship between graduates and the hospitality employers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed a continuous change in the business environment and an increase in the globalization of the economy which resulted in the marketplace becoming increasingly complex, highly uncertain, competitive and transformational [1,2]. Subhash [1] contends that organizations which are able to develop and establish competitive differentiation will make the difference and take the lead. At this point, people provide organizations with a sustained competitive advantage (p. 37) and ultimately, these organizations have to take a proactive stance towards attaining corporate objectives by nurturing human resources practices oriented towards development. Liepec [2] asserts that new work positions will be created and offered mainly in the service sector, in general and the hospitality sector in particular. Therefore, market paradigms require new workers who are well-educated and appropriately trained (p. 139).

Human resource development is a continuous process that aims to develop people to acquire new competencies to meet the aforementioned market conditions. Nath and Raheja [3] believe that the change in the job roles due to changed processes needs a different competency requirement on part of the job incumbents, leading to different skill sets and performance measurement standards (p. 26). Consequently, "organizations have to look at competencies requirements for a job which will align, assess and reward individual behaviors" (p. 26).

According to Neary [4], competencies include a broad range of knowledge, attitudes and observable patterns of behavior which together account for the ability to deliver a specified professional service. While Subhash [1] contends that competencies are the critical

knowledge, abilities, skills and personal characteristics necessary for superior performance (p. 37), for creating competitive advantage [3] and for performing a role effectively [5].

New emerging business requirements are highly influencing companies that aim to be market leaders to change their behavior. Accordingly, employees' competencies must be redefined. Lipiec [2] stresses that the center of interest should be quality of products, technological changes, good customer service and low operational costs (p. 142). Consequently, since employees must be given the opportunity to acquire new skills, training and retraining programs should be offered.

Weber, Finley, Crawford and Rivera [6] contend that companies seek best fits for their operations. Most companies assess their applicants' knowledge by testing and assessing the latter intelligence. Companies may not be concerned with the technical skills and abilities of their entry-level managers because they will be later trained according to the said company's standards. In fact, "these companies want their future managers to have the soft skills needed to be successful within their organization's environment" (p. 354).

This paper presents a brief description of the competencies the various stakeholders (graduates, academics and employers) select and consider as the appropriate competencies needed for employees in the business field, in general and in the hospitality industry, in particular. Following is a review of the travel and tourism sector in Lebanon and the requirements necessary in the development of adequate human resources to cover the market's needs. The paper provides necessary facts to assess the potentiality of the university's graduates and in particular what the Faculty of Business and Economics of AUST can offer to create a value-added workforce.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay [7] classified competencies as hard skills or soft skills. Weber et al. [6] contend that the aforementioned skills are based on either three categories of skills required for effective managers, namely, technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills; or, on five competency domains necessary for management training namely, conceptual/creative, leadership, interpersonal, administrative and technical (p. 354). However, Weber et al. [6] defined four competency categories as soft skills, namely, achievement and action, impact and influence, managerial (team management and developing others) and personal effectiveness (p. 355). Furthermore, based on previous research works by Boyatzis (1982) and Stevens and Campion (1994) cited in Weber et al [6], Weber et al. defined four categories of soft skills related to performance effectiveness. These are identified in Exhibit 1:

Exhibit 1. Four categories of soft skills

1. Leadership/people/relationship skills: These skills are needed for negotiation, teamwork, customer service and conflict resolution.
2. Communication: These skills are associated with listening, presenting and verbalizing and non-verbal communications.
3. Management/organization: These skills include articulating goals, organizing people and resources, monitoring progress and resolving problems.
4. Cognitive skills and knowledge: These kills relate to creative thinking, making sound decisions and solving problems within the workplace.

Source: [6], pp. 355-356.

Management competencies are common to the area of hospitality management. For the last three decades, research on competencies needed for hospitality managers has been continuous [8, 9,10,11]. Many of the competencies were soft skills needed to develop good working relationships with customers and employees. Weber et al. [6] identified a set of soft skills competencies considered potential and vital for business including working effectively with employees and customers, setting a positive example, displaying honesty/commitment and developing creative solutions to problems (p. 359).

The hospitality industry, being a vital partner with other economic players, continues to grow in importance across the globe (For example, India, [12]; The Netherlands, [13]; Taiwan, [14]; China, [15]; Lebanon, [16]). Therefore, the demand for qualified workers has increased given that the hospitality and tourism industry has the potential to create rewarding, higher-paying jobs with opportunities for upper mobility [15]. However and according to Gehrels [13], "one of the concerns of the professionals from the industry raised is the lack of quality in hospitality (management) education and availability of trained staff" (p. 38). The aforementioned fact is supported by Tsai et al [14] who contended that "despite their best efforts, Hospitality Management programs are often criticized by employers as not meeting the needs of the hospitality industry" (p. 50).

Kay and Russette [10] claimed that since the first hospitality management program was established in the United States of America in the 1920s, hospitality management educators have looked to industry leaders for advice and feedback regarding the essential competencies that student graduates need for professional success. Things have not changed today and educators hold the responsibility to continuously identify and investigate the required competencies which best fit the current industry [17]. So, definitely, having a well-designed and utilized set of competencies in the hospitality field can benefit employers, employees and hospitality management education [14].

Towards the achievement of the aforementioned, many researchers have developed competencies for persons entering the job market from educational institutions [14,18,19,20].

Wang [21] established that education, language skills, professional appearance and a hard-working attitude were four basic requirements in the food and beverage departments, in Taiwan. Wu [22] found that technical and problem solving competencies were essential for chain restaurant managers, with marketing management most in demand. While, Lin [23] performed a study in which he correlated hotel management courses with those of industry-required competencies. He found that there should be a balance between general education and specialized education and that a continuing dialogue about course content between educators and industry practitioners was crucial in keeping curriculum updated to meet the needs of the industry.

Tsai et al. [14] conducted a study that evaluated sixty competency statements by comparing perceptions of both hospitality professionals and hospitality management educators regarding competencies needed in hotels. Forty-four of the sixty competencies reached consensus. Both parties agreed that leadership, interpersonal and conceptual competencies were the most important for entry-level lodging managerial trainees. Three competency statements were ranked in top ten. These statements were:

* Communicate efficiently (orally and in writing)
* Employ Emotional Intelligence skills such as emotional control and passion
* Understand unique characteristics of lodging industry (p. 66)

Bosko, Dekker and Vander Hoek [24] asserted the university's role by emphasizing the importance of the connection of the curriculum with the professional hospitality world. They stressed education interdependence of the progress of the professional practice personalized by lecturers who join the university as staff members after a former career in the hospitality industry. As for Gehrels [13], he found out that the hotel upper segment restaurant managers held a wide range of value systems and driving powers. Ten values were identified including: conformity (guest oriented, highly disciplined), self-direction (curiosity), hedonism (enjoying work), achievement (pride at work, high motivation, striving for perfection, striving to be the best as a company, passion for their profession, being respected) (p. 46).

Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan [25], based their research on the fact that the literature uses a wide variation regarding the interpretation of competencies; however, in their intent to shed light on the relationship between skills, competencies and learning outcomes, they referred to the competencies delineated in the Tuning Project that was initiated in 2000 and whose purpose was to "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe". The Tuning Project describes three types of generic competencies, namely, "Instrumental competencies, Interpersonal competencies and Systemic competencies" (p. 5). It is worth mentioning that Fung and Wong [26] defined generic competencies as "transferable, multifunctional knowledge, skills and attitudes that people could learn and develop in different ways and learning environments, and apply across a variety of job and life contexts(p. 81)." Kennedy et al [25] claimed that competencies chosen in the Tuning Project were of general nature and further analysis was needed to understand their context. Moreover, they believed that there did not appear to be any rules or guidelines for the writing of competencies since these competencies were written in terms of ability, capacity, skills and commitment, or in terms of knowledge. However, at the end, they agreed that "an individual who has the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude may be described as being competent in their particular occupation. (p. 11).

The purpose of the Tuning Project was to initiate a joint dialogue with social groups, to be followed by deliberations with stakeholder institutions. Its potential benefits arise from gathering 5183 questionnaires from student graduates, 944 from employers and 998 from academics. The merit of such project was translated in the open and continuous dialogue among the involved parties, whereby, the potential results would reflect how each of the three respondent parties viewed the set of exposed competencies. Exhibit 2 summarizes the final outcome of classifying 17 different generic competencies ranked in order of importance as viewed by academics, graduates and employers.

Villa et al. [27] pointed out that academics gave a rank of "1" to basic general knowledge, while both graduates and employers ranked the same item as "12". Moreover, the authors showed that statistically, employers' and graduates' rankings were more similar among them than that of the academics' ranking. Compared to graduates, most relevant differences were: Elementary computing competences (4th position for graduates and 16th position for academics). Compared to employers, the most relevant difference was again interpersonal competences (5th for employers and 14th for academics) (p. 39).

The aforementioned results reflect that there are differences in the way employers perceive competencies necessary for their entry level student graduates and that these differences confirm that there is a lack of communication between the job market and academia. These differences are manifested in all fields, including that of the hospitality management. Tsai et al. [14] contended that despite their best efforts, hospitality management programs were

often criticized by employers as not meeting the needs of the hospitality industry (p. 50). While Gehrels [13] stressed on the ongoing need to emphasize the "schools connection to industry". "Gaining practical and real-life experience, thereby, facilitates the learning opportunities provided in companies and eventually understanding the connection of professional life to the world around it" (p. 47). Furthermore, Gehrels [13] drew attention to education's responsibility to properly and realistically prepare students for the hospitality industry, while acknowledging the role that companies can have in that process. As for Subhash [1], he asserts that "the hotel business is an employee-intensive and quality-driven service industry. The competitiveness and productivity of the industry depend primarily on the skill levels and professionalism of its employees. Consequently, the constituents within the hotel sector recognize that education, vocational training and human resource development are necessary to ensure their future" (p. 37).

Exhibit 2. Generic competencies

Label	Description	Academics	Graduates	Employers	Grad & Empl.
Imp1	Capacity for analysis & synthesis	2	1	3	1
Imp2	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	5	3	2	3
Imp4	Basic general knowledge	1	12	12	12
Imp5	Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession	8	11	14	13
Imp6	Oral and written communication in your native language	9	7	7	5
Imp7	Knowledge of a second language	15	14	15	15
Imp8	Elementary computing skills	16	4	10	8
Imp9	Research skills	11	15	17	16
Imp10	Capacity to learn	3	2	1	2
Imp12	Critical and self-critical abilities	6	10	9	10
Imp13	Capacity to adapt to new situations	7	5	4	4
Imp14	Capacity for generating new ideas (creativity)	4	9	6	7
Imp16	Decision-making	12	8	8	9
Imp18	Interpersonal skills	14	6	5	6
Imp20	Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team	10	13	11	11
Imp22	Appreciation of diversity and multi-culturality	17	17	16	17
Imp28	Ethical commitment	13	16	13	14

Source: [27]. Chapter Three. Table 6, pp. 38-39.

3. LEBANON

Lebanon is a small Middle Eastern country of 10,425 km^2. The Lebanese travel and tourism industry's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fluctuates between 10-12% of it. This industry generates around 175,000 jobs, accounting for around 10% of total employment in the country [28].

Since the 1960s, the golden days for the hospitality industry, Lebanon has been a major player in the highly competitive market for attracting tourists from all around the world. This trend, even with the recurring problems in the region, continues and Lebanon is still a competitor to worry about when compared to European and Gulf players.

Survivability of Lebanese hospitality industry is supported by the existence of major well-known chains like, Four Season Hotels, Movenpick, Hilton, Intercontinental, etc. However, the major pillar of the competition is the personality that the Lebanese possess and exert when dealing with their guests; a personality trait that is well developed, though it is simply an innate characteristic inherently found in the heart of the Lebanese culture.

Lebanon was declared "One of the best party destinations in the Middle East" by the British edition of Conde Nast Traveler, while Beirut was named among the "Top 10 cities in the world" by Travel and Leisure. "In the last three or four years, Beirut truly regained its mantle as the Paris of the Middle East," said Ian Bradley of the Association of Independent Tour Operators in U.K. He added, "It has old world charm, mountains, beaches and incredible ruins." Finally, Mathieson of SRI said, "The Lebanese tourist industry is very resilient. They know how to adapt and recover and will do it again" [29]. Furthermore, The Lebanese Inner Circle Blog [30] reported that the New York Times had set out to find the top 44 places to visit in 2009. The first on the list was Beirut (Beyrouth); the name appears under luxury, foods and party categories.

Toward the end of July 2009, CNN did a report on whether Beyrouth was the Best Party City in the world. One must recall that in 2006, before the war with Israel, Beyrouth was named by NY based Travel Magazine as the ninth best city to visit. While the west gets its news on Lebanon's nightlife through word of mouth among its expatriates, usually following social media announcements and news, one can simply follow– check their Facebook group. As an update, the British Sunday Times has thoroughly re- affirmed their view of Lebanon, labeling "Lebanon as the best 'country' to visit in 2010".

More comments are heard around the globe that fortify Lebanon's position in the international hospitality and tourism arena, including comments made by Francesco Fragialli, UNWTO Secretary-General, about Lebanese fortitude and resilience [31]. Moreover, according to the Huffpost Arts & Culture [32], in their *Huffington Post*, reported a book titled, *Art Cities of the Future* which named Lebanon among its profiling of influential places for art across the globe. The 336-page book selected cities according to their impact on contemporary art, their history of artistic importance and the overall cultural climate.

Nevertheless, the continuous crisis that characterized the environment of the Lebanese production sectors, including the tourism and hotel industry, contributed to the urgency of instituting crisis management schemes capable of supporting these firms; hence, enabling them to survive the drastic consequences of conflicts and war. Lebanon has endured painful hits, starting with the Lebanese Civil War that ended in 1990, followed by Israeli attacks in 1993 and 1996, then the Liberation War in the South in 2000, the series of assassinations,

the withdrawal of the Syrian troops, the July 2006 war and lately the Syrian conflict. Even with these hard hits, the Lebanese blue and white collar workers have pushed forward, supported by their acclaimed firm fighting spirit, to contain the consequences.

3.1 The Tourism Sector in Lebanon

The tourism sector in Lebanon has been an important contributor to the local economy, representing a major source of income and employment. The direct contribution of tourism to GDP, which includes internal tourism consumption and purchases by tourism providers, accounted for 9.8% of Lebanon's GDP in 2011, as compared to a 9.4% contribution in 2009; however, the total contribution which reflects the wider impact of tourism on the economy accounted for 35.2% of GDP [16]. The Lebanese Government's reconstruction efforts as to this sector, for the last two decades, have been astonishing; it revived the service sector, including tourism and hospitality clusters. 632,217 tourists came to Lebanon by 1998, then 956,000 came in 2002 and a high record of 1,278,469 persons in 2004— tourism contribution to GDP amounted to 10% [33]. Another record was achieved in the year 2010 with 2,168,000 tourists arriving to Lebanon; however, lower numbers were recorded in 2012, reaching 1,365,000 tourists (see Fig. 1). Since the beginning of 2013, the tourism sector has shown continuous weakening signs as a consequence of the Syrian conflict and its collateral damage on Lebanon. The number of tourists reached its lowest level since the first half of 2008; it totaled 623,864 in the first half of 2013, constituting a decrease of 12.6% as compared to the same period of 2012 (see Fig. 1). Also, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNTWO) indicated that Lebanon registered the fourth steepest decline in tourists' arrivals in the world in 2012 with a 17.5% decrease from the previous year [34]. This loss is mainly linked to the lower arrivals of Arab tourists (23.2% year-to-year) who remain dissuaded by the unsafe land travel and the warnings issued by their governments regarding visits to Lebanon (including Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait). According to the Christian Science Monitor's correspondent Nicholas Blanford [35], six Gulf countries slapped bans on their citizens' traveling to Lebanon, citing the worsening security climate as the main cause. The aforementioned low percentage reflected negatively on the hospitality sector. In fact, the occupancy rate of five- and four-star hotels within Beirut was at 58% in the first half of 2013, against 65% in the same period of 2012 [36].

Amid the aforementioned tourism expectations and although the latest tourism data covering the first eight months of 2013 showed that the sector is still subjected to the adverse local and regional conditions [37], Minister of Tourism, Mr. Fady Abboud [38], contends that the Ministry has planned a new strategy for Lebanon to create an outreach program that entails the invitation of more than 15 million Lebanese who are living in the diaspora to visit their homeland country. Mr. Abboud believes that Lebanon cannot afford directing its efforts toward the Arab Gulf countries only. Henceforth, the tourism industry will continue to be a main contributor to the Lebanese economy. Furthermore, Tony Ramy, general secretary of the syndicate of owners of restaurants, cafes, nightclubs and pastries in Lebanon, asserts that about a hundred establishments had closed shop in the period of August to December, 2013. He added, "Industry professionals are no longer able to cover their expenses which lead to a series of pay cuts, lay off and bankruptcies with an accumulation of debts and interests in the banks" (p. 25) [39]. However, there is hope as professed by Bahaa Issam Fatairy, director of PR services and business development, Genesis Consulting, "Lebanon has the best touristic platform regionally and internationally despite the political instability. Aside from the traditional tourism channels, medical tourism is on the rise" [39].
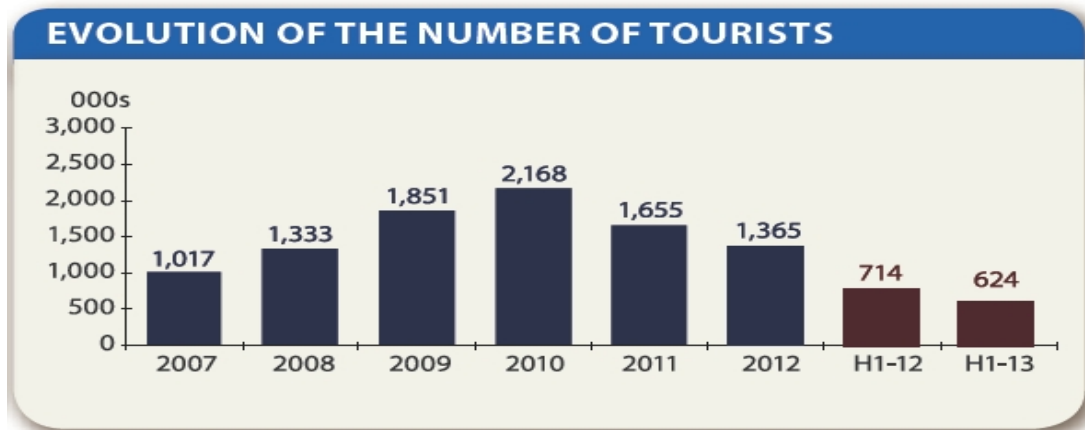
EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS

000s

2007	1,017
2008	1,333
2009	1,851
2010	2,168
2011	1,655
2012	1,365
H1-12	714
H1-13	624

Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of tourists in Lebanon, 2013

3.1.1 Tourism infrastructure

As for the international and local tourists' stay in hotels, furnished apartments, homes, beach resorts, country clubs and chalets, the following statistics were gathered. According to the Ministry of Tourism, there are 300 hotels in Lebanon with more than 15,526 rooms, 25,805 beds and 99 furnished apartment hotels with more than 5,609 beds; more are under construction. Moreover, there are 710 restaurants and night clubs, 143 car rental agencies, 72 travel agencies, 68 beaches and resorts, concentrated along the 35 km belt between Beirut and Byblos to the north (Ministry of Tourism, 2008; cited in [40], p. 9). There are six ski resorts equipped with a total of 46 ski lifts and a combined length of 30 km. At least 44 hotels and country clubs are located in close proximity to the ski resorts. Furnished apartments and chalets are rented, but for varying lengths of time. The distribution of the hotels in Lebanon by category is delineated in Table 1. There are almost 3,200 furnished apartments in Beirut, Mont Lebanon and North Lebanon; 67%, being in Beirut. Finally, according to the year 1997 statistics, there were 62,967 residential units used as second homes. While not all of these homes were tourist oriented, a large proportion was used by the Lebanese and non-Lebanese during vacation seasons [41].

Table 1. Hotels distribution by category, 2010

Region	No. of 1 star hotels	No. of 2 stars hotels	No. of 3 stars hotels	No. of 4 stars hotels	No. of 5 stars hotels	No. of Hotels by Region	% of Total
Beirut	-	10	19	41	18	88	26.3%
Keserwan	5	21	22	26	2	71	22.8%
Metn	1	18	12	9	4	44	13.2%
Baabda, Aley&Chouf	4	10	12	10	-	36	10.8%
Jbeil	5	4	10	1	-	20	6.0%
North	11	21	10	6	-	48	14.4%
Bekaa	2	5	2	1	2	12	3.6%
South	3	3	2	2	-	10	3.0%
Total	**31**	**92**	**89**	**96**	**26**	**334**	**100.0%**
% of total	**9.3%**	**27.5%**	**26.6%**	**28.7%**	**7.8%**	**100.0%**	

Source: Syndicat des Hoteliers au Liban, 2008; cited in [42].

3.1.2 Human resources requirements

During the Civil War, Lebanon lost more than 90% of its professional hospitality and tourism workforce, mainly to Arab and African countries. The strife and antagonism came to an end in 1990 and during the next six years, the rebuilding of the hospitality infrastructure, as well as of the required workforce, was in full swing. In the same period of time, hundreds of well trained, experts and professional tourism workers, of all ranks, returned to strengthen the efforts of reconstruction. These workers brought with them a multicultural flavor to the already well developed Lebanese culture of hospitality.

Awad [43] estimated that the overall human resources requirements in the tourism sector to increase between 1995 and 2010 at an average annual rate of 5.8%. Other figures show that the total tourism employment would grow from 41,500 in 2000 to 68,600 in 2010 and the demand would be for 2,700 new tourism workers each year. According to IDAL [16], tourism in Lebanon constitutes one of the largest employer in the country: generating 125,000 direct jobs in 2011 and 448,500 direct and indirect jobs in total (9.4% and 33.4% of total employment respectively) (Para 2). Furthermore, Marcopolis.net [44] reported that travel and tourism sector generated almost 10% of total employment in 2012. However, Saleh [45] reports in the Lebanese As-Safir newspaper that the President of the Union of Tourism Institutions and Head of the Hotel Owners Association in Lebanon, Pierre Ashkar revealed that "the sector sacked more than 70% of its seasonal workers, approximately 14,000 people, most of whom are college and university students. Furthermore, non-seasonal hotels have, so far, let go of 25% of their employees, or approximately 5,000 workers."

Moreover, research has shown that there is a disparity between the demand and supply of tourism workers; what the market is demanding can only be covered by at most 48%. It is worth noting here that the new tourism employees are not exclusively hired from tourism/hospitality graduates [46].

According to Al-Tamimi [47], "one of the most important elements of success of any country in tourism is the human element and its qualifications in interacting with foreign visitors and providing expected services. Therefore, making available personnel trained in providing hospitality services is important in developing the tourism sector. The manners in which tourists are treated vary among Arab countries, with Lebanese and Tunisian specialists registering the highest scores" (Para 4).

In 2011, Lebanon National Employment Office (NEO) and ILO [48] issued a national report which stated that "workers in Lebanese hotels and restaurants nationwide are typically young, male and single. Of the more than 13,280 hotel and restaurant workers surveyed for the NEO Report in 2010, 18.1% were female and 81.9% were male. 44.7% of hotel and restaurant workers were aged 20-29; 61.2% of workers were 20-34 years old. In addition, approximately 89.4% of restaurant and hotel workers in Lebanon were Lebanese, 4.9% were Syrian, 0.9% were Sudanese, and 0.6% were Palestinian. On average, the education level of restaurant and hotel workers was higher than that of the labor force as a whole" (cited in [49], p. 10). "Lebanese and non-Lebanese workers in the services market assume different tasks, with Lebanese generally holding managerial positions while non-Lebanese are mainly hired to perform low level jobs such as cleaning, washing the dishes, delivery, loading and unloading equipment/items etc..." (p. 11) [49].

3.1.3 Market challenges in the hospitality industry

The Lebanese hospitality and tourism sectors have suffered the most in the last three years of political instability. However, there is an interesting phenomenon in that restaurants and hotels are shutting off their operations in certain areas near Downtown and sprouting in areas that are at a distance. More precisely, the market's challenges, described next, are common critical factors to all nations and have affected the welfare of the industry.

3.1.3.1 Turnover

A more comprehensive approach to turnover has been adopted by most organizations; they view turnover as a process rather than a symptom. According to Riegel [50], turnover is a series of related events. He asserts that, "turnover is and has been a pervasive problem for the hospitality industry. There is evidence that turnover rates can reach as high as 200 or 300 percent in rank-and file positions and management turnover, at least at the operations level, can approach 100 percent in some organizations." To Wolfington and Wolfington [15] high turnover rates, combined with rapid industry expansion, are creating a widening gap between supply and demand for qualified workers who understand international standards and best practices (pp. 20-21). The Lebanese hospitality industry suffers from the same consequences, though to a lesser extent. Lebanese owners give special attention to employees who prove themselves to be an asset to their institutions; a caring attitude that has been observed and which has been reflected in the positive impact depicted in the retaining of middle-level managers.

3.1.3.2 Employer of last resort symptom

As implied, the hospitality industry possesses a strong image as being a potential employer, but despite unprecedented efforts to change its image, the industry is frequently perceived as the "employer of last resort" rather than the "employer of choice". This notion is supported by much evidence from the field that characterizes its workforce as transient workforce. That is, employees view working at hotels as something to do while seeking something better. In Lebanon, only 48% of the hospitality and tourism market is covered by hospitality management graduates. That is, 52% of the workforce is transient workers supplied from other business majors [43,46].

3.1.3.3 Intent to leave symptom

McFillin, Riegel, and Enz, [51] suggested that intent to leave the job is a function of two interrelated factors "the level of job satisfaction and the degree of personal commitment to the organization." However, today the aforementioned symptom, which contributes to the turnover process, suggests that organizational governance and culture should be modified to accommodate the workforce; thus, providing leadership, guidance and resources. Miller [52] suggests that "having satisfied customers leads to increased revenue and increased brand awareness. Having satisfied employees is the key contributor to a companies' success — especially in tough economic times" (Para 1). Moreover, Miller adds: "Satisfied employees are excited to come to work, are more willing to go the extra mile to please customers and are great brand advocates" (Para 4). Haskett [53] suggested that having an internal work quality would trigger a process of employees' satisfaction that in turn is translated to customer loyalty and profitability. Hejase, AbouChedid and Haddad [54] found that significant gaps exist between what Lebanese managers and their employees seek in their business relationships. Many Lebanese hospitality organizations lack the strategic outlook to

care for the welfare of their employees. Consequently, Lebanese employees possess strong feelings to leave their jobs, while continuously looking for organizations whose leaderships have clear policies about employees' support, respect and which offer jobs with clear career tracks.

3.1.3.4 Human resources view

Subhash [1] asserts that "organizations are required to adopt proactive development programs towards attainment of corporate objectives by nurturing a development oriented culture. Human resource development (HRD) deals with creating conditions that enable people to get the best out of themselves and their lives" (p. 37).The concept of HR development is more advanced in western countries than in the rest of the world. Though there is no agreement on one single definition of the subject, understanding HR development has been usually understood through terms such as the individual, work group, organization or work process; however, these terms are incomprehensive when trying to recognize HR development across various countries (p. 22) [55]. Moreover, very little focus has been given to HR development and human capital investment in the Middle East and other developing countries— of course Lebanon is one of these countries [56]. In Lebanon, HR development mainly focuses on training and development. Also, there is no clear differentiation among HR, HR Management and HR Development in the job market. At the university level, HR development is understood as part of the Faculty of Business curriculum [56].

SRI et al. [46] found that few companies in Lebanon have or understand modern human resources practices and systems. Their findings are based on a sample of 31 well- known companies from the hospitality industry.

"Increasingly, companies in a wide variety of businesses are finding that people can be their number one source of competitive advantage. But it's not enough for leaders to say that people are important, or to put issues high on their mental to-do list. What is needed are organizations that are designed and managed –from the boardroom to the front line-in ways that optimize talent attraction, retention and performance" (pp.1-2) [57].

3.1.3.5 Training and development

Traditionally, organizations had specialized work functions and detailed job descriptions. Today, organizations are emphasizing versatility rather than specialization [58]; versatility that is provided by cross-functional training through job rotation, personnel trading between work operations and peer training. Cross-functional training can provide the talent base that ensures operations to continue and run smoothly. It is worth noting that training the workforce takes place through the implementation of a mixture of techniques designed within the framework of the organization's strategy.

SRI et al. [46] found that workforce training does not seem to be a priority for Lebanese tourism companies; 63% of the restaurants, 48% of the hotels and none of the travel agencies surveyed have an official in-house training or a training department. The firms that are most likely to provide formal and systematic training are those linked to international chains.

Moreover, Nath and Raheja [3] contended that "organizations have to move from providing traditional training to competency based training whose focus is on imparting specific

competencies to perform present and future role and identification of competencies which are cost effective to select versus to train" (p. 29).

3.1.3.6 Employers' expectation of prospective lebanese hospitality graduates

For the purpose of the current paper, employer's requirements criteria was gathered from a group of Lebanese and foreign hospitality industry experts who continuously recruit hospitality and tourism graduates. According to Karaoui [59], editor of Bayt.com virtual job fair site, "employers are primarily looking for candidates who have the right kind of experience, can do the job and will fit in well with the company or hotel culture" (p. 24). Also, Mr. George J. Beyrouti, Country General Manager for Sodexo Services-Liban, asserts that graduates should: "rely on judgment of the facts for decision making, educate themselves about different segments and aspects of the hospitality industry, be conscientious about their strengths and weaknesses, be positive thinkers, team players, loyal and professional and pay attention to details" (p. 26) [60]. In addition, Mr. Sebastian Braun, Restaurant and Bars Director of the establishment Le Gray (5-star hotel in Beirut), contends that graduates should: "start modest, acquire necessary skills and knowledge, accumulate experience, be self-motivated with positive personality and behavior, have willingness to give their best and be willing to learn" [60]. On the other hand, Mr. Jean Paul Ramy, Managing Director of Blends (food development and management company), believes that graduates must "have a sense of leadership, have experience and know-how by working while studying, love their job, be committed and have keenness to grow within the company" [60]. While, Mr. Peter Goddard, Founder and Managing Director of TRI Hospitality Consulting, contends that graduates "must be dedicated, have necessary skills and be committed and hardworking" (p. 29) [61].

Moreover, Mr. Mounir El Khoury, Chairman and CEO of Market Key (Management Consultancy and Solutions company), advises graduates to "capitalize on their skills, experience and qualifications" (p. 30) [62]. Finally, Mr. Michel Salameh, Training and Internship Consultant of Educom Overseas, asserts that graduates "must have training and experience, own good education and capitalize on developed personal traits including culture, team work and leadership". Furthermore, Salameh believes that the service leadership and employability traits that the hospitality industry emphasizes include:

- "A positive and caring attitude
- A good work ethic
- Honesty and responsibility
- Good-time management skills
- Taking initiative when required and
- Having multi-cultural flexibility" [63].

3.1.4 Hospitality management programs

In Lebanon, the academic hospitality management programs have been evolving at a steady pace since 1994. A specialized workforce has been under preparation via two sources: technical schools and universities. Graduates of the hospitality management programs are in high demand and play an important role not only in Lebanon but in the surrounding region as well. These graduates' distinction, in comparison to others in the region, is attributed to the high standards of their preparation coupled with solid experience. The graduates' preparation programs use state-of-the art expertise, technology and laboratories and are

continuously up-to-date with the latest practices supported by hands-on experts who form part of the curriculum development efforts. However, SRI et al. [46] found that the totality of the graduating students majoring in hospitality management only covers 48% of the market's demand.

3.1.4.1 Hospitality management program at the American University of Science & Technology

In its continuous effort to overcome the current lag of hospitality management graduates stated earlier and in response to the local and regional hospitality industry's demands, the American University of Science and Technology (AUST, Beirut, Lebanon) has vigorously planned and developed a world-class competitive and comprehensive program in Hospitality Management. This program covers all areas of hospitality management and is targeted at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Its mission is to lead Lebanese institutions in an effort to modernize and create a versatile workforce capable of meeting the demands of the hospitality industry, while concurrently integrating new developments and findings in the field into its Academic Curriculum and Potential Research agenda.

3.1.4.1.1 The Curriculum and its Challenges

Enrollment:

The Hospitality Management curriculum at AUST was launched in the Fall Semester 1999-2000. An initial cohort of 90 students joined the program. In the Fall Semester 2000-2001, the program was modified to include practical internships so as to meet the market's requirements. The number of students rose to 292. Since then, the sophomore year students enrolled in the program rose to an unanticipated figure of 374 in the Fall Semester 2002-2003. The number of students enrolled, since then, followed an average trend of 260 students. The different and continuous incidents occurring in Lebanon, characterized by turbulent political and security issues, caused an unstable environment to the hospitality industry which was reflected in the major brain drainage of hospitality workers to the neighboring countries. Consequently, enrollment in the Hospitality Management major suffered a 10-15% decrease.

Program:

The Hospitality Management curriculum which is currently adopted at AUST under the umbrella of the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE) is presented in Exhibit 3.

The Hospitality Management courses are distributed within the following five categories:

1. General Graduation Requirements
2. Free Liberal Arts Electives (general knowledge area)
3. Business Graduation Requirements
4. Hospitality Management Major Requirements and
5. Technical Electives.

Exhibit 3. Sample program of study

<div>

Faculty of Business and Economics
Hospitality Management
TOTAL REQUIRED CREDITS FOR GRADUATION WITH A BS DEGREE
(105 CREDITS STARTING SOPHOMORE YEAR)

GENERAL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (24 CREDITS)

Code		Description	Cr
CSI	200	Computer Literacy	3
ENG	201	Composition and Rhetoric I	3
ENG	202	Composition and Rhetoric II	3
ENG	205	English Communication Skills Arabic	3
HMS	220	Arabic Communication Skills	3
MAT	220	Mathematics for Business	3
MGT	300	Business Communication	3

FREE LIBERAL ARTS ELECTIVES (9 Credits)
Students select 3 courses in the areas of humanities, social
sciences and natural sciences.

BUSINESS GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (33 Credits)

ACC	201	Principles of Accounting I	3
ACC	202	Principles of Accounting II	3
ECO	201	Introduction to Microeconomics	3
ECO	202	Introduction to Macroeconomics	3
FIN	301	Finance I	3
MGT	210	Management Principles	3
MGT	330	Business Law I	3
MIS	305	Management Information Systems I	3
MKT	201	Principles of Marketing	3
STA	210	Statistics and Probability for Business I	3
STA	310	Statistics and Probability for Business II	3

HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT MAJOR REQUIREMENTS (33 Credits)

HOM	210	Introduction to Hospitality Management	3
HOM	215	Hygiene & Sanitation in Food Service	3
HOM	220	Operations	3
HOM	222	Food Production Principles I	1
HOM	224	Internship - Restaurant & Bar Service	1
HOM	225	Internship - Front Desk	3
HOM	260	Food and Beverage Services	3
HOM	260L	Front Office Operations I	1
HOM	301	Front Office Operations Laboratory I	3
HOM	321	Hospitality Facilities Management	3
HOM	330	Food and Beverage Controls Management	3
HOM	410	Housekeeping	3
HOM	499	Food Production Principles II	3
		Senior Project in Hospitality Management	

TECHNICAL ELECTIVES (Choice of 6 Credits)
Students select 2 courses in advanced Hospitality Management areas or from other Business
majors.
(See Exhibit 4)

</div>

Exhibit 4. Areas of technical elective courses

ECO 310 Managerial Economics	HOM 396 Seminar in HOM
HOM 305 Hospitality Information Systems Management	HOM 412 Catering and Banqueting
HOM 310 Restaurant Operations	HOM 415 International Travel and Tourism
HOM 325 Marketing Management for Hospitality Industry	HOM 420 Purchasing for the Hospitality
HOM 360 Revenue Management	HOM 425 Ethics in the Hospitality Industry
HOM 380 Business Protocol & Etiquette	HOM 435 Strategic Hotel Management
HOM 395 Special Topics in the Hospitality Industry	
MGT 401 Total Quality Management	
MKT 460 Services Marketing	

Note: The special topics and seminar courses cover new trends in Hospitality Management, including Hospitality franchising, multi-cultural readiness and hospitality business psychology, among the emergent developing new topics.

As observed in Exhibits 3 and 4, there are 13 – 15 courses that contribute to hospitality management students' profile. These courses encompass major areas of specialization, including front office skills, back office skills, housekeeping and operations since, practical skills are part of the requirements. Accordingly, students have to enroll in practical training in the areas of front desk and restaurant and bar services. A total of 450 practice hours have to be demonstrated and recorded in order for a student to graduate. Furthermore, students have to conduct a research or feasibility project that integrates all skills and knowledge obtained from the program, resulting in a Capstone Project that is to be presented at the end of the senior year as a requirement to be eligible to graduate.

Besides the fact that more than 60% of AUST's hospitality students work as they study in most of the top brand hotels and restaurants, all hospitality students are offered an opportunity to travel abroad to join several internship programs for a semester, as apprentices in jobs, in the United States of America, (through an academic agreement with the American Hospitality Academy of South Carolina, USA; an academy that is considered one of the world's most well-known and respected providers of hospitality training and cultural exchange programs [64]). Every semester, resorts located in South Carolina, Florida and California receive 10 to 15 students as trainees.

Furthermore, as of March 31st 2011, the Faculty of Business and Economics, including the Hospitality Management Program, has been accredited by the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE), which is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), in the USA, as a programmatic accrediting organization.

Faculty:

The Hospitality Management Department at AUST consists of six full-time members with Doctorate degrees and eight part-time Master degree holders; all are working professionals in the said field and have a minimum of 10-15 years of experience. The following areas of specialty are currently offered: Nutrition, Safety and Sanitation, Food Operations, Culinary Art, Wineunology, Housekeeping, Front Office, Food and Beverage Services, Restaurant and Hotel Operations, Purchasing and Cost Control and Travel and Tourism.

Unquestionably, the search is continuous for expertise in contemporary areas, such as Casino Management, Events Development and Management, Crisis Management, Revenue Management, Resort Operations, etc. Newly emergent topics are frequently covered by adjunct faculty who work as top figures in the top 20 hotels, restaurants including: Chefs, Human Resource Officers, Ministry's advisors, owners of hotels and restaurants and consultants.

Laboratories:

Since its inception, the Hospitality Management Department has been aware that the major fundamentals are intrinsic to the curriculum. Consequently, great attention has been put into developing adequately supported and equipped laboratory facilities. The Hospitality Management Department understands the market's requirements that necessitate a workforce with capabilities in theory and practice.

Subsequently, three laboratories have been prepared, equipped and maintained at AUST. At present, one kitchen laboratory has been established where the fundamentals of food preparation operations are executed; it is equipped with state-of-the-art machinery and tools. The second laboratory is where the fundamentals of fine dining, food and beverage services and events management are practiced. The total area of both laboratories is 120 square meters, divided equally. A third laboratory, equipped with state-of-the-art Information Technology facilities, serves as a training center for preparing students in the use of Front Desk systems such as the Fidelio System. A fourth laboratory has been proposed whereby the fundamentals of housekeeping could be practiced; however, currently, students are sent on training sessions to prominent hotels and restaurants to fulfill their course assignments in this respect.

3.1.4.2 Employment opportunities

Perhaps one of the recurrent challenges in the survivability of an academic curriculum is the ability to address its prospective employment opportunities. In what follows, the potential employment areas for hospitality management graduates in Lebanon and the region are described. What characterizes AUST's Hospitality Management curriculum is the ability to walk the talk, i.e., match required competencies with educational outcomes in an intertwined approach of theory and practice.

As a start and upon the completion of their studies, 64% of AUST students have jobs in prominent restaurants, hotels, tourism facilities in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. AUST's students play active roles in marketing, consulting, front desk management, restaurant operations, kitchen operations, event management, housekeeping, bar management, facility management and quality auditing.

Currently, in Lebanon, there are 31 tourism and hospitality technical schools of which 14 are public and 17 are privately owned. More than fifteen universities offer majors in hospitality and tourism. Total graduates from all the aforementioned institutions are around 1500 students. However, AUST is proud of the fact that it is of no surprise to encounter at least one AUST hospitality management graduate or student in any of Lebanon's top twenty hospitality and tourism chains and organizations (both the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics and the Chairperson of the said department constantly contact top managers, hunting for job opportunities in addition to the adjunct faculty members who often recruit the students). In fact, it is worth mentioning that from every five jobs offered in the

Lebanese market, AUST's students occupy one. It happens that AUST is the largest university program in student numbers, 260 on the average as mentioned earlier. All other 14 institutions have between 100 to 200 students (Ahmad Jammal, Director General of Higher Education, Ministry of Education & Higher Education, personal communication, December 14, 2013).

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research is needed to investigate hospitality industry's ideas and insight into the quality of graduates necessary to fit the industry in Lebanon and possibly abroad. Data needed for the current research was collected using a survey questionnaire that targeted a convenient sample of employers whose selection was based on their willingness to participate in the survey and that they have employed AUST students. Results obtained were sorted and analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions, SPSS, an IBM product acquired by IBM in 2009 (p. 58) [65].

4.1 Survey Design

A survey to collect feedback from potential employers who have already employed AUST students was conducted. A questionnaire of fourteen questions was designed; these questions were divided into parts, the first part characterizes the employers' requests as related to employees' attitude, initiatives, and skills; while the second addresses the level of possibility of employers hiring more AUST students and how they compare AUST students to others from different academic institutions. All questions in part one, were to be rated by employers according to the following characterizations: unacceptable, needs improvement, satisfactory, above average and outstanding. Questions from part two were to be rated using dichotomous "yes or no" scale and triad rating using "less, equal or better" criteria. The questionnaire was validated by four hospitality managers. Then it was sent to the sample of employers asking their Human Resources officer to complete the questionnaire and return it in a sealed envelope. The sample size was 50. Response rate was 66% (only 33 employers answered back). Selected employers have hired AUST's students for the last five years and employ more than 5 students at their premises.

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Results are grouped in a set of Tables and Figures and findings are exposed using descriptive as well as causal statistics. Table 2 shows that there is at least an "above the average" match between AUST's students' preparation attained through their hospitality management program and the realities of the Lebanese business market's requirements. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the employees' work met the demands of the job, rated as satisfactory, above average or outstanding, while only 9% needed improvement.

Table 2. Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Needs Improvement	3	9.1
	Satisfactory	3	9.1
	Above Average	15	45.5
	Outstanding	12	36.4
	Total	**33**	**100.0**

Table 3 and Fig. 2 show that ninety-one percent (91%) of the employees were rated as more than satisfactory in their ability to make work-related decisions, with 9% needing improvement; while Table 4 and Fig. 3 show that all 33 employees were categorized as at least satisfactory in their attitude to accepting change.
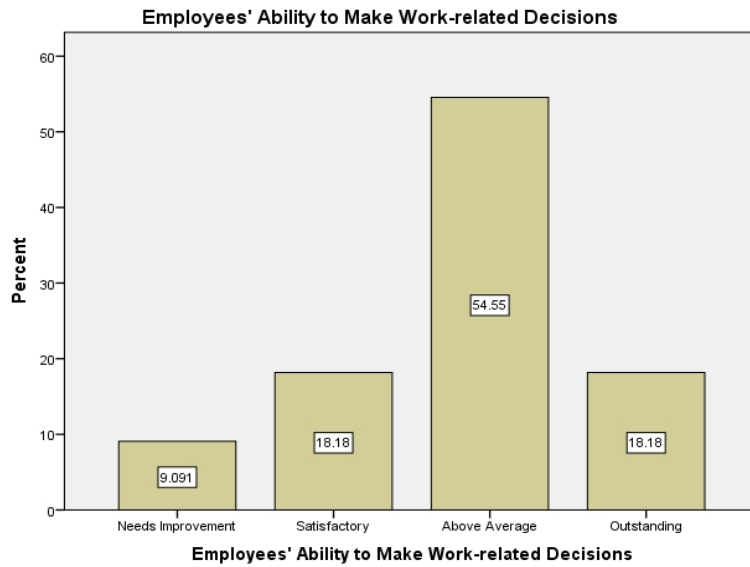

Fig. 2. Employees' ability to make work-related decisions

Table 3. Employees' ability to make work-related decisions

		Frequency	Percent
	Needs Improvement	3	9.1
	Satisfactory	6	18.2
Valid	Above Average	18	54.5
	Outstanding	6	18.2
	Total	**33**	**100.0**
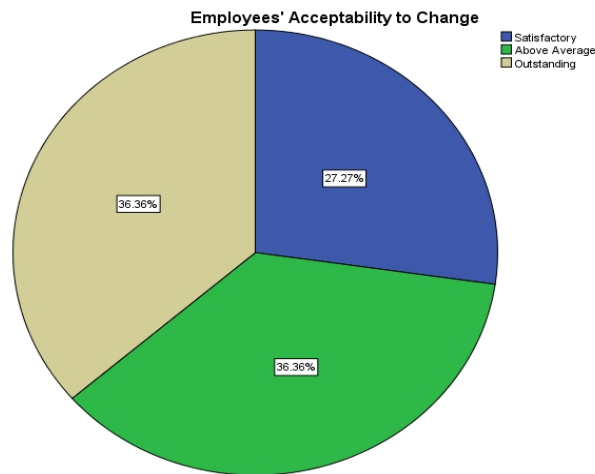
Fig. 3. Employees' acceptability to change

Table 4. Employees' acceptability to change

		Frequency	Percent
	Satisfactory	9	27.3
Valid	Above Average	12	36.4
	Outstanding	12	36.4
	Total	**33**	**100.0**

Moreover, Table 5 and Fig. 4 demonstrate that 91% were satisfactory in accepting directions, with 9% needing improvement and Table 6 shows that all 33 employers confirmed their willingness to hire similar employees from AUST.

Table 5. Employees' acceptability to directions

		Frequency	Percent
	Needs Improvement	3	9.1
	Satisfactory	12	36.4
Valid	Above Average	6	18.2
	Outstanding	12	36.4
	Total	33	100.0

Fig. 4. Employees' acceptability to directions

Table 6. Hiring other AUST graduates

Count	Frequency	Percentage
Hiring other AUST graduates		
Yes	33	100%
Total	**33**	**100%**

Furthermore, Table 7 depicts that all 33 employers were satisfied with their AUST employees' attitude, attendance, cooperation and compliance with rules. While Table 8 and Fig. 5 show that ninety-one percent (91%) of the employers believed that their AUST employees had appropriate knowledge when hired and only 9% needed improvement; finally, Table 9 and Fig. 6 demonstrate that all employers were more than satisfied with the quality of work of their AUST's employees.

Table 7. Employees' attitude, attendance and cooperation

| Statement	Response	Frequency	Percent
Employees' Attitude	Satisfactory	6	18.2
	Above Average	21	63.6
	Outstanding	6	18.2
	Total	**33**	**100.0**
Employees' Attendance	Satisfactory	3	09.1
	Above Average	18	54.5
	Outstanding	12	36.4
	Total	**33**	**100.0**
Employees' Cooperation	Satisfactory	3	09.0
	Above Average	15	45.5
	Outstanding	15	45.5
	Total	**33**	**100.0**
Employees' Compliance to Rules	Satisfactory	3	09.1
	Above Average	21	63.6
	Outstanding	9	27.3
	Total	**33**	**100.0**
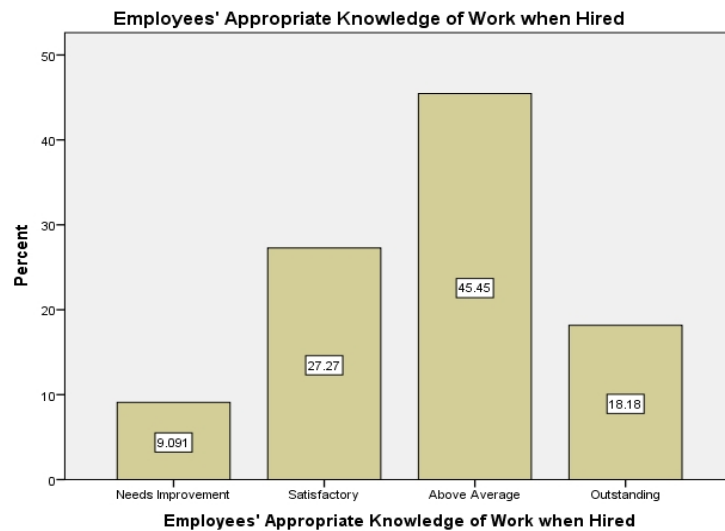
Fig. 5. Employees' appropriate knowledge of work when hired

Table 8. Employees' appropriate knowledge of work when hired

		Frequency	Percent
	Needs Improvement	3	9.1
	Satisfactory	9	27.3
Valid	Above Average	15	45.5
	Outstanding	6	18.2
	Total	**33**	**100.0**

Table 9. Employees' quality of work

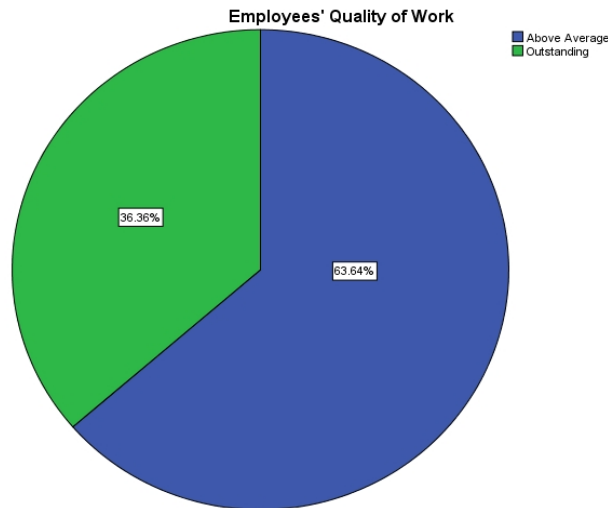|		Frequency	Percent
	Above Average	21	63.6
Valid	Outstanding	12	36.4
	Total	**33**	**100.0**

Fig. 6. Employees' Quality of Work

Table 10 and Fig. 7 show that all 33 employers will hire more AUST hospitality graduates if they apply for a job with them. While, Table 11 and Fig. 8 show that 94% of the employers view AUST's employees as equal to or better than recruits from other universities; only 2 employers or 6% had a different view. Moreover, Table 11 shows that 94% of the employers assert that when comparing AUST employees' salaries to other recruits from other universities, they were equal or better. Only 6% said that the salary was less.

Table 10. Comparing AUST employee to similar recruits from other universities

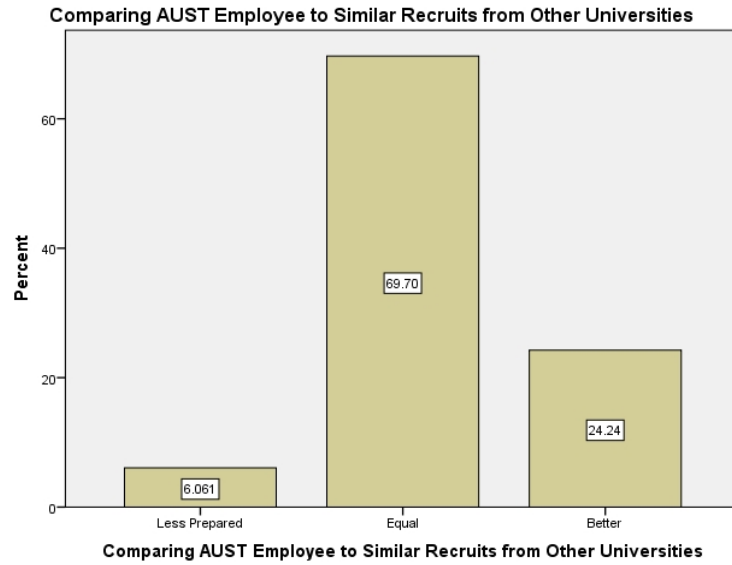| Count		Frequency	Percentage
Comparing AUST employee to similar	Less Prepared	2	6%
recruits from other universities	Equal	23	70%
	Better	8	24%
Total		**33**	**100%**

Fig. 7. Comparing AUST employee to similar recruits from other universities

Table 11. Comparing AUST employee Salary to other recruits from other universities

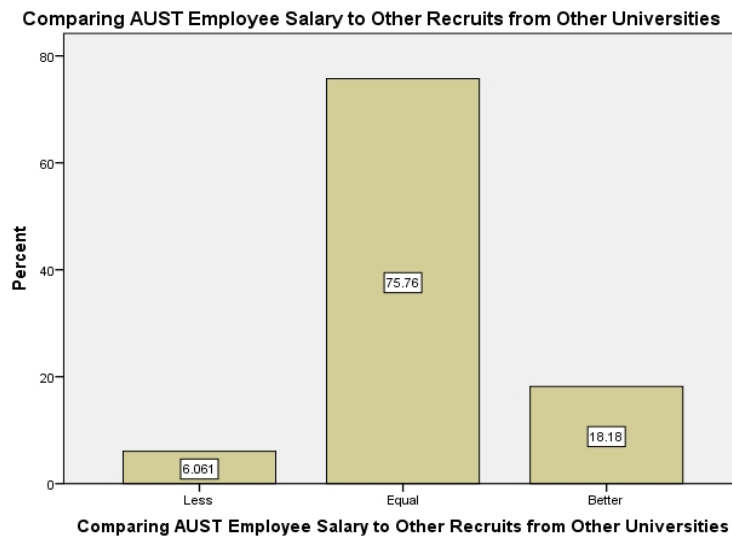| Count		Frequency	Percentage
Comparing AUST employee Salary to other recruits from other universities	Less	2	06%
	Equal	25	76%
	Better	6	18%
Total		**33**	**100%**

Fig. 8. Comparing AUST employee's salary to other recruits from other universities

The aforementioned findings demonstrate that AUST program of Hospitality Management is successful in attracting prospective employers to hire potential candidates. As deduced from the results, AUST's graduates possess the basic requirements delineated by the employers in the previous section of this paper. Table 12 presents a summary of the skills, knowledge and attitude as were ranked by the Lebanese employers who already hired graduates from AUST.

Table 12. Employers' ranks for desired skills, knowledge and attitude in potential employees

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job	4.09	0.914	4
Employees' Ability to Make Work-related Decisions	3.82	0.846	6
Employees' Acceptability to Change	4.09	0.805	4
Employees' Acceptability to Directions	3.82	1.044	6
Organizations' Efforts to Hire Similar Employees from AUST	3.64	0.653	8
Employees' Attitude	4.00	0.612	5
Employees' Attendance	4.27	0.626	2
Employees' Compliance to Rules	4.18	0.584	3
Employees' Cooperation	4.36	0.653	1
Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired	3.73	0.876	7
Employees' Quality of Work	4.36	0.489	1

However, for the sake of clarity, Exhibit 5 has been constructed to create a comparative view of what has been advised in terms of generic competencies (Exhibit 2), reflecting on the Lebanese experts and consultants' recommendations and the outcomes of the current research, whereby observed employers' opinion are considered for such a comparison.

The generic competency "capacity of applying knowledge in practice (rank 2)" was rated (rank 6) by the Lebanese experts and is equivalent to two requirements set by the Lebanese employers, namely, "employees' work meet demands of the job" and "employees' appropriate knowledge of work when hired", where the first is ranked (4) and the second is ranked (7); the generic competency "decision making (rank 8)" was matched by the Lebanese employers but with rank (6); the generic competency "capacity to adapt to new situations (ranked 4)" was equally ranked by the Lebanese employers although stated differently: "employees' acceptability to change"; the generic competency "capacity to learn (ranked 1)" was matched by employers as "employees' attitude (ranked 5) and by the Lebanese experts as "attitude (ranked 5) and "willingness to learn (ranked 2);finally, the generic competence "interpersonal skills (ranked 5)" was matched by the Lebanese employers as "employees' acceptability to directions (ranked 6) and "employees' cooperation (ranked 1), while it was matched by the Lebanese experts as "work in teams (ranked 8)".

The observer may infer from the above that the Lebanese employers are affected or impacted by the culture and way of thinking, based on the fact that priorities differed as was analyzed in the previous paragraph. However, for the purpose of this paper, the Lebanese priorities simulate the actual demands of the Lebanese market, a fact taken in consideration by the Hospitality Management Curriculum at AUST.

Exhibit 5. Comparative analysis of competencies

Description	Employers (Exhibit 2)	Description	Lebanese Consultants/Experts	Description	Respondent Employers (Current Research)
Capacity to learn	1	Having necessary Skills & Knowledge	1	Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job	4
Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	2	Willingness to learn	2	Employees' Ability to Make Work-related Decisions	6
Capacity for analysis & synthesis	3	Having work experience	3	Employees' Acceptability to Change	4
Capacity to adapt to new situations	4	Capacity to take initiative	4	Employees' Acceptability to Directions	6
Interpersonal skills	5	Attitude	5	Employees' Attitude	5
Capacity for generating new ideas (creativity)	6	Capacity of applying knowledge to practice	6	Employees' Attendance	2
Oral and written communication in your native language	7	Leadership skills	7	Employees' Compliance to Rules	3
Decision-making	8	Ability to work in Teams	8	Employees' Cooperation	1
Critical and self-critical abilities	9			Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired	7
Elementary computing skills	10			Employees' Quality of Work	1

A sample of potential employers who have a continuous relation with AUST and who are seeking more candidates from the said university is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Potential employers who already provided jobs to AUST's graduates

Restaurants	Hotels	Supermarket Chain	Shopping Malls
Corleone	Phoenicia	Carrefour, Kuwait	Beirut City Mall
Claudia	Le Royal	Spinneys	Majid Al Futtaim
Crepaway	Marriott – Beirut Marriott – Islamabad	Abou Khalil	Metropolitan City Center
Dunkin Donuts	Intercontinental-Le Vendome	BHV	Beirut Mall
Casper &Gambini	Metropolitan	ABC	ABC
Julia	Bristol	Aoun	
Roadster	Sheraton 4-stars		
Chopsticks	Four Seasons Hotel		
Pascucci	Grand Hyatt Hotel		
Beirut Waterfront Development	Hilton Hotel		
Napoletana	Mövenpick Hotel & Resort		

AUST Hospitality Management graduates have achieved the status of: Restaurant Manager, Department Head, Training Ambassador, Category Manager, Food and beverage Manager, General Manager, Sales Executive, Senior Chef, Club Floor Manager and Category Manager. The above do not include all the supervisory and workforce members.

5.2 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is used to assess the relationship between selected variables and the fit of the data to a certain regression line behavior. The aim is to study specific trends that could help to improve the researched variables and add statistical significance to the findings.

Several regression models were tested; however, only few were significant to the current paper.

5.2.1 Model one

Dependent variable, defined as: "Organizations' Efforts to Hire Similar Employees from AUST" and the Independent variable resultant from performing regression analysis, is: "Employees' Attitude"

Independent variables omitted (statistically insignificant), are:

1. Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job
2. Employees' Ability to Make Work-related Decisions
3. Employees' Acceptability to Change
4. Employees' Acceptability to Directions
5. Employees' Attendance

6. Employees' Compliance to Rules
7. Employees' Cooperation
8. Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired
9. Employees' Quality of Work
10. Comparing AUST Employee to Similar Recruits from Other Universities
11. Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities and
12. Employees' Gender

Tables 14 to 16 provide the technical information necessary to describe the model. Table 14 provides the necessary data to correlate each variable with another in order to build a statistical model that will withstand statistical modeling. Table 14 shows the model's summary. Results indicate that the model is quantitatively average due to the average value of the coefficient of correlation (R = 0.625) and the low value of the coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.391); however, the model is qualitatively acceptable and statistically significant with F-value = 19.912 with an associated probability of 0.000 which is less than α = 0.05.

Table 15 shows the results of ANOVA testing which indicate that the regression equation predicts better than would be expected by chance. The F-value = 19.912 with an associated probability of 0.000 which is less than α = 0.001.

Next, is Table 16 which shows that the independent variable is statistically significant with Pearson α < 0.05 or 5%.

Table 14. Model I Summary[d]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.625[a]	.391	.371	.518	.391	19.912	1	31	.000

Table 15. Model I ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.333	1	5.333	19.912	.000[b]
	Residual	8.303	31	.268		
	Total	**13.636**	**32**			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizations' Efforts to Hire Similar Employees from AUST
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employees' Attitude

Table 16. Model I Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.970	.604		1.605	.119		
	Employees' Attitude	.667	.149	.625	4.462	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Organizations' Efforts to Hire Similar Employees from AUST

Table 16 shows the following comparison of explanatory variables:

Employees' attitude

This variable has a regression standardized weight of 0.625. This means that for the variable "Employees' attitude", as this variable increases by one standard deviation (SD), the dependent variable "Organizations' Efforts to Hire Similar Employees from AUST" increases by 0.625 of a SD. Thus, AUST graduates whose attitude is positive and are dedicated and committed may increase their chances for being hired.

The aforementioned result confirms AUST students' actual behavior: they are practically known to have a positive attitude towards their work; they are ready to start from the bottom; and they are open to criticism (Rana El Khoury, General Manager, Campbell Gray Hotel, Beirut). This fact may impact positively the future selection of AUST candidates in the job market.

All other independent variables were statistically not significant and were excluded from the regression equation.

5.2.2 Model two

Dependent variable is defined as: "Comparing AUST Employee to Similar Recruits from Other Universities"

Independent variable resultant from performing regression analysis, is:

"Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired"

Independent variables omitted (statistically insignificant), are:

1. Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job
2. Employees' Ability to Make Work-related Decisions
3. Employees' Acceptability to Change
4. Employees' Acceptability to Directions
5. Employees' Attendance
6. Employees' Compliance to Rules
7. Employees' Cooperation
8. Employees' Quality of Work
9. Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities and
10. Employees' Gender

Tables 17 to 19 provide the technical information necessary to describe the model. Table 17 provides the necessary data to correlate each variable with another in order to build a statistical model that will withstand statistical modeling. Table 17 shows the model's summary. Results indicate that the model is quantitatively adequate due to the above the average value of the coefficient of correlation (R = 0.719) and the average value of the coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.517); however, the model is qualitatively acceptable and statistically significant with F-value = 33.228 with an associated probability of 0.000 which is less than α = 0.05.

Table 18 shows the results of ANOVA testing which indicate that the regression equation predicts better than would be expected by chance. The F-value = 33.228 with an associated probability of 0.000 which is less than α = 0.001.

Next, is Table 19, which shows that the independent variable is statistically significant with Pearson α < 0.05 or 5%.

Table 17. Model II Summary[d]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.719[a]	.517	.502	.372	.517	33.228	1	31	.000

Table 18. Model II ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.609	1	4.609	33.228	.000[b]
	Residual	4.300	31	.139		
	Total	**8.909**	**32**			

a. Dependent Variable: Comparing AUST Employee to Similar Recruits from Other Universities
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired

Table 19. Model II Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.567	.288		1.970	.058		
	Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired	.433	.075	.719	5.764	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Comparing AUST Employee to Similar Recruits from Other Universities

Table 19 shows the following comparison of explanatory variables:

Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired

This variable has a regression standardized weight of 0.719. This means that as the variable "Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired" increases by one standard deviation (SD), the dependent variable "Comparing AUST Employee to Similar Recruits from Other Universities" increases by 0.719 of a SD. Thus, AUST graduates whose work knowledge is appropriate when hired may increase their chances for being hired as compared to similar recruits from other universities.

The aforementioned result confirms AUST students' actual academic preparation for the Lebanese job market, in that they are academically and practically trained and know their field work well. They are ready to either continue in their current jobs or join new employers. This fact positively impacts the future selection of AUST candidates in the job market.

All other independent variables were statistically not significant and were excluded from the regression equation.

5.2.3 Model three

Dependent variable is defined as: "Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities"

Independent variables resultant from performing regression analysis, are:

1. Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job
2. Employees' Quality of Work

Independent variables omitted (statistically insignificant), are:

1. Employees' Ability to Make Work-related Decisions
2. Employees' Acceptability to Change
3. Employees' Acceptability to Directions
4. Employees' Attendance
5. Employees' Compliance to Rules
6. Employees' Cooperation
7. Employees' Appropriate Knowledge of Work when Hired
8. Employees' Gender

Tables 20 to 22 provide the technical information necessary to describe the model. Table 20 provides the necessary data to correlate each variable with another in order to build a statistical model that will withstand statistical modeling. Table 20 shows the model's summary. Results indicate that the model (shown as 2 in the Table) is quantitatively above the average due to the value of the coefficient of correlation (R = 0.719) and the low value of the coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.517); however, the model is qualitatively acceptable and statistically significant with F-value = 9.081 with an associated probability of 0.005 which is less than α = 0.05.

Table 21 shows the results of ANOVA testing which indicate that the regression equation predicts better than would be expected by chance. The F-value = 16.082 with an associated probability of 0.000 which is less than α = 0.001.

Next, is Table 22 which shows that the independent variable is statistically significant with Pearson α < 0.05 or 5%.

Table 20. Model III Summary[c]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.609[a]	.371	.351	.390	.371	18.311	1	31	.000
2	.719[b]	.517	.485	.348	.146	9.081	1	30	.005

Table 21. Model III ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.791	1	2.791	18.311	.000[b]
	Residual	4.724	31	.152		
	Total	**7.515**	**32**			
2	Regression	3.888	2	1.944	16.082	.000[c]
	Residual	3.627	30	.121		
	Total	**7.515**	**32**			

a. Dependent Variable: Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job
c. Predictors: (Constant), Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job, Employees' Quality of Work

Table 22. Model III Coefficients[a]

		Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.799	.316		2.527	.017		
	Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job	.323	.076	.609	4.279	.000	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	-.641	.555		-1.156	.257		
	Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job	.231	.074	.436	3.128	.004	.829	1.206
	Employees' Quality of Work	.416	.138	.420	3.013	.005	.829	1.206

a. Dependent Variable: Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities

Table 22 shows the following comparison of explanatory variables:

Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job

This variable has a regression standardized weight of 0.436. This means that as the variable "Employees' Work Meet Demands of the Job" increases by one standard deviation (SD), the dependent variable "Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities" increases by 0.436 of a SD. Thus, AUST graduates who have the necessary competencies for the job market are able to perform well at work and consequently employers' compensation schemes are commensurate with the employees' performance at work.

Employees' Quality of Work

This variable has a regression standardized weight of 0.420. This means that as the variable "Employees' Quality of Work" increases by one standard deviation (SD), the dependent variable "Comparing AUST Employee Salary to Other Recruits from Other Universities" increases by 0.420 of a SD. Thus, AUST graduates who show the appropriate quality of work reflect acceptable job performance and consequently employers' compensation schemes are commensurate with the employees' quality of work.

The aforementioned results assert AUST students' actual work performance, in that they are practically known to have practical training and work experience that match the job market's requirements and therefore, employers are ready to pay adequately. This fact may positively impact on the future selection of AUST candidates in the job market.

All other independent variables were statistically not significant and were excluded from the regression equation.

5.3 Reliability Test

The reliability test results depicted in Table 23 show that the Cronbach's alpha is 0.914, which is considered a highly acceptable value indicating the homogeneity of the questionnaire items for an exploratory research.

Table 23. Cronbach's Alpha for all questions

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.914	11

In regards to reliability, an assessment of the internal consistency of each survey set of items was performed, essentially assessing whether all the items belonging to one set were measuring the same thing by using Cronbach's alpha technique, where the reliability increases when the alpha value approaches 1. An alpha value of 0.8 or above is regarded as highly acceptable for assuming homogeneity of items, while an alpha value that is greater than 0.7 is considered appropriate even though this value could be as low as 0.6 for exploratory research [66].

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has shown, with statistical evidence, that Lebanese employers appreciate AUST's hospitality management students' competencies as manifested in their attitude, quality of work, appropriateness of knowledge when hired and their readiness to meet the job's demands. These attributes have been addressed in the literature where, Ipe [12] confirms that "managers in the hospitality industry seem to encourage the 'hiring the attitude'; a major shift from focusing solely on experience and technical skills" (p. 8).While, Bottiglieri [67] asserts that "hiring people with excellent emotional skills is the first step towards achieving superior customer service that creates customers for life" (p. 14).Moreover, Tsai et al [14] report that hospitality management educators and employers in Taiwan acknowledged three competencies, namely, communication skills, emotional control and passion and understanding the unique characteristics of lodging industry" (p. 66).

Evidence from the market place abounds as to the skills that AUST Hospitality Management graduates demonstrate in comparison to the market's requirements as observed from the findings of this research. Even though the Lebanese market is ailing, yet it still offers a dynamic and challenging environment that is noted by the attitude of Lebanese managers in major corporations; they are more positive, in comparison to foreign managers, as to providing all the support to their potential employees, who are contributing to better customer satisfaction through the quality of their work. According to Mohammad Azakir (Human Resource manager at Phoenicia Hotel, a 5-star hotel in Beirut), "Lebanese managers have more empathy toward their nationals and therefore, are ready to support their employees to

surpass the current crisis by offering them part-time alternatives rather than firing them" (personal communication, January 23, 2014).

It is the Faculty of Business and Economics' quest to continuously establish premier comprehensive undergraduate (and later specialized) programs, including that of Hospitality Management. The Faculty is confident that in the long-run, the Hospitality Management Program, in particular and other programs under the Faculty, in general, will have positive impact on the Lebanese national socio-economic environment by putting a halt to the drainage of brains. Hence, there is no doubt that AUST Hospitality Management Program will contribute to the national development plan of Lebanon. Consequently, the Faculty hired adjunct instructors who are either owners of restaurants, hotels, or tourism agencies for the purpose of keeping the said faculty as near as possible to the job market. Gehrels [13] asserts that there should be an ongoing need to emphasize the "schools connection to the industry" to allow graduates to gain practical and real-life experience (p. 47).

Apparently, AUST's success relates to the Lebanese job market since it realizes its education's responsibility to properly and realistically prepare students for the hospitality industry; its impact touches regional and international job markets as well. Hospitality graduates from AUST in Lebanon meet graduates from European and American hospitality institutions at work. The outcome is cross-cultural mixture of skills and knowledge directed by veteran hospitality and tourism employers who have been around the globe for more than 15 years; thus, resulting in a melting pot of expertise that has led the researchers to observe the importance of the following skills for the advancement of the Lebanese hospitality sector:

1. Flexibility in encompassing the unfathomed outcomes of continuous crisis.
2. The value added concept in products and services.
3. Continuous improvement in products/services.
4. Adequate response to the market's demands.
5. Innovative techniques when responding to customers' needs & wants.
6. The employment of potential HRs who are physically and mentally capable in organizations.
7. Taking advantage of the peaceful breaks to refurbish and upgrade facilities.
8. The ability to relocate efficiently and to take advantage of opportunities

In the absence of a Lebanese law that protects the rights of the Lebanese hospitality graduates amid the uncontrolled influx of Syrian refugees who many bring with them their skills and qualifications, a direct competition may be caused since the Syrians are satisfied with less pay in order to survive their ordeal. Lebanese graduates although superior in their multi-cultural skills and attitude find themselves at a disadvantage; a fact that is leading them to look for jobs abroad. The aforementioned situation is more prominent in the restaurant or food and beverage industry; however, it does not apply to the hotel industry since Lebanese employees, including AUST's graduates, have undergone training within the culture of the hotels and have been there for more than three years. These advantages qualify them for special packages under the current difficult circumstances.

6.1 Contribution of the Study to Knowledge and Practice

The current paper serves as an eye opener to researchers who are interested in studying the hospitality industry under crisis and at the same time study the influx of well-prepared hospitality graduates to a market governed by stressful job conditions and an environment characterized as hostile to the employers' of the hospitality industry. Moreover, this paper

emphasizes the fact that universities and other institutions of higher education hold the responsibility of continuing their upgrading of students' competencies to enable them to survive the difficult market's conditions and at the same time be ready to undertake opportunities beyond the borders. Furthermore, this paper shows that having employers as instructors add value in closing the gaps between education and hospitality industry. Finally, this paper contributes and adds value to the literature, characterized as highly lacking, of the current Lebanese job-market.

6.2 Limitations

Since this study involved a small population about one educational institution, which is a limiting factor to generalize results, the similarity of the value systems with other Lebanese educational institutions may lead to similar results. More research including a wider array of employers and a cross-sectional coverage of educational institutions is needed to highlight any differences.

As for the overall learning experience observed in the current research, although at this point it cannot be generalized because of the lack of the broader comparative analysis, it gives good motivation to seek other assessments from other institutions. Since students will continue seeking jobs in the market, the study encourages faculty, researchers and trainers to introduce new approaches and curriculum designs to offer better fit between market and candidate employees.

From the results of this research, we have found out that more awareness should be created in universities about the market-employee fit, a result that fits Tsai et al's [14] recommendation in Taiwan which asserts that both groups of educators and employers should continue to strive for agreement on and alignment of needs and bridge their differences (p. 66). This awareness is needed not only at the undergraduate level, but at the graduate level as well, so that students become believers of their strong preparation to seek any job in the Lebanese or the regional job-markets.

6.3 Recommendations and Future Directions

Capitalizing on the attainment of the aforementioned accreditations and as a continuous quest of excellence, the following ongoing activities for improvement of the curriculum of Hospitality management at AUST are aspired to:

- The establishment of specialized diplomas for specific jobs such as: Food & Beverage, Professional Chef, IT in Hospitality, Marketing in Hospitality, etc.
- Collaboration with leading academic programs in Hospitality Management within Europe, Australia and the United States.
- The addition of more specialized laboratories.
- The creation of a professional supervisory committee, involving prominent figures of the industry, to guide departmental efforts to develop a practical outlook to the curriculum.
- The embracing of leadership training and enforcing the soft skills necessary to improve communication and understanding of the other on an emotional level [6].
- The establishment of a third internship course whereby students gain practical hospitality management skills as management trainees.

- Embrace and add to the curriculum (area in Exhibit 4) three new technical courses, namely, Hospitality Franchising, Multi-Cultural Readiness in Hospitality and Hospitality Business Psychology. These courses are suggested in response to the inbound movement of international brands as manifested in food and beverage and hotel industries. It is worth mentioning that brands such as Dunkin Donuts, Hilton, Sheraton, Marriott and Carrefour have already hired AUST students and consequently graduates having previous knowledge in the suggested areas would definitely add competitive advantage. Mihoubi [68] contends that the Middle Eastern and Gulf Cooperation Council countries provide great opportunities for US brands (pp. 3-4). While, Olotu and Awoseila [69] assert that, "while the developed market is becoming saturated with franchising model that of developing economies is just opening up and even with its attendant challenges, the emerging markets are potential pot of opportunities" (p. 165). Furthermore, Ipe [12] recommends that employees require exemplary customer focus and a globalized outlook (p. 14), while Wolfington and Wolfington [15] recommend that an "effective hospitality and tourism curriculum should develop students' knowledge of foreign cultures and their understanding of how to deal with complex tasks and work on international teams" (p. 21)

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have decided that no competing interests exist.

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