

Professional Association: An article of perspective

As a broke college student attempting to make a few extra dollars here and there, let alone pay for school, I can personally attest to the frustrations and stresses that accompany achieving a four year degree at Grand Valley State University. On the other hand, as a student actively involved in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program, I have held three paid internship positions that have assisted me in my collegiate endeavors. For those of you **not** up to speed on labor facts affecting students like you and me, here's some information on popular student jobs in Michigan according to the Michigan Labor Market Information website sponsored by Michigan.gov:

- Waiters and waitresses make an average of \$7.48 per hour (this includes averaged tips)
- Amusement attendants and ticket takers bring in \$8.18 per hour
- Front desk clerks garner an average \$8.90 per hour
- Bartenders make approximately \$8.30 per hour
- Tour guides see \$10.27 per hour of service

In all fairness, these jobs are to support us as we venture to find a career in “big money” areas. And rightfully so! According to Monster.com, we have the following to look forward thanks to pursuing a degree in HTM:

- Assistant Restaurant Managers nationally average a \$38,000 salary
- Catering Managers make \$43,000 per year
- Food Service Managers in Michigan are averaged a \$45,000 salary
- Lodging Managers in Michigan boast a \$50,920 yearly income
- Michigan Meeting and Convention Planners realize a salary of \$41,390

Exciting, right?

Putting this information in perspective means you need quality links between the “college job” or “internship” you might currently have and the jobs you have serious potential for in your near future. Realizing this last summer for me meant developing my professional network of contacts and opportunities by joining two industry organizations, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and International Special Event Society (ISES). Student membership was under \$40 for each organization and I was immediately recognized as an active member of these organizations; upon being “accepted”, I was sent a 40-page directory of professional contacts in our industry, newsletters, invitations for future networking and industry-related events, step-by-step information on how to access the online network of professionals including group links, blog capabilities, and a profile, along with student-specific scholarship information.

Revisiting the first few words of this article, “...broke college student...”, I couldn't help but pay extremely close attention to the scholarships offered to students. Thinking, “I can totally do this...I totally *need* to do this” I began my application for MPI's College Education Scholarship – Category I which is a scholarship designated for college-related funding in a hospitality-related collegiate program. Since I felt I fulfilled this requirement (which I would think all of you reading this do too), I completed the simple application form online. The application required three brief written responses and gave very specific guidelines as to what students should include. After nervously submitting my application

and waiting a few weeks, I received an e-mail congratulating me on receiving a \$1,000 scholarship in support of my academic studies. To say the least, I was elated. I was immediately put in contact with an incredible woman from MPI's North American Headquarters in California who processed all my GVSU tuition bills and scholarship payment and answered approximately 1,295 of my questions without hesitation.

The entire process of applying for this scholarship took as much time as it takes you to attend a class and come home. Yes, you have to write short written responses, but if you skip the Facebook stalking for an afternoon and dedicate yourself to a couple of quality essays, I can assure you that you will have made a dramatic step towards enhancing your academic and professional future. The benefits made available to me, a mere student, have been awesome. I have just submitted another application to attend MPI's Future Leaders Forum in Salt Lake City, UT, a two-day conference aimed at professional development and strategic planning for future meeting and event planners like myself. MPI sponsors 30 student members to attend this conference which I have been assured will "jump start my career by meeting and learning from industry leaders".

I cannot tell you how comforting it is to belong to such incredible professional organizations that have a vested interest in their student members especially during this crazy economic time when establishing and maintaining contacts for future employment has become a top priority of students and professionals alike. I have easy accessibility to hundreds of contacts, invitations to countless events that increase my industry knowledge at conferences, expos, and forums, and leadership opportunities as chair, committee head, and volunteer positions.

To put this in a perspective easier to relate to as students, here's what I know for sure:

- Working at my first HTM internship would have required me to work 5 weeks for the same \$1,000 I was awarded in MPI scholarship funds
- Working at my second and third HTM internships would have required me to work one month for the same \$1,000
- Working at my part-time, holiday job would have required me to work almost *two months* before making the same \$1,000
- A \$40 student membership fee to MPI and ISES and an afternoon spent composing a few short essays was **well worth** the scholarship I have been offered and the contacts I have made

Check out the following organization as they all have student memberships readily available for you:

- Meeting Professionals International (www.mpiweb.org)
- International Special Event Society (www.ises.com)
- Professional Convention Management Association (www.pcma.org)
- National Restaurant Association (www.restaurant.org)
- American Society of Travel Agents (www.asta.org)

Best of luck with your professional development! I promise you that your minimal student membership fee will be worth every single dollar. And as broke college students, we could all use a little bang for our buck.