

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Mystery Shopping to Create a Hospitality Map

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

To increase student engagement in a hospitality course, the instructor assigns students a mystery shopper activity. In this activity, students apply course content and build community ties while assessing local businesses' properties and operations. Students first complete the mystery shopper activity individually and then work together as a class to create a hospitality map of their community, highlighting establishments that align with the eight sectors of hospitality: travel, lodging, restaurants, managed services, recreation, gaming, entertainment, special events, and country clubs.

To begin the activity, the instructor places students in groups of four or five. Each student is expected to complete the mystery shopper activity by visiting an establishment from a different hospitality sector than their other group members. After they are assigned their sector, students brainstorm locations and questionnaire items while discussing their pre-assignment expectations.

For the mystery shopper activity, the instructor provides a basic questionnaire of eight to 10 items and encourages students to add to the document. Example questionnaire items include asking students to record the greeting or welcome they receive, to assess the "wow factor" of the interior décor, and to rate the cleanliness of the restrooms. For this activity, the instructor expects students to observe establishments without partaking in their services. Students expand

their completed questionnaires into a written report.

Once they have completed the activity, students meet with their small groups to debrief about their written reports before engaging in a whole group discussion. The instructor leads the class discussion, focusing on broad themes and cold calling on students to provide reactions and responses. Example questions include: "Did anyone find anything really unusual?" or "What was the impact of a good 'wow factor'?"

After the group discussion, the class works together to create a hospitality map of the surrounding community. The instructor assigns each group a different region so that they can research the various hospitality services within that area. Teams survey the area for travel services, lodging, restaurants, managed services, recreation, entertainment, and special events, marking the location of each within their region. Each team presents a summary of their region's hospitality services before adding the information to the class hospitality map.

Notes from the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

The instructor reflected that students were more engaged with the course after this activity, as demonstrated by better attendance, increased participation in classroom discussion, references to personal connections established through the assignment, and higher completion rates.