Freeman expands hospitality certificate program

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Diego Bufquin, center, director of the Hospitality Management and Entrepreneurship Certificate program at the A. B. Freeman School of Business, talks with students during a site visit to Hotel Saint Vincent, a luxury boutique hotel in the Lower Garden District. (Photo by Eugenia Uhl)

When you think of New Orleans, hospitality is one of the first things that comes to mind. Food, music, tourism and festivals are essential ingredients in the city's culture, but they also represent big business opportunities in a large and growing market.

Now, the Hospitality Management and Entrepreneurship Certificate program at Tulane's A. B. Freeman School of Business is expanding to be open to students across Newcomb-Tulane College. The program was previously only available to business majors.

“New Orleans is a great place to learn about hospitality,” said Diego Bufquin, professor of practice at the Freeman School. “The leisure and hospitality sector is huge. It generates approximately $20 billion annually in economic output for the city.”

Bufquin, the faculty director of the Hospitality Management and Entrepreneurship Certificate program, said the offering prepares students for leadership roles in a wide range of hospitality-oriented businesses.

“Anyone who wants to work in a sector that offers customer service would benefit from taking the certificate program,” Bufquin said. “It’s for anyone who wants to learn about customer service excellence, how to develop a business plan or how to solve a consulting challenge for a hospitality company.”

The 12-credit-hour curriculum, which includes courses such as Entrepreneurial Hospitality, Festivals and Entertainment Management, and Hospitality Consulting, was designed to complement any undergraduate major, giving students a focused, achievable credential while allowing them to remain on track with their primary degree. Depending on whether they’re a business major or not, students can choose from four or five core hospitality courses, all of which emphasize hands-on experience and applied learning, as well as an optional elective.

In Hospitality Consulting, student teams work with real hospitality ventures to analyze a business challenge, develop strategic recommendations and present them to the client.

Claire Chauvin, a communications major pursuing the certificate, says engaging with a real client has been especially valuable, particularly since her team’s findings carry weight and could ultimately be put into practice.

“I really like how we're doing a hands-on project with an actual company, because it gives us experience that we wouldn't have otherwise,” Chauvin says.

Chauvin hopes to work in community relations for the NFL and believes the customer service skills she’s building through the program will be a big boost to her future career.

“I want to stay in New Orleans, ideally,” Chauvin said. "Being able to have a hospitality background is great, because New Orleans is such a hospitality-driven

city.”

Bella Wright, a psychology major with a minor in Entrepreneurial Business, enrolled in the program for its emphasis on entrepreneurship.

“I think that entrepreneurship is such a good foundation to have, no matter what you're studying,” Wright says. “Everyone completing the hospitality certificate is studying something else on top of it. The entrepreneurship courses give you the opportunity to study what you're passionate about while also developing the foundational business tools taught in the business school.”

Last summer, Wright enrolled in Global Industry Immersion, a three-week summer course in Barcelona and one of the program’s core hospitality courses. The program includes a week of on-site immersion in an international hospitality market. Students visit companies, meet with industry leaders and work in teams on a business challenge for a partner organization in the host city before presenting their recommendations to its executives.

“I really push them to work hard on their specific consulting project so that they can deliver value to the client at the end of the study abroad program,” Bufquin says. “I want them to deliver actionable, practical solutions.”

Wright says her background in psychology has given her a deeper understanding of the social and emotional dimensions of the customer experience, a perspective that contributes to the business skills she’s building in the program, and she encourages other non-business students to consider how the Hospitality Management and Entrepreneurship Certificate might complement their majors.

“Having a foundation in business is helpful for everyone, no matter what your passion is,” Wright says. “You don't need to dream of a corporate job to pursue the program. The classes themselves are a lot more creative than you probably think they are.”