

Odds in your favor: Spotlight on Casino Management

July 15, 2015

With practiced hands, dealers spread the cards into a fan. Nearby, the roulette wheel spins as players lean forward with smiles and excitement, waiting to see where the ball lands.

Casinos are far more than just games; they're economic engines that support a wide range of jobs – in New York State, nationally and across the globe.

Employment in gaming services jobs are expected to grow by 10 percent from 2012 to 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Careers can include a wide range of fields, involving hospitality, the high-tech security systems that catch cheaters, and even the wide range of laws governing the industry.

With job opportunities in mind, SUNY Broome is offering two new degree programs in Hospitality: Casino Management, A.A.S., and Event Management, A.O.S. The college also offers certificate programs in both fields. The two degrees are, in essence, connected.

"Casinos do all of these things: trade shows, expositions, conventions, even weddings," explained Rey Wojdat, chair of the Hospitality Programs Department.

The college's Casino Management program comes at an opportune time. The industry has recently been bolstered by state plans to expand in upstate New York. Locally, Tioga Downs in Nichols is seeking a state license to expand into a full casino – an effort that would add an estimated 560 full-time jobs and bolster the local economy, according to recent news reports.

Event planners are also seeing good odds in the job market; the profession was listed by the U.S. Department of Labor as one of the ten fastest-growing occupations in the country from 2010 to 2020. New York State's Department of Labor considered the employment outlook "very favorable," with an average annual opening of 530 jobs.

Event management opportunities are found all over the world, noted instructor Maria Montemagno, a certified wedding and event planner who teaches in the program. Students with this career can work in casinos, hotels, resorts, conference centers, banquet facilities, amusement parks, zoos, colleges or any organization that holds events.

“I find it to be an exciting field. It’s growing so much in this area,” said Bernadette Quaglia, who teaches in the casino program and is an industry professional. “In the gaming business, there’s a lot of room for advancement.”



Hands-on learning

Both degrees include popular, hands-on classes, such as wedding planning, bartending and casino games. There’s even a math course that uses casino games to teach arithmetic, algebra, probability and statistics.

Classrooms include the college’s very own Casino Vespa, which features the games and amenities future casino workers will be expected to know intimately, from a 14-foot craps table, Blackjack table and roulette, to an overhead security system, a security monitoring room, a working bar and more. New this year is a state-of-the-art sound system that will be used to create the sounds and ambiance of a working casino and bar, Wojdat said.

Wojdat further explained that while earning their degree, students are also expected to complete an internship involving a paying job that makes them accountable to an employer. Opportunities range from positions at Tioga Downs, Traditions, and Maines Paper and Food Service to the Forum Theatre and more.

Both programs feature top-notch instructors that have years of experience in their fields. Quaglia worked for Carnival cruise line’s casino department, working her way up from the floor to management. Montemagno started All Occasions by Maria, a successful wedding and event planning business based in Binghamton. Wojdat is a SUNY Chancellor’s Award winning professor with more than 30 years of professional teaching and industry experience.

James Baburchak of Kirkwood took the casino dealing class in the hope of getting a job in the industry and working his way up. He was originally looking at courses in the Niagara County area, and was pleased to find one at SUNY Broome instead.

“Bernie was awesome. She could give you a lot of firsthand accounts of what working in a casino was like,” he said.

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