The Road to UNWTO.TedQual Certification
A Documental Approach

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Abstract

In fall 2001, The Tourism Department at Sultan Qaboos University, Omancommenced offeringits BA degree program, where quality has always been a foremost conviction. In this regard, the department was the first Middle Eastern institution to acquire the UNWTO.TedQual certification in 2013;an achievement which was continued in 2015by renewing the accreditationuntil 2018. Benefiting from the cumulative experience gained during this process, this study aims to propose a best practice case, which can be utilized as a benchmark model for tourism and hospitality institutions seeking quality assurance and accreditation. Accordingly, the study demonstrates the Tourism Department quality assurance model before analyzing and interpreting the department accreditation documents and quality assurance plan.

Keywords: Quality, Accreditation, Education, Tourism, Hospitality, UNWTO.TedQual, Oman, Middle East

Introduction

Worldwide, the number of tourism and hospitality educational programs has increased rapidly, which raised concerns regarding the quality of these programs and of graduates' professionalism (Horng et al., 2006; Bosselman, 1996; Robbins, 2005; Nikolaeva et al., 2015). Consequently, "Accreditation" emerged to assess and assure quality of educational programs (Bosselman, 1996).

The UNWTO.TedQual (Tourism Education Quality) certification was introduced in the 1990s to apply total quality management to tourism education (Fayos-Solá, 1997; UNWTO, 2013).The UNWTO.TedQual is directly managed by the THEMIS Foundation which is the operative arm of the UNTWO education, training and knowledge management department. The aim of TedQual is to guarantee standardization in terms of management, structure and organization among all certified institutions. There are three dimensions that characterize TedQual System: standards of quality, quality of audit, and certification (Barbini and Presutti, 2010).

The Tourism Department was established in 2001 and currently offers two specializations: Tourism Management and Hospitality Management (Atef and Al-Balushi, 2017). Quality has always been a major conviction for Sultan Qaboos University SQU), College of Arts and Social sciences (CASS), and the Tourism Department. In 2013, the Department crossed a milestone by being the first Middle Eastern tourism department to achieve the UNWTO.TedQual certification, which was then renewed in 2015 until September 2018. This study aims to propose a best practice case, which can be utilized as a benchmark model for tourism and hospitality institutions seeking quality assurance and accreditation. Accordingly, the study demonstrates the Tourism Department quality assurance model before analysing and interpreting the department accreditation documents and quality assurance plan.

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Literature Review

Tourism and hospitality education is a branch of the overall tourism and hospitality industry that is dedicated to preparing students for positions within the industry (Riegel, 1995; Marković, 2006). Such education is an important factor in the sustainability of the tourism industry, at the same time, the industry actively affects competitiveness of educational establishments, through graduates' employment, they consistently provide assessment of the educational system quality and adherence to industry requirements and needs (Romanova et al., 2016).

The rapid growth of tourism and hospitality programs as a result of the increasing demand for qualified and well-trained workforce to the future development of the industry, makes quality a major concern. Aiming to deliver the kind of graduates that meet the industry requirements, suggests that quality shouldn't only be meeting the academic standards but as fulfilling industry needs (Sripun andLadkin, 2001).

The concept of "Quality" in higher education, varies according to perspectives; students consider quality in terms of their classroom experience; employability for graduates; for faculty it may mean professional development programs provided by the institution; for employers it is graduates capabilities when joining the workforce; and for the institutions it is related to education, research, and community services quality and quantity.

Quality can be assessed in terms of three broad dimensions: input, process and output (Cheng, 1995). It can also be evaluatedin termsof: excellence, threshold, fitness for purpose, fulfilment of an institution's aims and objectives, meeting customer requirements, transformation, and value for money(Harvey and Green, 1993). In general, quality evaluation often connects to fitness for use, the satisfaction of the needs of constituents, and fulfilment of institutions' educational claims (Cheng, 1995).

Quality Assurance, therefore, tries to encompass all stakeholders 'perspectives in addition to that of the institution itself. "Education Quality" is achieved through quality assurance and is evaluated through quality assessment which can be done by means of "Quality Audit" or "Accreditation" (Segers and Dochy, 1996; Al Tobi and Duque, 2015).In this respect, four key terms are broadly linked to quality (Westlake, 1998; Salmi, 2000; Sanyal and Martinm, 2007; Odera-Kwach and Ngulube, 2013;Ramsay, 2013):

- Quality Control: The operational techniques and activities, which an institution uses to meet the quality requirements.
- Quality Assurance: The systematic quality approach which ensures that the outputs remain always at the required standards.
- Quality Audit:An internal systematic examination or review of activities and procedures to assess if they have been applied as planned and promised.
- Accreditation: An external inspection used to scrutinise colleges, universities and higher education programs for quality assurance, where an accrediting agency certifies that the programme standards are appropriate for the award to which it leads.

The purpose of "Quality Audit" is to monitor"Quality Assurance" applied through "Quality Control" tools to ensure that an education process of acceptable academic standardsis provided, which may lead to acquiring "Accreditation"(Castelluccio and Masotti,2006;Nkiko et al., 2015).The common features of "Quality Assurance" and "Quality Control" systems are: approved purposes and methods, clear channels of communications and processes, commitment to continuous improvement, training and professional development, monitoring and review processes, and involvement of staff and students (Sripun andLadkin, 2001)."Quality Audits" and "Accreditation" are usually merged under the term "Quality Assessment". It isbelieved that within the progress of the quality movement in higher education, the attention moved from focusing on "Quality Audits "which is internally managed by universities to "Accreditation" which is controlled by external agencies(Anderson et al., 2000; Rosa et al., 2012; Abou-Warda, 2014).

The term "Accreditation" is wide-ranging; it can be defined as a formal published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a program following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards (Batteau, 2006); a process of external quality review in which recognition is granted to colleges, universities, and educational programs which meet or exceed established standards of educational quality (Tanke, 1986; Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), 2002). Anderson et al. (2000) defined accreditation as a process whereby an authority, recognised by institutions and government, determines that an institution offering courses in higher education may become self-accrediting, or offer its own higher education awards subject to periodic reviews.

From the accrediting entities standpoint, accreditation focuses on creating a process by which institutions/programs can present evidences of the processes used to sustain continuous quality improvement. The need for evidences is an inevitable feature of nearly all accreditation bodies (Uzumeri, 1997).

Thus, the whole idea of accreditation is based on the need for a functional mechanism that guarantees internal and external institutional efficiency (Castelluccio and Masotti,2006;Nkikoet al., 2015). The foremost purposes of accreditation in educational institutions are quality assurance and institutional improvement, the hope is that offering quality education entails the provision of advanced learning facilities and infrastructure, research-oriented faculty, an excellent curriculum and training, activity oriented pedagogical tools, generating employability and a very strong industry interface (Bogue and Hall, 2003; Martin and Stella, 2007; Jauhari, 2013; Ramsay, 2016).

Some of the most recognised accreditation bodies for tourism and hospitality related fields are (See Table 1): the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA), the TedQual Certification by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which have provided various sets of criteria to assess the quality of hospitality, tourism and leisure programs (Horng et al., 2009).

Table 1: Sample international evaluation/accreditation systems for tourism and hospitality programs

System	US ACPHA	UNWTO.TedQual certification	British QAA subject review in HLRS&T (2000-01)	US NRPA
organization	CHRIE	UNWTO	QAA	NRPA
Date	1988	1995	1997	1974
Quality standards	1. Mission &objectives 2. Evaluation& planning 3. Administration&governance 4. Curriculum 5. Faculty 6. Studentservice andactivities 7. Resources	1. Employers 2. Student 3. Curriculum 4. Faculty 5. Management	1. Curriculumdesign, contentand organization 2. Teaching,learning andassessment 3. Studentprogression andachievements 4. Student supportand guidance 5. Learningresources 6. Qualitymanagement&enhancement	1. Unitcharacteristics 2. Philosophy andgoals 3. Administration 4. Faculty 5. Students 6. Instructionalresources 7. Curriculum
Review procedures	1. Programself-study 2. Review teamvisitation 3. Teamjudgment	1. Programself-study 2. Review teamvisitation 3. Teamjudgment	1. Programself-study 2. Review teamvisitation 3. Team judgment 4. Follow-up review	1. Programself-study 2. Review teamvisitation 3. Team judgment

Adapted from: Horng et al. (2009)

Justifying the escalating trend for accreditation among tourism educational programs, Baum (2005) argues that tourism, unlike most other sectors of the economy, seeks for internationalization as it brings its workforce at all levels into frequent and sustained contact with international customers. Thus, it is crucial for tourism students to understand the international nature of its products and markets. Enhancing internationalization is surely one of the major merits of accreditation(Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003).

Methodology

To fulfill the research aim, two methods were applied. First, a case study approach was adopted as it is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin et al., 1991). Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.

Recognized as a tool in many social science studies, the role of case study method in research becomes more prominent when issues with regard to education, sociology, and community-based problems were raised (Grassel and Schirmer, 2006; Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006;Johnson, 2006). Case studies are attributed with the ability to enhance understanding and to establish cause and effect (Cohen et al., 2000). This methodology has an inherent strength in accessing data (Gibson, 2003). Yin (1994) presented at least four applications for a case study model: (1) To explain complex causal links in real-life interventions; (2) To describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred; (3) To describe the intervention itself; and (4) To explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes.

Second, an analysis of assorted, relevant documents is employed as a data collection method to analyze all the current tourism undergraduate academic plans in the Tourism Department in SQU. This is based on the assumption that "The bureaucratization of society has created a wealth of documentation in relation to administration…these provide an abundant source of data for social researchers in whatever field they operate" (Denscombe, 1998: 161). Thus, data reported in this research are officially drawn from a germane body in the Sultanate of Oman: The Department of Tourism in SQU. Nevertheless, the plethora of data which could be deducted from such documents, this research focuses only on analyzing the documents offered during the accreditation process to the UNWTO.TedQual. The utilized documents covered the five main areas of quality assessment as defined by the UNWTO.TedQual: The employers, the students, the curriculum, the faculty, and the management, plus a section onthe accomplishment of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (Part One: Department Self-Study), as well as the Department quality management practices (Part Two: Department quality assurance plan).

Analysis And Discussion

Part One: Department Self-Study

According to the UNWTO.TedQual certification rules; the department self-study should coverfive main areas of quality assessment: The employers, the students, the curriculum, the faculty, and the management, plus a section onthe accomplishment of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism(UNWTO, 2013).

A committee of four department members plusthe head of department (HOD) was formulated headed by one of the members under the supervision of the HOD. Each member was responsible for writing a section of the five self-study sections including applications of the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism within the scope of the section,and at the same time, collecting relevant evidences.

1. TheEmployers

The aim of this section is to verify that the program has taken into consideration the views and needs of future employers: public and private sector(UNWTO, 2013).Instead of directly presenting the main employers of the Omani tourism market, the Department of Tourism found it more meaningful to extend the scope of this area to cover the Department stakeholders, which should then include by default the department major employers. This includes:

Internal stakeholders:

- Tourism Department Students
- Tourism Department Faculty and Staff
- College of Arts and Social Sciences Faculty, Administration, and Support Services
- Sultan Qaboos University Faculty, Administration, and Support Services

External stakeholders:

- Hospitality and Tourism industry in Oman and GCC region
- Omani Government/Legislators
- Tourism Department Alumni

Several events are annually organized with the Department stakeholders including hosting official meetings (e.g. the Omani Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting; the SQU /Ministry of Tourism meetings) or organizing exhibitions, seminars and workshops, where information is shared to guide the Department progress in areas such as developing the current academic plans, offering new programs, course enhancements, internship, as well as giving feedbacks and responses to the stakeholders' concerns.

2. TheStudents

The aim of this section is to verify that the program has enabled efficient mechanisms for communication and coordination with the students (before, during and after graduation). It also seeks to assess students' performance and their satisfaction with the program(UNWTO, 2013). The following points were included in this section:

Admission criteria

Admission to The Tourism Department relies upon SQU and College of Arts and Social Sciences admission regulations and rules, where SQU admits the best students graduated from high schools strictly by merit.

Students are then distributed to departments based on students' interests, number of seats available in each program, English Placement/ExitTest results. TheTourism Department enrolls students after passing the foundation program and accomplishing level 6 in English.

Student's performancemonitoring

Student's performance is monitored by a hierarchy of five levels:
1. Academic advisor who ensures that students follow their study plan, adhere to the university rules and procedures, as well as that their needs are mostly fulfilled.
2. Course instructor who monitorsthe academic progress of students registered in her/his course.
3. Head of Departmentwhomonitors official correspondences between the students and the administrative units and works jointly with other levels for solving the students' problems.
4. Assistant dean for undergraduate studies whoacts as a link between the departments and the Deanship of Admission and Registration.
5. Deanship of Admission and Registration whose students-related duties are:

- Provide students' academic records and grades.
- Provide student statistical reports related to academic courses and programs.
- Provide advisors with related information to facilitate advising their students.
- Inform students when they exceed any academic time limit as per academic policies.
- Notify students when they reach probationary status.
- Maintain student records in the strictest possible confidentiality.

Advising and counseling

An Academic Advisor is appointed for each student to guide and monitor her/his academic progress, where eachstudent is required to visit her/his academic advisor during each semester's pre-registration period.Some of the advisors' most central responsibilities include explaining all about the Department academic plan, the different study tracks, helping students selecting proper courses to successfully fulfill their needs for graduation, providing special support for under-probation students. Furthermore, each staff member announces 6 scheduled weekly office hours to provide academic help for students registered in any of her/his courses.

Students' satisfaction assessment

Students' satisfaction is usually assessed through three major tools: The course and teaching survey, academic advising meetings, and students' liaison committee meetings. Feedback received from students is always available for related staff members, the Head of the Department, the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies, and the College Dean. Students are informed about the action taken to meet their needs and suggestions if applicable. If not, reasons are clearly mentioned, and alternatives are discussed.

Internacionalización of studies

The Tourism Department encourages and helps students to get international exposure for professional and self-development. Several actions are taken for achieving that, including but not limited to:
- Providing funded international internship opportunities annually.
- Funding students to participate in international events.
- Funding undergraduate students to participate in international conferences.
- Hosting international events.
- Standing collaboration agreements with international bodies and educational institutions.

3. The Curriculum

The aim of this section is to verify the curriculum content coherence, that effective pedagogical methods are being used, and the existence of and accessibility to pedagogical resources (UNWTO, 2013). The following points were included in this section:

Development of the program

The undergraduate study plan was initially formulated in 2001, before being modified and updated twice. First, in 2007 the study plan was slightly modified where changes were confined to introducing new and more market-oriented courses. Then, in 2010 the study plan was reformed, where major amendments were conducted regarding both the plan structure and courses. In academic year 2013-2014, the tourism department reformulated the following as part of the continuous improvement process adopted:

1. Tourism department vision, mission, objectives
2. Tourism undergraduate program vision, mission, objectives, and outcomes

This was implemented taking into consideration four factors:Affiliation to SQU and CASS,Affiliation to the Tourism and Hospitality disciplines,Employment market needs and trends, and Feedback received during the UNWTO.TedQual certification process (See Table 2).

Table 2: Tourism Department - Program Vision, Mission, and Objectives

	TOURISM DEPARTMENT	**TOURISM UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM**
VISION	The Tourism Department aspires to become a leading national, regional and international centre of excellence in tourism and hospitality teaching, research and community service.	The Tourism Department strives through excellence in teaching, to provide an outstanding tourism and hospitality education for its undergraduate program students, according to the international standards.
MISSION	The Tourism Department is committed to academic excellence, and distinction in research and community service through the provision of stimulating educational programs and learning activities in an environment that foster creative and critical thinking, effective communication skills and freedom of expression and social responsibility. Graduates are prepared to engage in life-long learning and to carry out tourism and hospitality career responsibilities with competence.	The Tourism Department undergraduate program is committed to academic excellence, integrity, and ethical behaviour through the creation and dissemination of knowledge related to tourism and hospitality in an environment that fosters creative and critical thinking, effective communication skills, freedom of expression, and social responsibility.
OBJECTIVES	. Provide a high standard education suitable for individuals seeking employment as professionals in tourism and hospitality. . Supply the national, regional, and international tourist market with the professional human resources required in different fields of tourism and hospitality. . Cultivate in graduates the ability to communicate and work effectively in multicultural environments. . Study current cultural, economic, and social issues that shape and affect tourism and hospitality. . Assume a leading role in community service and social responsibility nationally, regionally, and internationally. . Provide students with opportunities through training to develop their skills, capacities, and creativity for personal and professional development.	Provide students with academic foundation and real-life experience for a successful career in tourism and hospitality. . Improve students' ability to exercise judgment and critically analyse situations and develop alternatives. . Develop students' leadership and management skills, capability for career planning, goal-setting, and team-building. . Develop students' understanding of tourism and hospitality laws and ethical aspects. . Improve students' written, oral, and non-verbal communication skills and usage of information technologies.

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

The program mission is translated into specific program educational objectives and student outcomes that are expected as a result of the educational process. The Educational Objectives are related to Student Outcomes. The program educational objectives describe the expected skills, knowledge, and abilities that a graduate should achieve during the initial years following graduation.

Student Outcomes are statements that describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. These are related to the skills, knowledge and attitudes/behaviors that students acquire in their matriculation through the program (See Table 3).

Table 3: Student outcomes - Program educational objectives matrix

	KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING ATTRIBUTES	INTELLECTUAL/THINKING SKILLS	PROFESSIONAL & PRACTICAL ATTRIBUTES/SKILLS		COMMUNICATION & TRANSFERABLE SKILLS
	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5
	Provide students with academic foundation and real-life experience for a successful career in tourism and hospitality	Improve students' ability to exercise judgment and critically analyze situations and develop alternatives	Develop students' leadership and management skills, capability for career planning, goal-setting, and team-building	Develop students' understanding of tourism and hospitality laws and ethical aspects	Improve students' written, oral, and non-verbal communication skills and usage of information technologies
Outcome 1 Students will demonstrate unique knowledge related to operating a Tourism and Hospitality business in a diverse and global business environment	■				
Outcome 2 Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills and creativity required to effectively function in the tourism and hospitality industry		■			
Outcome 3 Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct all the duties required for working in the different Departments of tourism and hospitality institutions			■		
Outcome 4 Students will demonstrate the ability to define, identify, and evaluate ethical versus unethical business practices				■	
Outcome 5 Students will demonstrate the ability to employ proficient written and oral communication skills, including the appropriate usage of technology for effective customer service and teamwork					■

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Curricular structure and study plan

Tourism students currently studyfor four years (eight semesters), where the plan comprises 120 credit hoursdistributed on seven course categories (See Table 4). A successful completion of the 120 credits (roughly 5 courses per semester) and a minimum cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.0 (from a maximum of 4.0) are required to attain a Bachelor of Arts in Tourism.

Table4: Course category credit hours

	Course Category	Credit Hours
1	University Requirements	6
2	University Electives	6
3	College Requirements	11
4	College Electives	3
5	Major Requirements	34
6	Major Electives (6 Language Courses and 2 Elective Courses)	24
7	Specialization Requirements	36
Total		**120**

All students registering in the Department should study the major requirements courses, (12 courses / 34 credit hours) regardless of their specialization. Students usually receive these courses during their first four semesters in the Department. After finishing their first four semesters, students will then proceed toward receiving the specialization requirements courses, (12 courses / 36 credit hours) in one of the Department active specializations (Tourism Management and Hospitality Management) for another four semesters. Students must study two courses from group ofmajor electives courses; as well as to fulfill 6 course levels of either German or French language.

Learning and teaching

In its quest to provide the highest possible standards and quality of education, the Department invites professionals from all related fields to participate in and contribute to the students' education experience. This additional contribution is done through either guest lectures, seminars, or field trips. The study plan courses are built in a way to provide the students with both theoretical and practical aspects of the tourism sector using different teaching methods and media. In general, the study plan courses fall within three categories: In class courses, courses with practical applications, and internships.

Courses Monitoring

For each course there is a three-part course portfolio:
- Course file summary: Including general course information, syllabus, regulations, and grading system.
- Course work samples: Comprising samples of exams, handouts, and students' class activities.
- Course report: A SWOT analysis of the course.

Study organization and feasibility
All study plan courses are linked to the outcomes they are fulfilling (See Table 5 for a sample).

Table5: Mapping of courses to student outcomes

Course Title	Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5
	Level	Level	Level	Level	Level
Introduction to Tourism	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
Tourism Resources in Oman	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
Research Methodology in Tourism and Hospitality	Introduce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Summer Internship (1)	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
Summer Internship (2)	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
French for Tourism (1)	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
German for Tourism (6)	Reinforce	Reinforce	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize
Tourism Companies and Travel Agencies Operations	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Airlines Operations and Management	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Feasibility Study of Tourism and Hospitality Projects	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize
Tourism Marketing	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize
Hospitality Management	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Food Production	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Front Office Operations and management	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
Graduation Project for Hospitality	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Assessments
All courses have clear assessment methodsthat are applied to ensure students' outcomes achievement (See Table 6 for a sample).

Table 6: Student outcomes assessment

Course Title	Outcome 1 Assessment	Outcome 2 Assessment	Outcome 3 Assessment	Outcome 4 Assessment	Outcome 5 Assessment
Introduction to Tourism	Written Exam	Project	Project	Project	Project
Tourism Resources in Oman	Project	Project	Project	Project	Project
Research Methodology in Tourism and Hospitality	Project / Quiz	Paper	Presentation / Peer Evaluation	Presentation / Peer Evaluation	Project / Presentation
Summer Internship (1)	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam
Summer Internship (2)	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam	Report / Oral Exam
French for Tourism (1)	Project / Written-Oral Exam	Project / Written-Oral Exam	Project / Written-Oral Exam	Project / Written-Oral Exam	Project / Written-Oral Exam
German for Tourism (6)	Project / Written Exam	Project	Project	Project	Project / Oral Exam
Tourism Companies and Travel Agencies Operations	Training	Assignment / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation / Assignments
Airlines Operations and Management	Training	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation	Class Tasks / Exam / Presentation / Assignments
Feasibility Study of Tourism and Hospitality Projects	Project / Quiz	Project / Participation	Group Assignment / Peer Evaluation	Group Assignment / Peer Evaluation	Project / Presentation
Tourism Marketing	Project / Quiz	Project / Participation	Quiz / Participation	Quiz / Participation	Project / Presentation
Hospitality Management	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation
Food Production	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation	Assignment / Presentation
Front Office Operations and management	Written Exam	Project	Project	Project	Project
Graduation Project for Hospitality	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

4. The Faculty

The aim of this section is to verify the existence of transparent mechanisms to select the faculty, as well as favorable work conditions that promote their professional development (UNWTO, 2013). The following points were included in this section:

The Department has 16 academic faculty members holding PhDs, master's and bachelor's degrees from USA, UK, Germany, France, Australia, Egypt, and Oman. Table 7presents the department student/staff ratio, which refers to an excellent level of interaction.

Table7: Student - Staff ratio

Semester	No. of Sections	No. of Students	Teaching Staff	Student/Staff Ratio
Fall 2015	57	873	13	11.7
Spring 2015	64	963	13	12.6

Source: Tourism Department (2012)

Teaching monitoring

Effectiveness of teachers is monitored through the appraisal of academic staff, students' course and teaching survey, and students' liaison committee.

5. The Management

The aim of this section is to verify the existence of an organizational structure as well as support tools to monitor the program's quality (UNWTO, 2013). The following points were included in this section:

Department Organization chart

The Tourism Department is structured as follows (Figure 1)**:**
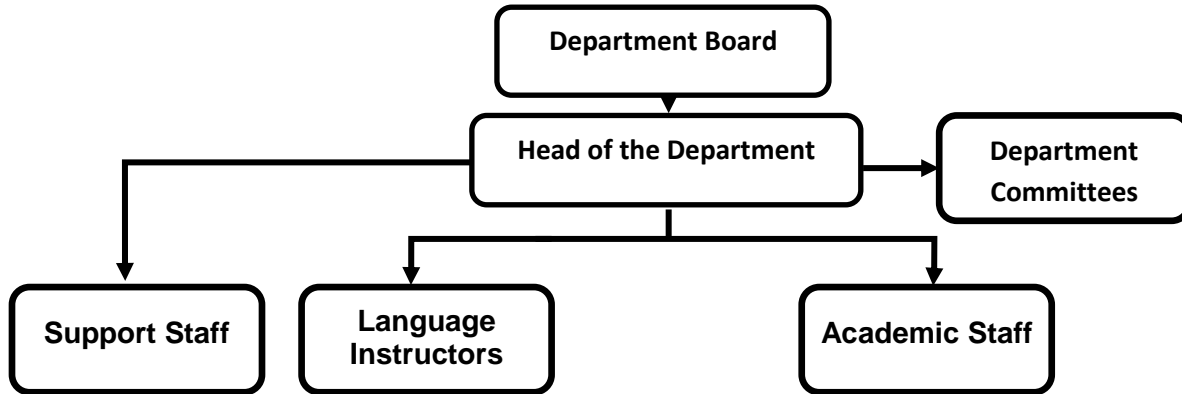
Figure 1: Tourism department organizational chart

Program monitoring

The department monitors the program completion rates by comparing the number of students successfully completing the program to the number of students whostarted the program per cohort (Tables 8&9).

Table8: Program completion rate during the past 4 years

Year	Number of Students per cohort	Number of Students Completing the Program	Apparent Completion Rate *
2011 / 2007	39	38	97.4%
2012 / 2008	38	36	94.7%
2013 / 2009	50	43	86%
2014 / 2010	27	22	81.4%

Source: Tourism Department (2012)

Table9: Comparison of planned and actual enrolments during the past 5 years

Year	Planned Enrolments	Actual Enrolments
2011	40	40
2012	40	40
2013	40	23
2014	40	27
2015	40	35

Source: Tourism Department (2012)

The Department did not reach the planned enrolments in any of the last three years. Accordingly, the Department is usually unable to fulfill the increasing job opportunities offered by the Omani tourism market. This shortage in enrolments could be due to two factors:

1. The significant freedom given to students to select their specialty, where the Department is usually competed by other attractive specialties (e.g. Engineering, medical, information and language studies).
2. The community resistance of tourism as a lucrative career, which is still evident despite the government's continuous efforts to spread awareness.

The Department follows several approaches for coordinating, monitoring and assuring quality of the undergraduate program with a focus on three important areas:

1. Teaching (using students' course survey).
2. Students (using academic advising & students' liaison committee).

3. Research and community service.

The Department dedication to quality assurance in teaching and learning, research and community service led to the formulation of the Department accreditation and quality assurance committee in spring 2012. The committee major functions are:

- Promotingquality culture in the Department
- Managing the Department accreditation processes
- Monitoringadherence to quality standards and practices

Program revision and assessment

Revision and assessment criteria are based on the principles of total quality management and continuous improvement. Several tools are utilized for assessing the employers and market needs:

1. Advisory Committee
2. Employers' Survey
3. National Joint Committees
4. Alumni Feedback
5. Course Evaluation
6. Students' Liaison Committee

6. Incorporating the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism into the Program

The aim of this section is to assess how the purposes and principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism are incorporated into the program reflecting on the above five areas (UNWTO, 2013).

To inform the department affiliates about the principles of the global code of ethics for tourism (Ten Codes), the program invited a UNWTO representative to conduct a workshop about the principles. The department committee members were directly involved in designing an action plan for the implementation of the global code of ethics in the five major areas of concern; the employers, the students, the curriculum, the faculty, andthe management. The main goal was to design a clear set of actions that could be implemented, controlled, and evaluated. One major challenge was the transformation of some of the codes into applicable actions in the tourism and hospitality higher education setting. See Table 10 for the implementation plan of the global code of ethics for tourism.

Table 10: Implementation plan of the global code of ethics

The Employers	The Student	The Curriculum	The Faculty	The Management
1. Increasing department students' exposure to diverse communities and cultures through internal and external summer internship placements. **[1]**	1. Increasing department students' exposure to diverse communities and cultures through internal and external summer internship placements. **[1]**	1. The principles of the global code of ethics for tourism to be covered within some of the study plan courses. **[1-10]**	1. Conducting workshops, lectures and seminars on current and critical tourism issues. **[1-10]**	1. Prepare Self-evaluation report (Every Five Years). **[1-10]**
2. Hosting presentations by key tourism industry professionals illustrating their efforts for promoting the Omani local values and encouraging mutual understanding between tourists and local citizens. **[1]**	2. Conducting awareness campaigns: • Off-Campus. **[1] [5]** On-campus campaigns for SQU students. **[2]**	2. A traditional lecture format, case studies, research papers, oral presentations, and discussions of best practices will be used to teach the principles. Students will also be tested on the principles through quizzes and examinations for positive reinforcement. **[1-10]**	2. Conducting awareness campaigns: • Off-Campus. **[1] [5]** • On-campus campaigns for SQU students. **[2]**	2. Prepare Annual Department Report. **[1-10]**
3. Conducting a graduates' employment survey. **[2]**	3. Tourism Festival to be annually organized by the tourism group [2]	3. Providing the library with books that deal with the global code of ethics and on current and critical tourism issues. **[1-10]**	3. Cooperating with the SQU Centre for Community Service and Continuing Education (CCSCE) in providing short courses to increase Community Awareness of Tourism. **[1] [5]**	3. Participating in tourism related committees on national and international levels. **[1-10]**
4. Providing short courses and consultancies to the governmental and the private sectors. **[3] [4]**	4. Continue to offer Sustainable Tourism course as college elective for the College of Arts and Social Sciences. **[3]**	4. Invite guest speakers from the governmental sector and the private sector to conduct lectures and help in teaching **[1-10]**	4. Conducting studies aimed at maximizing tourism benefits for local hosting communities. **[5]**	4. Advisory Committee Meeting to be held annually. **[5]**
5. Participating in activities organized by the tourism employers and other entities. **[3] [4]**	5. Field visits for Department Students to major tourism projects. **[3]**	5. Offer elective courses that fulfill prompt industry needs **[1-10]**	5. Carrying out studies about tourism at regional and international levels. **[1-10]**	

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)
Note: Numbers between brackets indicate the code number

Part Two: Department quality assurance plan

The Department board approved and adopted a "Department Quality Assurance Plan" (Tables 11, and 12) which comprises:

1. Periodic Activities
2. Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

1. Periodic Activities

The following is a list of activities completed on a regular basis to assure effectiveness of the departmental practices and adherence to quality standards.

Table 11: Quality Assurance Plan (Periodic Activities)

No.	Activity	Type	Semester		Frequency
	Department community service Report	CS	FL		1/Y
	Department community service plan	CS	SP		1/Y
	Research activities report	RC	FL		1/Y
	Department research plan	RC	SP		1/Y
	Best researcher appointment	RC	SP		1/Y
	Department committees' formulation	SA	FL		1/Y
	Department representatives at college committees' appointment	SA	FL		1/Y
	Appraisals & report compilation	SA	FL		1/Y
	Department advisory committee meeting preparation	SA	FL		1/Y
	Students extracurricular activities plan	SA	FL		1/Y
	Strategic plan tasks progress review	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
	Continuous improvement and accreditation meeting	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
	Department board meeting	SA	FL	SP	As Needed
	Department progress review according to Mission, Vision, & Objectives	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
	Department and college committees work follow-up	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
	Students' liaison committee meeting	SA	SP		1/S
	Department members training needs report	SA	SP		1/Y
	Department book update and review	SA	SP		Continuous
	Summer training assessment meeting	TL	FL		1/Y
	Training plan and budget preparation	TL	FL		1/Y
	Schedule and teaching load sheet	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Courses files collection and review	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Student academic advising status report	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Midterm & Final exams needs assessment	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Pre-results grades review meeting	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Grades report review meeting	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Teaching survey report	TL	FL	SP	1/S
	Best teacher appointment	TL	SP		1/Y
	Courses books status and needs assessment meeting	TL	SP		1/Y
	Study plans review and update	TL	SP		Continuous
	Summer semester schedule and teaching load sheet	TL	SP		1/S
	Summer training plan and distribution list	TL	SP		1/Y

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Note: 1/S=Once per semester, 1/Y=Once per year, CS=Community service, RC=Research & consultancy, SA=Steering activity, TL=Teaching & Learning

2. Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The main plan domains are broken down into activities with KPIs and benchmarks to better control performance.

Table 12: Quality assurance Plan (Key Performance Indicators - KPIs)

KPI	Benchmark
TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Percentage of course section with 30 or less students	80 %
Percentage of courses assessed and evaluated	100 %
Growth in the total number of student enrolled	-
Percentage of undergraduate students achieving CGPA < 2.7	60 %
Percent of undergraduate students on probation	10 %

Percentage of student graduated within expected period of graduation of concerned cohort	75 %
RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY	
Number of published articles in refereed journals per year	1 / Faculty Member
Number of refereed conference papers publications per year	1 / Faculty Member
Number of published books including book chapters over a period of 5 years	1 / Department
Number of International conferences organized over a period of 5 years	1 / Department
COMMUNITY SERVICE	
Number of training courses and workshops organized by the staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
Number of articles published, or talks given in the public media by staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
Number of staff participations in national, regional and international committees per year	2 / Department
Memberships in regional and international Professional Societies	1 / Faculty Member
DEPARTMENT STEERING ACTIVITIES	
Number of students' extracurricular activities done per year	2 / Year
Number of Department meetings per year	6 / Year
Number of college committees (regular) participated in by staff per year	2 / Faculty Member
Number of college committees (Ad-hoc) participated in by staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
Number of students' liaison committee meetings per year	1 / Year
Number of stakeholders' advisory board meetings per year	1 / Year

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Conclusions

In May 2013, a significant step was made on the Department's long trajectory of educational excellence and leadership. This step was the Department's reception of the UNWTO.TedQual certification for its undergraduate program as the first Tourism Department in the Middle East to receive this recognition. In October 1st, 2015 the accreditation was renewed for three more years till September 30th, 2018.

The UNWTO.TedQual certification process looks to evaluate the education program from two perspectives:

1. Compliance with the quality criteria defined by UNWTO.TedQual based on five areas: The employers, the students, the curriculum, the faculty, and the management.
2. Incorporation of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in the system.

Receiving the UNWTO.TedQual certification allows the Tourism Department several privileges including but not limited to:

- Inclusion of the Department in the UNWTO.TedQual exchange programs for students and professors' internship, scholarship opportunities, joint research projects, and scientific publication.
- International promotion of the Department and its programs through the UNWTO's various communication tools and mechanisms.
- Membership of the UNWTO.TedQual Network - a platform where institutions share knowledge, good practices and technical support.
- Use of the UNWTO.TedQual logo on official stationery and promotional materials.
- Participation in the UNWTO.TedQual worldwide annual event.
- Reception of support for organizing and hosting scientific events such as conferences and workshops.

A Final Word

- Academic accreditation could be International or National based on the accrediting body nature and based on the scope there are two types: Institutional or Program accreditation.
- Accrediting agency choice is an important issue where several factors must be considered:
- Philosophy of the accrediting agency
- Average length of accreditation process
- Actual process involved and workload
- Benefits gained, and support services provided by the accrediting agency
- Cost of the whole process
- To be ready for the process some basics should be available, ready, and updated:
- Mission - Vision - Objectives (Department)
- Mission - Vision - Objectives - outcomes (Program)
- CoursesPortfolio
- The program mission is translated into specific program educational objectives and student outcomes that are expected as a result of the educational process.
- Program educational objectives are consistent with the missions of the College and the University and the need of programs' constituents.
- The Educational objectives are closely related to the Student Outcomes.
- Program Matrix (Relationship between: Objectives - outcomes - Courses)
- Academic accreditation is an evidence-based process consequently data pertaining to the following should be available and fully comprehended by all department affiliates:
- History of the unit
- Quality Assurance Plan
- Department Statistics (Faculty - Students - Graduates - Employers)
- Study Plans
- Value added practices and tools: There are some practices and tools that are very crucial and greatly enhance the position of the program:
- Full disclosure
- Efficient communication channels
- Faculty and students' involvement in quality practices
- Advisory board
- Budget
- Department Booklet
- Infra and Super Structures (Labs - Classrooms - Library)

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