

BRIDGING ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY: PERPARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF MEETING PROFESSIONALS

By Greg DeShields, Founder, Executive Director Greg DeShields Consulting and Shawn Andre Murray, MA, MST, MSL,PHR, Associate Professor Tourism & Hospitality Management Montgomery County Community College



Greg DeShields Consulting LLC (GDC) is excited to collaborate with the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) for their 42nd Annual Conference in Portland, Oregon. Themed *Empower. Innovate. Act.*, this year's conference highlighted the innovative educational initiative, "Bridging Academia and Industry." GDC is a boutique consulting firm specializing in hospitality industry strategy, workforce development, diversity and inclusion, and the integration of academic and industry practices.

Led by Jason E. Dunn Sr., Chief Executive Officer the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) is a U.S.-based professional association dedicated to advancing the interests and opportunities of Black professionals in the meetings, events, and hospitality industries.

NCBMP Gorge Turner Scholars Kevin Richardson, Chairman, Jason Dunn, CEO, Carmen Gaines, Education

It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of **Carmen Gaines**, Community & Citizenship Manager at **Turner Construction Company**, and her leadership of the George Turner Scholars Program, which is a vital part of the NCBMP Student Education & Development Program, also extending the invitation for GDC to join the team. Through this program, Carmen plays a crucial role in identifying and nurturing emerging talent, particularly among students and early-career professionals committed to leadership in the hospitality industry.



This year, Carmen's outstanding work was recognized at the NCBMP's 42nd Annual Conference, where she was awarded the prestigious Chairman's Award. This honor is a testament to her unwavering dedication to the growth and development of future industry leaders.

The George Turner Scholars Program provides scholars with invaluable opportunities, including scholarship assistance, industry exposure, mentoring, and access to important conferences and networking events. This initiative not only helps scholars enter the field but also equips them with the tools they need to advance into leadership roles within the hospitality sector.

The "Bridging Academia and Industry" curriculum, designed specifically for junior and senior college students, provides an innovative learning experience for those aspiring to build meaningful careers in the meetings and conventions industry. This blend of practical and academic education enables students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, enhancing their critical thinking skills, creativity, and career readiness.

The curriculum was offered through Canvas LMS, an intuitive online platform that supports efficient asynchronous learning. By offering flexibility with a cohort-based model, the program allows students to engage with content at their convenience while fostering collaboration, community building, and shared growth—skills essential

in the meetings profession. The program began in July, concluding in November, providing students with a solid academic and professional foundation as they prepared to attend the NCBMP National Conference in Portland, Oregon (November 19–22).

In 2024, GDC launched a similar student program at the **National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators, and Developers (NABHOOD)** Conference in Miami, FL. Students participated in an engaging Hotel Development Case Study Competition, which challenged them to create and plan a hotel concept.

The objective of the project was to encourage students to engage in the creative process, exploring various aspects of hotel management, design, and guest experience. This case study emphasized strategy, feasibility, and a relevant industry approach, and fostered teamwork and organization, critical elements in the hospitality industry.

Aligned with NCBMP's mission, the Bridging Academia and Industry program amplifies the history, influence, and leadership of Black professionals in hospitality and events. Students gain not only practical skills but also a culturally informed understanding of the industry's evolution—an essential perspective for shaping a more inclusive and equitable future.

Integrating Black history into hospitality education is crucial as it challenges stereotypes, promotes inclu-

sivity, and provides students with a more complete understanding of the industry. By exposing students to diverse perspectives, the program fosters cultural competence while instilling pride and a sense of belonging in Black students. Learning about Black figures who overcame significant obstacles can inspire students to pursue their careers with confidence and resilience, empowering them to become future leaders.

This curriculum creates a more equitable foundation by acknowledging the past and empowering future generations of Black hospitality leaders. By fostering awareness, we ensure that the legacy of Black leadership continues to grow, making a lasting impact on the hospitality and meetings industries.

In collaboration with Shawn Andre Murray, Associate Professor of Tourism & Hospitality Management at Montgomery County Community College, we facilitated delivery of the Capstone Assignment for students to develop and present a competitive proposal for producing a high-profile conference within the meeting and convention industry. A critical role in evaluating the success of a curriculum, serving as a comprehensive measure of students' ability to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired throughout their studies. These projects, typically completed at the culmination of a course or program, allow students to demonstrate their understanding in a real-world or simulated context.



The Capstone case study provided an exceptional platform for students to demonstrate their capabilities in event planning and management. Assigned to prepare competing proposals for a prestigious conference, two teams explored key topics, including pricing analysis, calculating square footage, assessing prof-

itability, conducting competitive reviews, evaluating customer service, and leveraging artificial intelligence.

Representatives from NCBMP, the Education Committee, and the board evaluated students' work for creativity and professionalism. Everyone gained important insights from the competition, and after

thoughtful evaluation, Team 1 was chosen as the winner thanks to their proposal for an "Eco-Impact Sustainability-Focused Conference".

During the final Coalition Scholarship Breakfast on Saturday, November 22nd, the top team received a \$2,500 award in recognition of their exceptional performance.

TEAM A - Cassandre Bossicot, Celine Trombi, Karl Lerma, and Naadiya Al-Salam

Each member of the follow-up team was acknowledged for their contributions and awarded a \$250 individual payment.

The event highlighted not only the impressive skills of the students but also the generous support from the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals and their corporate sponsors. Their financial contribution made these awards possible, ensuring the students receive the recognition they deserve.

Most importantly, the Capstone case study provided a valuable opportunity for students to highlight their professional talents and gain real-world experience. The acknowledgment of their hard work at this prestigious event serves as a reminder



of the bright future ahead for these emerging professionals in the events industry.

Karl A. Lerma - Hospitality Management student Virginia State University

"Attending the NCBMP Conference in Portland, Oregon was a transformative experience that expanded both my professional network and my understanding of inclusive leadership in hospitality. The sessions and conversations challenged me to think bigger about my personal impact, along with exploring ways the meeting planning industry can elevate others through community engagement as I continue building my career in hospitality."

Cassandre Bossicot - Hospitality Management student Bethune-Cookman University

"As a George Turner NCBMP Scholarship recipient, the conversations, mentorship, academic experience, and energy in every room reminded me why I belong in this industry. This experience has pushed along with inspired me to dream bigger, show up boldly, and continue creating spaces for future students entering the meeting planning industry."

The collaboration between GDC and NCBMP represents a strategic investment in the future of the meetings and hospitality industry. The Bridging Academia

and Industry curriculum is more than coursework is a pathway to representation, opportunity, and industry transformation.

By empowering students with knowledge, competency, and cultural awareness, we are helping to shape the next generation of meeting professionals and ensuring that the legacy of Black leadership continues to grow. This initiative plays a crucial role in preparing students for success, creating a more inclusive, equitable, and innovative future for the hospitality and meetings industries.

"THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES"