Demand
In reviewing the master’s program in hospitality and exploring continued viability of the program, the faculty have worked hard to move the program from the traditional on-campus program to the online program that was introduced a year ago. In 2015, faculty in the Department of Hospitality Management surveyed industry professionals in Kansas and Missouri to assess the needs for a Master’s degree program. More than a half of survey participants (18 of 34 responses) indicated that they have one to five employees who may be interested in master’s program. When asked about the preferred delivery methods, most of the individuals preferred hybrid courses that would be online but would have meeting times throughout the semester (15 responses), followed by online only (12 responses), and on-campus at the Olathe campus (7 responses).

In 2019, Global Campus and the department worked with Emsi to analyze the feasibility of Kansas State University offering a hospitality management master’s degree online program. The report outlined labor market demand for the United States in the targeted occupations of food service and lodging management and those requiring a master’s degree. The report noted that there was an expected 4.5% increase in demand from 2018 through 2023, resulting in over 1,713 openings each year. The report further explored regional trends in distance programs versus non-distance programs and noted a 200% increase in completion of distance programs from 2013 to 2017, compared to a decline of 43.3% in non-distance programs, thus showing an increased demand for online programs in hospitality administration. Further, our bachelor’s degree graduates often indicated their willingness to continue with the advanced degree, but were unable to commit to attending classes on the Manhattan campus (Kaitlyn Allen, personal communication, March 13, 2017; Monica Nelson, personal communication, September 22, 2017; Katrina Marshall, personal communication, February 22, 2020). When the online program was established, two of these three individuals enrolled in the program.

It is important to note that all these data were pulled before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down restaurants and hotels across the United States. In July 2020, the GPIDEA Program worked with EAB to conduct a similar feasibility study to the one conducted by the department in 2015. While the pandemic negatively impacted overall market demand, the report noted that from June 2017 through May 2020, regional demand for master’s-level hospitality professionals grew an average of 0.96% per month, which outpaced demand for all other master’s-level professions. Further, between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018, regional completions for master’s level hospitality programs increased 7.38% per year, showing increased growth in student demand. The report noted that due to the current pandemic, short-term employer demand would decrease. While limited data is available to show how the hospitality industry will recover from this global pandemic, transaction data collected by 1010data in late-January showed combined spending across retail and service sectors, which
includes the hospitality industry, reached 85% of pre-COVID pandemic levels. In fact, a recent survey by the World Travel & Tourism Council showed that 99% of American and Canadian travelers are “eager to travel again”. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that leisure travel, business travel, and dining will rebound once the pandemic passes, thus leading to a strong industry with increasing demand for managers.

**Strategies to Increase Enrollment**

A considerable amount of work and resources have been put into moving the master’s program online. All required hospitality management courses have been developed for online offering, and the curriculum has been streamlined to be more inclusive of all hospitality and service-oriented businesses. A campaign to increase enrollment began in the summer of 2020. These efforts have continued throughout the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021 and promotion of the program will continue. Current efforts include:

- Offering two online open houses each semester to promote the program to those who are interested in a Master’s program in hospitality administration.
- Promoting the combined Bachelor of Science/Master of Science program with qualified underclassmen in hospitality management via targeted emails inviting students to apply. This effort has already yielded additional students in the program and we expect this to continue to help with enrollment numbers.
- Conducting targeted social media marketing campaigns, specifically in both South Korea and China, to promote the online master’s program.
- Establishing a connection with study abroad agencies in both China and South Korea who help match students with graduate programs. Students in these countries routinely seek out advanced degrees, providing an online option that can be completed without coming to the United States should be an attractive option to students.

Compared to fall of 2019, enrollment has increased by 175% to seven students in the program, with an additional five students who have already been admitted to the program for fall 2021, three of whom have committed to enrolling. We anticipate recruiting additional students in the coming months, however, targeted marketing efforts will continue.

**GPIDEA Master’s Program**

Another initiative we are pursuing to increase enrollment is a partnership with other universities to develop and offer an MS in Hospitality and Tourism Management through the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (GPIDEA). The initial development idea has been approved by the GPIDEA Board of Directors and the curriculum is currently being explored.

While the program is a year or more out from coming to fruition, we believe that participating in this program will increase visibility of the program and capitalize on advertising opportunities that we may not traditionally been able to utilize. Further, participation in the GPIDEA program will offer students pursuing the MS program at K-State additional course offerings, which would otherwise not be possible to offer with existing K-State faculty.