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ASU Mid-South Hospitality Program Earns National Recognition

Arkansas State University Mid-South's Hospitality Management program recently earned inclusion in BestHospitalityDegrees.com's "50 Most Affordable Small Colleges for Hospitality Administration and Management 2015" list. Lead Faculty Marjorie Gardner says that is just the beginning.

"We want to be No. 1 in everything we do," said Gardner who came to ASU Mid-South this the spring to direct the fledgling program. "I have really big plans, and I'm getting the support I need from our administration and the industry in our region. I see Arkansas State University Mid-South as having the potential to create the leading two-year hospitality management program offered globally. That's my vision."

Melissa Maypole, who compiled the information for the top 50 list, said researchers consulted the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator to evaluate schools enrolling less than 3,000 students and offering associate's or bachelor's degrees in Hospitality Administration/Management, Hotel/Motel Administration/Management or Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Management.

From the nearly 150 schools reviewed, 50 received recognition. ASU Mid-South placed 21st in the affordability ratings.

"What's special about this ranking?" Maypole wrote. "What impresses us is the depth and breadth you can find in an affordable hospitality degree—a degree that could very well set you on a path to a rewarding and profitable career."

Gardner, a native of Kingston, Jamaica, said the hospitality management field offers many career possibilities whether students want to work in their home towns or travel the world.



“The options are so wide, vast, and very interesting and exciting,” she said. “The hospitality business is booming; the number of jobs is growing, and it’s global. It appeals to a lot of different people and personalities, and it allows you to think big.”



“Hospitality is not just cooking. You can go into lodging, housekeeping, front desk management, or the cruise ship industry. Cruise ships operate like hotels today, and they give you an opportunity to explore different nations. If you want to stay closer to home, the Mid-South is like a buzzing tourist mecca. We have lots of activities and investments in the industry.”

With Southland Park Gaming & Racing as its key partner, ASU Mid-South opened the Jeremy Jacobs Hospitality Center this summer, a facility that is among the best of its kind in the region. The college also collaborates and shares space with the Delta Cuisine Commercial Kitchen and Business Incubator.

“Our facility is awesome,” Gardner said. “We have state-of-the-art stainless steel equipment, and we have secured some of the best technology available.”

Among other more typical kitchen appliances, the center features, a Combi Oven, blast chiller, and proof box. College and Delta Cuisine representatives, the building architect, and a kitchen consultant worked together to select commercial-grade, energy-efficient equipment that will meet the requirements of ASU Mid-South and Delta Cuisine for the foreseeable future.

The facility includes new construction on the North Campus as well as a renovated area in the existing structure which houses the Arkansas Workforce Center. The new construction includes all of the cooking/food preparation equipment. The repurposed section features a high-tech classroom, a large open area that can be used for social functions or special-event training, a bar, a hotel “suite” for instruction, a small meeting room, and faculty offices.

ASU Mid-South has also partnered with the University of Memphis Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management on a transfer agreement and scholarship opportunity for students who complete the college’s associate of science degree program. In addition, ongoing input from an advisory committee is helping ASU Mid-South align its program with industry standards.

“We want to make sure we are touching all of the most important areas to keep our curriculum and technology up to date,” Gardner pointed out.

The college offers an Associate of Science in Hospitality Management, an Associate of Applied Science in Hospitality Management, a Technical Certificate in Food Service Management, and Certificates of Proficiency in Food Service Management and Hospitality Management.

As part of the overall curriculum, Gardner said she plans to develop internship opportunities locally and internationally to enhance the program appeal. While working for the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, she coordinated an international internship program where she participated in the selection, placement, and supervision of students in practical-application work experiences in Jamaica and the U.S. She also has significant experience with program accreditation and course assessment.

Gardner said she has been interested in food and hospitality-related pursuits for as long as she can remember, thanks to her mother’s influence.

“That is my mom’s profession; she’s a homemaker,” Gardner explained. “I can remember back to when I was three years old being interested in food, nutrition, and teaching. My mom taught me. We didn’t only do the cooking with mom; we had to sew as well. In high school I excelled and was one of the top students in my class. I didn’t grow up in a wealthy family, so I had to work my way through school.”

After graduating from high school, Gardner went to Shortwood Teachers’ College where she earned a diploma in teaching. From there, she attended the University of Technology in Kingston, Jamaica, and earned a bachelor’s degree in Home Economics with an emphasis in Food and Nutrition. She later earned a master’s degree in Food Studies and Food Management from New York University.

She enjoys sharing what she has learned. “Most of my life I’ve been teaching; it’s my passion.” Gardner said. “I taught for 18 years at the tertiary level in Jamaica, and I was heavily involved in curriculum and student activities.”

When she relocated to the U.S., Gardner worked with students in high school and college classrooms.

“Teaching high school was a little bit challenging at first, but I really enjoyed it,” she said. “I taught at a school in Virginia that included many students from underserved families. One of my most enjoyable moments was when I was able to take those kids for a visit to the White House. It was a really good experience for them.”

Before coming to ASU Mid-South, Gardner taught for two years at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau. She left the university because “the program at ASU Mid-South attracted me. I was so surprised when I saw this institution and program. I said, ‘Wow! This looks like what I’m really interested in doing.’ It’s something I can help grow.”

For information on Hospitality Management training opportunities at ASU Mid-South, call (870) 733-6728, email admissions@midssouthcc.edu, see the website at www.asumidsouth.edu, or visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis.