



Orange County Associates Virtual Exchange (OCTAVE)

is a vehicle for collaboration of the **Tourism Cohort**
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New Leadership Announcement**
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Passing The Baton

OCTAVE Welcomes New Leadership

By Zoot Velasco

As a longtime adjunct professor and former Center Director at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) College of Business and Economics, I am pleased to announce that the **Center for Entertainment and Hospitality Management (CEHM)** has agreed to lead the **OCTAVE** cohort and newsletter as my contract ends.

CEHM is the primary hub for hospitality-related education and industry engagement at CSUF's business school, among the largest in the US. This center serves as a bridge between academic programs and the entertainment, tourism, and hospitality industries, particularly within Southern California's globally significant visitor economy. The Center is one of fourteen distinct Centers for Excellence at the business school, alongside entities such as the Giles-O'Malley Center for Leadership, the Gianneschi Center for Social Impact (my old stomping grounds), and the Center for Real Estate. These centers are designed to connect students with industry, provide applied learning opportunities, and support research and professional development.

CEHM is currently led by **Jim Lake**, a Southern California-based hospitality and entertainment professional and educator with a career rooted in large-scale operations, guest experience, and team leadership, including service as General Manager of Disneyland Park and President of SeaWorld San Diego. He emphasizes hands-on leadership, operational excellence, and a "people-first" approach to customer service. Colleagues describe him as a highly engaged, on-the-floor leader focused on continuous improvement and team development. Jim bridges academic theory with real-world application for students preparing for careers in tourism, events, and the entertainment business. Jim will join our **OCTAVE** steering committee in June and take over leadership in September. Dr. Ellen Kim, a former



director of CEHM and a current CSUF professor, has served on our committee since its inception and has been instrumental in bringing Jim and *OCTAVE* together.

The center is closely aligned with CSUF's Entertainment and Hospitality Management (EHM) concentration within the business administration degree. This program prepares students for careers in hospitality, tourism, and media-related industries by integrating business fundamentals with sector-specific knowledge. The center supports these academic pathways by connecting classroom learning with real-world applications. The core mission of the center is to link students directly with industry opportunities.

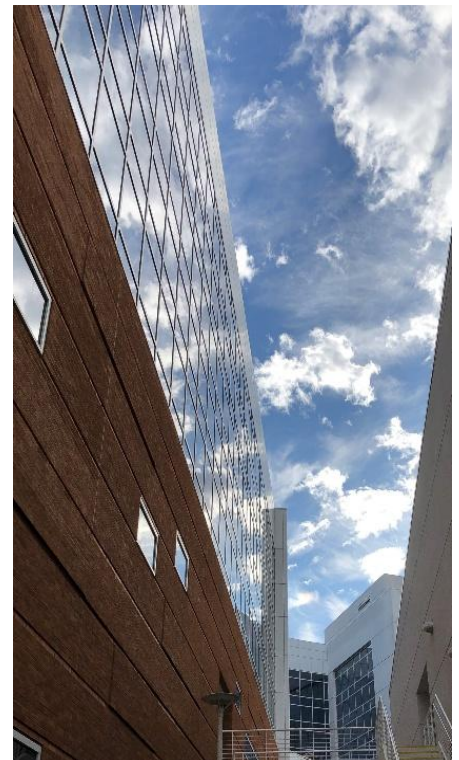
CSUF, often jokingly called "Disney University" in Orange County, is one of several universities in the Disney Aspire program, which provides educational opportunities for Disney's workforce. It has a long history and connection to launching new tourism leaders.

CEHM hosts events, guest lectures, and networking opportunities that bring students into contact with professionals across OC's hospitality and entertainment sectors. These engagements help students build relationships and understand current industry trends. Programming emphasizes career readiness through internships, applied projects, and exposure to employers. Southern California's proximity to major tourism and entertainment hubs, such as Anaheim's theme parks and Los Angeles media companies, enhances these opportunities.

Students in hospitality pathways often participate in complementary initiatives across the college, such as leadership development programs offered by the Giles-O'Malley Center. These programs include mentorship, executive engagement, and applied leadership experiences that mirror industry expectations.

The Center for Entertainment and Hospitality Management at CSU Fullerton's College of Business and Economics functions as a critical connector between students and the hospitality and entertainment industries. CEHM's mission makes Jim and the Center a great fit to lead *OCTAVE*, a direct line to industry leaders in Orange County. The partnership with OCBC and the California Jobs First Initiative is a natural fit with the mission of continuing the California Jobs First Activation Plan for Orange County.

As the consultant contracted by the OCBC to facilitate the California Jobs First OC Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Plan with community partners as a Workforce Investment strategy, I will continue in my role through September when my contract ends. I have worked hard to find a suitable successor for this program to carry forward our work. CHEM is a fantastic fit, and we look forward to Jim's leadership.



The Tourism Training Dilemma

By Zoot Velasco

In an interview with Steering Committee member Ellen Kim, California State University Fullerton (CSUF) Professor and Past Director of the Center for Entertainment and Hospitality Management, she noted that “hospitality programs are declining in enrollment at state universities across California (not so at CSUF), even as the industry grows and becomes a career path that is largely AI-proof.” Faculty increasingly believe the problem is not labor demand, but perception. The term “hospitality” is widely viewed by prospective students and their families as outdated, narrow, and associated with low-wage service jobs rather than professional careers with advancement, creativity, and leadership potential.



Rebranding “Hospitality”

To address this challenge, the university is considering rebranding the program to emphasize the “**Experience Management**” side of its programs, a program that reflects contemporary industry realities and better aligns with student interests. The idea originated at Disneyland, where CSUF is a key partner in the Disney Aspire program (offering free tuition to park employees at participating colleges and universities). Disney has changed its branding to focus less on the term “Hospitality” and more on “Experience.” This idea of rebranding Hospitality as Experience is not isolated. Rather, it follows a long history of rebranding within tourism and hospitality education as the field has evolved alongside the economy it serves.

Hospitality education has repeatedly adapted its language to reflect changing industry structures. In the 1970s and 1980s, many programs began as “Hotel Administration” or “Hotel & Restaurant Management,” reflecting a focus on property-level operations and food service. As the industry professionalized and expanded in scope, the early 2000s saw widespread adoption of the term “Hospitality Management,” signaling a broader managerial and business orientation.

Over the past decade, however, even “hospitality” has begun to feel limiting. Today’s tourism economy encompasses large-scale festivals, live entertainment, esports, conventions, experiential marketing, destination branding, and hybrid digital-physical events. As a result, many universities have either renamed their programs or created new degrees to highlight events, entertainment, sports, and experience management.

The University of Central Florida’s Rosen College (a key partner of Florida’s theme parks), for example, offers distinct degrees in “Event Management” alongside degrees in hospitality and tourism. This is the norm now. The University of Southern California and NYU’s School of Professional Studies both emphasize event, experience, and entertainment management rather than hospitality alone. San Diego State University (and other CSU campuses) have integrated hospitality, tourism, event management, and tribal gaming tracks within broader business or public administration frameworks. UNLV’s Harrah College of Hospitality has expanded its identity to include sports innovation, golf

management, gaming management, entertainment, and mega-event management, aligned with Las Vegas's evolving economy.

These shifts reflect an understanding that students are attracted to industries associated with creativity, culture, and impact. "Experience" and "entertainment" suggest leadership, event production, branding, and experience design—roles that align more closely with how young people see themselves participating in the economy.



Expanding the Mission: CSR, Social Enterprise, and B-Corps

At the same time, tourism education is being reshaped by changing values. Students increasingly want careers that align with social impact, environmental sustainability, and community benefit.

In response, many programs are incorporating CSR, social enterprise models, and Benefit Corporation (B-Corp) frameworks into their curricula. Since the early 2000s, every university in Europe has required its management graduates to study Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). That trend has reached the US over the past decade, and CSR has been integrated into the "Business & The Environment" course, a requirement for Management majors at CSUF.

Hospitality and tourism are uniquely positioned at the intersection of business, community, labor, and the environment. Training programs are beginning to reflect this beyond adding CSR to curricula by teaching sustainable destination management, responsible tourism, and climate resilience, and by increasing social enterprise in entrepreneurship classes and majors. Curricula will now highlight the growing number of B Corp-certified companies in food service, travel, events, and experiential marketing that legally balance profit with public benefit.

Institutions such as Cornell, UCF Rosen, and several European tourism schools now explicitly link hospitality education to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ethical supply chains, and inclusive economic development. These frameworks resonate strongly with students who view tourism not just as a service industry but as a platform for positive social change.

Rethinking Internships and Experiential Learning

Another issue in education that repeatedly surfaced in OCTAVE's community needs assessment is the need to rethink internships. Internships have long been central to hospitality and tourism education, traditionally framed as a "road to management." However, this model is under strain. Many students now avoid internships because they can earn significantly more through flexible part-time work, gig economy jobs, or year-round employment unrelated to their field of study. As a result, internships are increasingly perceived not as career accelerators but as low-wage labor that offers limited learning and uncertain outcomes.

Employers and educators must rethink how internships are designed and valued. (See our article in the last newsletter on the perfect internship.) To remain attractive and relevant, internships must:

- Offer competitive pay, recognizing that students face real financial pressures.
- Provide clearly defined learning outcomes, mentorship, and exposure to decision-making, not just frontline labor.
- Include project-based or rotational models that allow students to build skills in planning, marketing, operations, and leadership.
- Create visible pathways to employment, promotions, leadership, and professional networks beyond a résumé line.



Some organizations are experimenting with paid micro-internships, cooperative education models, and hybrid academic-industry studios where students work on real events, festivals, or destination initiatives as part of their coursework. These approaches better reflect today's labor market and students' expectations for meaningful, compensated work.

Restaurant onboarding offers a strong model for making internships more hands-on, with experiential learning, relationship-building, and team-building baked into the design (if you pardon the pun). See our article on this in Newsletter #4.

The tourism training dilemma is not a lack of opportunity, but a mismatch between perception, program design, and student values. Rebranding hospitality programs as Entertainment and Experience Management; integrating CSR, micro-credentials, and social enterprise principles; and redesigning internships to emphasize pay, purpose, and progression are all part of a necessary evolution. Institutions that successfully make these shifts will not only attract more students but will also better prepare the next generation of leaders for an industry that is expanding, diversifying, and redefining its role in society.



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Soft Skills Through Plays & Picks

Arts & Youth Sports as Models for Soft Skills Development

By Zoot Velasco

In contemporary education and youth development, soft skills such as critical thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, leadership, communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence are widely recognized as essential for success in school, careers, and civic life. While traditional classroom instruction often emphasizes technical or “hard” knowledge, extracurriculars like the arts and youth sports offer lived, practice-driven environments where soft skills and grit are cultivated through real experience and social engagement.

The arts—whether visual arts, music, theater, dance, or creative writing—offer unique contexts for developing soft skills because they require students to navigate ambiguity, interpret meaning, and collaborate with peers. Unlike structured curricula, artistic



engagement embraces open-ended challenges in which goals and solutions are not predefined, mirroring complex real-world problems.

Arts education has been linked to improved critical thinking, teamwork, communication, and perseverance, competencies that align closely with leadership and adaptive problem-solving in workplaces and communities. Research by the Arts Education Partnership highlights these relationships and their correlation with 21st-century workplace success skills. Art-based leadership development studies suggest that artistic practice fosters reflective and reflexive thinking, interpersonal communication, and emotional intelligence, all of which support effective leadership and decision-making. Participants in art-based learning environments often report increased capacity for empathy, collaboration, and sense-making—core components of adaptive leadership. Targeted arts programs have demonstrated improvements in problem-solving behaviors, such as intentional decision-making, task perseverance, and resourcefulness, among youth participants compared with control groups.

Art challenges participants to interpret complex material and meaning, express ideas in multiple formats (verbal, visual, performative), tolerate uncertainty and iterate creative solutions, and negotiate roles and collaborate on shared artistic goals. These processes naturally mirror the leadership cycle of assessing contexts, envisioning alternatives, and iterating toward better outcomes.



Sports have long been recognized not just for physical benefits, but also for facilitating social, emotional, cognitive, and leadership development. Participation in organized sports situates youth within dynamic systems of rules, teamwork, competition, and goal-oriented practice, creating rich conditions for the development of soft skills. Research shows that structured youth sports participation correlates with enhanced executive functions, including decision-making, self-regulation, and strategic thinking, which are foundational to effective problem-solving in academic and life contexts. Organized athletic programs provide repeated opportunities to analyze situations, adjust strategy, and persist through setbacks, mechanisms that strengthen cognitive flexibility and resilience.

A variety of studies link youth sports with enhanced leadership capacity. Longitudinal data indicate that many individuals credit their early sport experiences with developing leadership attributes such as teamwork, handling pressure, learning from mistakes, and decision-making. These are skills they carry into adulthood roles in business, education, law, healthcare, and civic life. Sports-based youth development research underscores the role of positive peer influence, coach engagement, and team affiliation in shaping teamwork, self-control, effort, and social competence—all key components of leadership and collaborative management.

Sports programs frequently position youth in formal leadership roles (e.g., captains, mentors, organizers), providing structured practice in responsibility, communication, and group coordination. The sports-based youth development (SBYD) framework has emerged precisely because intentional sport experiences reliably produce soft skills when designed with trainee development goals in mind

Comparing Arts and Sports in Soft Skills Training

Dimension	Arts	Sports
Primary Skill Drivers	Creativity, expression, reflection, interpretation	Teamwork, strategy, competition, resilience
Leadership Training	Often through collaboration, project leadership, peer facilitation	Often through roles like team captain, peer mentorship, decision roles
Problem Solving	Open-ended creative problem solving	Tactical and strategic adjustment, real-time decision-making
Social Development	Communication, empathy, negotiation of meaning	Social regulation, cooperation, peer feedback loops
Transfer to Life/Career	Emotional intelligence, communication, creative thinking	Resilience, teamwork, task leadership, stress management

Both domains provide experiential learning that cannot be fully replicated in traditional classroom settings. They naturally embed soft skills into contexts that matter: making music together, revising a play performance, adjusting plays mid-game, or strategizing against opponents.

Given this strong evidence base, educators, coaches, community organizations, and policymakers should continue to fund and expand arts and sports programming across diverse communities while intentionally designing curricula that link artistic or athletic experiences with explicit discussions of leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving. Society needs to train facilitators (teachers, coaches, mentors) to reinforce reflective practices and link youth experiences in arts/sports to broader life goals.

Some students will gravitate toward sports, others toward the arts. We need both options available to all. Both are not merely extracurricular activities; they are dynamic learning laboratories where young people practice and internalize the soft skills necessary for leadership and complex problem-solving. While they operate through different mechanisms (creative exploration vs. structured competition), each provides fertile ground for developing the relational, cognitive, and emotional competencies that enable success in school, work, and community life. The robust research findings across education, psychology, and youth development affirm that these domains should be central, not peripheral, to any strategy for holistic youth skill development.



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Upcoming Job Fairs

📌 July 2026

- **ORANGE COUNTY In-Person Community Employment Day Career Fair**
 - 📍 Holiday Inn Santa Ana-Orange County Airport
 - 📅 **July 23, 2026, 11:00 am – 3:00 pm**
 - Large community hiring event with many local employers.*
- [Orange County Virtual Job Fair](#) – Jul 30, 2026



📌 August 2026

- **Orange County Job Fair & Career Fair**
 - 📍 Courtyard Marriott Santa Ana
 - 📅 **August 13, 2026** — regularly scheduled fair series.
- [Orange County Virtual Job Fair](#) – Aug 18, 2026

NOTE: Additional Job Fairs are available to registered students at all local Colleges and Universities. Check with your College Counselors.

OCTAVE is a newsletter of the Orange County Business Council. Send us your questions, tourism success stories, needs, challenges, best practices, skills gaps, and emerging trends, and we will try to include the most relevant ones in OCTAVE!

CONTACT: Info@OCBC.com

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