



# A CAREER INVESTMENT

For one University of Guelph alumnus, earning his MBA was the investment he needed to catapult his career.

At the age of 16, Vito Curalli knew exactly what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. Unlike many of his high school friends, who had no idea what their future might hold, Vito was focused and determined, knowing that his dream job was to work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

A family trip that summer put his whole future in perspective. Together with his parents, he vacationed in Venezuela. A relative owned a hotel property there and during the trip Vito fell in love. He was captivated by the excitement and pace of the industry as well as the fact that everyone – from the hotel workers to the guests – seemed so incredibly happy.

When Vito, who was born and raised in Toronto, went back to high school in the fall, he told his guidance counsellor of his goal to work in tourism and hospitality. And, with that, the wheels were set in motion for a rewarding career working for some of the most recognizable brands in the industry.

Following his guidance counsellor's advice, Vito pursued a Bachelor of Commerce in Tourism and Hospitality from Toronto's Ryerson University. As part of his undergraduate studies, he was required to work in the industry. His first job was driving a shuttle bus on weekends for a hotel located in

Mississauga near Pearson International Airport. He worked hard and learned a lot – using the opportunity to soak up everything he could learn about the industry and how he could create a successful career within it.

The job as a shuttle bus driver taught him a lot of critical lessons about customer service and the importance of truly listening.

"They're lessons I still use today when our travel clients have a concern and turn to me or a member of my team to solve their issues," he says.

Even more importantly though, his job as a shuttle bus driver confirmed for Vito that he could have a career that he loved working in the industry that he loved. After earning his undergraduate degree, Vito began rising in the ranks, moving into management and taking on increasing levels of responsibility.

## Taking His Career to the Next Level

In 2007, almost a decade after he had completed his undergraduate degree and first entered the workforce, Vito felt he was beginning to plateau from a professional standpoint and he wanted a change.



"I'd reached a point where I needed something to catapult my career to the next level and I felt getting my MBA would have the biggest impact," he says.

Vito explored the options available to him at universities across the country. But it was the University of Guelph MBA that really got his attention. Upon admission, participants choose to concentrate their studies in one of two broad industry groups: Food and Agribusiness Management or Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Offered through the university's College of Management and Economics, it is the only MBA in the country that focuses on hospitality and tourism as a core component of its curriculum. Participants come to the program with a professional background in tourism and hospitality so that they can engage in discussions about industry-related management issues.

The program itself offers a unique combination of core courses that build key managerial skills as well as specialized courses that allow participants to apply concepts and skills to management situations in their industry group. The industry-specific courses include those that look at marketing and revenue maximization strategies, explore the strategies for defining and improving quality, and crisis and risk management strategies needed for the industry.

The University of Guelph's approach offers an opportunity to look at tourism and hospitality management from a high level, strategic perspective. And it was exactly what Vito needed to help him enter the executive ranks.

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## The Guelph Experience

The MBA is designed for up-and-coming professionals who want to enhance their credentials without disrupting their careers. And certainly that was Vito's experience as well. During the time he spent earning his MBA, he was also working full-time as a regional marketing director for a large hotel chain.

"The ongoing balance between career and school certainly tests your management skills, but it was worth it in the end," he adds. "As I gained new knowledge and skills during my studies, I was able to put them into action in my career immediately."

At University of Guelph's MBA, participants are offered the choice of two delivery methods: a full-time, on-campus option that allows the program to be completed within 13 months, or an interactive online experience.

Vito selected the online option as leading-edge technologies are integrated into the delivery so that students like him have the flexibility to study at home, at work or while travelling the world.

The innovative format created a highly interactive, engaging and supporting environment in which to learn. Vito was able to log onto his course's website at any time of the day or night as course timelines, materials and instructions are always available. An asynchronous computer conference system allows him to read and post messages without having to be logged in at the same time as his peers.

"It was very easy to log on and work through all of the programs and download all of the information," says Vito. "Because I travel quite a bit, it allowed me to manage my coursework as well as my day-to-day career. It worked out very well."

## Enhancing Management Competencies

Vito also experienced first-hand one of the advantages of Guelph's MBA approach. The program believes in helping its participants gain insights into their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can develop their management abilities.

"The MBA truly helped me with people and project management," says Vito. "They were areas that I was struggling with prior to the program. But many of the courses and group discussions focused on both and, as a result, I now have these two key management competencies."

He also saw tremendous benefits from the time spent on campus in Guelph. While the University uses technology to deliver its MBA program, participants are still required to be on campus for three brief periods. It allowed for more in-depth classroom sessions and an opportunity to network with and learn from his peers.

Vito still remembers the first day he stepped back inside a classroom for the first time in about 10 years.

“The on-campus opportunities were absolutely one of the highlights of the program,” he says. “The time spent together with other professionals in a relaxed, casual setting created a great environment to learn and enjoy the program. It is a great memory.”

And, certainly, the program gave him the career trajectory he was looking for as well. Today Vito is Executive Director of Canada, Latin America & International for Hilton Worldwide.

In this role, he oversees a group of international sales offices for Hilton Worldwide across the Americas. His 25-person team is responsible for global accounts on behalf of 3,800 hotels, in 83 countries, across 10 brands. They represent some of the most recognized hotel names in the industry including the Hilton, Waldorf Astoria, Doubletree, Embassy Suites, and Hampton. For both corporate and leisure travel, they work with a global base of clients including travel agents, meeting planners, and travel managers for large companies.

“The MBA program was very beneficial in helping build my career from that point onwards,” says Vito. “It was an investment in myself that has truly paid off.”



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