

Are you being served?

By Paige Kollock

The world's financial capital enriches LAU students' educational experience

"Hearing stories from graduates with real world experience is so important."

—Caren Salha, LAU marketing student

When Kentucky Fried Chicken entered the Chinese market in the 1980s, its slogan — "Finger-lickin' good" — translated to "Eat your fingers off" in Mandarin. When Chevrolet rolled out its Nova car in Latin America, the company failed to realize that "nova" translates as "doesn't go" in Spanish. These are just two examples illustrating the perils of introducing local products to the international marketplace.

LAU business students learned about these pitfalls and others in a course called "International Service Management," held at LAU NY in January.

Taught by Mahmood A. Khan, director of the Graduate Program in Hospitality & Tourism Management at Virginia Tech, the nine-day course combined in-class instruction with afternoon site visits to illuminate class discussions.

One such visit was to the renowned Plaza Hotel, a New York City landmark historically hosting princes, princesses and heads of state. The hotel offers perks like an in-room butler, private elevators for

no liqueur, for the birthday of a prince who didn't drink alcohol." She and her team even organized a New Year's Eve celebration on the penthouse terrace for a VIP client from the GCC who wanted to ring in the New Year in the snow.

These are just some of the many boutique services that five-star hotels like The Plaza offer. Of course, besides hotels, the services industry includes many other sectors, such as restaurants, attractions, hospitals, airlines, shipping and other transport, educational facilities, banking, consulting and more.

About 60 percent of all business conducted in the U.S. is related to services, said Khan. And an increasing trend toward automation doesn't necessarily mean fewer service jobs down the road. In fact, the opposite is the case.

"Automation provides ways to reach as many customers as possible conveniently and easily," Khan said, citing Amazon's broad reach of 244 million customers.

Classroom topics touched on concepts like "servicescape" (the way in which you tempt customers to buy your products), cultural differences when it comes to service, "conversational currency" or the buzz that exists around your company or product and how to expand on it, the gap between customer expectations and service provider expectations, among others.

Marketing student Caren Salha says she benefitted immensely from the course. "I really liked that we were undergrads, M.B.A. and Executive M.B.A. mixed together," she said. "We spent a lot of time together in and out of the classroom, and to hear stories from graduate students with real world experience is better than listening to theories in class."

All agreed that Khan's 35 years of experience in the field, as both a consultant and a professor, paid off. "He was incredible. He treated us like his friends or his children," said M.B.A. student Jimmy Ghosn.

This was the sixth course the Adnan Kassar School of Business has organized at LAU's New York outpost — all of them with the purpose of enriching students' educational experiences through exposure to instructors from U.S. universities and site visits to businesses and companies in the world's financial capital.



VIPs and secret entranceways to maintain guest discretion.

The students were treated to a private tour with The Plaza's Diplomatic Manager Alaina Monblatt, who showed them various rooms and suites and shared some of the more unusual requests she's received.

"Our concierge sourced two rare ferrets for a client who collects them in a particular shade of gray," Monblatt said. "Our pastry kitchen created a giant tiramisu cake ... custom-made with