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## USM students learn about gaming jobs, industry



BY ED KEMP • APRIL 22, 2009

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Not just about blackjack dealers, Mississippi's gaming industry generates billions of dollars and hires thousands of employees.

**ADVERTISEMENT** On Tuesday, Allen Godfrey, deputy director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission, visited the University of Southern Mississippi campus to tell students about the diversity of jobs available in both the commission and the state's gaming industry.

Cage workers, surveillance, security, marketing and information technology were just a few of the fields Godfrey listed while speaking to professor Valerie Simmons' financial accounting students.

He stressed the importance of accounting in the casino industry, as well as his own. Of the 125 positions at the MGC, 70 are in law enforcement and 30 in accounting.

"Anyone who can trace the flow of money from one account to the other - and how it affects that balance sheet - is going to become invaluable," he said.

Godfrey said that the state's casino industry has approximately 25,000 employees, with 3,000 employees coming from the hotel side of the industry. It represents 35 percent of the state's tourism jobs.

In 2008, the industry generated \$2.75 billion, making it the third highest revenue-generating casino business in the nation behind New Jersey and Nevada.

But that revenue figure was down from \$2.9 billion in 2007. From March 2008 to March 2009, gaming revenue was down 10 percent, Godfrey said.

Godfrey maintained that the industry is really strong, despite the downturn.

No casino representatives were present at the Southern Miss Career Fair in March. But tourism students didn't seem perturbed by difficult economic times.

Junior Zack Wilcox said the profession requires patience.

"Right now there's a little recession, but once people start spending the money again, it will be rolling," he said. "You just have to be patient."

Senior Whitney Hammons said the diversity of jobs within the profession gives her hope.

"It's a broad thing. It's not just casinos. There's restaurants, hotels," she said.

Tourism management instructor Evelyn Green said it's her mission to inform students of the employment possibilities in the casino industry.

The message has gotten through, she said. When she first started teaching her online Casino Resort Operation class two years ago, not a single member of the 20-student class actually wanted to work for a casino.

Not only is there now increased interest, but the program recently placed two students in food and beverage services at Beau Rivage in Biloxi. Green said it's a vital trend.

"With an industry like this, it's important to keep Mississippi talent within the state," she said.

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