

UNDERSTANDING THE PRIORITIES OF MARKETING EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF HOW WELL WE PRACTICE WHAT WE TEACH

Bradley W. Brooks, Queens University of Charlotte
David V. Rudd, Lebanon Valley College
Michael A. Tarabek, Queens University of Charlotte

ABSTRACT

Like most decision makers, academic marketing department chairs and their deans have traditionally relied heavily on their own individual experiences in making decisions for their departments. The faculty in these same marketing departments, however, stress to their students the need to utilize research information from relevant constituent groups when making decisions. If faculty, department chairs, deans, and other marketing academic decision makers are to be consistent with what faculty stress to students, the body of empirical research data examining their own constituency groups needs to be evaluated. This research provides a brief description of the empirical studies of various academic marketing constituency groups and makes recommendations for improving the usefulness of such on-going research.

INTRODUCTION

As marketing educators we often stress to our students the need to continually monitor and evaluate changing trends in the external environments we serve. We stress the need to invest continually in market research that tracks changes in all of our constituent groups. As with any organization, being truly excellent means being truly “market driven” as we often chant in our classrooms. All of which, however, begs a couple of difficult questions, “How well are we doing when it comes to monitoring the changing needs of our constituents?” and “How well do we utilize the market information that we do collect?”

Answering either of these questions should never be taken lightly. If one is unsure of the importance of these questions then simply consider how much our accrediting agencies are now stressing the need for us to assess everything we do. Our assessments must be based on our objectives and, just as we teach our students, shouldn't our objectives consider how well we are meeting the needs of our constituents?

This research offers a critical assessment of our performance on the former of the two questions above. How well are we, as marketing higher educators, monitoring the changing needs of our constituents? The answer to that question should also illustrate how well we actually practice what we teach.

NEED FOR MARKET RESEARCH IN MARKETING EDUCATION

Although marketing research studies may include a wide variety of differing individual objectives these research studies typically share one overriding purpose. Ultimately, research should be conducted to obtain information. Ideally, that information will then be useful in enhancing future decision making. As such, a wide variety of organizations benefit greatly from properly conducted research including “not-for-profit” organizations, “for profit” businesses, ministries, governmental agencies, and even educational institutions among potentially many others. Marketing academia, the source of educating students in why and how to scientifically conduct market research on an organization's stakeholders, is no exception.

To maximize their effectiveness, business marketing programs require well developed and well-conducted market research from a variety of constituencies (or business educational stakeholders) including students, alumni, faculty members, and the actual business community members (Heinfeldt and Wolf 1998; Ramaswamy 1992). Although each of these broad stakeholder groups may share many common interdependent objectives, their objectives may often hold some distinctions from each other. A business school, therefore, may find meeting the needs of each of these groups to be a daunting objective. Further

complicating this task is the likelihood that even within these stakeholder groups there exist distinct subgroups each with their own needs. Consider the differences in needs, for example, among marketing students studying for varying degrees (various bachelor, master, doctorate degrees). Or consider the different business/marketing community needs found within different types of industries or even found within different functions within a single organization. Without appropriate research, meeting the needs of any stakeholders would be extremely difficult at best.

Fortunately, business educational research literature offers numerous studies that examine the needs of each of these constituent groups that range from ascertaining the priorities of a single constituency to distinguishing the similarities and differences between multiple stakeholder groups. Although academic decision makers should not rely solely on research data when making decisions (to the exclusion of their own experiences), they should find such data to be a useful information source when making strategic decisions for a business school including its objectives, priorities, promotions, curriculum, and/or assessment decisions among a multitude of other decision options. Empirical research studies that inform academic marketing decision makers as to the needs and priorities of their stakeholders, therefore, can serve a useful function.

This potential importance, however, begs the question of how well the current research stream meets the overall requirements for understanding the needs of these constituency groups. This research provides a brief summary of the empirical research studies that inform academic marketing decision makers as to the priorities of their stakeholders. In evaluating the current nature of the research available to academic marketing decision makers, the purposes of this research are to identify research gaps and to recommend directions for future research that would address these gaps. The ultimate objective, therefore, is to develop directions for improving the understanding of the needs and priorities of stakeholders.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS SKILL SETS AMONG BUSINESS SCHOOL CONSTITUENCY GROUPS

While previous research has offered much insight into the various constituencies' priorities, it has done so only on an intermittent basis. Periodically, a new study is conducted that provides insights into the constituents' priorities, particularly framed within an importance ranking format. Unfortunately, however, researchers have not fully examined how rapidly these priorities are evolving. Without such knowledge, one cannot truly assess whether the current approach updates changes in priorities quickly enough to keep up with how often these changes are actually occurring. Should business school educators and

administrators desire to utilize such data, therefore, must rely on the most recently published data, hoping that it still reflects current information, or they must collect the data themselves. Examples of such studies that have provided empirical data from one of the three constituencies are provided below.

Empirical Studies on a Single Constituency

Employers. A significant focus of research examining marketing educational priorities has centered around the interface between the graduating students and their initial marketing employers.

McDaniel and White (1993), for example, surveyed recruiters who seek to hire undergraduate marketing majors. In surveying these recruiters, McDaniel and White (1993) utilized a five-point "importance" scale with interval properties and reported the mean results for each of 22 skills measured. This approach allowed them to combine employers' importance rankings of skills/characteristics with their rankings of which characteristics, experiences, and skills they thought seemed to be most lacking among recent marketing graduates.

Using these results, along with the discussions with other faculty members and even their own personal experience, McDaniel and White (1993) then combined these importance and preparedness ratings to provide a "Preparation Gap Index (PGI)." High on the PGI in 1993 (i.e., students were not appropriately prepared for these skills) were items such as "realistic expectations," "work ethic," and "oral communication skills." Ranking very low on the PGI (i.e., students were appropriately prepared for these skills) were more curricular centered items such as "marketing skills," "quantitative skills," "manufacturing/production skills," "knowledge of marketing," "international orientation," and "foreign language skills."

Conversely, Scholder Ellen and Pilling (2002) surveyed employers who hire employees with graduate marketing degrees. They found that these employers were particularly interested in hiring graduates with area-specific skills such as marketing management/strategic marketing, marketing research, and buyer behavior skills. They presented their results as a ranking based on percentages of response.

Students. Duke (2002) surveyed undergraduate marketing students to assess their perceptions of importance among various skills and characteristics (which he refers to as "learning outcomes"). He utilized a five-point Likert-type scale in measuring the students' perceptions of the importance of various learning outcomes as well as how well they feel that their undergraduate program prepared them for these same learning outcomes. Duke (2002) reported the mean score for each of nine broad "outcome categories." He even went further in developing a "Priority Index" (PI) based on how each outcome category ranked in terms of importance as compared to

how it ranked in preparedness. These students perceived communication skills (both communicating within groups as well as communicating electronically) to be the most important skills for them to develop as they embark on their marketing careers.

Alumni. Davis, Misra, and Van Auken (2002), Duke and Reese (1995), and Schmidt (1991) each offer more general priority evaluations from alumni. Davis et al. (2002) utilized a gap analysis approach to compare alumni perceptions of the importance of various skills for their current positions with perceptions of their Alma Mater's delivery of those skills while they were students. They concluded that alumni did not perceive their education to have been effective enough in delivering three primary skill areas in preparing them for their careers: information technology skills, oral communication skills, and written communication skills.

In surveying undergraduate alumni, Duke and Reese (1995) measured perceptions of their workplace relevance of various components of the marketing curriculum. Very recent graduates identified curricular components from courses such as promotions management, marketing management, personal selling, and consumer behavior as being particularly valuable or applicable to their current positions. Less recent graduates (employed in various marketing related fields) perceived that the courses that best prepared them for their careers were consumer behavior, marketing management, services, sales management, and promotions management.

Surveying business school undergraduate alumni, Schmidt (1991) measured advice from these alumni to their marketing faculty. She found that the advice most often cited was to focus on communication skills, to utilize real world projects, and to hold realistic expectations.

Empirical Studies on Multiple Constituencies

Seeking to satisfy the needs of a single stakeholder group is challenging enough. Attempting to satisfy the needs of multiple constituent groups simultaneously, however, can potentially be overwhelming. In attempting to do so, marketing departments should integrate the findings of these single constituency research studies when utilizing them in making curricular improvements. Marketing academicians, therefore, can also benefit from additional research studies that provide such integration of empirical findings from multiple constituents. Examples of such studies that have integrated empirical data from multiple constituencies are provided below.

Comparing Two Constituents. Wiles and Spiro (2004) also offer a study of interest for marketing academicians in developing their programs although it is not centered specifically on priorities of skill development. Wiles and Spiro (2004) surveyed undergraduate senior marketing majors as well as new salesperson recruiters for their

perceptions of the importance of job characteristics. They found that the students were focused more on job satisfaction and advancement opportunities in evaluating a sales position while the recruiters viewed the company's training program as being the most important but also with advancement opportunities second.

Comparing Three Constituents. Ackerman, Gross, and Perner (2003) integrated responses from students, faculty, and employers in developing priority rankings for a marketing department. They demonstrated, for example, that students significantly valued critical thinking less than did employers or faculty as a primary skill focus. Employers, however, were the least optimistic that critical thinking could be taught.

Using conjoint analysis techniques, Floyd and Gordon (1998) measured skill importance among employer and general business undergraduate student respondents in New Zealand. Overall, they found that employers and students alike ranked problem-solving skills as the most important skill set for student development. Various employer industries, however, did show some difference in their perceptions. They also included a smaller sample of a third group whom they identified only as "staff." The staff ranked communication skills as being the important set of skills on which to focus.

SAMPLE REPRESENTATION

These studies seem to offer much valuable insight into marketing higher education stakeholders. The full extent of their usefulness, however, must be evaluated in light of the generalizability of the sample statistics as well as the congruence between the research objectives or procedures and a particular individual marketing department's objectives.

Evolving Stakeholder Needs

As with any research information the usefulness of gauging stakeholder priorities is affected by the rate at which these stakeholders change and, similarly, the rate at which their priorities change. Consider how much change has occurred within just two stakeholder groups (specifically the marketing community and today's undergraduate students):

The overall business community has seen dramatic changes in recent years that may or may not have caused changes in employer priorities. As Brooks and Rudd (2005) put it:

"While each business discipline (accounting, marketing, management, finance, human resources, operations, logistics, etc.) faces great uncertainties, marketing may have faced the most radical changes over the past 10–20 years. In the last two decades, marketing, which may be viewed as a combination of applied psychology, project management, and finan-

cial analysis, has seen the rise of a plethora of new business models linking the seller to the customer. These transitions include Big Box Stores (Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, Costco), Category Killers (Circuit City, Toy's R Us, Sports Authority), the rise of traditional forms of direct marketing (catalogs, infomercials, and the world wide web), the massive explosion of the world wide web as both an information tool (Google, Yahoo!) and a commercial outlet (eBay, Amazon.com), and a myriad of financial services options ranging from banking to mortgage lending to credit counseling. How do curriculum designers stay up with the changing demands of the field in these times of rapid change?" (p. 172).

Employers, however, are not the only constituent group to have undergone great change. Consider the changes in students (undergraduates in particular) over the last couple of decades as well. Today undergrads, for example, appear to be very different from undergraduate students of a decade ago. Within the last decade, the Generation X students that filled undergrad classes have graduated and been replaced in the classroom by Generation Y. Previous research documents how Gen Y's experiences have led to differences in important educational variables such attention span and expectations. (See Kaimal 2003 for a thorough review of the unique characteristics of Gen Y.)

Drea, Tripp, and Stuenkel (2005) point out that today's undergraduate students have grown up in an environment in which they have been inundated with fast paced interactive technology from sources such as the Internet and hand-held video games. With exponentially greater technology at their fingertips than any other generation, this generation has become accustomed to rapid paced stimulation. As such, simply holding the attention of the typical undergraduate student today requires a different approach from the classroom approaches of the past. Today's college undergraduates get bored much quicker than earlier generations when presented a traditional lecture – with or without Power Point slides (Drea et al. 2005).

Furthermore, having grown up in an economically prosperous era, Generation Y's strong desire for instant gratification has provided its members a different set of expectations upon graduating than previous generations. Since the oldest members of Gen Y have now begun their careers as recent graduates, they are beginning to bring these unique expectations directly into the workplace. Van Dam (2006) states that Generation Yers enter the workplace expecting to learn through experiences in network teams while utilizing a tremendous amount of technological communication. They expect not only to enjoy the learning process, but even to be entertained and excited while participating (van Dam 2006). Furthermore, since Gen Y has been taught from an early age that it is acceptable to question authority, they tend not to

respond well to traditional management styles that include command and control methods (Lescohier 2006).

Unlike older generations, Gen Yers tend to begin their careers with the assumption that they will be changing jobs rather frequently. This assumption leads them to enter their initial place of employment with short term goals that do not include long-term personal development within that company (Kaimal 2003). Although research has not fully explored its impact, all of these expectations should impact how today's undergraduate students view the value and benefits of their educations. Such expectations, however, may or may not be consistent with their employers' expectations. To the extent that these expectations do not match with their employers, a potentially wide gap has developed between the expectations of these two important constituency groups.

Staying abreast of the evolving needs and expectations of this changing population poses a very difficult challenge. As members of Generation Y, most undergraduate students differ greatly from their professors in expectations and attention span. It becomes necessary, therefore, that as marketing academicians evaluate student perceptions in looking for ways to improve the learning experience that such generational differences be considered. Making changes in classroom approach, in curriculum, in managing student expectations, and even in assessment will be more effective when evaluated in light of these differences.

Despite these changes in students, particularly undergraduate students over the last decade, little research has been conducted to demonstrate how these differences in student inputs are influencing their educational experiences. Very little research has even been conducted on student perceptions since this generation became the predominate member of the undergraduate classrooms. Research data collected before 2000 may not reflect student perceptions in the latter part of the decade as Gen Y has replaced Gen X. Without a continuously updated research stream to reflect current student perceptions marketing academicians may be relying on outdated empirical data.

Congruence Between Research Objectives and the Individual Marketing Department's Objectives

Even if such population changes have not occurred the context within which a given study is conducted and presented will affect its usefulness for any given marketing department. Various marketing departments may each hold quite different objectives based on a multitude of different reasons. Consider, for example, the varying priorities that departments ascribe to different stakeholder groups or to different subgroups within these stakeholders. A marketing department that serves an evening MBA program within a large financial district, for example, may hold different priorities than a marketing department with

only undergraduates that serves in a community with a high proportion of advertising agencies. The latter department may wish to examine Scott and Frontczak's (1996) findings examining advertising employers' perceptions of new graduates' preparedness specifically for the advertising field while the former may not find it relevant in any way. In fact, with wide divergence in priorities and objectives, a particular educational marketing department may or may not find any study that examines its primary stakeholders of interest – even if it is current.

Furthermore, even when a particular research study does share objectives similar to those held by members of another educational marketing department the data results may not be presented in the format that the members of the other marketing department actually need. A specific marketing department's decision maker(s), for example, may require data to be broken out by certain respondent characteristics that were not provided in the published study. Without access to the raw data, those marketing department members will not be able to analyze the data in the format that they desire.

DATA PROPERTIES: ORDINAL RANKINGS VS. INTERVAL/RATIO RATINGS

Another important consideration in how useful these studies are for a particular marketing department is the scaling properties in which the data is collected and/or presented. Wiles and Spiro's (2004) research as well as McDaniel and White's (1993) PGI offer important insights based on their measures and methodology that extend well beyond their insights into managing marketing academia. Wiles and Spiro (2004), for example, utilized interval scale data from which they could compare the means of each item across the two groups. This approach allows them to identify the size of the gaps between the perceptions of each group. McDaniel and White's (1993) PGI also rates each specific skill/characteristic item with interval scaled measures. The interval scaled measures utilized in each of these studies offers the ability not only to rank the priorities of a long list of items, but also to rate them with corresponding distances between each point. This feature was necessary for allowing McDaniel and White (1993) to create the PGI with similar distance properties.

Unfortunately, researchers have not maintained a systematic approach for providing marketing academicians with up-to-date interval scaled data. The intermittent nature of these studies greatly inhibits the ability to examine truly up-to-date data. Furthermore, much of the empirical research examining priorities for the overall marketing curricula has relied on ordinal scaled rankings (such as Scholder Ellen and Pilling 2002)). Even indexes designed to examine curriculum priorities that were derived from interval scaled data have been transformed into a more ordinal (ranking) format (such as Duke 2002).

These studies provide extremely valuable insights for marketing academicians and each of the authors should be commended for offering this insight. The use of ordinal data, however, lacks the distance properties that McDaniel and White's PGI offered in the early to mid 90s, which does limit its application.

Questions involving the usefulness and analysis of purely ordinal scaled data versus interval scaled data are not new and essays can be found not only in marketing research literature (see Martilla and Carvey 1975 for an important discussion of these issues), but also in psychological studies and general statistical analysis treatises. Interval scoring has the advantage of including ordinal rank, but also a measure of the (possibly perceived) differences between choices. Such differences, though often critical to a marketing study, may or may not be a significant factor in the statistical analysis of the data. Another disadvantage of using ordinal data is the lack of normality necessary for certain statistical measures – such as a *p*-value to assess significance.

It is possible, however, to use mathematical algorithms to convert strictly ordinal data into interval scaled data. In some cases, empirical evidence may be used to determine appropriate intervals; in others the researcher may substitute his own judgment; but more common is the use of a preset pattern such as the normal probability distribution to assign proper interval lengths. In any case, such an algorithm would involve a monotonic (possibly nonlinear) transformation of the data. (Multiple variations on this abound in the literature. See Hofacker (1984) in which several examples are discussed.)

Dowling and Midgley (1991) present an empirical example in which a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the interval data was not significantly different from the same analysis on the purely ordinal data. This suggests that some tests, such as MANOVA, are less responsive to the presence of non-constant intervals between response points. It should be noted, however, that their example consisted of intervals that were very nearly a linear transformation (correlation coefficient = 0.9925) of the ordinal rankings. For transformations of ordinal data that are highly nonlinear or that use other statistical tools, the results of the statistical analyses can vary greatly between the interval data and the purely ordinal data (see Brockett and Golden 1992).

While ordinal data can be quite useful, interval data should always be preferable. Ultimately, there may be times when the marketing department head needs to have an understanding of the distances between ranked items. If, for example, a list of generated priorities were to identify written communication skills as the top priority in which marketing faculty should consider improvements, and if analytical skills were demonstrated to be of second highest priority, how much (if any) additional focus should a faculty member devote toward the written communication skills more so than to analytical skills? Should

the marketing academician, furthermore, devote any additional effort to developing students' analytical skills or should all of his/her additional effort be devoted toward the written communication skills? If the answer lies somewhere between these two possibilities, then how much closer should it lie to one extreme or to the other? Without identifying distances between ranked items, a marketing academician would not be able to answer any of these questions with as much certainty as he/she would have with such distances.

Undoubtedly, McDaniel and White's Preparation Gap Index offered valuable insights for any marketing department academician responsible for a wide variety of decisions when it was published in 1993. Also undoubtedly, there have been dramatic changes in business schools' stakeholders' needs as well as in marketing departments' approaches to higher education over the last decade and a half. As techno-savvy Gen X graduate students, even more techno-savvy Gen Y undergraduates, and the techno-engrossed Millennials enter today's ever evolving marketplace, academic marketing departments require consistently updated data on all constituents' needs.

UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES: WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

The overall marketing discipline needs a robust index that can be frequently updated that compares the important skill priorities with an honest evaluation of current graduates' preparedness of these skills. To be most effective such an index should offer data with interval properties. Duke (2002) offers an example of the type of data needed since he measures undergraduate students' perceptions of skill priorities with five-point Likert-type scales. In an ideal world of marketing academia, and presumably in the worlds of other academic disciplines as well, Duke's data could be combined with similar data from other researchers in maintaining an overall, up-to-date database.

The occasional appearance of an isolated study of the needs of the various constituencies, the perceptions of each constituency concerning the quality of their preparation in the face of these needs, the relative importance of different factors or even the change in relative importance of recognized factors, may be insufficient to the challenge of keeping marketing education in contact with the environment in which marketing is practiced. What the marketing discipline needs is a consistent tool that assesses the relationship between the education we are designed to deliver and the education that is needed by both the students and the employers. Essentially this is an extension of the concept of outcomes assessment that has developed over the past twenty years in response to a societal call for accountability in higher education.

Outcomes assessment initiatives for an individual program take place at two different levels:

- A. At the individual student level. Is the student learning consistent with expectations of learning from the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities students to engage in on their way to their degree?
- B. At the program level. Are students as a group achieving the specific learning outcomes proclaimed in the mission statement?

Since the move toward mission-driven program accreditation, an additional level been added:

- C. How does the performance of a given program compare to the performance of similar programs.

The key element in moving to the third level has been to develop widely used, standardized surveys that measure the perceived satisfaction of students, graduates, and employers with the overall results of their collegiate education. Typical efforts involve exit surveys upon graduation, alumni surveys after 3–5 years of employment, and employer satisfaction surveys concerning recent hires.

Combining assessments from a multitude of schools and programs has generated benchmark comparisons ranging from all schools and programs completing the assessment to all schools or programs from colleges and universities sharing similar classifications (the same Carnegie classification could be one example of classifications), to customized selection of benchmark institutions. The power of assessment data lies in the ability of program directors and curriculum designers to judge student performance and program performance against a panorama of outcomes from other programs in order to make those critical decisions about program development that lead to continual improvement.

As many who have tangled with assessment data and the need to close the loop have discovered, there are almost always more things that a program could work on than time or resources will allow. What is needed for the marketing discipline is a formal way of capturing the current performance and the relative importance of the various dimensions of current performance to key constituencies.

Consistent with Brooks and Rudd (2005), this research makes the following proposals.

- A. The creation of standardized format web-based research instruments that measure the following respondent types:
 1. Undergraduate as well as graduate marketing students.
 2. Recent graduating seniors in marketing in entry level marketing positions.
 3. The direct supervisors of these entry level hires.
 4. Recent graduates from master's programs in key marketing specialties.

5. The direct supervisors of these master's graduates.
6. The collegiate hiring staff from a wide range of companies active in the hiring of graduating seniors and specialty master's in marketing.
7. Faculty involved in curricular design and development at both the undergraduate and graduate levels from a cross-section of small colleges, large universities, full-time and part-time programs, undergraduate and graduate programs.
8. All other alumni from marketing educational degrees.

There will be some overlap since many individuals will fit into more than one of these categories. As such, a priority system would need to be in place to identify how such individuals should be treated.

Note that a web-based format allows for relatively easy data collection, access, and analysis. It is also consistent with the experiences of the constituency groups who will be responding.

- B. A methodology or similar methodologies that utilize interval scale measures to identify the relative importance of differing skills and characteristics on two dimensions: importance for marketing graduates; and preparedness levels of current marketing graduates. Typically, Likert-type scales will be sufficient. Alternatively, if the number of characteristics and attributes examined is relatively small (fewer than 20 or so), a method called analytical hierarchy processing may be useful (see Dyer and Forman 1991). This method creates an N dimensional space that places the N attributes and characteristics in relationship to each other based on having each respondent examine the relative importance of each pair of attributes relative to each other. This method is utilized to make very complex, multi-dimensional decisions in an environment of competing stakeholder interests and may be ideally suited for such a challenge. As such it should be well suited for merging different data sets that contain different dimensions.
- C. A system for publishing this survey and even the data via the web to the appropriate constituencies on a timely and periodic basis. Ideally, the data would be made available in its raw form to marketing academicians and administrators utilizing a fee-based system that would allow academic decision makers the ability to analyze the data across any format that they need (for example, breaking the respondents out by various sub-disciplines such as product management, advertising, consumer behavior, etc. or by respondent characteristics such as gender or class status).

Ideally, such research should also include some effort to project future needs. These proposals are designed to assist marketing higher education decision makers who are charged with meeting the needs of very dynamic constituents. Curriculum development is often a cumbersome, time-consuming, and difficult proposition at best. The drivers behind curriculum changes may include technology (computers, the internet, the worlds wide web, etc.), changes in societal concerns (ethics in the post-Enron era), changes in the competitive landscape (globalization), or changes in accreditation standards. Consistent short-falls in key outcomes assessment over time may indicate the need for curriculum changes. If the data proposed here were available on a consistent basis, marketing educators might have a better chance to anticipate changing needs of key constituents. The key would be for the decision maker to look for more than just year to year fluctuations in the data, but to ascertain consistent results that point to a potential need for change.

In the past, the complexity of this research challenge would have stymied even an open discussion of the possibilities. With the power of electronic cooperation, however, it may now be entirely feasible to mount this kind of research through a consortium of researchers working in their own areas who agree to contribute to the overall database. Just as Chonko (2003) exhorted marketing departments to become "change-ready marketing departments," all marketing faculty share the responsibilities of continuous improvement to develop the skills critical for their students to achieve successful careers. To fully understand how best to deliver an environment that will foster development of the most important skills/characteristics, marketers need current indices of reliable, unbiased measures of importance combined with current student preparedness levels.

DISCUSSION

Implementing these proposed changes would be difficult and may be met with some resistance. (Bringing about change often is met with resistance.) One potential area of resistance would stem from the changes in the incentive structure for the researchers. Such a system, however, could still offer valuable incentives. Clearly, those individuals who conduct this research should still be rewarded through publication and/or direct forms of compensation – much like they are now. There should actually be an increase in demand for such data in order to achieve all of the objectives proposed here. Total incentives, therefore, would likely not be diminished but instead increased. Hopefully, such an increase could reduce some of the initial resistance that may be felt with these changes.

A second area of immediate resistance could stem from the groups that potentially stand to benefit from this approach the most – the educational business departments. Many marketing departments likely conduct their

own research into understanding constituent needs. These departments may be reluctant to agree to a system in which all educational departments have access to the same shared data, however, since educational business programs do compete for students, gifts, and other forms of revenues. An individual marketing department may be concerned that their higher education “competitors” may gain greater benefit than their own department. Perhaps an individual marketing department may even fear that an important competitive advantage may potentially become compromised. Ultimately, however, individual marketing departments should see that the extent to which any department benefits from such data, even in regards to marketplace advantages, is based on how they use the data in their decision making. The appropriate use of such data may well differ with different departments based on the priorities they place on different constituents and on their specific objectives, programs, degrees, and accreditation.

Marketing educators and administrators have to make difficult decisions determining objectives and prioritizing between stakeholders. They then must make difficult decisions regarding how to design their curriculum, their assessment mechanisms, and even their promotions in

light of these objectives. Marketing faculty should have current information that is available for consideration within their own individualized context. The research literature has done a good job of providing information on the needs and priorities of our stakeholders. As Collins (2001) put it, however, in his very famous quote regarding organizations in general, “Good is the enemy of great” (p. 1). The good job that the research literature has offered could still be improved. We owe it to our students, to the business communities, to our alumni, and to ourselves to strive always for greatness.

As educators our ultimate (albeit perhaps ivory tower) goal should be to educate our students – even more so than making money. As marketing educators our ultimate goal should be to educate our students on how to make money (assuming theirs is a profit objective) more effectively and/or efficiently. The better our understanding of the needs of our ever changing stakeholders the more effective and/or more efficient we will be at meeting our own objectives. In other words, the better our understanding of their needs the better we will be able to practice what we teach.

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