

THE STUDENT ORIENTATION OF A COLLEGE OF BUSINESS: AN EMPIRICAL LOOK FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

MICHAEL PESCH, Saint Cloud State University
ROBERT CALHOUN, Saint Cloud State University
KENNETH SCHNEIDER, Saint Cloud State University
DENNIS BRISTOW, Saint Cloud State University

Administrators in higher education are adopting a strategic marketing approach as they face an increasingly competitive educational environment. More and more universities are employing branding strategies and a customer orientation in order to differentiate themselves from other institutions and to better understand the needs of students. This study presents the adaptation and application of the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS) in an AACSB accredited college of business. Implications of the results and administrative applications for the new scale are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

“The Power of X.” A visit to the web site of Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio provides the viewer with a subtle but powerful indicator of how administrators and marketers at that institution are applying the science of marketing. “The Power of X”, which serves as the university’s “brand” and permeates the Xavier web site, provides a focal point for many of the university’s promotional messages – from promotions targeting incoming freshman (www.xavier.edu/stx) to communications directed at Xavier alumni (<http://www.xu.edu/legacyfund/>).

In 2001, the University of Cincinnati introduced a branding initiative. Working with the university’s communication offices, the branding initiative was designed to, in part, build long-term brand equity, enhance credibility, and generate powerful value perception (<http://www.uc.edu/ucomm/documents/UCBrandingStandards.pdf>). The University of Cincinnati’s Brand Manual states:

The UC brand is based on its brand essence, brand character and brand attributes, creating a point of difference

among competing universities. (University of Cincinnati Brand Standards).

In 2002, the University of Hawai’i System announced the hiring of the Brand Strategy Group to help identify the characteristics that comprised the brand identity of the University of Hawai’i System. University officials noted that:

Our brand promise makes us unique, and differentiates us from every other university system in the world. (The University of Hawai’i System Update 2002)

Officials at Xavier, the University of Cincinnati (UC), and the University of Hawai’i System (UHS) and hundreds of other colleges and universities recognize that they now operate in a highly competitive and dynamic environment (brandchannel.com 2006), an environment that offers the top students from around the world the opportunity to choose from thousands of quality colleges and universities. As an example of the many institutional choices available to prospective and current university students, consider the following: In the state of Minnesota, some sixty-six private and/or public four-year schools compete to attract the brightest and best students from around the world. In California, over 130 such institutions are vying to attract and retain students. In the

state of New York, nearly 150 colleges and universities are competing for students.

Xavier, UC, and UHS officials have joined a growing list of schools that build competitive advantage by viewing the relationship between students and universities from a marketing exchange perspective. A growing body of research supports this approach (i.e., Amyx and Bristow 1999; Amyx, Bristow and Luehlfing 2006; Bristow 1998; Bristow and Amyx 1999; Bristow and Amyx 2006; Canterbury 1999; Chadwick and Ward 1987; Coffey and Wood-Steed 2001; Krush, Bristow and Schneider 2006; Licatta and Frankwick 1996; Mazzarol, Soutar and Thein 2000; Pate 1993). An important component of this marketing perspective is the adoption of the marketing concept, which is based upon a simple underlying business philosophy:

In order to best achieve organizational goals and objectives and to ensure the organization's long-term success, the firm must focus on the identification and satisfaction of both customer and organizational needs. (Drucker 1954; Levitt 1960; Webster 1988; Kotler and Armstrong 2001; Zikmund and d'Amico 2002).

University officials who apply the marketing concept to academia recognize the importance of adopting a customer orientation. Such a perspective does not imply that colleges and universities strive solely to satisfy the needs of students no matter the cost in terms of providing a quality educational experience for those students. Rather, the adoption of a customer orientation in academia means that the needs of multiple stakeholders - including the university, the students, and employers - are recognized and addressed. University administrators who adopt such an orientation must endeavor to provide students with a challenging and quality education that will enable them to pursue successful, productive careers and to contribute to the communities in which they live and work. In producing such students, the needs of employers are met, and the reputation of the university is enhanced.

In short, the adoption of a customer orientation in an educational setting means that the university looks at the educational experience from the perspective of the student. A key, therefore, to successfully implementing the marketing concept and adopting a customer orientation in academia is to assess student perceptions of the institution's commitment to understanding and meeting student needs.

University and college of business administrators can once again look to the world of business to provide an example of the importance of adopting a marketing concept orientation. Since the mid-1990s, many for-profit businesses have devoted resources to a phenomenon called the "Complaint Iceberg," where only a small minority of dissatisfied customers step forward to register their complaints with the company. British Airways (BA) discovered that only eight percent of dissatisfied customers bothered to contact Customer Relations to discuss their problems. Based on its success in retaining customers when it had the chance to address complaints, BA made concerted efforts to make it easier for customers to communicate with the company.

Higher education faces its own Complaint Iceberg. Students quickly learn that their university has so many institutional barriers involving multiple-step processes to register a complaint that very few students bother to let anyone know they are unhappy with the services being provided to them. The fact that only a few students complain leads most faculty and administrators to think that the institution is doing a great job of generating vast numbers of happy and loyal students (and subsequently, alumni). This may not be the case.

If in fact business school administrators cannot rely on students to come forth of their own volition to complain that their needs are not adequately being met, those officials must take a more proactive approach. Specifically, through formal surveys of the student body, administrators can identify latent problems with student perceptions of the sensitivity of the college to their needs. But in designing such a

research program, the question arises, “How do business school officials empirically assess student perceptions of the extent to which the college meets their needs?” One approach to measuring those perceptions lies in the adaptation of an extant measurement instrument, the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale, for use by business school administrators.

Bristow and Schneider (2005) developed the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS), an instrument designed to allow university officials to empirically measure the degree to which they are or are not perceived by students as being student oriented. The assessment instrument, can in effect, be used by administrators to prevent the “Complaint Iceberg” from growing to a size capable of causing significant damage to the institution..

The CSOS is a multi-item measure developed for use at the university-wide level and measures the “degree to which students feel a university makes decisions and takes action based upon the needs of the organization as well as those of the students” (Bristow and Schneider 2005).

THE STUDY

The research involved the adaptation of the CSOS for use in a college/school of business in order to measure, from the student’s perspective, the degree to which that college/school is student oriented. The construct of student orientation was defined by Bristow and Schneider (2005) as follows:

Student orientation means the degree to which a college/university takes actions and makes decisions based upon the needs of the students as well as the goals and objectives of the institution.

The CSOS is uni-dimensional and in previous research has demonstrated adequate internal reliability (.903) (Bristow and Schneider 2005). The CSOS consists of seven items with response categories ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Thus, summated scores on the scale could range from a low of 7 to a high of 42, with a possible 35 point spread and a theoretic scale midpoint of 24.5. In interpreting respondent scores on the scale, the higher a respondent’s score, the greater would be that respondent’s opinion that the university was indeed student oriented. Low scale scores would indicate that a respondent felt the organization was less student oriented. Given the possible 35 point spread, a composite score of 24 or less would indicate that students viewed their university as being at least marginally non-student oriented. A composite scale score of 25 or higher would indicate the student perception that the university was at least somewhat student oriented.

The remainder of this manuscript presents the findings of a study in which the CSOS was adapted for use in an AACSB accredited college of business and the results of the application of that revised scale in such a setting.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the study were 482 undergraduate students attending a large mid-western state university. Responses to demographic items in the study showed that 270 female and 205 male students completed the survey instrument (7 participants did not indicate their gender), and that 456 (95 percent) of the participants were business majors. Exhibit 1 presents a demographic profile of the participants. The participants in the study were volunteers from multiple sections of junior/senior level courses representing the five major programs in the college of business.

Procedure

The psychometric strength of the CSOS led the authors of this manuscript to adapt and apply the original seven-item scale (see Exhibit 2a) in a school of business setting. The adapted CSOS scale items are presented in Exhibit 2b.

**EXHIBIT 1
Demographic Profile of Participants***

Demographic Variable	N	%	
Age	18-21 years	196	40.6%
	22-25 years	242	50.2%
	26-29 years	17	3.5%
	30-33 years	6	1.2%
Gender	Female	270	56.0%
	Male	205	42.5%
*Note: Due to non response on some items, totals and category responses may differ			

**EXHIBIT 2A
College Student
Orientation Scale (CSOS) Items**

1. * ____ cares about students.
 2. * ____ takes the time to learn more about students.
 3. * ____ takes the needs of students into consideration.
 4. * ____ provides good value for the students' dollar.
 5. * ____ feels that students are important.
 6. * ____ feels that the needs of students are at least as important as the needs of faculty and staff.
 7. * ____ is concerned with providing a satisfying educational experience for students.
- * The appropriate university/college name would be used to complete these items.

**EXHIBIT 2B
Adapted College Student
Orientation Scale (ACSOS) Items**

1. The * ____ tries to help students achieve their goals.
 2. The * ____ takes the time to learn more about students.
 3. The * ____ takes the needs of students into consideration.
 4. The * ____ provides good value for the students' dollar.
 5. The * ____ feels that students are important.
 6. The * ____ feels that the needs of students are at least as important as the needs of faculty and staff.
 7. The * ____ is concerned with providing a satisfying educational experience for students.
- * The appropriate college/school of business name would be used to complete these items.

Once again following the lead of Bristow and Schneider and their work on the CSOS (2005), the seven revised CSOS items were written into a six-point Likert format with response categories ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Those seven items, coupled with several demographic questions, were administered to the undergraduate participants during regularly scheduled class times.

Results

Although the original seven-item CSOS has in the past exhibited strong evidence of internal reliability, due to the revisions of the items for use in the current study, the authors evaluated the psychometric properties of the adapted scale. Analyses revealed an overall Cronbach alpha of .925 for the adapted scale and item-to-total correlations warranted the inclusion of all seven scale items in further analyses and investigations. Finally, a common factors procedure with a varimax rotation and no *n*-factor specified resulted in the extraction of a single factor. Exhibit 3 shows the psychometric properties of the adapted CSOS.

**APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION OF
THE CSOS IN A COLLEGE OF BUSINESS**

The CSOS was designed by Bristow and Schneider (2005) as a tool with which university officials could effectively assess student perceptions of the degree to which a college or university is/is not student oriented. In this study, the CSOS was revised and adapted for specific application in a college of business.

As with the original CSOS instrument, participant scores on the adapted CSOS (ACSOS), when summed across all seven items of the six-point scale, could range from a low of 7 to a high of 42, with a possible 35 point spread and a theoretic scale midpoint of 24.5. The higher a respondent's summated score on the scale, the greater would be that respondent's judgment that the business school was student oriented, while lower summated scores would provide evidence that respondents considered

the college to be less student oriented. With a maximum possible spread of 35 points, a summated ACSOS score of 24 or less would indicate that students viewed the college of business of interest as being at least marginally non-student oriented. An ACSOS summated score of 25 or more would indicate the student perception that the college of business was at least moderately student oriented.

Descriptive statistics revealed that summated respondent scores on the ACSOS ranged from a low of 7 to a high of 42, with a mean adapted ACSOS score of 29.34. On average, then, based upon those scores, officials at the college of business where the study was conducted could conclude that students perceived the college as being somewhat student oriented. Further analysis revealed that 20.6 percent of the student respondents viewed the college of business as being marginally *non*-student oriented (ACSOS summated score of 24 or less), while nearly 80 percent of the participants rated the school as at least slightly student oriented (ACSOS summated score greater than 25).

Once again following the procedures of Bristow and Schneider (2005) in their work on the original CSOS, the authors of this manuscript assigned descriptive headings to each of the response categories on the ACSOS. In this case, given the scale end-points of '1' (strongly

disagree with a scale statement) and '6' (strongly agree with a scale statement) a respondent who circled the number '4' on a scale item would indicate that he/she agreed somewhat with that item. Similarly, a response of '5' to a scale item would indicate strong (but not complete) agreement with that statement. On the other hand, if a participant circled the number '3' on a scale item, the response would show that he/she disagreed somewhat with the item, while a '2' response to an item would indicate strong, but not complete, disagreement with that item and so forth.

Accordingly, a composite ACSOS score of 28 (7 scale items times a scale response of 4 to each) would indicate that the respondent agreed somewhat with the idea that the university was student oriented. A composite scale score of 35 (7 scale items times a scale response of 5 to each item) would indicate strong agreement with that same idea. Conversely, an ACSOS summated score of 21 (7 scale items times a scale response of 3 to each) would indicate that a respondent disagreed somewhat with the concept that the college was student oriented. Similarly, ACSOS summated scores of 14 would indicate that respondents disagreed strongly with the idea that the school was student oriented.

Further analysis of students' ACSOS summated scores showed that 2.3 percent of the

EXHIBIT 3					
Psychometric Evaluation of the Adapted College Student Orientation Scale					
Scale Item Number	Factor Loading	Scale Item Mean	Scale Item Std. Dev.	Item-to-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
1.	.831	4.52	1.01	.763	.913
2.	.775	3.56	1.08	.695	.920
3.	.867	4.05	1.09	.811	.908
4.	.787	4.42	1.16	.710	.919
5.	.874	4.37	1.03	.819	.908
6.	.822	4.04	1.13	.752	.914
7.	.864	4.41	1.05	.672	.909
Overall Cronbach Alpha = .925					

respondents disagreed strongly with the idea that the college was student oriented (ACSOS summated scores of between 7 and 14) and that 8.2 percent of the respondents disagreed somewhat with that idea (ACSOS summated scores of between 15 and 22). The analyses also showed that 46.1 percent of the student participants viewed the college of business as being somewhat student oriented (ACSOS summated scores of between 28 and 34), and that 20 percent indicated strong agreement with the idea that the school was student oriented (ACSOS summated score of 35 or higher). Figure 1 shows a distribution of ACSOS summated scores for all 470 students for whom such scores could be calculated.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Administrators in the college of business at the institution where the current study was conducted might view the findings from this study as a mix of good and not so good news. On the positive side, student responses showed that from perspective of the participants, the college was at least marginally student oriented. However, closer scrutiny of student responses revealed that while less than three percent of the respondents strongly believed that the college of business was *not* student oriented, only 20 percent of the students strongly believed that the college *was* student oriented.

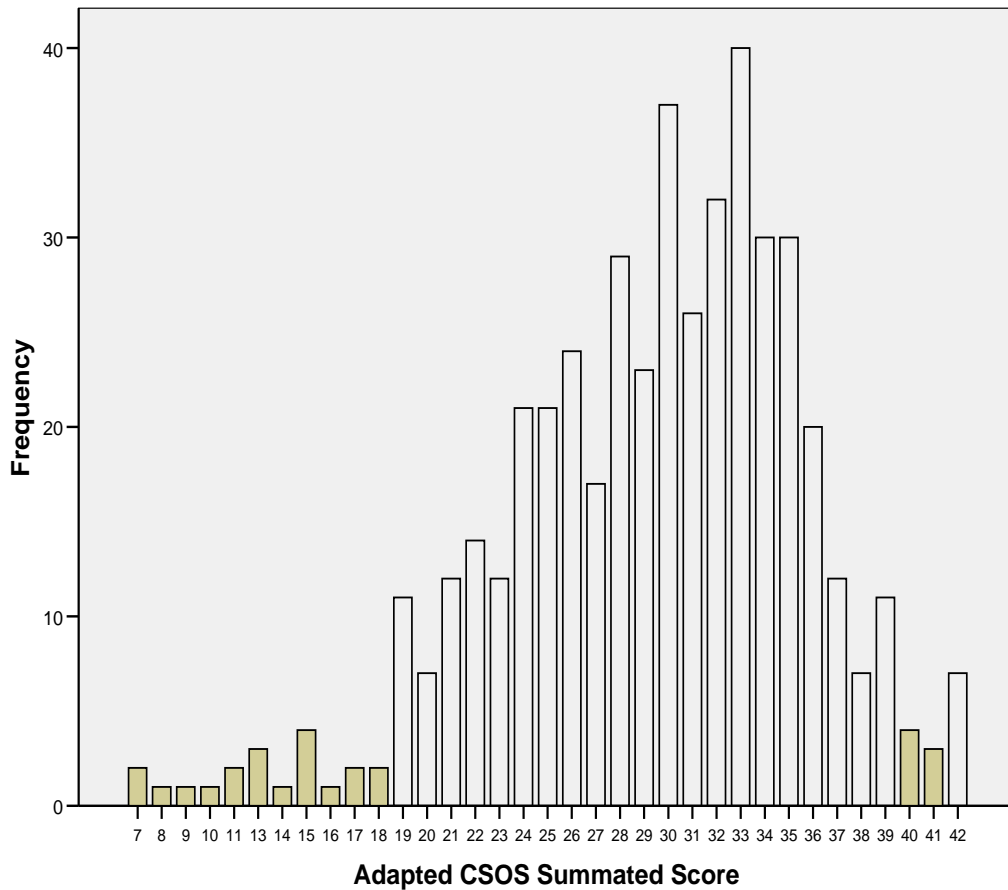
Viewed from this perspective, it becomes readily apparent that the student orientation of the college, at least from the perspective of the students, warrants serious further consideration. The primary researchers in this study would advise administrators in the college to conduct additional research in order to empirically investigate a series of related research questions. First, the college could develop a research program designed to better understand specific factors related to student perceptions of student orientation in the college. At the same time, that research could be extended to other, similar colleges of business and student orientation comparisons could be drawn. Based upon the findings of such studies, administrators could develop strategic plans to

change student perceptions of the school's level of student orientation or to deploy resources in order to actually improve the student orientation of the school.

The findings also suggest that colleges of business might consider the development and implementation of a cooperative, university-wide internal marketing program. Such a program could focus on the education and training of all college/university employees on the importance of student orientation. The program could emphasize the underlying philosophy that students' perceptions of the university and the various colleges or schools under the university umbrella are molded by virtually each and every employee with whom they come in contact and by each service contact experienced by the students. That philosophy is consistent with the marketing concept and the idea of cross-functionality throughout the university – from the desks of departmental office managers to the offices of the general maintenance workers to the office of the Provost and President. The creation of a truly student oriented college of business is dependent upon all units of the university working toward that common goal.

The findings in the study are also important when we consider the competitive environment in which schools of business operate. Just as automobile makers and computer firms face intense competition, universities and colleges of business seek to develop sustainable comparable advantages in a highly competitive marketplace. As noted in the introduction of this manuscript, students today can choose from literally thousands of universities in the United States alone. As of December 2006, students can choose from 540 colleges of business which are accredited by AACSB International (AACSB 2007). The development of student oriented programs and policies which are consistent with the overall business philosophy of the marketing concept is one way in which administrators can differentiate their colleges of business in a long and growing list of quality schools.

FIGURE 1
Summated Adapted CSOS Scores



The adapted CSOS and the results of this study also have important implications in the area of student retention. Student retention, especially after the first year of study, is becoming more and more important as a strategic initiative in higher education, including in schools of business. In an environment of escalating competition, where more and more business schools compete for fewer and fewer students, retaining students that have enrolled in one’s institution is both cost effective and a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the program that succeeds in keeping a high percentage of its freshman class.

Retention is especially challenging in business schools where freshman typically have little or no contact with their professional program, pursuing instead the completion of their general

studies program, coupled with the occasional pre-business class. Business schools have found it necessary to adopt creative strategies to better “bond” the freshman class to its business program (see, for example, Braunstein and McGrath 1997, McGrath and Braunstein 1997, and Braunstein, Lesser and Pescatrice 2006). The ACSOS certainly represents one metric by which business schools can monitor the relative success of these and related programs designed to enhance retention. While the retention rate itself is of paramount importance, the extent to which returning sophomores feel that the business school has indeed attended to their needs and desires as freshman (i.e., their perceptions regarding their school’s level of student orientation, as measured by the ACSOS) would be equally informative.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As with any piece of empirical research, there are limitations to be acknowledged in the research just described. Perhaps the greatest limitation of the study is that the findings are based on a single data collection in one business school. While most uses of the ACSOS would naturally be restricted to the marketing and strategic efforts at a specific, particular school, further examination of the psychometric properties of the scale using a wider “net” to capture different types of business schools would certainly be helpful, including perhaps across business schools by size, by region of the country, by domestic versus international, by Carnegie classification, by source of funding (i.e., public or private), and so on.

Second, although the early results discussed herein suggest the ACSOS will retain positive psychometric results as it is examined in other business schools, there was no opportunity to assess anything beyond face validity of the scale in the present study, not even in rudimentary fashion. Questions as to whether the scale possesses convergent, divergent and/or discriminant validity remain for future research efforts.

Finally, moving forward, it would be very interesting to hear reports of business schools’ successes (or failures) using the ACSOS to assess various programs and strategies as previously discussed.

REFERENCES

- AACSB International (2007), “Accredited Institutions.” <http://aacsb.edu/accreditation/accreditedmembers.asp>
- Amyx, Douglas and Dennis N. Bristow (1999), “The Marketing Concept in an Academic Setting: Assessing and Comparing the Needs of Asian/Pacific Islander and Anglo Consumers of the Educational Product,” *Journal of Customer Service in Marketing and Management*, 5 (4), 65-80.
- Amyx, Douglas, Dennis N. Bristow and Michael S. Luehlfing (2006), “Instructor Desirability, Student Choice, and Student Satisfaction: An Experiment,” *Wisconsin Journal of Business Education*, 55 (1) Winter 06/07, 16-24.
- Braunstein, A. and M. McGrath (1997), “The Retention of Freshmen Students: An Examination of the Assumptions, Beliefs, and Perceptions Held by College Administrators and Faculty,” *College Student Journal*, 31 (2), 188-200.
- Braunstein, A., M. Lesser and D. Pescatrice (2006), “The Business of Freshman Student Retention: Financial, Institutional and External Factors,” *Journal of Business and Economic Studies*, 12 (2), 33-56.
- Bristow, Dennis N. (1998) “Do You See What I See? The Marketing Lens Model in an Academic Setting,” *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 8 (4), 1- 16.
- Bristow, Dennis N. and Douglas Amyx (1999), “Consumer Primacy on Campus: A Look at the Perceptions of Navajo and Anglo Consumers” *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*, 7 (2), 31-44.
- Bristow, Dennis N. and Douglas Amyx (2006), “The Satisfaction with Cultural Diversity In the Educational Environment Scale (SCDEE): Development and Testing.” *Review of Business Research*, VI (3), 28-38.
- Bristow, Dennis N. and Kenneth Schneider, (2002), “The Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS): Application of the Marketing Concept to Higher Education.” *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12 (2), 15-34.
- Brown, Gene, Robert E. Widing II and Ronald L. Coulter (1991), “Customer Evaluations of Retail Salespeople Utilizing the SOCO Scale: A Replication, Extension, and Application,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 19 (Fall), 347-351.
- Canterbury, Richard M. (1999), “Higher Education Marketing: A Challenge,” *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9 (3), pp. 15-24.

- Chadwick, K. and J. Ward (1987), "Determinants of Consumer Satisfaction With Education: Implications for College and University Administrators," *College and University*, 62, 236-246.
- Churchill, Gilbert A. Jr., (1979), "A Paradigm for Developing Better Measures of Marketing Constructs," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16, February, 64-73.
- Churchill, Gilbert A. Jr., Neil M. Ford and Orville C. Walker, Jr. (1974), "Measuring the Job Satisfaction of the Industrial Salesman," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 11(August) 254-260.
- Coffey, J. Steven and Ruth Wood-Steed (2001), "Center of Attention: College and University Student Centers Are Not Just Another Campus Building; They Have Become Marketing Tools for Institutions," *American School and University*, 74, 3, November pp. 351-353.
- Drucker, Peter F. (1954), *The Practice of Management*, New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Krush, Michael, Dennis Bristow and Ken Schneider (2006), "The Student Connectedness Scale (SCS): A Tool for Proactively Managing the Student-Institution Relationship," *International Journal of Business Research*, VI (2), 35-49.
- Levitt, Theodore (1960), "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 45-45.
- Licatta, Jane and Gary L. Frankwick (1996), "University Marketing: A Professional Service Organization Perspective," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 7 (2), 1-16.
- Mazzarol, Tim, Geoffrey N. Soutar and Vicky Thein (2000), "Critical Success Factors in the Marketing of an Educational Institution: A Comparison of Institutional and Student Perspectives," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 39-58.
- McGrath, M. and A. Braunstein (1997), "The Prediction of Freshman Attrition: An Examination of the Importance of Certain Demographic, Academic, Financial, and Social Factors," *College Student Journal*, 31 (3), 396-408.
- Pate, William S. Jr. (1993), "Consumer Satisfaction, Determinants, and Post-Purchase Actions in Higher Education: A Model to Guide Academic Managers," *College and University*, Spring/Summer, 100-107.
- Saxe, Robert and Barton A. Weitz (1982), "The SOCO Scale: A Measure of the Customer Orientation of Salespeople," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 19, 343-351.
- Webster, Frederick E. Jr. (1988), "The Rediscovery of the Marketing Concept," *Business Horizons*, May-June, 29-39.
- Zikmund, William G. and Michael d'Amico (2002), *Effective Marketing: Creating and Keeping Customers in an e-Commerce World*, Cincinnati, South-Western.