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THE BEST UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING EDUCATION PROGRAMS: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine the content and structure of the best undergraduate marketing programs, as identified by *U.S. News and World Report* for 2002 and 2003. Results show there are basically two types of programs. The first type does not have a marketing major program. Rather, the student's program reflects the elective courses taken beyond the common core requirements. The second, more common, type requires students to take some set of courses, after which a marketing credential, e.g., a marketing major degree, is awarded. Among these schools anywhere from 3 to 7 marketing courses beyond the core are required, with 1 to 4 courses consisting of marketing electives. The most commonly required courses beyond the common core were marketing research, marketing management/strategy, and consumer behavior, in that order. This competitive information can be usefully employed in various ways for curriculum planning and assessment purposes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The program of study one receives while pursuing a specific degree is clearly one of the most important components of a college education. The material students are exposed to, some of which they presumably master, impacts the probability that they will be successful pursuing future specific opportunities, graduate school, or fulfilling specific job requirements. Most likely students, naïve as they must be regarding a collegiate education, simply assume that a degree program's curriculum has been crafted to prepare them for their futures. Similarly, most employers likewise probably simply assume that a person with a degree in a specific area, such as marketing, will have been exposed to some appropriate common body of knowledge, both within and outside the boundaries of the discipline.

Clearly, designing or revising a program's curriculum is a responsibility that must be taken seriously. Further, as anyone who has worked with others on a curriculum committee can attest to, it is something that can be very difficult to do. Different backgrounds, experiences, and educational philosophies of faculty can result in disagreements with regard to how rigid or flexible a program should be, the relative balance of theory and practice, and with regard to how much of a college education

should be discipline specific. Accreditation standards certainly provide some guidance to constructing appropriate programs, but these are generally broad, and different accredited programs can look quite different. With regard to business programs, the relatively new mission based AACSB accreditation standards allow schools considerable leeway in designing programs (AACSB, 2001).

At one extreme a program can be very heavily weighted towards a specific discipline and be very regimented. In marketing, many courses beyond the core can be offered and required of all marketing students. If this type of program is pursued, students may not be able to take courses which interest them, or which prepare them for interdisciplinary careers. Employers will find that the students all resemble each other in terms of the body of knowledge studied, and hence may not find future employees with complementary skills, but will, on the other hand, be assured that their hires have a solid exposure to marketing thought. At the other extreme a program may require very few courses, and even here there may be broad choices. Here students may be able to construct programs of study that parallel their interests, and employers may find students with very unique and complementary skills. However, the students may also be missing exposure to knowledge that might be considered essential by many marketing educators and practitioners.

Surveys of practitioners, faculty, students, and alumni regarding the important components of a marketing education have been conducted (Tanyel, McAlum and Mitchell, 1999; Shruptrine and Willenborg, 1998; Smith and Demichiell, 1996; McDaniel and Hise, 1984). While these are useful, it is usually difficult to translate results into overall program components. For example, in the Tanyel, McAlum and Mitchell study faculty and employer respondents indicated that responsibility and accountability, ethical values, and interpersonal skills were the most important characteristics of business graduates (1999). McDaniel and Hise (1984) surveyed CEOs regarding the importance of various marketing and marketing activities as sources of growth and profits, but it is not clear what one should do when trying to decide how flexible a program should be, or which courses should be required of all students.

Faculty and other academicians have also contributed to the literature regarding program development by providing normative models and advice (e.g., Pharr, 2000; Koch, 1997; Lamont and Friedman, 1997; West and Aupperle, 1996; Motwani, 1995; Payne and Whitfield, 1999; Alden et al., 1991), by developing a case for changing the curriculum (e.g., Pharr and Morris, 1997; Karathanos, 1999), or by describing curricular revision experiences of specific institutions (e.g., Sautter et al., 2000; Miller, 2000; Pharr and Morris, 1997).

There have also been empirical reviews of required and elective marketing courses. A consistent finding is that the most commonly required courses for marketing majors are, in order, principles of marketing, marketing research, and consumer behavior (Butler and Straughn-Mizerski, 1998; Turnquist, Bialaszewski and Franklin, 1991; McDaniel and Hise, 1984). Turnquist, Bialaszewski and Franklin also found that 42.3% of the 163 institutions surveyed required two courses in statistics, 76.1% required calculus, and that 89.6% required more than 3 marketing courses (1991). Pharr and Morris examined programs at 14 colleges and universities and found that, on average, 11.9 semester marketing credits were required, along with an additional average of 7.1 elective marketing credits. The average number of total semester hour marketing credits required was 18.9 (Pharr and Morris, 1997). The average number of courses listed in the 75 catalogs examined by McDaniel and Hise was 11.8 (1984).

The fundamental purpose of this research is to add to the empirical literature by assessing the content and structure of the best undergraduate marketing programs, rather than a representative cross-section of schools. Primary objectives for this study were as follows:

Specifically, for business majors, determine...

- the number of credits required in the upper division common core,
- the proportion of programs that require calculus,
- the number of economics, computer course, and statistics credits required, and
- the prevalence of integrated courses.

For the marketing major, determine...

- the number of credits beyond the common core required for a marketing major,
- the relative mix of specified versus elective marketing courses required of marketing majors, and
- the most common required marketing courses.

Secondary objectives regarding the marketing program included determining:

- the number of marketing courses offered at other schools,
- the number of total semester credits required for the degree, and
- the number of schools that have adopted an integrative core program.

Limiting the scope of this study to the best is justified on a number of grounds. First, the notion of TQM and benchmarking relies not only on determining what others are doing, but more importantly what the best are doing; that is, on identifying

best practices (Ross, 1999; George and Weimerskirch, 1998; Motwani, 1995; Capezio and Morehouse, 1995; Omachonu and Ross, 1994; Brocka and Brocka, 1992). Benchmarking, which can be considered an important component of a situational analysis, is done in academe, including through AACSB (Payne and Whitfield, 1999). In addition to providing information that may prevent a school from inadvertently straying too far from mainstream practices, knowledge of programs at the best schools may also prove useful when generating and evaluating alternatives designed to differentiate a school. Second, even if one disagrees with the specific identity of the best programs, the schools are all of a high enough caliber that their actions regarding programs are worthy of at least a cursory review. At the least, such a list culls out many mediocre schools that would not justify any emulation. Third, even if the missions, objectives, and resources are very different from other colleges and universities it is informative to examine the variability of program structure and modal practices within this group when contemplating program changes. Finally, even if one makes the argument that the reputation of a school is in spite of a mediocre program or in spite of a lack of innovativeness, rather than because of it, it is interesting to contemplate what can be done programmatically while maintaining an outstanding reputation.

II. DATA

Clearly, a study of the best schools requires identifying such a set of schools. Two lists of the best undergraduate marketing programs were found in the literature: *The Gourman Report* (1996), and the well-known annual list compiled by *U.S. News and World Report* ("Best Colleges: Undergraduate business specialties: Marketing," *U.S. News and World Report*, 2003). Several considerations led to the choice of the *U.S. News and World Report* as the list to be used. First, *The Gourman Report*, last published in 1996, was somewhat dated. Second, the methodology used in *The Gourman Report* is unclear. The *U.S. News and World Report* lists for specialty programs are based on nominations and evaluations by deans and senior faculty ("Business: Methodology," *U.S. News and World Report*, 2003). Finally, there was a significant amount of overlap between the lists. All of the schools on the *U.S. News and World Report* list, except for the University of Texas – Austin, the University of North Carolina, and MIT, were on the Gourman list, and the lowest rank of the remainder of the *U.S. News* list, Arizona State University, was 34 on the Gourman list. Further, 16 of the *U.S. News and World Report*'s schools were in the top 21 of the *The Gourman Report*'s rankings. Hence, regardless of the continuing criticisms of the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (see Karl, 1999; Mast, 2001), there is a strong case that this list is dominated by schools that are, at the least, among the best.

Hence, the best schools, for the purposes of this study, consist of the universities that made the online *U.S. News and World Report's* Best Colleges list for undergraduate programs in marketing for 2002 and 2003 ("Best Colleges: Undergraduate business specialties: Marketing" *U.S. News and World Report*). The list of the 22 schools utilized for this study, and the rankings of the schools for 2002 and 2003, along with additional information, is presented in Table 1.

Information regarding programs was obtained via university Web pages and published catalogs available over the Internet. This was supplemented by telephone calls and emails when confusing, conflicting, or otherwise inaccessible data was encountered. In order to reduce measurement error one researcher developed the primary matrices of information and carefully checked and rechecked all figures several times, and a second double-checked a subset of the information and calculations.

III. RESULTS

All credits are expressed in semester credit hour equivalents. For quarter schools the published credits for courses were multiplied by $2/3$.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is a distinct outlier in several respects, and therefore warrants some preliminary comments. First, given their program organization, it is not always a straightforward task to identify what all other schools would consider semester credits. Course descriptions do not indicate credits, but rather indicate the number of lecture hours, lab hours, and outside study hours expected for each course. For a few courses the commonly accepted guideline of two hours of outside study for each hour of lecture did not hold. Second, some university requirements do not carry credit (i.e., physical education). Third, there are no undergraduate marketing courses – undergraduates enroll in MBA classes. For these reasons data regarding MIT is excluded from all subsequent discussions.

1. OVERALL PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

As shown in Table 1, only 9 of 21 schools require more than 120 credits for a marketing degree, and none require less. Emory University requires the most, 138 semester hours, followed by Ohio State University with a 130.7 semester hour requirement. The University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University, New York University, University of Southern California, and Texas A&M all require 128 hours. The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Indiana University Bloomington both require 124 credits. It is clear that the dominant degree program consists of a 4 year, 15 credits/semester course of study.

U.S. News and World Report Rank by year		University	Number of Marketing Courses in Catalog ^a	Number of Marketing Course Credits ^b	Semester Credits Required for Degree
2002	2003				
1	1	University of Pennsylvania (Wharton)	20	46.5	128
2	2	<i>University of Michigan Ann Arbor^c</i>	6	18	120
3	3	<i>University of California Berkeley (Haas)</i>	5	15	120
4	4	University of Texas at Austin (McCombs)	8	24	120
5	5	<i>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Kenan-Flagler)</i>	8	24	120
6	7	Indiana University – Bloomington (Kelley)	17	45	124
7	9	University of Wisconsin – Madison	8	24	120
8	11	University of Florida (Warrington)	8	32	120
9	6	New York University (Stern)	18	43	128
10	10	University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign ^d	12	36	124
11	16	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan)	20 (graduate)	58 (graduate)	n/a
11	8	University of Virginia	12	36	120
13	16	Pennsylvania State University – University Park (Smeal)	15	45	128
14	15	Emory University (Goizueta)	10	40	138
14	18	Michigan State University (Broad) ^d	13	39	120
16	NR ^e	<i>University of Washington</i>	13	34.7	120
17	13	Ohio State University ^d	9	24	130.7
17	12	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	8	28	120
19	13	University of Southern California (Marshall)	15	60	128
NR ^e	19	Texas A&M University - College Station (Mays)	16	48	128
NR ^e	19	University of Maryland – College Park (Smith) ^d	11	33	120
NR ^e	21	Arizona State University ^d	15	45	120
		MEAN ^f	11.8	35.2	123.7
		Minimum-Maximum	5-20	15-60	120-138

- a. Does not include internships, practicums, special topics, independent studies, and logistics/supply chain courses.
- b. Semester credit equivalents.
- c. Italicized schools have open programs. That is, no specified marketing program beyond the core.
- d. These schools award a degree in distribution management, logistics, or supply chain management.
- e. Not included in year's list of best marketing programs.
- f. Excludes MIT.

The number of undergraduate marketing credits offered at each school was also examined and is also presented in Table 1. In counting marketing course offerings logistics courses, non-specific special topics or readings courses, independent study and research courses, and courses that essentially duplicated another course (e.g., honors courses) were excluded. Logistics and supply chain courses were excluded since some universities have chosen to emphasize that area, sometimes as a different discipline. Specifically, Indiana University Bloomington offers a distribution management degree through the same organizational unit as the marketing degree, while at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Pennsylvania State University, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, University of Maryland, and Arizona State University have separate departments that specialize in distribution or supply chain management. Hence, it was felt that including them would somewhat distort the results. The range of credits offered varies from a low of 15 credits at the University of California Berkeley to a high of 60 credits at the University of Southern California. The mean value is 35.2 credits. With regard to the number of courses listed in the catalogs, the University of California Berkeley, with 5 courses, offered the fewest number of courses, while New York University listed the most with 18 different courses. The mean number was 11.8 courses. Coincidentally, McDaniel and Hise, in their study of 75 catalogs, reported the same mean number of catalog marketing courses (1984). However, it is likely that their definition of marketing courses was somewhat different.

One interesting finding is that University of Southern California, Ohio State University, the University of Wisconsin, and Arizona State University provide subspecialty programs for marketing majors, such as brand management, marketing research, and sales.

Another minor but interesting observation is that New York University and Indiana University Bloomington offer the equivalent of 1.5 credit courses. At Indiana University there are four 1.5 credit courses required of all marketing students. At New York University the courses are electives. For these two schools the conventional packaging of a program into 3 credit units has been broken.

2. LOWER DIVISION REQUIREMENTS

The common core of programs, at both the lower and upper levels, was examined. The lower division requirement figures presented in Table 2 reflect the credits required in courses that are usually offered at that level, regardless of the actual level of the specific course. For example, the University of Minnesota requires all students take a 2-credit junior-level course in management accounting. The 2 credits were included in the computations regarding lower division accounting.

Further, given that the course is offered as part of the upper division core, it was also included in the computations regarding the total upper division core credits.

All schools, with the exception of the University of Virginia, require at least one course in calculus. The University of Virginia requires that students take either a course in probability or in calculus. Turnquist, Bialaszewski, and Franklin (1991), in their study, found that 76.1% of the 166 AACSB accredited schools in their study required calculus. With regard to statistics, all schools in this study required at least one course. The mean number of statistics credits was 3.9, while the median and the mode was 3 credits. The maximum number of credits required in statistics is 6, which is required at 5 of the 21 schools.

The extent to which students were exposed to economics, through economics courses, was also examined. All students at all schools were required to take at least some economics courses, usually, but not always, at the lower division level. The number required varies from 6 credits, which is the case at 7 schools, to a maximum of 16.6 credits at Ohio State University.

With regard to computer courses, the universities of Michigan, Wisconsin-Madison, Washington, and Emory do not explicitly require computer classes. Further, some schools specifically indicate that qualified individuals may have the computer requirement waived.

Finally, it is apparent that two three-credit courses in accounting is the standard. Both Emory and the University of Southern California require 8 credits of accounting, but in both cases the standard number of credits/courses is 4 credits, and hence in both cases this translates into 2 courses.

	Range	Mode	Mean	Median
Lower Division Core Requirements				
Calculus ^a	0-6	3	3.5	3
Computer courses ^b	0-6	3	2.6	3
Statistics	2.7-6	3	3.9	3
Accounting ^c	4-8	6	5.9	6
Upper Division Core Requirements				
Total Upper Division Core Credits Required	18-36	24	25.6	24.7
Economics (lower & upper level)	6-16.6	6	8.6	8.7
Marketing	2-4	3	3	3

a. At the University of Virginia students are required to take a course in calculus or probability.

b. University of North Carolina and University of Wisconsin's courses were at the junior level. A couple of schools had specific provisions for getting requirements waived.

c. Some accounting was at the upper division level at U. Minnesota, U. of North Carolina, U. of Wisconsin, and U. of California Berkeley.

3. UPPER DIVISION COMMON CORE REQUIREMENTS

The upper level common core requirements, required of all business majors at the junior and senior levels, were also examined, and a few select findings are presented in Table 2. The number of semester credits required as part of the upper division core program varies from a low of 18 at the University of Texas Austin to a high of 36 at the University of Southern California. The mean is 25.6 credits, the mode 24, and the median 24.7 credits. Common core requirements are very similar. All schools require a course in marketing, finance, management/organizational behavior, and quantitative methods.

Table 2 specifically reports the number of credits required in marketing because of concerns raised in other studies. Specifically, Butler and Straughn-Mizerski point out that there is no longer an explicit AACSB requirement that all business students take marketing (1998). Further, they found that principles of marketing were required in only 90.9% of the programs they studied (1998). In the Turnquist, Bialaszewski, and Franklin study the percent of programs that required a principles course was 96.3%, and McDaniel and Hise found it required in 92% of the programs they examined. While marketing principles may have been covered in other courses in those studies, in this study all of the schools explicitly require a basic marketing course. As shown in Table 2, the mean, mode, and median number of marketing credits required is 3.

There has been a call to develop integrated core programs (see, for example Pharr 2000; West 1996). Pharr reports that many believe marketing programs need to be reengineered, and that 10 AACSB accredited schools have, or are, developing integrated programs. Of the universities examined here only two universities have clearly developed integrated core programs. Indiana University Bloomington has an integrated core that consists of four 3-credit courses (operations management, finance, marketing, and strategy). The University of Virginia's integrated core program consists of three 4-credit and three 3-credit courses.

4. REQUIREMENTS BEYOND THE COMMON CORE

Several aspects of the structure and requirements of marketing programs beyond the common core constituted the heart of this study. Specifically, the number of marketing credits required, the specific courses required, and the degree of flexibility of the programs were examined. Perhaps the most interesting observation is

that two different models for educating marketers are present among the best programs.

5. TWO DIFFERENT OVERALL APPROACHES: OPEN AND MARKETING MAJOR MODELS

Beyond the upper level core requirements two distinct approaches are represented among the best schools. The first approach, followed by the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, the University of California Berkeley, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Washington, require no specific marketing courses and have no specific marketing major program. In these open programs, representing over 19% of the best programs, students are free to craft their own program of study. The student's transcripts, and not a designation on their degree, reflect the extent of their marketing education. In spite of having no explicit marketing program, deans and senior faculty still feel strongly enough about the quality of the programs to propel them into the top programs lists. This approach, where the responsibility for choosing courses lies with the presumably competent-enough student, follows from, and is consistent with, a Humboldtian, or German, educational philosophy (Ratcliff, 1996).

The second, more prevalent approach, specifies a program of study required for a marketing credential. Within this group there is a fair amount of variability with regard to the number of credits required and the degree of flexibility. This is the only type of program reviewed in previous studies (e.g., Butler and Straughn-Mizerski, 1998; McDaniel and Hise, 1984; Turnquist, Bialaszewski, and Franklin, 1991). This marketing major model, particularly with regard to the more rigid programs, is consistent with a liberal arts approach (Ratcliff, 1996; Rudolph, 1977).

In order to compare these two approaches more closely, the common core requirements and the total number of business credits required of graduates for the two types were compared. As shown in Table 3, universities without explicit programs in marketing, referred to as open programs, tended to have a slightly larger common core, and require more business elective courses, than those with explicit marketing major programs. However, the total number of upper-division business credits required is, on average, lower for open programs. Hence, at these schools' students have a maximum degree of flexibility, and a corresponding responsibility, to craft an education that meets their needs and interests.

It is interesting to speculate on the reason's schools without an explicit marketing program are considered among the best marketing schools by senior faculty and deans. First, it may be that the lack of a specific degree designation, along with a

structured, specified program, is not important with regard to evaluating the quality of a program. In other words, while there may be considerable variability among the graduates with regard to their courses, the general output may be deemed very good. Perhaps, even, the necessity of thinking through and developing one's own program of study may be an important part of the student's education. Another possible explanation is that a school's reputation may be influenced to a very great extent by non-curricular considerations, such as the quality of the faculty and students, the resources commanded by the school, or by the general reputation of the school. A variation on this is that an objective assessment of the relative worth of the two models is either not possible or not known, at least by the evaluators. However, if those who chose the best colleges – deans and senior faculty - are ignorant of the relationship of program to outputs, then any relationship is likely unknown among other stakeholders.

		Range	Mean
Upper Division Common Core Credit Requirements	Open Programs ^a	24.7-30	27.6
	Marketing Major Programs ^b	18-36	25.1
Marketing Major Required Credits	Open Programs ^a	0	0
	Marketing Major Programs ^b	9-22	16.0
Business Elective Credits Required	Open Programs ^a	5-12	9.2
	Marketing Major Programs ^b	0-9	2.1
Total Program Business Credit Requirements	Open Programs ^a	32-40.5	36.7
	Marketing Major Programs ^b	36-52	43.2

a. University of Michigan Ann Arbor, University of California Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of Washington.
b. All other universities in study except MIT

6. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MARKETING MAJOR MODEL

It is informative to examine more closely those schools that award some type of certification in marketing. The title of the certification varies somewhat, from marketing major at many schools to area of emphasis (area depth, for example, at Emory). Here the number of credits in marketing that is required, the most common required courses, and the degree of flexibility of the programs are examined.

As shown in Table 4, with regard to the number of marketing credits required beyond the common core for a marketing major designation, the range varies from a low of 9 at the University of Virginia, to a high of 22 credits at the University of

Texas at Austin. The mean and median value is 16.0 credits, and the mode 12 credits. In terms of the number of courses required, the mean is 5.1, the median is 5 courses, and the mode is 4.

The number of identified, specified required courses beyond the common core varies from a low of 0 at Emory University, which simply requires students to take 3 courses (12 credits) in marketing, to a high of 4 courses at the University of Texas at Austin, Arizona State University, and the University of Indiana Bloomington. Six universities specifically require 3 different courses, three specifically require 2 courses, and four specified only 1 course. The mean number of specified required marketing courses is 2.3, the mode is 3, and median is 2.5.

All marketing programs require students to take marketing elective courses. This varies from a low of 1 course at the University of Florida to a high of 4 courses at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, New York University and Texas A&M. The mean number of marketing elective courses required is 2.8 courses, while the mode and median are 3.

	Range	Mode	Mean	Median
Marketing credits required beyond the core	9-22	12	16.0	16
Marketing courses required beyond the core ^b	3-7	6	5.1	5
Specified required marketing courses	0-4	3	2.3	2.5
Marketing elective courses required for degree	1-4	3	2.8	3.0

- a. Includes all universities listed in Table 1 except the University of Michigan, University of California Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Washington. These schools do not have formal marketing major programs. Also excludes MIT.
- b. B. The University of Indiana, Bloomington requires four 1.5 credit marketing courses, which, here, are counted as two 3 credit courses.

Table 5 provides information regarding the most common specific marketing courses required of marketing students, including the marketing principles course, which was required of all business students in all universities, as well as the results from previous studies (Butler and Straughn-Mizerski, 1998; McDaniel and Hise, 1984; Turnquist, Bialaszewski, and Franklin, 1991). Apart from the principles course,

the most common required marketing course is marketing research, required at 13 (76.4%) of the universities. A marketing management or marketing strategy course is required at 11 (64.7%) universities, and 9 (52.9%) universities require a consumer/buyer behavior course.

	Current Study ^a n=17	Butler & Straughn- Mizerski (1998) n=110	Turnquist, Bialaszewski, & Franklin (1991) n=163	McDaniel & Hise (1984) n=75
Principles of marketing	100%	90.9%	96.3%	92.0%
Marketing research	76.5%	77.3%	88.3%	81.3%
Marketing Management/Strategy	64.7%	78.2%	77.9%	76.0%
Consumer Behavior	52.9%	58.2%	60.7%	60%
a. Includes all universities listed in Table 1 except the University of Michigan, University of California Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Washington. These schools do not have formal marketing major programs. Also excludes MIT.				

IV. DISCUSSION

There are a number of interesting points that follow from the results. First, with regard to lower division requirements, most results are not surprising. Calculus is the default functional mathematics requirement, two accounting courses are still standard, and economics is standard fare, as is statistics. All but three schools explicitly require computer courses. For those that do not require computer courses, it is not clear whether it is assumed that students are now familiar with computer technology by the time they enroll in college, and/or whether computer usage is taught as an integral part of other courses. Without base data it is also not clear whether this indicates a shift.

With regard to the upper division core requirements, there is a remarkable degree of consistency across the programs. In fact, the results were so consistent among schools it was not deemed necessary to report on the specifics. It appears that most students are exposed to very similar bodies of information across universities. All students are required to take marketing, finance, management, and some quantitative courses, for example.

With regard to marketing major programs, there is some variability regarding the number of credits required, and with regard to the mix of specified and elective

courses. At one extreme a few elective courses in marketing are required, and at the other extreme a rather large number of courses, with a modest number of electives, are required. Interestingly, every single program allows some latitude for course choices.

This range in flexibility is even greater when one considers those schools that follow an open model. These schools, of course, represent the most flexible marketing programs.

It is interesting to consider these findings in light of the call for developing a better understanding among business students of the interrelationships of various business and non-business disciplines (e.g., Alden et al., 1991; Pharr, 2000), and the call for increasing program flexibility (e.g., Pharr 2000). With regard to the first issue, open programs can generate graduates with the broadest range of interdisciplinary understanding, as well as with the narrowest. Some students may combine courses from several disciplines, while others may focus on only one discipline. With regard to the call for flexibility, clearly adopting an open program maximizes flexibility. Such programs provide students the most opportunity to choose courses that best meet their perceived needs. Of course, this also provides students with the opportunity to choose inappropriate courses.

To the extent that a quality program can be developed with relatively few specific courses required, it is difficult to argue for a highly structured program on academic grounds. To require all students to take a specific course implies that the marginal benefit from that course is greater for all students, and all their future employers, than any other course. Given different interests among students and employers, maximizing program flexibility would seem to have little downside. There is even a positive aspect to allowing students to pursue easier, less relevant courses – potential employers can better distinguish between those who are qualified, and those who aren't.

A final finding is that a quality undergraduate marketing program does not require a university to offer an inordinately large number of undergraduate courses. The mean number of courses is a modest 11.8, including the basic principles of marketing courses. The University of California Berkeley has only 5 undergraduate marketing courses listed, the University of Michigan 6, and several others fewer than 10 courses.

An interesting exercise is to develop a modal marketing major program based on the results of this study. Such a program would have a common core of approximately 24 credits, a marketing program of 12 credits, with at least 1 elective marketing course. Finally, marketing research, consumer/buyer behavior, and a

marketing management/strategy course would constitute the required core of the marketing program. There would be approximately 10 or so undergraduate marketing courses in the catalog. This implies that almost any marketing department of moderate size can duplicate the structure of programs reviewed here.

V. FUTURE RESEARCH

In addition to the hypotheses identified above, there are a number of manageable research questions that warrant attention. First, expanding research to cover the structure and content of general education requirements, and the degree of flexibility of the entire undergraduate program, might provide useful insights. It is possible that programs that are less structured with regard to marketing programs are more structured with regard to general education requirements. Linking the degree of flexibility and structure to student, employer, and graduate school satisfaction would be important for curriculum development. Linking such factors to other outcomes, such as productivity, would be better, but probably very difficult.

It would be useful to understand the extent to which a curriculum is an attribute that is evaluated by employers and potential students. If few consciously evaluate program structure and content, then it may not prove a useful means of differentiation. It would be particularly informative to examine the number of firms recruiting from open versus marketing major schools, and the number of marketing jobs along with salaries and signing bonuses offered at each type of school. If certification in marketing is valued by firms there should be a discernable difference between the two types of schools.

Another useful study would examine how program structure affects the time required for students to obtain an undergraduate degree, the number of credits students accumulate prior to graduating, and the extent to which a program's structure acts as a barrier or enabler with regard to students' switching majors. Finally, if enough information can be collected it may be useful to examine the extent to which schools at all quality levels fall into different strategic groups.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most intriguing finding is that it is not necessary to have a program that awards a marketing credential in order to be recognized as having one of the best undergraduate marketing programs. An open program, whereby a student's area of training beyond business core courses is reflected in his or her transcript, is sufficient.

Those schools that have formal marketing programs require anywhere from 9 to 22 semester credit hours beyond the core. The mean is 16 credits (5.1 courses), and

the mode is 12. All such programs provide students with at least some choice regarding courses. The mean number of required marketing elective courses is 2.8, and ranges from 1 to 4.

Interestingly, beyond a basic marketing principles course that is required of all business students at all schools, there is no single course that is required at all schools to obtain a marketing credential. Marketing research is required at 76.5% of the schools, which implies that 23.5% of the best do not feel that it is a mandatory part of a marketing program. Marketing management/strategy is required at 64.7% of such schools, and consumer behavior at 52.9% of the schools.

The overarching conclusion is that there is a fair amount of variability among the best schools, and with regard to marketing training, there is no consensus as to what marketing topics must be included in a student's marketing education. The only constant is that students have some choice with regards to their marketing training.

Interestingly, it is not necessary to have an extensive set of marketing courses in order to have a high-quality marketing program. The mean number of catalog courses is 11.8 courses (35.2 semester credits) but is as low as 5 courses.

With regard to the total number of business and business-related credits required at the upper division level among open and marketing credential programs, anywhere from a low of 32 to a high of 52 credits are required. The mean number of credits among open programs is 36.7 semester credits, and 43.2 among schools which award a marketing credential. Hence, there is a fair degree of variability with regard to the overall structure of programs.

At the very least the data presented here constitutes competitive intelligence that can provide program reviewers and developers a useful reference point. In the language of brand management (Keller, 2000), it can be used to identify points of parity, and points of difference, of one school against the best.

In developing or reviewing a program, it would seem reasonable that the greater the discrepancy between what better schools require and what the given institution does or is considering, the greater the degree of explanation required. That is, if a school wishes to develop or deliver a program that is quite different from other schools, there should be a good reason. Presumably these programs, and others like them, are setting the expectations of employers and students.

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