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## The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: The Role of a Consumer Mentality in Higher Education and Exploring How it Can be Overcome

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### Recommended Citation

Batory, Stephen S.; Batory, Anne Heineman; Burns, David J.; Lanasa, John; and Stuart, Randy, "The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: The Role of a Consumer Mentality in Higher Education and Exploring How it Can be Overcome" (2013). *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2013*. 15.  
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# **The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: The Role of a Consumer Mentality in Higher Education and Exploring How it Can be Overcome**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Serving and satisfying customers is often viewed as the primary function of businesses. Consequently, a customer orientation, or a focus on determining customers' wants and needs and designing and offering products to satisfy them, is a key concept within marketing. Is the importance of a customer orientation also true in higher education? Several believe that it is. The answer to the question of who is the customer in higher education, however, is less clear. Historically, society was viewed to be the primary customer of higher education – the purpose of higher education was viewed to produce educated individuals who possess the knowledge and skills to serve society by serving as leaders in society and its primary institutions, including government and business. Arguably, this view of the purpose of higher education has changed. Today, students are most often viewed as the customers of higher education. Indeed, when viewing the activities of colleges and universities, the extent to which a consumer mentality has been accepted and employed quickly becomes obvious. The promise of consumer (student) satisfaction is viewed to be key to attracting students and is an essential component of most university marketing programs.

Not all agree with this assessment of the role of a consumer mentality in higher education, however. Several believe that a consumer mentality is antithetical to higher education, which logically raises an important question: Why would a customer mentality be appropriate for most organizations, but not higher education? The focus of this special session is to explore this issue.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Stephen S. Batory (Ph.D., University of Maryland) is a retired Professor of Marketing at Bloomsburg University. He is the author of numerous research based articles and presentations and has recent publications in The International Journal of Learning, Journal of Marketing Education, Pennsylvania Journal of Business and Economics and the Journal of the American Academy of Business. Dr. Batory has performed research based consultations in areas such as health care, television, consumer goods, and site location. His current research interests are academic integrity issues among college students, faculty and administrators.

Anne Heineman Batory (Ph.D., University of Maryland) is Professor of Marketing at Wilkes University and Chair of the Department of Entrepreneurship, Leadership, & Marketing. She teaches in the consumer behavior, marketing, advertising, and leadership areas at Wilkes. In addition to teaching and administration positions in higher education, Dr. Batory has served as consultant for consumer and research issues in such diverse industries as health care, higher education, television, consumer goods, and site location. Dr. Batory is a frequent presenter at marketing conferences and the author of several articles which have been published in The International Journal of Learning, the Pennsylvania Journal of Business and Economics and the Journal of the American Academy of Business.

David J. Burns, D.B.A. (1987, Kent State University) is Professor of Marketing and Director of Faculty Programs, Xavier University. He has co-authored several books, published over 95 journal articles and book chapters and presented over 200 papers. His research interests include mission integration, retail location and atmospherics, ethics, and consumer culture.

John Lanasa (Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh) is Director of Sports Leadership and Director of Sales Initiatives at Duquesne University.

Randy S. Stuart received her MBA with a concentration in Marketing from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She teaches Principles of Marketing, Retail and Retail Management. She joined the Kennesaw State faculty in August 1998 after a 25-year career in retail, wholesale sales and part-time teaching. Stuart worked in retail management for Walgreen Drug Stores and then in wholesale sales in the confectionary, women's clothing, and gift and souvenir industries.