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Revising the Undergraduate Marketing Core Curriculum: A Survey Approach*

By R. Eugene Klippel, Max L. Densmore, and Cheryl Kleinke

Some time ago we decided to review the courses in marketing at the Seidman School and if necessary change them. A review of the literature suggests that the best marketing curriculum must apply the marketing concept and meet the needs of students, educators, and the business community, which ultimately employs marketing graduates. Several educators have addressed the issue from this perspective, but they provide limited empirical support for their position (Abell, 1977; Cooke and Dayton, 1981; Dwyer, 1977; Enis, 1977; and Weinrauch, 1977).

Fortunately, two studies have been identified which use survey research techniques to gather information from educators and practitioners regarding undergraduate marketing curriculum requirements (Listman, 1976, and Wilson and Darley, 1982). Both studies attempt to integrate their findings by comparing and contrasting the perspectives of the different groups studied.

This paper also attempts to integrate the perspectives of educators and practitioners based on survey information and follows the general format of earlier studies (Listman, 1976, and Wilson and Darley, 1982). While it was not our intent to duplicate either of these studies, sufficient similarities exist to permit observable trends in key areas to be identified.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this study focus on determining whether significant differences exist between the groups under investigation regarding their opinions on the desirability of: (1) selected marketing courses for undergraduate marketing majors, (2) selected educational training tools, and (3) selected undergraduate marketing curriculum objectives.

Research Methodology

A questionnaire was mailed to 203 marketing department heads of American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business accredited schools of business. This group was believed to be most knowledgeable about curriculum development and revision, as well as leaders in business education. Responses from 99 department heads (49 percent) were received.

Questionnaires were also mailed to marketing executives of 200 firms randomly selected from the Fortune 500, a list of the nation's largest corporations. Usable responses were returned from 39 executives by the cut-off date, for a 20 percent completion rate.

* This article is an edited version of a paper given by the authors. Because of space limitations, detailed hypotheses and statistical tables have been deleted. Please contact one of the authors if you wish to receive a copy of the original manuscript.

Local practitioners were also surveyed. Questionnaires were mailed to 66 executives of local firms that are affiliated with Seidman School and employ a large proportion of its graduates. Usable responses were received from 19 local firms, for a 29 percent completion rate.

The response rate from each segment of the sample compares favorably with those from the Wilson and Darley study (Wilson and Darley, 1982); therefore, a second mailing was not conducted.

Questionnaires mailed to each group contained identical questions. Respondents were asked to indicate the desirability of fifteen selected marketing courses for undergraduate business students concentrating in marketing. Questions pertaining to marketing courses included the phrase "other than the basic course," since the basic course was assumed to be a necessary requirement, not a special additional requirement. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of ten educational techniques used in undergraduate marketing education. Finally, each group was asked to indicate the desirability of selected curriculum objectives for undergraduate business students concentrating in marketing.

Specific marketing courses, teaching techniques, and marketing curriculum objectives evaluated, based on desirability, are as follows:

Marketing Courses

1. Marketing Research
2. Marketing Management
3. Consumer Analysis
4. Marketing Problems
5. Advertising/Communications
6. Marketing and Policies
7. Sales Management
8. International Marketing
9. Industrial Marketing
10. Channels of Distribution
11. Retail Management
12. Quantitative Methods/Models
13. Forecasting
14. Physical Distribution
15. Purchasing

Teaching Techniques

1. Case Analysis
2. In-Depth, Theoretical Training
3. Research and Consulting Projects
4. Quantitative Techniques and Models
5. Guest Lectures
6. Internships
7. Computer Simulation
8. Co-op Programs
9. Field Trips
10. Team Teaching (Industry/Academic)

Marketing Curriculum Objectives

1. In-depth understanding of marketing's role in the business environment.
2. Develop decision-making skills.

3. Develop an ethical philosophy of business and personal behavior.
4. Provide skills necessary for advanced positions in marketing.
5. Develop skilled researchers and practitioners in marketing.
6. Prepare for further graduate education in business administration.

Results

Desirable Marketing Curriculum

Four courses appear to be extremely desirable to all groups for inclusion in the core marketing curriculum. They are:

Marketing Research
Marketing Management
Marketing Problems
Advertising and Communications

For four other courses (Consumer Analysis, Quantitative Methods, Forecasting and Sales Management), serious differences of opinion appear to exist. In general, educators prefer more emphasis on behavioral issues vis-a-vis consumer behavior, whereas business executives appear to place more emphasis on quantitative oriented courses.

Desirable Teaching Techniques

The survey results indicate that all groups believe case analysis to be an excellent tool for educating marketing students. After that, educators emphasize textbook approaches rather than "hands-on" work-related experiences. The reverse is true for both business groups. For example, educators emphasized the value of in-depth, theoretical training, while business groups preferred guest lecturers, internships and computer simulation as desired educational techniques.

Desirable Marketing Curriculum Objectives

The two most desirable marketing curriculum objectives were:

- To provide students with an in-depth understanding of marketing's role in the business environment and
- To develop the student's decision-making ability.

Business executives rank the latter objective first and the former second, while educators' rankings were just the opposite. However, based on statistical tests, all three groups found these two particular marketing curriculum objectives extremely desirable.

In summary, the survey data supports the position that educators and marketing executives view the desirability of the six selected marketing objectives similarly. The results of the analysis of variance show clearly that there is no significant difference in the average desirability ratings of the six marketing curriculum objectives among the three groups surveyed.

Continued on page 7

Conclusion and Implications

Our findings suggest that educators and marketing executives are in solid agreement on the relative desirability of the stated marketing curriculum objectives. In addition, both appear to be in reasonable accord on the "core" marketing courses needed in the curriculum to achieve these objectives. However, with the exception of case analysis, the groups differ on the educational techniques that should be used in presenting these materials to the students. Clearly, the practitioner groups would like to see more "hands-on" techniques used, e.g., internships, computer simulation, and field trips.

The implications of this study for educators suggest that a core marketing curriculum should include: (1) marketing research, (2) marketing management, (3) marketing problems, and (4) advertising/communications. Further, to reflect practitioner concerns, marketing electives should be offered that emphasize quantitative analysis, e.g., quantitative

marketing methods and models, forecasting, etc. This study also suggests that the consumer behavior course be an elective rather than a requirement.

Finally, our study suggests the need for marketing educators to integrate additional educational techniques in teaching their courses. Clearly, practitioners want more experienced students, and educators are challenged to meet this need. Not only may this integration of teaching techniques be pedagogically superior to less integrated formats, but such experience may also provide students with a decided advantage in the entry-level employment marketplace.

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The Grand Rapids Economics Index

Continued from page 3

index, compiled for the Grand Rapids area, shows that Grand Rapids is continuing to move toward good times. Not all of us feel that. Prosperity is not shared uniformly by all. But it can be said that more people are working and more paychecks are being received and spent on goods distributed by Grand Rapids retailers. The worst of the recent years were 1980 and 1982. It looks as though 1984 will be another good year.

The composite index is made up of a weighted average of five economic indicators: bank debits, retail sales, residential and non-residential construction, industrial power consumption and employment, all of which are adjusted for seasonal variations and for the effects of inflation.

An index has been prepared for the United States which makes use of approximately the same components that make up the index for Kent and Ottawa Counties. The movements of this index are shown on an accompanying chart, which gives some evidence of how local economic activity compares with national economic activity. The composite U.S. index is correlated with real U.S. Gross National Product movements. These movements reflect changes in the general economic health of the U.S.

The index and its components are prepared by Dr. William Peterson, Professor of Economics at GVSC. Inquiries and detailed facts about the index can be obtained by writing to Dr. Marvin G. DeVries, F.E. Seidman College.

The Expansion Begins to Slow

Continued from page 4

but there aren't any. Taxing the "rich" (translation: upper income) and business corporations will close only part of the deficit and will have only minimal impact on interest rates because it will cut private saving more than would even-handed tax increases and expenditure cuts.

The major clouds on the horizon are the effects that still higher interest rates would have on Third World borrowers, some of whom might declare a moratorium on their debt service payments to big American banks if rates rise further. This is a potentially explosive problem with possible disastrous implications for all of us if it is mishandled.

The other problem stemming from our high level of interest rates is that they could cut the expansion short. Although this does not ap-

pear to be the case for the near future, the slowdown appears to be beginning. The other major cloud—the auto strike and its effects on the economy—appears to have been cleared up. At this writing, the strike has been settled and there is optimism over worker ratification. Its effects should be made up shortly and the economy's progress hardly impeded. It is unclear, though, what the effect of the settlement will be. That could be worse for the economy than the strike itself.

The outlook for the rest of 1984 and the first part of 1985 is still pretty good. Although the expansion appears to be slowing, there should be no imminent danger of recession. But a perusal of economic indicators—leading, coincident, and lagging—does show that, at minimum, a slowdown in growth is occurring. Thus, real GNP is expected to in-

crease around 3-4 percent over the next six months. Incomes and employment should continue to rise but more slowly than in the recent past, and unemployment could fall to near 7 percent in early 1985.

Inflation, which has been remarkably subdued, could start accelerating slowly in early 1985, but double digits are not imminent. Interest rates, then, will depend on what happens at the Federal level to reduce the deficit. Without meaningful moves in the direction of lower deficits, it is difficult to find credible reasons why rates will decline.

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