

## GENDER AND CULTURE-BASED LEARNING DIMENSIONS OF MARKETING STUDENTS AT AN AMERICAN COLLEGE

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### ABSTRACT

Due to a growing number of female and foreign learners entering the business classroom, marketing educators have to understand the learning needs and characteristics of these students. This paper describes a study comparing the learning and study strategies of American male and female marketing students with their foreign counterparts. Research shows that there are gender and culture-based learning differences. The results of this study show that both American and foreign females come to the marketing classroom with a significantly better attitude toward learning tasks and a higher level of motivation. However, anxiety toward certain learning activities is a problem for American and foreign students of both sexes. The results of the study are discussed and learning improvement plans are described.

### INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators are facing a dramatically changing student population. Today, over half of all business students are females (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1995) and some 100,000 foreign students are enrolled in business programs (Paige, 1990). This creates both an opportunity and a challenge for marketing educators. It is an opportunity to use the diversity of the student body to enrich the classroom learning experience (Mestenhauser, 1983). It is a challenge in that the professor must be sensitive and alert to the gender and culture-based learning characteristics of their students (Paige, 1990). To better identify and understand these differences, this paper describes a study comparing the learning and study strategies of American

male and female marketing students with the learning strategies of their foreign counterparts.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research indicates that gender-based learning differences are most pronounced in the areas of motivation and quantitative skills (Tyson, 1989). Furthermore, several studies have shown that females perform better in the business classroom than males (Mutchler, Turner, and Williams, 1987; Bayes and Nash, 1989).

As for foreign students, they bring their values, beliefs, patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, and learning to their new environment (Kleinfield, 1994). The contrast between the cultural orientation of the foreign student and the host culture may be sharp in some areas and subtle in others. This creates what Hoff (1979) called "education shock."

Learning strategies are behaviors that influence how the learner processes information (Mayer, 1988). The expanded interest in learning strategies is a result of the large and growing number of academically underprepared or disadvantaged students entering the college classroom (Weinstein, 1988). To deal with this development, many postsecondary institutions have created programs that help incoming students learn-how-to-learn (Noel and Levitz, 1982). Studies indicate that the more the student understands about how they learn, the more likely they will become independent, responsible, self-confident learners (Myers, 1992).

## METHODOLOGY

The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory--LASSI (Weinstein, Palmer and Schulte, 1987) was administered to 18 to 24 year old, American and foreign students at a liberal arts college. These students were either marketing majors or taking marketing courses. The survey, which was conducted by three male business professors, resulted in 171 useable inventories: 45 American males responses, 42 American female; 43 foreign males, and 41 foreign female. The LASSI consists of 10 subscales measuring Attitude, Motivation, Time Management, Anxiety, Concentration, Information Processing, Selecting Main Ideas, use of Study Aids, Self Testing, and Test Strategies. LASSI produces a score for each subscale ranging from 1 to 99. The scores approximate the distribution of LASSI scores for all college students in the U.S. (Weinstein, 1987).

## RESULTS

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the subscales indicated that both American and foreign male marketing students scored significantly ( $p < .05$ ) lower than their female counterparts in terms of Attitude and Motivation. What is more, American males also scored significantly lower than American females on Time Management, Concentration, and use of Study Aids. Foreign males also scored lower than foreign females on Information Processing skills. In addition, there was no significant difference among any of the groups in terms of Anxiety. Some research indicated that higher levels of Anxiety might have been expected from female students, but that research generally applied to only quantitative courses.

## DISCUSSION

Since this survey was exploratory in nature, the results can not be generalized beyond the specific sample. It should be noted that the student respondents were primarily juniors and seniors taking an upper-division (300-level and above) course. These are typically the students

that marketing professors would have in their classrooms. Also, research indicates that foreign students experience their greatest "education shock" during their initial transition into American college life (Paige, 1990). It is possible that the foreign students of this sample had largely weathered the transition.

Further, it is also important to remember that the foreign student sample is relatively small (84 foreign respondents), and the students themselves come from 28 different countries. Clearly, it would be hard to generalize based on such a diverse group. But again, these are typically the students a marketing professor could have in his or her classroom.

Literature suggests that students should consider improving their weaker learning and study skills in order to optimize their academic performance (Weinstein, 1987). According to the results, both American and foreign male marketing students recorded their lowest scores in the areas of Motivation and use of Study Aids. The lowest scores for American and foreign female marketing students were in the areas of Motivation and Anxiety. Foreign males and females reported their lowest four LASSI scores in exactly the same subscales.

Bogue (1993) assessed the LASSI subscales and suggested ways in which a professor and student can work together to strengthen a particular learning characteristic. Looking just at the Motivation subscale, for example, Bogue (1993) reports that motivation drastically affects the student's desire to manage his or her time and do well in college. It particularly affects the immediate or near-term tasks necessary for successful completion of course work. To improve their motivation, students need to:

- o accept responsibility for all of their school tasks.
- o begin acting motivated. This involves completing assignments before class, arriving at class on time, participating in class

- discussions, asking questions when concepts are not understood, reviewing class notes, seeking help when necessary.
- o analyze outside interests and responsibilities and determine if they are interfering with academic performance.
  - o estimate the time needed to complete outside class assignments. If there is a great discrepancy between the estimate and the actual hours needed, the student needs to evaluate the quality of the work and the time it takes to perform the tasks.

In addition, exercises and checklists are available to help students implement their action plans and evaluate their progress.

#### CONCLUSION

With females accounting for nearly half of the business student body and foreign students accounting for an ever increasing number, it is important to recognize the learning strengths and weaknesses of these two important groups. Specifically, both American and foreign females come to the marketing classroom with a significantly better attitude toward learning tasks and a higher level of motivation. However, anxiety toward certain learning activities is a problem for American and foreign females, as well as for foreign males. Research suggests that this anxiety may be particularly acute for quantitative courses such as marketing research. Nevertheless, there are things the student and professor can do to strengthen learning skills. With information such as this, the marketing educator will be in a stronger position to help the growing number of female and foreign student have a productive and successful learning experience.

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