MEETING THE NEEDS OF ADULT STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY CATERGORIZATION OF MARKETING DEPARTMENT MISSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Between 1990-2000, the number of adults enrolled in higher education institutions increased by 40%. The needs of this growing segment of students are different from traditional students in that they require time flexibility, program flexibility, and a stronger emphasis on the practical. To understand the importance universities place on educating this non-traditional student, in this preliminary study we conducted content analysis on the mission statements of eighteen California universities. Four categories emerged that demonstrated varying degrees of emphasis on serving adult students.

INTRODUCTION

Shifting demographics and the changing nature of marketing and business are converging to create a large new segment of students of higher education. They are adult and often already in the workforce. Between 1990-2000, the number of adults enrolled in higher education institutions increased by 40%, while total population enrollment increased by 9% (National Center For Education Statistics 1999). The needs of this growing segment of adult students are different from traditional students in that they require time flexibility, geographic flexibility, program flexibility, and a stronger emphasis on the practical (Tucker 2000). What types of schools are focusing on meeting the needs of these students? One method to determine this is to look at the mission statement of the school and or/department. Mission statements are the articulation of an organization's identity, purpose and direction (Leuthessor and Kohli 1997). By studying the mission statements of higher education institutions, we can determine which institutions are focused on meeting the needs of higher education and where our respective institutions stand in relation to these education providers. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to study the mission statements of higher education institutions to determine if their mission is inclusive of meeting the needs of these students. Given the rapid growth of non-traditional higher education institutions like the University of Phoenix and Devry, both

traditional and non-traditional higher education institutions are studied. A typology of school missions is developed and several implications are drawn. Finally, areas for future research are discussed.

The Changing Nature of Business, Marketing, and its' Students

Two forces are converging to create a new student with new needs. The first force is the aging student. As the Baby Boomers age, the bulk of the population is aging. Additionally, as a result of breakthroughs in medicine and fitness, adults are living longer, healthier lives - which has lead to longer working lives. The effects on higher education are significant. Statistics quoted here include 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges and universities, and non-degree granting institutions. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of individuals enrolled in higher education institutions increased by 14% from 12,097,000 to 13,819,000 students. Between 1990 and the end of 2000, that number is expected to increase by 9% to 15,072,00. Simultaneously, the growth in adults (24+) in higher education has also increased – but at an astronomical pace. Between 1980 and 1990, adult higher education enrollment increased at a rate of 90% from 2,384,000 to 4,535,000 students. Between 1990 and the end of 2000, enrollment is expected to grow by 40% to 6,347,000 students. The impact of these numbers has been reflected in recent articles, which have stressed the need for higher education institutions to respond to the changing demographic profile of students (Koch 1996; Pearce 1999).

The second force is fast changing knowledge. Just-in-time knowledge is more than just a catch-phrase, it is something that companies want for their employees. For example, if the gurus of marketing pronounce Green Marketing as a significant force, organizations want to send their managers on an intensive course on Green Marketing. If Services Marketing is declared different from Product Marketing, then organizations immediately want to send their managers to a services marketing conference. On a more long-term basis, traditional marketing topics have been supplanted or complemented by new courses such as services

marketing, business-to-business marketing, e-commerce, and database marketing. A survey of several schools reveals that 85% of courses currently offered in business school didn't exist 45 years ago (Tucker 2000).

Linking the demographic changes and the changes in marketing knowledge creates a new large segment of working adult students that need training and re-training in basic skills and knowledge. The delivery of this knowledge cannot follow the traditional model owned by traditional schools. First, these adult students are working and may have a family. Thus they are less flexible in the times that they can attend. They need to choose their learning time as opposed to the school scheduling their time. Second, for the same reasons, they need geographic flexibility. Learning that can be done at home or while out of town on business better meets their needs. Third, as many of these adults work – and are being sent by their organizations, the 4-year degree program may not be appropriate. They need faster degrees and certificates – or degrees where they can work at their own pace. Fourth, organizations s may be sending these individuals to learn a specific skill (MicroSoft Access, e-commerce areas, etc.). Thus they need a concentrated course that focuses on these specific needs. Finally, as many of these adults are in the workforce, an emphasis on practical is necessary. In a study performed by Smart et al. (1999), 107 of the marketing discipline's most well-regarded educators were asked to reflect upon changes to come in the future. Respondents agreed that the marketing discipline must become more practical and relevant to students and practitioners. In the next section we will examine the link between the Internet and the education needs of these adult students.

The Internet & Adult Education

In their seminal article, Ives and Jarvenpaa (1996) state that, "a knowledge revolution is being propelled by the twin engines of computer technology and communication technology...the World Wide Web lets anyone, at a moderate cost, publish information accessible to others anywhere in the world." The web is a built in distribution system for knowledge, and as the price of PC's and Internet access come down, the web enjoys greater and greater penetration. Among their predictions, Ives and Jarvenpaa (1996) envision the rise of virtual learning communities, demonstrated skills (versus certification), just in time versus just in case education, and business education and business practice together.

These themes developed by Ives and Jarvenpaa (1996) tie in to some of the needs of the adult student

segment. The web allows adult students to have greater access in two ways. First, an online course can be accessed at any time. Individuals seeking knowledge on the net are not constrained by the hours that the library is open or the hours that classes are scheduled. Therefore it meets the time flexibility needs of adult students. Second, the web allows access from anywhere. Therefore it meets the geographic access needs of adult students. It does all of this in the context of connectivity by linking students to students, students to instructors, and students to business creating a virtual business learning community.

Thus the web meets two of the five needs of adult students – geographic flexibility and time flexibility. Although the other needs can be facilitated on the Web, the characteristics of the Web do not inherently meet the criteria of different forms of degrees, more focused learning needs and an emphasis on the practical. These criteria can be met online or offline.

How are traditional higher education institutions responding to this dynamic new teaching medium? A study of 263 members of the Academy of Management found that faculty were supportive of more technology-assisted pedagogy and increases in the business-work component. However, they show little enthusiasm for investing in distance learning, preferring not to compete fully in this major growth market in higher education They also showed little enthusiasm for allowing business executives to partake in the curriculum development (Pearce 1999). It should be noted that this research does represent a general overview, and there are traditional higher education institutions that are tackling some of these issues. For example, the Extension School at U.C.L.A. offers a variety of online marketing courses geared towards adults and several schools like Cal State Fullerton and Cal State Northridge are beginning to develop some online marketing curricula.

Non-Traditional Schools

A Smith Barney study (Tucker 2000) concluded that the established system is failing to fully supply the post-secondary education market. As a result, the private sector has stepped in. They are aggressive, independent and for-profit. While they still account for a small proportion of the higher education market (less than 3%), they are opening new institutions quickly. Between 1996-1997, their rate of growth was 18.4% compared to a growth rate of less than 1% for traditional higher education institutions (Reeves 2000).

Simultaneous to traditional schools wetting their feet with online distance learning, non-traditional higher education institutions like the University of Phoenix, the DeVry Institute and National University are designing full online degrees and courses. For example, the University of Phoenix offers an online Bachelor of Science in Business and E-Business and several different MBA's. They use the Internet to respond to the time flexibility and geographic flexibility needs of adult students. Additionally, class times are designed to fit around busy workdays.

While the Internet helps them meet two of the needs of adult students, they are also geared towards meeting the other needs of adult students (shorter degrees, focused skills, and an emphasis on the practical). At employee training schools such as Learning Tree International, rather than get a degree, students go to these schools to learn a specific skill in a short time, such as HTML, coding or how to use the latest version of Windows. Additionally, some of these non-traditional schools offer shorter degrees in the form of certificates and have an inherent focus on the practical. For example, the teaching model for the University of Phoenix is that the teacher must be working full-time in their industry. In addition to these types of schools, there has been other private sector intrusion. Cable operators and telecommunication companies are aggressively developing virtual classrooms. Publishers and software houses are developing multimedia products that will substitute for, rather than complement, traditional classroom education.

These non-traditional higher education institutions share one characteristic in common – they are student and employer-oriented and answer the needs of the fastest growing segment of students. By answering these needs, they will continue to exhibit extraordinary growth rates. Hence, they may be viewed as competitors to traditional higher education institutions.

In a strategic context, traditional schools need to evaluate their position versus the competition and determine whether they need to situate themselves as competitors in relevant segments. One way to understand how a school or department is positioned is to look at their mission. In the next section, we develop a typology, or general classification of the different school missions. This will allow schools to understand where they stand versus the competition – and to assess whether they need to develop a strategic response.

Mission Statements

A mission statement has been defined as the articulation of the desired organizational culture (O'Halloran 1988; Campbell and Nash 1992). There is a strong consensus in the literature that the development of a mission statement is fundamental for the survival and growth of any business (Drucker 1973; Peters and Waterman 1982). Mission statements are widely seen as necessary in helping an organization form its identity, purpose and direction (Leuthessor and Kohli 1997). Domick (1990) established that, "A statement of mission is a statement of intent, of direction...a well articulated and successfully embodied statement of purpose can essentially define an institution." Thus the mission statement describes the focus of the institution. Several studies that examined the relationship between mission statements and organizational success have produced mixed results (Pearce and David 1987; Germain and Cooper 1990; Rarick and Vitton 1995; Bart 1998; O'Gorman and Doran 1999). In any case, the mission statement is a revealing articulation of the company's strategy.

In an attempt to better understand the different positionings of the traditional and non-traditional schools, it was decided that an exploration of their mission statements would be useful. This is a pilot study to a larger study that will segment/categorize major schools with marketing departments according to their mission statement. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are distinct segments of schools based on mission statements and to develop a preliminary list of categories by which to categorize other schools in the full study.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, we examined the mission statements from the websites of four-year degree granting colleges and universities. In our sample, we included traditional public and private universities, as well as non-traditional schools. We selected specific schools using three criteria. First, to limit our scope, it had to be located in California. Second, it had to be an institution of higher learning offering a degree in business with courses in marketing at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Finally, either the Marketing Department or the College of Business had to have a mission statement (if the mission statement of the Marketing Department was unavailable, we used the mission statement from the College of Business). We selected a non-representative sample of universities fitting these criteria that included eight private universities, two University of California institutions, five of the California State Universities,

and three non-traditional universities. These four groups seemed to represent the various types of four-year degree granting institutions and an attempt was made to select a representative cross section of institutions fitting each of these categories. Table 1 shows the specific universities included in this study.

Content analysis was used to analyze each of the mission statements from the above institutions. Content analysis is a "systematic attempt to codify the matter contained in a defined set of communications" (Angell, Dunham, and Singer 1964 p. 133). Content analysis was chosen because it has been proven as an objective, systematic and quantitative description of communications by past empirical investigations (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999; Cook 1992; Berelson 1952). Utilizing this methodology, we identified the different elements of the mission statements. Based on shared elements, we then classified the universities into thematic categories. The ultimate goal was to reveal the positioning of these universities with respect to their focus on the non-traditional student, broadly defined as adult and often already in the workforce, and typically requiring time flexibility, geographic flexibility, program flexibility, and a stronger emphasis on the practical (Tucker 2000).

Results, Discussion, & Strategic Implications

The content analysis revealed that each of the mission statements included a statement about the importance of academics. Representative examples of these statements included "the encouragement of learning" and "academic excellence" as important strategic goals. Because this element was present in all of the mission statements, we excluded it from further analysis, as it did not help differentiate the institutions. Based on the analysis of the remainder of the content in the mission statements for each of the universities, the following elements emerged as important: Being multicultural, being global, focusing on values, targeting a career adult market, providing geographic flexibility, providing time flexibility, maintaining a practical emphasis, utilizing active learning, emphasizing a cross-functional curriculum, using technology to facilitate learning, and integrating ethics into the classroom. The specific elements found in the mission statements are listed in Table 2.

We examined the elements present in each mission statement and classified the institutions based on commonalities in their strategic focus. Based on the content analysis, we identified four thematic categories of schools, which we have labeled "adult-oriented," "techno-cultural," "values oriented," and "not oriented."

The "adult-oriented" institutions were those that specifically targeted the adult market, and included California Coast University, National University, and the University of Phoenix. These schools tended to have geographic and time flexibility, and a strong practical emphasis. The mission statements of the universities in this category focused on students with "geographic limitations and/or time constraints" using instruction to serve these students that "does not require attendance at any specific location." It is not surprising that these institutions have emphasized serving the needs of the non-traditional students in their mission statements because they view these students as their primary target market.

The "techno-cultural" universities included all of the Cal State Universities (Bakersfield, Fullerton, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Northridge) and the DeVry Institute. All of these institutions identified the use of technology as important in educating their students in their mission statements. Additionally, many of the schools in this group also have a practical emphasis, are multicultural, and/or have a global focus. These mission statements acknowledged the importance of "maintaining an up-to-date technology infrastructure" and building skills in "the application of research technology." While these universities do not have an explicit goal of serving the non-traditional student in their mission statements, their techno-culture makes them well suited to address the needs of these students.

The "values-oriented" institutions (Chapman, Loyola Marymount, Pepperdine, the University of San Diego, and the University of San Francisco) had a primary focus of imparting a particular value system on their students, and with the exception of the University of San Francisco, all of these universities have a religious orientation. These institutions focus on "faith and the promotion of justice" and "value-centered personalized learning." Another common element in three of mission statements is a global focus. Overall, this group of universities has not addressed the needs of the adult student as articulated in their mission statements, and instead has positioned themselves as educators of the soul.

The "not-oriented" schools were those that had one or none of the elements in their mission statement (UC Davis, UC Riverside, Stanford, and USC. All of these schools had a very strong emphasis on goals such as "being the leading academic school of management in the world" and being a "premier academic institution." The positioning of these schools (as expressed in their mission statements) was elitist and did not consider other factors than academic excellence as important in the education of

their students. While some are addressing the needs through extension schools, their core business departments are not focused. This category seems the least prepared and least willing to focus on the needs of the adult segment of the market.

These four categories of schools demonstrate that a continuum exists in the importance that business schools and marketing departments place on addressing the needs of the growing non-traditional segment of the higher educational market, ranging from an intensive focus on serving their unique needs, to a complete generalization of the needs of this emerging segment. As this segment of the market rapidly grows in numbers and importance, the universities that have positioned themselves as preeminent scholarly institutions, while ignoring the needs of the non-traditional student, may find themselves (at this level) at a significant disadvantage in the marketplace.

There are several implications to our findings. First, this research reveals that university missions can be segmented into at least four categories. Thus universities have direct competition within certain mission segments, and indirect competition across mission segments. Second, by establishing the different segments of universities, the growth of each segment (beyond just adult-oriented) can be tracked over the medium and long term. This will help universities better understand if they are positioned for growth. Third, certain segments of business schools and marketing departments may want to consider changing their strategic focus in order to satisfy the needs of this growing segment of adult students. For example, the "not-oriented" universities may seek to form strategic alliances with the "adult-oriented" institutions to strengthen areas in which they are weak. Another option for the "not-oriented" universities is to strategically reposition the university to better serve this market by focusing on the adult students using their own resources. Universities selecting this approach might develop a new university brand or extend their brand to new facilities/campuses. An important related issue to all of these implications is whether a university *should* reorient their strategy to serve new emerging markets or focus more on traditional intellectual ideals.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this research was to help understand how universities can be segmented based upon their current positioning in the marketplace. We analyzed the mission statements of eighteen California universities and used content analysis to help understand the importance that universities place on

educating the non-traditional student. Four categories emerged demonstrating varying degrees of emphasis on serving the needs of these students.

This was a preliminary study limited to a non-representative sample of private and public institutions in California. We intend to collect additional data to extend our findings across a larger number of institutions in other geographic locations. We also plan on further examining and segmenting the non-traditional student based upon demographic characteristics like age and family situation. We expect our four categories to be further validated as well as the possible emergence of additional categories. Once this larger sample is obtained, we will analyze the data using correspondence analysis, which is an interdependence technique that can describe the association between the different elements of the mission statements and the distinguishing characteristics of the university. We hope to help universities better understand these different segments and identify strategies that they can use to better serve the needs of these students.

Tables available upon request.

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