

A MULTICAMPUS MARKETING RESEARCH CONSORTIUM ON STUDENT RETENTION  
IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM:  
PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS

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ABSTRACT

Marketing faculty from five campuses in the California State University system conducted a collaborative project which investigated the retention of Business School transfer students. On each campus, marketing students utilized a common questionnaire and research design to conduct interviews as part their class requirements. The difficulties and rewards of conducting this type of coordinated project are reviewed and guidelines for future research consortia are presented.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews a unique research project which was voluntarily undertaken from 1988-90 by a group of marketing faculty from five different campuses of the California State University. A common research design was developed by the faculty on a topic in marketing education, and then, students in marketing courses used a common survey instrument to collect data at each of the participating campuses.

Thus, there are two related bodies of literature that are relevant to this project. First, is the use of a multi-campus real-world project as an integrating mechanism in the marketing research course. Next, is the issue of voluntary collaboration of faculty on a multi-campus project. What are the incentives, problems and rewards?

Previous Research on Using Live-Cases in Marketing Courses

In order to provide students with hands-on experience in the research process many marketing educators have used some version of the live-case or real-world project approach. This usually involves student teams analyzing a actual marketing problem for a client. This methodology has been discussed by several authors (Browne 1979; Dandurand 1986; de los Santos and Jensen 1985; Dommeyer 1986; McCain and Lincoln 1982). These class projects have been used in several

different marketing courses including marketing research, personal selling, advertising, consumer behavior, and the marketing capstone course (de los Santos and Jensen 1985; Haas and Wotruba 1990; Humphreys 1981; Ramocki 1987; Richardson and Raveed 1980). Class projects allow students to translate marketing concepts and theories into practice and provide real-life marketing experiences. Another major objective of a class project is to give students the opportunity to interact with peers in a group setting. In this way, individual talents can augment the strengths of others to produce a more complete learning experience.

Previous Research on Faculty Collaboration

Academicians have long known of the benefits of collaborating with colleagues on research projects. However, in the marketing literature there is scant research on this topic. An article by Clark (1985) studied the coauthorship of journal articles as part of a productivity rating scheme for marketing departments. He developed a "collegiality index" which includes a count of papers which are jointly authored by faculty from the same institution and acknowledges that the exchange of ideas of colleagues can be one of the more rewarding aspects of conducting research.

While the marketing faculty represented in the Clark study had collaborated in the writing of research papers, there is no mention of coordination of data collection efforts across campuses. Likewise, a literature search produced no discussions of the process of marketing faculty collecting comparable data from several different geographical areas.

The potential benefits of such replication are substantial. There would be larger data sets which could lead to more confidence in our results. We also would be able to compare results from different cities and regions. Perhaps, as indicated

by Clark, most important would be the opportunity for extended interaction with another researcher on a subject of mutual interest.

As the marketing discipline's knowledge base continues to expand and additional methodologies become available, marketing educators have become more specialized. In some situations the size of the investigation task often requires colleagues at the same or different institutions to combine their talents to gain significant insights into today's complex marketing education problems.

### COLLABORATION ON STUDENT RETENTION RESEARCH AT CSU

The remainder of this paper describes the experience of a group of marketing educators in the twenty campus California State University (CSU) system in their collaborative attempt to investigate retention issues related with the transfer of community college students to the CSU system's business schools. First we discuss the genesis of the project and its early phases. The benefits and the problems associated with a large collaborative effort will be presented next. Finally, suggestions for designing and implementing collaborative research projects will be offered.

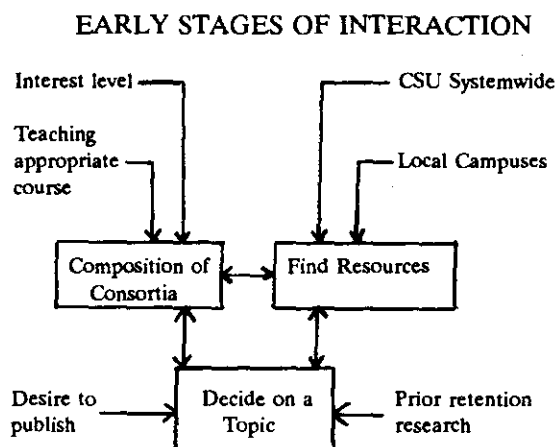
#### Evolution of a Research Focus

The idea of a collaborative effort came from a dinner conversation among several colleagues at a 1988 marketing conference. We were discussing a paper on research consortia which had been presented at the 1987 Western Marketing Educators' Association meeting (Saltzman 1987). Inspired by the virtue of replication, the joy of collegiality, and the challenge of voluntary coordination, several of us agreed to try conducting a low profile multicampus project. Interestingly, the topic of the research was discussed only after we decided to collaborate! How we chose a topic will be discussed in a subsequent section of this paper.

### EARLY INTERACTIONS

The early stages of this collaborative effort included the formation of the consortia, deciding on a topic and searching for local resources. As indicated in Figure 1, these activities are all interdependent but they are not sequential or linear. Rather they illustrate the iterations and the backwards and forward linkages of the research process described by Zikmund (1989).

FIGURE 1



#### Composition of the Consortia

Given this voluntary organizational structure, it was not surprising that the membership of the consortia changed several times during the course of the project. Three faculty members had changes to their spring 1990 teaching schedule and therefore were not able to have their classes utilize this project. In two of these situations local colleagues who were teaching marketing research agreed to have their classes adopt the project as a course assignment. In a third case of a schedule change, the faculty member promised that he had resources from his dean in the form of student research assistants who would conduct the interviews. We tried to identify another faculty member at this campus who was teaching an appropriate course but the current member assured us that he could do it with the research assistants and resisted any efforts to find a substitute arrangement. We are still waiting to hear from this demoted team member.

#### Finding Resources

We decided that until the project was well developed we would avoid looking for resources from outside each campus. However, each campus was responsible for finding the funds necessary to support their local data collection. At most campuses we were able to find support for telephone calls, released time for faculty, or research assistants. This came from a variety of

institutional arrangements with Deans, Department Chairs, Registrars, and Admissions Offices.

While it seemed relatively easy to obtain resources to conduct the surveys, acquiring a recent accurate list of business school transfer students was difficult or impossible on some campuses. In one case the lack of cooperation from the Registrar led to an early abort of that campus's project involvement. In another situation, after the data were collected the local campus administration was unwilling to verify the department code of each student who had been interviewed, even though this question had already been asked in the survey.

When the research design was complete and a preliminary questionnaire was available we decided that we had enough confidence in the project to ask for some funding from the CSU Systemwide administration. Initial conversations with the Chancellors Office were very encouraging and a modest proposal for \$8,000 was sent to CSU. Several weeks after the proposal had been submitted we received a telephone call from an embarrassed associate vice-president who informed us that there was no funding program into which the project fit. In retrospect the timing of our request was terrible. This was the spring of 1990 when major upheavals were taking place in the CSU System which resulted in the forced resignation of the Chancellor. It was virtually impossible to attract the attention of the appropriate administrators.

#### Deciding on a Topic

Since we wanted to generate local and eventually systemwide support for the project, we searched for a topic which would be of interest to CSU administrators. The topic chosen was transfer student retention. The CSU system has over three hundred thousand students enrolled at its twenty campuses. Approximately fifty percent of these students have transferred from community colleges. Despite their previous college experience, less than fifty percent ever earn a bachelor's degree. The reasons for transfer students dropping out include: lack of financial resources; increase in proportion of part-time students; and changing enrollment patterns (older and more women) (Villega 1986).

Another reason for our interest in studying transfer students was the previous research some of us had already done on the topic. In particular, at Cal State

University San Bernardino, the retention of both freshmen and transfer students had been the subject of two preliminary studies conducted by students enrolled in marketing research classes. Thus, a questionnaire had been developed and a research design implemented which could form the basis for the multicampus project.

Because of the importance of transfer students, their relatively high attrition rate, and the previous experience we had with this group we designated first year transfer students as our target population. A modification to this decision was made in the winter of 1990. As we made progress we began discussing the potential for journal publications from this retention project. One faculty colleague suggested that narrowing our target population to business school students would allow us to research a topic with more relevance for potential publication in marketing and other business related journals. Thus, as we progressed, our research design evolved to accommodate the consortia members' experience and needs.

#### IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH DESIGN

During the spring of 1990, a finalized questionnaire was administered by selected marketing research classes on the CSU campuses of Fresno, San Diego, San Bernardino, Sacramento, and San Francisco. Over 1300 telephone interviews with recent business school transfers were completed. The data were compiled into a single data file and the process of analysis was begun.

The preliminary results indicate that the business school experience is far more rigorous than the students expected prior to matriculation. For example, the students report spending much more time studying than they expected to and that classes are more difficult than they anticipated. Also, instruction by faculty is considered by transfer students to be better than their expectations. These and other findings will be the subject of future papers.

The effort, coordination, and resources that were needed to undertake and complete the project to this point were enormous. Many problems were encountered along the way. However, the benefits of conducting research on such a large scale appear to more than outweigh the problems. Below, the

## 2. Select Collaborative Group Members

Faculty should be contacted that have an initial interest in the topic. It is better to talk to prospective group members face to face. Conferences, such as the Western Marketing Educators' Conference, are ideal places to meet and discuss the topic with faculty that share similar interests.

## 3. Appoint a Leader

Someone must play the role of the leader. The leader must ensure that members of the group that have volunteered to participate in the research project follow through with their promise. The leader must arrange for the distribution to the members of the group of a reproducible copy of the questionnaire, a description of the data collection methodology, and a standardized format for the computer data file. When the survey has been completed the leader must coordinate the merging of the data from the separate campus.

## 4. Assign Responsibilities

Specific task assigned to each team member should be based on their interests and expertise. Primary responsibility (e.g., data analysis) to individual group members.

## 5. Set Deadlines

Deadlines for the completion of data collection, analysis, and preparation of research papers and articles must be determined at the outset of the research project. These deadlines need to be clearly communicated to all members of the group.

## 6. Produce Results

The process needs to be completed to produce a report for the sponsors of the project as well as papers written by the faculty.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many marketing education issues that need to be investigated require research projects which are too large to be implemented by an individual faculty member. Such projects can be completed by combining the resources and talents of colleagues at the same or different institutions. This paper presented an example of such an undertaking. The end result of the

collaborative effort was that some problems were encountered along the way, but the benefits derived from the results of the project overshadowed these problems.

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