

IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENT SATISFACTION

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Consumer satisfaction is one of the most fundamental and important concepts in marketing. It is the central theme of the marketing philosophy that is built on the notions of consumer sovereignty and its well-known counterpart of the marketing concept. While considered appropriate as an operating philosophy for business firms, the marketing concept is in its early stage of adoption in so-called "non-traditional" areas.

Perhaps the broadest and deepest application of marketing concepts and practices to date in a non-traditional area is that of higher education. Declining demand for college education, the rapid escalation in tuition rates, rising cost, increased competition from vocation schools and decreasing government support have all lead to the need for a marketing approach. One of the more important aspects in the application of marketing in colleges and universities, especially as demand declines, is determining, evaluating and improving student satisfaction.

Study Objectives: While marketing scholars have researched consumer satisfaction across a number of products and industries, they have ignored higher education. On the other hand, the educational literature demonstrates a number of efforts to define, develop and validate means to measure college student satisfaction. These studies, however, focus on only the performance aspect of satisfaction. Research in marketing has shown that consumer satisfaction is a function not only of the aspect of performance, but also how important that aspect is to the consumer. Thus, the purpose of this paper was to (1) determine the performance and importance aspects of college student satisfaction and (2) to demonstrate how such an analysis can be useful in evaluating certain educational programs.

Methodology: A questionnaire was developed that contained five attributes of satisfaction. They were: (1) quality education - nine dimensions related to the students' intellectual development, (2) recognition - nine dimensions indicating a consumer orientation of the faculty toward students, (3) compensation - nine dimensions that attempt to assess the amount of work required relative to academic outcomes, (4) working conditions - nine dimensions consisting of the physical features of the product and (5) social life - nine dimensions consisting of the opportunities for students to meet socially relevant goals. The respondents were 537 students attending Seattle University. A one-way ANOVA was performed for each of the five attributes to determine if there were differences across the majors. Next, mean ratings were calculated for each of the attributes dimensions. The mean ratings were then plotted on an importance satisfaction grid which allows for what has been termed "importance - performance analysis." Only nursing majors, undergraduate business majors and MBA's were analyzed in this study.

Results and Implications: The one-way ANOVA's across the three majors for each of the five college attributes were all statistically significant at the .01 level. This means that students from nursing, business and MBAs

rate the satisfaction and importance dimensions for attributes differently. The results suggests and supports at least two important notions critical for university marketing. First, the majors are perceived by students to be different products offered by the same university. This is nothing new of course, for many schools, particularly private ones, have recognized this for years resulting in different prices (tuition rates) for different products (majors). Second, it means that these products serve different target markets (students) who have different needs and wants. The implication is that the university must provide different college features to different students at the university. The idea that one program or feature will suffice no longer applies, if it ever did. Also, the implication for college resource allocation and improvement is much clearer.

The mean importance and satisfaction ratings for the five college student attributes were placed on a two-dimensional grid. The interpretation of this grid is quite straight forward based on the grid's four quadrants - the upper left hand is labeled "concentrate here," the upper right hand one is termed "keep up the good work", the lower right hand quadrant is termed "possible overkill", and the lower left hand corner is called "lower priority." Emphasis was on the upper left hand one for it contains the dimensions that are important, but where students indicate low satisfaction with the college's performance. Overall, those attributes that need improvement are for the most part those ranked lower in terms of importance, working conditions and social life. There are common concerns across majors suggesting for example that working conditions is more university specific, rather than major specific. Also, not all dimensions are judged to be of concern or important. For example, the social life attribute for MBA's has six dimensions that fall in quadrant 3 and 4, areas of "possible overkill" and "low priority."

Conclusions: The real value of this type of analysis is that it provides deans of various schools a useful focus for developing marketing strategies. One important task in the application of the analysis is that these common attributes with common dimensions must be interpreted in ways that are specific and pertinent to the department or school that offers the major in question. However, this is not as difficult as it first appears, because those responsible for departments are generally quite familiar with what specific features apply to each attribute and its dimensions.