

ARE MARKETING STUDENTS INTERESTED IN MARKETING?

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ABSTRACT

Marketing students showed the same, or slightly higher, levels of interest in their major as did other business and nonbusiness majors. However, students took little initiative in reading about business and marketing outside of assigned studies. Implications for a dynamic marketing program are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

It has been stated by Shelby Hunt (1992) that marketing education occupies a position more analogous to the professions than to purely academic disciplines like sociology. Even though colleges and schools of business have not been able to demonstrate that having a degree in marketing significantly improves a person's performance in marketing (see Hunt, Chanko, and Wood 1986), many students may be seeking a marketing degree for purely vocational reasons irrespective of any native interest in the subject matter.

Everyone is exposed to marketing in their daily lives and Wright, Bitner, and Zeithaml (1994) made a convincing argument that students should be inherently interested in, at least, service marketing because of their experience as service consumers. Yet, one of the most common arguments against a customer-driven approach to marketing education has been the realization that most of our students want a degree, and not all of that want a degree actually want an education (Clifford 1994).

The impetus for the present study was the observation by one of the authors who once taught in the social sciences. He noted that marketing students seemed less interested in the topic matter of marketing than the social science students did in the topic matter of their majors. Consequently, the

purpose of the study was to compare the interest in marketing of marketing students with the interests in the topic areas of students in other business majors and with nonbusiness students.

PROCEDURE

A questionnaire was developed that looked at three different content areas of interest: outside readings, membership and participation in professional groups and clubs, and general interest in topic areas related to their major. In addition, students were also asked why they chose their major and what area they would have chosen if they could pick and do well in any major.

Students were junior and senior students at two midwestern regional universities. There were only two significant ($\alpha = 0.05$) differences between the students of the two universities on 35 recorded measures. Consequently, the responses from the two universities were combined.

The questionnaire was administered in business classes that had a wide variety of majors: consumer behavior, principles of marketing, organizational management, and tourism marketing. The students represented a cross-section of different majors that a marketing and business instructor would face on a regular basis. In all, 200 students participated. Of these, 23% were marketing majors, 48% were business (other than marketing) majors, and 29% were nonbusiness majors. Fifty six percent of the respondents were women. The respondents had a median age of 21.0 years.

RESULTS

Reading Habits

There were no significant differences between the marketing, business, and nonbusiness majors in their reading habits.

TABLE 1

PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO
REPORTED READING

	Mark	Bus	Nonbus
I. Outside of class assignments, in a typical week, do you read all or part of			
1. the school paper	78.2	80.2	65.5
2. local or state paper	47.8	44.8	44.8
3. national newspaper	17.4	21.9	15.5
II. Have you read at least one book (not assigned) in the last year?			
YES	71.7	67.7	75.9
III. Are you currently reading a book not assigned?			
YES	41.3	26.0	27.6
1. If you are currently reading a book, is the book you are currently reading nonfiction?			
YES	50.0	64.0	27.6
2. Is the book business related?			
YES	11.1	12.0	0.0

About half of the students reported reading a local newspaper, but only about one in five were reading a national newspaper which could conceivably include the Wall Street Journal. Somewhere between a half to a quarter of the students were currently reading a book. About one of ten of these books related to business. It is interesting to note that only half of the students could remember the title of the book they are *currently* reading.

Membership in Organized Groups

Seventy three percent of the students were members of an organized group. Specifics are given below in Table 2.

TABLE 2

PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN
ORGANIZED GROUPS

	Mark	Bus	Nonbus
I. Do you currently belong to an organized group?			
YES	82.6	69.8	70.7
1. Professional group related to your major?			
	58.7	39.6	41.4
2. Professional group unrelated to major?			
	17.4	16.7	6.9
3. Church groups			
	8.7	12.5	19.0
4. Fraternities & sororities			
	6.5	6.3	6.9
5. Athletic groups			
	13.0	8.3	15.5
6. Special interests unrelated to above			
	15.2	19.8	17.2

By far, the students are most likely to belong to an organized group that was related to their majors.

General Interest

Seven statements were included on each questionnaire that dealt with general interest that a student might have with aspects of their major. Each was measured on a Likert scale. The results are summarized in Table 3. Half of the statements were worded negatively, but all the responses below have been adjusted to the positive.

The general level of interest was quit high. Marketing students consistently indicated a higher interest than did the other two groups. The interest does, however, seem to be vocational. The marketing students' interest drops when jobs are not available and when graduate school is mentioned. This observation was reinforced by another question that asked the students why they chose their major.

TABLE 3
MEAN RESPONSES TO GENERAL INTEREST STATEMENTS

	Mark	Bus	Nonbus
<i>Disagree: 1 2 3 4 5 : Agree</i>			
1. The subject matter of my major is interesting.	4.35	4.02	4.24 ¹
2. Most of my classes are (not) boring.	3.76	3.62	3.67
3. I would like to work at a job related to my major before I graduate.	4.50	4.24	4.29
4. If there were no () jobs in my major, I would still pick the same major.	3.41	3.77	3.21 ¹
5. I almost never () think about the subject matter of my major outside of class & study time.	4.20	4.11	4.34
6. I think I would like the type of people that would typically work in my major.	4.24	3.88	4.12 ¹
7. I would like to go to graduate school and study my major area more.	2.50	2.69	2.99

Note: Statements marked with a ¹ were significantly different between the three groups.

Almost 22% of the marketing students indicated that the selection was for vocational reasons, while 19% and 5% of the business and nonbusiness majors indicated the same.

DISCUSSION

Contrary to the perception of one of the authors, marketing students in this study showed the same, or slightly higher, levels of interest in their major as did other business and nonbusiness majors. The students generally report that they find the subject

matter of marketing interesting and that their marketing classes are not boring. They seem to have a positive attitude about getting involved in the work force. They have joined organized groups that reflect the interests of their majors.

On the negative side, the students take little initiative in reading about business and marketing outside of their assigned studies.

The mixed message of this study was summarized by one last question which read, "If you could pick any major and do well at it.. what would you pick as your major? Forty four percent of the marketing majors picked marketing, 29% and 22% of the business and nonbusiness majors picked their own major. While twice as many marketing students picked their own major as did nonbusiness students, still over half of the marketing students would pick another major in an ideal world.

The vocational interests of marketing students can be used by marketing faculty to further the education of their students. One of the differences found between the two schools was how many students belonged to professional groups related to the students' major. One of the universities has a very active AMA chapter and a newly instituted Mu Kappa Tau national honorary society. Both are active organization with the marketing department fully involved with the placement of concerned faculty as advisors, and with monetary and staff support. The students' response has been enthusiastic and productive. The same department also instituted a successful internship program with local businesses.

LIMITATIONS

This small study makes no claims of being inferential in the sense that the results could be projected to the universe of marketing students. The sample sizes were small and localized. The remarkable consistency of the responses from two different universities over 500 miles apart, however, indicate that there is sufficient evidence for further investigation.

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