

THE MARKETING RESEARCH MAJOR  
COURSE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

As marketing research becomes widely accepted as an integral component of the marketing management process and as job requirements become more specialized, marketing departments must face the needs of students who seek a research career. The purpose of this study is to help meet those needs by (1) identifying what course of study will best prepare students for a career in marketing research and (2) providing an overview of the opportunities in the field.

A survey of marketing research professionals in the Los Angeles area was conducted in 1986. A total of 197 deliverable questionnaires were sent out with one followup. Marketing suppliers were most heavily sampled (115); consumer companies (such as Hunt Wesson, Carnation, Matel) next (44); and advertising agencies third (38).

The total response of 71 completed questionnaires represents an overall response rate of 34%. The response rates for the three subsamples were: 40% for marketing suppliers, 30% for consumer companies, and 32% for advertising agencies.

There is a good deal of agreement among research professionals on the courses they would recommend for research students. Seven courses are seen as important by at least 50% of respondents in all three groups. These seven courses are: Marketing Research, Report Writing, Consumer Behavior, Principles of Marketing, Interviewing Techniques, Multi-variate Statistics, Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences, and Marketing Case Analysis.

In addition, half of respondents in both research firms and advertising agencies recommended Advertising Principles, Group Discussion, and Inferential Statistics. And over half of the respondents with research firms and consumer companies recommended Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences.

Four traditional marketing courses -- Product and Brand Management, Professional Selling, Advertising Management, and Advertising Copywriting -- are viewed as important only by researchers in advertising agencies.

The data on job openings suggest that there are entry level positions available in marketing research in the Los Angeles area. Of the 47 firms responding to a question on openings expected in the next year, a total of 73 jobs were noted as available; an average of 1.6 positions.

Among research suppliers and advertising agencies, these jobs are likely to go unadvertised and to be filled by word-of-mouth. Consumer companies are more likely to recruit entry level personnel through newspaper advertisements. Advertising agencies are somewhat more likely to positively respond to "walk ins." None of the three types of firms are likely to recruit on campus or through agencies.

Information on compensations and backgrounds of research employees was provided by only half of the respondents. As such, these data must be considered only suggestive.

Students with Bachelor's Degrees and minimal prior experience can obtain positions as Junior Analysts with salaries in the high teens and up to \$20,000. With two or three years experience as a Junior Analyst and possibly with the addition of an M.A. or M.B.A., the employee could reasonably expect to be promoted to Analyst at \$23,000.

Another three years of research experience should bring one to the level of Senior Analyst with a salary averaging \$32,000. To become an Assistant Director of Research, or Research Director requires a broader background -- 5 to 8 years of non-research experience -- and a Master's Degree or possibly, for Director, a Ph.D. The compensation reflects these credentials averaging \$56,000 for Director.

The data on course recommendations and career opportunities suggest several directions for Marketing faculty. First, departments offering an undergraduate emphasis in marketing research should design an interdisciplinary program drawing upon courses taught in communications, statistics, and the behavioral sciences.

Second, faculty should encourage students who wish to work for a research supplier or an advertising agency to make contacts -- through internships, participation in local chapters of the AMA, or attending seminars -- which will give them entree to "word-of-mouth" information about job openings. Students who wish to work for a consumer company should be directed to the more conventional route of newspaper advertisements.

Third, faculty should make it clear to research students that in order to move up in the field, they will have to get an M.A. or an M.B.A.

Marketing research is a viable undergraduate emphasis for students with interdisciplinary interests, the ability to make personal contacts, a commitment to obtaining a graduate degree, and professional goals that do not rest on high monetary compensation.