

# WMEA, & STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT UNDER AACSB

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## ABSTRACT

As the AACSB in the 1990's has promoted various avenues to improve student preparation for the business world, marketing educators have found themselves in a dual position. The first issue has been how to respond to the various initiatives from the AACSB, including outcomes' assessment from student coursework. The second follows, as to how AACSB members may be both efficient and effective in promulgating its agenda. The second is important if students will be held in traditional curricula, as opposed to distance and organizational ("adult") learning, neither of which may competitively suggest accreditation. However, these AACSB standards could apply in such nontraditional settings.

## INTRODUCTION

The Western Marketing Educators Association consists of one or more marketing educators from approximately 200 institutions of higher learning, principally in the Western United States. Of these, about 87 institutions are currently accredited by the American Assembly of Colleges and Schools of Business--The International Association for Management (AACSB). The AACSB is the only business accrediting organization certified by the U.S. Commission on Recognition of Post-Secondary Accreditation, and serves a similar role globally according to its website, <AACSB.edu> (AACSB 1999).

Membership in AACSB includes about 670 U.S. educational institutions, 140 international educational institutions, and 60 business, government and nonprofit organizations. Approximately 355 U.S. educational institutions are accredited as business schools, and 15 international institutions are. The 670 U.S. members provide 85% of the business and management degrees in this country, while those institutions which are accredited in this country produce about 55% of the business and management degrees in America, annually. The AACSB website is one source for this information, and contains much more data. Just as about 53% of the U.S. AACSB

educational membership is accredited, so nearly 43% of the WMEA membership is AACSB accredited. The lower percentage of accreditation for WMEA is obviously connected to the number of junior colleges associated with WMEA.

## PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The AACSB 1995 Manual lists the following categories of Standards, for those institutions which desire accreditation: Preconditions, Mission and Objectives; Faculty Composition and Development; Curriculum Content and Evaluation; Instructional Resources and Responsibilities; Students; and Intellectual Contributions. Quite humanely, AACSB provides for self-evaluation in each of these categories, in advance of formal visitation. However, even if an institution is not actively seeking accreditation, such standards have an important currency in providing guidance to motivated educators.

The question undertaken by the investigators was to what extent were the standards in one of the above areas known to, and responded to, by members of the Western Marketing Educators Association. Specifically, we inquired about the Outcomes Assessment of Curriculum Content. Questionnaires were sent to nearly all members of WMEA, as their names appeared in the 1998-99 Membership Directory, during July 1999. Responses were received from individuals representing 51 educational institutions, approximately 25% of WMEA membership. In addition, personal discussions were held by telephone or email with 16 of the 51 institutions.

## Questionnaire Results

Of usable answers, 44 of the institutions responding were public and 7 were private. The same number (44) were 4 year, as opposed to 5 which were given as 2 year. More than half of the institutions (27) had separate marketing departments. The number of full time equivalent instructors ran from 1/2 to 33. Respondents were asked about learning outcomes in four courses: principles, market research, consumer

behavior, and marketing capstone. Analysis indicated a surprising range of assessments.

At least four kinds of assessment were being used or being considered by WMEA members across the 51 responding institutions. First, there were measurements of individual learning within a group, such as examinations for a course or for an advancing cohort of, say, juniors in marketing. These, of course, were scored by assigned instructors and school graders. Second, there were measurements of professional competence, as with group marketing plan presentations (witnessed by the instructor), or as attested to by employees and employers after graduation. Third, there were the "charm school" (like-dislike) evaluations of courses and instructors by students at the completion of particular learning experiences. Fourth, there were evaluations—sometimes by students, but usually by faculty—of how well student and worker performance (the first and second categories) were meeting the self-proclaimed mission of instruction in business schools.

What are some of the social forces and ideas driving these various modes of assessment?

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Wright, Bitner and Zeithaml (1994) discuss a shift from the teaching of marketing to the learning of marketing. This appears to be a shift in emphasis from course knowledge (first category, above) to professional competence (second category, above). Professional competence closely correlates with experiential learning, as was witnessed in WMEA's recent meetings in Palm Springs (1999). In our opinion experiential learning is doubly important, because it purports to be useful and because it is usually impactful (and therefore well learned). Those courses which attempt to provide such professional competence, often by the use of experiential learning, are open subsequently to favorable evaluation by students when they become workers, and by their employers.

Ahmadi, Blake, Kelley and Takeuchi (1999) are concerned about the linkage of learning to organizational mission. For their institution (CalState, Sacramento) one goal is: "Graduate students with a strong, modern foundation in business knowledge, skills, and values that prepares them to adapt successfully to the professional world." If the test here is a test of professional competence as observed in the second category, above, then the logic would seem to be how well such a mission is supported by group presentations and/or employee performance. The

AACSB encourages business institutions to establish such mission statements, and then to endeavor to have performance by faculty and students measured against these statements (AACSB 1995). This would be assessment #4, above.

## TWO-STAGED PROCESS

Bush and Sjolander (1996) focus upon outcomes-based measures as a two-staged process to establish goals of particular knowledge and skills, and then to create instruments to provide these measures. Hill and Herche (1999) note that these measures face a challenge when experiential teaching is tossed into the classroom mix. We note that as long as success and satisfaction in business, subject to ethical standards obviously, is the principle lodestone, then at least we know what we want to measure.

The emerging dominant model of assessment seems headed towards student, employer and academic evaluation of the success of the learning process in marketing. The model thus becomes: useful knowledge, well learned + social and communications skills, well demonstrated = high probability of personal satisfaction in business + high evaluations by employee/former student.

Aside from the matter of what we want to measure about student knowledge and business performance, we have the third category, above, of like-dislike evaluations of instructors and courses. The salient question seems to be the relevance of such evaluations to learning outcomes. Of course, for those schools competing for students, this third measure possibly offers a guide for instructor and course selection.

Thus, the range of responses for Outcomes Assessment for all four targeted courses included all of the issues we discussed: marketing knowledge, professional preparation, satisfaction of students with instructors and material, and achieving business school missions.

## MISSING RESPONSES

Even more significant in our estimation, however, was the absence in most responses of any discernible Curriculum or Student Outcomes Assessment. For principles courses, only 17 schools had at least one of the four techniques of Outcomes Assessment. For marketing research, there were 7 schools with at least one technique. For consumer behavior there were 9 schools, and for the capstone course in

marketing there were 14 schools using at least one technique of Curriculum or Student Outcomes Assessment.

## **ADMINISTRATORS' RESPONSES**

Discussions with departmental chairs, and deans, indicate that indeed there are assessment techniques in place of which some of our respondents were unaware. Assuming the correctness of these statements, then most elementary management theory is being violated by not informing other managers (that is, faculty). There were 17 respondents who said that work was being done to put some assessment tools in place soon. Perhaps in a few years almost all WMEA institutions will be using a variety of assessment devices, for curricula and professional performance thereafter.

### **PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AS GOAL**

From our experience, including this project, there is a hint that instruction has become more focused upon professional competence in many institutions. Job-useful knowledge seems more significant. Professional competence seems more important, with group projects and presentations demonstrating useful knowledge and skills. Even input from local businesses seems more relevant, whether by instructors seeking jobsite visits or by students going to firms to provide some type of marketing audit.

The final question of the survey was a request for general comments on outcomes' assessment. Most respondents indicated that more was needed, but did not really point out a direction. It is our sense that uncertainty exists as to whether marketing educators should be most concerned with educational or with professional outcomes. If the former, then we must consider what educational outcomes we desire, via instruction and testing. If the latter, then professors must consult with employers, and students who have become fulltime employees. While time-consuming, it is certainly not a difficult matter for marketing instructors to interact with the business world. It will, however, mean that many a syllabus will have to be modified if we desire certain professional outcomes.

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR OUTCOME ASSESSMENT IN PLANNING**

At least three issues seem paramount to us. First, AACSB needs to provide examples of various Outcomes Assessment techniques. These should obvi-

ously deal with at least three of the options given--course knowledge, professional preparation, mission satisfaction--and perhaps instructor/course evaluations. This AACSB seems to be doing currently, whatever the level of awareness among instructors. In addition, we have spoken with several marketing department chairs who indicate they are a part of 'model' programs. We certainly hope they will share with us shortly the results of their experimentation!

Second, whatever the assessment tools are, they should be made available to all faculty on-line. The AACSB website is certainly a suitable venue. Go to their <AACSB.edu> for insight on goals, and some techniques for achieving these.

Third, is the matter of governance in academia. For anyone who examines the management of profit and nonprofit businesses, the independence of many tenured faculty is a bit overwhelming. Some in political science have compared it to the U.S. Senate. Ours is not to suggest a change in the tenure system! Rather, it is to acknowledge that many senior faculty may not actively pursue such Outcomes Assessment, whether it is a personal matter of impending retirement, of disinterest, or whatever. Consequently, if the specific models are offered as "for examples" by AACSB, and if this information is immediately available on the internet, others in marketing departments may push the process forward, and perhaps shame recalcitrants into grudgingly following.

In his April address to the AACSB at its annual meetings in Atlanta (1999), President-Elect Robert Taylor of the University of Louisville responded to member requests by indicating that the benchmarking of educational outcomes would be one of his major initiatives. As if to respond to recalcitrance by some faculty in actively pursuing assessment outcomes, another of Dean Taylor's initiatives is to deal with eroding corporate support for the AACSB.

The implication here is that many corporate trainers feel that the AACSB is not as relevant today for the requirements of corporate performance. In other words, for corporate trainers the assessment of student performance is important as it relates to eventual job performance. Without such connections, and strong correlation seen between curriculum and job performance, the MBA and BS/BM degrees for example may begin to wither in favor for training offered by corporations using both their own staff and other private firms, whether utilizing a live or distance learning model.

Another option offered by employers could be to reduce salary bonuses given to newly minted MBA's and baccalaureate holders, in favor of supporting them in the pursuit of part-time degree programs at institutions such as the Universities of Phoenix, Redlands or Northrop, after these employees have demonstrated solid worth to the employer.

It might be circumspect for some marketers to examine the November 1, 1999 issue of The Industry Standard. In it we are informed of the on-line educational plans of Harvard and Wharton (among others) (1999) with Pensare.com, and of Columbia, Chicago, Stanford and London School of Economics (among others) with Unext.com. Aside from any first mover advantages, the national and international reputations and access to investors of such schools are to say the least, "interesting".

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