

STUDENT RECEPTIVITY TO AN UNDERGRADUATE COURSE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND BUSINESS DECISION MAKING: A FOCUS ON MARKETING MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues are a concern in most areas of business operation. Yet schools of business devote minimal attention to these topics. To fill this gap, the National Wildlife Federation Corporate Conservation Council (NWFCCC), assembled a consortium of business scholars to develop course materials and pilot graduate courses on environmental considerations relevant to management decision-making.

This study examines how receptive undergraduate business students are to a course on environmental issues and business.

The data for this report come a survey of undergraduate business majors from one California State University conducted in Fall, 1993. A systematic random sample was taken of courses offered in the College of Business. One in six courses listed in the Course Schedule was selected for the study. Of 50 classes selected for the study, 33 participated, a 67% response rate. Seven hundred ninety-seven valid questionnaires were received.

Respondents were asked to rate the business implications of 17 issues on a standard five point importance scale. The list of issues was drawn from topics covered in the three pilot graduate courses designed and taught by members of the NWFCCC curriculum project.

Overall the students rate the business implications of environmental issues "somewhat" to "very important" (mean ratings of 3.5 to 4.5 on a 5 point scale). Perceptions of the relative importance of the 17 issues are consistent across departments. Students in all departments see waste disposal, pollution, energy, toxic substances, recycling waste, and waste reduction as the most important topics to business. They see global warming, possibilities for sustainable development, and environmental issues as marketing opportunities as among the least important. Only two issues yield statistically significant differences among

the majors: marketing and operations management majors rate "manufacturing/packaging resource alternatives" higher in importance than do other majors; marketing and international business majors rate "environmental issues as market opportunities" higher in importance than do other majors.

Respondents were asked to rate on a 5 point scale how important environmental issues were to functional business areas. An analysis of mean scores indicates that students in 5 of the 7 departments surveyed see marketing as the business area in which natural resource and environmental considerations are most important. Students in all 7 departments see Finance, Computer Information Systems, and Accounting as the areas in which environmental considerations are least important.

The undergraduates surveyed agree that a course on environmental issues and business decision making should be offered at the undergraduate level rather than the graduate level. Forty percent of business majors (46% of marketing majors) thought this course should be required for all business majors.

A quarter of respondents said they "definitely would" and two fifths said they "probably would" take such a course. Differences between departments were not statistically significant.

The perceived importance of environmental issues and high level of interest in a course on environment and business indicate strong student demand for such a course. Although marketing majors are not more sensitive to environmental issues than other majors, the general agreement on the importance of these issues to marketing suggests that such a course should be based in the marketing department.